

No.
02
2018

ASPEN Review

ASPEN.REVIEW
CENTRAL
EUROPE

COVER STORIES Edwin Bendyk, Zoltan Istvan, Aleksandra Przegalińska, Marek Vácha, Jan Lukačević
POLITICS Erhard Busek ECONOMY Zsolt Darvas CULTURE Nelly Bekus INTERVIEW Charles King



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Beyond the Human

**Human Co-development
with Machines:
New Technological
Entities**

**How to Measure and
Maintain Our Trust
in Machines?**

About Aspen

Aspen Review Central Europe quarterly presents current issues to the general public in the Aspenian way by adopting unusual approaches and unique viewpoints, by publishing analyses, interviews and commentaries by world-renowned professionals as well as Central European journalists and scholars. The Aspen Review is published by the Aspen Institute Central Europe.

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Beyond
the Human

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Transcending Humanity?

Dear Readers,

Could the limits of human capabilities be expanded through technology and genetic editing? Does it sound too bold and presumptuous? Is it beyond imagination to improve not only human “software” via education and training but also human “hardware” via genetics and technology? What has been science fiction for some time now seems to be possible. Aleksandra Przegalińska, an expert on human-machine relations, explores a question whether and how can a robot be trusted by humans. With the line between organism and machine disappearing, it has become tempting for humans to become literally “hardwired.” Edwin Bendyk reminds us of Haraway’s socialist-feminist-cyborg manifesto from the ’60s that sparked imagination about epochal and planetary transformation and inspired creative semiotic attempts to shape a desired paradigmatic shift. Is a binary choice between the organic and the technological over? Recent giant advance in nanotechnology seems to prove the case. Co-development of humans and machines as “companions” or “cyborgs” could facilitate adaptation to technological progress. Notions like “enhancement” or “betterment” of human race ring a warning bell; Marek Vácha reminds us how eugenics led to death factories. Can we imagine social consequences of technological revolution

under way? In an interview with a prophet of transhumanism, Zoltan Istvan, a concept of universal minimal income is debated. How would a free society deal with the resistance of “unadaptable individuals?” To quote Bendyk: “There is no escape, but there is a possibility of fighting.” Resistance could stem from rather unexpected corners, for example by making a strong case for “a right to be offline.”

We keep following the developments in Central Europe by an interview with elderly Austrian statesman, Erhard Busek. György Schöpflin provides an insight into Fidesz’s election campaign narrative. Aleksander Kaczorowski points to a choice between Mitteleuropa or Charlemagne, as one of the challenges for German European policy rests in the balance between relations with Macron’s France in the West and its neighbors in the increasingly obscure East, demonstrated in this issue by Robert Anderson’s anatomy of Central European strongmen, former Prime Ministers of Slovakia, Mečiar and Fico. In *Aspen Review* we will continue to examine political leadership style with the values of free world and an open and democratic society.

Stay tuned to ideas around Aspen Institute!

JÍŘÍ SCHNEIDER

Executive Director, Aspen Institute CE

ASPEN.REVIEW

EDITORIAL

Germany the Pop Last Ho

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Law and Justice (PiS) has worked hard to earn the title of the most anti-German among today's ruling parties in the European Union. So it may seem surprising that in the new foreign policy guidelines presented by the new Foreign Minister Jacek Czaputowicz, Germany is PiS's last hope for saving Poland from marginalization in the European and international arena.

The Law and Justice government was supposed to raise Poland from its knees, but instead it brought it to the ground in just two years. It was supposed to take Poland out of the peripheral condominium, where it had allegedly begged for mercy of colonial powers. Instead, it engineered a self-isolation of the greatest degree among new EU member states. From Washington to Tel Aviv, from Kiev to Prague, no one cares for the opinions of the Polish government or treats it as a reliable partner. And no one wants to talk with it, except for a few countries which are doomed to working together with Warsaw due to their proximity, economic interests, their political situation, and the balance of power within the European Union. Germany is the most important among these countries. The PiS government knows about it, it is its ace in the sleeve which was now put on the table.

You could venture the claim that Polish foreign policy no longer exists. There is only PiS foreign policy: protective measures aimed at preventing the ruling party from being held accountable by EU institutions for deliberately violating the constitution and the principles of the rule of law. Poland Anno Domini 2018 does not comply with the so-called Copenhagen criteria. It is a set of principles the fulfilment of which was a condition of EU entry in 2004. Today, the Poles would have lower chances for being admitted than the Serbs (and not much greater than the Turks).

However, it is easier not to let the fox into the henhouse than to drive it away. The example of Poland (but also of Hungary) shows that EU institutions are in fact helpless against those member states where the ruling parties do not recognize any international obligations besides those resulting from bilateral relations. “The core of diplomacy are bilateral relations,” said minister Czaputowicz. “The European Commission is not a supergovernment and the European Parliament is not a superparliament.”

It means in practice that the PiS government does not intend to back down in its confrontation with the European Commission, for thanks to the support of Hungary and the Baltic states it does not fear the consequences of launching the procedure provided for in Article 7 of the European Union Treaty. And at the same time, it counts on a restrained approach of Berlin to proposals for making respect for the rule of law a factor in the division of EU funds, for Germany “is our main political and economic partner in the EU.”

This optimism and “betting on Merkel” by PiS are not unfounded. The greatest countries of Central Europe, that this Germany, Poland, and Hungary, indeed have a common interest in preserving the EU status quo. None of these states want a “two-speed Europe,” a European “federation” or a “hard core.” They do not want it, for a consequence of such a “reform” would be a new division of the continent into the West and the East, and hence a tangible worsening of the international, geopolitical, and of course economic position of Mitteleuropa.

Mitteleuropa, as opposed to the Intermarium or Trimarium promoted by PiS, is a real geoeconomic entity, which for the German economy is what China is for the world economy. In the last quarter-century, Germany invested a lot of political and financial capital in this region. A significant difference between the Vistula valley and the Pearl River Delta is that Mitteleuropa, unlike Communist China, has no single decision center; power is dispersed between centers in Berlin, Vienna, Warsaw, Budapest, Vilnius, and Prague (which of course does not mean that they are equally influential). Still, the fact remains that Mitteleuropa is a necessary point of reference both for German and Polish foreign policy, security, and economy. Germany will not abandon it for the sake of the illusory prospect of leadership over “Carolingian Europe,” especially since it would have to be shared with France, for the same reasons for which in the foreseeable future the Poles will rather not turn their backs on Germany in order to resurrect the Commonwealth together with Ukraine.

Berlin’s (or more precisely German society’s) opposition to turning the eurozone into a political federation (as proposed by the president of France) make it unnecessary for Poland and Hungary (as well as Czechia) to seriously consider entering the eurozone. From Berlin’s perspective it is more important that Central European countries do not find themselves in the ruble zone. Polish interests coincide with German ones in this point as well.

It is fascinating in a way how much the policy of Law and Justice is enclosed in the mental space defined in the 1840s by German liberals and Austrian conservatives, advocates of economic cooperation of the German states from that time and Habsburg Austria. It should make you think that under PiS government, Warsaw reckons only with Germany. The conclusion is that minister Czaputowicz not so much presented the guidelines for Polish foreign policy but showed how PiS politicians destroyed it in the last two years.

ALEKSANDER KACZOROWSKI
Editor in Chief Aspen Review Central Europe

ASPEN REVIEW
JAKUB DYMEK

COVER STORY
INTERVIEW
TRANSHUMANISM
LIBERTARIANISM
FUTURISM

Zoltan Istvan: It Goes beyond Human

Let's think about this: what happens when some time in the future the whole generation of Chinese kids have higher IQs than their American peers, because they're technologically hardwired for that? Will this be a national security issue? This is a global security issue—says Zoltan Istvan in an interview with Jakub Dymek.



JAKUB DYMEK: You are a transhumanist—member of a movement endorsing technologically augmented advancement of human species and using technology to extend our capabilities. What does transhumanist thinking bring into the world of policy debate in the US and worldwide and how politically influential it is?

ZOLTAN ISTVAN: Transhumanism influences politics today only a little bit. But at the same time, transhumanist movement grows exponentially, like 1000% every year. So I think its implications for the policy debate here in the US and globally will only grow in scale and importance, obviously. Transhumanism can define policy debate of the future, of that I'm sure. President Trump can say today that manufacturing jobs and jobs in general are lost because of immigrants. But he wouldn't be able to say the same thing up until 2020 campaign, because it's simply not true, and more people realize the simple fact that jobs aren't lost to immigration, but automation. It's tech "stealing the jobs" he is going to have to say then. And you cannot build a wall to stop technology from spreading. This is how transhumanism is already shaping this debate. And it goes beyond jobs. Let's think about this: what happens when some time in the future the whole generation of Chinese kids have higher IQs than their American peers, because they're technologically hardwired for that? Will this be a national security issue? This

is a global security issue. And I'm not even going into genetic engineering just yet...

Do you think that today's policy debate is sufficiently concerned about issues like these?

Not sufficiently whatsoever. It's amazing that in presidential debates between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump there was no mention of robotics, artificial intelligence, genetic editing, none of that. And these issues—even if they haven't changed politics just yet—are changing realities of life and work worldwide. Journalism has changed dramatically because of automation for example. But actually there's a simple reason why it's not debated enough. It's a hard thing to say to your voters—robots are stealing your jobs, things are going to change, et cetera. Saying things like that is going to be detrimental to politician's appeal to the voter base. But not saying this doesn't change the fact that technology is accelerating.

What happens when some time in the future the whole generation of Chinese kids have higher IQs than their American peers, because they're technologically hardwired for that? This is a global security issue.

Another issue: life extension. We have a set of institutions—like social security, retirement benefits, healthcare system, and so on—built upon certain life expectancy.

But that's going to change, too, and this change has to be factored in policy debate, right? It's not happening today.

Well, I wouldn't reasonably expect politicians who can't handle their own email or Twitter accounts to actually concern themselves with problems like these.

Funny thing is: one of the basic tenets of transhumanism is to promote life extension, but what that gives us is also these ageing politicians, old dogs who cannot be taught new tricks, and there's really a debacle coming when

I've made a decision long time ago to support universal basic income and I still believe it to be the best solution until we come up with something better

the ruling elite isn't even familiar with the most basic features of today's online technology. Presidential terms are limited to eight years, but you can run for Congress or Senate indefinitely.

What a transhumanist candidate for office like yourself can offer American workers that can benefit them in the time of automation and technological acceleration which entails reasonable fears about their and their families' futures?

I've made a decision long time ago to support universal basic income and I

still believe it to be the best solution until we come up with something better—but for the time being there's nothing that compares to it. Some form of basic income should support people while automation takes jobs—some libertarians don't like it, but there should be this discussion about how capitalism, commerce, trade can continue while it's only robots that run the planet.

It is possible that capitalism will survive for the next 20-30 years, while actual economy will keep falling. Capitalism will be under immense pressure in the next 5-10 years and more and more people will be asking how to organize the economy for basic need of survival. We're already seeing massive job loss to automation: I believe millions will lose their jobs by the 2020 election in the United States and by 2025 we will have 20-30 million people's jobs replaced by automation.

What struck me as a paradox is: you run as a libertarian candidate and identify yourself as such—libertarian transhumanist—but also promote programs like space exploration, investment in science, free education and basic income, which by definition demand government's money, oversight, and enforcement.

And for that reason many libertarians don't see me as one of them—they say I'm no libertarian at all! [laughs] But the reason libertarians haven't

achieved anything significant politically and haven't even done very well in terms of media is because they've been impractical with exactly those kinds of things you've just described. In America today 49% of the people already depend on government services to survive: be it social security or food stamps. So half of the voting population relies on the government, while some libertarians still pretend government can't do things. It's libertarian flaw. I, as a libertarian transhumanist, don't believe in redistribution in strictly fiscal terms—tax the rich more, give money away—but for example see technological streamlining of bureaucracy as a form of redistribution, because by making government more efficient we're saving resources which can be invested elsewhere. I believe it's possible to be a libertarian and support some form of government intervention.

How would this look like in terms of policy?

In San Francisco we have such a terrible homelessness problem. I believe we should pay for the housing for the homeless and literally force the homeless to live there. And the reason is, when I went to San Francisco City Hall to submit my paperwork for the governor's run, me and my small daughter were literally unable to walk the pavement because of the amount of used needles and human feces. In one county, Los Angeles County, there's fifty thousand homeless people.

There's where my libertarianism ends: when a social problem like homelessness becomes at the same time an infringement on someone else's civil rights, like my right to go to my own City Hall as a citizen. Here you have an example where some enforceable action should be taken.

In America today 49% of the people already depend on government services to survive: So half of the voting population relies on the government, while some libertarians still pretend government can't do things.

I imagine it quite frustrating that such a rich, innovative, and prosperous community like San Francisco cannot at the same time handle basic problems like infrastructure maintenance, public schooling and transportation, affordable housing. But what this also says contradicts your belief that technology would provide reasonable solutions to all these problems. In Silicon Valley you have all these companies and they didn't alleviate any of these problems, they've exacerbated them.

I think there's too much crony capitalism and too much lobbying power built into the government. I think there are incredible ways to solve a lot of these problems through innovation. But what happens is we in California have the biggest

bureaucracy probably in any state and the state has been mismanaged for a long time. Look at the projects developed today: we have this Bullet Train, which is essential-

The fact we still have people going to bed hungry and that some parts of California resemble slums in India causes this deep political polarization and distrust in political process

ly going to be a train to nowhere, because in 4-5 years there will be more driverless cars, and nobody's is going to take train ever again if he or she can arrive to Los Angeles from San Francisco in similar amount of time, but while sleeping in their own car. Nobody saw that coming. Same with Elon Musk's Hyperloop, which I don't think is realistic just yet, but I know for sure that somebody already made billions of dollars on these infrastructure and transportation projects here in California, which are going to be rendered useless in couple of years anyway. The reason why it's hard to get anything done is that anyone who's elected into office has so many paybacks to do and there's so many special interest groups who are putting politicians where they are.

I believe there are certain European countries—like Norway or Sweden—where there's also extensive bureaucratic apparatus, yet these countries are getting things done,

but let's put it aside for a minute.

I visited both Norway and Sweden and I love these places, I think political culture there is different than in California—although I don't want to say anything bad about California—less polarized, less volatile, with more trust, and so on. But you have to note that California is significantly bigger than Sweden or Norway is and at the same time it's a place where circa 14% of population lives below poverty line and almost 40% live close to poverty. This is why I predicate my proposal for universal basic income on lease or selling federal land. Really poor people have less opportunity to actually benefit or even see this state's natural reserves and its resources. Easiest way for them to participate in these riches is through land dividend in a form of basic income which would be funded from commercial use of federally-owned land.

The fact we still have people going to bed hungry and that some parts of California resemble slums in India—which I've seen as a reporter with the National Geographic—causes this deep political polarization and distrust in political process which is fueled by special interest money.

And a transhumanist's response to that in quick three policy proposals?

Federal land dividend, about which I just told you, is and always was my first policy proposal. It doesn't necessarily have to function as a basic

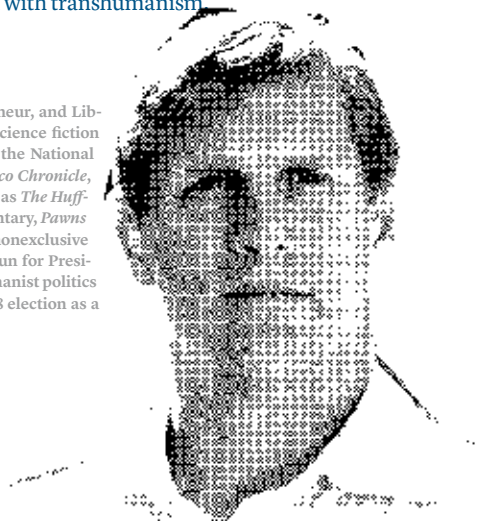
income, it can subsidize food stamps, housing, healthcare and welfare while at the same time lowering taxes. Second thing I propose is to decriminalize all drugs. I know it sounds radical, but I'm a big supporter of the kind of system Portugal has, where efforts are made to reduce harm and not to penalize drug abuse. My idea behind decriminalization of all drugs is to stop the costly war on drugs and use the money instead on rehabilitation and healthcare. This provides us with a perspective for building a freer, more liberated society and invest in care and support for those who need it. Also: saves us from this terror when even recreational drug use can result in persecution, being put in jail, destruction of families. The third thing I'd normally say is lowering taxes, but let's skip that for a moment. I propose using technologies like blockchain for replacing bureaucracy and making government more efficient and reducing employment in administration. There's so much AI around that having people doing every single bit of work in managing things is simply nonsensical and too costly.

ZOLTAN ISTVAN

is one of the world's most influential transhumanists, a journalist, entrepreneur, and Libertarian futurist, the author of *The Transhumanist Wager*, a philosophical science fiction novel. In his previous career he was an online and on-camera reporter for the National Geographic Channel. His writings have appeared in a blog of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Outside* and *The Daily Caller*. His work has been covered in publications such as *The Huffington Post*. Istvan's coverage of the war in Kashmir was made into a documentary, *Pawns of Paradise*, distributed by Janson Media. Australia's *The Age* has acquired nonexclusive Australian rights to the show. In late 2014, Istvan announced his intent to run for President of the United States in the 2016 elections to raise awareness of transhumanist politics issues. He announced his intent to run for Governor of California in the 2018 election as a member of the Libertarian Party. | Photo: Zoltan Istvan Archive

So, what's coming next?

I predicate a lot of things regarding technology—automation, AI, and life extension—will result in a significant backlash. From, for example, Christian people who will resist the idea of us becoming different humans than we are today. Surprisingly, when for the first time—in March 2018—a driverless car killed a person on the road, it became a news event, but it didn't generate as big of an outrage as I previously thought it would. But it doesn't mean we aren't heading in this direction in the near future, where this supposed clash of people and technology will result in some sort of social upheaval. But with transhumanism, as with every technological innovation of the past, there's a process of acceptance. Transhumanist movement is on the same trajectory as environmental or green movements were back in the day. When 30 years ago people were saying about the need to save the planet, they were seen as crazy. But the idea caught on and today green movement and environmentalist thinking are global political forces that shape many of the most important debates of today. Same will happen with transhumanism



ASPEN REVIEW
MAREK VACHA

COVER STORY
EUGENICS
GENETICS
DARWIN

From Darwin's Theory to Auschwitz



The quest, goal, or dream is obvious. Some long time ago, from a savage wolf we bred the first domesticated animal ever, the dog. What if we attempt to do the same with the human?

History of modern eugenics goes back to perhaps the 19th century and to *The Origin of Species*. Not only did Darwin confirm the existence of evolution but he also pinpointed the mechanics of it: natural selection. *The Origin of Species* was first published in November 1859. Four years later, in 1863, Francis Galton (Darwin's cousin) puts forward an idea of two key factors which determine the outcome of what I will look like: *nature* and *nurture*, genes and environment. In 1883 Galton finally coins the term "eugenics," striving for a quality genus, and a new branch of biology is enthusiastically welcomed.

The enthusiasm for eugenics in the second half of the 19th century, yet unchecked by the later horrors of Auschwitz, is understandable. *Eugenics is the self-direction of human evolution*, declared a period poster. "What nature does blindly, slowly and mercilessly the man can choose to do wisely, rapidly and kindly," Galton muses. "If a twentieth part of the cost and pains were spent in measures for the improvement of the human race that is spent on the improvement of the breed of horses and cattle, what a galaxy of genius might we not create! We might introduce prophets and high priests of civilization into the world, as surely as we can propagate idiots by mating *crétins*. Men and women of the present day are, to those we might hope to bring into existence, what the pariah dogs of the streets of an Eastern town are to our own highly-bred varieties." (Galton 1864)

The enthusiasm for eugenics in the second half of the 19th century, yet unchecked by the later horrors of Auschwitz, is understandable.

Negative Eugenics

The following chapters of the eugenics story do not offer amusing reading. It is symptomatic that all who pondered and probed its positives automatically considered themselves desirable and fit for procreation and considered unfit all the other "feble-minded," proletariat, prostitutes, mentally ill, and criminals. So far the positive eugenics, i.e. procreation of the desirables, has never been really successful. What has been far more successful, unfortunately,

has been the so-called negative eugenics, the prevention of procreation of those deemed unfit. There are essentially three ways how to achieve this. First two, isolation and sterilization, were initially tested in the US. Nazism dared to venture farther and, under the so-called T4 plan, over 70 000 mentally ill people were murdered between 1939 and 1941. Another 70 000 were slaughtered till the end of the war even after the program was officially halted.

In medicine we have come so far that we no longer simply aim to get rid of the symptoms, with the help of various medicaments, but we target the ailment's essence and origin, hidden away in the cell's core.

In the 1950s, due to pseudoscientific race theories of the Nazis, eugenics becomes a forbidden word. At the same time, the first genetic counseling takes off in the US. Generally accepted guidelines are for the doctor to explain the nature of the disease, available options and possible scenarios, and then to respect the decision of those being counseled. The right to bear a child, however afflicted, becomes one of the basic human rights, undeniable after the atrocities of Auschwitz. Family and its happiness comes first before the society's genetic health.

Gene Therapy

The introduction of gene therapy has been enthusiastically, and understandably, applauded as an important step towards “the betterment” of a man. In medicine we have come so far that we no longer simply aim to get rid of the symptoms, with the help of various medicaments, but we target the ailment's essence and origin, hidden away in the cell's core. Gene itself becomes the medicine. In words of Zdeněk Neubauer, the mutiny of robots has begun—matter seeks to improve itself.

Then again, practical results have not been completely satisfactory. In 2000 in Paris (Hacein-Bey et al 2001) eleven children were treated for X-SCID (X-linked severe combined immunodeficiency). Nine responded to the treatment and were able to go on to living normal lives and even after two years there was a definite improvement; the treatment was hailed as the first undeniable success of gene therapy. Yet three of them went on to develop leukemia, almost certainly the result of the activation of the inserted LMO2 oncogene. One of the children has deceased and all following treatments based on retroviral transduction of lymphocytes have been halted worldwide.

The reason might have been too strong an optimism: the mechanics of the treatment consisted of cell's bombardment by retroviruses, which had been modified to contain the correct gene variant. It was impossible to determine how many of them would enter the cell, where exactly in the genome they would end up, and whether, through the insertion, they would not cause disruption of another gene, which might be responsible for regulation of cell division.

At the same time, many critical voices were gathering strength in a movement which led to Article 13 of famous Oviedo Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine:

*An intervention seeking to modify the human genome may only be undertaken for preventive, diagnostic or therapeutic purposes and only if its aim is not to introduce any modification in the genome of any descendants.*¹

The idea is obvious: gene therapies are possible and acceptable only if the results of these therapies end their life cycle along with the patient and they are not carried on onto the next generations. In other words, it is conceivable to conduct all sorts of modifications of somatic cells of the patient, as long as his gametic cells are left alone.

No one in the world cast any doubt on Article 13. Until the year of 2015.

Technology CRISPR/Cas9

The main difference between "classic" gene therapies, which use adenovirus or retrovirus as their vectors, the new technology CRISPR/Cas9 is capable of finding a specific place on a specific DNA, cutting out a predetermined gene, and offering a modified gene version in its stead. The scope of potential applicability, from cancer and AIDS treatment to agriculture, is currently beyond our imagination. The technology is revolutionary and the two women behind it, Emmanuelle Charpentier and Jennifer Doudna, are bound to receive a Nobel Prize, either this or the next year.

If there is something that the current Europe does well, then it is the shift of mere human interests to inalienable human rights.

On April 1, 2015, a seemingly innocuous text was published that caused a storm. Junjiu Huang and his colleagues at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou described how they used the technology CRISPR/Cas-9 to edit a gene for beta hemoglobin (HBB) in 86 human embryos (Liang et al. 2015).

1) Council of Europe. 1997. Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Dignity of the Human Being with regard to the Application of Biology and Medicine: Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine. Coe.int. 5th June 2018 (<https://rm.coe.int/168007cf98>).

2) The Francis Crick Institute. 2016. HFEA approval for new "gene editing" techniques. Crick.ac.uk. 5th June 2018 (<https://www.crick.ac.uk/news/science-news/2016/02/01/hfea-decision>).

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Nicholas Agar, "Whereto Transhumanism? The Literature Reaches a Critical Mass," *Hastings Center Report* 37, no. 3 (2007): 12-17.

Galton, F., (1864) *Hereditary talent and character*. Mac-Millan's Magazine.11,157-165 p.165-166

Portmann, A., *Biologie jako světová velmoc na poli techniky*. in Kleisner, K., (2008) *Biologie ve službách zjevu. K teoreticko-biologickým myšlenkám Adolfa Portmanna*. Pavel Mervart. Červený Kostelec.

The results were abysmal. Two days after injecting molecules capable of gene editing only 4 out of 54 surviving embryos carried planned genetic changes; however, these embryos were so-called mosaic, i.e. effective only in several cells. The results were so dismal that researchers summed up the use of CRISPR/Cas9 technology for editing of embryonal DNA as “not feasible at this time.”

As Chinese researchers are not bound by ethical constraints, there is another research project underway: comparing thousands of children with above average IQ with thousands of children with normal IQ.

The storm was caused by the fact that human embryos, left over from assisted reproduction, were used for the experiments. The embryos were so young that gene therapy affects them before the division of cell lines into somatic and gametic. The Chinese researchers were quick to assert that they would never implant such modified embryos in vitro and they were solely conducting an experiment.

The world’s reaction was to be expected. On February 1, 2016, the UK announced that its researchers would be granted the permission to modify human embryos—without ever planting them in vitro, of course.²

The future is uncertain. If history of medicine ethics is to offer any lesson, and I would gladly be mistaken here, I would wager that, after the technology becomes mastered and more or less foolproof, the transfer in vitro will take place and the Article 13 will be modified. If there is something that the current Europe does well, then it is the shift of mere human interests to inalienable human rights.

Eugenics with W

It is a new form of eugenics, its another form—not of children but of the human itself, “W-genics” or “you-eu-genics”: eugenics of itself, individual control over genes of my own body. The goal is to create a new form of human, called, for example, Homo Evolutis, Posthuman, Transhuman, Parahuman, H+, and so on. Transhumanism is “*an intellectual and cultural movement seeking to fundamentally enhance human condition with the help of common sense and new technologies. These will be widely available for the betterment of intellectual, physical and psychological capabilities of man and will prevent aging.*” (Agar 2007)

Even today we have some rare mutants in the human population, possessing desirable features: rare double mutants in the gene for myostatin (MSTN) have more muscle tissue and lower amount of body fat, rare mutants in the gene PCSK9 carry 88% lower risk of coronary disease, double mutants in the gene FUT2 are resistant to gastroenteritis. In future we are bound to find many more, and the efforts of w-genics will be to spread these desirable mutations or create entirely new ones.

In Beijing's enormous BGI (Beijing Genomics Institute), the goal is to gather together all information and technologies that were brought about by human genome sequencing.

If a genome of one schizophrenic individual is compared with a genome of one healthy individual, the differences will not constitute a proof. However, if we go on to compare genomes of thousands of schizophrenics (the number here is only for an example) with thousands of healthy genomes, it is possible to find some statistical correlations.

As Chinese researchers are not bound by ethical constraints, there is another research project underway: comparing thousands of children with above average IQ with thousands of children with normal IQ. If there are differences to be found, it will be another step towards "designer babies." The possible outcome can be either a selection of embryos with better prospects of high IQ in assisted reproduction or a direct change of genome, be it with the help of CRISPR/Cas9.

As of now, China declares that no such procedures are taking place.

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MAREK VÁCHA

studied molecular biology and genetics at the Faculty of Science of Masaryk University in Brno, theology at the University of Olomouc and in Brussels. In 1997 and 2000, he participated in two expeditions to Antarctica. In 2002, he spent six months at Trappist monastery Sept-Fons in France. He is the president of Institute of Ethics and Humanities at Third Medical Faculty of Charles University. He also serves as a parson in parish Lechovice u Znojma. He publishes in many scholarly and popular periodicals, his themes are evolutionary biology, medicine, and environment ethics. | Photo: Marek Vácha Archive





Our Trust in Machines —How to Measure and Maintain It in Turbulent Times?

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PRZEGALINSKA

COVER STORY
TECHNOLOGY
TURING TEST
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

We are no longer sure if we are following the path of humanizing technology, or rather moving towards adapting humans to technologies.

Nowadays, with the advent of the Internet of Things and ubiquitous computing, the upcoming trend is rather to detect and recognize emotional information with passive sensors which capture data about the user's physical state or behavior without interpreting the input. Current state of technological development does not clarify what will be the next stage of a airs and what sort of use will we make of those technologies that are either replacing people or opening up a new, radically deeper level of machine-human interaction and interdependency. We are no longer sure if we are indeed following the path of humanizing technology, or rather moving towards adapting humans to technologies. Recent scandals with major data leaks at Facebook, Grindr, and others do not make our understanding of this complex process any easier.

I have been working in the field of artificial intelligence and its societal implications for a decade now. The reliability of various devices, systems, and platforms arises as an important problem when one considers the level of trust that is allocated in them. In a social context, trust has several connotations. Trust is characterized by the following aspects: one party (trustor) is willing to rely on the actions of another party (trustee);

It can be demonstrated that humans have a natural disposition to trust and to judge trustworthiness that can be traced to the neurobiological structure and activity of a human brain.

the situation is directed to the future. In addition, the trustor (voluntarily or forcedly) abandons control over the actions performed by the trustee. As a consequence, the trustor is uncertain about the outcome of the other's actions; they can only develop and evaluate expectations. Thus, trust generally can be attributed to relationships between people. It can be demonstrated that humans have a natural disposition to trust and to judge trustworthiness that can be traced to the neurobiological structure and activity of a human brain. When it comes to the relationship between people and technology, the attribution of trust is a matter of dispute. The intentional stance demonstrates that trust can be validly attributed to human relationships with complex technologies, and machine-learning based trackers and sensors could be considered as complex technologies. Thus, one of the key current challenges in the social sciences is to re-think how the rapid progress of technology has impacted constructs such as trust. This is specifically true for information technology that dramatically alters causation in social systems: AI, wearable tech, bots, virtual assistants, and data. All that requires new definitions of trust.

The Field of Bots Is Booming

In the spirit of understanding human-machine relations, and trust in particular, we have decided to devote a large chunk of our work to researching its complexity. We are currently an interdisciplinary and transatlantic team located in the East Coast of US and in Warsaw, Poland. Our research has so far been devoted to social interaction of chatbots that are employees/members of the organizations that implement them. Chatbots (also called bots or conversational agents) are a perfect example of implementation of the postu-

lates of artificial intelligence by simulating human behavior based on formal models. Currently, the field of bots and natural language processing is booming. Bots are more and more frequently used in call centers, account management, tele- and online marketing. We are all experiencing the ongoing process of introducing artificial intelligence in the area of social interaction with people, with particular emphasis on the interactions in the professional sphere and in business.

One could think of our research as a specifically understood, reverse Turing test for humanoid and social robots. Humanoid robots, similar to bots, perform certain activities as a substitute for humans, whose function is often to imitate human behavior. The Turing test is an experiment that was conceived as a way of determining the machine's ability to use natural language and indirectly to prove its ability to think in a way similar to humans.

Humanoids vs. Social Robots

A typical humanoid has artificial intelligence, visual data processing, and a facial recognition system. Similarly, a social robot possesses the same features but without physical resemblance to a human. It imitates human gestures and facial expressions, is able to answer certain questions and conduct simple conversations on predefined topics, for example about the weather. Sophia, the humanoid created by Hansen Robotics that became famous for being granted the citizenship of Saudi Arabia this year, for example, uses Alphabet's voice recognition technology and is designed to become smarter with the passage of time.

Sophia is conceptually similar to ELIZA bot program which was one of the first attempts to simulate human conversation. In 1966, designed by Joseph Weizenbaum, ELIZA, the first bot capable of talking to people, conducted several "therapeutic" conversations with patients, acting as a Rogerian psychologist. This project has been the inspiration for previous

Chatbots are a perfect example of implementation of the postulates of artificial intelligence by simulating human behavior based on formal models.

studies carried out by the project manager and her team regarding affective for various variants of bots of our research can be thought of as a specifically understood, reversed Turing Test for humanoid robots, used increasingly in organizations and companies.

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It Needs to Start Asking New Questions

Humanoid and social robots, similar to bots, perform certain activities as a substitute for humans, whose function is often to imitate human behavior. The Turing test is an experiment that was conceived as a way to determine the machine's ability to use natural language and indirectly to prove its ability to think in a way similar to human. We feel that Turing test par excellence is still a great philosophical inspiration, but in the era of machine learning and deep learning one needs to start asking new questions that help understand human-robot relationship better.

In our work, the two following research questions are most relevant:

a) In what way and to what extent are features related to social intelligence developed in these programs? How does it manifest itself in interactions with co-workers (people)?

b) What effect does the socialization of AI in general (and chatbots in particular) have on the organization of work? Taking into consideration consequences of interactions with chatbots, how are professional and social roles re-negotiated? How does the introduction of conversational agents affect organizational culture?

The Turing test is an experiment that was conceived as a way to determine the machine's ability to use natural language and indirectly to prove its ability to think in a way similar to human.

At the first stage of our work, we used qualitative methodology. The approach taken in this part of the research was virtual ethnography. We analyzed the behaviors of individuals on the Internet using online marketing research techniques to provide useful insights concerning usage of bots, their place in organizations that implement them, and customer's approach to them. After collecting qualitative data concerning the roles ascribed to chatbots in organizations, we shall proceed to the second stage. In the experiment, which is to study the interaction of individuals and chatbots, we used various sensors (electromyography—EMG, electro-dermal activity—EDA, electrocardiography—ECG, etc.). Our purpose here was to examine the differences in human-human and human-non-human interaction process.

A Little Attention to the Interaction between Man and Technology

The research is original and definitely has an exploratory character. Its meaning is also enforced by recent success of Eugene Goostman in Turing test in 2014, where 33% of judges assessed that chatbot they had been interacting with was a human being, and by further developments in bots such as Alexa, Siri, Cortana, Google Now, and others.

Only little attention so far has been paid to the socio-cognitive nature of the professional interaction between man and technology in general, and chatbots in particular.

We hope that our work will fill a gap in the HCI research (Human-Computer Interaction) where only little attention so far has been paid to the socio-cognitive nature of the professional interaction between man and technology in general, and chatbots in particular. And there are more and more of them coming to interact with us. Moreover, the research will underline the important dimension of social cognition in all interactions. This dimension is extremely important as it contributes to the formation of a new organizational culture, setting new professional and social roles, and to non-humans associates that are here called co-workers of the future.

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The First Cyborg in Chthulucene

Cyborgization means human co-development with machines: new technological entities arise in response to human and social needs, and at the same time humans and social behaviors adapt to conditions and possibilities (the so-called affordances) offered by machines.

Donna Haraway is one of the most important figures in the contemporary humanities. Her ticket to a remarkable career was the pioneering “Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s” (1985), a cult text, familiar to anyone interested in the development of science and technology in a wider social, cultural, and political context.

Haraway, then working at the University of California in Santa Cruz, received an offer from the *Socialist Review*, a magazine published by the West Coast Collective; they needed a text outlining the perspective of what was possible and saying how to achieve it. Let us recall that it was the time of consolidation of the neoliberal ideology, Margaret Thatcher was preparing for her battle with the miners, and Ronald Reagan was slowly approaching the end of his first term as president of the United States.

In the Soviet Union, the real socialism project was dying together with its old men. In Poland, the belief in the viability of democratic socialism, still visible in the Solidarity program, was crushed by the tanks of December 1981. In France, the socialists, who under the leadership of François Mitterrand and in alliance with the communists in 1988 started an ambitious left-wing project, were soon confronted with a new force—globalization and globalized capital. “There Is No Alternative” for free-market liberal capitalism, TINA for short, became the slogan of the day, which for many still remains in force.

Science Is Subject to Human Weaknesses

This was the atmosphere in which Donna Haraway, a biologist by training and a committed feminist-Marxist intellectual by temperament, was tasked with inventing an alternative. When studying biology at the prestigious Yale University, Haraway had discovered that she was less interested in pure science and more in practicing science as a social and cultural activity. Thus she joined a growing community of researchers who rejected the positivist belief in the alleged neutrality and objectivity of the scientific method. Like any other area of human life, science is subject to human weaknesses—it is influenced by relations of power in laboratories, by beliefs, and by cultural stereotypes.

It is good to be aware of these weaknesses, as they can be important for interpretations of the data obtained during research. For example, does the language of competition, aggression, and domination used for describing behaviors in groups of apes describe real relations in these groups or is it a projec-

Like any other area of human life, science is subject to human weaknesses—it is influenced by relations of power in laboratories, by beliefs, and by cultural stereotypes.

tion of relations which reign (and certainly reigned) in laboratories dominated by men? Did Charles Darwin not use the vocabulary of 19th-century Victorian capitalism when describing the mechanisms of evolution? After all, Pyotr Kropotkin, who relied on other observations, came to the conclusion that cooperation rather than competition was the great force driving evolution forward.

A critical approach to the system of science in its actual form did not discourage Haraway from science and technology itself, therefore she did not take the path travelled by many feminists in those times. In reaction to

the patriarchy ruling the world of technology and science they chose a denial of technology, often for the sake of a sentimental ecogism feeding on a vision of recovering harmony through a reconciliation with Mother Earth.

War as a Technocratic Enterprise

The scholar from Santa Cruz was very well aware of how the industrial-military-scientific complex was consolidating and that its essence was the development of computer technologies. Thanks to Robert McNamara and his computers, the war in Vietnam turned into a technocratic enterprise, managed by C³I (Command, Control, Communications, and Intelligence) systems. Under Ronald Reagan's presidency, the American army entered the stage of star wars, an incredible increase of military expenditure and investment in the newest technological solutions. The spirit of consolidation of power and capital in the hands of the patriarchy permeated popular culture. This was the time when William Gibson published perhaps the most important cyberpunk book, *The Neuromancer* (1984; it popularized the term "cyberspace"), Ridley Scott surprised the world with *The Blade Runner*, and James Cameron introduced *Terminator* (1984).

Instead of giving in, Haraway decided to take away the initiative from men and when Ronald Reagan was starting his second term, she announced her "Manifesto for Cyborgs." She surprised everyone: the socialists from the East Coast Collective hated the text, unlike the West Coast Collective, which was enraptured. Similar divisions appeared in feminist communities. And little wonder—Haraway went across traditional binary divisions of technology/culture, humans/nature, man/woman.

The "Manifesto" proposes a new language, based on the acknowledgement that the symbiosis of humans with technology, especially in the age of the IT revolution, irreversibly changed not only the living conditions of people. The essence of humans also changed—we became cyborgs, "chimeras, hybrids of machines and organisms." Cyborgization means

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A Full Cyborg Is an Agent Defined by Its Actions

Haraway points out, however, that the change does not affect only real aspects of everyday life, increasingly influenced by interventions of technical systems. No less important is the change of imagination, the cyborgization of minds, caused, for example, by the works of popular culture we already spoke about. And it is this change that contains an emancipatory potential, an answer to the TINA slogan. The alternative does not exist in the world ordered by the binary divisions quoted above. They are the source of male domination, expressed, for example, in the arms race and militarization.

A paradoxical by-product of this race is cyborgization, which by removing the line between organism and machine opens the way to abolishing other divisions, including the most important one—into man and woman. Because a full cyborg has no sex, it is an agent defined by its actions rather than its sexuality. This discovery opens the way to an alternative. It leads through becoming aware of your cyborg condition and taking control over it through socializing knowledge and technology.

Haraway is conscious of the ambiguity of technological solutions: the Internet may be an instrument of both social integration and achieving domination by corporations. This is where the political nature of technology lies—it opens new possibilities through its ambiguity. It is better than escapism based on the belief that you can run away from modernity to a charming innocence from pre-modern times. There is no escape, but there is a possibility of fighting. “I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess,” declared Haraway.

Changing the Perspective on Nature

The text, written more than thirty years ago, has lost nothing of its power and relevance, but Haraway did not stop at it and she formulated other manifes-

tos. The second, from 2003, is “The Companion Species Manifesto.” This vague title conceals another radical move, continuing the path indicated in the “Manifesto for Cyborgs.” If there is no borderline between machines and organisms, then how are relations between organisms, for example people and animals, shaped? Haraway shows that using sharp distinctions between species is absurd. Humans co-develop with the animals surrounding them, the best example of which is their tens-of-thousands-years-long co-development with dogs.

The Internet may be an instrument of both social integration and achieving domination by corporations. This is where the political nature of technology lies—it opens new possibilities through its ambiguity.

Realizing this symbiosis means the necessity of changing your perspective on nature, rejecting—like in the case of the humans/machines relation—binary oppositions. Humans are part of nature, this is self-evident. However, they do not form an isolated, separate species but contribute to the “spider web of life” with other species. The culmination of writings of the more than 70-year-old thinker is the book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* from 2016, another work going beyond the dominant notions. This time Haraway takes up the extreme challenge posed to humans—the awareness of the finality of Earth as the basis of their existence.

In the scientific language, this fact is described by the term “Anthropocene”—it defines the time in which we live and in which people, thanks to the technology they developed, became the main factors shaping the further development of the geocosystem. This fact is perfectly visible in geological formations, and hence many scholars propose to sanction it by acknowledging that the geological era of Holocene ended and Anthropocene started.

A Return to the Earth from Greek Mythology

Haraway accepts this proposal, although she prefers the term “Capitalocene.” It changes the perspective, because it shows that the actor behind the change is not an abstract human, but a specific, historically developed social-economic system, that is capitalism. But she ends the discussion with her own proposal, to call the new times Chthulucene. Putting together the Greek words *kthom* (earthly) and *kainos* (new), she wants to communicate the arrival of a new epoch of return to the earth. Again, it is not about a return

to the good Mother, but to the earth from Greek mythology, often hiding sinister forces under its surface, forces which may rapidly end the Anthropocene with the extermination of the arrogant species.

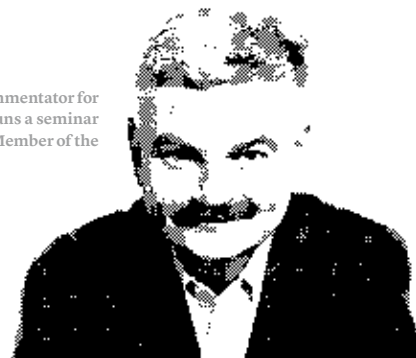
Donna Haraway is a “child of Sputnik,” a program of education in natural sciences with which the USA reacted to the Soviet threat. This program facilitated science education for women and produced the ranks of technocrats and researchers who ensured the Cold War advantage of the United States. However, Haraway did not join these ranks, choosing to engage in the criticism of the capitalist system instead. An interesting choice for a person raised in a traditional Irish Catholic family. Catholicism was for her an important and intense experience until early young age. She does not renounce it today and declares that she is a “lay Catholic.” She emphasizes that the experience of sacraments, especially Communion, had a significant impact on the development of her thought, producing the belief in the force of semiosis, that words (concepts and metaphors) influence reality.

Donna Haraway is a “child of Sputnik,” a program of education in natural sciences with which the USA reacted to the Soviet threat. This program facilitated science education for women.

The prestigious artistic magazine *ArtReview* called Donna Haraway the third most important figure of the world of art in 2017. In just one year she went forty places up. Interestingly, she is not directly involved in art, but the jury decided that her rapid rise resulted from her equally rapidly rising influence on the imagination of artists. It is the best possible expression of admiration for her almost four-decades-long work of persuading people that there is an alternative, but we need a new language which will create a new reality.

EDWIN BENDYK

is Head of Centre for Future Studies at the Warsaw-based Collegium Civitas and a commentator for *Polityka* weekly. He is a lecturer, writer, and columnist, author of several books. He runs a seminar on the new media in the Centre of Social Sciences at the Polish Academy of Sciences. Member of the Polish PEN Club. | Photo: Polityka Archive





Why Should We Care about Going to Mars?

Despite being often denounced and considered impractical, space research plays an important role in building our future.

Going to Mars is beyond human capability, at least when it comes to humans themselves. So far, our remotely controlled, sophisticated robots are discovering peculiarities of this red boulder flying through space on our behalf and this status quo will not change at least for the next ten years.

Since the 1970's, when the in-situ research started with American landers Viking I and Viking II, we have been closely looking at Mars and unveiling mysteries of the Red Planet. It indeed is a challenge. Less than 10 of our probes successfully landed, yet they provided us with so much valuable information. We have learnt that Mars is like Earth's little brother: it shares a similar history and of all planets in our Solar System, it is the closest to our one. It has a thin atmosphere which allows for some weather phenomena to occur: wind, clouds, and even dust storms. There are signs that it used to be covered with liquid water, creating oceans, rivers, and carving out valleys into the Martian soil. Water is still stored there, although as ice, along with frozen carbon dioxide.

So what is our motivation to go to Mars? All of the mentioned properties make it a perfect candidate for a planet that could host life. This breakthrough discovery would redefine thinking of humans as species. However, even without this discovery, Mars is an interesting place. Its distance from Earth, temperature range, large storage of water, carbon dioxide, and other chemical compounds make it so far the most feasible option for colonization and potential terraforming, hence making it the first stop on turning humankind into multiplanetary species. It may sound too much like a science

fiction but this effort is crucial for the survival of our kind and for learning more about our own Planet Earth. In science, analogies are a substantial tool to discover the missing pieces of a puzzle and studying Mars can provide us with information that can tell us about the history of Earth, its formation, and what may happen to it in future.

A Common Goal Can Unite People

In order to do that, our scientists and engineers are developing a cutting-edge technology. Despite their political disputes, countries cooperate, because this feat is too big to be completed by a single nation. It is a great example how a common goal can unite people regardless of their differences. In the past ten years, several missions based on international cooperation successfully reached Mars and there are more coming in the upcoming decade. In 2020, two missions, European ExoMars 2020 and its American counterpart Mars 2020 will launch towards Mars and in the following years, we can expect some of the most ambitious projects in human history taking place. Samples of Mars soil would not only be dug out using drills but eventually returned to Earth for a more thorough analysis. Due to the limitations of our technology, this is where we need to go beyond human activity: using landers, robotic rovers, and potentially drones is our only option to explore this planet.

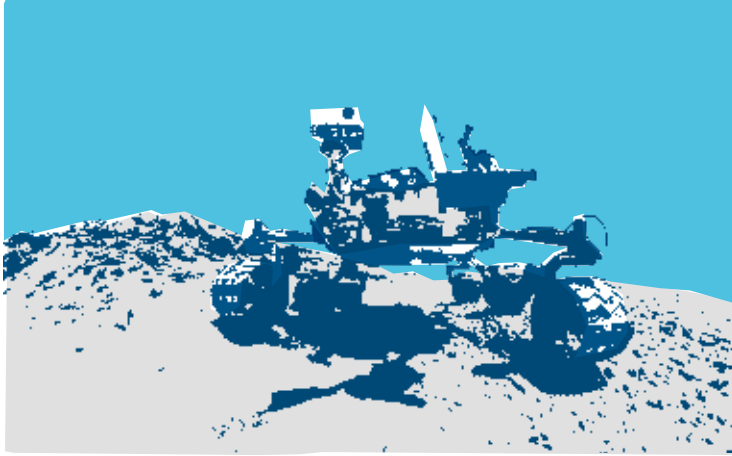
But is it really the only option? Since so many countries have been involved in the research of Red Planet for so long, why did we not go to Mars already when people managed to get to the Moon? There are several reasons and none of them make this task easier.

The Problem of Distance, Gravity, and Radiation

First, a major problem is the distance. In an ideal constellation, the journey between both planets using the launch systems available now takes about

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eight months. Eight months! Even the signal, travelling at the speed of light, takes several minutes to reach Mars. That is a very long time throughout which the astronauts' crew shall occupy themselves with work, and the group dynamics will develop. Moreover, there is still an issue with covering basic physiological needs on their space journey, such as nutrition, hydration, and



PICTURE 1: Curiosity Selfie; source: NASA/JPL-Caltech

breathing. Furthermore, since the trip takes so long, duration of the scientific mission on the surface shall take at least a year. Along with both journeys, we talk about a mission lasting as long as three years. For such an extended period of time, we do not quite yet have the technology available to create the right conditions for astronauts' survival.

Second, the gravity. Here on Earth, we do not pay much attention to it as long as things are not falling out of our hands. It becomes a real issue when one tries to defy gravity and escape a gravitation field of a planet or a moon. While escaping the Moon is considered rather simple

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due to lower gravity, Mars is a larger, more massive body, and this causes a problem. A higher gravitational acceleration is more difficult to conquer (just to put it in perspective, lunar gravitation acceleration is equal to $\frac{1}{6}$ of Earth's one, while on Mars it grows to $\frac{1}{3}$ of Earth's gravitational acceleration, and that is quite a difference). In order to successfully leave Mars and return back on Earth, we would have to deliver a really powerful rocket to Mars. Experts say it would have to be as powerful as Saturn V, a rocket that brought people to the Moon. And getting such a colossus intact on Mars is really tricky. Most likely we will end up using reusable launch systems instead.

Third, when we are at those distances and launch systems, the way to Mars has another big setback, and that is the ubiquitous cosmic radiation. Missions to the Moon within the Apollo program have not been exactly long, which worked in favor of the astronauts on board. The longest one lasted for 12 days, which is still a duration that human body can withstand in space and receive reasonable amounts of cosmic radiation.

Taken to the extreme, if we sent astronauts to Mars tomorrow, not only would they not have a chance to get back, but they would probably go blind or simply die in space.

The Endeavor Is Taking a Concrete Shape

However, eight months of travelling through such an environment is a significantly longer period and our technology does not provide us with solutions which would efficiently protect astronauts in deep space. Taken to the extreme, if we sent astronauts to Mars tomorrow, not only would they not have a chance to get back, but they would probably go blind or simply die in space.

Despite what has been said regarding Mars properties and challenges which arise with our attempts to get humans to another planet, this greatest endeavor in human history is taking a concrete shape. Multiple parties are interested in going to Mars, including Elon Musk's private venture SpaceX, which suggests the incredible potential this planet offers. While his plans may seem unrealistic, it is because his marketing-driven approach does not allow him to make any long-term estimations. NASA and its partners suggest a different, more realistic scenario.

In 2028, the first humans will reach Mars orbit. There, in a self-sustainable orbital station, they would cooperate with robots and drones on the surface. The main issue nowadays is the long delay in communication caused simply by the great distance between both planets as this prevents us from controlling any technology on Mars in real time. That may change with the orbital station from where, using VR, we may control our robots and dramatically speed up the exploration. This newly obtained information may lay a foundation for a decision when and where it would be best to land. Depending on funding and technological advancement, the first people will set foot on the surface of Mars in 2033 or 2035. And that is, at least in space research, right around the corner.

A Redefinition of Our Thinking

This milestone in space exploration will redefine how we think of human society and may benefit us all. The last time our technological advancement rapidly evolved was thanks to our effort to reach the Moon and it has led to the miniaturization of computers, digital photography, and a vast amount of insulation materials used nowadays. Such breaking moment may be coming again with another challenge ahead of us. As it was outlined, there are many issues we need to solve before the first human will walk on Mars and safe-

The last time our technological advancement rapidly evolved was thanks to our effort to reach the Moon and it has led to the miniaturization of computers, digital photography

ly return. The beauty of such situation is that our future inventions will not only help astronauts set foot on an unknown land but also help hundreds of millions of people here on Earth. To sustainably obtain drinkable water and efficiently produce food in such hostile environment will teach us valuable lessons and this technology can be reused in similar, just slightly less hostile places here on Earth.

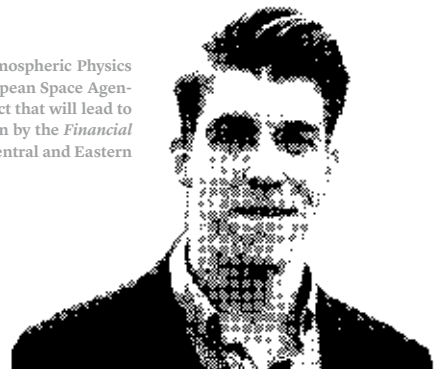
And finally, the aspect of unity. Contemporary witnesses who watched the television on the memorable Monday 21st of July, 1969, reported that they felt a sense of unity with the whole humanity and this experience was shared by people regardless of nationality, ethnicity, gender, or age. In the upcoming years we will have a chance to go through the same, perhaps even more intense experience. Despite being often denounced and considered impractical, space research plays an important role in building our future, not only as a field that can provide us with much-needed technology but also as a tool that will pave our way outside of our own planet and help us build peaceful, cosmopolitan future. That is why we should care about going to Mars.



We invite the alumni of Aspen Young Leader Programme to present their projects, thoughts and inspiration in Aspen Review. Aspn.me/AYLP

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Charles King: We Are Back in the 19th Century

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INTERVIEW
ETHNICITY
NATIONALISM
RACISM

If you ask average students about differences between human beings, the first division is race, next comes ethnicity. They believe that it is real. Not just that it's a powerful sort of idea—says Charles King, professor of International Affairs and Government at Georgetown University in an interview with Aleksander Kaczorowski.

ALEKSANDER KACZOROWSKI: You have written some excellent books on the Black Sea, Caucasus, Istanbul, and Odessa. How did you get involved in these Eastern Europe issues?

CHARLES KING: Where I grew up, if you wanted to be strange at the time when I grew up, the best way to be strange was by being interested in the Communists. I grew up in a rather conservative part of the United States, in the South, in Arkansas. During the Cold War in the 1980s this part of the world might as well have been on another planet, at least the society that I grew up in. And I think I was always fascinated by the idea that people who live as far away as Europe or even in the Soviet Union must be real people, need not have two heads.

You know, “the Russians love their children too?”

Yeah, you know, you mention this song that, of course it was a silly pop song in a way, but I think to the 15-year-old me that was a bit of a revelation: “Oh yes, I guess they must.” So then I just became fascinated by the Communist world, as we used to call it, and my first time out of the US was to the Soviet Union. I had never left the US before. I got my passport, they sent it to you through your post office back then. So I got a passport to go with my Russian class to Leningrad and Moscow.

That was the spring of 1987, which was of course an interesting time. The beginning of Perestroika, the beginning of glasnost. The circumstances, the places, the people,

all that was fascinating. It had a particular kind of smell, the place, the particular Soviet smell and it was some combination of a very cheap tobacco and grease from the wheels of the metro cars. I still remember being fascinated by it. I had no business caring about anything like that, I mean, I grew up on a farm, my mom still lives on the family farm, but I think I was just thrown into a thing that was as different from what I knew as I could imagine. And then I decided I wanted to go to graduate school in that field.

I got a scholarship after I finished my undergraduate degree, to do a master's degree in Russian and East European studies and I kind of landed by chance in the best possible place, at Oxford. The main person teaching Eastern European history and politics was Timothy Garton Ash. I was in the same class with PhD student Timothy Snyder and there was a guy, a visiting student from Bulgaria, Ivan Krastev. I think we all felt we were experiencing something special.

Was it 1989?

It was right after. It was in 1990 that I came to Oxford. So everything was still fresh and I signed up for a two years' master's degree in the middle of which, of course, the August coup happened in Moscow so I started a degree which was called "Soviet studies" and by the time I graduated it's changed its name to "Russian...". Then

I was searching around for something to write my dissertation on, and I remember Tim Snyder, who came a year after me and we both had the same scholarship. I remember talking with him about what he wanted to do and he said "I'm gonna go off this summer and study Polish."

I thought I should learn a new language too. I learned Russian as an undergraduate and I thought I should pick up another

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language. I thought Tim is doing Polish, so I should pick something different. There was an ad on the language center board that you could learn Romanian, so I called the place and I started working with a guy, he was another student from Romania. And one thing led into another, I started to focus more on South-Eastern Europe and that part of the world. And I think, I've really been fascinated, for some time, by this kind of meeting place of the Islamic world and Europe. And much of the history of Eastern Europe is about that meeting.

And that, over time, flowed into being very concerned with nationalism and national issues and I found myself increasingly writing books about things that were sort of against a national story. My

dissertation was about Moldova, about Romanian and Russian relations over this territory. It was really a story about how national identity gets constructed or deconstructed. Over time I picked some topics that allowed me to talk about the past in a way that is something other than national. History writing is done in museums, history curricula are taught as if the only way to talk about the past is to talk through something called the nation. I wanted to pick subjects where you cannot lie about nations.

But why did you choose the Black Sea?

I wanted to write a book that moved away from my main concern, which was Romania, Romanian speaking lands. I had a Fulbright scholarship in Istanbul in 1998, so I was almost on the Bosphorus, I was renting an apartment up above the Bosphorus. And it dawned on me that one way in which you could write about history that didn't just take the nation as

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a given was by picking some geographical feature and writing on it from a historical perspective. Because it's strange that we think it's totally unproblematic to write big, thick history books called "The Bulgarians" or "The Poles". When that's a very problematic thing to do. Especially if you want to cover a long historical era as you have to assume that those who you try to call Bulgarians today existed 5 or 15 centuries ago.

I guess you could just write the history of the Black Sea that revolves around the Ukrainians, the Georgians, the Turks, but that would be a very boring book. And I wanted my books to talk about the way in which people interacted across this landscape. Nationality as we know it now was non-existent. It doesn't of course mean that there weren't conflicts, it just means that the unit of conflict or cooperation wasn't something called the ethnic nation.

What struck me about this book was your positive view on the Russian empowerment in this area. It was the Russian state which modernized the northern part of the seaside and brought modernity to this mixture of cultures that had existed for a few thousand years.

Of course it depends on the period. For the territory which was a part of the Soviet Union it is rather a de-modernizing force between 1970-80. But if you're talking

about the 1870-80s, then yes, this is the periphery of the modernizing empire. And especially for 50 years now historians of Russia in the US and Europe have realized that you actually can't tell Russian imperial history without understanding something about empires and disarray.

There's now a new generation of younger historians of the Russian empire who realize that they have to be multilingual. If you're going to do anything on the Black Sea you have to have very good

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Russian and Turkish to use the Ottoman sources. There was a wonderful PhD student at Georgetown University who wrote about diseases around the Black Sea and realized that in the 19th century the growth of the modern border guard systems was largely a result of the quarantine system. The border guards were there essentially as disease control agents. And the modern system of guards grew on top of that system of disease control. It's almost like a microbial history of the Black Sea. So there's so much good work now that begins to transform some of those old narratives.

What's wrong with those old narratives?

Well, it's amazing to me that when you go to things called "national museum" across the region from the Baltic to the Black Sea the structure of the story is exactly the same. Like, when you walk in the first room there's going to be a mock-up of an archaeological dig with some bone in it. The first thing you see is a big map and the map shows your country at its greatest expanse. And you kind of think "Why would you do that? Why wouldn't you show your country when it was the smallest it ever was?" You could do that, but now we're gonna show the greatest expanse, go through rooms that are about the growth of some kind of a local culture, which won't have a name like "Hungarian" or "Romanian," it will have some archaeological name but you'll discover that the people in this place painted their pots in a very particular way, so that tells you that they were a unified culture, civilization, and then there were some invasions. Then you had an invader for too long and then you're going to have a national poet.

I always think that if it was a detective story, the detective at some point would say: "Wait a minute. Nobody's telling exactly the same story about what happened." I would be suspicious that everybody is lying. But we never get suspicious like a detective.

We should do better at that. The nature of modern nationalism is that you can take exactly the same museum and transplant it to a different place and change the proper nouns and you have got exactly the same story. And we repeat that over and

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over, we repeat the national symbolism in the museum and in the school curricula. This thing kind of perpetuates itself. And it gets to this point where it can cause people to lose any sense of moral perspective whatsoever. There are a lot of things that do that, this erosion, like communism and authoritarianism but nationalism does that, too. Is it really more important that you conjugate a verb in a particular way and you get everybody else to conjugate the verb in a particular way rather than letting in a Syrian family who will die? When you think about it what a bizarre thing to believe that this.

Why do we believe in this, then?

Because we believe in the idea of modern states and modern states are deeply intrusive ways of organizing your political life. I mean the modern state that cares how you educate your kids or a modern state that cares whether it treats you for disease or not, or a modern state that cares what version of history you tell yourself

and your children and repeat it. But what we should be worried about is whether people are living the values of freedom, openness, democracy, responsive government, the sanctity of the individual, the rights of women. Those are the things that we should be really focused on. But the political debate is all about what does the national museum look like. It's really the wrong set of things.

Are you talking about Europe?

The US is going through the same version of the same kind of thing. It's complicated in America because our version of nation is a thing we call "race" and we divide our society along this line. It's just that the American translation of the word "nationalism" is "racism." It has its peculiarities but historically it's the same phenomenon. And so in our debates about passing along values they sometime get hijacked in the same way that they might in the European context.

I think we're witnessing the natural outcome of some tensions that were there all along. The American view of Central Europe and, for that matter, of the Soviet Union during the Communist period, was as a prison house of nations. Not really a prison house of people, but of peoples. It was not the idea of captive individuals or human rights, but the nation was somehow captive to the foreign influence. And so that train of thought was always there

during the Cold War, this tension between the human rights idea and a deeply nationalist vision of political community. And in a way in this moment you see a separation between those different ideas.

The best example of this is, of course, Hungary, where you rewind the tape 20 years. And I remember conference after conference, seminar after seminar where 35-year-old Fidesz representatives were talking about European values, freedom, and democracy, doing it in excellent English and all of the ex-cold warriors from America and Britain were sitting around the table nodding and saying “Yes! That’s the future of Europe.” But then I also remember some of the same Fidesz folks when they started talking about Treaty of Trianon.

Do you know the late train theory of nationalism?

No.

The Hungarian train pulls up at the station just at the time that the station announcer announces the end of the nation state. And the Hungarians arrive and shout “Wait a minute! We just got here and now you’re telling us that in the era of globalization you don’t need the nation state anymore?! We’ve only just thrown off the shackles of foreign occupation!” And that, I think, is the essential Fidesz message now. So their approach to things like multilingualism

and immigration looks very 19th century. Because it is very 19th century.

But then of course the thing being proclaimed in Britain, France, US, or elsewhere is also increasingly 19th century.

Even in America. I am always amazed

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by this and I think that many Europeans don’t understand it but America has long had its nationalist narrative. It’s a deeply European-style nationalism that privileges the role of people, particularly those of a British Isles origin and of Nordic heritage. It was called in the 19th century the “nativist movement.” In the period from the 1930s to the 1960s or so the real inheritors of it were mainly southern politicians in the segregated states in the South. It’s always been there and “Trumpism” is just the latest version of it.

What is your next book about?

I’m doing something different now. I realized that over the years I’ve learned something about nations and nationalism and ethnicity and conflicts. So I’m going to turn around and write about my own country. I’m writing a book about

a group of intellectuals in the 1920s-30s in the US at the time of restrictions on immigration, rising nationalism, racism, on the eugenics movement in America,

what we should be worried about is whether people are living the values of freedom, openness, democracy, responsive government, the sanctity of the individual, the rights of women.

who argued deeply against the scientific reality of all of those things. They were people who were quite well-known in the US, such as Margaret Mead, the anthropologist, but they found themselves at a moment in the history of their own country when they had to argue forcefully

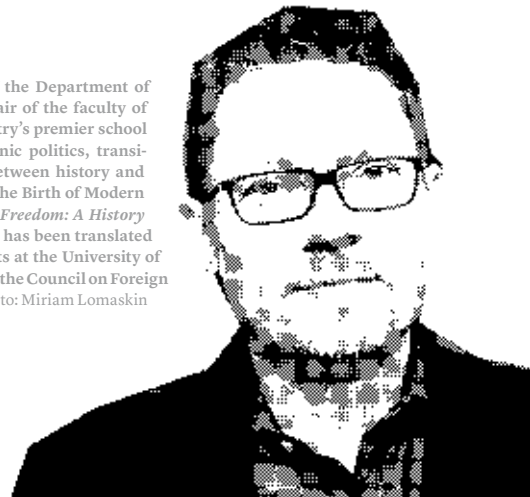
against the received wisdom. And I think we're increasingly in that moment now.

If you ask average American students on the difference between human beings, the first division is race, next comes ethnicity, and then, further down the line, you have religion. They have in their heads this 19th century division of society and they believe that it is really real. Not that it's just a powerful sort of idea. They believe that it's biology. And it astounds me that in the 21st century this pseudo-scientific vision, which they took from school, from their parents, still exists.

Collaboration Aleksandra Kaczorowska

CHARLES KING

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Hungary, Fidesz, and the EU: The Elections and After

What the country needs is a constructive opposition, one to which the government could listen rather than ignore.

György Schöpflin At the time of writing this text, it is too early to say anything definitive about the strategies of the new Fidesz government. Still, one can be reasonably sure of a good deal of continuity in foreign policy—building on the Visegrad 4 (V4), trying to balance the energy dependence on Russia, and maintaining a not-too-quarrelsome relationship with the EU.

There is near-constant comment from the Left that tries to signal the death of the V4. One can see why. From the perspective of the universalist Left, a coherent V4 is more than an obstacle, it is a pain in the neck, above all because there is some justice in the V4 complaints of being treated as secondary members of the EU, who must simply accept what the EU-14 tell them, notably in the Left's favorite areas of human rights and civil society.

The proposition that there are viable alternatives to arranging the power relationship between elected governments and unelected sources of power (NGOs, judiciary, lobbies, etc.) is not just offensive in the eyes of the Left but positively sacrilegious. Can there be more than one model of democracy in Europe? No, say the liberals (or hyper-liberals as John Gray has called them); yes, says Fidesz and much of the rest of the V4 (and whisper some other member states). The success of Fidesz in the April 8 elections proves the point that this model of democracy works.

Mass Immigration Triggered a Trauma

A few words here as to why it has worked. There were a number of issues on which the two Fidesz governments' record was less than perfect—health-care, education, the weakness of SMEs are among them. Yet the Left never made any attempt to campaign in these bread-and-butter issues. Instead, it walked right into the trap that Fidesz set for it. It made no attempt to shift the election campaign from immigration, on which it would always be weak, as the opposition knew full well.

Mass immigration—the arrival of over 200,000 migrants and refugees in 2015 on Hungarian territory—triggered a trauma that the Hungarian state was unable to provide the security that society wanted. In a real way, the uncontrolled march of the migrants questioned the very existence of the Hungarian state, a deeply neuralgic thought in the light of history, and constituted a form of structural violence.

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The opposition, captives of human rights normativity as they are, could never see it in this way, which was, presumably, why they walked into the Soros trap. Many observers, both abroad and in Hungary, were perplexed by the Sorosisation of the campaign. This has to be seen at the symbolic level. In effect, by focusing so strongly on Soros, the Fidesz campaign made him the symbolic leader of the opposition, the opposite polarity to Orbán.

In this contest, Orbán would always have a solid majority. Soros, the alien outsider—his Jewishness was completely irrelevant in this connection—could never be a rallying point for a mass of the voters. The only way

for the Left to escape this trap would have been to distance itself from Soros and cut itself off from the heavily Soros-dependent NGO ecosystem, it was unable to do so, hence the Left's message to the electors was always overshadowed by the Soros issue.

Hopes of Orbán Disappearing Have Been Dashed

In the short term, the left-wing opposition is distraught, traumatized, and at a loss. Each and every one of its tactics failed: a half-hearted wooing of Jobbik, reliance on the moral support of their Western counterparts, the constant stories of the opposition being able to unite behind a single anti-Orbán candidate. Jobbik, which sought to displace Fidesz as a center-right ruling party, also failed, above all for reasons of their lack of credibility; still, it emerged as the largest opposition party with a million votes.

In the short term, the opposition's response to its electoral defeat is to rely on the street. This is a perfectly acceptable instrument in a democracy, but it will work only if the ruler's self-legitimation is already eroded. This can hardly be true of Fidesz after its election victory. And the fear is that by launching street demos—there were perhaps 100,000 demonstrators in Budapest on the April 14—the opposition will not begin to reappraise its concept of opposition.

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Here the legacy of the late communist period and the way in which that legacy was transferred by the former democratic opposition to a multi-party system has been thoroughly negative. Under communism, the opposition could afford to be destructive and to try to eliminate one-party rule. But once it succeeded with the collapse of communism, the destructive model of opposition became counter-productive because it led to a zero-sum concept of politics, effectively excluding democratic compromise and promoting a winner-take-all mindset.

This polarization is so far-reaching in Hungary (and Poland) that it has come close to bringing a segmented society into being, but one which cannot find a way out of this cul-de-sac. What Hungary needs, therefore,

is a constructive opposition, one to which the government could listen rather than ignore.

The nature of the Hungarian domestic scene is inherently interesting, but has implications for the country's relationship with Brussels too. If there were hopes in the EU that Orbán and Fidesz would disappear, these have been thoroughly dashed. The Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, Frans Timmermans, et al. will have to come to terms with another four years of Fidesz and maybe are ready to do so. The European Parliament's report demanding the launching of an Article 7 procedure will certainly go ahead, it is likely to be voted on in the autumn, but will then probably run into sands.

What Hungary needs, therefore, is a constructive opposition, one to which the government could listen rather than ignore.

It is up to Council to act, but it is unlikely that either the Austrian or the Romanian presidencies will be particularly eager to pursue Hungary. And then, in May 2019, the European Parliamentary elections will very likely produce a legislature in which there will be a blocking minority of Euroskeptics, or near enough. Hungary (and Poland) will then move down the agenda, much to the sorrow of the left-liberal hegemony.

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Europe's Pet Autocrats

The EU is trapped in an authoritarian equilibrium. Could autocracy spread from Hungary, where it is well-entrenched, and Poland, where it is rapidly taking root, to other member states?

Over the past eight years, Viktor Orbán's Fidesz government has dismantled Hungarian democracy and replaced it with a distinct form of what both Balázs Trencsényi and Dalibor Rohacs have labeled Goulash authoritarianism. In Orbán's soft-authoritarian kleptocracy, journalists, judges, civil society activists, and opposition politicians are not imprisoned, and nominally "free" elections are held. The government maintains the pretense that it is a democracy, albeit an avowedly "illiberal" one. In reality, however, it is no democracy at all. The media is almost completely controlled by the government or by oligarchs closely tied to it.

The judiciary has been captured by Fidesz and packed with partisan loyalists. Independent NGOs and opposition politicians are demonized in government-run mass propaganda campaigns that invoke conspiracy theories and anti-Semitic tropes; advertisements plaster the country depicting Fidesz' political opponents and critics as pawns in an international plot orchestrated by Brussels bureaucrats and the Jewish banker George Soros to destroy Hungary's Christian culture by flooding it with millions of Muslim refugees. Most importantly, elections have been so thoroughly rigged (through manipulation of voting rules, harassment of opposition parties, and media manipulation) that opposition parties have no real chance of winning. If a minimal definition of democracy entails *free* and *fair* elections, Hungary certainly fails the second half of that test.

With democratic institutions and the rule of law in retreat in countries across the world, it might come as little surprise to see a young democracy like Hungary go off the rails. But one thing makes developments in Budapest much more surprising than those in Moscow or Ankara: Hungary is a member of the European Union. The EU claims to be “founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and respect for human rights.” How could a union founded on democratic values allow an autocracy to emerge in its midst?

Party above Principle

The main answer is to be found in a vice as old as democratic politics itself: excessive partisanship. The chief reason that the EU has sat by passively as Viktor Orbán has destroyed democracy and the rule of law in Hungary is that he has enjoyed the political protection of leaders of his transnational Europarty—the European People’s Party or EPP. Nominally a center-right grouping that includes national affiliates such as Germany’s Christian Democrats, France’s Republicans, Poland’s Civic Platform, and Spain’s Popular Party, the EPP has provided a welcoming home for Orbán’s far-right, autocratic regime. Of course, party loyalty is a perfectly normal phenomenon in healthy,

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well-functioning democracies. The problem comes when party leaders are willing to sacrifice fundamental democratic values to advance their partisan interests, and that is precisely what the leaders of the EPP are doing today.

The EPP is the dominant force in EU politics: it controls a plurality of seats in the European Parliament, and EPP members Jean-Claude Juncker, Donald Tusk, and Antonio Tajani hold the Presidencies of the Commission, Council, and Parliament respectively.

As Orbán has discovered, this is a nice team to have in your corner in a political fight. For more than five years, leaders of the EPP have consistently defended him, endorsed his reelection, and worked to block EU action against his government, such as the triggering of the Rule of Law Framework, or the Article 7 procedure that can lead to sanctions for serious and persistent breaches of the EU’s fundamental values. They have done so despite the Orbán regime’s blatant violations of the EU’s

fundamental values and the EPP's own purported commitments to pluralistic democracy and the rule of law.

The hypocrisy of betraying cherished principles in the interest of partisan loyalty is of course a common feature of democratic politics around the world, so it is hardly a surprise we should find it in the EU. But the dynamics at play in the EU represent a very specific strain of this common disease. As scholars of comparative politics have noted, in the context of multi-level, federal-type systems like the EU's, partisanship can help sustain autocratic regimes at the state level within otherwise democratic federations. In such contexts, authoritarian leaders at the state level

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may deliver voters and legislators to a party or coalition at the federal level. In exchange for these votes and seats, the democratic leaders of that national coalition will be inclined to tolerate the local authoritarian's practices and block any calls for federal intervention.

Subnational Authoritarianism

These dynamics (sometimes labeled "subnational authoritarianism") help explain the survival of repressive governments in the Jim Crow American South for nearly a century after the Civil War: the national Democratic Party needed the support of Southern Democrats (Dixiecrats) to win majorities in Congress and to compete in presidential elections, so they protected Dixiecrat regimes in Southern states even as they systematically violated the fundamental rights of African American citizens and rigged the elections by disenfranchising them. Similar partisan dynamics are familiar in federations in Latin America, Argentina and Mexico included.

Today we see the same process at work in the EU, with Angela Merkel, Jean-Claude Juncker, Donald Tusk, Manfred Weber, Joseph Daul, and other EPP leaders protecting their party's pet autocrat Orbán because he delivers votes that bolster EPP dominance in the European Parliament and gives the group—usually though not always—a reliable vote in the European Council.

Though the EPP derives particular benefits from being the largest group, all Europarties benefit from being as big as possible: a party group's size influences the committee chairmanships it holds, the speaking time it is allocated in parliamentary debates, and the amount of EU funding it receives. Like the EPP, other Europarties have been tempted by such incentives. While the EPP may be the most egregious defender of an autocratic regime in the EU, it is hardly the only Europarty to betray a willingness to coddle demagogues or aspiring autocrats.

Leaders of the nationalist, Euroskeptic European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)—a party which includes the British Conservatives—have defended their Polish affiliate, the PiS, even as it has staged a brazen attack on the rule of law in Poland. ALDE, the Liberal and staunchly pro-integration EU party group, continues to stand by its Czech member party ANO whose populist Prime Minister, Andrej Babiš, has railed against the EU and is under criminal investigation for fraud involving EU subsidies. The Party of European Socialists (PES), the leading Europarty of the center-left, has shown more willingness to take on its own, criticizing Victor Ponta during Romania's 2012 constitutional crisis and even suspending Slovakia's Prime Minister Robert Fico between 2006 and 2008 after he went into coalition with a far-right party. Nevertheless, even the PES has shown its willingness to embrace national parties who violate its hallowed principles, as for in-

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stance in allowing Fico's SMER to remain a member in recent years despite his government's Islamophobic rhetoric and its blatant defiance of EU refugee policies supported by the PES.

Europe's Authoritarian Equilibrium

If partisanship is the ailment, what might be the cure? Counterintuitively, an added dose of partisanship may be necessary. The same comparative politics literature that explains how partisan politics can help local autocrats survive also explains conditions under which partisan politics may eventually help dislodge them from power. First, if the federal party supporting the local autocrat begins to suffer reputation costs from supporting him, the party may

finally withdraw support and press for his ouster. Second, if other federal parties are able to intervene to support local opposition parties, they may bring them the resources they need to break the local authoritarian's grip on power.

While such dynamics have eventually helped topple local autocrats within other federal-type unions, they are unlikely to play out in the EU context any time soon. The problem is that at present the EU is trapped in what I have termed an authoritarian equilibrium: Partisan politics in the EU has developed to a point where there are great incentives for Europarties to protect national autocrats in their groups, but not to the point where they might trigger the dynamics that could dislodge these autocrats. In this suboptimal trap, the EU has neither too much partisan politics, nor too little, but just the wrong amount.

The first problem is that because so few voters are even aware of the existence of Europarties, these groups pay no political price for supporting national parties that violate their fundamental values. In politics with more fully developed party systems, federal parties may eventually pay a political price for supporting a brazen autocrat, as his actions could tarnish their party's "brand." But given their low salience, Europarties have no brands to

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tarnish. If few voters know about the existence of Europarties like the EPP, fewer still would recognize the crucial role the EPP has played in supporting Orbán politically and blocking any EU action against his government. Thus the EPP and the national parties that belong to it pay no political price for supporting Orbán's autocratic regime. To put it another way, Angela Merkel and her CDU have probably lost zero voters in national elections or European Parliament elections as a result of their consistent support of Viktor Orbán's Fidesz party within the EPP. While the political benefits of tolerating autocrats in your party group are many, the immediate political costs of doing so are nearly nonexistent.

The EU's Half-Baked Party System

The second problem concerns the opposition. Once a local autocrat has consolidated single party rule, he can use the power of the party-state to make

it impossible for the opposition—even an opposition less inept than that in today’s Hungary—to compete effectively. In more fully developed polities, federal parties might channel assistance to the beleaguered local opposition parties. With enough outside support, the local opposition might eventually break the autocrat’s grip on power. But in the EU’s half-baked party system, it is illegal under EU party regulations for Europarties or their foundations to provide funding or resources to national parties. Thus, opposition parties in a state like Hungary that are persecuted by the Fidesz-controlled election commission and forced to compete on a profoundly uneven playing field can secure very little support from the Europarties to which they belong.

Meanwhile, the autocratic governing party does not need material support from its copartisans, because it controls the state budget. As the election observers from the OSCE concluded in their preliminary statement on the recent Hungarian elections, “Hungary’s 8 April parliamentary elections were characterized by a pervasive overlap between state and ruling party resources, undermining contestants’ ability to compete on an equal basis.” Ironically, in a state like Hungary that receives massive EU subsidies, when the autocratic government uses state resources to perpetuate its rule, it is to a large extent using EU resources. Thus the EU finds itself in the ridiculous position of heavily funding an autocracy that runs mass propaganda campaigns denouncing it.

Of Outer Bounds and Time Horizons

The EU is trapped in an authoritarian equilibrium, but can we expect it to escape anytime soon? Could autocratic member states persist for decades within Europe’s broadly democratic union? Could autocracy spread from Hungary, where it is well-entrenched, and Poland, where it is rapidly taking root, to other member states?

The lessons of US history are sobering in this respect: as Robert Mickey and others have shown, authoritarian enclaves persisted in the US South for nearly a century after the Civil War. To be sure, membership in the EU will place an outer bound on the form of authoritarianism member governments could practice: recognizing that mass arrests of journalists, civil society activists, or political opponents would most likely prompt some form of EU sanction, these regimes would remain soft-autocracies not outright dictatorships. But within those bounds, there is certainly a risk that such

governments could persist for many years within the EU, benefiting from its subsidies while thumbing their noses at its core values.

While the long-term survival of such regimes within the EU is possible, it seems unlikely. Instead, the emergence of such regimes is likely to soon provoke a major political crisis for the Union. The emergence of autocratic regimes that eliminate the independence of the judiciary is likely unsustainable within the EU. The EU is a community based on the rule of law, and it relies heavily on national courts—acting in their capacity as courts of the EU’s legal system—to enforce EU law faithfully and to provide effective remedies where it is violated. If the EU cannot count on the independence and sincere cooperation of a member state’s courts, then EU law effectively ceases to exist in that member state. Already a case has been referred to the European Court of Justice in which a judge from another member state (Ireland) is asking whether it can still treat Polish courts as independent bodies whose rulings need to be recognized in other member states.

Given the failure of Europe’s political leaders to take a stand against the rise of autocratic government in some member states, Europe’s judges may have little choice but to confront the issue. Yet even a bold judicial ruling from Luxembourg denouncing attacks on the rule of law and democratic values in Poland or Hungary would simply put the ball back in political leaders’ court. Eventually, the only real solution will involve Europe’s craven political leaders rediscovering their spines, denouncing the autocrats in their midst, and firmly sanctioning governments that flout the fundamental norms their states committed to when they joined the Union.

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Erhard Busek: Brussels Has to Learn How to Talk with Central and Eastern Europe

ASPEN.REVIEW
JAKUB MAJMUREK

INTERVIEW
POLITICS
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It's profoundly unfair to blame solely the new democracies of Visegrad group for anti-European sentiments—says Erhard Busek in an interview with Jakub Majmurek.

JAKUB MAJMUREK: Year 2018 marks not only the one-hundred-year anniversary of the end of World War I, but also of the end of the reign of House of Habsburg and Habsburg Empire. Is that issue discussed in Austria today? Do you believe that the legacy of Habsburg Empire is still significant for the Central and Eastern Europe?

ERHARD BUSEK: I wouldn't necessarily say that it's very widely discussed here, in Austria. It's clearly not an issue which would be crucial for contemporary Austrian politics. And as for the Central and Eastern Europe, I'd say that what is

still important for the politics of the region is perhaps not the legacy of Habsburgs, but of the disintegration of their rule, and the wave of nationalism following it after the end of the World War I.

One can argue that today as well we can observe a kind of populist, anti-European revolt in the Central and Eastern Europe, led by such politicians as Viktor Orbán or Jarosław Kaczyński. Would you agree with that opinion?

First of all, it needs to be said that a populist wave is going through the whole Europe. There's a lot of populism

in developed, Western democracies. Look at what is happening in France, in Belgium, in the Netherlands, and so on, and so forth. Look at the US, where Trump won presidential elections campaigning with “America First.”

One can also point to Austria in that matter. The government of Christian-Democratic Chancellor Sebastian Kurz is supported by a populist Freedom Party.

Yes, it’s happening for the second time. I think that it would be a challenge both for Europe and Chancellor Kurz to learn how to handle that situation, how to block the Freedom Party from leading the government in the populist direction.

But, to come back to the Central and Eastern Europe, I think it’s profoundly

Western European political and opinion leaders are very often lacking basic knowledge about the Central and Eastern Europe, they’ve got no clue what is really happening there.

unfair to blame solely the new democracies of Visegrad group for anti-European sentiments. For a long time I’ve been criticizing the way in which the Western countries, old member states of the EU, perceive what is happening in the so-called East (which is actually the middle of Europe). Western European political and opinion leaders are very often lacking basic

knowledge about the Central and Eastern Europe, they’ve got no clue what is really happening there. They’re often treating Central and Eastern Europe like it was one homogenous block. While in reality, the situation in Czechia is rather different than that in Poland, or in the Hungary. Look at the Czech Republic. The economy is really good, the country is cooperating with European institutions, and, despite some obvious problems, the general situation doesn’t look that bad.

What do you think about the recent developments in Slovakia, where Robert Fico had to resign as the head of government after mass protests following the assassination of the investigative journalist Ján Kuciak?

I was very impressed with what I saw in Slovakia. It was the biggest mobilization in that country since the fall of communism. Once again, it shows that we can’t treat Central-Eastern Europe as one, homogeneous bloc. That we sometimes have to talk directly to the civil society in the region. We witnessed how the citizens of Slovakia raised against the corrupted politics of their government. This is something which should be supported. But in order to be able to do it, we need the knowledge about differences between the situation in Slovakia and let’s say Poland. Ignorance in that matter is making a genuine discussion about the real problems of the region very difficult.

And the real problems of the region are?

The main problem of Central and European countries is their own history. They've all left the communist system still no so long ago. Perhaps not long enough to develop stable democracies. And even the stable democracies are currently facing very grave challenges: globalization, technological changes, mass migration. It can

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all understandably lead to some primitive, populist reactions, both in the new democracies and the old. There's an old joke about a man who says "It's horrible how everyone is thinking only about himself, only I think about myself!"—and this is how European politics does look like today.

Do you think that Western European elites have a feeling that countries of "New Europe" gave up on integration, that they want to opt-out from European project?

Once again, it's a misunderstanding. We can't assume that the people living in Central and Eastern Europe would become Europeans the day after their countries join European Union. It's a long, demanding process. Visegrad countries and their societies still have a lot to learn about living in integrated Europe and

the Western countries should teach them showing some patience and empathy in that process. European leaders have to talk with each other. They can't just make announcements in the media. I've been criticizing Austrian government for some time that it stopped talking with Orbán—we used to have many meetings with Hungarian government. If we still had, it could help solve some problems.

Some European leaders, like French President Emmanuel Macron, believe that the differences you're talking about should be reflected in the structure of the EU, in the project of "two-speed Europe."

I think it's a terrible idea. In Central and Eastern Europe it's—quite rightly I believe—regarded as discriminatory towards new member states. And it's just natural that when you feel that you're

It shows that we can't treat Central-Eastern Europe as one, homogeneous bloc

discriminated, you're trying to protect yourself—this is how the Eastern part of EU is reacting to Macron's proposals.

Do you think that Macron's plans for tighter integration of the eurozone have any chance of success?

I'm not sure about that. If you look at Angela Merkel, she sounds a bit different than Macron when she's talking about the future of Europe. She's rather in favor

of sort of compromise with Central and Eastern European countries. Macron's proposals are not generally accepted even in France—French parliament hasn't yet made any decision on that subject.

One of the main points of a heated discussion between the “New” and the “Old” Europe is the process of relocation of refugees. Why did it become such a huge issue in the Central and Eastern Europe?

Once again: it all comes down to the lack of dialogue. The European institutions are dictating the terms of relocation, there's no real discussion with Eastern European partners. We should also remember that Western countries did actually very little to help the Italians and Greeks with the refugee crisis. We can't blame Orbán for everything, can we?

The main problem of Central and European countries is their own history. They've all left the communist system still no so long ago. Perhaps not long enough to develop stable democracies.

But don't you think that the proposition that Poland should accept less than 10 thousand refugees is actually quite reasonable? It shouldn't be so controversial, should it?

The issue is not with the numbers, but with the lack of debate. The public opinion

in “New Europe” can have a legitimate feeling that Europe is forcing them to accept the refugees, that it's not respecting the democratic decisions of the Central and Eastern European nations.

There's an ongoing argument between European Commission and Polish government about the rule of law in Poland and their reforms of the judiciary. How should European institutions deal with Poland?

I think that European Union is totally correct here. Polish government is breaking the rules of the EU. Brussels should criticize and put pressure on Polish government, but at the same time talk with it. When was the last meeting between any important politician of the European Commission and Mr. Kaczyński?

Well, one can argue that Mr. Kaczyński is just a member of Polish Parliament, he doesn't hold any office.

Sorry, but it's a silly answer. You need all your resources to influence the decisions of Polish government. Nothing bad would happen if one of the EU commissioners asked for a meeting with Jarosław Kaczyński.

The problem is that in matters of judiciary reform the Polish government doesn't seem very eager to make any significant steps back.

Yes, that's why the European Commission

should also bear in mind that the current government and its politics is backed only by the minority of Poles. The European leaders should not only talk with Law and Justice Party, but also try to reach the majority of Polish citizens, undertaking dialogue through a vast, dense network of institutions of civil society in Poland.

It's just natural that when you feel that you're discriminated, you're trying to protect yourself—this is how the Eastern part of EU is reacting to Macron's proposals.

To what end the conflict between Warsaw and Brussels could lead?

It's up to European Commission and European Council. You can be sure of one thing, though: there's going to be no "Polexit." Poland is far too big and far too important for the EU to let it quit.

Law and Justice Party believes that Poland is a natural leader of the region. The government is trying to integrate Central European countries around such projects as Three Seas Initiative. What do you think about the prospects of such endeavors?

I've been observing politics for some time now, and after many years of experience I can say that almost every government is inventing new institutions to raise its influence. Many of them are vanishing

after more or less brief period of time. To give you an example, I was instrumental in creating Central European Initiative decades ago. Now it hardly functions.

What do you think are the greatest threats for Central European region and EU in general in the near future?

I think that's part of the problem, we're panicking about Orbán instead of discussing the real issues. Because the real danger for Europe is not Kaczyński but the politics of Mr. Putin. The real threat may come from the deeds of Turkey. Or from Chinese engagement in Africa, which could result in a new migration crisis. Besides that, Chinese are on a good way to overtake large part of European economy—unless Europe strengthens itself. These are the strategic problems, I'd worry more about them than about Mr. Kaczyński.

You've mentioned Putin as a "real problem" for Europe.

What do you think we can expect from his third term?

It's going to be a tough one, that's all that we can predict right now. I think that the West should perhaps reconsider its strategy towards Putin. I'm quite skeptical about the sanctions. They don't seem to be working, maybe we need a different approach, try some dialogue with the Russian leader. It's obvious that Putin did break international law many times and Russia clearly deserved to be punished, but

when you're imposing sanctions you also need a plan how to come out from them.

And what about Ukraine in that situation?

The good thing is that it was possible to achieve some kind of armistice. It's sadly not completely respected on both sides, but it's partially working. EU should put pressure both on Moscow and Kiev to make them fulfill their promises.

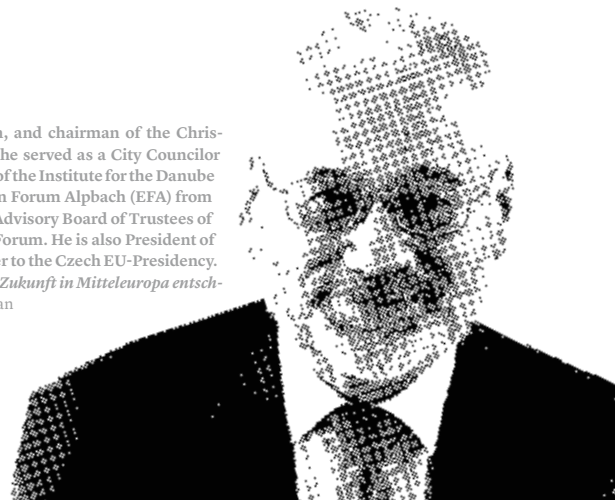
Polish government is breaking the rules of the EU. Brussels should criticize and put pressure on Polish government, but at the same time talk with it.

But it doesn't solve the Ukrainian problem in the long term, does it? What should be the blueprint of European politics towards Ukraine?

Europe has to learn from the failure of its own actions. Member states of the EU have no clue what the situation in Ukraine is really like. In the past we failed to develop a cohesive neighborhood policy towards Ukraine—one that could help the Ukrainian state boost its economy, social affairs, civil society. The events of both Maidan revolutions were the effect of that failure. Now we have to develop a new plan for strategic cooperation.

ERHARD BUSEK

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The Superpowers Flex Their Muscles

ASPEN.REVIEW
PAWEŁ PIENIAŻEK

POLITICS
SYRIA
KURDS
ASSAD
GEOPOLITICS

After seven years, there is less and less of a civil war and more and more of a proxy war between the superpowers in Syria. Illustrating that are the battles for Aleppo, Raqqa, Ghuta, and Afrin.

When trying to find a symbol of foreign domination, you always have to look at the sky. It was so in Afrin. People stopped or slowed down, shaded their eyes from the sun with one hand and pointed the other at the sky and exchanged a brief “oh, look, an airplane” or “oh, look, a drone.” The former frequently drew attention to themselves with the roar of the engine, they hovered low over the city. You never know if the pilot does not intend to drop the bombs just where you are in a given moment. Drones provoked less fear. They were well visible to the naked eye. They were really big and languished lazily over the city. They were watched carefully. A drone always heralds something bad—a potential air raid or artillery fire. Airplanes and drones flew over the city with impunity, because the Kurdish militias from Popular Protection Units and Women’s Protection Units, better known by the acronyms YPG and YPJ, do not have air fleets or anti-aircraft weapons. So people could only watch and hope that somehow it would be possible to avoid death from the air.

The Changing Fortunes of the Kurds

Afrin is a city and region of the same name, located in North-Eastern Syria. According to the UN, 323,000 people, mostly Kurds, lived in the region until recently. It was one of the most peaceful places in Syria, side-lined by most

of the terrible events which have been going on since 2011. This changed on January 20, 2018. Turkey and the militias supported by it began the operation “Olive Branch,” targeted at “terrorist nests,” that is Kurdish militias. Ankara treats YPG and YPJ as branches of the Workers Party of Kurdistan (PKK), which is regarded as a terrorist organization in Turkey, the United States, and the European Union.

Initially, Arab and Turkmen fighters along with the Turkish army very slowly occupied successive territories. It seems that they were unable to achieve the defined goal, which is a 30-kilometres wide buffer zone that would separate the Turkish border from the territories controlled by the Kurds. However, once the mountains were crossed, everything went smoothly. Kurdish militias were leaving one area after another, as they were unable to defend them. All their moves were watched and attacked from the air. The air zone over Afrin is controlled by Russia, which opened it for Turkish aircraft. Two and a half thousand people died in the battles for Afrin. It was difficult to find anyone among the killed and wounded Kurdish fighters and civilians who suffered bullet injuries. Usually, it was shards. Finally, on March 18, Afrin was taken by Turkey and the rebels.

The Kurds turned out to be just as defenseless in Afrin as the fighters of the so-called Islamic State in the battle for Raqqa in 2017. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), that is an alliance of Kurdish and Arab militias supported by an international coalition headed by the United States, were quickly occupying successive areas around the city after launching an operation against Isis. Despite numerous tunnels and strategies aimed at

Afrin was one of the most peaceful places in Syria, side-lined by most of the terrible events which have been going on since 2011.

undermining their air advantage, the Jihadists had no chance. There were days when over one hundred bombs were dropped by American aircraft on Raqqa. The city quickly turned into rubble. After more than four months of offensive, the fighters remaining in Raqqa reached an agreement with the SDF. Their convoy left the city and went to the province of Deir ez-Zor, where Isis occupies some territories until today. The SDF managed to do that only thanks to the active support of the international coalition. Were it not for the air raids, the Islamic State would have possibly remained in northern Syria for a long time.

Rescuing Assad

As we remember, anti-government protests in Syria broke out on the wave of the Arab Spring on March 15, 2011. Many Syrians demonstrated then against the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, against poverty, unemployment, and lack of prospects. Some also demanded democracy. Peaceful protests quickly turned into a bloodbath. Weapons appeared on both sides of the conflict, the authorities and the protesters. Three months later, people spoke about a civil war. In seven years, at least 400,000 people were killed in Syria. Over 11 million, that is half of the population living in the country before the war, had to leave their homes. Of that number, 6.5 million are still in the country.

With each passing year, this war is becoming less and less a civil war. The new dynamics of the conflict results from the involvement of other states, which are more and more active in Syria. Back in 2015, it still seemed that the days of President Assad's regime were numbered. Government forces were losing successive areas and the fighters threatened even Damascus. This changed when first Iran and then Russia decided to actively support the regime. As a result, scattered groups without a centralized command were forced to retreat and gradually ceded territory to the regime. An example of that was the battle for Aleppo.

It is the largest city in Syria, with around two and a half million people living there before the war. The first districts fell into the hands of the rebels in 2012. The city became a scene of endless fights. It was only the involvement of Russia, raiding the city with barrel bombs, as well as Iran that enabled Assad's army to surround the anti-government forces and four and a half years later to crush them and force them to surrender. According to the data of the Syrian Human Rights Observatory based in London, 21,452 civilians were killed during the fighting.

A “Hell on Earth” in Ghuta

Similar developments occurred recently in eastern Ghuta, a suburb of the capital city of Damascus, controlled since the beginning of the war by anti-government militias. It was one of the worst humanitarian crises during the conflict in Syria. UN Secretary-General António Guterres described the situation as “hell on earth.” Almost 400,000 people were imprisoned in this enclave controlled by the opposition. In February 2018, regime forces with their allies launched an attack and managed to crush the defenses of anti-government forces.

This happened after a dramatic battle in which hundreds of people were killed and the suburb was razed to the ground.

In April, the last militias left eastern Ghuta. Most of them, including Ha'yat Tahrir al-Sham associated with Al Qaeda, took refuge in the Idlib province, controlled by anti-government forces. Only Jayash al-Islam (the Army of Islam), whose number is estimated at 10,000 fighters, went to Jarabulus, located in Turkey-controlled area called the Shield of the Euphrates. The name comes from the first Turkish intervention in northern Syria in 2016. Its official aim was the fight against the Islamic State, but above all it was intended at preventing the Kurds from incorporating Afrin into territories controlled by them.

Geopolitics Has Captured Syria

At present, Assad's regime controls more than half of Syria. It would not be possible without its foreign allies, Russia and Iran. Turkey also creates an umbrella under which scattered militias can find shelter. They have to reciprocate with implementing Ankara's policy. They were in the vanguard of the battle for Afrin and suffered losses there.

Turkey is very active in building its position in north-western Syria, and local militias are used for this purpose. It is possible that soon they'll have to take part in the fight for the city of Idlib, the presence of Al Qaeda splinter groups offering a great excuse for that. Another potential target is Kurdish-controlled Manbij. For now, the attack is impossible, because international coalition forces operate there, but if President Donald Trump makes good on his announcements of a quick withdrawal of American troops from Syria, the Turks will certainly not hesitate to take the city.

Paradoxically, the only forces which can claim not to be directly connected with any foreign power are the jihadists. Smoldering concentrations of fundamentalism still pose a big threat. The Islamic state, various Al Qaeda splinter groups, and newly emerging organizations are waiting for a convenient moment to return. It is possible that they will be stronger than before.

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Should Central European EU Members Join the Eurozone?

ASPEN.REVIEW
ZSOLT DARVAS

ECONOMY
EU
CE
EUROZONE
MAASTRICHT

Central European governments—especially in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland—have a wait-and-see attitude and do not show an interest in joining. Yet the EU is not only about economic benefits.

The debate on eurozone entry of the Central European EU member states has intensified after Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission, expressed the Commission's ambition to accelerate the process and suggested a special pre-accession financial instrument to increase the euro's attractiveness. Are central European countries ready to join? Would it be beneficial for their economies or, conversely, would eurozone membership lead them to the same fate that southern eurozone members suffered after their own entry?

With the exceptions of Denmark and the United Kingdom, the two countries that have a treaty-based opt-out, all EU countries have a legal obligation to join the euro. But the EU treaties do not specify a timeline for this obligation and, in practice, countries can delay their entry for as long as they wish. Sweden, for example, would have been ready to join in 1999 or anytime since then; but since a referendum in 2003 turned down the eurozone membership, Sweden intentionally does not join the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM II), and thereby does not meet one of the entry criteria.

A Wait-and-See Attitude in Czechia, Hungary, and Poland

Central European governments—especially in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland—have a wait-and-see attitude and do not show an interest in joining. Sometimes the unfavorable examples of southern eurozone members—Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain—are used to argue against EU membership. These countries suffered from unsustainable development between

When southern countries joined the eurozone, the interest rates fell to the relatively low German interest rates from their previously higher levels.

1999 and 2008, which was partly related to their eurozone membership, and they had great difficulties after 2008. The overall economic record of these countries has been rather weak; looking into the reasons behind these weak outcomes can produce lessons for Central Europe to follow.

When southern countries joined the eurozone, the interest rates fell to the relatively low German interest rates from their previously higher levels. At the same time, these countries had higher price and wage inflation, partly reflecting the convergence of their lower price level to the eurozone average. But lower interest rates—coupled with somewhat higher wage and price increases—lowered the real value of the interest rate, which in turn fueled consumption and credit booms, raised the wage growth beyond productivity growth, and generated large external imbalances such as large current account deficits. These external deficits were primarily financed by borrowing from abroad; thereby, external indebtedness also increased to very high levels in these countries.

Southern European Developments Are Not a Template for the CEE Countries

At the same time, these countries also had structurally weak public finance positions. Greece and Italy had rather high public debt levels even before 2008. Spain had a seemingly good fiscal position with public debt below 40% of GDP and, in some years before 2008, it had a budget surplus. However, too much revenue came from the construction industry and other booming sectors, while major vulnerabilities were built up in the banking sector.

Ultimately, pre-2008 Southern European developments turned out to be unsustainable. When the crisis hit, private capital inflows stopped. This necessitated harsh current account adjustments, even if European

Central Bank's financing of banks helped to cushion the speed of adjustment. Strained fiscal positions necessitated procyclical fiscal tightening. Painful wage falls, unemployment increases, and emigration followed. Inadequate crisis management framework of the eurozone exaggerated the problems. Eventually, Southern European countries came out of the deep economic contraction after 2008, but the recession lasted too long and inflicted major social pains.

Clearly, Southern European developments should not provide a template for Central European countries. To the extent that the euro was responsible for the pain in the south, insofar as it fueled unsustainable developments, a degree of Central European caution is warranted.

The Lessons from the Mistakes Have to Be Learnt

Still, the euro was just part of the story in the south. Other factors also played important roles in the fate of the southern members. Improper functioning of the labor market allowed for excessive wage growth relative to productivity growth in the boom phase, and made the necessary reduction in wages more painful in the bust phase. Inadequate control of the banking sector did not prevent major vulnerabilities building up before 2008, which led to pain-

To the extent that the euro was responsible for the pain in the south, insofar as it fueled unsustainable developments, a degree of Central European caution is warranted.

ful and costly bank restructuring after 2008. What is more, fiscal policy mistakes before 2008 necessitated sharp fiscal tightening during the recession after 2008, so that fiscal policy could not be used to cushion the economic shock. The euro might have played a role in these pre-2008 policy mistakes too, if it led to complacency based on the belief that a crisis inside the eurozone is unlikely to happen. These policy mistakes could have been avoided and lessons from these mistakes have to be learnt.

Important conclusions can be taken from the experiences of central European countries too. Developments in the three Baltic countries—Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia—which maintained tightly managed exchange rates before introducing the euro between 2011, 2014, and 2015 respectively, were rather similar to developments in southern eurozone countries in the pre-crisis period, and in fact were more extreme in a number of aspects.

The economic contraction of the Baltics after 2008 was much sharper than in Southern Europe, but these countries were able to return to growth much faster, partly due to their higher level of microeconomic flexibility.

The Lack of a Stand-Alone Monetary Policy in Slovakia Did Not Hinder Good Developments

Perhaps more relevant for the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland is the experience of Slovakia, a country that introduced the euro in 2009. Slovakia had a floating exchange rate before entering the ERM, and within the ERM the value of the Slovak koruna appreciated sharply. The euro conversion rate for Slovakia was fixed in the summer of 2008, when Central European currencies were at record high levels relative to the euro. A few months later, the collapse of Lehman Brothers in September 2008 resulted in a massive currency depreciation of the Czech koruna, Hungarian forint, and the Polish zloty, but not the Slovak koruna. The currencies of the three central European currencies depreciated relative to the Slovak currency by about 30%—a huge change. If exchange rates matter so much, the three central European “outs” should have had better economic performance than Slovakia, but this did not happen.

The economic contraction of the Baltics after 2008 was much sharper than in Southern Europe, but these countries were able to return to growth much faster, partly due to their flexibility.

Slovakia was one of the best performers in terms of economic growth after 2008 and outperformed the Czech Republic and Hungary. Apparently, the lack of a stand-alone exchange rate and monetary policy in Slovakia did not hinder good economic developments. On the other hand, Hungary had a flexible currency both before and after 2008, yet there were unsustainable macroeconomic developments before 2008 and the growth record after 2008 was one of the weakest in the region.

Eurozone Membership Did Not Determine Economic Success in Central Europe

The example of Bulgaria is also telling. Bulgaria tied its currency to the D-mark in 1997, and then to the euro in 1999, without any change since. The only reason Bulgaria has not adopted the euro is that it was not allowed to do so. One of the conditions of eurozone entry is a stable exchange rate

inside the Exchange Rate Mechanism—but there are no transparent conditions on entering the ERM II and Bulgaria was not allowed to join it. Anyhow, the fixed exchange rate of Bulgaria makes this country a quasi-eurozone member.

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Bulgaria also accumulated a large current account deficit before 2008, though it was mostly financed by foreign direct investment and not by loans as in Southern Europe. Despite the fixed exchange rate, Bulgaria had a relatively mild recession after 2008 and recorded faster growth between 2009 and 2016 than the floating-rate Czech Republic and Hungary. This good Bulgarian growth performance is especially remarkable since Bulgaria had to manage a major macroeconomic adjustment by reducing the current account deficit (24% of GDP in 2007) to a surplus in recent years. Export market share of Bulgaria developed almost the same way as that of floating-rate Poland, and better than that of the Czech Republic and Hungary.

Clearly, eurozone membership (or the use of a fixed exchange rate) was not a factor determining economic success in Central Europe. There were both good and bad macroeconomic performances in both the flexible and the fixed exchange rate regimes of Central European countries. The implication is that the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland, as well as the other Central European “outs,” could be successful both with and without the euro.

The Maintenance of Healthy Fiscal Positions

Much more important than euro membership is the prevention of the build-up of macro vulnerabilities, like large foreign indebtedness and bank balance sheet fragility. Policymakers should develop tools to address such imbalances if they happen to occur. Macroprudential policy and sustainable fiscal policy should have key roles in prevention, while flexible labor and product markets should help the adjustment if such imbalances occur.

Another important point is the maintenance of healthy fiscal positions, so that fiscal policy can facilitate stabilization in an economic downturn. The Maastricht fiscal criteria (public debt must be less than 60% of GDP;

budget deficit less than 3% of GDP) are unsuitable for assessing the healthiness of fiscal position. For example, Ireland and Spain had budget surpluses and a debt-to-GDP ratio of only 25-40% in 2007, yet a few years later the public debt ratio soared to close to—or even above—100% of GDP. Instead of focusing on these headline fiscal numbers, it is of greater importance to analyze the underlying weaknesses of fiscal positions—such as an excessive

Macroprudential policy and sustainable fiscal policy should have key roles in prevention, while flexible labor and product markets should help the adjustment if such imbalances occur.

reliance on certain revenue streams (like those coming from the construction sector in Spain and Ireland before 2008); the existence of economic vulnerabilities, which might undermine fiscal revenues; and the sustainability of public expenditures, like pension and healthcare systems, in light of demographic changes. These lessons are equally important for countries both inside and outside the eurozone.

Eurozone Entry Is More of a Political Than an Economic Decision

The Maastricht criteria are clearly inadequate for assessing a country's readiness to join the eurozone, but due to legal reasons they have to be met. The level of economic development is also an irrelevant factor in the eurozone entry decision; as I argued, a number of less-developed Central European countries experienced overall favorable macroeconomic developments under the euro or a fixed exchange rate. Likewise, the possible pre-accession financial instrument that the European Commission will likely soon propose

The Maastricht criteria are clearly inadequate for assessing a country's readiness to join the eurozone, but due to legal reasons they have to be met.

is not relevant for the entry decision. At best, such a financial instrument could provide a relatively small amount of money, which should not play any role in the major decision of whether to join the eurozone or not. Furthermore, Central European countries receive about 3-5% of their GDP from the EU budget—even if that would be lower in the EU's next Multiannual Financial Framework of 2021-2027, which further underlines the irrelevance of a relatively small amount of pre-accession instrument.

Similarly, the future reform of the euro, or the ability to influence it, is not a relevant issue from the perspective of euro adoption. The euro's architecture has been significantly improved since 2008—most importantly by the establishment of the Banking Union, which should reduce the likelihood of the build-up of financial sector vulnerabilities and help to address them should they occur. The development of the EU's Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure can foster discussions about emerging vulnerabilities, which is helpful in avoiding the repetition of the pre-2008 fate of southern eurozone

Eurozone entry is therefore more of a political than an economic decision. In economic terms, Central European “outs” could perform well both inside and outside the eurozone.

members. Given that growth has returned to the eurozone, including Southern Europe, eurozone politicians might not feel the urgency to make further major reforms. In short, the eurozone has become much better than it was before 2008, and no major changes to euro governance are expected.

Eurozone entry is therefore more of a political than an economic decision. In economic terms, Central European “outs” could perform well both inside and outside the eurozone. Nevertheless, the EU is not only about economic benefits. The EU represents our shared commitments to European values, such as the respect for human dignity and human rights, freedom, democracy, equality, and the rule of law. These values, as well as our striving for peace and the well-being of citizens, define the EU. The euro is the EU's currency. The legal commitment to introduce the euro must be honored, a step that should also strengthen members' commitment to European values.

ZSOLT DARVAS

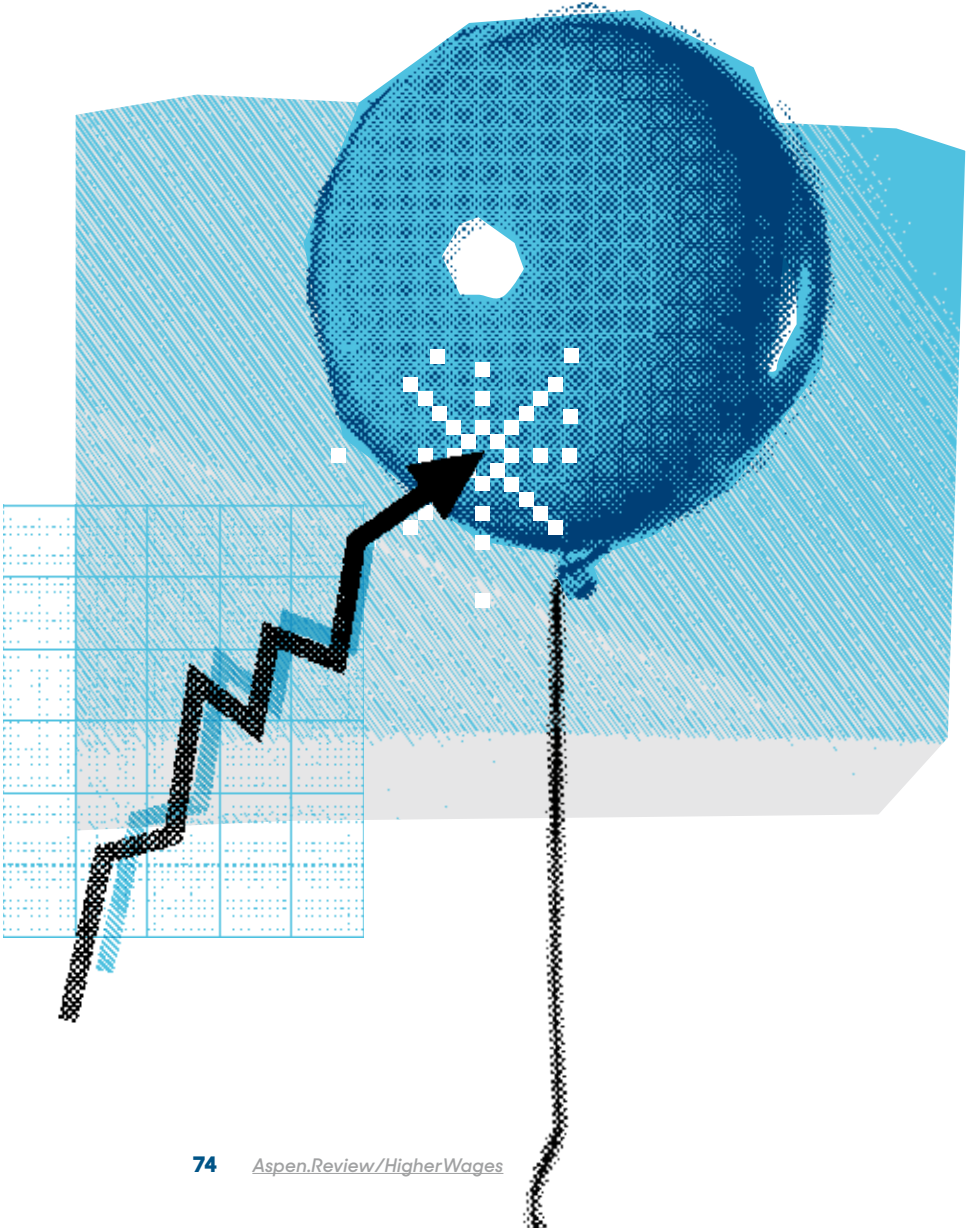
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PETR HOLUB

ECONOMY
WAGES
TRADE UNIONS
GERMANY
COMPETITIVENESS

Higher Wages as a Catastrophe? Hopefully an Impulse for Further Growth



Czech economy relying on low cost labor is in cul-de-sac. It all comes down to transformation of economy, whose authors, with their drive for cheap currency, had bet on cheap manpower

Grocery retailer Lidl's new starting monthly salary for a floor workforce is 28 000 CZK (1100 EUR) and this figure has made some waves. How come a low qualified cashier can make such money? It ought to be said the given sum is before taxes and the net income is around 20 000 CZK (786 EUR).

Let us take a look at starting salary at discount grocery retailers Lidl or Aldi in Germany. Two years ago, a detailed survey of Hans Bockler Foundation, tied with trade unions, found out that it was 2066 EUR, 52 500 CZK, monthly in today's money. So, should we not be surprised by that figure instead, indicating that Czech workforce takes home half of what their German colleagues do?

Concerns over Steep Salary Growth

The panic spreading among local economists and entrepreneurs ought to be explained. They do worry about nothing lesser than future prosperity. The current economic model does not take into account salaries being half of German level, they should be significantly lower. If they start catching up too fast, that would be bringing us closer to a serious problem, fast. Even the highest authority on all things economic, Jiří Rusnok, the Governor of Czech National Bank (ČNB), has warned against this trend on Czech TV. "If the GDP is growing from 3 to 4 percent, then the same rate should apply to wage growth," adding that in longer perspective faster growth is not sustainable.

The panic spreading among local economists and entrepreneurs ought to be explained. They do worry about nothing lesser than future prosperity.

To put things in proper perspective even more, let us examine an average salary in Germany and Czechia. Last year, the Czech average gross salary in manufacturing or service sectors was 29 504 CZK monthly, according to the Czech Statistical Office. The German figure stands at 3788 EUR, according to its statistical counterpart. In other words, a Czech took home 29.6 percent of what a German did. What is more significant is that it is on

par with figures before the break out of the last financial crisis in 2008. Czech economy depends on export and it can be said that in the last ten years for the exporters, who had their hands full with finding markets for their products, high wages and their growth was the least of their worries.

Dissatisfaction with Low Income on the Rise

Things were still quite calm last year, even though after the cessation of exchange rate interventions by ČNB the Czech crown went up against the euro and the wages grew by 105 EUR. German growth was 85 EUR though, so nothing changed much, at least with regard to parity between the two countries. The decade of wage calm might be soon over though, as Lidl news have signaled. Prognosis of the Finance Ministry works with 4.5 percent of real wage growth, roughly the same as in previous year. Czech currency is estimated to copy similar rise.

Czech workforce would earn little over 30 percent of Germany's but still less than one third.

If more companies are to follow Lidl's example and increase wages dramatically or if they are forced into a wage tug of war then all prognoses, not only concerning salaries, will be up in the air.

It does not really matter whether one supports the low wage policy or does not; either way it seems no longer attainable. Popular dissatisfaction with low income is generally on the rise and is increasingly influencing politics. Unemployment has ceased to be a major concern, many people do shopping in near abroad and pay close attention to locals' purchase power at Aldi or Spar. Leftist government, despite its pro-growth rhetoric, did nothing more dramatic than just lip service and let the Czech-Moravian Confederation of Trade Unions, chaired by Josef Středula, do all the protesting. Employers could very well live with that.

However, all that is about to change. Both leftist parties can either enter into government or support it, but due to their electoral defeat they have to push for wage growth with much more fervor, particularly in the manual labor sector, if they are to remain politically relevant, or even present on the political map at all. If social democrats are to end up in opposition, then they can come up with a set of radical demands, either when it comes to minimal wage or stricter rules for foreign businesses channeling hundreds of billions of profits out of the country in dividends, tougher taxation included.

So far the government has been trying to help the businesses by importing cheap labor from Ukraine, with the effect of sabotaging trade unions efforts for wage growth. Yet even with the help of the Ukrainians it is not possible to keep the wages low for good. The exodus of qualified workforce looking for employment at near abroad is steadily increasing. If it is almost impossible to find doctors, nurses, or qualified masons along the borders with Germany and Austria, the reason is obvious. To keep them at home by increasing their income appears to be more effective method than to import less qualified substitutes from Ukraine or Russian speaking countries.

Where Did the Mistake Happen and How to Fix It?

Economy relying on cheap labor is suddenly in a dead end street. An effective way out of this predicament is not to go directly against the wall. Solutions can be found only if the cause of the current mess can be identified. It is necessary to go to the very beginning of economic transformation, whose authors, trying to weaken the Czech crown, had bet on low-cost manpower. A Czech laborer takes home as much as a Hungarian or a Pole, despite being more qualified and having come from a long industrial tradition. A double exchange rate would have been more appropriate, which would have brought Czech wages closer to those in Slovenia—a more natural alignment.

Czech reformers probably aimed at beating German and Austrian competition with the massive help of wage dumping. They did manage to make life harder for them here or there, yet in a closer look it is clear that Germans and Austrians did not stay idle to be swept aside by cheap Czechs, even on a regional level. Their companies took advantage of their strong financial condition and exported poorly paid jobs to Czechia or further east.

Whatever jobs they lost they managed to make up in a more robust service

Economy relying on cheap labor is suddenly in a dead end street. An effective way out of this predicament is not to go directly against the wall.

sector, with focus on highly-paid industrial services—design, marketing, and sales. The Czechs offered themselves as cheap laborers, so they can hardly complain now that foreign investors took them by their word. It is worth to visit south and west regions along the border. Across the frontier the development is far more tangible.

Everyone Is Expecting an Impulse from the West

The bet on cheap Czech labor seemed to pay off, at least in the beginning. In 1995, the Czechs earned 10 percent of German salaries. A decade later it was 20 percent, followed by three years of the fastest economic growth since the beginning of the transformation, and local wages peaked at 30 percent. The growth then stalls and ratio remains unchanged. Real numbers offer even bleaker outlook. In 2008, the difference was 2200 EUR, last year it was 2700 EUR.

Economists and managers are close to a panic attack when taking into account a possible wage growth copying 2005-8 trend.

It appears only logical to leave the policy of low wages, yet it is not easy to find an alternative. To repeat German and Austrian maneuver which let

It sounds almost comical. Countries like Poland, Hungary, or Czechia insist on keeping their national currency in order to keep the wages low by weakening the exchange rate and thus maintaining competitiveness.

the Czechs have poorly paid jobs? Then one needs to find someone offering aggressively such services.

It is clear though, beyond any doubt, that something must change. A good piece of advice has come from Gunther Schnabl, an economist from Leipzig with focus on Southeast Asian economies. He took notice of the fact that although the Eastern Europeans go through a similar modernization process, they behave quite differently from the Southeast Asians. "Eastern Asia is not oriented solely on Japan, there is a significant trade between China and Malaysia, Malaysia and Singapore, Singapore and Philippines, Philippines and Malaysia. There is a real division of labor among them, whereas Eastern Europe is focused solely on the West. Trading relationship between Czechia and Hungary, Hungary and Bulgaria are on a relatively low level," Schnabl pointed out in an interview for *aktualne.cz* daily. In other words, there is no independent model for economic growth in Czechia, Hungary, or Bulgaria and everyone expects an impulse from the West. The offer of cheap labor fits into this model.

Low Wages as a Part of National Identity

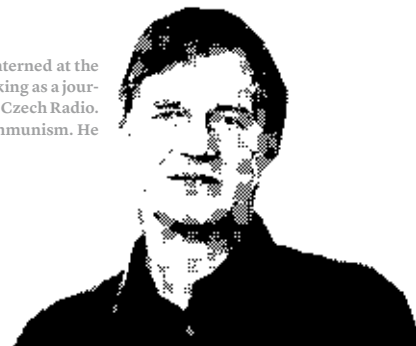
It sounds almost comical. Countries like Poland, Hungary, or Czechia protect this passive position as a part of their national identity. They insist on

keeping their national currency in order to keep the wages low by weakening the exchange rate and thus maintaining competitiveness. At the same time they rely on investment and subsidies that are meant to bring their companies up to the same perceived technological level of the West. State program of incentives has only limited impact. “If there is a strong influx of capital during a short period of time, then after quality investment projects quickly follow the less desirable ones. That is given, automatic. When there is a sudden reversal of interest rates, it quickly becomes apparent which investment was good and which less so. Inevitably, recession follows,” Schnabl warns against hasty incentives in investments.

From this perspective it is possible to view the strengthening Czech crown and the pressure on wage growth as an opportunity. Czechia gets rid of really cheap labor jobs and can keep only quality sectors. Strong companies can overcome their dependency on the West and expand to Poland, Hungary, and Bulgaria. Economic policy can support service sector, particularly with higher added value—medical business, software development, financial services. Wage growth presents a window of opportunity to make up for a delay caused by focus on cheap labor.

PETR HOLUB

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A Clash of Titans

ECONOMY

US

CHINA

DOMINATION

WTO

This is not just about trade and exchange of goods between the United States and China, but about who will have a greater influence on the world in terms of trade, economy, and even technology and other things.

Chinese ministries of Commerce and Foreign Affairs announced in a joint statement: “China will fight to the end at any cost” against the US threat to impose new tariffs on imports from China. However, President Donald Trump famously tweeted in response: “When you are already \$500 billion down, you can’t lose,” and later enunciated that a trade war would be “easy to win.”

Not everyone is so optimistic. Opinions on recent decisions are mixed. Chinese media are taking a tough approach, rejecting American arguments and actions as “ridiculous” or even as expressing “deep arrogance.” And *Global Times*, very well known for its bellicose tone, stated in one of its editorials: “A strategic resolution is being established in China, which is to fight Trump administration’s trade aggression in the same way the country fought US troops during the Korean War.”

American lawmakers and experts are less belligerent and see the Trump administration's new duties and tariffs threats on Chinese goods rather as misconduct than a remedy. This position is summed up well by the statement of the Republican Senator Ben Sasse: "Hopefully the president is just blowing steam again, but if he is even half-serious, this is nuts."

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However, we have a completely new vocabulary on the agenda, with such frequently used terms like "arbitrary restrictions," "unreasonable proposals," "unusual responses," "countermeasures," "heavy blow," "rebuttal," "damage," "strategic spirit of sacrifices." No question that a bellicose rhetoric is on top of the agenda. With some real actions already looming.

Further Course Is Difficult to Predict

At the time of writing, we have an open dispute and an extremely dynamic situation, its further course difficult to predict. We do not know if this will end in just words and threats or if both sides will take some real actions. So far the facts are as follows. A mission of Liu He—a special envoy (and a long-time friend) of President Xi Jinping, formally deputy prime minister and in fact the person in charge of the Chinese economy now—to Washington ended in failure. Both sides confirmed that talks and trade negotiations had been broken.

Instead we have another sequence of events: in early March Donald Trump announces special tariffs on steel and aluminum (and then he exempts several countries, including Canada and South Korea, from it), and a month later he asks the office of the US Trade Representative (USTR) to prepare a special list of goods imported from China bought last year for 50 trillion dollars. Which the Chinese immediately countered with their own list. However, Trump did not back down and asked the USTR to make another list, this time for the sum of 100 trillion dollars. You get an impression that the spiral is winding up.

We do not know if anyone will bring the relations between the two strongest economic powers on the globe out of this spiral. But we do know what the American intentions are. Politicians in the USA, including President Trump himself, are unhappy about the too high trade deficit with

China (375 billion dollars last year), “unethical practices” of the Chinese in adapting American high-tech, a “frivolous approach” to the question of copyright, and the ambitious program “Made in China 2025,” which is nothing other than an open challenge to the existing American technological domination.

A Question of Domination and Leadership

So this time it is not just about trade and exchange of goods, but about something much wider—about domination and leadership, about who will have a greater influence on the world in terms of trade, economy, and even technology and other things. And such a dispute concerning dominance or hegemony between two powers which are giants just by dint of their size may have disastrous effects on the whole global trade and world economy. Not only in the military sense, we are dealing with the “Thucydides trap” when—as was recently demonstrated by Graham Allison and experts from Harvard in a widely publicized study—the current hegemon is doomed to a violent clash or even war (only a trade war?) with the rapidly growing rival and pretender.

This is why the World Trade Organization (WTO) has already entered the stage and soon—if the situation continues to be dynamic and if Americans and Chinese do not return to the table—other organizations and institutions, and then governments, will be forced to join the fray, for many of them will be affected in one way or another. There are speculations—so far only speculations—about the impact of American and mutual sanctions on, for example, producers of technologies (negative), exporters of soya (positive), or even large corporations producing civilian

This time it is not just about trade and exchange of goods, but about something much wider—about domination and leadership, about who will have a greater influence on the world.

airplanes (could Airbus replace Boeing on the Chinese market?). There are signals from all over the world that a genuine trade war is nobody’s dream or something desired. Most observers and analysts agree with the opinion pronounced by the Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang and then repeated by many prominent Chinese: “In a trade war there will be no winners, only losers.”

The Stakes Are Very High

And we have not seen such trade war for a long time. A classic example quoted is the Smoot-Hawley Act from June 1930, when in reaction to the Great Depression the US administration raised tariffs on over 20,000 imported goods. We know what happened then: many other countries adopted similar “beggar-thy-neighbor” approach, in three years US trade with Europe fell by some two thirds in volume and the whole global trade declined by some 66 percent between 1929 and 1934.

Here the calculations obviously go beyond purely commercial and economic ones, they have a political and geostrategic aspect, where slightly different arguments are brought into play.

No wonder that literally no single expert wants a repeat of this situation, but here the calculations obviously go beyond purely commercial and economic ones, they have a political and geostrategic aspect, where slightly different arguments are brought into play.

Both sides know very well how high the stakes are. Moreover, experts emphasize that the USA is a system of checks and balances, and a hearing in US Congress is scheduled for May 15, 2018. Until then, the tariffs are still only in proposal stage. As President Trump’s economic adviser Larry Kudlow said: “Nothing happened. Nothing’s been executed.”

But things have gone very far, and at least in the verbal sphere we already have an open conflict, exacerbated by the decisions, sanctions, and tariffs. After two Trump-Xi summits last year it seemed that the two titans had come to an agreement. Not unnecessarily. Exactly the opposite is true. What will this roaring rollercoaster bring us?

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History Repeating Itself



Mečiar
Tereza Nvotová
(2017)

The fall of Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico in mid-March was greeted almost like another East European “Color Revolution” or even a reprise of the Velvet Revolution that brought down Communism in Czechoslovakia. Foreign journalists rushed to witness the biggest popular demonstrations in the country since 1989. They cheered on the downfall of the country’s longest-serving premier, who was painted as one of the Central European populist quartet of Viktor Orbán, Jarosław Kaczyński, and Miloš Zeman.

Tereza Nvotová’s recent documentary *Mečiar* draws a much closer parallel, juxtaposing images of the popular mobilization that helped bring down Slovakia’s founder Vladimír Mečiar with demonstrations against corruption within Fico’s Smer party last autumn. The documentary shows both that Slovakia’s weakness is its predilection for strong leaders, but that its strength is its popular anger when they overstep the mark. For Nvotová, the young generation must learn these lessons and stand ready to continue the fight.

How close are the parallels between Fico and Mečiar, as well as with neighboring strongmen such as Hungary’s Orbán and Kaczyński’s Poland? And what does this tell us about Slovak politics, and the differences from its neighbors?

Fico’s Takeover of Power

Some have argued that Fico was always just a “young Mečiar” clone. Slovak advertising impresario Fedor Flašík is shown in *Mečiar* yet again claim-

ing credit for creating Smer in 1999, just as if he had sold gullible shoppers old wine in new bottles. Flašík ran the advertising campaign for Mečiar in 1998 when he was defeated by a coalition led by Mikuláš Dzurinda, but then switched to Fico, a former Democratic Left deputy, for Smer's first general election in 2002, when it came a creditable third with 11% of the vote. Behind Flašík were a group of mini-oligarchs such as Vladimír Poór, many of whom had also transferred their financial backing to the up-and-coming Fico after 1998 when they saw that Mečiar, if not yet finished domestically, was anyway unacceptable internationally.

Fico did little to contradict this impression when he formed his first government together with Mečiar's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) in 2006. He then seduced HZDS voters away to Smer, which consigned the once-dominant party Mečiar had created to political oblivion in 2010 and led to its leader's retirement. Fico, like Mečiar, then went on to be prime minister three times until he was forced out over the assassination of journalist Ján Kuciak, who was investigating alleged links between the Calabrian mafia and Smer.

This story is rather too neat. Fico was as much using Flašík and the other HZDS tycoons as they were him, and he only formed an unholy alliance with Mečiar and the nationalist Slovak National Party (SNS) as more mainstream parties refused to work with him. It can just as easily be argued that he did Slovakia a big favor by taking over Mečiar's voter base and pushing him out of politics.

To Feel What the People Want to Hear

Nevertheless, there are some real similarities between the two strongmen in their background, style, and policies that help explain their dominance of the Slovak political scene. Born 20 years apart (Mečiar is now 75, Fico 53), both were bright working-class students who trained as lawyers and joined the Communist Party. Mečiar was expelled after the 1968 Soviet invasion, though as the documentary details, he allegedly became a secret police informant and afterwards stole his file to cover his tracks.

Mečiar uses archive footage well to show how both charismatic demagogues were able to command crowds using simple, folksy, emotional, even vulgar language, and by offering simple solutions to their problems, which had often been ignored by the smug Bratislava liberal elite.

Former Bratislava Mayor Milan Ftáčnik, who was with Fico in the Democratic Left Party, says he has this rare gift to tune into people's needs. "He is able to feel what the people want to hear," he says. "No-one around him has that ability."

Fico was always the more polished speaker, and his performances were staged more professionally, but Mečiar was the one who appeared to have a real emotional bond with his supporters. At a huge election rally I attended at Bratislava's old ice hockey stadium in 2002, he joshed with the grannies that had been bussed in from nearby villages, cracking bawdy jokes and basking in their adulation. But the documentary neatly shows how a few years later these older, poorer, and less well-educated rural voters switched over to Fico, and used similar language to express their devotion.

The Lambasting of Political Opponents

Nvotová's rare interview with Mečiar in the documentary shows his charisma but allows him to pose as an avuncular grandfather rather than the menacing figure I remember. In my first interview with him in 1997 he spoke quietly and sadly about the injustice of Slovakia's exclusion from the EU and NATO, but when he looked at me with his hooded eyes the effect was as chilling as being fixed by a wounded bear.

The darker side of these rhetorical gifts is the way Mečiar and Fico lambasted political opponents, creating a hugely divisive political culture. Especially when on the defensive, both flew into cold rages, Fico for instance publicly accusing journalists of being "dirty prostitutes" who were besmirching the country's good name. As with Orbán and Kaczyński, opponents are not only enemies but traitors to the nation.

In terms of political content, Fico mined the rich seam of Slovak nationalism, xenophobia, and racism that Mečiar had exploited before him. In his first term, Fico played on fears of Hungarian irredentism to prove he could be as nationalist as his coalition partners, but by his third term he was in coalition with the largely ethnic Hungarian Most-Híd party and was on good terms with Orbán. He aped him by using the 2015 refugee influx into Europe to whip up fears among his voters, fighting in the 2016 election under the slogan "Protecting Slovakia." His rhetoric against Islamic refugees was among the harshest in the region, even though he was careful to admit just enough to avoid EU infringement proceedings. "He did benefit—he was able to sustain himself as

PM—but he created all this space for the fascists,” says Vladimír Bilčík, foreign affairs expert for the new liberal Spolu [Together] Party. “He pushed the boundaries of what is acceptable discourse, including on the streets.”

A Vision of a Strong and Protective State

Mečiar and Fico also fulfilled the first of academic Cas Mudde’s two populist features by claiming to be fighting on the side of the little man against a corrupt elite. Like Orbán and Kaczyński, when in power, Fico used welfare handouts to buy support from poorer voters. In opposition he slammed both Mečiar and Dzurinda as corrupt, though his own party was to become dominated by business groups, and graft under his rule was to rival anything in previous administrations, though it has yet to reach the heights of Orbán’s kleptocracy.

Yet there are also key differences between Fico and Mečiar and the neighboring strongmen. The most obvious, though perhaps the least important, is that Fico is a self-proclaimed socialist, whilst the others are authoritarian conservatives.

The documentary shows both that Slovakia’s weakness is its predilection for strong leaders, but that its strength is its popular anger when they overstep the mark.

Fico’s ideal is a strong state that protects its people, but this is a vision that Mečiar, Orbán, and Kaczyński all share. “I am an *étatist*,” he told me in 2006 at the start of his first term. “I respect the role of the state. The first goal of the government is to guarantee that if someone is in a bad social situation, the state must provide such conditions that they can live normally.”

Fico believes the Left has neglected this duty to its cost. He told a Party of European Socialists (PES) conference in Prague in 2016 (a grouping that suspended Smer once and in which he has never felt at home) that they had not only ignored their voters’ fears over immigration and multiculturalism but they had also forgotten about their bread and butter issues, such as wages and living standards, allowing the populist Right to steal their clothes.

A second more substantial difference is that Fico has nailed the EU’s colors to his mast, while Mečiar, Orbán, and Kaczyński use the bloc more as a punch bag. Fico took Slovakia into the eurozone and now proclaims his desire for the country to be in the inner core.

Slovakia Was Sliding towards Dictatorship

Yet again the differences are less than they first appear. Fico was at first ambivalent about EU membership, famously campaigning on the issue in the 2002 election with the slogan “Yes, but not with bare arses.” In interviews with me at the time he complained that there needed to be more discussion about the costs of Slovak membership, that the country was unprepared, and that there would be a popular backlash.

Even now that he has become an EU enthusiast, Fico attacks the bloc when it suits him, such as over refugees or anything that he divines will play well with his domestic audience. It is clear that Fico supports the EU largely because it is a strong selling point against the Euroskeptic parliamentary opposition; whether he would continue to back it if it stopped being in his political interest is very doubtful.

There are some real similarities between the two strongmen in their background, style, and policies that help explain their dominance of the Slovak political scene.

The third and key difference between Fico and Mečiar, and between him and Orbán and Kaczyński, is with the second part of Mudde’s definition of populism: despite everything, Fico remains a pluralist, while the others believe that they alone represent the general will and should be able to rule unchallenged. Under Mečiar, Slovakia was even sliding towards dictatorship. One of the documentary’s strongest sections shows how Mečiar’s secret police even kidnapped President Michal Kováč’s son and probably commissioned the murder of witness Róbert Remiáš.

Mečiar Inoculates the Country against Authoritarian Populism

Fico may bully journalists and other politicians, clash with President Andrej Kiska, and squash opposition within his own party; he may also have nobbled the police, prosecutors, and judiciary; but he has not tried to undermine democracy, stifle the media and NGOs, or remake the state in the way Mečiar, Orbán, and Kaczyński did. He has always worked skillfully to patch together coalitions, and even when Smer held an absolute majority in 2012-16 he ruled responsibly. “Fico used single-party government power with restraint because he saw what happened to Mečiar,” says Bilčík. “He does not want to go down in history books like Mečiar.” He also finally resolved the recent

political crisis by resigning, when Kuciak’s murder was clearly something he had no responsibility for.

So what does all this tell us about Slovak politics and how it differs from its neighbors? Slovakia’s short 25-year history as a state may help explain its weakness for strongmen such as Mečiar and Fico, but it also fails to give them the deep roots of grievance and trauma that have provided such fertile soil for Orbán and Kaczyński. “Hungary and Poland are limited and defined by their heavy history,” says Milan Nič, senior fellow at the German Council on Foreign Relations.

The crisis of the Mečiar years has also in a way inoculated the country against authoritarian populism. Not only is his fate a warning for politicians such as Fico but the network of civic movements that sprung up to mobilize opposition to Mečiar also provides a positive example that still resonates today, as the documentary tries to show.

Gloom-mongers fear that Fico will now still direct events from behind the scenes, just like Kaczyński does in Poland. However, they should recognize that the way Slovak demonstrators forced out a powerful premier is the envy of their counterparts in Budapest, Warsaw, and even Prague, who are also protesting against corruption and obstruction of justice. “It shows something healthy about the system and that democracy is working better here than in Poland, Hungary, and Czech Republic,” says Ftáčnik. Orbán in particular has built up such a strong state machine backed by loyal supporters (and assisted by a fractured opposition) that many Hungarians have given up on politics or chosen to emigrate. Nvotová need not have worried: as events have now shown, Slovak democracy by contrast is very much alive and kicking.

ROBERT ANDERSON

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TV in the Search for a Unifying Idea



Between Truth and Time. A History of Soviet Central Television

Christine Elaine Evans

(Yale University Press, 2016)

This book tells much more than it promises. Through the history of Soviet Central Television from the late 1960s to the mid-1980s and the kaleidoscopic image of its major TV programs, this book shows the evolution of

the Soviet political project in the era of late socialism. Rather than presenting television as a mere toolkit that served for ideological indoctrination of Soviet citizenry, Christine Evans tells a fascinating story, in which television producers, who tailored new television shows, did, in reality, something far more significant: they tested new forms of cultural and political rules of negotiations and, ultimately, elaborated new ways of life of the Soviet citizens.

Being intimate and compellingly visual, television was ideally positioned both to explore the moral and political ambiguity of the Soviet societal project and to address the political and ideological challenges of late socialism. Major characters of the Evans' story are TV makers—writers, director, and editors—who are portrayed as skilled and creative professionals who knew how to navigate the complex world of censorship in order to secure the space for creativity and experiments. Evans shows how TV makers challenged restrictions imposed by the Communist rulers by drawing on the

theatrical and cinematographic legacy of Russian avant-garde and building the post-war Soviet television culture on the foundation of artistic experience of post-revolutionary time.

Paradoxically, the demand on the original and inventive TV programming was coming not only from the audience, which in post-Stalinist era of relative intellectual freedom was, indeed, prepared for sophisticated and thought-provoking television production that would convey the atmosphere of new era. Soviet rulers understood the importance of cultural production in stabilizing the social and political life, too. Television programming in late socialism became an important mechanism of searching for new ways of unifying a diverse public, legitimizing authority, and performing the state's responsiveness to its citizens. Creativity of television makers made these goals achievable without resorting to dogmas of a communist ideology but also without open questioning of their plausibility.

The Mass Culture as a Formative Mode of Social Organization

Exploring the imaginative technologies of Soviet television production, Evans reveals the paradoxical truth about the similarity between Soviet and Western society of that time. Pursuit of consumer identities rather than political aims, private self-realization rather than abstract declarations could be found in many countries on both sides of the Iron Curtain after 1968, and these shifts were vividly reflected in television shows, films, and popular music that explicitly encouraged these developments.

What Frankfurt school thinkers once depicted as a specific feature of Western capitalism has now been discovered in the socialist context, too; on both sides of the ideological divide the mass culture became a formative mode of social organization and mechanism of exercising power. The difference was in details. In the West, mass culture was controlled by advertising and commercial imperatives.

Being intimate and compellingly visual, television was ideally positioned to explore the moral and political ambiguity of the Soviet societal project.

In the Soviet context, it was the ideological necessity to revitalize the state, to reimagine its relationship to the public that made the Central Television's professionals important actors in a politically vital experiment under the

rule of Nikita Khrushchev. The shift “from conversion to persuasion” as the primary means of mobilizing population had raised the status of mass media in Soviet society, and the Central Television was at the forefront of this change.

Insights on the Phenomenon of Stagnation

The title of the book *Between Truth and Time* tells about the paradigmatic shift that occurred in Soviet media landscape: from *Truth*, which was the title of main newspaper of the Soviet Communist Party, to its rival news program *Time* that was launched on the Central Television on January 1, 1968. The change could be read as a symptom of the loss of faith in the proclaimed “truth” about the imminent arrival of communism among Soviet elites that, ultimately, led to the understanding of the necessity to look for new ways of representing state and society that could be flexible enough to endure.

On both sides of the ideological divide the mass culture became a formative mode of social organization and mechanism of exercising power. The difference was in details.

The book by Evans adds important insights to the existing scholarship on the phenomenon of *stagnation*. Being closely intertwined with Gorbachev’s agenda and Cold War politics, the notion of a “stagnating” country shaped the image of late socialism through the series of false dichotomies between official and unofficial culture, between ideology and freedom, between state and society. According to some revisionist accounts given recently by scholars, late socialism for many Soviet citizens was a stable, prosperous, and non-violent era with its own experience of progress and well-being.¹

The book by Evans supplements this portrayal with an image of remarkably vibrant world of Soviet mass media, which alongside film, popular literature, and music were more than a toolkit for ideological programming and certainly more than mere entertainments.

Growing Pessimism Posed a Challenge to Central Television

Christine Evans, however, does not simply dismiss “stagnation” in Brezhnev’s era as inadequate way to depict the complexity of late socialism in Soviet history.² The sense of malaise, irony, and political disengagement that is widely remembered about the Brezhnev era cannot be simply discarded as invented and unreal.

What needs to be reconsidered is the role that stagnation played in the evolution of the Soviet project. Inertia of that time constituted a mood through which Soviet people made sense of their lives in the years of late socialism, but it did not exclude the openness to new connections and ways of being in the world. In fact, according to Evans, it was “stagnation” with all its entangled social, economic, and political troubles that made Soviet rulers worry about popular disaffection and forced them to look for television programs that could address these problems.

Growing pessimism about the Communist Party’s ability to deliver on its promises after 1968 posed a significant challenge to Central Television festive programming, but it also opened multiple opportunities for experiment and innovation. The Cold War, paradoxically, made the provision of attractive television programming even more important, as in the atmosphere of growing popularity of mass culture Soviet entertainment was expected to catch up and provide “worthy alternative.”

The “Letter Desk” as a Hub for Interaction

There are several paradoxical features of the Soviet system and society that history of Soviet television reveals. The conventional image of the socialist state portrays it as a completely top-down entity, in which the party rulers imposed the ideological dogmas onto the powerless and passive society.

The story of the “Letter Desk” on Central Television that was created in late 1950s reveals how the mechanisms of interaction with the society on television operated, providing the public with the channel for voicing their concerns and wishes. Letters from the audience were not only counted and tabulated in a manner resembling the treatment of sociological data.

What needs to be reconsidered is the role that stagnation played in the evolution of the Soviet project.

By 1960 the Letter Desk was producing annual reports that analyzed the viewers’ letters for the previous year, provided statistics on how many letters individual program desk had answered in a timely manner, and reproved those content desks that were less effective in communication with public. In a way, Central Television became a hub for interaction where the state responsiveness and public engagement were performed to compensate what was lacking in the county’s political life.

1) Neringa Klumbyte and Gulnaz Sharafutdinova. 2013. *Soviet Society in the Era of Late Socialism, 1964–1985*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books; Vihavainen, Timo; Bogdanova, Elena (Hrsg.). 2016. *Communism and Consumerism. The Soviet Alternative to the Affluent Society*. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers.

2) Dina Fainberg and Artemy Kalinovsky. 2016. *Reconsidering Stagnation in the Brezhnev Era. Ideology and Exchange*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

3) Leonid Parfenov: ‘Brezhnev XXI veka—eto kruto’ *Novaya Gazeta*, 17 July 2017, <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2017/07/14/73109-leonid-parfenov-brezhnev-xxi-veka-eto-silno>

To reconstruct the stories of conception and creation of specific television programs on the Central Television, Evans employs impressive number of sources, from personal notes, professional publications, memoranda, scripts, and memoirs to statistics and correspondence between viewers and television editors.

Growing pessimism about the Communist Party's ability to deliver on its promises after 1968 posed a significant challenge to Central Television festive programming.

The most fascinating part of the study takes readers to the backstage of creation of the most famous television programs, TV news, fictional miniseries, and game shows. Nearly all programs discussed in the book—the news program “Time”, miniseries “Seventeen moments of spring,” game shows “What? Where? When?” or “KVN” and others—have been perceived by the public as unique creations of the Central Television, iconic Soviet cultural products.

Evans, however, places these Soviet TV shows in the larger context of Western and Eastern European television and shows that they came to being in the dialogue between television makers that crosscut both state borders and ideological divide. In spite of common perception of Cold War as a period of political isolation and ideological hostility that had been maintained on the level of the official rhetoric between two blocks, Soviet television creators lived and worked in the international professional world that involved various interactions and influences.

The Soviet Central Television Legitimizes the Regime

These professional entanglements took many forms beyond direct program exchange; it included private screenings of foreign television for television producers, journalistic and scholarly analysis of foreign programs, and personal relationships between Soviet and foreign professionals.

Television makers proved to be key actors not only in linking the Soviet cultural domain with the rest of the world; they have been vital in maintaining continuity between the Soviet and the post-Soviet television culture in Russia, too. By stressing the agency of television professionals, Evans adds an important insight to the increasingly common comparison between late Soviet Union and contemporary Russian state.³ And this is not simply a

Television makers proved to be key actors not only in linking the Soviet cultural domain with the rest of the world; they have been vital in maintaining continuity

matter of continuities between generations of late Soviet and new Russian media elites, which is rather normal in spheres that require training and technical skills, like television.

As Evans shows, the key function of the Soviet Central Television in the Brezhnev era remains relevant to official Russian media today—the search for unifying national idea that would legitimize power regime and provide foundation for social cohesion. This contemporary search began already in the 1970s, when cultural and political elites started to look for sources of social unification and political authority outside the Marxist-Leninist doctrine.

It is not surprising, then, that key television genres, formats, and strategies of Brezhnev era remain highly relevant to contemporary state television broadcast in Russia. This continuity not only gives the audience the sense of their own cultural history and tradition but also reveals the preservation of ideas and beliefs about television nature as a medium and its relationship to the state.

The key function of the Soviet Central Television in the Brezhnev era remains relevant to official Russian media today—the search for unifying national idea that would legitimize power regime.

NELLY BEKUS

holds PhD in Sociology (2007) and currently works at the University of Exeter. She is the author of the book *Struggle over Identity. The Official and the Alternative “Belarusianness”* (2010), and also published numerous articles on post-Soviet nation-and-state-building, religious and linguistic policies, history, and memory. | Photo: Aspen Review Archive



All the Faces of Islamophobia



Islamofobia jako technologia władzy.
Studium z antropologii politycznej
[Islamophobia as a technology of power.
A study on political anthropology]
Monika Bobako

Universitas, Kraków 2017, s. 418.

In the spring 2015, exploring Islamophobia in Central-Eastern Europe could still be regarded as a somewhat exotic preoccupation. The reason was not that prejudices against Muslims did not appear in the public discourse, but they did not provide an important political fuel, remaining just an element of a debate on the events in the Middle East. In the autumn of the same year a complete change of scene has occurred. A great wave of Islamophobia swept over public debate, poisoned the language of politics, and conquered social media. All major political forces succumbed to a moral panic surrounding the refugees from the Middle East and North Africa, but it reached a climax when the Polish Right represented by the Law and Justice Party (PiS) won the elections by exploiting the worst Islamophobic clichés in the visual and discursive forms drawn from the anti-Semitic propaganda going back to the first half of the 20th century.

Fear, hatred, and contempt for Muslims invaded both the salons of the elite and everyday language, and remain there until today, although in our part of Europe Moslems themselves constitute an almost imperceptible

minority. Understanding what has happened is neither easy nor obvious. The person who decided to take up this challenge was the Polish philosopher Monika Bobako, whose book *Islamophobia as a technology of power* is an excellent instrument for coping with the nature and origins of today's Islamophobia in the entire Western world (including its Central European part).

The author argues that contemporary Islamophobia cannot be reduced to an exaggerated reaction to a real threat from Jihadist terrorism as-

Contemporary Islamophobia cannot be reduced to an exaggerated reaction to a real threat from Jihadist terrorism associated with Al Qaeda and the Islamic State.

sociated with Al Qaeda and the Islamic State. It was born much earlier and manifests itself across the whole spectrum of political-ideological groups and communities. At the same time, in contrast to anti-Semitism or biological racism, which had been banished from mainstream debate in Europe and North America for many decades, even the most primitive prejudices against Muslims go unpunished in serious media, in the highest echelons of power and in the communities regarding themselves as cultivated and progressive. This universality of top-down Islamophobia, which gradually grew since the Iran revolution in 1979, the Gulf War in 1990, the resistance against the colonization of Palestine in the nineties, and the events of September 11, 2001, turned it into a political and widespread development, as it happened during the electoral campaign in Poland in the summer and autumn 2015.

Modern Genealogy, or Racism

Bobako's book combines a philosophical perspective with anthropology of politics, sociology, political economy, and history. The author provides a comprehensive analysis of hostility to Moslems, places it in a wide context of the emergence of Western modernity, and finally the mechanisms of ideological and material reproduction of contemporary neoliberal capitalism. Islamophobia is for her not an archaic intrusion of a long overcome irrational prejudice into rational public sphere, but a modern ideological formation serving the requirements of the expansion of forms of political, ideological, and economic power characteristic for capitalist societies of the 20th and 21st centuries. Paraphrasing Max Horkheimer, Monika Bobako claims that you cannot speak about Islamophobia by keeping silent about capitalism.

Outlining the genealogy of contemporary Islamophobia, the author goes back to the historical beginnings of the modern era and the founding acts of the figure of the Other in the West. She points to two key events—the expulsion of Iberian Jews after the occupation of Granada by Catholic kings of Spain in 1492 and exiling the descendants of Muslims (Morysians) and Jews (Marranes) converted to Christianity in 1607-1614. Between these two episodes, which were genocidal in their consequences (in both cases the persecutions resulted in more than 100,000 deaths), a uniquely modern construction of the Other emerged, focused not on religion (which you can always change), but on racial features, for the first time appearing in the Spanish doctrine of blood purity (*limpieza de sangro*) and articulated in terms of essentialistically conceived culture, and since the 19th century in terms of biology (from which there is no escape). It is then, Bobako emphasizes, that

Islamophobia is for her not an archaic intrusion of a long overcome irrational prejudice into rational public sphere, but a modern ideological formation.

the outlines of contemporary anti-Semitism and Islamophobia appeared. Discovering the common historical roots of both these forms of xenophobia has important implications for understanding the connections between their contemporary forms. It also helps to overcome the limitations resulting from the political instrumentalization of the claim to unique status for anti-Semitism (or Islamophobia) in the context of the Israeli-Arab conflict.

The Political Economy of Islamophobia, or How Moslems Were Invented

Monika Bobako goes far beyond the dominant liberal-culturalist explanations of the current career of anti-Moslem prejudices. She associates them with the crisis of capitalism and especially with the effects of crisis management with the use of neoliberal policies. And thus she outlines a political economy of Islamophobia.

The neoliberal project means the state withdrawing from the role of a force ensuring a social and political integration of society, and at the same time offers an ideological vision supporting this retreat. It puts responsibility for the consequences of neoliberal policies on their victims. It explains pauperization, inequalities, instability of labor relations, or unemployment not

through systemic factors, but through cultural limitations of the population groups affected. In this way the poorest, often destabilized segments of the working classes are regarded as cultural minorities (Muslims, immigrants), and in those areas where until now a class conflict was perceived, the neoliberal project wants us to see this conflict in terms of identity.

Districts of Brussels or Paris which until recently were called working-class suddenly become immigrant, although they are populated by people who have never been migrants. And it works as a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, because the worsening situation on the labor market and the retreat of the state drives the poor to seek support in family networks and local communities, which in such circumstances acquire strong ethnic-religious features. In this way neoliberal economic policies literally produce the Other.

In the Name of Tradition and Progress

Today's Islamophobia has two main faces—conservative and progressive. The first one brings together conservative-nationalist defenders of “Christian European values” allegedly threatened with infiltration by minority groups which “do not want to integrate.” Hostility to Muslims is here a variant of hostility towards other groups accused of poisoning the healthy organism of the so-called Latin civilization—feminists, sexual minorities, or even environmentalists. Bobako analyses this trend through texts of Paweł Lisicki, one of the most influential Polish right-wing journalists, editor-in-chief of *DoRzeczy*, who combines Islamophobic journalism with attempts to relativize old anti-Semitic myths.

Districts of Brussels or Paris which until recently were called working-class suddenly become immigrant, although they are populated by people who have never been migrants.

The second type is no less dangerous. Since the nineties, the extreme right in Europe has increasingly often used Republican or even Enlightenment rhetoric, exploiting the issue of the rights of women or sexual minorities. The examples of the Dutch Freedom Party, its Austrian counterpart, or the French National Front demonstrate that paradoxically this rhetoric is meant to serve politicians who deny the very idea of equality, which has always laid at the basis of historical struggle for minority rights. Today the rights of women (or gays) are to be an instrument of exclusion. They are

employed to stigmatize immigrants as culturally not mature enough to respect them and to close the borders to refugees. The pretended concern for women revitalizes the old colonial/anti-Semitic fantasy of a racially alien man threatening “our” women.

The uniqueness of the situation we found ourselves in after 2015 is that both these forms of Islamophobia have merged in the rhetoric of such ruling parties as Polish Law and Justice or the Hungarian Fidesz or in the speeches of US President Donald Trump and the Czech President Miloš Zeman. This post-modernist mixture is the trademark of the new post-fascist right and an expression of its ideological inconsistencies, which are very efficient tools in the political strategy of managing the fears and frustrations of the lower middle classes.

Prejudices across Traditional Political Divisions

The strength of Islamophobic prejudices is, therefore, that their impact often goes across traditional political divisions. Some progressive communities—liberal-feminist, rationalist, or gay—succumb to the charm of Republican Islamophobia (Bobako calls it progressivist), unintentionally becoming allies of post-fascism. Such are the cases of the famous Italian reporter Oriana Fallaci, French feminist Elizabeth Badinter, or liberal activists from the Polish Women’s Congress, discussed by Bobako.

Monika Bobako’s book presents a fascinating picture of the forms of Islamophobia and reconstructs the mechanisms governing it. Outlining its expansion against a wider backdrop of economic and political crisis, she indicates that an effective fight against this development cannot be limited to the area of multicultural education. It is of course necessary, but

The strength of Islamophobic prejudices is, therefore, that their impact often goes across traditional political divisions.

far from sufficient. What is more, focusing on issues of multiculturalism assumes accepting the vision of society imposed by Islamophobic right and its progressive fellow travelers, and so it reinforces its domination in the discourse on the new forms of xenophobia in the Western world. Any genuine opposition against the wave of hostility to Others must be based on a discursive rejection of forms of producing otherness, and hence also some forms of multiculturalism.

Indeed, conclusions to be drawn from Bobako's analyses seem to suggest that the right way could be depoliticizing identity and re-politicizing class antagonism, bringing together the struggle for the rights of women, criticism of racism and the imperial policy of the West in the global South, and finally overcoming the theoretical-ideological constructs such as Judeo-Christianity, which create a vision of a modern Mediterranean cultural community, but exclude from it the Arab-Moslem tradition, thus reproducing the exclusivist movement of 19th-century colonial Orientalism towards "Semitism." Islamophobia is deeply enrooted in the culture and power formations of the Western

Any genuine opposition against the wave of hostility to Others must be based on a discursive rejection of forms of producing otherness, and hence also some forms of multiculturalism.

world in the 21st century. Today's Muslims have entered the role of a generalized Other. They will play this role until the dismantling of the ideological-political-economic framework which constantly recreates this otherness, compiles the elements forming it, and uses it to reproduce the ruling system and to manage its crisis. The eponymous "Islamophobia as a technology of power" will cease to work along with the order the interests of which it serves.

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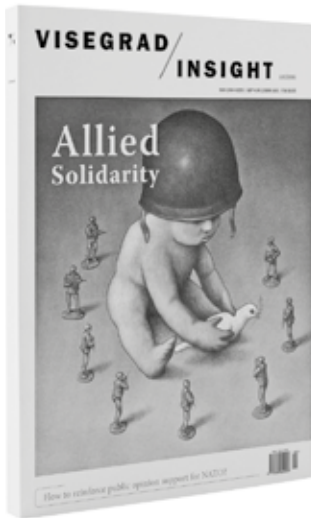


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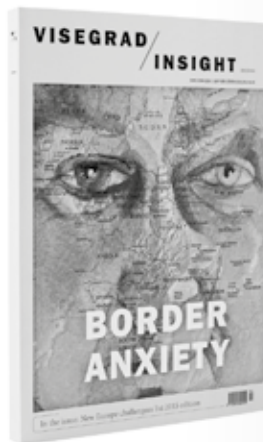
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ART DIRECTION

Concept, layout, illustrations: Touch Branding
Cover © 2018; Aleš Mička (*Touch Branding*)

PUBLISHING EDITOR

Jenda Žáček

PUBLISHED BY

Aspen Institute Central Europe
Palackého 1, CZ 110 00 Prague
Aspen.Review@AspenInstituteCE.org
AspenInstituteCE.org
Year VII
No. 02/2018
ISSN 1805-6806 (Print)
ISSN 2570-6217 (Online)

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