

EUROPE OF NATIONS VS EUROPE OF THE EUROPEANS

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Abstract

On the verge of the second decade of 21st century Europe looks less European and increasingly nationalist. There are plenty of reasons behind the remarkable march to power of the likes of Victor Orban in Hungary, Jaroslaw Kaczyński in Poland, Sebastian Kurz in Austria and Andrej Babis in the Czech Republic. Let's not forget the role of Marine Le Pen in France, Nigel Farage in the UK and Carles Puigdemont in Catalonia, in Italy it is Cinque Stelle Movimento of Beppe Grilo and its current leader Luigi Di Maio and Liga Nord's chief Matteo Salvini, without forgetting, of course, AfD in Germany. Regardless of the variety in the names included in this list, there are lot of common features for their rise to prominence, probably the most notable being the failure of the old liberal democratic elites to deliver on the new demands of the post-2008-economic crisis European societies. Just to mention a few of the others will mean to refer to the consequences of this failure, i.e. the phenomenon of state-capture, which resulted in the ascendance of extreme left and right political entities; the mishandling of the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean and Aegean seas that caused the outburst of nationalism and chauvinism across Europe, most notably Central and Eastern, and of course, the most troubling one – the rising insecurity among the European citizens about the capabilities of liberal democracy to prove its “only-game-in-town” status as a successful political formula.

Key words

Europe, nationalism, populism, neoliberalism, neoconservatism

The following text is a response to the rising xenophobia in the so-called “civilized world”, in particular the European continent. It may also be seen as addressing or directly answering some of the major talking points

of the self-styled “new conservatism” movement, which is by far and large anything but conservative as will be demonstrated by the next lines. All in all, the arguments which are coming below will provide at least some ground for doubt in both ideological directions – liberal and conservative, and their “fault” and arguments about the current state of affairs throughout Europe. Not only the consequences of their respective political domination or reign, neoconservatism in the 1980s and 1990s and neo-liberalism roughly since the beginning of 21st one will be held into account, but the processes they set in motion as well. For the “mortal enemy” approach adopted by both of these classic liberalism ideology offspring has led to most of the problems observed today.

In the aftermath of this ideological clash alike the ones between Nazism and communism earlier in the 20th century and democracy vs. communism later during the Cold War, contemporary Europe appears today to be again a battleground of grand ideas. Unfortunately, the strategy adopted by the adversaries of today’s frames the opponent as an enemy deserving anything but total denial and despise has never been easier – Facebook and the likes are at hand providing an arena for hate-speech, false news and post-truth like never before. Traditional media appear to lose their gatekeeping function of fact-checking and shaping the daily news agenda and what is newsworthy today seems to be determined by whether or not it is trending or viral across the new social platforms.

Thus, lacking trustworthy and reliable sources the general public is no good position of gaining anything but the emotions from the parties involved in the discourse over the nature of the ongoing political, social and economic developments of the recent times. Informative choice, let alone reflection and understanding became near impossible as the whirlwind of posts, tweets and shares took over the attention of the contemporary individuals across the developed, but not only, countries. Societies appear to lose their integrity as social coherence as power aspirers of various nature stormed the classical political arena armed with smart phones and access to Internet. However, Nietzsche was proved wrong by current developments for the “will to power” today goes hand in hand with the will to revive the once pronounced dead God in order to maximise its political reach.

Conspiracy of global nature, similar to the acclaimed Zionist one refurbished and reinvigorated by the Nazis’ propaganda machinery, is a trademark for the new conservatism discourse as its advocates see obstruction to their tradition-abiding efforts everywhere. Fake news and deep fake news

thrive, but what really threatens Europe is the post-truth politics discourse established as a trade mark of the new wannabe conservatives. The lack of modern widespread understanding of the European Union (EU) identity coincides with the rise of radical politics, easy-solutions and all-in politics sometimes described, not entirely correct as populism – right and left one. That is beyond doubt a major “contribution” of the post-communist elites – both Western and Eastern, especially after the turbulent first decade of the new millennium. For Europe long ago became not a nation or territory-bound descriptive locus, but rather a cultural, civilizational area beyond particularistic claims of its geographical limitations. Pax Romana nowadays is nothing but Pax Europaea.

Populism and especially the right-wing one, according to Eatwell and Goodwin (2018), has been for quite some time in the making along the lines of the Four Ds of distrust in elites, destruction of national culture, deprivation in the economic sphere and dealignment in political identification and voting behaviour. The EU to them is, for some good reason though, a fundamentally elitist and undemocratic project, while neoliberal globalisation conspired along and caused widespread resentment, not so much due to its material effects as its psychological ones. For the solid feeling among individuals around the world and Europe in particular of growing inequality and identity swallowing immigration waves result in a sense of relative deprivation. However, intriguing and meaningful, as William Davies points out in his review of the book,²³² is that “*the category of national populism is stretched in so many directions that it obscures more distinctions than it illuminates. It starts with an eminently understandable desire to be listened to and recognised, but then extends to demagoguery, violent threats and wall-building. If the language of racism, nationalism and fascism is really not adequate to distinguish between the desire for stable community and Salvini’s vicious hatred of refugees, between alienation from unelected elites and Orbán’s dismantling of the rule of law, then find a language that will*”.

A perfect example that is in line with the above-mentioned specifics is the recent campaign of Orban in Hungary framing George Soros, a Hungarian-born billionaire and elf-styled protector of modern liberal order and its values, and Jean-Claude Juncker – the president of the outgoing European Commission, as enemies of the state of Hungary, for it bares much

²³² <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/nov/15/national-populism-review-compassion-for-supporters-of-trump-brexite-le-pen>, accessed on 12th April 2019.

deeper implications. It is not just that the old elites are conspiring against the traditional Hungarian values sucking out its sovereignty to Brussels, but Europe is also guilty for it is siding with the Hungarian state arch-enemy, the guy who turned his own in favour of the migrants and foreigners, who will destroy our Homeland and erase our traditions. Similarly, in France and in Germany nationalists like *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) and *Rassemblement National* (National Rally) are calling for not letting the outsiders, east Europeans included, take over the established societies with their fundamental traditions and order. All over the European nation-states there are voices calling for resistance to the invaders and their attempts of conquering Europe and threatening the very core values of its civilization. Yet, the solution of those patriots is not more European integrity, but rather more national consolidation which will only be able to withstand the migrants' attack. Building walls, not bridges became the refrain of their paradigm perfectly in line with the doctrine of their new inspiration – the US president Donald J. Trump.

It is perfectly acceptable to them, if not deliberately aimed at, bringing good old tactics back to prominence, for there is still a lack of sufficient proof of European instruments able to cope with the new issues and problems. The tragedy is into the fact that these patriotic voices deny every attempt for discovering or applying something of European character, blaming Europe for the very presence of the new threats on their doorstep. This behaviour of total denial of what is coming from Brussels is masked as saving Europe from its incompetent bureaucracy for the future generations of Europeans – those proud ancestors of Charlemagne/ Charles the Great, Jan Sobieski, Louis XIV and Elizabeth I. Thus, its ideology could be nothing else but neo-conservative, as it is trying to preserve what they cherish dear – the Fatherland.

To the new apostles of nationalism, being European is not in accord with being French, German, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Polish or Czech. It is the fear and rejection of cohabitation of various identities, which in turn is a rejection of globalization and in the bottom line – modernity. Losing one's national identity has become an issue not only because of the migrants fleeing for their lives or seeking fortune in Europe, but for the clash between the concepts of multiculturalism and nation. How can one coherent nation with its sovereign territory and God-approved natural order and rights co-exist with newcomers who do not only lack any desire to integrate and become like us, but pride themselves on being different from us? The soft touch of liberalism, equalitarianism and tolerance has been badly exposed

by its inability to address the issue and point rightfully out that people are coming to Europe not to conquer it anymore, but to become part of its progress and contribute accordingly to the established social, political and economic order perfectly in line with its competitive nature of any kind and at every level. Enriching European perspectives and not changing it should have been the light motive!

The reaction coming from new conservatives across the continent is at least pretending to be saving Europe... from itself. They, because of lacking true arguments against the core of the achievements of modern liberalism that are an integral part of it ideologically, aim at something else. Something which caught the old establishment off guard – the new conservatives, accused the governing neo-liberal entrenched elites of the sins of their mortal Cold War enemy – totalitarianism. For them neoliberalism attempted to melt all those differences of the unique nations, ethnic, linguistic and religious groups into one – pan-European multicultural identity, with such a zeal through measures and policies which in the end looked nothing but totalitarian in their reach and goals. The artificial nature of everything that comes from Brussels made it easy not for the Europeans, but for foreigners to take over “us”, while we were, supposedly trying to integrate them. Abominations such as all men equality, third gender, same-sex marriage, abortion, sex-change, transgender, religious tolerance infuriated the new conservatives, as in them they recognize nothing but total surrender to transhumanism and betrayal of European traditions.

The only point missing (quite on purpose!) was that every policy came in power after it was proposed, deliberately discussed in detail, voted and subsequently implemented by the governments of the same national states that happen to be members of the EU and that by chance happen to be the only legitimate representative of the majority of the individuals living on their territories. Such a paradox! Still totally neglected like the myth of the European values and traditions. For if the assumption of their existence is valid, why do Western and Northern Europeans find it hard to differentiate between migrants coming from Syria and Afghanistan and employment-seeking citizens of countries from Central, Eastern and Southern Europe? Are we not sharing the same values? Or does it depend on the occasion, perfectly in line with the moral relativism of the new conservatives?

History of the close and distant past has become a major issue again, together with all the prejudices of the old times – Islam, culture, migration,

etc. West vs. East – thus came the widespread overwhelming feeling for losing one's grip over life and state, both in the West and in the East, though for different reasons. Elites, on their turn, failed to perform and lead, which resulted in a vacuum filled with anxiety over so many issues poured in an endless train of posts every second over the new channels of communication, wrongfully called social media. That anxiety was not and is not addressed properly, especially in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis, which spurred the boom in the extreme political narrative.

Thus, it was no surprise at all that the democratic political system and its ideology – modern liberalism, took the main fault. The misunderstanding of its core package thrived partially because of the laziness of its advocates – the very people who rebuilt post-Second WW Europe and defeated later the Soviet Union in the Cold War. Failing to take and above all deservedly explain its credentials, putting aside claims that this is the end of the history and democracy as it is, the EU political leaders of all parties inevitably triggered a process we nowadays label as the EU identity crisis and the rise of nationalism – the very old dilemma that Europe has been through a couple of times over the past two centuries.

It is worth noting that not until recently there were not that many nations in Europe and the world at all – they were rather various political communities consisting of sub-communities based on different identity lines but nations. For example, the Habsburg Empire, which emerged in the 16th century, consisted of of Germans, Hungarians, Croats, Serbs, Czechs and Slovaks who cohabitated together in the vast area of the empire as separate ethno-linguistic groups with their local specifics. One of the major consequences of the First World War was that it spurred nationalism throughout Central and Eastern Europe. From the ashes of the Habsburgs' and Romanov's Russian empires emerged the new nation-states of Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia and Romania. Those states in turn fell both victims to their own internal nationality conflicts and harsh disputes over territory with their newly emerged neighbouring nations.

It is commonly forgotten in that regard that the nation was “invented” by the French Revolution. In the aftermath of the Revolution each and every Frenchman became a citizen of the Republic in order to install a sense of equality among other things in the state torn by excessive violence and estate-based social stratification. However, the new nationalistic pride of the French Revolution was more than just self-identification in order to achieve greater mobilization. Its famous slogan “liberty, equality, fraternity”, packed

with the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, demonstrated ambition and belief for them to hold true for all humanity and liberal progress, establishing universalistic international order.

Thus, individual liberty, human equality, fraternity of all people became the founding stones of liberal and democratic nationalism. The revolutionary French nationalism put free individual will and choice in the formation of nations and, therefore, the new nations were portrayed as acts of self-determination of all of their members. Subsequently, Napoleon's armies spread the French spirit of nationalism throughout Europe and beyond. Ironically, it was exactly the conquest of Napoleon and his revolutionary inspiring codes that turned the nationalism of the Europeans against France. Most prominently, Germany rejected all the principles upon which the American and the French Revolutions had been based as well as their liberal and humanitarian aspects of nationalism. Instead, German nationalism turned to the historical tradition to justify the right of each and every group of individuals with a common language, religion, habitat and history to call themselves "a nation", in practice introducing the discourse of cultural and ethno-linguistic determinism against universalism as a rule of the thumb²³³.

The policy of offering easy solutions has never led to "the best result" for the community, as Aristotle entrusted to it. The call for raising walls, the passion for mythologizing historically dubious events and facts, the return to the pre-modern roots of identifying the individual with the group based on shared generic traits, geographical habitat, linguistic group, even religion and skin colour, lead to an attack on the very essence of Pax Romana and later Christendom Europe – people live better together, not separated. A symbol of this understanding in the modern world of the 21st century is the European Union built on the debris of Europe's destroyed by the Second World War of the rival national states.

The denationalization of post-war Europe, which took place at the political level through the normative criminalization of the Third Reich ideology and the rehabilitation of patriotism, was actively supported by the economic power of the Marshall Plan that culminated in the creation of the European Union in 1957. However, the sustainability of the EU's political paradigm was put under serious test from the Big Bang expansion (10+2) – a phenomenon that brought into the Union, along with many other

²³³ Britannica Academic Edition Online, <https://kenli.nbu.bg:2145/levels/collegiate/article/nationalism/117287>, accessed on 12th of April, 2019).

internal changes, also the ongoing re-nationalisation of the new Member States from Central and Eastern European (CEE) societies after the collapse of the Soviet Union. As Offe (1991) predicted, after the totalitarian grip of the Soviet dogma was over, during the transition from communism in the CEE countries, besides building a market economy and liberal democracy under a Western model, the new truly independent states also rediscovered their national identity (Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Croatia) and/or started the process of building/shaping it (Macedonia, Slovakia). Integration into the other key Euro-Atlantic structure of political prominence and importance – NATO, meeting key criteria from Maastricht, and Copenhagen in particular, had a mitigating effect on the newcomers in United Europe. And although everything seemed destined for the new Europe of peacefully cooperating members to be better settled than the old one of hostile nations, today we observe something quite different.

The Schuman and Monnet Europe aims at the prosperity of the majority and foresees unification through the diversity guaranteed by the rule of law. The challenges of the 21st century give a new force to theories like Huntington (1993), which divided the world almost a quarter of a century ago to areas dominated by potentially hostile civilizations. The imminent conflict between them is the engine of progress and as cynical neorealist theories claim, the right is always of the stronger. The modern European civilization, however, has been already into seven decades of efforts to refute such catastrophic visions, although there is no lack of provocation, especially on the side of countries that have chosen Huntington as their prophet, like Russia and, to a lesser extent, China and India. Their behaviour is largely a consequence of the technological revolution brought about by the Internet phenomenon, which has expanded spheres and opportunities for influence, as well as providing unexpected means and opportunities to achieve individual, corporate, group and national goals.

Constructing more Europe and more Brussels after 2009 at the expense of national sovereignty in societies that for the first time boldly and freely can manifest their history and culture, on the basis of increased self-confidence and economic prosperity after decades of Communist terror, could not have happened at a more inappropriate moment. As a result, there naturally emerged internal opposition and resistance to such supranational behaviour and policy on the part of the EU. In the EU itself, among its founding members, there are a plenty of signals for such resistance as illustrated by the debate and the process of Brexit in the UK, as the presidential

elections in Austria and France, as well as the parliamentary elections in the Netherlands, Italy and Austria. Objectively, part of it is far from unjustified, especially as it concerns the excessive bureaucracy of the administration of the Union and the slowness and indecision of its operational structures, a natural consequence of the process of cohesion and convergence between 28 different countries.

The insertion of the hypothetical threat of the Islamic civilization against migrant, immigrant and refugee invaders in Europe adds even more drama to the European political and social agenda. The fact is that the Old Continent has learned much from both the clash with Islam and the cohabitation with it. Parallel to personal hygiene, medicine and scientific achievements of the ancient Egyptian, Hellenistic, Persian, and Roman worlds, Europe has a commercial outlet to the whole of Asia. There is no lack of tension, but it is largely reciprocal and mirroring in volume and direction – Crusades were met by the invasion of Europe two centuries later, and while the first ones were in the glory of the name of Christ, the latter were for the glory of the Crescent. Today, from the distance of time, and looking as much as possible rationally and analytically at human history from the past centuries, we can say that the misuse and abuse of religion for political purposes is equally inherent to both worlds.

The European identity happens to be much, much older than the respective Italian, Bulgarian, Polish, Hungarian or French one. However, the collapse of the big global European Empires like the Russian, Habsburg and the Ottoman ones spurred the process of nation-building across the European continent, quite often manipulating and elaborating on well forgotten or entirely fabricated historical myths. Each and every of the new political entities desperately looked and found evidence for their both political and cultural superiority over their neighbours', which to serve as a platform, a keystone and a foundation for the newly established nation state. In the due process of identity seeking, most of the newly founded European nation-states forgot that most of them share a common feature much older than their striving for identity, i.e. the Christian religion.

Be it Catholic Christians, Protestants or Orthodox, people of various ethno-linguistic communities actually belong to a much older Pan-European community – that of Europeans. In this regard, the contemporary claim that the European Union is a postmodern social political and economic construct, thus, unnatural and aiming to destroy the coveted nation-state,

is apparently not valid and void according to professor Kalin Yanakiev²³⁴. Therefore, all contemporary new conservative critics who claim that the EU is an unnatural and artificial structure of neoliberal character, aimed at weakening national sovereignty in its reach rather than facilitating its members' prosperity, actually speak false, as the European identity precedes each and every national one on the continent. So, it appears that not the EU, but their efforts seek to destroy and return Europe to the pre-modern times of no communities but tribes and clans.

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²³⁴ Nations and Europe – Which is Older?, <http://kultura.bg/web/нациите-и-европа/>, accessed on 09th of April, 2019)