

# GEOSTRATEGIC PULSE

*Motto: "Opinions are free, but not mandatory" I.L. Caragiale*

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"The High Level of Interdependence of Today's Globalised World Is Reflected in the Geopolitical Articulation of the European Commission"

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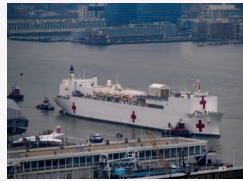
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**EDITORIAL**



**Leadership and Trust**

**Constantin IACOBÎȚĂ**

The rows below are meant to re-emphasize things that have already been said repeatedly and in different forms, out of the need to strengthen ourselves against the threats we are facing and that will most probably leave deep marks on our conscience, way of life and future.

Based on the proverb which says that nations and the society as a whole have the leaders they deserve, I would like to propose an addition: leaders are not only representative, they are also perfectible.

How precisely?

- By reminding our leaders, that when we offered them our vote and trust we found ourselves – even if only in part – in what we sensed from them.
- By realizing that tough times and challenges allow, or make us prove our qualities – be them inherited or shaped and developed, and that these qualities should serve the common good – of our society, not that of an ideology, a social class or an individual.
- By acknowledging – when the case, or by admitting – even if only to their own conscience, that leadership comes with great responsibility. The responsibility of being a true model (of competence, honesty, respect, humanity) and not forgetting that they (the leaders) will be remembered in history as they were and not as they wanted to be and/or attempted to portray themselves.

The above would entail the leaders:

- To acknowledge their own limitations – personal, or even leadership related – and, consequently, attract – based mainly on competence, respect and mutual trust – relevant experts, who would be empowered and employed within these parameters.
- Not to forget that leaders and nations cannot face alone challenges to the entire humankind and that in such crises the success of everyone will be the true measure of individual success.
- To realize, time and time again that people are more than a resource, or a means for the leaders to getting ahead, as well as to ensuring common, or individual welfare. Namely, that people are the reason and purpose of our existence.

As for each of those helping the few to become leaders, and sometimes maintain their positions, they can contribute to the success of leadership process as follows:

- Firstly, by trusting. Trusting the choices that they have made, the leaders' qualities and their potential for development. Trusting that the leaders will remain dedicated to the ideas and principles they had been upholding, and trusting that any challenge can be overcome by working together.
- By showing courage and responsibility in reminding the leaders all of the above, when convinced they have been forgotten or ignored.
- By being really willing to see themselves in the place of leaders whose actions they disprove and criticize without knowing their circumstance, motivation and details.
- Ultimately, by acknowledging the fact that they retain the leadership and responsibility of their own existence.

Moreover, by being a model (of competence, honesty, respect, humanity) to themselves, they could contribute to the success of the leadership of the society.

## The Political Narratives of a Global Crisis: Competing Ideologies and Strategic Rivalries in the Symbolic Management of the COVID-19 Crisis

**Alexis CHAPELAN**

The year 2020 was expected to be fraught with political turmoil. In preparation for the November general elections, America was warming up for a tense contest whose outcome was deemed decisive for the decade-long battle waged between populism and liberalism. The strong performance of Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders, proponent of a robustly left-wing agenda, threatened what had been the DNA of the Democratic Party's doctrine: a centrist liberal consensus hitherto viscerally wary of upheavals and, crucially, of the world "Socialism". In addition, while America was seething with the energy of a fierce electoral year, in Russia, a new constitutional reform project was sketching the future contours of what is the most disruptive geopolitical force of the last decade, *putinism*. Europe was in the throes of the post-Brexit trade negotiation, and the void the UK had left behind was prompting a process of internal re-equilibration, which pitted two political brothers increasingly at odds: Angela Merkel's Germany, who squarely opted for a conservative roadmap for Europe, and Emmanuel Macron's France, hell-bent on a sweeping rethink of the EU. And, at the gates of the European citadel, war was reigniting in Syria over Idlib, brutally thrusting into a similar highly volatile arena, two of the major regional powers (anti-Assad Turkey and pro-Assad Russia), while simultaneously setting in motion waves of refugees bound for the Western El Dorado. Thus, the menace of a direct confrontation between the Russian and Turkish forces (heightened by the alleged bombing of a Turkish convoy by

possibly Russian jets<sup>1</sup>) added to the noxious geopolitical stew of the turbulent Middle East, already simmering with a latent conflict between Iran and the United States.

This was, as of February 2020, the political landscape of the world. For most observers, the burgeoning new decade felt plainly similar to the last, rhythmmed as it was by populist bravado in the West, military unrest in the Middle East, rivalries in Asia and latent fears of economic slowdown or even financial crisis. "Business as usual", one might be tempted to say. That was until an unknown infection from the family of coronaviruses sent history on a pivot towards uncharted territory. It took the world by storm, literally ripping apart in a matter of weeks the fabric of social life, as we knew it, and ushering in a historic juncture.

### What is COVID-19? The Parameters of a Global Crisis

Coronaviruses (the name refers to the crown-like spikes on their surface) are a large family of pathogens and were not a novel threat; medical practitioners were well acquainted with its earlier strains, who could cause both benign diseases and more sinister afflictions, such as the 2002 SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) and the 2012 MERS (Middle East Respiratory Syndrome). The severity of the new strain (baptized COVID-19 in February 2020 by the WHO) is moderate: it had a mortality rate most likely inferior to 4%<sup>2</sup> and an infectiousness (called reproduction number or  $R_0$ ) of roughly 2.2, meaning that an infected person will contaminate on average 2.2 persons.<sup>3</sup> These

1. See Carlotta Gall, "Airstrike Hits Turkish Forces in Syria, Raising Fears of Escalation", *The New York Times*, 27 February 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/27/world/middleeast/russia-turkey-syria-war-strikes.html>

2. "Coronavirus (COVID-19) Mortality Rate", *Worldometer*, 5 March 2020, <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/coronavirus-death-rate/#who-03-03-20>

3. "The average coronavirus patient infects at least 2 others, suggesting the virus is far more contagious than flu", *Business Insider*, 17 March 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/coronavirus-contagious-r-naught-average-patient-spread-2020-3>

metrics are reassuringly manageable when pitted against those of SARS (mortality rate of 9.6%<sup>4</sup>) or MERS (over 35% mortality rate<sup>5</sup>) epidemics, but they still are alarmingly high in comparison with seasonal flu (mortality rate of 0.1 and a R0 of 1.3<sup>6</sup>). Furthermore, the metrics of the Spanish Flu, which caused an estimated 50 million deaths between 1918 and 1920, should act as a sobering wakeup call. With a case fatality ratio of 2.5% (quite possibly widely underestimated, but again it could be the same with the novel coronavirus) and a R0 of 2.2, the 1918 influenza has uncannily similar mortality and infectiousness rates to the COVID-19. Most of the large scale epidemics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, essentially respiratory disease, have relatively mild symptomatology and low mortality rates at first sight (at least in comparison to earlier pestilences such as plague, smallpox or cholera), but in absolute numbers they remain devastating. Even a disease with a mortality of less than 1%, such as the Asian Flu of 1956-1958<sup>7</sup> or the Honk Kong Flu of 1968-1969<sup>8</sup>, can go on causing millions of deaths, a cost our societies are not ready to accept in search of an elusive “herd immunity”.



(TeleTrader.com)

First traced in China in early January, the COVID-19 spread across the country and the globe at a brisk pace, despite the fact that rela-

tively drastic measures were taken early on. In mid-January, the City of Wuhan and the province of Hubei were placed under quarantine order, but the virus was already circulating globally. Around the 20<sup>th</sup> of January, first cases were recorded outside China, in other Asian countries such as Japan, South Korea or Thailand, then in the United States (21<sup>st</sup> of January), Europe (24<sup>th</sup> of January in France) and Africa (14<sup>th</sup> of February in Egypt). On the 30<sup>th</sup> of January, the WHO declared COVID-19 a public health emergency. By the end of February, new clusters emerged in South Korea, Italy or Iran, some of them with no clear source of exposure – such cases point to large-scale community transmissions (meaning that multiple unrelated outbreaks can appear, and new cases were unrelated to the main disease cluster in China). On the 6<sup>th</sup> of March, the number of infections passed the 100.000 mark, out of which almost 3500 were fatalities. It had taken roughly three months before the 100.000 mark was passed; it took only 12 additional days to reach 200.000 infections. Italy issued a lockdown first affecting the country’s northern Lombardy region (8<sup>th</sup> of March) and then the entire population (10<sup>th</sup> of March), and other European countries followed suit. By mid-March, the WHO declared that the coronavirus outbreak “can be characterized as a pandemic” which is defined as the global non-recurrent spread of an infectious disease, for which there is no collective immunity. At the time of writing of this piece, and taking into account a dramatically volatile and unstable situation, over 183 countries and territories around the world have now reported cases. With the world effectively grinding to a halt, and, at the time I am writing this, more than 3 billion people live under imposed lockdown, while societies across all five continents are waking up to a new grim reality.

4. See World Health Organization, *Consensus document on the epidemiology of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS)*, <https://www.who.int/csr/sars/en/WHOconsensus.pdf>

5. See World Health Organization, *WHO MERS Global Summary and Assessment of Risk*, August 2018, [https://www.who.int/csr/disease/coronavirus\\_infections/risk-assessment-august-2018.pdf](https://www.who.int/csr/disease/coronavirus_infections/risk-assessment-august-2018.pdf)

6. Rachael Rettner, “How does the new coronavirus compare with the flu?”, *Live Science*, 19 March 2020, <https://www.livescience.com/new-coronavirus-compare-with-flu.html>

7. Claire Jackson, “History lessons: the Asian Flu pandemic”, *British Journal of General Practice*, 59 (565), August 2009, pp. 622–623

8. See Patrick R. Saunders-Hastings and Daniel Krewski, “Reviewing the History of Pandemic Influenza: Understanding Patterns of Emergence and Transmission”, *Pathogens*, Issue 5, No. 4, December 2016, pp. 66-74

## A New Way of Working, Consuming and Succeeding: Towards an Acceleration of Digitalization?

From a social and economic standpoint, it is still too early to muse on the fallout of the ongoing pandemic. Its effect might long outlive the actual bout of sanitary urgency, and prove a catalyst for ample societal tectonic shifts. There is yet no scientific consensus on the duration of the epidemic, and the different forecasting efforts must take into account a slew of unknowns and assumptions, such as whether the pathogen is affected by seasonal temperature variations. If there is indeed a seasonal affect, just like with all the other endemic coronaviruses, a new research from universities in Basel and Stockholm contends that the epidemic might dip in summer only to peak again in the winter of 2020/2021, causing months of disruption.<sup>9</sup> States such as the US<sup>10</sup> and the UK<sup>11</sup> are already bracing for over twelve-month-long scenarios, as internal documents reveal. However, it is not certain whether COVID-19 will display modulated transmissibility and dip during warmer months. In this case, another study conducted by the Imperial College of London shows that if unregulated, the pandemic might peak in April, May or June, and wither away once collective immunity is achieved; however, not before putting tremendous stress on healthcare infrastructures and potentially claiming millions of lives worldwide. Only protracted shutdowns

ranging up to 18 months could mitigate the damage, by flattening the infection curve.<sup>12</sup> Other academics paint a less stark picture: a severe lockdown of weeks could plausibly strangle the epidemic, pointing to the Chinese, Singaporean or South Korean way of handling of the crisis.<sup>13</sup> Depending on whether the more drastic containment measures will span for weeks or months, the impact on the post-COVID-19 era will be vastly different.

It is reasonable to expect a more long-term boom of flexible remote work arrangements and an acceleration of the digitalization and robotisation (robots cannot get sick and are already enrolled in offering logistical support to economies paralyzed by quarantines, for example, by delivering food to infected persons in isolation<sup>14</sup>) of our societies. These societal trends were already well underway, but the pandemic will likely act as a catalyst and break down resistance to change. Similarly, consumer behaviour might be durably altered too. Embrace of e-commerce, contactless payment options and consumption of digital, non-physical goods (especially in the entertainment industry) soared: China, which acted effectively as the Guinea pig (or a crystal ball) of the lockdown economy for many weeks before it generalized worldwide, witnessed a 3% increase in e-commerce transactions.<sup>15</sup> Largely, commerce-related activity for the months of January and February dropped by roughly 20%, so these numbers are remarkable. Mobile gaming

9. Richard Neher (et. al.), "Potential impact of seasonal forcing on a SARS-CoV-2 pandemic", *Swiss Medical Weekly*, 16 March 2020, <https://doi.org/10.4414/smw.2020.20224>

10. Peter Baker and Eileen Sullivan, "U.S. Virus Plan Anticipates 18-Month Pandemic and Widespread Shortages", *The New York Times*, 17 March 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/17/us/politics/trump-coronavirus-plan.html>

11. Denis Campbell, "UK coronavirus crisis to last until spring 2021 and could see 7.9m hospitalised", *The Guardian*, 15 March 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/15/uk-coronavirus-crisis-to-last-until-spring-2021-and-could-see-79m-hospitalised>

12. Neil M. Ferguson (et. al.), "Impact of non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) to reduce COVID19 mortality and healthcare demand", *Imperial College COVID-19 Response Team*, 16 March 2020, <https://spiral.imperial.ac.uk:8443/bitstream/10044/1/77482/5/Imperial%20College%20COVID19%20NPI%20modelling%2016-03-2020.pdf>

13. Chen Shen, Nassim Nicholas Taleb and Yaneer Bar-Yam, "Review of Ferguson et. al. 'Impact of non-pharmaceutical interventions'...", *New England Complex Systems Institute*, 17th March 2020, <https://necsi.edu/review-of-ferguson-et-al-impact-of-non-pharmaceutical-interventions>

14. See "How Will the Coronavirus Change Consumer Behaviour?", *E-Marketer*, 9 March 2020, <https://www.emarketer.com/content/podcast-how-will-the-coronavirus-change-consumer-behavior>; Chloe Kent, "How are robots contributing to the fight against coronavirus?", *Verdict Medical Devices*, 5 February 2020, <https://www.medicaldevice-network.com/features/coronavirus-robotics/>

15. Allison Schiff, "Which COVID-19-Related Consumer Behaviour Shifts Are Here To Stay?", *Ad Exchanger*, 6 March 2020, <https://www.adexchanger.com/ecommerce-2/which-covid-19-related-consumer-behavior-shifts-are-here-to-stay/>

companies, food delivery services and remote work software companies are reaching their revenue peaks.<sup>16</sup> In the entertainment and retail industries, for example, these trends are plausibly here to stay, and durably alter the way people consume.

The imperatives of social distancing made digitalization a crucial aspect of the crisis response of most companies. The “digitally lazy” are the first to face extinction, so the pandemic reinforced a latent hierarchy between “traditional” labour-intensive economy (tourism, bars and restaurants, retail, manufacturing industries) and a much more dynamic tech-savvy business model, epitomized by the roaring rude health of companies like Amazon in these dire times.<sup>17</sup> A new operating architecture is emerging. Companies are moving towards an increasingly non-material “core” based on software, data and digital networks, which do not require more than intermittent inter-personal physical closeness. This describes the habitual white-collar work environment. However, other models require inherent physical proximity to function. The less a model builds upon physical premises and interactions and the more flexibility it allows (for both workers and customers), the better it seems to be resisting. In the post-pandemic economic ecosystem, these are lessons that might dramatically bring forward and accelerate an already burgeoning trend. Such evolutions might pose stringent questions on the long run, if they were to become permanent.

However, they also raise immediate challenges: more than ever, the coronavirus epidemic exposed, in China and elsewhere, the digital divide of our still imperfectly digitized society. For example, the pandemic risks widening the

gap between rural students for whom the closure of schools means all learning activities grinded to a halt and urban middle and upper-class pupils for whom the crisis will only mean learning a little bit *differently*.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, continued access to educational and cultural contents depends not only on the material rudiments of connected life (an internet connection, a laptop or a smartphone), but also on the cognitive command of such digital tools. While a younger but economically disadvantaged population may not have the economic resources to buy a computer, older demographics are sometimes under a different type of stress – that of learning new skills, which could save their lives by curtailing unnecessary trips (think online shopping, used by less than 1 in 6 Americans over 50, according to a 2018 International Food Information Council Foundation<sup>19</sup>). In a Bourdieusian turn, the crisis shed light on how social capital<sup>20</sup> is not only composed of economic assets but also relies on certain “cultural” resources, such as digital alphabetisation or, in case of businesses, the capacity to digitize rapidly core activities. For individuals and firms alike, the COVID-19 pandemic is highlighting and reinforcing a symbolic cartography of the “have” and the “have-nots”, along lines that are not entirely new, but are a clear sign of the new societal tectonics.

### **The Collateral Political Cost of the Crisis: Democratic Uncertainty, Populism and Distrust**

The political fallouts of the current pandemic are equally uncertain, and interesting; unsurprisingly, the sheer magnitude of the crisis disrupted the political tempo of democracy,

16. John Koetsier, “Coronavirus Cuts Smartphone Sales 55% in China. But E-Commerce And Delivery Businesses Are Booming”, *Forbes*, 9 March 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnkoetsier/2020/03/09/china-smartphone-sales-drop-55-thanks-to-coronavirus-but-e-commerce-and-delivery-businesses-are-booming/#3958b6dc4bb9>

17. “Amazon hiring 100,000 new distribution workers to keep up with online shopping surge caused by coronavirus”, *CNN Business*, 17 March 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/03/16/tech/amazon-shipping-coronavirus/index.html>

18. See Raymond Zhong, “The Coronavirus Exposes Education’s Digital Divide”, *The New York Times*, 17 March 2020

19. International Food Information Council Foundation in collaboration with AARP Foundation, *Grocery Delivery for Older Americans*, July 2018, <https://foodinsight.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/IFIC-Older-Americans-Grocery-Delivery-Report-FINAL.pdf>

20. For Bourdieu’s authoritative definition of social capital, see Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992

notably the cycle of elections. Elections or referenda were delayed or postponed in Great Britain,<sup>21</sup> France,<sup>22</sup> Italy and Spain,<sup>23</sup> but also outside Europe, for example in protest-hit Chile, where a much-anticipated constitutional referendum was promised to appease growing social unrest.<sup>24</sup> The primary campaigns in the United States are under pressure, with public rallies banned and candidates trying their hands at the first exercise in virtual campaigning. Indiana, Connecticut, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland and Ohio have postponed their primary presidential elections, and the elections in New York (which is a major cluster of infection, with tens of thousands of confirmed cases) could be subjected to delays. The public events of the two candidates (Bernie Sanders and frontrunner Joe Biden) have been cancelled, and debates are organized without on-site audiences.<sup>25</sup> Most democracies followed suit.

The suspension of democratic normalcy, often institutionalised through the declaration of states of emergency, feels justified and often complies with constitutional provisions. While “corona dictatorships” may indeed spring up, it is in the etymological sense (from the Latin *dictātor*) of an extraordinary authority instituted in times of crisis, with a clear limited mandate. Even drastic measures such as forced confinement, restrictions on freedom of movement and mass surveillance are not outside the bounds of the constitutional toolkit of modern democratic authority, and in many cases, it is unlikely that established democracies will struggle with long-term authoritarian tendencies, once the pandemic ebbs away. That is, of course, unless there was already a pre-existing authoritarian tropism. The situation is

more strained in countries where democracy is perceived to be less sure-footed, or which struggle with incipient democratic backslidings. Societal acceptance of such unprecedented inflation of coercive power demands a high level of confidence in public authorities. In the absence of it, the emergency is only gaping underlying wounds.

In Israel, the dread of the coronavirus pandemic has landed in the aftermath of the third general election in twelve months. Netanyahu’s bloc, led by the Likud, ended three seats shy of a majority, and the opposition led by Benny Gantz declared its intention of forging a new majority coalition. Amid escalating tensions, Netanyahu suffered the worst political reversal in a decade-long career, as President Reuven Rivlin tasked Gantz with forming Israel’s next government. Still serving as Prime Minister as the crisis hit the country, Netanyahu enacted sweeping measures and literally incapacitated the opposition, by suspending Parliament, because health guidelines prevented such an assembly. In addition to this move, unprecedented in Israeli history, courts were shut down (thus sheltering Netanyahu from an undignified trial for corruption) and the internal security agency implemented cell phone tracking of citizens, in order to monitor the whereabouts of suspected carriers of the virus (with citizens receiving text messages saying: “Hello, you were in close proximity to someone with coronavirus. You must immediately isolate at home to protect your relatives and the public. Sincerely, Public Health Services.”<sup>26</sup>). Unease over potential breaches of privacy or the reinforcement of the executive have been palpable. While social media was seething with

21. “May’s local elections should be cancelled due to coronavirus, says Electoral Commission”, *The Telegraph*, 12 March 2020, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2020/03/12/mays-local-elections-should-cancelled-due-coronavirus-says-electoral/>

22. “Le report du second tour des municipales se met en place”, *Le Monde*, 18 March 2020, [https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2020/03/18/municipales-le-report-du-second-tour-se-met-en-place\\_6033513\\_823448.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2020/03/18/municipales-le-report-du-second-tour-se-met-en-place_6033513_823448.html)

23. “European elections in a time of coronavirus”, *Brookings*, 20 March 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/03/20/european-elections-in-a-time-of-coronavirus/>

24. “Chile moves to postpone constitutional referendum amid coronavirus crisis”, *The Guardian*, 19 March 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/19/chile-postpone-constitutional-referendum-coronavirus-crisis>

25. “2020 Democratic Primary Election: Voting Postponed in 7 States Because of Virus”, *The New York Times*, 20 March 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/article/2020-campaign-primary-calendar-coronavirus.html>

26. Daniel Estrin, “Israel Begins Tracking And Texting Those Possibly Exposed To The Coronavirus”, *NPR News*, 19 March 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/03/19/818327945/israel-begins-tracking-and-texting-those-possibly-exposed-to-the-coronavirus?t=1584866782679>



accusations that the country was morphing into a “Big Brother on steroids”,<sup>27</sup> other public and political figures denounced a “power grab” by Netanyahu and even declared democracy under assault. Historian Yuval Noah Harari contended we are witnessing the first “corona dictatorship”, feeding off the corpse of Israeli democracy.<sup>28</sup>

In Hungary, Parliament pushed through (by 137 to 53) a new set of measures, which not only include jail terms for those spreading coronavirus misinformation (a legitimate move at first sight, but one that can be easily weaponized as an effective censorship tool), but also gave the Orban government sweeping emergency power with no clear time limit. The lack of a sunset clause for the emergency powers of the executive played into a decade-old fear that the country is teetering on the brink of authoritarianism. The current crisis did not significantly shift Orban’s communication, whose conservative nationalism buttressed his symbolic management of the pandemic. In the beginning of March, the Hungarian government proceeded to the eight extension of the 2015 “crisis situation due to mass migration”, citing the epidemiological risks of any uncontrolled movement of people.<sup>29</sup> The first confirmed coronavirus cases being Iranian students in Budapest, the government easily weaved together in its rhetoric migration and the sanitary crises as interconnected phenomena. It highlighted the alleged “clear link” between migration and the outbreak, singling out Iran as the major spreading focus of infection and asylum-seekers as its main vectors of transmission.<sup>30</sup> It also developed – albeit more

cautiously – another line of argument, criticising the Western alliance and EU’s failure to respond to the crisis, and emphasizing the aid offered by extra-European countries such as China: “We received help from China and the Turkish Council. This is the situation now. Despite this, we remain EU members. This is our home, but we must see that this is not where help is coming from now” professed Viktor Orban.<sup>31</sup> This refashioning of the east-bound geopolitical shift of Hungary, by turning against EU alternative solidarities deemed eminently more “operational”, is indeed worrying, but is coherent with the narrative manufactured since 2015 by the Fidesz.

Populist entrepreneurs did not sensibly alter their discourse, once the cataclysmic scale of the pandemic was revealed, and often tried to obfuscate the relative disinterest (or outright dismissal) exhibited in the early stages of the spread. In a rally held in North Charleston, South Carolina, on the 29<sup>th</sup> of February, Donald Trump famously floated the idea that the coronavirus was a Democratic “hoax” to undermine his administration and railed the press’ “hysteria” surrounding the epidemic.<sup>32</sup> Prominent Republican figures echoed this rhetoric, deploring undercurrent political motives behind a “makeshift crisis”. Conservative radio host Bill Mitchell concluded that by “marketing” the coronavirus as the “Black Plague”, Democrats try to manufacture the economic crisis needed to bring down Donald Trump in the wake of the November election, in the same underhand fashion the Chinese totalitarian government used it to clear the streets of Hong Kong from

27. See for example @RavivDrucker, “למשלה בהליך אסור לתת” לממשלה להיכנס לנייד של כל אחד מאיתנו. חייבים להתנגד כזה לעשות צעד כל כך דיקטטורי. טוואן זו לא דוגמא שאנחנו צריכים לשאוף אליה. זה נותן לממשלה להיכנס לנייד של כל אחד מאיתנו. חייבים להתנגד לזה”, *Twitter*, 14 March 2020, <https://twitter.com/RavivDrucker/status/1238909218113101827>

28. Yuval Noah Harari, “The first corona dictatorship – Israeli democracy just died”, *Facebook*, 19 March 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/Prof.Yuval.Noah.Harari/posts/2781094835304824>

29. “Pandemic-Hit Hungary Harps On About Migrant Crisis”, *Balkan Insight*, 19 March 2020, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/03/19/pandemic-hit-hungary-harps-on-about-migrant-crisis/>

30. “Orbán to EU Counterparts: Clear Link between Coronavirus and Illegal Migration”, *Hungary Today*, 11 March 2020, <https://hungarytoday.hu/orban-to-eu-counterparts-clear-link-between-coronavirus-and-illegal-migration/>

31. See Vlagyislav Makszimov, “Hungarian parliament approves new emergency powers allowing ruling Fidesz to ‘indefinitely’ rule by decree”, *Euractiv*, 15 March 2020, [https://www.euractiv.com/section/coronavirus/short\\_news/hungary-update-covid-19/](https://www.euractiv.com/section/coronavirus/short_news/hungary-update-covid-19/)

32. See The Sun, “Donald Trump rally in North Charleston, South Carolina - Replay”, *YouTube*, 29 February 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8P3aE21OKUw>

protesters.<sup>33</sup> Another conservative media personality, Rush Limbaugh, claimed the “coronavirus is the common cold”, while also suggesting it is a (failed) bioweapon produced by Chinese authorities:

*Nobody wants to get any of this stuff. I mean, you never... I hate getting the common cold. You don't want to get the flu. It's miserable. But we're not talking about something here that's gonna wipe out your town or your city if it finds its way there. This is a classic illustration of how media coverage... even if this media coverage isn't stacked, even if this is just the way media normally does things, this is a hyped, panic-filled version. It's exactly how the media deals with these things to create audience, readership, interest, clicks, what have you.*<sup>34</sup>

While the president of the United States and its supporters rapidly back paddled and realized the true scope of the threat, other leaders, such as Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro, persisted in downplaying the seriousness of the situation.<sup>35</sup> However, he was increasingly isolated in holding such views, even within the populist camp. The menace of a global spread of the virus perfectly sustained a consistent narrative rehashing anti-globalization tropes, nationalism and critique of international organizations (even if the UN and the WHO were among the most vocal advocate of a prompt response). Pro-Brexit YouTuber Paul Joseph Watson contrasted the death tolls in “left-wing, open-border” Italy and Spain and, on the other hand, Russia, Singapore or Hungary, which enacted tough border restrictions.

*At what point does stopping an immensely dangerous and disruptive global pandemic*

*become more important than the sacred, never to be questioned or curtailed “international flow of people”? The World Health Organization, whose job it is to stop a global pandemic, has repeatedly insisted that preventing stigmatization and keeping borders open is critical, to the point where they seem more concerned about that than actually stopping the pandemic.*<sup>36</sup>

The context also fuelled another populist argument, this time related to the effort to avoid that the virus leads to racial profiling of Asians and brings about a recrudescence of xenophobic sentiments. Paul Joseph Watson complained to international bodies and the WHO showed more concern about policing speech and finding non-discriminatory names for the disease (labelled the “Chinese virus” by Donald Trump) than for effectively working a strategy to strangle it.<sup>38</sup>

The analysis of the populist and far-right discourse reveals the crisis did not upend or challenge the basic ideological grammar of populism, but rather reinforced its anti-globalization and nationalist core. The pattern of manufacturing a symbolic response to the sanitary urgency followed proved recipes: identifying the “root cause” of the problem (open borders and mass migration as a sanitary hazard), then labelling political (the EU, international bodies, liberal-leaning national governments) and the cultural (the media establishment, arrogant technocrats) culprits. The morphology of the crisis lends itself to anti-establishment resentment, as it plays persuasively into the angst-ridden populist imaginary. The pandemic is framed as a coalescence of mismanagement by the three

33. Bill Mitchell, “The survival rate of Coronavirus is nearly 98%. When you count young, healthy adults, it is closer to 99.5%. Why is this being marketed as The Black Plague? Democrats get to crash the economy and Chinese get protesters off the streets of Hong Kong.”, *Twitter*, 25 February, <https://twitter.com/mitchellvii/status/1232258919831146499>

34. “Rush Limbaugh: The coronavirus is an effort to get Trump”, *Media Matters*, 24 March 2020, <https://www.mediamatters.org/rush-limbaugh/rush-limbaugh-coronavirus-effort-get-trump>

35. “Brazil's Bolsonaro calls coronavirus ‘a little flu,’ claims strong measures unnecessary”, *Global News*, 28 March 2020, <https://globalnews.ca/news/6746747/brazils-bolsonaro-coronavirus/>

36. Paul Joseph Watson, “EU Officials Refuse to Implement Border Controls to Stop Coronavirus”, *Summit News*, 25 February 2020, <https://summit.news/2020/02/25/eu-officials-refuse-to-implement-border-controls-to-stop-coronavirus/>

37. “Trump sparks anger by calling coronavirus the Chinese virus”, *The Guardian*, 17 March 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/17/trump-calls-covid-19-the-chinese-virus-as-rift-with-coronavirus-beijing-escalates>

38. Paul Joseph Watson, “Coronavirus”, *YouTube*, 11 March 2020, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iqhJmsZC\\_a4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iqhJmsZC_a4)

archetypal “seats of power”, against which populists historically mobilize the political establishment (embodied by national governments and “liberal” or “left-wing” parties), the cultural media establishment (the mainstream press) and the technocratic experts’ bodies (the WHO, the EU, some senior health advisers). Even medical researchers and professionals are sometimes concentrating the ire of populist rhetoric. The treatment of Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the United States National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases and leading expert of the Trump administration, proves that even when technocrats operate under the authority of the political, populists can interpret even minor frictions between the two, as a combat to the death between shady Deep States proponents and brave democratic heroes. Fauci never openly attacked Donald Trump, but his messaging was notably less optimistic, and his briefings sometimes went against the upbeat and confident tone of the presidential administration. He was instantly accused of surreptitiously mocking the president when he was caught on camera dropping his head and rubbing his forehead in apparent exasperation during a Trump speech on March the 20<sup>th</sup>.<sup>39</sup> Fauci became the target of a hostile social media campaign, mainly under the hashtag #FauciFraud.<sup>40</sup> Dichotomizing technocracy and democracy (“No one elected Fauci nor did we give him the power to destroy this nation” tweeted pro-Trump political commentator John Cardillo<sup>41</sup>) is a long-established populist strategy. It fitted the current drama all the better in the context of an ideological space already structured by conspiracy angsts and anti-vaccine rhetoric. The thematic of health and disease display the embeddedness between political resentment against the powerful (amongst which are counted accredited medical professionals, who are given a voice in traditional media and increasingly gain political salience) and a more unfocused cultural malaise against the mainstream, which prompts compensatory quests of alternative explications (conspiracy theory) or remedies. Homemade coronavirus cures and aberrant bio warfare conspiracies are not successful *in spite* of the repeated rebuttals and warnings enunciated by healthcare professionals, they are successful *because* they are so forcefully disavowed by what is perceived as an all-powerful “establishment”. It is neither anecdotal nor coincidental that prominent far-right figures such as InfoWars’ editor Alex Jones have been peddling miracle COVID-19 remedies (such as a nano-silver toothpaste) online, to the point New York’s attorney general threatened legal action against Jones.<sup>42</sup> A very similar pattern could be observed in the case of climate change. The coupling of anti-science dispositions and anti-establishment populist politics, both articulate a form of revolt against the alleged “privileged cast”.

The coronavirus is, unsurprisingly, another battleground of the culture wars. It offers insights on the psychological and ideological inroads of populism into society. In many respects, it only validates the existing political biases, albeit the frontline has now evolved. When struggling with the ideological management of an unprecedented emergency, political entrepreneurs are not particularly innovative doctrinally and fall back on acquired formulas to mobilize support. However, this does not mean that symbolic struggles are muted, quite the opposite. This is true within nation-states but also across borders, which may be sealed for people but not for ideas. Not only did parties or ideologies try to control the narratives of the crisis, but also countries or geopolitical entities. A prime example of this is the manner in which the Chinese sanitary response to the COVID-19 pandemic became entangled in the crossfire of competing narratives, underpinning two antagonistic

39. Dr. Anthony Fauci did a facepalm after Trump mentioned the 'Deep State Department' in a wild coronavirus briefing”, *Business Insider*, 20 March 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/dr-anthony-fauci-did-a-facepalm-during-trumps-coronavirus-briefing-2020-3>

40. #FauciFraud, *Twitter*, [https://mobile.twitter.com/hashtag/FauciFraud?src=hashtag\\_click](https://mobile.twitter.com/hashtag/FauciFraud?src=hashtag_click)

41. John Cardillo, “No one elected Fauci nor did we give him the power to destroy this nation. @realDonaldTrump needs to consider Fauci's opinion while weighing it against the devastation it's doing to our nation. I'm not sure Fauci's motives are entirely pure”, *Twitter*, 1 April 2020, <https://mobile.twitter.com/johncardillo/status/1245132795506237440>

42. Hanna Kozłowska, “Alex Jones peddled a fake coronavirus cure that can turn people’s skin permanently blue”, *Quartz*, 14 March 2020, <https://qz.com/1818606/alex-jones-ordered-to-stop-selling-fake-coronavirus-cures/>

geopolitical visions.

**The COVID-19 Pandemic: Liberal Cautionary Tale or Patriotic Tour de Force? Is China Losing Control? The Narrative of the Coronavirus Crisis, or a Case Study in Symbolic Management?**

China made the headlines first, in early January – discreetly, quietly, without fanfare. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of January, *The Guardian* reported that a cluster of pneumonia cases in central China, in the Hubei province, might be due to a newly emerging member of the family of coronaviruses that caused the deadly SARS and MERS outbreaks in the beginning of the century.<sup>43</sup> However, with regard to the approximately 60 cases related to the Wuhan live-animal market, Chinese authorities ruled out the SARS and MERS coronaviruses as possible causes, as well as flu, bird flu, adenovirus and other common respiratory pathogens. On the 14<sup>th</sup>, media outlets reported that what was dubbed as “China mystery illness” claimed the first human life, a 61-year-old man already suffering from a slew of other illnesses.<sup>44</sup> However, at that time, no robust evidence of human-to-human transmission was found, and Chinese authorities assured that no new contaminations had occurred since the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January. It was not until the 20<sup>th</sup> of January that human-to-human transmission of the “mysterious SARS-like virus” was confirmed.<sup>45</sup> The spectre of the SARS epidemic that caused almost 800 deaths was invoked with increasing frequency, and the lunar New Year travel period was laden with epidemiologic anxiety, despite the reassuringly manageable mortality rate (around 2%, a very low rate when compared with the 10% exhibited by SARS). As a result, ten cities were locked down and the New Year festivities were scrapped. Already, the effort was gathering global attention because of the sheer scale of the containment: never before had such a large

population been cut off from the outside world by a quarantine. The city of Wuhan itself was home to 11 million people, who were barred from leaving the city starting with the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January. The dominant framework adopted by Western media was shaped by China’s unique power structure, a combination of ultra-centralized authoritarian bureaucracy, dogmatic patriotic ideology and *Weltpolitik* ambitions. A certain surreptitious narrative of “Chinese exceptionalism” was quietly undercutting much of the media reporting of the sanitary crisis. Most observers saw the epidemic through the lenses of Chinese politics and ambitions, and more specifically, the politics of the Chinese Communist Party. High-capacity authoritarian centralization undoubtedly allowed a draconian level of constraint to be enforced swiftly and efficiently, with minimal opposition, and the State’s mighty surveillance apparatus proved the ideal tool to launch one of the greatest infectious-disease containment enterprises the world had ever seen. The narrower the space of civil society, the easier it was for the authorities to control and regulate it down to the last detail (something curbing the transmission entailed), by tapping into a dense web of embedded social discipline norms. It seemed that a hyper-centralized political system, unhindered by the checks of individual rights and liberties could have a distinct advantage over a free society. While some pondered the eventual merits of authoritarian centralism, in grief-stricken Italy, the videos of mayors’ desperate and sometimes exasperated pleas to lockdown “dodgers” became viral quickly.<sup>46</sup> This seemed to confirm a certain latent anti-democratic bias. Popular vloggers and YouTubers vented their frustration at the uncivil recklessness and individualism of the “democratic citizen”:

*You know what, in this, I have to say I respect China. [...] The consequence of the Chinese dictatorship is that people follow*

43. “China pneumonia outbreak may be caused by Sars-type virus: WHO”, *The Guardian*, 9 January 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2020/jan/09/china-pneumonia-outbreak-may-be-caused-by-sars-type-virus-who>

44. “First death from China mystery illness outbreak”, *The Guardian*, 14 January 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/11/china-mystery-illness-outbreak-causes-first-death>

45. Lily Kuo, “China confirms human-to-human transmission of coronavirus”, *The Guardian*, 21 January 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/20/coronavirus-spreads-to-beijing-as-china-confirms-new-cases>

the rules. While I am not a fan of dictatorships, I find that the result - a certain amount of discipline - is quite frankly not bad at all. Really. There, they did contain the epidemic.<sup>47</sup>

*Business Insider* listed the 56 most aggressive measures taken by Chinese authorities to curb the spread of infection, contending that despite their proven efficiency, they might be “impossible to implement” in a democratic country such as the US. Among them were the systemic tracing of cell phones and the ubiquitous police presence.<sup>48</sup> Even senior WHO officials, such as Walter Ricciardi, recognized liberal democracies may be, at first, ill equipped in tackling the sanitary urgency, as they have to show more restraint.<sup>49</sup> Through the slow and cumbersome response, it opposed the virus. The Western liberal-democratic “brand” was only further weakened and desacralized, argued Stephen Walt in the authoritative (and left-leaning) magazine *Foreign Policy*.<sup>50</sup> Can the coronavirus become a turning point in the protracted ideological battle between the West and the East?

The match of China or Singapore – built on fear and respect for authority – and of the cheek-kissing unruly Italy or Spain appeared headed to a foregone conclusion. Nevertheless, while authoritarianism had established a very high threshold for the acceptability of public authority intrusion, allowing mass surveillance and tracking, it posed other problems that Western media was keen to highlight. The death of Li Wienlang, a medical professional under investigation for “spreading false rumours” for

having been among the first ones to reveal the extent of the threat posed by the novel Coronavirus, brought to the forefront the cracks in the Chinese narrative. The Coronavirus was compared to the Chernobyl of this century – the debacle that ripped the veil of illusion and exposed the horrendous cost of the “silence pact” forced by tyranny on its press and citizens.<sup>51</sup> The French newspaper *Le Monde* detailed the systematic censorship exerted by the Chinese authorities and the merciless crackdown on emergent citizen journalism.<sup>52</sup> *The Guardian*<sup>53</sup> and the *New York Times*<sup>54</sup> reported on the fresh faces of this new brand of street journalism, such as Li Zehua, an unaffiliated citizen reporter who quit his stable job at China’s state broadcaster and came to Wuhan on his own, and who has gone missing since late February. Transparency and democratic accountability – or the lack thereof – were at the heart of these liberal cautionary tales which, drawing on the reminiscence of the near-catastrophe of the 2002 SARS outbreak, were looking to reveal the corrupt heart of the formidable disease-fighting machine the Communist Party was peddling to the outside world.

The *National Review* titled “*To Protect the Future, Hold China to Account*”, echoing the rhetoric of Donald Trump and the U.S. secretary of State Mike Pompeo. The conservative magazine alleged that China’s attitude both before (by its refusal to regulate wet-blood markets) and after (by the extensive cover-ups and suppressing of all whistle blowers’ warnings) the breakout had “unnecessarily caused and exacerbated a world pandemic”.

47. Astronogeek, “Je perd foi en l’humanité”, *YouTube*, 20 March 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r9PUxMIcogU>

48. “China took at least 12 strict measures to control the coronavirus. They could work for the US, but would likely be impossible to implement”, *Business Insider*, 24 March 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/chinas-coronavirus-quarantines-other-countries-arent-ready-2020-3>

49. “Italy, Pandemic’s New Epicenter, Has Lessons for the World”, *The New York Times*, 21 March 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/21/world/europe/italy-coronavirus-center-lessons.html?smid=nytcore-ios-share>

50. “How the World Will Look After the Coronavirus Pandemic”, *Foreign Policy*, 20 March 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/20/world-order-after-coronavirus-pandemic/>

51. “Geopolitics Unmasked: How COVID-19 became China’s Chernobyl”, *The Warsaw Institute Review*, 30 March 2020, <https://warsawinstitute.review/news/geopolitics-unmasked-how-covid-19-became-chinas-chernobyl/>

52. “Comment le coronavirus défie la censure chinoise”, *Le Monde*, 18 February 2020, [https://www.lemonde.fr/sante/video/2020/02/18/comment-le-coronavirus-defie-la-censure-chinoise\\_6029984\\_1651302.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/sante/video/2020/02/18/comment-le-coronavirus-defie-la-censure-chinoise_6029984_1651302.html)

53. Lily Kuo, “They’re chasing me: the journalist who wouldn’t stay quiet on Covid-19”, *The Guardian*, 1 March 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/01/li-zehujournalist-wouldnt-stay-quiet-covid-19-coronavirus>

54. Vivian Wang and Javier C. Hernández, “Coronavirus crisis awakens a sleeping giant: China’s youth”, *The New York Times*, 29 March 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/28/world/asia/coronavirus-china-youth.html>

Adding insult to injury, China is now trying to pose as a saviour, leveraging against the West its dwindling numbers of infections and its humanitarian aid to embattled countries such as Italy. The only solution is to hold accountable the previously untouchable Chinese Communist Party for the damage, and definitively reverse the world's complacency towards Beijing, concludes the Republican-leaning publication<sup>55</sup>. Trump and the US was the only major geopolitical actor to lay the blame on China publicly, the president even conspicuously referring to the virus as "the Chinese virus", adding the world is paying the price of the Chinese government laxity and opacity. In response, Chinese officials were quick to point out the fact that the harsher tone adopted by the Trump administration represents a pivot (Trump had earlier expressed admiration at the Chinese handling of the virus<sup>56</sup>), motivated by the need for a scapegoat to deflect attention from the U.S.'s catastrophic sanitary situation.<sup>57</sup> The Chinese national news agency, the Xinhua News Agency, published in English an opinion piece to denounce the "political virus" spread by the US:

*Ever since the outbreak, some U.S. politicians have been busy with their frivolous political theatrics. These so-called political elites in the White House have taken to heart nothing else but their political agendas to suppress China. Even the virus, a public enemy of all, has been made their anti-China weapon. In face of the COVID-19 pandemic, all countries should not only take effective prevention measures at a national level, but also enhance transnational cooperation. At this critical moment, smearing others or finger-pointing contributes nothing to*

*containing the epidemic nor uniting people across the world, but will only lead to a fearful waste of time and a narrowed window of opportunity.*<sup>58</sup>

The Chinese response can be read as a mimetic counter charge to the American line of argument, against accusations that Marxist-inspired authoritarianism and geopolitical selfishness of the CCP crippled an efficient containment strategy. The Chinese narrative strives to reverse the optics and paint the U.S. as an ideological power blinded in its response by political bias, which prioritize internal hate-mongering agendas to the common good:

*As infections are rising sharply in the United States, the U.S. government has responded by spending a substantial amount of its energy on shifting blame and ignored the fact that only solidarity and cooperation will defeat a worldwide pandemic that is still developing. Such rhetoric makes sense in an election year in the United States when politicians try to shift U.S. voters' attention from dissatisfaction with the government's inability in response to the epidemic to China and shirk their responsibilities. This reveals the political decay and illusion of "democracy" in the United States. In many aspects, the U.S. administration is setting a bad example in the global fight against the virus.*<sup>59</sup>

China's narrative has been completely devoid of ideological meaning. Declining to engage in Russia's "culture war" rhetoric, it strategically focuses on pragmatic universalism and the furthering of its image of international trustworthy, reasonable broker. The U.S. aid response is lambasted ("As a major power, the United States should have been at the frontline

55. Lewis Libby and Logan Rank, "To Protect the Future, Hold China to Account", *The National Review*, 21 March 2020, <https://www.nationalreview.com/2020/03/coronavirus-pandemic-hold-china-accountable/#slide-1>

56. "Trump repeatedly praised China's response to coronavirus in February", *CNN*, 25 March 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/03/25/politics/trump-coronavirus-china/index.html>

57. "They are looking for a scapegoat. Chinese Foreign Ministry responds to Trump's allegations", *TN News*, 23 March 2020, <https://top-news.online/they-are-looking-for-a-scapegoat-chinese-foreign-ministry-responds-to-trumps-allegations/>

58. "Commentary: Washington's 'political virus' is destructive to global anti-coronavirus efforts", *Xinhua Net*, 16 March 2020, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/northamerica/2020-03/16/c\\_138884121.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/northamerica/2020-03/16/c_138884121.htm)

59. "Commentary: U.S. government sets bad example in global anti-virus fight", *Xinhua Net*, 22 March 2020, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/northamerica/2020-03/22/c\\_138904333.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/northamerica/2020-03/22/c_138904333.htm)

of helping other countries fight the epidemic”<sup>60</sup>), and contrasted with China’s global solidarity:

*As the peak of the epidemic in China has recently passed, China has been readily helping other countries. [...] What China has done has been translated into a popular slogan that reads: "Our partnership, stronger than metal and stone, defies geographical distance."*<sup>61</sup>

The main tenet of the counter-narrative China manufactured over the last three months was not the ideological or moral superiority of the communist model, but *eficiency*. In a video series chronicling the “People’s War” against the virus, images of ultra-modern hospitals springing from the ground in days, factories working at maximum capacity to produce equipment and orderly squads of medics, military personnel and volunteers are coalescing into a new political grammar. The legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party is not its ideological purity, but its success in turning the country into a gigantic Fordist virus-fighting machine: the shedding of the emphatic messianic speech that traditionally infused fascism or communism is a significant, historic shift in the totalitarian imaginary. Nevertheless, the verticality of the Chinese model is never denied or turned invisible (“This is because of the government’s leadership and in the same time the cooperation of the people of China. It cannot happen without the two”<sup>62</sup>), and old Leninists conceptions of party vanguard seem to have been diluted into a utilitarian, devoid of ideology, and quasi-managerial paradigm of efficiency.

Both from inside and the outside, the narrative put forward by Beijing has been unremittingly chipped at; for the regime, however, it is a matter of life and death to retain control – at least internally – of how the 2020 pandemic will be remembered in history books.

### The Return of the Big State?

Symbolic management, however important, is not the sole horizon of the crisis. The coronavirus crisis thrusts immediate, searing questions upon the political system – and the answers offered under dire pressure might mould the post-crisis world durably. Governments took such sweeping and cost-laden actions across all sectors of economic life that we might reasonably content we face with the most massive exercise of coordinated state power in the last decades (at least in the West). Even the most stringent measures taken in the aftermaths of terrorists ploys feel like child’s play in comparison. As stated above, political restrictions (curfews, travel bans, suspension of legislative sessions or courts) are in most cases going to be short-lived, mainly because it took a decree to impose them, and will only take another decree to lift them. It is in the economic realm that these measures will very likely outlast the actual emergency, especially as the economic emergency might be significantly more protracted than the sanitary one - low-interest loans,<sup>63</sup> immediate disaster assistance,<sup>64</sup> unemployment compensation for laid-off workers,<sup>65</sup> deferring fiscal and social security contributions for companies and individuals.<sup>66</sup> The most powerful economies all laid out

60. *Ibidem*

61. *Ibidem*

62. “People’s war: China’s response to COVID-19”, *Xinhua Net*, 4 April 2020, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-04/04/c\\_138946047.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-04/04/c_138946047.htm)

63. “Bank of England cuts interest rates to all-time low of 0.1%”, *The Guardian*, 19 March 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/mar/19/bank-of-england-cuts-interest-rates-to-all-time-low-of-01>

64. “SBA to offer disaster assistance to small businesses amid COVID-19 impact”, *Kold News*, 19 March 2020, <https://www.kold.com/2020/03/19/sba-offer-disaster-assistance-small-businesses-amid-covid-impact/>; “Coronavirus: un plan à 45 milliards d’euros pour soutenir les entreprises”, *Le Monde*, 17 March 2020, [https://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2020/03/17/coronavirus-un-plan-a-45-milliards-d-euros-pour-soutenir-les-entreprises\\_6033375\\_3234.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2020/03/17/coronavirus-un-plan-a-45-milliards-d-euros-pour-soutenir-les-entreprises_6033375_3234.html)

65. “Coronavirus: chômage partiel pris en charge à 100 %, arrêts de travail automatiques pour les parents”, *L’Obs*, 13 March 2020, <https://www.nouvelobs.com/coronavirus-de-wuhan/20200313.OBS25990/coronavirus-chomage-partiel-pris-en-charge-a-100-arrets-de-travail-automatiques-pour-les-parents.html>

66. Cécile Barbière, “After declaring ‘war’ on COVID-19, France readies measures to uphold economy”, *Euractiv*, 18 March 2020, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/coronavirus/news/after-declaring-war-on-covid-19-france-readies-measures-to-uphold-economy/>

comprehensive plans to tackle the shutdown of large sectors of activity. In Italy, the social dimension was particularly manifest: layoffs were forbidden, rent was reduced, 100-Euro bonuses will be handed to the most vulnerable employees, parental leaves and tax suspensions were granted. Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte hailed this 25-billion effort “the Italian model”, who could be the scaffolding of a pan-European emergency programme.<sup>67</sup> In France, deficits are expected to exceed the symbolic 100% of GDP mark this year. Similarly, extensive market regulations were put in place: the Autorité des Marchés Financiers (AMF), the French market watchdog, banned short selling on 92 stocks, a measure that may be prolonged for up to one month to prevent financial speculation.<sup>68</sup> Elsewhere, governments ordered price freezes on medical supplies, basic goods or utilities.<sup>69</sup> Private healthcare facilities, medical supplies, masks or even hotels and available building were requisitioned in Spain or France.<sup>70</sup> But the most striking undertakings were nationalisations: to save Alitalia from collapsing, Italy fully re-nationalized the airline carrier<sup>71</sup> and other countries might follow suit. In the emergency package presented, the French Finance minister Bruno Le Maire resorted to the language of protectionism, proclaiming that nationalizations of certain large strategic companies was certainly not outside the bounds of possibility.<sup>72</sup> Not only could such measures, but also companies such as Renault or PSA

target air carriers like Air France.<sup>73</sup> This is all the more remarkable given that before the crisis the French government engaged in a bitterly contested privatisation process, on which it has now completely backpedalled.

This massive injection of capital is going to come, on medium term, with certain strings. In an ideological climate increasingly hostile to neoliberalism, a return to pre-epidemic formulas of deregulation might simply not be feasible, from both an ideological and economic standpoint. After the economy goes out of hibernation, financially drained states will have to compensate for their losses in order to operate even at a basic level – let alone sustain the extensive welfare programs already in place. The imperatives of the post-COVID-19 will be those of any functioning state apparatus, in the wake of the steepest escalation in government expenditure since World War II. Three options are thus available to policy-makers:

1. An iteration of orthodox neoliberal austerity. It entails drastically reducing government budget deficits through spending cuts and the scrapping of costly welfare programs. This option carries a high symbolic cost: the fraught political dynamics of the pre-epidemic period are likely to be reignited, reinforcing the shift towards populist left and populist right, both fuelled by the economic malaise of the “precarariat” and of the low and middle-income classes. With elections looming, the solution of strict

67. “No layoffs, reduced rent: ‘Italian cure’ for COVID-19 pandemic”, *CNA*, 19 March 2020, <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/world/coronavirus-covid-19-italy-economy-measures-12554500>

68. Cécile Barbière, “After declaring ‘war’ on COVID-19, France readies measures to uphold economy”, *op. cit.*

69. “Philippines announces price freeze on basic goods amid COVID-19 calamity”,

*MSN News*, 19 March 2020, <https://www.msn.com/en-ph/news/national/philippines-announces-price-freeze-on-basic-goods-amid-covid-19-calamity/ar-BB11mzIU?li=BBR8Mkn>

70. “Coronavirus: 180.000 tests Covid-19 réquisitionnés dans une entreprise liégeoise!”, *Sud Info*, 19 March 2020, <https://www.sudinfo.be/id174671/article/2020-03-19/coronavirus-180000-tests-covid-19-requisitionnes-dans-une-entreprise-liegeoise>;

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72. Isabelle Chaperon, “Coronavirus : Bruno Le Maire n’exclut pas des nationalisations”, *Le Monde*, 18 March 2020, [https://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2020/03/18/coronavirus-bruno-le-maire-n-exclut-pas-des-nationalisations\\_6033503\\_3234.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2020/03/18/coronavirus-bruno-le-maire-n-exclut-pas-des-nationalisations_6033503_3234.html)

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liberal orthodoxy and austerity is unlikely to be politically attractive.

2. Imposing heavier fiscal burdens. This is another unpopular choice, and possibly impracticable in a convalescent economy.
3. Keeping a foothold on the economy to extract revenues directly once profit returns. This scenario is particularly nebulous but plausible, if a protracted crisis was to prompt public takeovers of crumbling private firms. It is, politically and symbolically, a less costly option. Furthermore, even if mainstream governmental parties will shy away from it, anti-system platforms already championing protectionism will gain electoral ground, accelerating the shift. The awareness of the necessity of a paradigm shift is undoubtedly present. Boris Johnson uttered a discreet “We all remember what happened in 2008, everybody said we bailed out the banks and we didn’t look after the people who really suffered”; the allusion was clear.

The most drastic political measures – curtailing civil liberties, postponing elections and suspending Parliament – are generating a healthy (up to point) dose of malaise nowadays; however, if the conditions allow it and there is a genuine political will for a return to democratic normality, lifting restrictions can be enacted with a simple signature on an official document. In the economic realm, it will be exceedingly difficult to shift into reverse gear overnight, given the astronomical costs involved. The current crisis will have long-lasting effects on economic policies and political dynamics. It may lead to a profound shift in economic thinking, fuelled by the threat of widespread backlash and electoral upheavals.

If the 1990s and the 2000s were the high-water mark of neoliberalism and market deregulation, and its ebbs commencing with the 2008 crash, the coronavirus crisis might prove

fatal. With cruel irony, the conservative *National Review* observed that if the coronavirus is known to take off people with underlying pathologies, the diseased neoliberal order might succumb among the first: “High neoliberalism already had a pre-existing health condition, and this global pandemic may be fatal for it”.<sup>74</sup> The totems of austerity and of the minimal state are going up in flames in the urgency of the imminent collapse. Moreover, with right-wing conservative or liberal-leaning governments in power in the United States, Great Britain and France, the current crisis appears increasingly as a bonfire of neoliberal orthodoxies.<sup>75</sup>



<https://www.forbes.com/sites/mikepatton/2020/04/06/covid-19-response-brings-economic-hardship-how-will-stocks-react/#d0e90685ae5b>

To what extent our familiar economic ecosystem will be restored after the return to normalcy is unsure, and precise estimates depend on the cost (in human lives and GDP points) and the duration of the crisis. A historical excursion, to the 1918 influenza, shows that across Europe – and particularly in Northern Europe, which is the focus of existing literature – the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic was a crucial milestone in the century-long construction of the national healthcare system<sup>76</sup> and of the Welfare state.<sup>77</sup> At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, medicine was to a much higher degree a fragmented

74. Fred Bauer, “How Coronavirus Could Change Politics”, *National Review*, 19 March 2020, <https://www.nationalreview.com/2020/03/how-coronavirus-could-change-politics/>

75. See Andrew Rawnsley, “The coronavirus crisis ignites a bonfire of Conservative party orthodoxies”, *The Guardian*, 22 March 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/mar/22/coronavirus-crisis-ignites-bonfire-of-conservative-orthodoxies>

76. See Laura Spinney, “The World Changed Its Approach to Health After the 1918 Flu. Will It After The COVID-19 Outbreak?”, *Time*, 7 March 2020, <https://time.com/5797629/health-1918-flu-epidemic/>

77. See Brian Melican, “How Spanish flu helped create Sweden's modern welfare state”, *The Guardian*, 29 August 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/aug/29/how-spanish-influenza-helped-create-sweden-modern-welfare-state-ostersund>

liberal profession, and when doctors did not work on their own it was frequently under the patronage of private or religious charities. Such configuration limited the access to healthcare, but the decentralized structure of the system had another drawback. Many diseases (including the 1918 influenza) were not reportable diseases, which meant medical professionals were not compelled to report cases to the authorities, making the centralized monitoring of the ongoing pandemic almost impossible. The lessons learned in 1918 ushered the age of “managed care”, with many states embracing socialized free healthcare, funded via state-run insurance schemes. Health ministries appeared, bridging professional politics and technical healthcare expertise (after the frustrating experiences of the pandemic, when health leaders were often left out of cabinet meeting), and reinforcing the centralized, state-led character of the transformations. At a transnational level, an international bureau for fighting epidemics was created in Vienna in 1919, and the short-lived League of Nations set up a health branch (the Health Organization, which was later restructured into the present-day World Health Organization). Some countries chose a different route: the United States opted for employer-based insurance schemes, for example. However, universally, the post-flu era was marked with the seal of a stringent demand for rationalization and centralization. It is likely the COVID-19 pandemic will witness something of similar magnitude.

Harking back to the tumultuous history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, one can perceive a certain pattern of state interventionism in economy and social life: as a rule, crises (whether they were military, sanitary or economic) have incentivized many of the state-led egalitarian initiatives in the past century. This should not come as a surprise: crises breed fear and uncertainty, and fear and uncertainty, in turn, breed demands for safety, comfort, rationality, and centralization. The hazy rationality of the Invisible Hand is not armed to provide the soothing comfort, which communities at war request, and proves no match in times of crisis to the more robust sense of certitude imparted by centralized state action.

Ultimately, bureaucratic organisms such as Social Security are not only products of an egalitarian moral quest, but reflect the rationality imperatives of modern states (whether they are real or perceived), which are only heightened in times of emergency.

### Concluding Remarks

Few observers doubt COVID-19 will durably alter the way societies think, consume, relate to themselves and to each other, take care of their environment (virtual or physical) and prioritize needs in the future. However, the consensus does not go any further than that. Divination is not something social sciences are – and should be – comfortable with; nevertheless, there are robust leads pointing at what a post-coronavirus world might look like. Some other cues can be taken from history: from medieval plagues, introducing the concepts of quarantine and isolation (but also the ancestor of the hazmat suit, in the beaked form of the infamous “plague doctor” costume) to the Spanish flu popularizing masks, hand-washing and centralized national health systems, from smallpox bringing the first vaccines, to AIDS introducing widespread usage of condoms and ending the centuries-long taboo on STDs, diseases were often “game-changers”, catalysing social change, and thrusting the New upon hitherto reluctant societies.

One thing is certain: the most uttered phrase during this past month must have been “I’ve never seen something like this before”. History in the making is indeed a strange thing to witness and to live through, even from the coziness of one’s sofa.

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# A Very Distant and Lonely World

**Ambassador Professor Dumitru CHICAN**

Since the beginning of this year, our **global village** has been living on a daily basis under the pressure of a terrible disease known as the “Coronavirus”, or “COVID-19”. Geographically originating from the Chinese city of Wuhan, the phenomenon has rapidly reached the dimension of a global pandemic, which the World Health Organisation declared on the 11<sup>th</sup> of March 2020.

The global human community is going through a crisis with no prospects of reaching an end and which, due to its impact and consequences can be considered the most lethal and destructive of our generation and of the generations to come, given the resilience of its after effects.

The decisions the governments and societies take and will put into practice during the next weeks and perhaps months will be produce significant shifts and changes. They will be felt not only at the level of our conventional identities, health systems, economies, but most of all, at the level of our mindsets, systems of values, social relationships and cohesion, as well as our very own cultural structure. They will also have impact on the livelihood, which define us as humans, as well as on the system of traditions, beliefs and convictions which define our society and give us national and social identities.

The people in the “Coronavirus Age” are threatened by a perspective of change disguised under the less vocal and even less official slogan “life for security”. However, the slogan itself is in danger of taking the terrifying shape of “security in exchange for liberty and a unique identity”.



Perhaps all this is the iron ball of anthropological inheritance cuffed to our feet by the chain that keeps us grounded in our sacred soil. And perhaps, it is the certainty of the relationship with our identity heritage what makes us carry these iron balls and care for them as an assurance of us being part of a condition which is unique and safer than the illusory rhetorical freedom used as a bargaining chip.

## Life as a “State of Emergency”. The World Seen from a Distance

For the first time in half a century, humanity has been living in the throbbing pace of emergency, an expression that, while familiar in the therapeutic domain, has a repetition and replication valence. It has the tendency to transform human existence into a long sequence of emergencies with different time limits, interconnected through the same long sequence of isolations and non-communication that pull us away from each other. We are witnessing a compression and an acceleration of time itself – both historical and social. Decisions that in quiet times take longer to ponder and analyse before being adopted and implemented are now taken in a day or even less. In a state of emergency, technologies, instruments and cures, whether unreliable or unsafe, or even hazardous, are brought forth because doing nothing could be far more dangerous. Entire societies are used as test subjects in extensive social experiments and, for lack of other therapies, isolation and refraining from social interaction are put into practice. These terms did not exist until now in our day-to-day vocabulary, however, they became reference points without having tried beforehand to find answers, even if perfectible, to some fundamental questions. What will happen to the individuals and the community when everybody works from home and only communicates from a distance, via the means provided by technological progress? How far can “distance learning” go and how effective can it be?

### A Geopolitics of Uncertainties

At a crossroads, when societies, governments and state institutions are facing the huge flow of the pandemic challenges, our cognitive and inner universe resembles more and more a dark and bottomless well where questions, hopes and anxiety simmer. And, more or less explicit, the attempts to identify possible answers and solutions seem to be more obviously and naturally contingent on the word “post”. In a world where we talk about post-terrorism, post-truth, post 9/11, or post-humanism, it is not surprising for our axiological turmoil to focus on what the world may, or may not be after the Coronavirus pandemic. Following the deadly Twin Towers attacks, the former president George W. Bush said that the world *after* [the attacks] would never be the same. And this world *after* has disappointed, as it brought religious wars instead of an awaited peace, the sharpening of the ideological or economic conflicts instead of a new world order, as well as a consumerist and mercantile globalization at the expense of national and cultural identities.

So how will the world be after COVID-19?

What memories will the lone and asocial human make, what will be the resorts to reanimating seriously ill economies if they have not already been unthinkable destroyed? How will we be able to understand the system of values, democracy, the concept of nation, the dimensions of human rights and liberties, the perspective of cooperation and cooperative multilateralism?

There is, of course, the old anthropological dimension of hope, which tempts us to believe in a fast restoration of great balances; however, it is accompanied by the primal fear of possible social and identity deflagrations whose scale is difficult to know and predict. How deep and threatening will be the cleavage – widening before our very eyes – between the developed countries and nations, less affected by the “Corona” storm and the states that, given their deprivation, are more affected by the eye of the storm and by the mayhem it produces? What should raise concern and motivate preventive measures is the possibility that the scale of the

pandemic will very fast lead to the collapse of some regimes and systems of government, with all the consequences such imbalances and uncertainties – more or fewer – may bring to the national destiny.



After the last World War and during the convulsions of the Cold War we have witnessed a furious campaign to transform the world into the famous *global village* – as a principle, theory and way of life. Yet, the political, intellectual and decision-making elites that have theorized absolute liberalism and globalisation for decades were the first who, at the first breath of the “Corona” storm, proceeded to national self-isolation and to closing down borders. What will the post-pandemic stage bring from this point of view? It would be risky to deny, with oratorical vehemence eventually, the perspective of a “deglobalization” caused by the aftermath of the pandemic on a medium and long term. And, what argument would be strong enough to support the claim that avant-garde political ideologues such as the American Donald Trump, the Chinese Xi Jinping and the Indian Narendra Modi would not turn the crisis to their own interests and advantages?

### To Survive Together or to Die Alone

Humanity is going through a global crisis, perhaps the most virulent and dramatic of our generation. The decisions and behaviours of governments and societies over the next few weeks will reshape the individual and collective structures and identities for many years to come. In the fight against the present challenges, lucid actions and global partnerships must focus not only on efforts to contain and eradicate the pandemic, but also on finding an answer to the

fundamental question: “what kind of world do we want to live in?” Starting – in our actions and vision – from the belief the storm will pass and we will no longer be test subjects, we hope we will get back to what we used to be – **homo cogitans, homo amans** – thinking human, loving human. We live, temporarily in an abnormal way, determined by an abnormal time. A time that makes us face two choices – to live as outraged and isolated humans cocooned in their solitude (including a nationalist and isolationist solitude), or to embrace global solidarity. The epidemic itself and the crises that come with it are global phenomena with dimensions that can only be approached and dealt with through global solidarity. From this point of view, thinking humans, who pretend to fight an unusual war against an unseen enemy, should acknowledge that they are those who obsessively keep on fighting their own conventional wars, caused by the same triggers – cultural, ideological, confessional, ethnical and so on.

Unfortunately, while at the level of rhetorical discourse the pandemic is seen as global, we cannot say the same about the character of the reaction (as being worldwide and joint). And, from this standing point one may say that we are practically witnessing a collective paralysis of the international community. At the beginning of the crisis there was talk, in a low voice, about an emergency meeting of the world leaders and decision makers in order to come up with a joint action plan. This project fell silent very quickly, dead even before it was born. G7 managed to give to the world and their own citizens a simple videoconference, with no outcome as regards the joint measures and action plans.

We have to choose between active unity and self-isolation within the walls of our own helplessness. That is, the will to show our ability to rise to the challenge and prove our worthiness. Otherwise we sentence ourselves to the loss of our only remaining right – the right to hope. The right to hope while immersed for a long time, if not forever in the dark chasm of our solitude.

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# The Politics of Fear and Loathing. Coming to Terms with a Decade of Radical Discontent and Liberal Malaise

**Alexis CHAPELAN** *Can't Happen Here* and other titles of the genre

## An Age of Anxiety?

Twice in the last decade, Orwell's seminal dystopia *1984* topped best-sellers list. In 2013, after Edward Snowden leaked revelations about the NSA's widespread surveillance operations, *1984* sales rose dramatically amid an explosion of references to the book's totalitarian, tentacular entity, the "Big Brother".<sup>1</sup> It spiked again, by more than 9500%, in late 2017, when a White House aide casually evoked the existence of "alternative facts" when faced with her own previous erroneous statements.<sup>2</sup> This may seem - and as a matter of fact is - a relatively innocuous piece of information, by and large. There is nothing shocking or ground breaking in the ebb and flow in popularity of an acclaimed classic and a mainstay of literature studies in high-schools and universities across the globe. Yet this growing pique of interest is telling us something about the overarching narrative of our times, like so many other tiny, apparently insignificant details weaving the fabric of life and culture of a particular era. This is all even truer when considering the larger cultural dynamic underpinning this revitalized upward commercial trend: editors are quick to point to a broader boom of dystopian literature production and consumption over the last decade. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 017*, Sinclair Lewis' *It*

are now recurrent best-sellers.<sup>3</sup> Bleak depictions of liberticide societies and the struggles to overthrow them are permeating popular culture. Launched in 2008, Suzanne Collins' series *The Hunger Games* and its cinematic adaptations (the last instalment of which was release in 2015) stormed with brisk efficiency the world of young adult fiction, grossing billions worldwide. Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid-s Tale* (originally published in 1985) spawned a thriving TV series in 2017 and a hugely successful sequel to the novel in 2019 (one copy selling every 4 seconds in the UK alone for the week of its release).<sup>4</sup> 2019 also witnessed another unexpected blockbuster - Todd Philip's *Joker*, which pitted the main character's slow descent into madness against the backdrop of a nightmarish, collapsing fictional polity - garner thunderous reviews and more than one billion dollars worldwide in gross revenues.<sup>5</sup>

Dystopias are much more than a blossoming market, they the hallmark of a profoundly existential cultural moment. They are the fictional lenses through which are articulated all -too-real collective angsts, and the threads connecting these dark make-believe universes to current societal dynamics are sparingly evident: debates over the tentacular nature of digital surveillance (whether state-controlled, as it was the case for the NSA's programs exposed by Snowden in 2013<sup>6</sup>, or profit-oriented, as in the

1. Ian Crouch, *So Are We Living in 1984*, *The New Yorker*, 11 June 2013, <https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/so-are-we-living-in-1984>

2. *George Orwell's 1984 is Suddenly a Best-seller*, *The New York Times*, 25 January 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/25/books/1984-george-orwell-donald-trump.html>

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4. *Handmaid's Sales: Margaret Atwood's The Testaments is Immediate Hit*, *The Guardian*, 17 September 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/sep/17/handmaids-sales-margaret-atwoods-the-testaments-is-immediate-hit>

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6. See for example Glenn Greenwald, *No Place to Hide: Edward Snowden, the NSA, and the U.S. Surveillance State*, Metropolitan Books, New York, 2014

case of the Big Tech<sup>7</sup>), political authoritarianism and police repression, gaping inequality, reality TV and mass culture, rollback on hard-won rights (especially women's rights and abortion, with the nomination of staunchly conservative Justices at the Supreme Court by the Trump administration or the watering down of domestic violence legislation in Putin's Russia<sup>8</sup>) or even the growing salience of new medical technologies effectively redefining biology.<sup>9</sup>

Few things are more political - or prone to politicization - than fear. Dystopias reflect this variable geometry of anxiety, along fault lines drawn by political communities of belonging. There is a undoubtedly a certain ideological partition of "spheres of influence": *The Handmaid's Tale*, for instance, with its chilling visions of State-enforced theocratic fanaticism and enslaved cohorts of women reduced to birth-giving machines, resonates well with progressives and pro-feminist movements, while Huxley's nightmarish anti-consumerism and anti-technology literary charge echoes more closely conservative disenchantment with modernity. Sometimes, one single book, such as Orwell's masterpiece, can become a "symbolic node" which sees multiple and antagonistic political narratives cut across and compete for the chance of imposing their own dominant meaning

in collective consciousness. There is a conservative reading of Orwell, focusing on free speech (one of the new ideology of the global conservative right<sup>10</sup>) and on the allegedly *newspeak*-esque political correctness stifling "dissident" thought on themes such as multiculturalism, immigration, LGBT rights or abortion among many others.<sup>11</sup> But *1984* also strongly appeals to a liberal, anti-authoritarian ethos, and progressive spirits were quick to point out the "Orwellian soul" of president Trump's regime, and draw parallels between populism's vengeful tone and the Party-mandated Two Minutes Hate in *1984*.<sup>12</sup> Left-wing French publicist Laurent Joffrin posits:

*Orwell in his time had correctly diagnosed this disease in Nineteen Eighty-Four, showing how brazen lies unapologetically forced upon society can be a formidable political weapon. He then had totalitarian regimes in mind. Nowadays, one is forced to admit this diagnosis applies to some of the world's foremost democracies.*<sup>13</sup>

But a caveat must be issued. However believable, enthralling and poignant, literature is not a fool proof tool for reading the present - and even less the future. Internet and pharmaceuticals have not hatched into being *Brave New World's* aseptic and robotic humanity, reality TV shows

7. See for example Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, Profile Books, London, 2019

8. See for example Zack Breslin, *The Handmaid's Tale: A Timely Warning*, Medium, 7 August 2019, <https://medium.com/@zackbreslin/the-handmaids-tale-a-timely-warning-dddf302ca5>

9. See for example *L'utopie du 'Meilleur des Mondes', modèle de la médecine traditionnelle?*, *Génétique*, 3 December 2014, <http://www.genethique.org/fr/lutopie-du-meilleur-des-mondes-modele-de-la-medecine-contemporaine-62551.html>

10. See on this topic Wayne Batchis, *The Right's First Amendment: The politics of Free Speech and the Return of Conservative Libertarianism*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2016

11. See for example Lauren D. Spohn, *Big Brother's PC Culture*, *The Harvard Crimson*, 11 August 2017, <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2017/8/11/spohn-big-brother-pc/>; John Reed, *Political Correctness is Newspeak*, *John T. Reed Blog*, 25 November 2016, <https://johntreed.com/blogs/john-t-reed-s-news-blog/political-correctness-is-newspeak>; Joshua Philip, *Thoughtcrime Is Becoming a Reality*, *The Epoch Times*, 19 May 2019, [https://www.theepochtimes.com/thoughtcrime-is-becoming-a-reality\\_2928582.html](https://www.theepochtimes.com/thoughtcrime-is-becoming-a-reality_2928582.html); Myron Magnet, *Hate Crime is Only a Step A way from Thoughtcrime*, *Wall Street Journal*, 1 January 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/hate-crime-is-only-a-step-away-from-thoughtcrime-11577905525>; Victor Davis Hanson, *We are living Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *National Review*, 25 September 2018, <https://www.nationalreview.com/2018/09/kavanaugh-nomination-battle-like-orwells-1984/>; Mathieu Bock-Côté, *George Orwell, auteur pour notre temps*, *Figaro Vox*, 14 June 2019, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/societe/mathieu-bock-cote-george-orwell-auteur-pour-notre-temps-20190614>; Andrei Dîrlău, *Huxley + Orwell = Lunacek. Corectitudinea Politică – metastază a Marx-ismului Cultural*, *Cultura Vieții*, 16 May 2014, <http://www.culturavietii.ro/2014/04/16/huxley-orwell-lunacek-ii-corectitudinea-politica/>

12. See Cass Sunstein, *1984 Comes to 2019*, *Bloomberg*, 18 July 2019, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2019-07-18/trump-s-2019-and-orwell-s-1984-have-too-much-in-common>; Laurent Joffrin, *Trump, Johnson et Orwell*, *Libération*, 18 December 2019, [https://www.liberation.fr/politiques/2019/12/18/trump-johnson-et-orwell\\_1770000](https://www.liberation.fr/politiques/2019/12/18/trump-johnson-et-orwell_1770000)

13. Laurent Joffrin, *Trump, Johnson et Orwell*, *Libération*, 18 December 2019, [https://www.liberation.fr/politiques/2019/12/18/trump-johnson-et-orwell\\_1770000](https://www.liberation.fr/politiques/2019/12/18/trump-johnson-et-orwell_1770000)



have not morphed into *Hunger Game*-style murderous jousts, and Donald Trump, however worrying his theatrics may be, still resembles more Andrew Jackson or Berry Goldwater than the mysterious, superhuman Big Brother. Dystopias, and the way we consume and make sense of them, are much more a roadmap of our inner sense of reality than of the effective material conditions of our existence. In other words, they speak of us, in a language permeated by our culture and political identities, not of the world around us.

So, what does this fascination for dystopias, across the political board, tell us about ourselves. The answer is very simple, and probably disappointingly predictable: that we are afraid, afraid and uncertain about what the future holds. Anxiety runs deep in all political cultures, providing essential ideological fuel for mobilizations, from the Occupy Wall Street movement, to the Gilets Jaunes protests. But while these manifestations undoubtedly exhibited variegated political and ideological hues, muddying even more the fault lines between political identities, the decade had one clear winner: populism.

### **The Politics of Fear and Loathing: How Populists Stormed the Establishment**

The 2010s didn't invent populism, far from it. It is surprising how sparse are the real doctrinal innovations brought about by the new decade. The main ideological architecture of populism was roughly in place by the beginning of the new millennium, and occasional political upsets (the Freedom Party of Austria's entrance into a government coalition in 2000 or Jean Marie Le Pen's stunning runoff with Jacques Chirac in the 2002 French presidential elections) exhibited theatrics and a rhetoric uncannily familiar to the present-day observer. Tropes such as globalization, mass immigration, the European "super-state", national identities, corruption and

the contempt of the establishment for the "little man" were already weaving a simple yet potent narrative of elite betrayal and people's purity, which has known few significant amendments since then.

Scholarly debates enriched the conceptual framing of the phenomenon. The scientific validity of the very notion of populism was re-established, after decade in which it was dismissed as a "pseudo-concept"<sup>14</sup> crippled by "polysemous overuse"<sup>15</sup> or political weaponization. Populism suffered from a conceptual over-stretching that Isaiah Berlin wittily christened "the Cinderella Complex":

*There exists a shoe – the word "populism" – for which somewhere there must exist a foot. There are all kinds of feet which nearly fit [...] The prince is always wandering about with the shoe. And somewhere, we feel sure, there awaits a limb called pure populism. This is the nucleus of populism, its essence.*<sup>16</sup>

A young Dutch scholar, Cas Mudde, decided to cut through this Gordian knot of definitions and concepts with a simple yet engaging intuition: populism was *less than an ideology* (such as fascism, communism, liberalism or corporatism), but *more than a mere style of political verbal and nonverbal communication* (such as shouting, deriding enemies, using coarse, uncomplicated language or losing the tie on stage). It is a "thin-centred ideology", aggregated around a few core beliefs, who piggybacks onto more robustly fleshed-out ideological hosts.<sup>17</sup> Left-wing populism, for example, feeds off socialism; right-wing populism can attach himself to nationalism or fascism. It can also thrive on less conventional associations: Alberto Fujimori in Peru or Carlos Menem in Argentina enacted a relatively successful populist neo-liberalism<sup>18</sup> and, more recently, liberal candidate Emmanuel Macron also had several attempts on the 2017 presidential campaign trail to frame himself as a populist maverick hell-bent on cleaning a broken

14. Jean-Pierre Rioux, *Les populismes*, Tempus Perrin, Paris, 2007

15. Alexandre Dorna, *Avant-propos: Le populisme, une notion peuplée d'histoires particulières en quête d'un paradigme fédérateur*, *Annuaire de l'étude des sociétés et cultures contemporaines Europe/Amérique*, no. 5 (2005)

16. Isaiah Berlin, *To Define Populism*, *Government and Opposition*, vol. 3, no. 2 (Spring 1968)

17. Cas Mudde, *The Populist Zeitgeist*, *Government and Opposition*, vol. 39, no. 4 (Spring 2004)

18. See Kurt Weyland, *Neoliberal Populism in Latin America and Eastern Europe*, *Comparative Politics*, vol. 31, no. 4, 1999

and delegitimized system.<sup>19</sup>

Mudde's article was called *The Populist Zeitgeist*. At that time, the title seemed, at best, strained: the world then was far from being menaced by a populist tidal wave. Two events changed the global perception on populism: the Brexit vote on the 23rd of June 2016 and the election of Donald Trump on the 8th of November 2016. In 2017, the catastrophic tenure of centre-left French president François Hollande propelled the anti-establishment Front National into the second round of the presidential race. Meanwhile, a populist Mitteleuropa emerged, with countries like Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Romania (albeit briefly), Austria and Italy all experienced bouts of illiberalism. Populism made inroads or captured well-established parties, such as in the United States, Hungary or Poland but it can also utilize as political vehicles formerly fringe anti-system parties, such as in France and Italy. The second strategic approach was often accompanied by a complex ideological process of "de-demonization" through which the far-right heritage of these radical challengers was rendered invisible or marginalized. The French Rassemblement National (formerly Front National)<sup>20</sup> or the Hungarian Jobbik<sup>21</sup> abandoned explicit anti-Semite tropes, but successfully recomposed an alternative exclusionary axis of "otherness" around

immigration and Islam. Islamophobia is thus often ostentatiously construed as a performative *anti-anti-Semitism*, populists singling out Muslim minorities or far-left activists for their alleged anti-Semitic violence.<sup>22</sup> A further break with the traditional far-right or conservative agenda is enacted by what Gael Brustier coined "security hedonism"<sup>23</sup>. Identity politics and Western exceptionalism can be constructed around a liberal-libertarian nucleus, and multiculturalism can be antagonized as a threat to gender equality, sexual tolerance and freedom of speech, among other core liberal values. This shift from ethnic nationalism to "civilizationism"<sup>24</sup>, apparent especially in Western and Northern Europe, is a strategic move to break the *cordon sanitaire* isolating right-wing populism, but also a novel ideological formula, which incorporates evolving societal norms and values into a new synthesis.

When populists fail to seize seats of power, their discourse moulds the public sphere and infuses the rhetoric of their political opponents, especially on the traditional right and moderate centre-right.<sup>25</sup> The agenda-setting potential of populism far exceeds its coalition potential, and often predates actual governmental takeovers (this was well documented in the case of Italy<sup>26</sup>), thus lodging an ideological tension at the very heart of the democratic system. They normalize their ideas and colonize the ideological

19. See for example Fabio Bordignon, *In And Out: Emmanuel Macron's Anti-Populist Populism*", *Europ - London School of Economics and Political Science*, 28 April 2017, <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2017/04/28/macron-anti-populist-populism/#Author>; *Macron: the Anti-establishment Centrist*, *Harvard Political Review*, 6 May 2017, <https://harvardpolitics.com/hprgument-posts/51589/>; *Emmanuel Macron accepte d'être qualifié de candidat populiste*, *Le Monde*, 19 March 2017, [https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/article/2017/03/19/emmanuel-macron-accepte-d-etre-compare-a-un-candidat-populiste\\_5097038\\_4854003.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/election-presidentielle-2017/article/2017/03/19/emmanuel-macron-accepte-d-etre-compare-a-un-candidat-populiste_5097038_4854003.html)

20. See Gilles Ivaldi, *A New Course for the French Radical-Right? The Front National and De-Demonization*, in Tjitske Akerman, Sarah L. de Lange, Matthijs Rooduijn. *Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe. Into the Mainstream?*, Routledge, London, 2016

21. See Emily Schultheis, *How Hungary's Far-Right Extremists Became Warm and Fuzzy*, *Foreign Policy*, 6 April 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/04/06/how-hungarys-far-right-extremists-became-warm-and-fuzzy/>

22. See *Augmentation des actes antisémites : une conséquence directe de l'immigration incontrôlée et du communautarisme*, *Rassemblement National*, 12 September 2014, <https://rassemblementnational.fr/communiqués/augmentation-des-actes-antisemites-une-consequence-directe-de-limmigration-incontrollee-et-du-communautarisme/>

23. Gael Brustier, *Le désordre idéologique*, Les Editions du Cerf, Paris, 2017

24. Roger Brubaker, *Between Nationalism and Civilizationism: the European Populist Moment in Comparative Perspective*", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Volume 40, Issue 8, 2017

25. See Lise Esther Herman and James Muldoon (ed.), *Trumping the Mainstream*, Taylor & Francis Group, London, 2018

26. Jakob Schworer, *Populistization of Mainstream Parties? Evidence for Populist Contagion in Italy*, Working paper for the ECPR General Conference in Hamburg 2018, retrieved from <https://ecpr.eu/Filestore/PaperProposal/b671722d-ac0d-4159-95f9-636de93f63a1.pdf>

“common sense”<sup>27</sup> on immigration, security, multiculturalism and a host of other issues, thus delegitimizing the moral *cordon sanitaire* put in place by other parties, who in turn are often pillaging populist programs and discourse.

A further testament to the adaptability of the populist formula is its growing ideological investment in the political economy of the precariat.<sup>28</sup> The returns on investment proved to be rapid and robust. Themes such as pauperisation, unemployment, inequality or social mobility are now central to populist discourse (on the right as well as on the left), who exhibits an increasingly salient anti-neoliberal bent. By framing welfare in terms of deservingness and competitiveness in what is presented essentially as a zero-sum game, welfare nativism allowed populists to best articulate what was a somewhat dangling thread of their doctrine: the idea that there is somehow a perverse collusion between plutocratic elites and ghettoised, disfranchised and ostensibly disadvantaged minorities (be it sexual minorities or immigrants). The access to the State’s limited resources enacts the symbolic intersection between the vertical (the pure people against corrupt elites) and the horizontal (indigenous white population against non-native elements) axes of Otherness: indeed, it is only with the complicity of political and media elites that immigrants have allegedly been able to “hijack” large swaths of the welfare benefits to the detriment of the native-born. This fiction restored a certain homogeneity of the enemy, allowing a more efficient mobilization and weaponization of discontent. Moreover, like the defence of a core set of ostensibly liberal values (sexual openness, gender equality, secularism, etc.), support for generous albeit restrictive

welfare schemes acted effectively as a bridgehead to the mainstream, constituting the centrepiece of right-wing populists’ catch-all electoral strategy. The more these aspects can be embedded into an affective definition of the national identity, the more effective this strategy appears. The salience and success of such narrative depend as a result on national political cultures. “Security hedonistic” discourse has a particular appeal in countries like Denmark and the Netherlands, where tolerance and permissiveness are widely perceived positively and have been precociously integrated into a narrative of national exceptionalism that ought to be preserved and protected.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Sweden<sup>30</sup> or France<sup>31</sup> (both countries with robust social-democrat or even, for the latter, communist traditions) often expressed their national exceptionalism in terms of their social security system and its ability to enact national solidarity – it is unsurprising that in these countries welfare nativism infused more strongly populist agendas.

### Populism or Populisms?

Populist rhetoric proved to be essentially a fluid form with an eminently variable geometry. The last decade, which saw both an ideological complexification of populism and a geographical extension of populist networks, hatched a form of populism *à la carte*, exhibiting both strikingly similar traits and specific cultural nuances. Trump (USA), Bolsonaro (Brazil), the Brexit Party (Great Britain), the AfD (Germany), Vox (Spain), the Rassemblement National (France), Lega Nord (Italy) or Duterte (Philippines) are tracing the contours of a complexified populist cartography straddling multiple cultural, religious and political traditions. The symbolic

27. On the notion of “common sense” within the framework of ideological discourse, see notably Norman Fairclough, *Critical and descriptive goals in discourse analysis*, *Journal of Pragmatism*, Volume 9, Issue 6, December 1985

28. The notion of precariat, proposed by British economist Guy Standing, encompasses a broad range of social and economic statuses, all characterized by instability, insecurity and downward social mobility. See Guy Standing, *The Precariat and Class Struggle*, *RCCS Annual Review*, issue 7, 2015

29. See Roger Brubaker, *op. cit.*

30. See Maximilian Hohenstedt, *Welfare Chauvinism in Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties. The Reframing of the Sverigedemokraterna as True Social Democrats*, Grin Verlag, Berlin, 2018

31. See for example Gilles Ivaldi, *The Successful Welfare-Chauvinist Party? The Front National in the 2012 Elections in France*, *ESA’s Research Network on Political Sociology (RN32) Mid-term conference*, European Sociological Association (ESA), November 2012, Milano, Italy.

and ideological distance between its cardinal points has never been smaller: Bolsonaro and Trump have more in common than Peron and, say, Father Coughlin had in the 1940s. The intensification of ideological flows across an increasingly interdependent ideoscape<sup>32</sup> is a trend most visible in the last ten years: movements and leaders in countries as different as the United States and Brazil are constructing a master-narrative using roughly the same “building blocks” (or, to use Arjun Apparundai’s terms, the same “keywords”). A pure hard-working people, an arrogant cosmopolitan elite, a corrupt and biased media establishment, a threat of economic and cultural wipe-out through mass immigration, globalization and neoliberal individualism: this is a universal recipe for populism.

Some relatively new tropes emerged in the cusp of populist rhetoric, spreading globally like ideological wildfire: notions such as “free speech crisis” and “political correctness” are compelling vehicles of populist rhetoric, framing the dichotomy between a shady and authoritarian elites keen on policing thought and speech (and striking down as racist, homophobic or sexist what challenges them) and honest, commonsensical majorities. Such narrative accounts to a large extent for the cultural resilience of trumpism, probably more than brutish racism and sexism *per se*. Trump’s opposition to fake news and anti-hate speech Internet laws<sup>33</sup>, or his promise to defend freedom of speech on university campuses (depicted in the conservative imaginary as bastions of left-wing quasi-totalitarian hegemony<sup>34</sup>), have been met with applause from

his base. In 2019, a student who was attacked on campus for supporting Donald Trump was invited on stage at the Conservative Political Action Conference next to the president, while the audience cheered and hurraed loudly.<sup>35</sup> Protection of free speech (or at least certain types of free speech) and the fight against allegedly rampant political correctness infused Trump’s narrative with a sense of cultural warfare that helped counter the dulling of his anti-system edge. The “free speech” topos travelled across the Atlantic to Europe: in France, railing the “bien-pensants” (conformists) of the establishment who try to silence dissident opinions on themes such as migration, race or security is now a leitmotiv. In a speech at the National Assembly, Marine le Pen opposed the anti-fake news legislative package, arguing it endangers freedom of expression in the very nation of the French Revolution: “Freedom of expression is an everyday battle, our history and our past, including our recent past, makes it a moral obligation.”<sup>36</sup> The leader of the Rassemblement National evoked the 2015 Charlie Hebdo tragedy, when cartoonists were targeted by terrorists for satirical drawings of Prophet Mohammed: “Five years ago, in France, eight staff members of a satirical magazine died for using their fundamental right to free speech. [...] Back then, you all were Charlie, we were Charlie, France was Charlie.”<sup>37</sup> Such themes and the weaponization of free speech unite mainstream populist movements like the Rassemblement National and far-right radicals such as Holocaust denier Alain Soral<sup>38</sup>, just like in the USA the trope of the “crisis of the First Amendment” bridges mainstream conservatism,

32. For an in-depth exploration of the notion of ideoscape in the context of a globalized world, see Arjun Appadurai, *Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy*, *Theory Culture Society*, 1990, issue 7

33. See *Count on Trump to Defend Free Speech from Global Censorship*, *The Hill*, 2 September 2019, <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/459647-count-on-trump-to-defend-free-speech-from-global-censorship>

34. See *Trump’s Campus Free Speech Executive Order Protects all Students – it’s Intellectual Freedom vs Social Tyranny*, *Fox News*, 21 March 2019

35. Washington Post, “President Trump speaks at CPAC 2019”, *YouTube*, 2 March 2019 (live stream on 2 March 2019), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n\\_PT6fZtslo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n_PT6fZtslo)

36. Marine le Pen, *Marine le Pen défend la liberté d’expression sur internet!*, *Facebook*, 23 January 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/MarineLePen/videos/1210913002446328/?v=1210913002446328>

37. *Ibidem*

38. Alain Soral, who has been repeatedly convicted for hate speech, routinely proclaims “the end of freedom is speech” and bemoans France being rating 48<sup>th</sup> in press freedom. See ERTV Officiel, *Alain Soral: la fin de la liberté d’expression*, *YouTube*, 20 September 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8tveKyomCGI>

Trumpian populism and the alt-right.<sup>39</sup>

Other tropes are also universalizing quickly, taking roots and bearing ideological fruits in very different soils. One such a “success story” is the notion of “deep state”. It was widely circulated during the Trump campaign and used successfully to boost his anti-establishment narrative even when Trump and his administration took over the executive branch of power following the 2016 victory.<sup>40</sup> In France, the same idea was epitomized by the formula “gouvernement des juges” (government by judges), denounced both by Marine le Pen<sup>41</sup> and right-wing populist polemicists such as Eric Zemmour.<sup>42</sup> Such phrases are potent vehicles of populist worldviews: they allow power feuds with the judiciary (in France) or government agencies (in Trump’s case) to be framed as vital moral battles between the people and elites. Populism is at heart an insurgency bid, and its most effective story is the one of the honest underdogs going against the powerful, the pullers of strings, and winning against

formidable odds; David against Goliath, fundamentally. Fighting the “deep state” and its avatars enacts an ersatz, paradoxical outsider posturing even when populist do seize and exert power.

However, if the populist core imaginary has grown sensibly more homogenous during the last decade, it remains solidly rooted in national specificities. Diversity and even antagonism are still the norm. UKIP long refused association with the Front National on grounds of anti-Semitism.<sup>43</sup> After a resounding failure in 2014,<sup>44</sup> in 2019 a “populist group” laboriously emerged in the European Parliament (Identity and Democracy), but it does not contain movements like the Polish PiS, Hungary’s Fidesz or Czech Republic’s ANO 2011. Even further to the right, “fringe” radical right populists like Jobbik or Golden Dawn are cast out to the informal Non-attached Members “group”, rubbing shoulders with communists, regional pro-independence and “satirical” parties.<sup>45</sup> There is still an operative “ladder of respectability” within populism that might mean Nigel Farage can disparage the Front National as anti-Semitic and extremist, and the Front National can refuse to sit in the same political group as Jobbik (who as a matter of fact accused the FN of being a “Zionist” party<sup>46</sup>) in the EP.

Even where agreement prevails and ideological distance is relatively small, populist rhetoric caters to the needs and demands of very specific political cultures. Populism operates on the premise that the nation-state is the basic

39. See John Finn, *Fracturing the Founding: How the Alt-Right Corrupts the Constitution*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, 2019

40. See Arto Sillanpää, *The "Underdog" versus the Shadowy Power Bloc: An Epistemic Governance Approach to the Right-Wing Populist Discourse Around the "Deep State"* (Master dissertation, Tampere University, 2019), retrieved 11 February 2020 from <https://trepo.tuni.fi/handle/10024/116210>

41. @MLP\_officiel, *Il ne peut pas y avoir un gouvernement des juges qui tue un parti politique! Et l'exécutif ne peut pas avoir connaissance des activités de l'opposition*, Twitter, 17 October 2018, 9:39 AM, [https://twitter.com/MLP\\_officiel/status/1052448697466937344](https://twitter.com/MLP_officiel/status/1052448697466937344)

42. See for example *Face à l'Info*, CNews, aired 29 October 2019, retrieved 11 February 2010 from <https://www.cnews.fr/emission/2019-10-29/face-linfo-du-29102019-894083>

43. *En Grande-Bretagne, les eurosceptiques de l'UKIP refusent l'alliance avec le FN*, *Le Monde*, 21 April 2019, [https://www.lemonde.fr/europeennes-2014/article/2014/04/21/elections-europeennes-le-ukip-britannique-dit-non-au-front-national\\_4404801\\_4350146.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/europeennes-2014/article/2014/04/21/elections-europeennes-le-ukip-britannique-dit-non-au-front-national_4404801_4350146.html)

44. *Le Pen, Wilders Fail to Put Together Far-Right Group in European Parliament*, *Euronews*, 24 June 2014, <https://www.euronews.com/2014/06/24/le-pen-wilders-fail-to-put-together-far-right-group-in-european-parliament>

45. See *2019 European Election Results*, European Parliament, 23 October 2019, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en/sweden/>

46. *Extrême-droite: le Jobbik hongrois qualifie le FN de parti sioniste*, *Le Monde*, 26 June 2014, [https://www.lemonde.fr/europeennes-2014/article/2014/06/26/rififi-a-l-extreme-droite-europeenne\\_4446210\\_4350146.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/europeennes-2014/article/2014/06/26/rififi-a-l-extreme-droite-europeenne_4446210_4350146.html)

political unit, and its audience is therefore national, not global. Let us explore once more the notion of the deep state, and how it articulates a blanket legitimization strategy (pitting shadow unelected pullers of strings against pure democratic heroes) with national issues and angsts. In the USA, the deep state is a trope moulded in the crucible of the anti-Big Government narrative and of the Reaganian offensive on federal bureaucracies. One should recall that Reagan routinely evoked “bureaucratic sabotage” when faced with reticence from federal agencies.<sup>47</sup>



And if Reagan liked to depict bureaucrats more like hapless fools rather than malefic geniuses, he still crafted an enduring dichotomy between the “good”, heroic State (police, military, elected representatives, etc.) and the “bad”, parasite State (bureaucrats churning out regulations in cramped offices) that still defines public attitudes and lends credibility to “deep state” conspiracy rhetoric. In France, the “government by judges” efficiently mobilizes a history of “plebeian” democracy dating back to the Jacobin tradition. Already in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Montesquieu (who was far more liberal and more wary of unchecked power than Jacobins) was challenging Locke on his emphasis on the judiciary, concluding that in a just political system the judiciary branch should be voided of all real political authority.<sup>48</sup> President Charles de Gaulle (still a role-model for politicians and one of the rare consensual political references of the

post-war era) once famously stated: “The Supreme Court of the French nation, it’s the people”,<sup>49</sup> thus wording a widely shared deep hostility to any form of limitation imposed to popular sovereignty. “Government by judges” could thus be presented, in the light of this tradition of a uniquely French democratic ethos, as profoundly alien and threatening.

What these examples highlight is the fact that in a globalized world, populist political entrepreneurs still need to tap into national myths in order to be credible and achieve any form of mobilizing efficiency. At a time when the symbolic apparatus is increasingly structured by global ideologies (such as the environmental crisis, globalization, free speech, gender or inequality), proclaiming populism to be a free-floating narrative, as universal as disenchantment with politics, is tempting. It would be however plain wrong. Populism skilfully utilizes successful universal catch-phrases, but infuses them with national subtext to appeal to a home audience whose correct emotional buttons they master. Trump knows American blue-collar electorate has been often socialized in a defiance of Big Government – his deep state discourse plays into this. French populists know how to exploit their public’s radical democratic convictions and the image of illustrious figures such as Charles de Gaulle.

### Developing a Taxonomy of Populism

The “categorize” debate has long been permeating populism scholarship. Most studies do not address populism per se, but specific types of populism: authoritarian, right-wing, conservative, agrarian, presidential, etc. Margaret Canovan even famously argued that, as populism is a concept too abstract to be efficiently defined, exploring its more empirical subcategories was the best strategy to make headway towards a complete understanding of the phenomenon. Others, probably also suffering

47. *Reagan Beats no Retreat in the War on Bureaucracy*, *The New York Times*, 21 October 1981, <https://www.nytimes.com/1981/10/12/us/reagan-beats-no-retreat-in-war-on-bureaucracy.html>

48. See *Séparation des pouvoirs et gouvernement des juges*, *Cercle des Européens*, 17 June 2011, <http://www.ceuropeens.org/article/separation-des-pouvoirs-et-gouvernement-des-juges>

49. Charles de Gaulle, *Discours et Messages*, Plon, Paris, 1970

50. Margaret Canovan, *Populism*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York, 1981

from acute “Cinderella Complex” fatigue, agreed. This led to a flourishing of “populism-with-adjectives” in scholarly and media literature.

Canovan tried among the first to catalogue certain salient subtypes of populism, using a complex typology with seven compartments: revolutionary intellectual populism (the Russian *narodnik* movement), peasants populism (agrarian movements of the pre- and inter-war Eastern Europe, but also Zapatistas in Mexico), farmers’ populism (The People’s Party in the late 19th century United States), populist dictatorship (such as Peronism), populism democracy (in which the author pins Swiss direct democracy model), reactionary populism (Canovan cites under this label American segregationist George Wallace) and politicians’ populism (catch-all demagoguery, relatively voided of ideological content).<sup>51</sup> This model works excellently for historical populist experiences in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, but proves less fruitful for understanding more recent mutations, mainly because agrarian populism went quasi-extinct after World War II. More recently, other scholars attempted binary approaches: left-wing vs right-wing, inclusionary vs exclusionary, authoritarian vs democratic.<sup>52</sup> The trouble with such dichotomies is that, ultimately, they are too general and do little to provide a more refined cartography of populism, especially if we zoom out of the national framework and embrace regional and global perspectives: indeed, left-wing and right-wing paradigms may well explain the opposition of Bernie Sanders’ and Donald Trump’s campaigns, but fail to capture the myriad ideological nuances between Trump and, say, Geert Wilders, who are both lumped under the same right-wing umbrella.

We will attempt to advance an alternative taxonomy to map today’s populist landscape. A few methodological caveats are necessary before proceeding. A pertinent taxonomy of populism requires at least two things: first and foremost, a core definition of populism. We will rely on Mudde’s landmark 2004 study to forge a baseline definition: populism is an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, *the pure people* versus *the corrupt elite*.<sup>53</sup> Secondly, each subtype of populism ought to include all characteristics of the concept of populism plus at least one additional feature.<sup>54</sup> Such a taxonomy also entails that populism is the primary, not the secondary, concept: parties and movements that exhibit sporadic “weak populism” features (for example Emmanuel Macron’s *En Marche* or UK’s Conservative Party) will not be reviewed. For manageability purposes, we will limit ourselves to major parties and movements, who display one of three conditions of political relevance: ideological agenda-setting potential, blackmail potential or governmental (and implicitly coalition) potential.<sup>55</sup>

We will also circumscribe our field of analysis to democratic and quasi-democratic contexts, leaving out countries that experienced democratic landslides so dramatic they no longer fulfil even basic criteria. Taking the EIU 2019 Democracy Index as a reference framework, we will only consider countries with scores higher than 6 and who are listed as “Full” or “Flawed” democracies: Turkey as “hybrid regime” and Russia as an “authoritarian regime” will thusly be excluded.<sup>56</sup>

Our taxonomy operates on two hierarchical levels. The first takes into consideration the placement on the left-right continuum.

51. Ibidem

52. See Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo and Pierre Ostiguy, *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2017

53. Cas Mudde, *op. cit.*

54. Ibidem

55. Our choice of criteria draws heavily on Giovanni’s Sartori model, which has nevertheless twofold: blackmail and coalition/governmental potential. We added a third dimension, the capacity to mold and veer the national ideological conversation, which is coherent with our emphasis on ideology rather than structures and organizations. See Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis*, vol. 1, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1976

56. *The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index*, *The Economic Intelligence Unit*, <https://infographics.economist.com/2019/DemocracyIndex/>

Placement on the left-wing spectrum is best defined by the propensity towards equality,<sup>57</sup> and as such we will label left-wing those movements that, while exhibiting strong anti-elitist tendencies, fundamentally challenge any vertical segmentation of society (based on wealth, merit, education, etc.). In this category, one expects to find movements, like the now defunct Occupy Wall Street, La France Insoumise, Greece's Syriza or Spain's Podemos, and personalities like Bernie Sanders or Jeremy Corbyn. Left-wing populism is often an offshoot of socialism (in Cas Mudde's terms, a thin ideology attached to the more robust host of socialism), aggregated around a reinvigorated leftist critique of social-liberalism and of the "Clinton-Blair-Macron" third-way philosophy.<sup>58</sup> On the contrary, right-wing populism is structured by the hierarchy between the "in-group" and the "outgroup", usually conceptualized in ethical and cultural (ostensibly racial conceptualizations are rare, occurring only at the fringes, and often officially disavowed), rather than strictly economical terms. As such, it is profoundly inegalitarian, even when it dons the cape of workers' saviours and of welfare-ism. Right-wing populist comprises parties like the Rassemblement National, the Brexit Party, PiS or Lega.

We nevertheless try to eschew simplistic dichotomies by recognizing the autonomy of a political "centre" that fits neither the right nor the left paradigm. Centrist populism is a contested notion, but a valuable one to render the distinguishability of catch-all programmes such as the ones of The 5 Stars Movement (Italy) or of ANO 2011 (Czech Republic). Centrist

populism is comfortable with themes such as anti-corruption, who dramatically substantiate the narrative of the *otherness* of political and business elites (the "little man" cannot be corrupt, as he lacks the material and symbolic resources to engage in such behaviour), but apart from that they are much less ideologically sure-footed. They often try to compensate for this by enacting a form of "stylistic" rather than "ideational" populism, best embodied by the theatrics of charismatic leaders like Beppe Grillo who claimed to represent "the barbarians who will lead the world forward",<sup>59</sup> but whose party was conspicuously more restrained than Salvini's Lega.<sup>60</sup> The crumbling of the Lega - 5 Stars Movement coalition government in Italy and the latter's reorientation towards the centre-left PD<sup>61</sup> is a testament to the ideological balancing act that many centrist populists have to put on.

The second level scrutinizes the morphology of populist discourse, in order to elaborate a model of issue salience and issue ownership specific to populism: which is the preferred overarching narrative? Which issues are prioritized by populist political entrepreneurs in their rhetoric? On which issues are they more credible?<sup>62</sup> The focus of our paper being the much more successful and variegated right-wing populism family, our taxonomy will try to offer a more refined cartography of this puzzling and rocky terrain. We identified three main subtypes:

- **Conservative populism** is the "default setting" of right-wing populism, especially in Southern and Eastern Europe. As an ideological configuration distinct both from conservatism

57. See for example Norberto Bobbio, *Left and Right. The Significance of a Political Distinction*, Wiley, London, 1996

58. Chantal Mouffe made a similar argument, claiming that the fact that left and right-wing parties coalesced around the center of the center ushered an era of post-democracy and managerial politics. See Chantal Mouffe, *Pour un populisme de gauche*, Albin Michel, Paris, 2018

59. Wall Street Journal, *Italy's Beppe Grillo Celebrates Trump-Style Populism*, YouTube, 30 November 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCiaGG-QHsY>

60. *They're Taking Italians for a Ride: Five Star Movement Stalls League's Anti-migrant Decree*, *The Local Italy*, 20 May 2019, <https://www.thelocal.it/20190520/five-star-movement-league-matteo-salvini-anti-migrant-decree>

61. *Italy's Government Crisis Comes to the Boil*, *Euractiv*, 20 August 2019, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/italys-government-crisis-comes-to-the-boil/>

62. For a conceptualization of the notions of issue salience and issue ownership, see John R. Petrocik, *Issue ownership in presidential elections, with a 1980 case study*, *American Journal of Political Science*, 40 (1996) and Éric Bélanger & Bonnie M. Méguid, *Issue Salience, Issue Ownership, and Issue-Based Vote Choice*, *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 27, Issue 3, September 2008



and other subtypes of populism (see below), it exhibits a strong nationalist tropism and professes attachment to “traditional values” such as the normative family and religion. Intrinsically, it is characterized to a large extent by hostility towards progressive social agendas such as LGBTQ rights or feminism. “Progressive politics”, imported from morally bankrupt centres (urban agglomerations inhabited by global elites, the Western world, Brussels, etc.) are seen as inflicting irreparable damage to national life; national communities are often reimagined through narratives of exceptionalism, as “last frontiers” of Christianity in an age of moral decay. Consequently, conservative populism can use anti-colonial frames to mobilize supporters, attacking for example feminism and LGBTQ rights as “Ebola from Brussels” (to quote Polish conservative organisations).<sup>63</sup> It can also be comfortably pro-business and share some conservative-liberal postulates, such as economic anti-interventionism. The archetypal model of conservative populism is Orban’s Fidesz and Poland’s PiS, who embedded the defence of “family values” into their political identities. The Romanian PSD also briefly fitted this paradigm, through its reliance on anti-colonial frames<sup>64</sup> and its support for conservative initiatives such as the 2018 Family Referendum.<sup>65</sup> Outside of Europe, the Tea Party (now largely digested into Trumpism), with its blend of polarizing evangelical rhetoric and economic libertarianism, articulated a formula similar to the one of conservative populism.

- **Social nativism** is a complex umbrella term, coined by economist Thomas Piketty in

*Capital et Idéologie*.<sup>66</sup> Bent Greve christened “welfare chauvinism” the rise of increasingly nativist frames of welfare deservingness in countries with strong social-democrat traditions, such as Nordic countries.<sup>67</sup> Welfare populism is the translation of a cultural debate (and largely of indigenous *cultural* angsts) in economic language, more specifically in the economic language of the left. Contrary to left-wing populism, it remains highly exclusionary towards ethnically defined outgroups. An offshoot of welfare chauvinism is what French sociologist Gael Brustier coined “security hedonism”, where antipathy for outgroups is motivated by the defence of a cultural and economic model based, paradoxically, on tolerance, individuality, liberty and prosperity. The “otherness” of Islam as a cultural block is brought forth by this revitalized commitment to humanistic values such as LGBTQ rights, feminism, secularism, freedom of expression (particularly freedom to publicly criticize and mock religion), within an argumentative strategy that incorporates such values into a new definition of nationalism and citizenship. In a country like the Netherlands, proud to have adopted the world’s first marriage equality law and be one of the most sexually open in the world, populists like Pym Fortuyn and later Geert Wilders (leader of the Party for Freedom) successfully deployed a rigid dichotomy between “backwards” and “intolerant” Islamic ultra-conservatism and “progressive” and “tolerant” indigenous Dutch identity.<sup>68</sup> In France, fiery polemics around the relationship between Islam and feminism, secularism or the freedom of speech (a fraught subject in the wake of the

63. Elżbieta Korolczuk and Agnieszka Graff, *Gender as “Ebola from Brussels”: The Anticolonial Frame and the Rise of Illiberal Populism*, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 43, no. 4 (Summer 2018)

64. See *Deputatul PSD Liviu Pleşoiianu: România este O COLONIE ÎN DEVĂLMĂŞIE. Sunt atât de multe felii de şară cu care se servesc nestingheriţi atât de mulţi stăpâni, încât e deja destul de complicat să mai ripostezi*, *Active News*, 8 May 2017, <https://www.activenews.ro/stiri/Deputatul-PSD-Liviu-Plesoiianu-Romania-este-O-COLONIE-IN-DEVALMASIE.-Sunt-atat-de-multe-felii-de-tara-cu-care-se-servesc-nestingheriti-atat-de-multi-stapani-incat-e-deja-destul-de-complicat-sa-mai-ripostezi-143113>

65. *Liviu Dragnea: Mulţi se tem de legalizarea căsătoriei între un om şi un animal, ca în alte ţări*, *Digi 24*, 30 September 2018, <https://www.digi24.ro/referendum-familie-2018/liviu-dragnea-isi-explica-pozitia-fata-de-referendum-si-anunta-ce-va-face-dupa-aceea-psd-1005670>

66. Thomas Piketty, *Capital et Idéologie*, Seuil, Paris, 2019

67. Bent Greve (ed.), *Welfare, Populism and Welfare Chauvinism*, Policy Press, Bristol, 2019

68. Koen Damhuis, *The Biggest Problem in the Netherlands: Understanding the Party for Freedom’s Politicization of Islam*, *Brookings*, 24 July 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-biggest-problem-in-the-netherlands-understanding-the-party-for-freedoms-politicization-of-islam/>

2015 murder of popular Charlie Hebdo cartoonists for mocking Islam in a series of drawing judged “blasphemous”) allowed Marine le Pen to anchor the Rassemblement National’ imaginary into resolutely progressive territory.<sup>69</sup> Social nativism (whether we consider the more economic-centred vision of “welfare chauvinism” or the culture-centred approach of “security hedonism”) shows how new ideological spaces, hitherto unexplored, are increasingly becoming available to right-wing populist imaginaries. As such, it is a relevant development of the last decades that might durably alter traditional taxonomies of populism.

We christened the last paradigmatic subtype “securitarian populism”, to emphasize that its ideological nucleus is to be found in repressive security solutions. Its more radical embodiments are to be found outside of Europe, in places where criminality is high (mainly due to drugs, poverty and ghettoization) and the political culture is often desensitized to violence and human rights abuses: Bolsonaro’s (elected president of Brazil in 2018) and Duterte’s (president of the Philippines since 2016) incendiary rhetoric against drug dealers and gangs<sup>70</sup> can be seen through this lens. Securitarian populism is fuelled by a perception of state failure and of creeping insecurity affecting lower and middle classes. Its promised “mano-dura” policing and its hyper-macho

posturing<sup>71</sup> has a cross-class appeal. Security populists have understood the most powerful story is be a nightmare with a hero: bed men are menacing your country, but I am here to save you. In Europe, too, diluted forms surfaced: the Rassemblement National have long derided governmental leniency in the infamous crime-ridden “banlieues” (impoverished peri-urban suburbs)<sup>72</sup>, and UKIP threw all its ideological weight into the tense conversation on the knife crime surge in London.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, as long as a relatively functional state can rein in the most extreme forms of violence, in Europe and Northern America populism often just straddle the line without fully engaging with hard securitarianism.

Apart from the three canonical types, we identify two awkward outliers, that we lumped together under the – admittedly imperfect – label of Anglo-Saxon populism. The **First** is Trumpism, which remains a remarkably complex ideological object to grasp. If Trump became shorthand for populism, it is certainly because his brand of politics draws on multiple broad narratives and fuses them into an original and potent synthesis. Donald Trump is equally comfortable with the language of moral conservatism (garnering support from Evangelicals<sup>74</sup> with claims to be the “most fearlessly pro-life president in American history”<sup>75</sup>), of securitarian intransigence,<sup>76</sup> or of “liberal conservatism” (becoming a champion of

69. See for example Dimitri Almeida, *Exclusionary Secularism: The Front National and the Reinvention of Laïcité*, *Modern and Contemporary France*, Vol. 5, Issue 3, 2017

70. See *Rodrigo Duterte's drug war is 'large-scale murdering enterprise' says Amnesty*, *The Guardian*, 8 July 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/08/rodrigo-dutertes-drug-war-is-large-scale-murdering-enterprise-says-amnesty>; *Another Fire is Raging in Brazil - in Rio's Favelas*, *The Washington Post*, 6 September 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/09/06/another-fire-is-raging-brazil-rios-favelas/>

71. See Rebecka Eriksdotter Pieder, *It's A Man's World: The Worrying Trend of Hyper-Masculinity in World Leaders*, *The McGill International Review*, 13 November 2018, <https://www.mironline.ca/its-a-mans-world-the-worrying-trend-of-hyper-masculinity-in-world-leaders/>

72. See *Émeutes à répétition dans les banlieues: c'est pas cher, c'est la politique de la ville qui paye!* [communiqué de presse], *Rassemblement National*, 3 November 2019, <https://rassemblementnational.fr/communiqués/emeutes-a-repetition-dans-les-banlieues-cest-pas-cher-cest-la-politique-de-la-ville-qui-payé/>

73. UK Independence Party, *Sadiq's London – Violent Crime Goes Through the Roof*, *Facebook*, 3 January 2018, [https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/sadiqs-london-violent-crime-goes-through-the-roofhttpwwwukiporgsadiq\\_s\\_london\\_vi/1694784200543463/](https://www.facebook.com/UKIP/posts/sadiqs-london-violent-crime-goes-through-the-roofhttpwwwukiporgsadiq_s_london_vi/1694784200543463/)

74. *President Launches Evangelicals For Trump' Coalition*, *NPR*, 5 January 2020, <https://www.npr.org/2020/01/05/793827578/president-launches-evangelicals-for-trump-coalition?t=1582022650755>

75. *President Donald J. Trump Is Devoted to Protecting American Freedoms and Promoting American Values*, *The White House*, 4 February 2020, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-is-devoted-to-protecting-american-freedoms-and-promoting-american-values/>

76. Associated Press, *Trump says big crackdown coming on crime, drugs*, *YouTube*, 28 October 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x0Q0kiBilvg>

anti-political correctness and free speech right-wing advocates<sup>77</sup>), while also at occasions engaging in the rhetoric of defence of gay minorities and women against the “barbaric” Others at the gates.<sup>78</sup> Trump is a populism chameleon, which makes him hard to classify and label. But the reason we eschew including him into one of the above three paradigms (conservative, social nativism, securitarian) is that Trumpism has a very different rapport with the mainstream right than all other populist entrepreneurs. While most radical right populist movements developed and matured outside traditional right-wing parties, sometimes in direct opposition to them, Trump manufactured a synthesis whose aim was to take over and revitalize the Republican establishment, not destroy it. Trumpism is embedded into Republicanism, and cannot be separated from this frame. It wasn’t always like that: Trumpism is not a monolithic bloc, and has to be reviewed diachronically. Trumpism was at the beginning markedly more centrist (for example, Trump was gleefully lambasting the likes of Pat Buchanan in the early 2000, mocking the “staunch right wacko vote” they hoped to garner<sup>79</sup>), before sharpening its blue-collar, plebeian anti-systemic edge in the 2016 campaign and eventually, after his election, veering towards cultural conservatism in the crucible of orthodox Republicanism.

The **second** one is the British anti-elitism Euroscepticism of Nigel Farage. Farage is the jutting prow of what, in the 1990s and early 2000s, seemed a minor Conservative insurgency. Member of the Conservative Party since 1978, he left the Party in 1992. Many of the senior figures of UKIP, such as Paul Nuttall, Douglas



Carswell or Mark Reckless, were also disenchanting conservatives, admirers of Margaret Thatcher who felt their old party was becoming a sluggish, politically correct mammoth unable to channel radical change any more. Contrary to a widely-held misconception, UKIP and Farage were not offshoots of the neo-fascist tradition, who was then embodied by the British National Front (BNF). Tellingly, in his seminal 2007 volume, Cas Mudde doesn’t include UKIP in the Populist Radical Right (PRR) family with the BNF.<sup>80</sup> Roger Griffin very similarly argued that UKIP cannot be said to compete in the same ideological league as the openly racist and authoritarian BNP, despite being perplexed by manifesto statements about immigration which “would not be out of place” in continental neo-populist parties.<sup>81</sup> The scholarly consensus prior to 2015 was that UKIP was a “non-extreme”, right-leaning, single-issue party aggregated around a limited political objective: exit from the European Union. The success of the party after 2014 and the demise of the BNP ushered in a new era, in which Farage’s UKIP (and later the Brexit Party) were able to fuse multiple distinct traditions and break into the mainstream. It exploited a formula that was

77. See for example Lucian Gideon Conway III, Shannon C. Houck & Meredith Repke, *Donald Trump as a Cultural Revolt Against Perceived Communication Restriction: Priming Political Correctness Norms Causes More Trump Support*, *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, Vol. 5, Issue 1, May 2017

78. *Trump Administration Launches Global Effort to End Criminalization of Homosexuality*, *NBC News*, 19 February 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/trump-administration-launches-global-effort-end-criminalization-homosexuality-n973081>

79. Steve Kornacki, *When Trump Ran Against Trump-ism: The 1990s and the Birth of Political Tribalism in America*, *NBC News*, 2nd of October 2018, retrieved from <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/when-trump-ran-against-trump-ism-story-2000-election-ncna915651>

80. Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right in Europe*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007

81. Roger Griffin, *Non Angeli, sed Angli: The neo-populist foreign policy of the ‘new’ BNP*, in Christina Schori Liang (ed.), *Europe for the Europeans: The Foreign Policy and the Populist Radical Right*, Ashgate, Publishing, Farnham, 2007

hardly original and innovative: on the one hand mounting anti-immigration and anti-globalization sentiments, and on the other hand the widening gulf between New Labour and its blue-collar electoral base in rural and peri-urban England.<sup>82</sup> What is unique, however, is the subordination of all his rhetoric to a unique, monolithic master-narrative: Great Britain must leave the EU. Euroscepticism was not an innovative idea. It infused British political culture, and by the 2000s it was already embedded into mainstream Conservatism.<sup>83</sup> Farage’s own definition of Euroscepticism - a “wish to be free of the bureaucratic, anti-democratic, supranational structures based in Brussels”<sup>84</sup> - echoes the neo-thatcherian tropes of Conservative opponents to the Maastricht and Lisbon Treaties. What is original, though, is how Farage was able to fuse anti-EU rhetoric and anti-elite resentment, transforming in a few years his party into an ideological (albeit not electoral) powerhouse whose crowning achievement, the Brexit vote, changed durably the European political landscape. The EU efficiently morphed into shorthand for arrogant and disconnected elites; but the reverse is also true. British anti-elitist Euroscepticism is a unique strand of thought, meshing together the dangling threads of neo-thatcherite conservatism, hard right

nativism (orphaned after the disappearance of the BNP) and Labour’s blue-collar alienation.

Our readers can find the summary of this analysis and a visual mapping of our taxonomic categories in the table below.

### Conclusions

We all like to give decades nicknames. The “decades-with-adjectives” is certainly an enjoyable branding game, albeit ultimately rather trivial. Tying one arbitrary ten-years span to an overarching narrative is not very conducive to a perfectly nuanced and refined understanding of social phenomena. But after all, human thought trades in the currency of stereotypes, catchphrases and jingles, so such habit should not come as a surprise.

We had the “roaring” Twenties, the “turbulent” Thirties, the “fighting” Forties, the “fabulous” Fifties, the “swinging” (or “psychedelic”) Sixties, the “disco” Seventies, the “greedy” Eighties. Things got murkier after the Nineties: the “naughty” Nineties (the “noughties”) gained some traction in pop culture, however for less fortunate political-minded folks, the main “naughtiness” was indulging into the brazen optimism of imagining we had reached a liberal end of History. The 2000s are even more elusive. Historic Neil Ferguson christened them the

Left Wing Populism	Centrist Populism	Right-wing Populism			
		Conservative Populism	Social Nativism	Securitarian populism	Anglo-Saxon Populism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bernie Sanders</li> <li>La France Insoumise (Jean-Luc Mélenchon)</li> <li>Syriza</li> <li>Podemos</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ANO 2011</li> <li>Five Star Mouvement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fidesz (Viktor Orban)</li> <li>PiS (Jaroslaw Kaczynski)</li> <li>Lega (Matteo Salvini)</li> <li>Alternative for Deutschland</li> <li>Tea Party</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Party for Freedom (Geert Wilders)</li> <li>Rassemblement National (Marine le Pen)</li> <li>Sweden Democrats</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rodrigo Duterte</li> <li>Jair Bolsonaro</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trumpist Republicanism (Donald Trump)</li> <li>British Anti-elitist Euroscepticism (Nigel Farage)</li> </ul>

Categorization of populist ideologies

82. See Matthiew Goodwin and Caitlin Milazzo, *UKIP: Inside the Campaign to Redraw the Map of British Politics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2015

83. See Denis McShane, *Brexit: How Britain Left Europe*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2016

84. Nigel Farage, *Populism is just Beginning*, *Newsweek*, 29 January 2020, <https://www.newsweek.com/farage-brexit-populism-just-beginning-trump-impeachment-nobody-laughing-now-1484705>

“boom-and-bust” decade.<sup>85</sup> It was, with 9/11 and the 2008 financial wipe-out, the painful return of History so unceremoniously fired previously. For the *Times Magazine*, it was the “decade from Hell”.<sup>86</sup> The famous magazine did promise, though, the next one will be better .... Well, was it?

The 2010s were marked by two main, thumping headlines: the vote to leave the European Union of the British People in June 2016 and the election of Donald J. Trump as the 45th of the United States of America in November of the same year. Should we call the 2010s the “Trumpy” or the “Brexit” 2010s, as Neil Ferguson jokingly suggested? Other looming, slow-burning issues of the 2010s will most certainly outlive the legacies of these two events: the incredible surge of artificial intelligence, the rise of social media, the mounting sense of environmental emergency are likely to shape more durably the world future generations will inhabit. However, it was populist fear and fury that cadenced the daily rhythms of political reality in the last decade. Populism felt, for better or worse, visceral and immediate, and few of us could eschew reflecting on the cultural and political questions Trump, Brexit, Marine le Pen or Orban thrust upon our societies. The Zeitgeist was indelibly imprinted by a pervading sense of crisis and alienation of large swathes of citizens who felt “invisible”. Addressing head-on the underlying dynamics driving global populism is both an intellectual and civic endeavour whose urgency has never been greater, unless we want once more to be mere dazed onlookers of the second round of the culture war.

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- Time Magazine
- Wall Street Journal

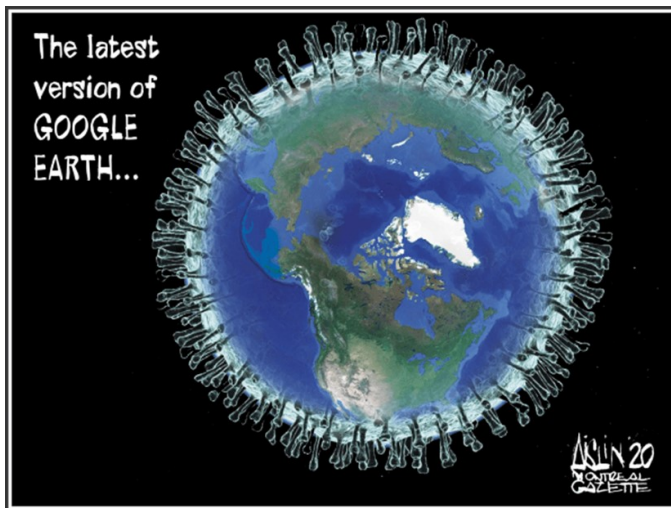
# The Prisons - Potential Sources for the Expansion of COVID-19

Vladimir - Adrian COSTEA<sup>1</sup>

## Summary

In this article, we set out to look at prisons as potential sources for the expansion of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are taking into account the special status of prisons and the informal rules, which set the ground for life behind bars. We are referring to the dynamics of entries and exits from the penitentiary, in order to identify possible preventive and management measures, should a COVID-19 outbreak occurs.

**Key words:** penitentiary, COVID-19, overcrowding, prison system, outbreak.



Corona Earth by Terry Mosher, the Montreal Gazette, 12.03.2020 (Cagle Cartoons)

## Sudden Changes, Extreme Measures

The COVID-19<sup>2</sup> pandemic has started to influence everyday life, but also economic

development and political activity on a global scale, effects that will be felt, most probably, in the next few years.<sup>3</sup> The option of closing down borders and declaring a state of emergency (which automatically implies restricting certain rights) is the most likely scenario for countries which are facing an increase in the number of people infected with the new Coronavirus, or a mutation of the virus. In our opinion, efforts to manage the migration flow have not been backed by an effort to prevent the spread of the virus to vulnerable people, since taking such action could have led to a decrease of the election capital. Isolating and later casting out the “leper”<sup>4</sup> took place according to the red and yellow zones of the Coronavirus infection.<sup>5</sup> The national policies of the countries infected by COVID-19 have failed to identify potential outbreaks which could accelerate the spread of the virus.

Disadvantaged and underdeveloped groups have not generally benefited from extra protection measures, an aspect we see mainly in China, Italy, France, the USA and Iran, countries where prisons have become sources for the epidemic, as visitors have not been checked to see whether they came from high-risk areas.<sup>6</sup> The management and the prison personnel have become possible carriers of the disease, as they have been exposed both to the prisoners (who were not in good health due to lack of hygiene) and to the outside environment. We are taking into account the fact that providing each prison

1. The publication of this article was made possible with financial support coming from the project *Entrepreneurship Education and Professional Counselling for Graduate Students and Post Graduate Researchers in Order to Transfer their Knowledge to the Field of Social and Cultural Sciences to the Work Market (ATRIUM)*: POCU/380/6/13/123343, cofinanced from the Social European Fund through the Operational Programme Human Capital 2014-2020.

2. World Health Organization, “Coronavirus (COVID-19)”, “WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 - 11 March 2020”, “Report of the WHO-China Joint Mission on Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). 16-24.02.2020”, accessed on 17.03.2020, available at <https://www.who.int>

3. Matteo Lucchese, “The economic consequences of coronavirus: a major economic and financial crisis”, *Open Democracy*, 16.03.2020, accessed on 17.03.2020, available at <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/economic-consequences-coronavirus-major-economic-and-financial-crisis/>.

4. Michel Foucault, *Anormalii, Cursuri ținute la Collège de France 1974-1975*, translated by Dan Radu Stănescu, afterword by Bogdan Ghiu, Bucharest, Univers Publishing, 1999, pp. 54-55.

5. European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, “COVID-19. Situation Update Worldwide”, accessed on 13.03.2020, available at <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/geographical-distribution-2019-ncov-cases>.

6. Amanda Klonsky, “An Epicentre of the Pandemic Will Be Jails and Prisons, if Inaction Continues”, *The New York Times*, 16.03.2020, accessed on 17.03.2020, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/16/opinion/coronavirus-in-jails.html>.

with hygiene products and actually ensuring the proper environment for a proper daily hygiene is a structural problem in many countries (including Romania). One of the extreme solutions was the temporary release of 70,000 Iranian detainees,<sup>7</sup> an action which was followed by the United Nations asking Iran to release all the prisoners suspected of being infected with the new Coronavirus.<sup>8</sup>



*COVID-19 and World* by Gatis Sluka, Latvijas Avize, Latvia, 12.03.2020 (Cagle Cartoons)

### A Poor Civic Education. Between Hysteria, Negligence and the Illusion of Immunity<sup>9</sup>

The replicating ability of SARS-CoV-2, aside from the medical features specific to the latest strand identified in an outbreak in the city of Wuhan (Hubei Province, China)<sup>10</sup>, takes advantage of vulnerabilities which are part of human nature, as well as the ability of authorities to manage and communicate during a crisis. Globalization and the high level of exposure of the population contribute to the

exponential spread of the virus, in societies which lack the necessary education of how to follow minimum respiratory hygiene rules. The 21<sup>st</sup> century lifestyle exposes us to overcrowded places, which lack sanitization on a regular basis. Moreover, the transmission of the virus from man to man, before symptoms such as fever or coughing occur,<sup>11</sup> make the virus invisible, especially when measures have not been taken to locate and isolate high risk areas.

The problematic evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic is not properly dealt with by people who, lacking civic education, look for different ways to avoid following the prevention rules imposed by authorities. Lies and naivety contribute to a certain extent to the spread of the virus, since the main issue is lacking the ability to assume social responsibilities. In some cases, we see people defying elementary logic. Panic and exaggeration have led to exposure – including in crowded spaces, due to the lack of trust in authorities and in politicians.



*The Coronavirus Scream* by R.J. Matson, CQ Roll Call, 03.03.2020 (Cagle Cartoons)

At the same time, we witness the syndrome of a strong illusory sense of immunity, which is not deterred by the expansion of the COVID-19 pandemic. On the contrary, human nature constantly defies dangers and threats which can

7. "Iran to Release 70,000 Prisoners to Prevent Coronavirus Spread", *USA News*, 09.03.2020, <https://www.usnews.com/news/world-report/articles/2020-03-09/iran-to-release-70-000-prisoners-to-prevent-coronavirus-spread>.

8. "UN Calls for Iran to Free All Prisoners over COVID-19", *FTM News*, 11.03.2020, <https://www.freemalaysiatoday.com/category/world/2020/03/11/un-calls-for-iran-to-free-all-prisoners-over-COVID-19/>.

9. Certain paragraphs can be found in the article "Educația civică precară și iluzia imunității" (*A Poor Civic Education and the Illusion of Immunity*), published by [www.stiripesurse.ro](http://www.stiripesurse.ro), 13.03.2020, available at [https://www.stiripesurse.ro/educatia-civica-precara-si-iluzia-imunitatii\\_1440329.html](https://www.stiripesurse.ro/educatia-civica-precara-si-iluzia-imunitatii_1440329.html).

10. World Health Organization, "Coronavirus (COVID-19)".

11. Ibidem.



put life and physical and mental integrity at risk. From not following traffic rules to breaking those related to the prevention of the spread of COVID-19, poor civic education manifests itself in a lack of compassion towards others, in some cases towards parents, friends or colleagues. Truth be told, intentional exposure to disinformation makes people act impulsively, irrationally, coming to a point where they unconsciously endanger their lives or health.

Politicians represent the mirror image of the ills of society, easily understood if we are aware of the fact that they are a part of it and that they wish to preserve this image, which reflects a certain identity. The competition between politicians uses the same mechanisms and means to obtain tangible results in the short term, especially of a personal nature. Cooperation and solidarity, although often evoked in moments of crisis, have lost their value and substance in a society where the main stake is survival (individual).

Of course, we do not know the size of the pandemic; however, what concerns us the most is that human nature will be marked by the same challenges, which tear it apart from inside out. Hypocrisy and naivety will expose the entire society to countless crises, whose magnitude will play by similar scenarios.

We find a similar pattern in the behaviour of the economic and political players, whose reaction was to postpone, for as long as they could, suspending any activity, in order to minimize economic repercussions. The low level of digitalisation (which is not accessible to all people), IT security breaches, and the lack of cohesion and solidarity among state actors (among whom there are major discrepancies regarding resources and political interests) hindered the fast transition of activities online, as well as the management of the pandemic at a global level.

Individual responses to the pandemic aimed at taking progressive measures to limit some rights, at the same time with the gradual expansion of the quarantine areas. Misinformation, the lack of trust in the establishment and the dependence on a certain

lifestyle have fuelled panic and hysteria, damaging the cohesion of societies.



Coronavirus Fears by Peter Kuper, politicalcartoons.com, 11.03.2020 (Cagle Cartoons)

### The Prison System Explained for All

The entry and exit flows in and out of prison are: (1) leaving the community and transferral to a different detaining facility; (2) visits from lawyers and people in the support environment; (3) prison management and personnel. These three dimensions reduce the level of isolation of the prison system, contributing to maintaining a certain level of interaction with the environment outside the prison system. Thus, it is a part of our societies, even if the walls of the prison and the low level of transparency coming from each prison symbolically isolate it.

In essence, incarceration does not mean being only partially isolated for a certain period in a limited and monitored area; incarceration means, whether we like it or not, lack of certain rights, limited access to certain conditions, sometimes at minimum standards. Serving a sentence in overcrowded conditions means an increased limitation to accessing the resources distributed to each detainee. We must mention from the start that we will not be referring to issues which describe the prison system from

the theoretical perspective of levelling the difference in the social status and power of the detainees, by levelling the conditions of the incarceration.<sup>12</sup> On the contrary, in our opinion, the prison system highlights the differences in the status and the power of the detainees, putting at risk those who do not possess high social, economic and political capital.



Prison Overcrowding by Daryl Cagle, CagleCartoons.com, 05.03.200

A shortage of resources and limited access to hygiene, together with the deficiencies in administering proper medical treatment, actually put all incarcerated persons at risk, especially when we are witnessing the emergence and expansion of a pandemic. Gradual exposure to improper conditions while serving a sentence (insufficient space, lack of ventilation and natural light, exposure to rats and insects, lack of proper medical treatment and a delay in administering that treatment) weakens the body's immunity. There is an increase in the risk of your health getting worse, which exposes and makes the detainees vulnerable to pathogens, especially under those circumstances when their occurrence and

evolution is sudden.

Insufficient access to hygiene and daily hygiene activities which take place in common contribute to an increase in the level of exposure to the COVID-19 pandemic, under such circumstances in which allotting limited resources overlaps the existence of an informal culture represented by a decreased level of civic education. The incarcerated persons do not understand the importance of personal hygiene and social responsibility, not even on a small scale, as they lack the necessary education and living standards to be able to adjust to a lifestyle which does not endanger their health and that of the persons with whom they keep in touch.

Inappropriate detention conditions expose the persons who present health problems to immunodeficiency, increasing the risk of them becoming vulnerable to pathogens, which can endanger the health of the detainees, but also that of the prison personnel, who work under the same conditions. In the context of the COVID-19 expansion, persons with acute respiratory problems need to be closely monitored, in order to benefit from necessary medical treatment, should their health worsen. At the same time, prison personnel (especially medical personnel) must take necessary actions and have enough power to handle a swift intervention needed to limit the spread of the virus and to manage the existing prison accommodation facilities. We are taking into account the issue of overcrowded prisons, which is a recurring phenomenon in most countries<sup>13</sup> and which hinders the proper management of accommodation facilities. Isolating the persons who are more likely to catch COVID-19 contributes to an increase in the overcrowding of the other detention facilities, which increases the discontent and frustration of the detainees.

While tensions escalate, the incarcerated persons and the prison personnel abandon all means of communication and cooperation. On one hand, refusing to cooperate and follow the

12. United Nations, *Human Rights and Prisons. A Pocketbook of International Human Rights Standards for Prison Officials*, New York and Geneva, United Nations Publication, 2005.

13. Michael Tonry (ed.), *Penal Reform in Overcrowded Times*, Oxford, New York, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 73-79; Bert Useem and Anne Morrison Piehl, *Prison State. The Challenge of Mass Incarceration*, Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 3.

rules of the prison personnel is a sign of protest regarding their sentence, which is why we see a tendency among the prisoners to refuse to agree with the measures taken by the management and prison personnel. On the other hand, the various pretexts used to escape the daily routine (among which there are the requests to access the medical system) highlights the lack of trust of the prison personnel, which interferes with a swift, preventive intervention. Simultaneously, the legitimate interest to protect the image of the prison imposes a certain informative framework, under circumstances when the management suspects that the health of the prisoners has worsened due to improper detention conditions.

### **Crises Management. Virus-Transmitting Agents**

To prevent the occurrence and expansion of cases infected with the new Coronavirus, and to avoid turning the detention facility into an outbreak centre, we have identified three different sets of actions for each group (who risk becoming virus-transmitting agents). We mention the fact that taking preventive measures contributes to the actions taken by authorities in the areas affected by the virus.

Firstly, managing the flow of people who come in and out of prisons is a necessary and complex action. On one hand, we believe isolation is necessary for a certain period in rooms specially designated for quarantined people, or people who were transferred from other prisons (under exceptional circumstances). On the other hand, we propose the establishment of a special section destined for persons who suffer from acute respiratory deficiencies or other illnesses, which could endanger their lives, while at the same time medical personnel closely and regularly monitor their health. Separating the incarcerated persons according to their health limits the risk of infection and spread of COVID-19. We believe that the specially designated sections should be disinfected on a regular basis. On the other hand, protecting prison personnel should become a priority seeing that they constantly come into contact both with the

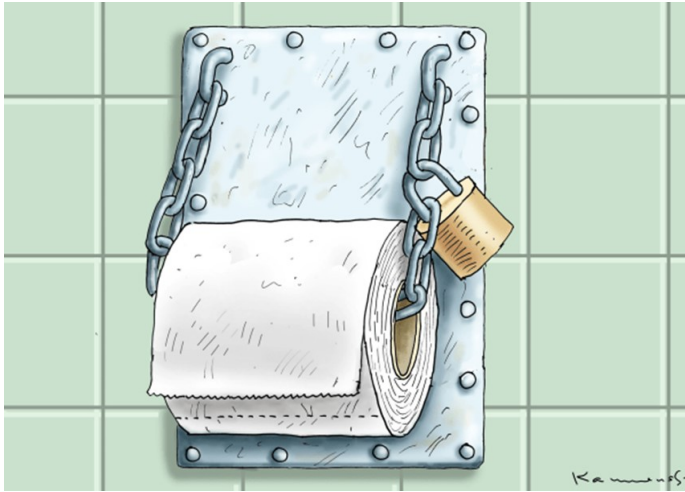
outside world and with the prisoners. Providing proper protective equipment and the necessary supplies to ensure a proper hygiene are some of the measures which somewhat diminish the risk of infection with the new Coronavirus.

Secondly, we believe that it is necessary to reduce the number of visitors. Suspending visits from lawyers and the support environment must be compensated by access to free online conversations, conference calls or telephone calls, while at the same time providing incentives which could replace prison outings (passes, community visits). The digitalisation of the detention facility is a necessity in order to reduce the flow of entries into the facility for handling administrative matters. Moreover, the work in prison regime should provide equal compensation to work delivered outside the prison, so that all activities can be done inside, the only exceptions being situations where detainees are not exposed to places that are overcrowded or which can be a danger to their health.

Thirdly, intensifying actions to ensure a minimum level of hygiene is of the utmost urgency, while at the same time ensuring access to medical care. Supplementing the necessary items for hygiene and disinfection means identifying financial resources from the budget of the institution and should be exempted from the rules of public acquisitions. The persons having health issues (especially acute respiratory problems) must benefit from proper treatment as well as from constant monitoring and specialised care. An extended program for individual access to the medical facility, together with supplementing the necessary stocks to ensure the proper functioning of the medical service, are necessary to ensure an effective management of the risk represented by the spread of COVID-19 among the detainees and prison personnel.

Fourthly, we believe it is necessary to set in motion a fast response plan for prison personnel (which could be made known to the detainees as well), which could be enforced if they identify persons who manifest symptoms of the new Coronavirus infection, or when they are

informed of contact with persons carrying COVID-19. The fast response plan (isolation and proper treatment) must be adapted to the needs and specific aspects of the prisons.

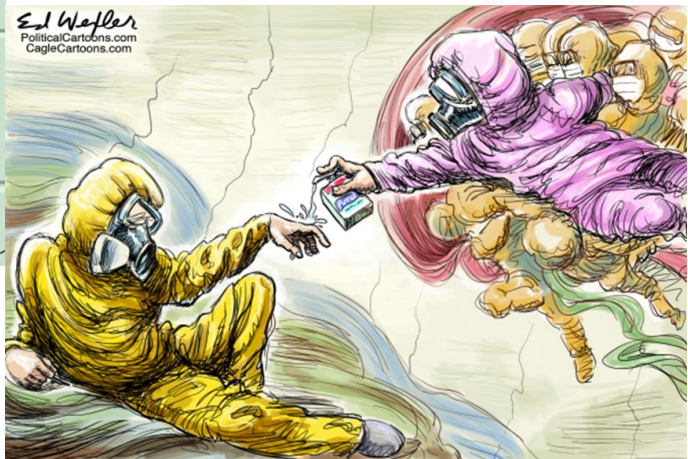


*Toilet Paper Lockdown* by Marian Kamensky, Austria, 15.03.2020 (Cagle Cartoons)

However, reducing the number of activities poses many problems to the reintegration process, especially when those actions last a long time. Associating the reduction of sentences to coercion, highlights the issues regarding incarceration and total isolation in improper conditions, highly affecting the physical and mental health of those persons, especially of those who are more vulnerable. We believe that these actions should focus more on the development of the skills and knowledge necessary to follow the rules regarding personal hygiene and care. Of course, it is up to every detention facility to manage the issue of organising these activities safely and to limit the number of persons involved. From our point of view, using fliers to promote these actions is not effective, if we are to consider the high rate of (functional) illiterates who usually occupy prisons.

What we propose are daily check-ups coming from the medical personnel, in every cell, to inform and inspect the health of every detainee, a solution which allows permanent monitoring and reduced time in providing the necessary treatment, should it be the case. Adopting this measure implies supplementing the number of medical personnel and prolonging their schedule, as well as ensuring the necessary

equipment for personal hygiene and care to be at each person's disposal. At the same time, this measure must be accompanied by supplying the prison shops and mess halls with food and maintaining accessible prices for basic products. Constant updates are important in order to prevent tension rising and (violent) protests, which would hinder actions taken for the prevention and occurrence of COVID-19 infected persons.



*Creation of Panic* by Ed Wexler, politicalcartoons.com, 14.03.2020 (Cagle Cartoons)

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# Opinion: COVID-19 Pandemic Impact on Defence

*Ciprian - Mircea RĂDULESCU*

The occurrence and rapid spread of COVID-19 has shaken the entire world. Initially seen as a local phenomenon in Wuhan or, in the worst-case scenario only in China, it turned in less than two months in a global problem.

The speed with which the virus spread and the level of its impact paralysed, one by one, countries which had a normal social and economic life and made them focus almost exclusively on taking measures to control and stop the spread of the disease and cure those infected.

Under these circumstances all other activities have been either cancelled (e.g. tourism) or put on hold.

The Defence sector is one of the affected areas but, at the same time, it is directly involved in a scenario that seems to come from a Sci-Fi movie.

All the countries affected by COVID-19, and we can see that the pandemic hit every continent, are taking actions to fight as efficient as they can with an enemy that, until yesterday, was not taken into consideration. The Armed Forces have been called to take part in this war and their weapons of choice are multiple. Below, I will try to describe some of the military actions taken in the fight against the coronavirus.

## Limit the Spread

The most common way of spreading the virus is through social contact and large crowds represent the most aggressive way.

Military exercises planned for this period were such a risk factor. Therefore, it has been decided to either cancel, or downsize some of them:

- NATO's "Europe Defender 2020", planned between the 20<sup>th</sup> of April and 20<sup>th</sup> of May, was

scaled down in order to limit the movement of troops from the US and other countries through Europe, whilst other countries, including Romania, decided to cancel their participation;

- "Cold Response" planned by Norway between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> of March was cancelled;

- Other exercises, where US troops were planned to attend have been either concluded earlier ("Juniper Cobra", in Israel), or cancelled ("African Lion").

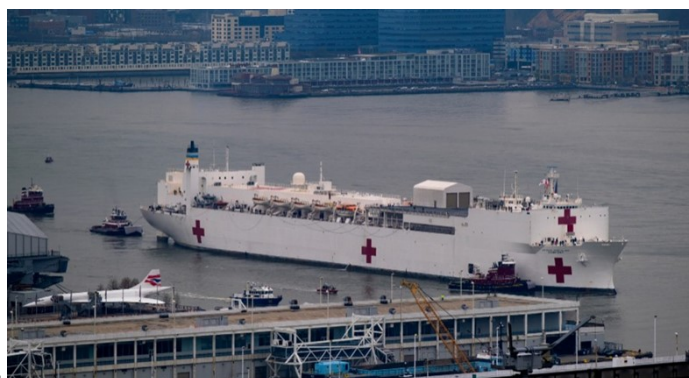
In order to limit the spread of the virus the Armed Forces were also called, where needed, to support the police to enforce restrictions on movement imposed by the authorities.

## Fighting the Virus

The Armed Forces have capabilities that can be used by the civilian authorities either to treat the infected or for logistic support.

In some countries, military medical facilities have been made available to the civilian authorities for the treatment and transport of patients, as well as for logistic support, such as:

- The US Navy sent to the New York City Harbour the hospital ship USNS Comfort with 1,000 beds to help relieve city hospitals overwhelmed by coronavirus patients.



<https://www.politico.com/states/new-york/city-hall/story/2020/03/30/usns-comfort-arrives-in-new-york-city-1269589>

- On 18<sup>th</sup> of March, the UK Ministry of Defence activated the "COVID Support Force", and up to

20,000 troops can be called to assist the civilian authorities. One of the first measures was to have the helicopters from the Aviation Task Force on stand-by, to support the medical evacuations requested by the civilian authorities.



MOD Crown Copyright (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-support-force-the-mods-contribution-to-the-coronavirus-response>)

- Germany also mobilized its Armed Forces to fight against the pandemic. One of the many measures adopted by this country was to use military medical transport to bring COVID-19 infected patients from Italy and France to German hospitals.

In Romania, the Ministry of National Defence operationalised a ROL 2 military hospital in Bucharest and purchased from the Netherlands a Mobile Isolation and Treatment Modular System that was set up in Constanta. Mild and moderate COVID-19 patients can be treated in these facilities.

- NATO, through the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC), is centralising the member states and partners' requests related to the fight against the coronavirus. Romania used this mechanism to access the Alliance's strategic airlift capabilities for transporting medical equipment from South Korea.

The NATO Air Forces are also used to repatriate own nationals and nationals from partner countries stuck in various parts of the world because of civilian flights cancellations.

## The Defence Industry

The defence industry is also affected by the pandemic. The effects are not only immediate, but can have an impact on future capabilities if the crisis lasts longer and the qualified personnel lose their jobs.

In order to retain the workforce, some companies decided to temporarily reconvert their production to medical equipment, needed for hospital treatment and in low supply for the large number of infected.

Large US companies, such as Ford and General Electric announced that they would jointly produce ventilators. NATO is using its structures, such as NATO Support and Procurement Agency - NSPA to finance the private sector in Italy in order to produce masks and ventilators for hospitals. Israel Aerospace Industry (IAI) announced its involvement in the production of ventilators by transforming one of its air defence missiles production lines.

## Instead of Conclusions

While affected by COVID-19 just like the rest of society, the defence has also been called to support the fight against the pandemic alongside those who, this time, are in the frontline - medics. Thus, the defence, together with the law enforcement (Police and Gendarmerie) is serving a noble cause - protecting the citizens.

The role of defence is diversifying more and more in the general context we are now and, after the battle is over and won, we can expect it will be called to join the economic reconstruction effort, mainly to help restart and ensure the good functioning of the economy.

## THE EUROPEAN UNION

## Interview with Mihnea MOTOC: “The High Level of Interdependence of Today’s Globalised World Is Reflected in the Geopolitical Articulation of the European Commission”

In an unstable geopolitical environment, where the international landscape is marked by growing tensions, the reformation process of the European Union after Brexit cannot ignore the way the Member States seek to relate themselves to the security and defence dimension.

After a long service in the Romanian diplomacy - where he served as secretary of state for Euro-Atlantic Integration, ambassador of Romania to the Netherlands (1999-2001), permanent representative to the United Nations (2003-2008) and, later, to the European Union (2008-2015), as well as ambassador to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (2015), Mihnea Motoc served as minister of defence from 2015 to 2017.

He is currently serving as deputy head of the European Political Strategy Centre and special adviser on European defence and security affairs to the president of the European Commission. In the interview offered to Vladimir Adrian Costea for the Geostrategic Pulse Magazine, Mihnea Motoc analysed the prospects and challenges to the global strategic forecast, starting from the role and objectives of the EU in the field of European defence and security.

*\* The opinions expressed in this interview belong to the interviewee and should not be seen as necessarily reflecting the position of the European Commission.*



**Vladimir-Adrian Costea: Mr. Mihnea Motoc, we are currently trying to identify and understand the new challenges posed by Brexit. What are, as of now, the main prospects and challenges regarding the post Brexit global strategic prediction of the EU?**

Mihnea Motoc: It will probably take some time until we will be able to fully, understand them despite all the contingency plans that have been worked on extremely exigent over the past few years. It will be difficult to finalize them this year, during a transition period, and – except for the fact that Great Britain becomes a third country to us – the reality is that it is still “business as usual” for both the British and us (and this situation may very well last for two more years). The EU loses a major diplomatic, strategic, military, financial and technological player, but this does not change its course and global priorities, the more so since their future relationship will be a close partnership and will continue to entail a high degree of alignment (Great Britain is not leaving Europe). On the contrary, there are many fields, such as European defence, where the post-Brexit EU can state new, or even higher ambitions.

**What are the main objectives and courses of action set by the Commission for this year? To what extent has Brexit influenced the Commission’s strategic priorities?**

The strategic objectives of the Commission led by Ursula von der Leyen cover the 2019-2024 term. Some, such as the *European Green Deal* and the digital package, are transformative paradigms, which practically mobilize all policy areas; other cardinal directions will be strengthening the global player profile including by reviving multilateralism, an economy for the

people, protecting the European way of life, reviving democracy in Europe. The high level of interdependence in today's globalised world is reflected in the geopolitical articulation of the Commission, meaning that the foreign policy issues will be systematically included on the agenda of the College, and the formulation of any policy will be done in correlation with their external dimension. The first 100 days of office in 2020 have already brought considerable breakthroughs on most of these work strands. I cannot see how Brexit can influence the shaping of the Commission's strategic compass.

**Articulating the EU budget continues to represent a particular stake. What are the prospects of managing the United Kingdom's contribution to the EU budget, estimated at 12-14 billion Euro?**

Great Britain is the second net contributor to the budget of the EU, and the 27 Member States have to take over its contribution. A number of Member States find it difficult to accept a similar or a larger contribution to the future budget, or, for that matter, a bigger overall figure for that budget, following Brexit. The draft prepared by the Commission promotes a formula, allowing for both the coverage of the gap generated by Brexit, based on increased national contributions and redeployments within the budget of the EU, and adequate financial allocations for new policies and priorities introduced on the European agenda over the past years by the Member States as well as a larger share for European financial appropriations, which are vital to keeping Europe competitive and relevant on a global scale.

**What are the most sensitive issues regarding the financing of investments in the EU's security and defence? Where does the EU need to make adjustments to its budget and actions?**

I would like to address mainly the issue of investments in the area of defence, where I could identify four domains where things are sensitive: prioritising European financing, its size, aspects of legality and of ethics of this financing, respectively. When I talk about the

sensitivity of prioritising investments in the field of defence, I take into account the fact that the selection must support the strategic course intended for the revival of the European Defence (in short, strengthening Europe's strategic autonomy). The investments must support the prime actors in the European defence industry, in order for them to be able to withstand the global competition in the field, as well as the small and medium size innovative enterprises. They must support the Member States whose defence industries differ very much, as well as cover the current capability deficit (including strategic enablers), and they must support the development of the defence capabilities for the future, which will imply transitioning to a fundamentally different generation of technology. These capabilities will be difficult to access under the prevailing paradigm where most of the generation of defence assets and technologies takes place strictly at national level. The investments must support conventional research and, increasingly so, "disruptive research".

To meet all these different requirements, the Commission has included in the EU's draft budget a proposal to allocate adequate funding to European defence, military mobility and relevant components of the research programmes. A reconfiguration of the budget exceeding the scale of a mere adjustment could effect significant changes to the type and magnitude of the level of ambition for European defence, or at least to the timeframe for the for implementing the goals set.

Regarding the legal aspects, the Commission has been receptive to suggestions aimed at consolidating safeguards of compliance with international law, in relation to any programme which is financing defence research and development out of the EU budget. It is also worth flagging up here the complexity of different national regimes of arms export control, an area largely beyond the Commission's competence.

Finally, and especially with regard to the achievements generated by the applications of Artificial Intelligence in the area of defence,



assurances and safeguards have been provided to the effect that human control of the deployment of resulting capabilities and technologies is preserved.

**How do you see the way the debate regarding the EU's multiple reform scenarios is currently articulated? To what extent do the EU Member States still have the energy and wish to redefine the future of the European construction?**

These are very appropriate questions, at a time, when the interplay between the Community method and the inter-governmental approach experiences certain shifts. Whereas, for now, it may look as several European policies are heavily shaped in national frameworks. I am convinced that the debate regarding the ways to increase the democratic legitimacy of the European institutions and the consolidation of European governance will follow its natural course, under the influence of two factors: (1) the existence of an institutional framework for approaching these matters (the Conference on the Future of Europe) and the ideas generated at the level of the European institutions (which are mainly included in the programmatic documents of the Commission led by Ursula von der Leyen); (2) the multiplication of crises and challenges – especially technological – on a global scale, which will all require an European response.

**To what extent is the evolution of the conflicts in the Middle East a catalyst for redefining the cooperation between Brussels and Washington? How can the EU get involved, beside NATO, in managing the situation in the Middle East?**

The EU is very well placed for playing a major part in dealing with conflicts in the Middle East, also due to the area's historical and geographic vicinity to Europe. The EU has the potential and the tools to facilitate and diplomatically mediate negotiations between the parties concerned, and has the ability and readiness to provide post-conflict assistance. Its position has constantly been principled and focused on strict compliance with applicable international law, as well as on the belief that there can be no other

solutions but negotiated ones to conflicts in the area.

This being said, the conflicts in the Middle East place the EU – perhaps more than any other foreign policy issues – in a difficult position when the articulation of a common European position is necessary. To this limitation, one has to add the difficulty for the EU to bring military resources to bear. While it is true that long lasting solutions to conflicts cannot be reached exclusively by military means, the absence of the military component from the range of instruments used to end a conflict does not make an efficient mediation easy. We need flexibility, enhanced versatility and adaptability, since political peace processes initiated in the area – to a great extent without notable evolutions, lately – are confronted with significant changes as of recently. This is a region where a more pragmatic and “muscular” policy would be required, where the continuous, backed up and multidirectional European presence is a must, taking into account the risk that solutions to the conflicts are articulated without European involvement, or the possible appearance of a political void which sooner or later gets filled in. In many of these conflicts, the configuration of the local or global powers involved, and the relations between them, proxies and local players have the tendency to change frequently. The Middle East is a good example for the numerous changes in the behaviour of the major global powers: high degree of unpredictability, ubiquitous rivalry, an international character and manifestation centred on self-interest.

In the light of these aspects, yes, the Middle East has the potential to redefine the cooperation and the relationship between global players, in general. The Transatlantic relationship, for its part, is going through a period of adaptation to this *new normal* of the global action, but it is important to mention that its fundamental parameters of partnership and congruent values cannot and will not be altered for that reason only.

## Interview with Sergiu Mişcoiu: “The Brexit Earthquake Was Read Differently Not Just by the Leaders of the Member States, but also by the EU Leaders”

The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland leaving the European Union and Euratom represents a major challenge to the EU member states and has complex economic, financial, social and political implications for the entire Community acquis.

Sergiu Mişcoiu, professor at the Faculty of European Studies, Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, offers us an overall picture regarding the perspectives and challenges related to the protection of the EU’s identity in the post-Brexit context, in the interview given to Vladimir Adrian Costea for the Geostrategic Pulse magazine.



**Vladimir Adrian Costea: Mr. Mişcoiu, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland leaving the EU brings back under discussion the future of the European Union. What is the lesson the EU is learning from Brexit?**

Sergiu Mişcoiu: The main lesson is that the process of European integration isn’t linear and one-way. Its dynamics depends on the countries’ willingness to be part of this process, on how

committed they are, and the supranational component is far from being able to really influence the direction these countries are headed to, or whether they are led by Eurosceptic or Euro-indifferent governments. Until Brexit, the possibility offered by the Treaty of Nice to a state to leave the European Union was considered absolutely hypothetical and highly improbable. However, Brexit is proof that there are sovereign national political bodies who decide for themselves. We can argue, of course that the British have been manipulated and subjected to a nationalist-populist rhetoric; however, they have undoubtedly voted in favour of leaving the EU.

**How can the EU be defined in the post-Brexit horizon? Do we have more or less Europe? Or, on the contrary, we have a multiple-speed Europe?**

The Brexit earthquake was interpreted differently not just by the leaders of the member states, but also by the leaders of the European Union: on one hand, sovereigntists such as Viktor Orban but also some pro-Europeans, thought it was necessary for the EU to adapt so as to allow more decisional autonomy to the member states, in order to avoid another “Exit”. On the other hand, European leaders such as Emmanuel Macron, believed that Brexit was a call to closing ranks even more, to emphasising the supra-national nature of the European institutions, and in fact to heading towards a European confederation (even though the use of this concept is avoided, so as not to shock the European public). This fracture line brought the relaunching of the European project to a stalemate, and Ursula von Der Leyen’s Commission is the result of this stalemate: the new commission has a programme aimed at conciliating these different views and does not

intend, for example, to start talks on a new, more integrative European treaty.

**To what extent does Brexit strengthen the feeling of solidarity amongst the EU member states? What are the main prospects and challenges related to the EU identity projection in a post-Brexit context?**

Among the EU founding states, as well as among the Northern states, Brexit has regenerated a sense of solidarity through the reaffirmation of the unity and the common values institutionally supported by the French-German nucleus: a social and a liberal Europe, open and directed towards jointly taking advantage of the benefits of globalisation. However, countries such as Poland, Hungary and, to a smaller extent Croatia, Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, interpreted Brexit as a message of consolidation of national sovereignty, as well as of (re)assertion of a common Eastern-European platform – a Europe of nations intended to be responsible and sovereign, following the Christian tradition and defender of rather “classical” values. This cleavage seems difficult to overcome, as it actually matches significantly different views and cultural, ideological, and geopolitical commitments, both strongly advertised by their proponents.



UK and European Union by Gatis Sluka, Latvijas Avize, Latvia, 21.11.2018 (Cagle Cartoons)

**What are the scenarios regarding the redefinition of a new cooperation framework between the EU and the United Kingdom?**

As the current *status quo* shows, neither of the two initial scenarios came true. We did not have a soft, carefully and consensually negotiated and timed Brexit, as we did not have a brutal divorce that wouldn't leave room for maintaining mutual arrangements, such as the negotiation of a flexible form of customs union. The Coronavirus crisis can, however further estrange Great Britain from the Continent, sadly at a moment coinciding with the timing initially planned for clarifying the post-Brexit framework for cooperation between the UK and the EU. Consequently, Britain is slowly overtaken by those who are in favour of straying further from the EU, an EU concerned more than ever with fighting against a pandemic which ravages the whole continent.

**What are the prospects for the EU expansion in the Balkans? What about Scotland joining the EU?**

An expansion of the EU should be decided during the mandate of the current Commission, so that the idea of enlargement and the positive dynamics of the EU are not compromised. Geopolitically speaking, Serbia - which is the country more likely to join the EU, is torn between the EU, Russia and China. North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina continue to face identity issues, as well as issues of political and institutional stability. Unexpectedly, one of the countries with the slowest post-communist transition, Albania, seems the closest to an eventual integration. As for Scotland, it can very well win the rematch against Great Britain and break away from it, should a secession referendum be agreed upon by the Parliament in London, which for now is not the case. So, the more the public agenda is busy with the worst sanitary crisis in the world's recent history, the more fanciful is today discussing the possibility of an eventually independent Scotland joining the EU.

# Romania and Hungary - Two Geographically Close Neighbours.

## The Romanian-Hungarian Relations between 1918 and 2018

**Dr. Alexandru GHIȘA**

The Versailles system of treaties between 1919 and 1920, following World War I, replaces imperialism with nationalism and practically ends the process – which lasted for the whole 19<sup>th</sup> century – of the formation of the modern European states. The first country to separate from the Ottoman Empire was Greece, after a long Russian-Ottoman war which ended with the Adrianopolis Peace Treaty in 1829 and recognised the autonomy of the newly emerged state.[1] It took 30 years for a new country to gain its independence from this “sick” empire – Romania. It emerged following an intra-European war, the War of Crimea, which ended with the Peace Treaty of Paris, in 1856. Based on this treaty, the European powers involved in the conflict – England, France, the Ottoman Empire, the Habsburg Empire, Prussia and Sardinia, on one hand, and the Russian Empire, the losing side, on the other hand, agreed to the idea of a union between the Principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia. Thus, on the 24<sup>th</sup> of January 1859, with the election in Iași and Bucharest of one ruler, Alexandru Ioan Cuza, the United Principalities become one country, modern Romania, established due to European interests in the Danube and Black Sea areas.[2] During the Oriental crisis between 1877 and 1878, Romania, led by Karl, Prince of Hohenzolern-Sigmaringen, joins Russia and declares war against the Ottoman Empire to obtain its independence on the battlefields of Bulgaria. According to the Berlin Treaty, in 1878, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro became independent states, and Bulgaria became an autonomous principality under Ottoman sovereignty.[3].

Following international recognition, Romania will establish diplomatic relations with the countries which recognised its independence,

including the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This multi-ethnic state, where two communities – the Austrians and the Hungarians – were the dominant nationalities, was a dual monarchy, led by a monarch, Franz Joseph, “Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary”, but which had two parliaments and two governments, in Vienna and Budapest. The *Austro-Hungarian Compromise in 1867* changes Hungary’s status in relation with the monarchy, becoming an autonomous kingdom, which however didn’t have its own armed forces, diplomatic service or budget. The three executive domains are considered common affairs; however, they remain in Vienna, the official capital of the empire state. The Romanians in the monarchy won’t recognise the duality and will proceed to organise their own national movement and set clear political objectives. To them Romania as a country was very important, as they will now have a mother country capable of defending their interests.

Consequently, on the 11<sup>th</sup>/23<sup>rd</sup> of September 1879, the Romanian diplomatic agency in Vienna was raised to the rank of Legation, and on the 2<sup>nd</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> of October the same year, Ion Bălăceanu presents to Emperor Franz Joseph his letter of credence as the Romanian envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary.[4] This certifies that Romania’s status is a distinctive issue of international law and the Austro-Hungarian Empire must treat it accordingly. In its turn, the Empire sends to Bucharest its own envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary, Ladislav Count of Hoyos, who, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of October/2<sup>nd</sup> of November 1879, presents his letter of credence to Prince Karl.[5] So, at that time, Romania established diplomatic relations with the Austro-Hungarian Empire as a matter of international law, as neither Austria nor Hungary were independent countries. These relations functioned from 1879 until August 1916, while between 1883 and 1916 they were

allies in what was known as the Triple Alliance. One of the main objectives of the Kingdom of Romania in its relationship with the Austro-Hungarian Empire was the situation of the Romanians in the Empire, believed to be, in 1910, over 3 million citizens, living in Transylvania, Banat, Hungary, but also Bukovina.[6] In the middle of World War I, Romania reaches the conclusion that its 37 year old hopes of improving the situation of the Romanians in the Empire do not stand a chance; on the contrary, in the area administered by the "Autonomous Kingdom of Hungary", the people have been treated as inferiors and oppressed by the dominant Hungarians. In that moment, the Romanian government, led by Ion I.C. Brătianu, took action, joined the Entente, and declared war on the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

On the 14<sup>th</sup>/27<sup>th</sup> of August 1916, the Romanian minister in Vienna, Edgar Mavrocordat, went to the Palace of the Ministry of Foreign Relations in Ballhausplatz, where the Kingdom of Romania declared war on the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It is the only declaration of war that Romania issued. It didn't declare war on the allies of the empire (Germany, Bulgaria and the Ottoman Empire) because it only sought the freedom of the Romanian provinces under the rule of the dual monarchy. The document contained the claims of the Romanian people, in full determination and dignity required by international protocol, stating that "the war which has taken almost all Europe brings to our attention the serious troubles which hinder our national development and the very existence of the countries; Romania, wishing to make a contribution to the end of the conflict and acknowledging the need to safeguard its race, finds itself in a position where it is forced to join those who are more able to ensure the accomplishment of its national unity. This is why it now sees itself at war with the Austro-Hungarian Empire." [7] The consequence of this declaration was the end of the diplomatic relations between Romania and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Legation in Vienna and the Romanian General Consulate in Budapest were closed. Romania's interests in Vienna were represented by the US Embassy and, starting

with 1917, by the Swiss Legation. [8]

The state of war between Romania and the Empire had direct repercussions on the military and political evolutions in Central Europe and, even more, on the final crisis of the dual monarchy. First of all, the treaties signed by the countries in the Entente – England, France and Russia – with Italy (26<sup>th</sup> of April 1915) and Romania (17<sup>th</sup> of August 1916) and the promises made to Serbia (August 1915) to get Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, Croatia and Fiume (Rijeka), question the strength of Austro-Hungary as an Empire, and even foresee its fall. [9]

Secondly, the migrant political leaders, representatives of the nations in the dual monarchy, get for their secessionist claims the support of the public opinion and the authorities from the member countries of the Entente. The Slovenians, the Serbians and the Croatians jumpstart a programme for the formation of a Southern Slavic country, and the Czechs and the Slovaks take action to establish a country of their own. In Paris, London, Rome and Bucharest, the Italians and the Romanians are acknowledged their demands to unite the countries they inhabit – Italy and Romania. [10]

The death of emperor Franz Joseph on the 21<sup>st</sup> of November 1916 and the attempts of his successor, Charles I as Emperor of Austria/ Charles IV as King of Hungary to meet the desires of peace of the peoples in the monarchy, won't be able to stop the fall of the empire. The events in 1917 in the USA – Woodrow Wilson's propagation of the principle "there is peace without victory" – and in Russia – the removal from power of the Russian tsar, Nicholas II, and the victory of the Bolshevik revolution – will encourage the new emperor. [11] His intention was to rebuild "the empire and the kingdom" state as a confederation; however, the government in Budapest fervently opposed him. Nevertheless, Charles I's public manifesto addressed to his "faithful peoples" on the 16<sup>th</sup> of October 1918 (published on the 17<sup>th</sup> of October 1918) [12] will start the devolution of the Empire. The imperial manifesto was positively received by the nations in the monarchy, except

for Hungary. The political leaders of nations correctly interpreted the document signed by the emperor as indicating a path toward devolution. All ethnic communities in the empire proceed to forming "national committees", which will take power from the central government and move it to the territories where they live. The "national committees" will take actions in order to establish their own state governments and won't take to the federal association model any more. The Czechs and the Slovaks, the Southern Slavs, the Polish and the Ruthenians, the Italians and the Romanians will reject the imperial forecast reformation and will state loudly and clearly their intentions to fight for all their national, political and territorial claims.[13] Even in Vienna, a hasty parliamentary session, which became known as the Provisional National Assembly, proclaims, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of October 1918, the Republic of German-Austria.[14] This action means that Austria separates from its empire, even before the other peoples are ready to do it.

These events determine the authorities in Budapest to operate towards secession from Vienna, but through keeping and defending the Habsburg crown, a symbol for the unity of all the lands under the rule of the "holy Hungarian crown". On the 25<sup>th</sup> of October 1918, Budapest forms a new government, under the leadership of Mihály Károlyi, which will be called the "National Hungarian Council" (NHC). Its name and objectives originate from the same imperial manifesto, meant to reform Austro-Hungary, and will work in the interest of the Hungarian nation by taking over all the prerogatives of the central establishment. Given the devolution of the central political and administrative structures in Vienna, the NHC did not have and could not claim its authority over the territories inhabited by Romanians, Croatians, Serbians, Slovenians, or Slovaks.[15]

In Transylvania, the Romanian National Party (RNP), led by Iuliu Maniu, adopts in Oradea, on the 12<sup>th</sup> of October 1918, a Declaration which challenges the right of the two houses in the Hungarian government to represent the interests of the Romanians in Transylvania and Hungary. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of October 1918, the

declaration is read and supported in the Parliament in Budapest by Prince Alexandru Vaida. Still in Budapest, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 1918, the National Romanian Council (NRC) was formed, and it had six members from the RNP – Vasile Goldiș, Aurel Lazăr, Teodor Mihali, Ștefan Cicio-Pop, Prince Alexandru Vaida, Aurel Vlad, and six social-democrats – Tiron Albani, Ioan Fluieraș, Enea Grapini, Iosif Jumanca, Iosif Renoiu, and Basiliu Surdu. The NRC is led by Ștefan Cicio-Pop, who will move the headquarters of this political body to Arad. The decisions taken by the NRC will be made known to the church and given the approval and support of the bishops Miron Cristea (orthodox, the future Patriarch of Romania) and Iuliu Hossu (Greek-catholic, future cardinal).

After the Romanian protest followed the Slovakian protest, bearing the same message, challenging the right of the Hungarian institutions to represent their national interests. As such, Mihály Károlyi presents in front of the members of the parliament the programme of the Independence Party regarding the matter of the nationalities. It recognises the Croatian right to separate, under the condition that it ensures Hungary's access to the sea and its keeping the port city of Fiume. Subject to attention is Oszkár Jászi's federalist programme to establish five states – Austria, Hungary, Poland, Bohemia and Illyria (the Southern Slavs) – which would form the Danube Confederation.[16] Consequently, Mihály Károlyi tells Oszkár Jászi, who was responsible for the issue of the nationalities within the NHC, to start negotiating with their representatives.

Budapest's project ignored the Romanian population, destined to remain within the borders of a Hungarian state. To persuade them, Mihály Károlyi summons at his residence a delegation made of Romanian representatives, while the Hungarian representatives were Ernő Gárámi and Oszkár Jászi. The Romanian delegation composed of Ștefan Cicio Pop, Aurel Lazăr, Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, Vasile Goldiș, Ioan Erdely, and Aurel Vlad raised the issue of an autonomous Transylvania, to which the Hungarians never agreed.[17] As the NRC had trouble taking over the "governing"

responsibilities of the territories inhabited by Romanians, on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November 1918 the Hungarian government is notified to allow the transfer of “all institutions and political, administrative, judicial, educational, religious, financial and military bodies” from the 23 districts and regions inhabited by Romanians to three other districts. The notification signed by Ștefan Cicio Pop, the president of the NRC, says that the NRC will be waiting for an answer by the 12<sup>th</sup> of November 1918, 18.00 hrs.[18] The document is looked into during the Hungarian parliamentary session on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 1918, who see it as an ultimatum. To avoid a Romanian uprising, which could lead to the Entente or the Romanian forces occupying the country, Oszkár Jászi proposes starting negotiations with the Romanians. The talks take place in Arad, on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of November 1918, following the diplomatic rules of equality, as the NRS and the NHC were established by the same criteria as the “national councils” of all the nationalities in the fallen empire.[19] After two days of negotiations, the Hungarian minister concludes that the Romanian delegation wants “the sovereignty of the Romanian nation” and sees this issue as “very serious”. Oszkár Jászi says that only the peace conference has the ability to decide over matters regarding state law and proposes a transition deal until the conference.[20] At the end of the reunion, the Hungarian dignitary understands that his actions are unsuccessful, and asks Iuliu Maniu to state clearly what the Romanians want, while the latter gave him a straight answer: “total separation”. [21]

After the failure of the Romanian-Hungarian talks in Arad, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 1918, the NRC called on the Great National Assembly in Alba Iulia, which would take place on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1918. The delegations were chosen during popular meetings. 1228 people were elected as delegates from all social and professional strata – teachers, priests, peasants, lawyers, soldiers, students etc. Vasile Goldiș read the resolution regarding the union of Transylvania, Banat, Crișana and Maramureș, which was voted unanimously; all 100,000 Romanians, present in the Field of Horea, in Alba

Iulia, received it with enthusiasm.[22] So, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1918, the Romanians from what used to be the Austro-Hungarian Empire democratically exercised their right to self-determination, conferring legitimacy and durability to the union with Romania of the territories they inhabited.[23]

The shock of the decisions taken in Alba Iulia made the government in Budapest decide, on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> of December 1918, to approach the issue of establishing and defending an ethnically pure Hungary, in an area where Hungarians represented a majority.[24] Proclaiming a Hungarian independent state, separated from Austria, implicitly meant denouncing the *Austro-Hungarian Compromise from 1867*, and all the consequences of this act, including those concerning Transylvania. The affiliation and the future of this territory was decided by the Romanian majority. The new Hungarian state, established in an ethnically pure area, was not perceived as a Hungarian endeavour. The Hungarian political and intellectual elites set as their national objective the reestablishment of the former feudal Hungarian kingdom, or what they called “historical Hungary”. The perspective and later the certainty of losing the territories which used to belong to the “holy crown” made then “Provisional President of the Hungarian Democratic Republic”, count Mihály Károlyi, play a last card, the red Bolshevik card. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 1919 he peacefully transferred the power “to the people”, to the Hungarian communists and socialists. On the 21<sup>st</sup>/22<sup>nd</sup> of March 1919, Béla Kun, the leader of the communists, who favours an “ideological and military alliance with the Russian soviets” and opposes the imperialist Entente, takes over the newly founded “National Governing Council” in Budapest.[25] The decisive Romanian military intervention that took Budapest on the 4<sup>th</sup> of August 1919 was the only one able to overthrow Béla Kun’s regime and protect Central Europe from communist danger. After the communist revolutionary regime who brought the “red terror”, Budapest establishes a counterrevolutionary government led by Miklós Horthy, who, in his turn brought the “white terror” as a right radical response to oppose left radicalism.[26] He dissolves the

republic proclaiming the Kingdom of Hungary, with himself as regent.

Historically speaking, in the fall of 1918, democracy won against the dual monarchy of Austria and Hungary. The treaties in Versailles won't do anything but recognise *de jure* a *de facto* situation – the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This is the “imperial state” that fell in 1918. The peace treaty between the allies and Austria, signed on the 10<sup>th</sup> of September 1919 in Germain-en-Laye and by Romania, the Kingdom of Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia three months later, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of December 1919, confirmed the disappearance of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. This treaty recognises Austria as a republic and an independent and sovereign state. The allied and associated powers announce that they will resume their diplomatic relations with the Republic of Austria. The treaty also modified the name of the country – from the Republic of German Austria to the Republic of Austria – to avoid any association with Germany, but also to highlight the continuity of Austria with regard to the Western half of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, thus making it responsible for the world war.[27]

On that note, on the 4<sup>th</sup> of June 1920, in Trianon, a peace treaty is signed with Hungary, which is recognised as an independent and sovereign state, however, in continuity with the Western half of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, it is made responsible for the world war. The Treaty of Trianon was signed by 23 countries – Hungary on one hand and 11 European countries on the other, and the allied and associated powers, among which Romania and three newly established states – Poland, Czechoslovakia and the Kingdom of Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia – and other 12 non-European countries – the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the South-African Union, India, Japan, China, Cuba, Nicaragua, Panama and Siam. [28] Romania was represented by Nicolae Titulescu, a former minister, and by Dr. Ion Cantacuzino, minister of state, Hungary by Ágoston Bernárd, welfare and labour minister, and Alfred Drasche-Lázár de Thorda, envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary.[29]

The Treaty of Trianon was not a treaty between Hungary and Romania, but a treaty between Hungary and the rest of the world. The settlement of the dispute between Romania and Hungary is important to both states; however, it represents only a small part of the treaty.[30] Its preamble focuses on the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and, through Article 73, recognises Hungary's independence. So, the Treaty of Trianon represents the birth of Hungary as a modern, independent and sovereign state, a distinctive subject to international law. The Treaty also states that once it is implemented, the state of war ends and the allies and associates can establish official relations with Hungary. Article 27 establishes the borders between Hungary and Austria, the Kingdom of Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia, Czechoslovakia and Romania. This article established the legality of the separation from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, not Hungary, of the territories mostly inhabited by Romanians - Transylvania, Banat, Crişana and Maramureş. Article 29 specifies that the borders were to be established in the field, by delimitation commissions, fully empowered to determine the most exact lines, according to the existing districts and local economic interests.[31]

The fact that the Hungarian borders have been well traced is proven by their resistance in time. Anyway, out of all central European countries, Hungary is unique as the two greatest geopolitical powers in this area, Germany and the USSR had no territorial claims over it, nor did its neighbours, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia. Therefore, Hungary did not register any imminent military threat or danger to its territory or sovereignty.[32]

The Romanian Parliament on the 17<sup>th</sup> (by the senate) and the 26<sup>th</sup> of August (the Chamber of Deputies) ratified the Treaty of Trianon. The Hungarian Parliament ratified the treaty on the 14<sup>th</sup> of November 1920 and the Hungarian Government, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March 1921. The peace treaty with Hungary was implemented on the 26<sup>th</sup> of July 1921, after it had been previously ratified by the other signatory countries.[33]

In the period following the implementation of



the Treaty of Trianon, Romania and Hungary negotiated for the establishment of diplomatic and good neighbourly relations. Two days after its signing, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 1920, so before the ratification and implementation, count Pál Teleki, the foreign minister of the Hungarian government led by Simonyi-Semadan, and starting with the 19<sup>th</sup> of July 1920 Hungarian prime minister, devised the ground lines of the relation with Romania: 1) Hungary will return the territories around the borders inhabited by Hungarians and Swabians; 2) autonomy for the Hungarians, Szekelys and German-speaking Saxons in Transylvania; 3) a liberal agreement regarding the rights of the minorities; 4) Hungary will have mining rights over the mines in Maramureş. In exchange for these concessions, Pál Teleki would have been willing to give up Romania's 9 billion Crowns debt, which it had to pay as compensation.[34] Of course, these territorial claims and demands for autonomy for Transylvania were dismissed in Bucharest, in exchange for friendship with Hungary. The necessity of establishing diplomatic relations with Hungary was acknowledged both in Bucharest as well as in Budapest. French diplomats had to intervene in both capitals so real steps could be taken.[35]

So, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of August 1920, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bucharest proposes the establishment, in Budapest, of a Romanian "diplomatic commissioner", who could later be accredited as a minister plenipotentiary. This mission is entrusted to colonel Traian Stircea, royal adjutant. At the same time, Romania proposes sending to Budapest a delegate in charge with the issues related to the implementation of the amendments of the peace treaty. The person assigned for this is Ion Lapedatu, general secretary of the finance department in the "Directory Council of Transylvania", led by Iuliu Maniu.[36] Hungary responds and accepts, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of August 1920, the appointment of the two persons and makes its intentions known that it wishes to assign a qualified diplomat to represent Hungary in Bucharest.[37] A royal decree appointed Traian Stircea "envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary" and sent him, on the

21<sup>st</sup> of February 1921, to Budapest to take over the Romanian Legation there.[38]

At the same time, Budapest took similar action to establish a Hungarian legation in Romania. The communication process goes through Vienna where there were a Romanian and a Hungarian legation. The first nominated diplomat accepted by the Romanians, in October 1920, was Szilárd Masirevici, a former Austro-Hungarian diplomat who would instead take over the Hungarian legation in Vienna.[39] Under these circumstances, the Hungarians requested the nomination in Bucharest of a chargé d'affaires, in the person of András Hory, who would also serve as a counsellor within the legation.[40] He would start his mission in Bucharest on the 15<sup>th</sup> of February 1921 and would lead a team made of Béla Szentirmay, general consul, Emil Szilas, vice-consul, and Jozséf Takács-Tolvay, military observer, but who would be in a counsellor's position, as Hungary, according to the Treaty of Trianon, was not allowed to send military missions abroad.[41] As the head of the Hungarian legation in Bucharest, the government in Budapest would assign Baron Iván Rubido-Zichy, who would come later.[42]

Both diplomatic missions, the Romanian one in Budapest and the Hungarian one in Bucharest, had to first normalise the bilateral relations and the implementation of the amendments foreseen in the Treaty of Trianon. The diplomatic relations between Romania and Hungary were the result of peace, which made itself known in the bilateral relations, and an institutional adaptation to Hungary's new status as a distinctive subject to international law. The foreign policies of the two countries were in opposition ever since the beginning – the Kingdom of Hungary, ruled by its regent Miklós Horthy, adopted a revision policy of the treaties signed in Paris, between 1919 and 1920, while the Kingdom of Romania, ruled by King Ferdinand, acted to the defence of the *status quo* established in Paris, and was willing to build a system of alliances which would serve that purpose.

For almost 100 years, the main subject of the relations between Romania and Hungary isn't

good neighbourliness, but the Treaty of Trianon. If in Romania this treaty is seen due to its positive effects – first of all recognising the union in Alba Iulia, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1918, in Hungary the political and intellectual elites see the influence of the articles regarding the borders of the newly emerged states within the ruined, former Austro-Hungarian Empire. The constant opinion that the Treaty of Trianon was a great injustice to Hungary, expressed by all parties and civic and professional organisations, no matter their political beliefs, hindered the country's relationship with its neighbours and others as well. At the level of the elites as well as at the level of the Hungarian public opinion, there are two themes regarding national interest – condemning the Treaty of Trianon and defending Hungarians outside the [country](#).<sup>[43]</sup> These two objectives were very visible throughout the whole interwar period (1920-1940), a little bit less during the communist regime (1945-1989), and they peaked in the post-communist period. On the 4<sup>th</sup> of June 1990, the Parliament of the Republic of Hungary commemorated the Trianon episode with a moment of silence, and on the 19<sup>th</sup> of June 2001, the Parliament in Budapest motivated the law on the status of the Hungarians outside the borders as a reparation for the losses caused by the Treaty of Trianon.<sup>[44]</sup> Even more, the 4<sup>th</sup> of June is considered the Day of National Unity.<sup>[45]</sup> All political events in Hungary, which are accompanied by protests, make a show of a whole range of “Trianon” claims. Even after 100 years, Budapest is still looking for a party or an alliance which could be made responsible for Trianon. It is justified to say that a “Trianon syndrome” manifests itself throughout all Hungarian social spheres.<sup>[46]</sup>

The promoter of this syndrome was the regent admiral Miklós Horthy, who instated in Hungary a parliamentary, autocratic regime, permanently asking from the Parliament in Budapest increased prerogatives for the institution of the regent. During the whole interwar period, from 1920 up to 1941, Horthy ruled Hungary with an almost royal authority. Practically, the Treaty of Trianon was signed under his mandate as the head of the Hungarian state. The Hungarians

from the Austro-Hungarian Empire lost two thirds of the territories from the former autonomous kingdom, which had 13 million inhabitants, coming from various ethnic groups (Romanians, Slovaks, Serbians, Croats, Ruthenians, Germans, Gypsies and Jews, including 3 million Hungarians), all of whom would become citizens of Austria (Burgenland), Czechoslovakia (Highlands/ Felvidek), Romania (Transylvania, the Romanian Banat, Crişana/ Partium, Maramureş) and Yugoslavia (the Serbian Banat, and Vojvodina/Bacska in Hungarian). This loss caused a lot of discontent, which resulted in the beginning of an increase of revisionist beliefs, only to later turn into a national obsession.<sup>[47]</sup>

Thus, the revision of the peace treaties in Versailles became a constant objective of the Hungarian foreign policy. The young diplomatic apparatus in Budapest saw revisionism as a priority, recurrent in the relations with the countries which had territories which had once belonged to the feudal Hungarian kingdom – Romania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. A document drafted by Miklós Horthy in October 1919 said “Hungary's number one enemy is Romania because we have the highest claims over its territories and because it is our most powerful neighbour. This is why the main objective of our foreign policy is settling our issues with Romania by going to arms.” He believed that “until the right moment to strike arrives, peaceful relations with Romania must be maintained; however, we must use all opportunities to isolate it diplomatically, and Transylvania must have at all times an active irredentist organisation”. With regard to Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, the same document stated, “The way to satisfy our territorial revisionist objectives is to encourage the secessionist tendencies of the Croats and people from the Sudeten region and to take direct military actions against those countries”.<sup>[48]</sup> Only a carrier officer could have set these kind of foreign policy objectives for unexperienced diplomats.

In order to achieve its objective, Hungary needed a powerful ally, a supporter of the revision of the treaties from Paris, and it could

only be Germany. At the same time, Hungary needed the League of Nations to consolidate its status and to provide foreign financial support. On one side, the conflictual demands of the alignment with a German revisionist group, anti-League and on the other, with an anti-revisionist League of Nations, were among the first Hungarian parallel foreign policies. Miklós Horthy was secretly working on an alliance with Germany in order to achieve his revisionist goals, cooperating with the military segment and using his personal relations with Erich Ludendorff and Hans von Seeckt. Furthermore, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs he contacted London and Washington to persuade Great Britain and the USA to agree to the fact that returning old territories is necessary to ensure stability in the region.[49] Both endeavours meant to achieve the same revisionist goal, which is why Miklós Horthy will adopt an authoritarian and fascist regime, similar to Benito Mussolini's in Italy, way before Adolf Hitler and Nazism became famous in Germany, leaders to whom he will become very close. As part of Miklós Horthy's inner circle, we must also mention the communist leader, Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin. The consolidation of united Romania, which now possessed Transylvania and Bessarabia, pushed Hungary towards forming a *de facto* alliance with the USSR, against it. Admiral Horthy and his regime managed to establish a *gentlemen's agreement* regarding Romania. Ever since 1919 Miklós Horthy intended to ask for Moscow's military support against Romania, taking steps towards it by naming, in 1938 as Chief of Defence Staff, a former commander of Béla Kun's Red Army, and Moscow declared in 1941 that it was willing to ignore Hungary's war declaration if its involvement wasn't "active". Moreover, Vyacheslav M. Molotov, Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars for Foreign Relations, informed the Hungarian government that "in the future, Hungary could count on Soviet support regarding Transylvania, so long as it maintains its neutrality in the German-Soviet war".[50]

Romania's position and status after World War I changed considerably. Following the Union in 1918, Romania became a medium sized country

in Europe, with a surface of 295.049 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of 14.7 million people in 1919, which in 1930 reached 18,057,028 inhabitants. The Romanians were 71.9% of the population, and among the 20 minorities the Hungarians represented 7.9% (1,425,507 inhabitants in 1930).[51] At the same time Romania changed its neighbours. Three of them, Hungary, Soviet Russia and Bulgaria, had territorial claims and acted as enemies. The Bolshevik government notified Bucharest, on the 13<sup>th</sup>/26<sup>th</sup> of January 1918 that it ended all diplomatic ties with Romania, and on the 5<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> of April 1918, Soviet Russia declared that it did not recognise Bessarabia's union to Romania.[52] A few years later, what was to become the future USSR will adopt a revisionist view over the Paris treaties, because it had not been invited to join their signing. Situated in the area of extended Central Europe – from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea – between the states which formed the *cordon sanitaire* between Germany and the USSR, the Romanian diplomacy chooses to form an alliance with five of them: Poland, Czechoslovakia, the Kingdom of Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia (which would later become Yugoslavia) and Greece. This diplomatic initiative of the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Take Ionescu, is agreed with and supported by France and Great Britain, powers which were involved in the signing of the treaties in Versailles.

Consequently, the relationship between Romania and Hungary is marked by a period of divergences, which linger even when they are part of the same alliances – between 1941 and 1944, during World War II, between 1945 and 1989, during the communist regime and even in the post-communist era, until today, when they are both members of the EU and NATO. Taking into account the post-Versailles international context and Hungary's double play, Romania must overcome bilateral relations and build a multilateral diplomatic network of relations. The first steps towards this objective head for Poland, with which Romania signs a political and a military, defensive convention (between 1920 and 1921), both countries feeling the need to protect themselves from the USSR.[53] The

agreements between Romania and Poland remain bilateral as Poland had a problem with Czechoslovakia and did not wish to enter a multiple alliance with the latter in it.

The first regional alliance in Central Europe is between Czechoslovakia, the Kingdom of Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia and the Kingdom of Romania, in the spirit of the agreement of the "Society of Nations", which will be called the Little Alliance, or the Little Entente. All three states envisaged their defence in case of an unprovoked attack from Hungary, which was slowly fulfilling the obligations from the treaty of Trianon. Moreover, as states formerly part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, all three of them were interested in preventing the eventual rise of the Empire under Habsburg rule. The Little Entente (1920-1921) was rushed due to Charles of Habsburg's attempt to take over the Hungarian throne (March 1921). The Little Entente sent Hungary an ultimatum, which warned it that if the former king does not leave the country by the 6<sup>th</sup> of April 1921, it would use military means to ensure the country upholds the Treaty of Trianon.[54] A second attempt coming from Charles IV of Habsburg to take over the Hungarian throne (21<sup>st</sup> of October/1<sup>st</sup> of November 1921) is thwarted by the energetic attitude of this tripartite alliance. Romania envisaged that this alliance should enable the creation of a system which could coordinate foreign policy actions and level the organisation of the military. The Little Entente was meant to be a peace effort, a defence instrument of the *status quo* established by the treaties in Versailles.

The Little Entente and its actions against Hungary, which proved effective, pushed this country towards Germany. Hungary practically becomes a compatible ally with Germany, both having as their main objective in their foreign policies the revision of the treaties from Versailles. Germany's trust in Hungary began to fade in the summer of 1938, when Budapest accused Germany of having lacked preparedness in its attempt to break Czechoslovakia apart. Only after the minister of foreign affairs, Kalmán Darányi, sent Hitler a personal message from Horthy, which showed his desire to leave the League of Nations, to join the Anti-Comintern

Pact and to sign a new long-term deal, did the German chancellor intervene and gave Hungary southern Slovakia, during the first Vienna Arbitration (3<sup>rd</sup> of November 1938).[55] On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February 1939, the Hungarian Government signed the Anti-Comintern Pact, and two weeks later Horthy was ordered by Hitler to occupy Ruthenia, a territorial acquisition which increased Hungary's debt towards Germany. Budapest answered this with its decision to withdraw from the League of Nations.[56]

In Bucharest, the Romanian diplomats saw the communist Soviet Union and Nazi Germany as the greatest threats to Europe. In the meantime, Hungary managed to establish an early alliance with Nazi Germany and reached an understanding with the USSR for the partition of Romania. Taking this into account, the German-Soviet non-aggression pact, signed on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 1939 – The Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact and its secret additional protocol – intensified the extremely complex political environment in which Romania was forced to operate. Thus, in the summer of 1940, Romania was under extreme pressure from two of the powers which were at the peak of their political and military might – Nazi Germany and the communist Soviet Union. They were both against the system of treaties signed in Versailles and saw Romania as the result of those treaties. Consequently, Romania wasn't well perceived – neither by Berlin nor by Moscow. Both capitals encouraged Hungary's revisionist policy against Romania. The Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact was very effective in Poland's case, which was attacked by Germany on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 1939, and by USSR' Red Army, on the 17<sup>th</sup> of September 1939. The direct consequence of this double aggression was Poland's dissolution and its division between Germany and the Soviet Union.

The Polish precedent threatened Romania. Under the circumstances in which Germany proved its loyalty towards its cooperation with the USSR, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 1940, Moscow delivers Romania an ultimatum, summoning it to give back Bessarabia and North Bukovina.[57] Politically and militarily isolated, and upon Germany's advice to "unconditionally agree to

Russian terms", Romania accepts the terms of Transylvania.[62] evacuation disposed by Moscow.[58] Giving up Three rounds of Romanian-Hungarian Bessarabia, North Bukovina and the Hertza negotiations took place in Turnu-Severin – on region surprised Budapest, but also encouraged the 16<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of August 1940.[63] The it to start an offensive to take back Transylvania. two governments assigned one delegate each – the Romanians appointed Valer Pop, and the Hungary; the first to win, the second to save Hungarians appointed András Hory. They both itself. So, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 1940, Romania gives had full power of decision. Each delegation had up French guarantees and withdraws from the four experts. According to the Hungarians, League of Nations. Hitler's response to these Romania had to cede 2/3 of the territory it took during the union on the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1018 actions repeats the solution of the Bessarabian (68,000 km<sup>2</sup>, 3,900,000 inhabitants, out of whom 2,200,000 were Romanians and 1,200,000 were Hungarians). Hungary would crisis: King Carol II is advised to start negotiating with Hungary and Bulgaria on matters regarding territorial claims and proceed to give up certain territories.[59] leave Romania Banat and South Transylvania. These exaggerated claims ensured the failure of In the following period, high officials from Budapest and Bucharest travel from Berlin to Rome to support their interests. The way they were received, and the results of those visits are significant for what was to come. The fact that on the 9<sup>th</sup> of July 1940 Hitler, Ribbentrop and Ciano received the Hungarian Prime Minister, Pál Teleki, and the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs, István Csáky, and the fact that Carol II was denied his visit to the Reich Chancellor, was a warning to Romania.[60] heads of the German and Italian diplomatic missions in Budapest and Bucharest. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of August 1940 Hungary answers affirmatively to the question whether is willing or not to accept the arbitration. Romania, through its Crown Council convened in Bucharest, communicates its agreement on the morning of the 30<sup>th</sup> of August 1940, at 4.20 a.m. On the same day, at 13.00, Romania receives a series of notes from Germany and Italy, which guarantee its territorial integrity and the inviolability of its state territory, and the Romanian Government agreed with these guarantees. At 13.30-14.00 the arbitration decision is signed in Belvedere Palace, without allowing the presentation of the two parties involved. Joachim von Ribbentrop and Galeazzo Ciano signed as arbitrators, for Romania signed Mihail Manoilescu and for Hungary, István Csáky. Valer Pop and Pál Teleki acted as witnesses.[64] Following the second arbitration in Vienna (30<sup>th</sup> of August 1940), Romania lost and Hungary won what will be known as North Transylvania, 43,492 km<sup>2</sup> out of the complete or

partial territory where there was a total of 14 districts – Bihor, Ciuc, Cluj, Maramureş, Someş, Mureş, Năsăud, Odorhei, Sălaj, Satu Mare, Trei Scaune, Târnava Mare, Târnava Mică, and Câmpulung Moldovenesc – with a population of over 2.600.000 inhabitants, out of whom most were Romanians.[65] (According to the map attached to the Decision of Arbitration [66]).

The opinions in Budapest and Bucharest were almost unanimous: the border was artificial, and economically, geographically, strategically and from the point of view of the communication lines, was considered illogical.[67] To the Hungarian public opinion, the second arbitration in Vienna was a partial reparation of the unjust Treaty of Trianon. The reason for this was that two thirds of the Hungarian population in Romania (1.1 million) returned to Hungary, however, a larger number of Romanian ethnics (1.2 million) ended up under Hungarian rule. A presentation of Hungary, which was published in Budapest, in German, said that “the partition of Transylvania was practically a solution to the issue of the Hungarian minorities, but, at the same time, it gave birth to another even more serious issue, that of the Romanian minorities in Hungary”.[68] This is why the Romanian government at that time believed this solution was temporary. Moreover, the decisions taken in Vienna on the 30<sup>th</sup> of August 1940 haven’t been promulgated in Bucharest neither by Ion Antonescu, who assumed the leadership of the Romanian government (starting with the 5<sup>th</sup> of September 1940), neither by King Michael I, so they can be further considered legally null and void. Hitler’s statement when he met with Ion Antonescu on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November 1940, in Berlin that “history won’t stop in 1940” encouraged the Romanian dignitary to act in order to take back the lost part of Transylvania. [69] General Antonescu could not have known that Hitler said the same thing to the Hungarian ambassador in Berlin, but with a different meaning.[70] Such an ambiguous statement for both the Romanian and Hungarian dignitaries fully confirms that divided Transylvania became an essential tool for Hitler, to use both against Romania, as well as against Hungary, in order to tie the two countries more to Third Reich.

One of the most serious consequences of the Vienna Award, from the summer of 1940, was expediting the competition between Romania and Hungary to win over Nazi Germany.[71] In 1940 and in the first part of 1941, Germany managed to significantly influence Romania’s actions by manipulating its competition with Hungary. The interest regarding the Eastern Campaign (against the USSR), the difference between the armed forces and the resource (mostly oil) and agricultural contribution favoured Romania over Hungary.[72] While Romania had good reasons to take part in the war against the USSR – to free Bessarabia, North Bukovina and the Hertza region – Hungary entered the war only to prove its loyalty towards Germany, to keep North Transylvania and to eventually get South Transylvania. It was highly unlikely because in Vienna, Romania’s borders had been guaranteed by both Germany and Italy, and the Romanian government agreed to those guarantees. However, Hungary’s borders had not been guaranteed, which made Hungary turn to Moscow once more, the great absentee from the arbitration in Vienna. The guarantees granted to Romania bothered the USSR deeply, because they limited its way towards the west and south, at the border with the Prut and the Danube.[73] The USSR’s distress because it was not invited to Vienna was expressed by V.M. Molotov, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of September 1940, to the head of the German diplomatic mission in Moscow, F. W. Von Der Schulenburg. The Soviet dignitary criticised his partner over the fact that Germany showed lack of loyalty towards the commitment it took in 1939, and he referred to the two neighbours of the Soviet Union (Hungary and Romania) and to the fact that giving guarantees to Romania was against the wishes and the interests of the Soviet government, clearly mentioning South Bukovina, which the USSR had wanted from Romania. Perhaps the distress of the Soviet leadership regarding the arbitration in Vienna with concern to Transylvania is why Stalin and Molotov decided to end World War II or simply cancel it. [74]

The competition between Romania and Hungary, both allies within the Axis, caused

different actions coming from the two countries in connection to the short and medium term development of their bilateral relations. During the next four years the relations between Hungary and Romania will witness considerable estrangement, which determined László Nagy, the Hungarian ambassador in Bucharest, to declare in May 1941 that they “rather resemble the relations between Greenland and Antarctica”.<sup>[75]</sup> The statement is not far from the truth. Practically, after the withdrawal of the Romanian troops and administration from North Transylvania, and the immediate occupation of the territory by the Hungarian army, which establish in the region military leadership, economic and cultural cooperation is completely blocked. There still were formal diplomatic relations, but both governments – the one in Budapest and the one in Bucharest – were waiting for the opportune moment to start a fight – either peaceful, with the help of Germany and Italy, or a possible armed conflict.<sup>[76]</sup>

Both countries hoped to be able to settle their scores following the peace after World War II. So, in the beginning of 1944, Romania and Hungary are looking for a way to come out of the war. They are both trying to receive guarantees from the Allies – Great Britain, the USA and the Soviet Union – regarding their sovereignty and territorial integrity. At the same time, both countries were trying to leave the Axis honourably while still maintaining a “friendly” attitude towards Germany so as not to be labelled as traitors.

Romania takes the first step on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 1944, when King Michael I removes field marshal Ion Antonescu from power and joins the allies. Romania told Germany it would get out of the war and gave the German troops 15 days to leave the country. After they initially agreed to it, the German army bombed Bucharest. As a response, the entire Romanian army, including its high ranking officers, launched a counteroffensive which lead to driving the German forces out of the capital and out of the south-eastern part of the country, before the Soviet troops entered Bucharest. The Romanians kept on fighting for the Allies against the Axis, contributing with 25 divisions, all the way to the

end of the war in May 1945.<sup>[77]</sup> On the 30<sup>th</sup> of August 1944, Romania breaks all diplomatic ties with Hungary.<sup>[78]</sup>

Hungary told Germany that it wanted to get out of the war on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 1944, and gave the German forces 15 days to leave their country. An overwhelming number of Hungarian superior officers stood for the Germans, and Miklós Horthy, as head of state, was persuaded to entrust Hungary’s leadership to a pro-German government.<sup>[79]</sup> After this, the Hungarian army crossed the border into Vienna Award Transylvania, attacking the Romanian army. From that moment on, Romania and Hungary were at war. The Hungarian army will fight alongside the German forces until the winter of 1944/1945, when Soviet and Romanian troops enter Budapest and liberated Hungary from the Horthy-Fascist regime.

Starting with 1944, while still at war, but with a Red Army in full offensive, Moscow takes over the issue of Transylvania, because it wanted control over both Romania and Hungary, and wanted to take them out of the war against it. The part which Adolf Hitler played in using Transylvania as leverage against Bucharest and Budapest, will be taken over by “comrade” Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, the communist leader of the Soviet Union. He would prove even more efficient than the Nazi leader – he would manage turn both Romania and Hungary into communist countries and have them under the sphere of influence of the USSR, both taking part for almost half a century in what would later be called the “Eastern Bloc”.

While setting the grounds for peace after the war, the Soviet leaders assign the “Litvinov Commission” (the Peace Office within the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs in Moscow) with answering the following question: what is Transylvania, and to whom should it belong? In 1944 this Commission took into account three solutions:

- North Transylvania, taken from Romania through the second Vienna Award on the 30<sup>th</sup> of August 1940, is returned to Romania.
- North Transylvania stays with Hungary.
- Transylvania becomes independent, under

the patronage of the USSR.[80]

The most supported option was that of an independent Transylvania, outside any union or federation, however proposed by the "Litvinov Commission" as temporary, until clearing all the possibilities of sincere cooperation with Romania, or Hungary. This option was advantageous, as it strengthened neither Romania nor Hungary, the USSR's neighbours. Only the action taken by Romania on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 1944 when it decided to join the allies and fight against Nazi Germany and Horthy Hungary will determine Stalin to ignore the option of an independent Transylvania. He goes back to an older idea of his, expressed in December 1944, during the meeting with the British delegation led by Anthony Eden – Romania's expansion at the expense of Hungary and "Transylvania's restitution (or at least part of it) to Romania".[81] This formula enables Stalin to keep Bucharest under control and give Budapest hope until the conclusion of the peace treaties. The "Litvinov Commission" will provide a point for Stalin's option – Transylvania can be returned to Romania "in exchange for solid guarantees that it would cooperate closely and on a long term with the USSR and permanently give up its claims over Bessarabia and Bukovina".[82]

During the peace negotiations following World War II, both Romania and Hungary are dealt with together as former German satellites, considered a defeated state, under the influence of the USSR, agreed upon by Great Britain, the USA and France. Even if after the meeting in Moscow between Joseph V. Stalin and Winston Churchill (9-18 October 1945), when they agree on the percentage of the spheres of influence, and Romania will have the worst fate of all (the USSR would have 90%, while the Allies 10% – compared to Hungary 50%/50%), both countries would benefit from the same treatment. Furthermore, the issue of Transylvania is attributed to Romania, without being dealt with during the Peace Conference in Paris in 1947. The USSR manages to impose during the Peace Treaty with Romania, signed on the 10<sup>th</sup> of February 1947, that the Soviet-Romanian border would be the same as it was

on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1941 (Art.1), following the takeover of Bessarabia, North Bukovina and the Hertza region, and the border between Romania and Hungary remains as it was on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1938, before the Award in Vienna on the 30<sup>th</sup> of August 1940, declared "null and void" (Art.2). The text of the treaty mentions the cessation of all hostilities between Romania and Hungary (Art.8).[83] On the same day, the 10<sup>th</sup> of February 1947, the Peace Treaty with Hungary was signed, having similar provisions regarding the borders and the cessation of hostilities.

After, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of July 1945, Romania signs an economic convention with Hungary, and on the 13<sup>th</sup> of April 1946 signs the first Romanian-Hungarian economic agreement, and only after the signing of the peace treaties, on the 5<sup>th</sup> of November 1947, did the governments in Bucharest and Budapest decide to restart their diplomatic relations by turning their political missions into legations.[84] Furthermore, after a series of visits from the heads of the governments – Petru Groza in Budapest (3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> of May 1947), Lajos Dinnyés in Bucharest (23<sup>rd</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> of November 1947), and again Petru Groza in Budapest (22<sup>nd</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> of January 1947) – they come to sign a friendship cooperation and mutual assistance agreement between Romania and Hungary. In this document, the parties agreed on a common friendship policy, as well as on taking joint international actions in the spirit of the UN Charter.[85]

As a consequence of the decisions taken by the winning powers, following World War II (1<sup>st</sup> of September 1939-9<sup>th</sup> of May 1945), Romania and Hungary enter again the same system of alliances, this time under the patronage of the USSR, which imposed in both Bucharest and Budapest communist regimes. Under the security umbrella of the USSR, Romania and Hungary become two "sister countries", with "brotherly" political regimes. They will both join the same military alliance – the Treaty of Warsaw (starting with the 11<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> of May 1955) and will cooperate within the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> January 1949) following the rules set by Moscow. Practically both countries will be under Soviet military occupation – Romania from 1944 until



1958, and Hungary from 1945 until 1991.

Contrary to appearances, Romania and Hungary will continue their competition for the same region of Transylvania. Even if it was given to Romania, the Soviet leader J.V. Stalin still plays his part as an arbitrator by encouraging Hungary to demand territorial concessions at the borders, and an autonomous regime for the Hungarians outside its borders. Moreover, in May 1952, when the communist leadership in Bucharest sent to Moscow, for approval, the project for the new constitution, it was changed by Stalin and Molotov imposing the creation of a "Hungarian Autonomous Region" (HAR). Therefore, Article 19 of the new Romanian communist constitution mentions, "the HAR was a region entirely inhabited by Hungarian population, which had an independent administration, elected by the inhabitants of the HAR".[86] This autonomous region was established after a Soviet model, taking into account Stalin's idea of finding a solution to the serious issues concerning the ethnics in the former USSR. Since Moscow didn't recognise Romania as a unified state, the HAR became a precedent for different other compact ethnical blocs, which would have led to the federalisation of the country. Since the USSR Red Army had headquarters in Târgu Mureş, Sfântu Gheorghe and Miercurea Ciuc, the Romanian authorities were requested to leave their posts and their place was taken by Hungarian ethnics, named by the deputy minister of internal affairs in Bucharest, the Hungarian János Vincze (Ion Vințe). Stalin created "Little Hungary" which appointed Lajos Csupor as its leader. The latter kept in contact with the Soviet military representatives and with Russian and Hungarian diplomats.[87] The establishment of the HAR did not please Budapest, but stopped for a time the territorial claims over Romania, at least until Stalin's death on the 5<sup>th</sup> of March 1953.

In the period immediately after Stalin's death, the "Eastern bloc" witnessed a more relaxed transition, when both Romania and Hungary tried to change their relations with Moscow. In Hungary's case, the communist leadership shows interest in domestic cooperation, and in winning over the public opinion, traumatized

again after the war by the loss of the territories recovered during the collaboration between Horthy and Hitler, and especially by the reconfirmation of the Treaty of Trianon from 1920 and by the peace treaty signed in Paris, on the 10<sup>th</sup> of February 1947, with the new winner Allies – the USSR, the USA, England and France. Again, Hungary seeks a strong ally and it cannot be but the Soviet Union in whose sphere of influence it was. The action is at an advantage since the Hungarians were under a second communist wave, following the Soviet Hungarian Republic (1919) established by Bela Kun's first wave. The new leaders of the Hungarian Communist Party (HCP) – Mátyás Rákosi, Ernő Gerő and Imre Nagy (the latter having collaborated with Bela Kun) get Moscow's support to showing concerns over the situation of the Hungarians in Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and especially Romania. Thus, in September 1954, the couple Mátyás Rákosi, the leader of the party, and Imre Nagy, the Hungarian Prime Minister, send a letter to the communist leadership in Romania, where they describe the Hungarian-Romanian bilateral relations as cold and unsatisfactory. Mátyás Rákosi appeals to Valter Roman, his good friend and colleague from the Moscow Communist International (Comintern) with whom he is more direct, and raises the issue of Transylvania. [88]

In the post-Stalin age, however, Romania has other concerns. The fight for power within the Romanian Workers' Party is fierce and favours Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, who between 1952 and 1955 becomes the head of the government. Since the international context became more favourable, even though he was subordinated to Moscow, he spoke of the "Romanian way towards establishing a socialist age".[89] When Walter Roman informs him about the Hungarian debates concerning Transylvania, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej chooses a national line of defence of Romania's territorial integrity.

A documentary study drafted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the leaders of the party in Bucharest, in 1959, showed the nationalist policy between 1954 and 1955 when, at the head of the government in Budapest was Imre

Nagy. The ministry analysed press articles and speeches from the electoral campaign in 1954, when Transylvania is being referred to as "Hungary's forever stronghold".[90] The study mentions the debate which took place in Hungary due to the brochure signed by Dezső Nemes, editor in chief of the "Népszabadság" party newspaper, which was titled "Patriotism and the Right-Wing Phenomena", published in 1955 and issued in 15,000 numbers. The author, party journalist, brings up the issue of the border between Hungary and Romania, highlighting the fact that the Treaty of Trianon was unjust and that it hadn't been recognised by the Soviet Union. The study argues the proliferation of revisionism in Hungary surrounding the revolutionary events from the "Hungarian Fall" in 1956 and highlights the fact that in their relations with Romania, and later Czechoslovakia, every Hungarian official delegation had claims over the "issue of the borders".[91] The most disturbing matter was a request coming from the Hungarian Embassy in Bucharest that a map of the HRA should be attached to the map of the Republic of Popular Hungary, and included in an atlas which would be issued in Budapest. This diplomatic action determined the Romanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Simion Bughici, to ask his colleague whether Hungary saw the HRA as a part of Romania or Hungary.[92]

These attitudes put on guard the communist leadership in Bucharest, who will manage the Hungarian crisis according to Romania's national interests. During the events in Hungary, when, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October 1956, Imre Nagy, the national representative of Hungarian communism, is reinstated at the head of the revolutionary government, the Romanian communist leader, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, goes to Moscow to support the endeavours of the Soviet Union regarding the events in Budapest. Manifesting even an excess of loyalty towards the new leader, Nikita Khrushchev, the Romanian leader manages to get close to him and even ask for the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Romanian territory.[93] Relevant to how loyal Romania was to the USSR is shown by the fact that the latter "hosted", from the 23<sup>rd</sup> of

November 1956, until April 1957, in Snagov, under Soviet control, "Imre Nagy's group".[94] Basically, the Romanian government gave a so-called political asylum to the members of the Hungarian government led by Imre Nagy, arrested in Budapest by the Soviet army and "billeted" in Snagov, Romania, where they have been investigated by specialised institutions from the USSR. The "Imre Nagy group" was sent back to Hungary upon the express request of the Hungarians, where, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June 1960, the former prime minister and three of his collaborators were executed, while five others were convicted for various periods of time. The whole operation took place under the careful supervision of János Kádár, who became Prime Minister with the help of the USSR, after the massive intervention of the Red Army.[95]

After the events in Hungary, a special relationship between János Kádár and Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej will be born, which will be reflected in the bilateral relations. It is worth mentioning that, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June 1958, when Imre Nagy was convicted and executed, the Hungarian authorities informed only three embassies – "those belonging to the countries which have been the closest to Hungary during the days of the counterrevolution", Romania being one of them, along with China and the USSR.[96] Between 1958 and 1965 (until the death of the Romanian leader), there will no longer be major friction between Romania and Hungary, even if there were several books and articles in the press which referred to Transylvania. It is a time when the Hungarians agree and contribute with logistics, and sometimes financially through their local authorities, in order to help build graves and monuments for the Romanian soldiers fallen in the fights along the Soviet army to free Hungary from the occupation of Nazi Germany during the last months of World War II (October 1944-May 1945). The visits of both Hungarian and Romanian party and state leaders were mainly successful, however highly sensitive when referring to the issue of Transylvania and to the Hungarian community in Romania, which were not included in the declarations post-visits, and which came up during negotiations every time,

according to the good offices of the two “brotherly” countries. All these sensitive issues were carefully monitored by the diplomatic missions – the Romanian one in Budapest and the Hungarian one in Bucharest. A significant moment was in 1959, when the universities “Victor Babeş”, and “János Bolyai” in Cluj merged, an action perceived by the Hungarians as the closure of a university with Hungarian teaching, even if the new university had bilingual teaching. Again in 1960 there is an administrative restructuring which affects the HAR, as two regions – Sfântu Gheorghe and Târgu Secuiesc – were transferred to the district of Braşov. It is the first change of a structure imposed by Stalin in Romania to satisfy Hungary. The HAR will be called “The Mureş Hungarian Autonomous Region”. The leaders in Budapest didn’t have any reaction to this change, as they were too busy dealing with domestic nationalism and with consolidating their regime following the events in 1956.

After intense negotiations, the Soviet-Romanian relations lead to the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Romanian territory, and the leaders of the Party in Bucharest show the first signs of distancing from Moscow. Right after the end of the withdrawal, in August 1958, the USSR realised it had lost the main leverage over this satellite state. Moscow acts quickly to discredit Romania and its foreign relations. For these actions, the USSR cooperates with its other satellite states – Hungary, Bulgaria, the Democratic Republic of Germany and even Czechoslovakia.[97]

The good relations between Romania and Hungary and even between Romania and Tito’s Yugoslavia bother Moscow, which intervenes, how else but through propaganda – on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1963, the leader in Kremlin, Nikita Khrushchev, leaks to the press the peaceful alteration of the borders. It advertised the matter of the separation of the two Germanies, as well as the possibility of changing the border between Romania and Hungary.[98] The action is not singular. The Romanian embassy in Moscow informed in January 1964 of the interest Soviet professors and researchers had regarding the issue of Transylvania, “a region

temporarily under Romanian control”, which “isn’t really part of Romania”.[99] Even if Khrushchev later changed his mind saying that “the issue of border change should not be raised among socialist countries”[100], the spark had already been lit in Bucharest and most of all, in Budapest. Moscow felt the need to draw attention to the fact that it remained an arbitrator in the relationship between Hungary and Romania and relaunched the competition between the two countries. It is worth mentioning the fact that at the level of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the Hungary and Romania Direction within the Department of Foreign Relations was colloquially called by the employees “the Transylvania sector”.[101] This is a reflection of how important the USSR believed the Transylvania issue to be in maintaining its influence over both Hungary and Romania.

Freeing Romania from the Soviet military occupation in 1958 enables the Romanian Communist Party to issue, in April 1964, a statement independent from Moscow. The debate on the document is, domestically speaking, favourable for the popularity of the communist party, and externally, people even started mentioning a “Bucharest spring”.[102] One year later only, a change in leadership takes place – after the death of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, the leadership of the Romanian Communist Party is assumed by Nicolae Ceauşescu (23<sup>rd</sup> of March 1965). The relations between Ceauşescu and Kádár will be totally different, in a negative way. In Hungary, Ceauşescu is seen as a nationalist, being blamed of closing the Hungarian university “János Bolyai”, and, not long from then, in 1968, through a domestic administrative reform, which made the transition from regions and districts, to counties, he would also be blamed for the dissolution of the “Mureş Hungarian Autonomous Region”. During all these years, Romania and Hungary’s relations reposition themselves with regard to Moscow. Both countries keep their communist regimes, remaining members of the Treaty of Warsaw and of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, but will go different ways until the

fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. Ceaușescu's Romania will distance itself from Moscow's policy, showing openness with regard to foreign relations and having a domestic authoritarian regime. By comparison, Kádár's Hungary, and the Soviet military occupation, supplemented after the Soviet intervention in Moscow in the fall of 1956, will tag along Moscow as far as its foreign policy is concerned, and domestically speaking, will practice a "human communism" or a Hungarian national "goulash communism".

If Hungary quickly adapts to the changes of the "global socialist system" started by Moscow itself through its transparent reformation policy and gives János Kádár (1988) up, bringing to the leadership of the communist party the second in command, Nicolae Ceaușescu's Romania behaves as a country at an impasse and becomes completely isolated in its foreign policy. Romania acts defensively to the domestic changes of the Hungarian policy. During the last years of communism Hungary challenges Romania on the same issue of Transylvania and Budapest finds support in Moscow, which does not officially want to get involved as an arbitrator, but encourages Hungary.[103]

During these years we witness the start of interethnic events with a potential for conflicts, in the Yugoslavian and Soviet areas: Kosovo, where the Albanian population, representing the majority, initiates an anti-Serbian secessionist movement; Nagorno-Karabakh, where a conflict breaks out between the Azeris and the Armenians from the two Soviet republics at that time - Azerbaijan and Armenia; the political and national emancipation movement of the Baltic republics - Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, joined by the Romanians in the republic of Moldova. All these conflict areas are highly visible in the press, and come in support of the wishes of some Hungarian institutions interested in introducing Transylvania in this equation so as to make it an international matter. In 1988, when Moscow seemed willing to consider the Baltic republics somewhat autonomous, in Budapest the idea spread that it should ask Romania for an autonomous Transylvanian regime, which should be granted internationally. [104]

The Hungarian offensive against Romania lasted between 1985 and 1989 on three sides - on the cultural and historical side, in order to prove that Transylvania belonged to Hungary; secondly there was the "phenomenon of the refugees", which attacked the Romanian establishment and Ceaușescu's dictatorship; and the third aspect was the support of the Hungarian community in Romania claiming that it had been deprived of its rights and freedoms.

Culturally and historically speaking, the highlight was reached when, in 1986, the publishing house of the Hungarian Academy of Science published "The History of Transylvania" in three volumes, a series coordinated by Bela Köpeczi, the Hungarian Minister of Culture at that time. The work was issued three times, amounting to 130,000 copies. They later published a one volume synthesis in English, French, German and Hungarian, sufficient numbers to send to all the greatest libraries in the world. In a communist state such as Hungary at that time, such a work with such a circulation, which referred to a region belonging to another communist country under political patronage, could not have been published without the approval of the leadership of the party and of the country. Romania's reaction at the highest level - the head of the state, ensured the book's international promotion.[105]

The issue of the refugees, and the migration of Romanian citizens - Hungarian ethnics, but Romanian ethnics too - from Romania to Hungary, mostly illegal, significantly affected the bilateral relation. Between 1988 and 1989, the process became a phenomenon, amplified and encouraged by the Hungarian authorities, who obtained support and financing from the UNHCR. Propaganda stimulated donations from individuals and humanitarian organisations. The phenomenon received support due to an action taken by the Hungarian authorities - free access to a passport and travel abroad, by lifting domestic visas to get out of the country, starting with the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1988. Therefore, many Hungarian citizens, mainly experts, left the country and never came back. The free spots in schools, universities, hospitals, factories and research centres were filled with specialists

from Romania, Hungarian ethnics, who integrated perfectly in the Hungarian society. In this case, we are referring more to an economic migration, instead of a political one. Romania will take this step – free access to a passport – two years later, on the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 1989.

The issue of the Hungarian minority in Romania was permanently on the agenda of the bilateral relations between Romania and Hungary. Constantly bringing up this unilateral and aggressive matter, which worsened Romanian-Hungarian relations considerably, was part of an ample and professionally orchestrated joint Hungarian-Soviet propaganda against Romania. During this propaganda, Hungary advertised among the domestic and foreign public opinion, the transfer of Transylvania's sovereignty (or at least some part of it) from Romanian authority. The Hungarian manager of this propaganda all through the '80s was Mátyás Szűrös, the head of the Department of Foreign Relations within the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, trained in the USSR, János Kádár's faithful collaborator and the former Hungarian ambassador in Moscow (1978-1982).[107]

For the matter of the minorities, Budapest adopted the principle of the collective rights of the national minorities, which becomes a tool of its revisionist policy. Bucharest maintained its principle of the individual rights of the persons categorised as national minorities. Under those circumstances, Romania never interfered to try to protect the Romanians in Hungary, precisely not to fuel or justify the demands of the Hungarians. However, institutions, politicians and people of culture, organizations and professional associations in Hungary demanded rights and freedoms for the Hungarian community in Romania, as if it had been threatened with extinction. It is worth mentioning the fact that the Hungarian intellectual elites in Romania were similar to those in Hungary, they had writers and artists perfectly integrated in Hungarian culture, they spoke literary Hungarian and many simple folks did not even know Romanian. Not only did the doctors, engineers, teachers and other highly qualified people from the Hungarian community

in Romania, educated and trained in this communist country, who left their native country to replace those who migrated to the West, adjust quickly to their work places, but they made sure Hungary didn't feel the *brain-drain* in the years that followed communism. The huge anti-Romanian propaganda in Hungary took full advantage of the Romanian systematization of the villages. The Hungarians displayed it as a destruction policy of the Hungarian and German villages in Transylvania. This issue caused in Hungary and in the Western countries a massive psychosis against the regime in Bucharest given that none of the Hungarian and German inhabited villages were touched.[108]

The tense Romanian-Hungarian bilateral relations made the Romanian authorities close the General Consulate of the Socialist Republic of Romania in Cluj-Napoca (July 1988), and the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party even took into account the usefulness of the Romanian Embassy in Budapest. These circumstances required a meeting at the highest level. The initiative belonged to the Romanian head of state at that time, Nicolae Ceaușescu. The Hungarians, represented by Károly Grosz, the Secretary General of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, and Prime Minister of the Hungarian government, came with a positive answer. The meeting took place in Arad, on the 28<sup>th</sup> of August 1988, and managed to ease for the moment the tensions in the bilateral relations.

Only a year after, in 1989, the great geopolitical changes caused by the fall of communism, the European *hinterland* of the USSR, followed in 1991 by the break-up and the disappearance of the Soviet conglomerate, directly affected Romania and Hungary. Even if in Bucharest and in Budapest they are still wondering if a revolution did indeed take place in December 1989, the changes which took place in the relation between the two countries justify the term. The totalitarian, ideologically polarised political system, which was based on a closed, centralised and state controlled economy, was overturned and replaced with a democracy, which included various political parties, and economically speaking, it changed into a free

market economy, open to international trade. At the same time, both states became democracies and returned to the national and nationalistic policy from before World War II.

Between 1988 and 1989, Hungary managed to peacefully break away from communism. The experience of the violent events in 1956, after 32/33 years, determined the reformist-communists to sit down at the same table with the democratic opposition and together find a new institutional formula. Going West and the Euro-Atlantic integration process was filled with debates concerning Hungary's new status in Europe, as well how to preserve its national identity. The fact that Hungary changed its neighbours – except for Austria in the west and Romania in the east, its neighbours in the north, Slovakia and Ukraine, and those in the south, Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia are new countries – made Budapest go one way, “for a better past”, politically speaking. In order to make yourself noticed among the political elites, no matter the orientation, left or right, you must fulfil two demanded conditions considered national interests – denounce the WTreaty in Trianon and support the Hungarians outside the borders. [109] The Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party turns into the Hungarian Socialist Party and adopts the two new national conditions. The omnipresent Mátyás Szűrös will lead the Parliament and ensure alternance in power. In 1990, the Hungarian Democratic Forum forms a government led by József Antall. The Prime Minister dies during his mandate and, following the end of this mandate, the Forum disappears from Hungarian political life. In 1994, the socialists, led by Gyula Horn, a member of Matias Szűrös' team, take the leadership of the government.

In Romania, breaking away from communism was violent, but well directed and broadcast live on national television. Even if the political change strongly opposed communism and lead to the disappearance of the communist party, the leadership was assumed by its former members. In Bucharest, the construction and consolidation of the democratic institutions took a long time, six years, having the same president, Ion Iliescu. The change would come only in

1996, when historical parties such as the National Liberal Party and the Christian Democratic National Peasants' Party formed the Democratic Convention.[110]

Romanian nationalism slowly faded after 1990. The interethnic episode between the Romanians and the Hungarians, which started on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March 1990 in Târgu Mureş, and which could have caused a general conflict in Transylvania, was quickly overcome by the Romanian majority. However, it lingered in the political discourses of the Hungarian minority in Romania, but also in the political discourses of the centre-right Hungarian politicians. The Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania entered the parliament, joining the Romanian government, and toned down the power of the Romanian nationalist discourse and set astray the fears regarding Hungarian secessionism.

Turning to NATO and joining the EU were the main objectives both in Bucharest and in Budapest. For this, the two capitals needed to prove to Europe that Romania and Hungary ended their disputes and mutually recognised their borders and that they had normal diplomatic relations. After rushed negotiations between the Romanian government, led by the Social Democratic Party and its Prime Minister Nicolae Văcăroiu, and the socialist Hungarian government, led by Gyula Horn (the former minister of foreign affairs in the communist government, led by Miklos Nemeth), the two parties signed in Timișoara, on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September 1996, the *Treaty of Understanding, Cooperation and Good Neighbourliness between Romania and Hungary*. [111]

The Romanian-Hungarian Treaty was signed in peacetime, in a relaxed atmosphere of cooperation. However, it has several shortcomings regarding the way to approach the evolution of the relationship between the two countries. Thus, the treaty treats the matter of the borders superficially, mentioning only the fact that the “inviolability of the borders” is necessary, but it does not mention what those are or how they were settled. The document goes around referring to the basic document, the most important in this case, the Treaty in

Trianon, signed on the 4<sup>th</sup> of June 1920.[112] Instead, the document puts more emphasis on the matter of the status of national minorities; true that there are only two articles, but one of them is two pages long and has multiple attachments. In the list of attachments, it mentions that Recommendation 1201 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe does not refer to "collective right". Even if this is evidenced, the error is that Recommendation 1201, which is a political document, is given legal force due to the mere fact that it is included in a legal document.[113] Practically when it comes down to minorities, the Hungarian community in Romania is granted an advantage, which is not comparable to that granted to the Romanian ethnics in Hungary. Perhaps the Romanian and Hungarian negotiators alike took into account the fact that in Romania live 1,434,377 Hungarian ethnics, while in Hungary only live 7,995 Romanian ethnics (data at the level of 2002, 6 years after the signing). They did not consider that even then, back in 1996, as well as today, in 2018, all European minorities must enjoy the same rights, no matter their number. This is while the Hungarians in Romania are members of the parliament in Bucharest, and they take part of the governing process, while in Hungary not only the Romanians, but also the other 13 national and ethnic minorities are far from being represented in the Parliament in Budapest.[114] Since 1918 until today, in 2018, for 100 years, Hungary does not wish to have minorities in the parliament in Budapest. The explanation comes from the fact that the small number of minorities – Romanian, Slovakian, Serbian, Croatian etc. – who were present in October-November 1918 in the Hungarian Parliament are still blamed for the disappearance of what was once the "Autonomous Kingdom of Hungary" in the late Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Consequently, the *Treaty of Understanding, Cooperation and Good Neighbourliness between Romania and Hungary* was and is a formal agreement, which enabled Hungary and Romania to join the Euro-Atlantic structures. Hungary joined NATO on the 12<sup>th</sup> of March 1999, and on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2004 became a member of

the European Union.[115] Romania became a full member of NATO on the 29<sup>th</sup> of March 2004, and on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2007 it joined the European Union.[116]

Now, in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Romania and Hungary are again in the same system of alliances. The sensitivities related to Transylvania and the minorities are still there in the bilateral relation, however not as evident as in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. So long as no country becomes an arbitrator in the relations between Romania and Hungary, tranquillity in the Carpathians and in the Danube basin is ensured.

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## THE EUROPEAN UNION

# China Is Not Replacing the West in Serbia

**Jelena MILIĆ** And in response to Serbia's request, China has indeed sent much-needed medical equipment, including ventilators, masks, and other supplies, as well as a team of medical experts from Wuhan, where the new coronavirus first appeared.

**Intro:** Serbia is not seeking to replace the West as its principal partner, and no amount of Chinese coronavirus aid is going to change that.

Faced with the daunting challenge of the coronavirus crisis, the Serbian government has solicited Chinese assistance in very public fashion to help combat the pandemic. For the authorities in Belgrade, COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus, has the potential to pose an even greater challenge than in other countries. Serbia has one of the oldest populations in the world, and hundreds of thousands of its citizens live and work in the European countries hit hardest by the pandemic. Over 400,000 Serbians have already returned to Serbia from these European countries, many of them undoubtedly carrying the coronavirus.

Belgrade's public appeal to Beijing for COVID-19 support and the consequences of its gratitude, however, should not be exaggerated. The cooperative relationship between Serbia and China in recent years is at least partially an outgrowth of the Kosovo dispute. Belgrade appreciates and seeks to expand relations with virtually all countries that have not recognized Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence. China is one of these countries, and as a permanent member of the UN Security Council Beijing wields considerable influence by ensuring that Kosovo is not granted a seat at the UN until Belgrade is able to reach a compromise settlement with Pristina.

Much like Italy, Austria, and every EU and NATO member state to their east, Serbia is part of China's Belt and Road Initiative. While the Chinese are economically active in Serbia, their investments are, in reality, mostly loans and remain clustered around several specific projects. Of the \$2.2 billion that has entered Serbia from China, almost two-thirds are loans and only one-fourth, or \$561 million, actual investments. Compare this to Chinese investments in the U.K., which were \$8.3 billion in 2019 alone. In Serbia, China's investments include a steel plant in the town of Smederevo and the Bor Mining and Smelting Basin (RTB Bor). The Smederevo steel plant was owned and operated by U.S. Steel until 2012, when the American company sold it back to the Serbian government for one dollar.

Unwilling to allow the largest employer in Smederevo to fail, but disinclined to subsidize the steel plant indefinitely, the government could not find a buyer — until China's HeSteel



People wave Chinese and Serbian flags during a concert in support of China's coronavirus fight at Belgrade's Kalemegdan Fortress, Serbia, Feb. 22, 2020. Credit: AP Photo/Darko Vojinovic

The Serbian government quickly hit the panic button. Since its European and American partners were facing the same difficulties at precisely the same time, they were not in a position to provide Serbia with the tangible and immediate assistance it required. But China was.

stepped in and purchased it for \$56.1 million in 2016, making a commitment to retain all those employed. The story is similar with RTB Bor. Although the government of Serbia is grateful to Chinese actors for unburdening it of the Smederevo steel plant and RTB Bor, China's role in the Serbian economy remains modest in relative terms. Approximately 65 percent of Serbia's overall trade is with the EU, and the non-EU countries of the western Balkans represent a significant portion of the remainder. Serbia's trade with China is, for example, only a bit larger than its trade with Bosnia-Herzegovina, which has a population of 3.3 million.

Sino-Serbian relations have expanded in the security and defense realm. Belgrade signed a contract to buy and assemble several Chinese drones. In 2014, the Serbian police, having worked with their Chinese counterparts to track down a fugitive wanted for a Belgrade hit-and-run and hiding in China, were impressed with the Chinese technology used to locate and arrest him, resulting in a decision by the Serbian Interior Ministry to procure and deploy China's "Safe City" surveillance infrastructure in Belgrade.

However, in stark contrast to the 13 military exercises that Serbia conducts with NATO and NATO member states each year, or nearly 80 percent of all its exercises, Belgrade has only just announced that it will engage in an exercise with China for the first time in 2020. This, however, is less about China and more about counterbalancing Russia, which is force-feeding Serbia weapons sales and various other forms of military cooperation. Moreover, Serbia's EU and NATO partners Germany and France, as well as the European Union Naval Force, already participated in exercises with the Chinese last year.

The United States and NATO member states are the largest financial donors to the Serbian armed forces. While this is not widely known, the United States is Serbia's closest security partner, and China is neither able nor inclined to replace it. Rather than Chinese arms purchases, President Aleksandar Vucic, during a recent visit to Washington, announced that Serbia would be

buying weapons from the United States and one of America's closest allies, Israel. In addition, Serbia recently adopted the second cycle of its Individual Partnership Action Plan with NATO, which puts the country's military cooperation with NATO on a level that far exceeds its military engagement with China, and also supported a vital compromise among all actors in Bosnia & Herzegovina on adopting a reform program for the country's armed forces in cooperation with NATO.

The role of China in Serbia is distinct from that of Russia. Unlike Russia, China does not work to prevent a resolution of the Kosovo dispute or intentionally generate other obstacles to Serbia's relations with the EU and United States. In fact, Belgrade's cooperation with China is at least in part meant to dilute Russian influence in Serbia. Moreover, the substance of Serbia's relations with China is really no different than that of many other European states, including countries that are already members of the EU and NATO. A substantial amount of attention has been given to China's assistance to Serbia over COVID-19, but far less attention has been paid to the fact that Beijing also provided similar forms of aid to Italy, Spain, Poland, and roughly a dozen other EU and NATO member states. While Vucic has expressed gratitude to President Xi Jinping for China's assistance, he has also thanked both U.S. President Trump and Xi for "working to solve this crisis together" and told them "the world needs their leadership more than ever."

In part, however, it goes back to Kosovo. Beijing's rejection of Pristina's unilateral secession and its role in helping to prevent Kosovo's membership in the UN, which is critical for Belgrade as it negotiates a mutually acceptable settlement with Pristina, has created a basis for the expansion of Sino-Serbian relations. If the United States and Europe are truly concerned about Chinese influence in Serbia, they can dislodge China by helping Belgrade and Pristina reach a compromise.

In the meantime, the EU should counter Chinese economic activities in Serbia and the broader region by facilitating access to its infrastructure funds for EU candidate countries

like Serbia. Brussels must develop a common EU policy and set of requirements for Chinese investments, especially related to technology and telecommunications, allowing Serbia and other EU candidates to be accurately assessed for compliance. It should also remove steel and other quotas that are in place for these countries, treating them like the future members they are. The United States can leverage the resources of its recently established Development Finance Corporation, sponsoring projects in Serbia that are both commercially viable but also strategically valuable, particularly in critical infrastructure. This can also be done by linking Serbia and the western Balkans to the Three Seas Initiative.

For its part, Serbia must still tread carefully in its relations with China. This is especially true when it comes to the use of Chinese technology and telecommunications equipment in defense

and security systems and public administration. Serbia should not deploy Chinese technology in a way that could undermine civil liberties or provide China access to its security infrastructure, which would create challenges for Serbia on its path to the EU. Beijing can help Serbia maintain leverage in its negotiations to find a mutually acceptable solution over Kosovo, but it cannot play an active role in resolving this dispute, which Vucic is striving to do. The solution to Kosovo lies in Europe and the United States. Belgrade understands this well. Serbia is not seeking to replace the West as its principal partner and, despite the current rhetoric and public expressions of gratitude, no amount of Chinese aid to fight coronavirus is going to change that.

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## Old and New Challenges to the European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of the Countries in the Western Balkans. The Western Balkans - Always Something "Different" from the Rest of Europe

**Alexandru PETRESCU**

The Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, "Kosovo", North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and, sometimes, Croatia and Slovenia) is an area in Europe which tries (or so it says) to share European values and join the great "European family" represented by the EU, but it faces a series of challenges. This is not a first; just like the Balkans, the area of the Western Balkans is somewhat particular, an area which knew how to test the entire world, and not just once.

We will only mention the pretext used to start World War I and the role of the breakthrough at Salonic in speeding up the end World War, as well as the significant role of the antifascist movements in Yugoslavia in defeating Nazi Germany during World War II.

Following the same "pattern", the fact that the countries and "entities" in the region wish to join the EU represents a major challenge in itself. There is no need for many details and we can start from the need to offer an image on the candidates for accession – official and potential.

The first success story in the region is Slovenia's. Since it joined the EU and NATO relatively quickly (2004), this country (almost) got rid of its "scarlet letter", the symbol of being a part of the tormented Western Balkans. In 2007, Slovenia becomes a member of the Euro and Schengen areas.

At first, Croatia had a high price to pay for belonging to this area: a five years long civil war with many victims and atrocities committed by representatives of both belligerent ethnicities. If joining NATO was easier (the process ended in 2009), in order to join the EU a higher "price" had to be paid by Zagreb – it had to "fully

cooperate” with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague (ICTY), with a focus on collaboration for locating and transferring to the Tribunal a person suspected of having committed war crimes - general Ante Gotovina. It is true that, following the appeal, the ICTY exonerated the general even if it concluded that the Croatian side had indeed committed war crimes. Finally, in 2013, Croatia joins the EU.

The next most successful candidate is Montenegro, which practically started all negotiation processes at once and managed to join NATO in 2017. The European integration of this state was held back by slow domestic reforms and because of a long period of time when there was no significant progress in fighting corruption. Another concerning factor is Moscow’s possible “malevolent interference” in the internal affairs of the former Yugoslavian country and in its efforts to join the EU and NATO. The authorities in Podgorica and a number of western officials firmly believe that Montenegro is subjected to hybrid attacks from the Russian Federation (supported by a few Serbian entities, such as the Serbian Orthodox Church).

In 1990, Albania, a former communist country with a tough regime, started a long and difficult transition process marred by many social and economic crises. The NATO accession process was concluded in 2009, while the EU accession process, which officially started in 2009, only in 2014 is “rewarded” with Albania’s recognition as an official candidate to the Union; however, it is still facing significant challenges, both internal and (some) from the EU itself.

The biggest “issue” is “Kosovo”, which cannot be considered a country. At least, not a state with all the attributes. Almost half of the members of the UN and most of the countries in the EU recognised “Kosovo’s” independence. However, there are five member states which did not recognise “South Serbia’s” independence: Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain.

However, the EU sees “Kosovo” as a potential candidate, and this is why it poses a second

problem – the difficulty of giving it a name. As a compromise, some analysts use the term “entity”. Or, they simply refer to “EU candidates” and the reunions often bear the name “EU Western Balkans Summit” ...



EU Western Balkans Summit, Poznań, July 2019  
[https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/48202720562\\_b86672a352\\_k.jpg](https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/48202720562_b86672a352_k.jpg)

Closely linked to “Kosovo” is the issue of its mother country of the province, Serbia. Although it started negotiations to join the EU in 2014 and opened several negotiation chapters, Serbia has lately been warned more and more often and clearly that it would not be able to join the EU before settling the “Kosovo” file. However, at the level of the EU there is not a clear, coherent and agreed formula to settling it (especially taking into account the fact that the five member states mentioned above keep on refusing to recognise “Kosovo’s” independence). The only thing they seem to agree on is the need to have a “comprehensive and legally binding” agreement, which should be both durable and sustainable.

In its turn, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is a *sui generis* country. It was established following a civil war and a peace agreement (Dayton-Paris/DPPA) which provided a dense and complicated formula that significantly burdens the functioning of the country. The conscience of the international community can only be put at ease by the fact that the DPPA stopped the loss of human lives, the suffering of the displaced and refugees and the massive material damages. However, today this country is “treading water” and is not getting any closer to EU integration. Well, at least not fast enough to satisfy its own

citizens and its European partners. And this is (also) because of some of the amendments in the DPP agreement. Ever since 2008, BiH and the EU have had a provisional agreement regarding trade relations, which, in 2015, has been replaced by the Association and Stabilization Agreement, and in February 2016, BiH officially submitted its application to join the Union.

North Macedonia, a former Yugoslavian country as well, seems to have escaped the vicious circle of the 30-year-old dispute with Greece regarding its constitutional name. Following the “historic agreement” in Prespa, in June 2018, Athens stopped blocking its northern neighbour’s road to European and Euro-Atlantic integration, so, starting with March 2020, North Macedonia managed to join NATO and received the OK to start the EU accession negotiations.

North Macedonia and Albania tried, in 2019, to set a date for the start of the EU accession negotiations but they were practically blocked by France (by President Emmanuel Macron himself), which asked for a new “methodology”. Considering this, the EU agreed to develop (February 2020) such a new methodology, and the details would be discussed with the “partners” from the Western Balkans (during the summit which would take place in May in Zagreb).

However, these events were overshadowed by the pandemic caused by the new Coronavirus – SARS-CoV-2 (which causes the viral infection known as COVID-19), which has the potential to prolong and complicate the EU accession process of these aspiring countries and entities.

So, the main challenges of the EU enlargement in the Western Balkans are: the EU domestic reform, including Brexit and the requests regarding the revision of the enlargement process, the “Kosovo file”, the dysfunctionalities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the low rate of reform in Albania and Montenegro, and ... SARS-CoV-2 and COVID-19. Other challenges this process faces are Russia’s “malignant” interests, China’s commercial and economic “offensive”, and Turkey’s comeback in the region. Some ill-willed analysts would add to the list the interests and competition between some of the

EU members...

### The Current Stage of NATO’s Enlargement Process in the Western Balkans

We must mention from the beginning that Serbia does not wish to join NATO, that BiH’s accession process to NATO has been blocked for the past few years by the leadership in Banja Luka (The Republic of Srpska), which is now in power in Sarajevo as well, following the general elections in October 2018, and Kosovo, even if it wants to join NATO, cannot start the process, so long as it is not a real country, member of the UN and recognised by its mother country, Serbia.



The Macedonian President signing the Instrument of Accession (<https://pretsedatel.mk/>)

In mid-March 2020, NATO members have finished ratifying North Macedonia’s NATO accession protocol (the last country to sign was Spain – 17.03), and the Macedonian president, Stevo Pendarovski, signed (20.03.2020) the Instrument of Accession, which basically is the last procedure of the authorities in Skopje before submitting the Instrument and going through with the ceremonies celebrating the event. On 27.03.2020, the Instrument of Accession was deposited in Washington, USA, being the depository of the North Alliance Treaty. The ceremony marking the occasion was live-streamed via Skype from Skopje and watched by the Macedonian minister of Foreign Affairs (Nikola Dimitrov) and the US ambassador to North Macedonia.

Depositing the Instrument means that the

Republic of North Macedonia has officially become NATO's 30<sup>th</sup> member (the first step had been taken in 1993 by a declaration from the parliament). On the same day, North Macedonia received congratulations from the US Secretary of State and from the Secretary General of NATO. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of March, in Skopje, the accession was marked by an honorary gun salute.

The ceremonies to raise the North Macedonian flag at the NATO headquarters in Brussels and at the Allied Command Transformation in Norfolk (USA) were planned for the 30<sup>th</sup> of March, and the Macedonian Minister for Foreign Affairs took part in his first videoconference with the NATO ministers of foreign affairs on 02.04.2020.

In November 2019, Serbia finalised the second stage of the NATO intensified Individual Partnership Action Plan for 2019-2021, which would stand as the legal basis for cooperation with NATO in all areas of common interest. Furthermore, meeting some objective needs, but also answering some of the criticisms coming from a few members of the civil society, in December 2019 the Parliament in Belgrade adopted the National Security Strategy and the Defence Strategy of the Republic of Serbia, which attest Serbia's military neutrality. They allow Serbia to cooperate with all interested military alliances and countries, including NATO and the Collective Treaty Security Organization (CTSO) formed under the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

This is why Washington is worried about the Serbians' cooperation with the Russians in the fields of defence (military and military technology), security and civil protection (through the Russian-Serbian Humanitarian Center in the city of Nis). A growing concern for the Americans is the Serbian weapons acquisitions (hybrid artillery systems and Pantzir-S air defence missiles systems, Mi-35 attack helicopters and Mi-17V-5 transport and attack helicopters) and the Russians' weapons and military equipment donations to Serbia (six Mikoyan MiG-29s, 30 T-72 tanks and 30 BRDM-2 amphibious armoured patrol vehicles). This is why the USA warned Serbia that they could impose sanctions if it continues its military

acquisitions from the Russian Federation.

However, NATO stated on several occasions that it is Serbia's legitimate right to have various partners in the field of defence, including with regard to its military acquisitions.



Admiral James Foggo, Belgrade, December 2019  
<http://www.mod.gov.rs/cir/14803/sastanak-drzavnog-sekretara-zivkovica-sa-admiralom-fogom-14803>

Both NATO and the members of the CTSO keep on cooperating with Serbia, probably because they wish to avoid isolating Serbia and to prevent it from entering Russia's tutelage.

Kosovo has been closely cooperating with both NATO and its member states, while the Albanian establishment in Pristina have expressed on various occasions their wish to join the alliance. This wish is a no for Kosovo for various objective reasons: Kosovo is not a country because it is not a member of the UN, and Kosovo's independence is not recognised by four of NATO's members (Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain). This is why NATO as an organisation does not recognise Kosovo's independence; however, all the members of the Alliance are adamant in contributing to the stabilisation of the situation, in ensuring the security and conditions suitable for building a democratic society and facilitating the dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade for the identification of a sustainable solution. NATO is not part of the dialogue; this task was assigned to the EU and its members. However, lately, we have witnessed the USA getting more involved in this dialogue.

This is how Kosovo has in its territory an international peacekeeping force, under a UN



mandate, led by NATO – the KFOR, which supports the reformation of Kosovo's defence and security system, with the help of a NATO Advisory and Liaison Team (NALT). Among other things, NALT supports and trains the Kosovo Security Forces, which the Alliance sees as a civilian structure.

Because of the decision taken by the authorities in Pristina, in December 2018 (aside from the amendments of its own "constitution"), to change the KSF Ministry into the Ministry of Defence and the KSF into Kosovo's Armed Forces, NATO is reconsidering its cooperation with the KSF. They have not been able to change their name yet (Kosovo Armed Forces), only their mandate, which includes tasks and assignments destined for the armed forces.

In this context, it is worth mentioning:

- Belgrade and the Serbs in Kosovo firmly oppose these two measures; they consider them illegal and contrary to Resolution 1244 of the UN Security Council (10.06.1999) and to the the Kumanovo Military Technical Agreement (09.06.1999).

- Belgrade and the Serbs in Kosovo ask KFOR (NATO) to continue preventing the deployment of forces and the activity of the KSF in the four "Serbian Municipalities" in North Kosovo (Leposavić, North Mitrovica, Zubin Potok and Zvečan), unless they are approved by the municipalities.

- Initially (2017-2018), the USA opposed the two changes, which contradicted Kosovo's Constitution.

- Several NATO member states firmly supported the changes.

- In 2019, the USA stated that they favoured the changes; however, they had to occur gradually over a longer period (approximately 10 years) and through dialogue with the Serb community in Kosovo.

- Several NATO members, which recognised Kosovo's independence, believe the KSF is Kosovo's army and invite them to join military training exercises and programmes. Furthermore, many of these countries continue to provide counselling and financial and material support for the training and endorsement of the

KSF.

As far as BiH's NATO integration is concerned, the Serb politicians and the ruling party, the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats, leading the Republic of Srpska, have blocked it all through 2019. This blockade had an effect on the leaders of the other ruling bodies in BiH (the Croats and the Bosnians), who stopped the formation of the BiH Council of Ministers. The Serbs practically opposed the Membership Action Plan to join NATO, as well as sending the First Annual National Program to Brussels. After repeated negotiations and external pressure, they reached a compromise. They adopted a reformation plan instead of the First Annual National Program.

Of course, the political dispute continued and the Bosnians, the Croats and some of the Serb parties (members of the opposition in the Republic of Srpska and under a technical mandate at the level of the central institutions in Sarajevo) came up with the same FNBP, disguised under a different name. At the same time, the Serb parties in power in the Republic of Srpska and legitimised by the results of the 2018 general elections to assume the leadership of BiH institutions highlighted that the document made no reference to BiH's intentions to join NATO. The compromise allowed the formation of a new Council of Ministers; however, it did not solve the country's older problems.

Therefore, the only common option for all the countries in the Western Balkans outside the Union (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and "Kosovo") is to join the EU, but not NATO.

### **The Current Stage of the EU Enlargement Process in the Western Balkans**

BiH's accession process to the EU has been blocked for years, because they did not fulfil some conditions: the harmonization of the electoral legislation – as to eliminate interdictions for the candidates who are of different ethnicity than the three constituent peoples, and allowing them to occupy official positions (the Sejdić-Finci case decided by the ECHR), or the failure to adopt legislation

regarding BiH's state owned properties. These failures have also blocked the closure of the Office of the High Representative in BiH. Unblocking the accession process to the EU happened not thanks to BiH's progress, but because some of the EU member states came to the conclusion that BiH was incapable of fulfilling these conditions fast enough and that there was a chance the country would lose the popular support necessary for the integration. Thus, the Croatian and later the German-British initiatives in 2014 changed the rules, enabling BiH to continue its accession process with the promise that it would fulfill all the conditions.

Against this background, in December 2016, the authorities in Sarajevo received their first "questionnaire" from Brussels, which they sent back to the EU officials in February 2018. Despite Brussels' request for more detailed information, BiH failed to clarify a series of issues (March 2019). This is why BiH is still a potential candidate but has failed to be an official candidate to the EU.

Serbia started negotiations to join the EU in January 2014 and so far it has opened 18 chapters out of 35. The most problematic is Chapter 35, which refers to the "normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo". The authorities in Belgrade claim they are ready to open more negotiation chapters; however, the EU imposed the pace.

If in the beginning of the negotiation process the difficulties in the cooperation with the ICTY slowed the pace, at present this pace is set by the progress of the dialogue with Pristina and by the fears of some of the EU members regarding the intensification and diversification of the relations between Belgrade and Moscow. Practically, Serbia is accused of not having adhered to the international sanctions against the Russian Federation – adopted due to its role in the conflict in eastern Ukraine and because it annexed Crimea – but also of having developed and intensified its relations with Russia in various fields. Another sensitive subject for Serbia and the EU is the fact that Serbia signed a free trade agreement (October 2019) with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), where Russia

plays an important part. While the EU warned Serbia that the agreement must be terminated before it joined the EU, Serbia argued that many of the EU members had an economic and commercial cooperation with the Russian Federation and that the trade agreement would be terminated only on the eve of Serbia's accession to the EU.



EU Western Balkans Summit, Sofia, May 2018

[https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/es/eu-western-balkans-summit-in-sofia\\_6302\\_pk](https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/es/eu-western-balkans-summit-in-sofia_6302_pk)

The relations between Serbia and the EU have recently been overshadowed by the COVID-19 epidemic in Serbia, because the leaders in Belgrade said that the EU was late in answering Serbia's requests for help in combatting the epidemic. Furthermore, president Aleksandar Vučić even accused the EU of denouncing its principles and expressed his firm conviction that the solidarity of the EU is dead. However, in the second part of March, the EU decided to offer Serbia financial aid, for emergencies as well as for combatting the epidemic on a medium term.

During this time, a quicker and more substantial aid came from China. Consisting in donations of protection equipment, ventilators and six experts on combatting the virus, it was highly mediated. This is where Carl Bildt – a former Swedish prime minister and the President of the NGO "The European Council for Foreign Relations" – criticised Serbia, because President Vucic himself welcomed the Chinese plane transporting the aid when it landed on Belgrade International Airport (21.03.2020), and the event was highly mediated. At the same time, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March, when a plane came from China with aid paid for by the EU (the transport was organised by the UNDP), the event was not as mediated as the former, and the

shipment was welcomed by the prime minister Ana Brnabić, not by the president.

As far as Serbia's accession process to the EU is concerned, it is not (yet) affected by the tensed relations between Belgrade and Brussels in the context of the COVID-19 epidemic, and the EU is making efforts to normalise the relationship between Serbia and Kosovo, which is essential to the progress of the two on their way to European integration. The latest initiative to this regard is the assignment, in the near future, of a special emissary for dialogue (the most circulated name was that of the Slovak diplomat Miroslav Lajčák) who would manage the dialogue directly and thus relieve the High Representative Josep Borrell. One of the fundamental objectives of the new mediator will be to impement the provisions of the agreements signed so far between Belgrade and Pristina while at the same time finding a compromise regarding the status of Kosovo and eventually mediating an agreement between the two, which must be "comprehensive and legally binding".

Even if Kosovo is not a member of the UN, it is considered a potential candidate to the EU, and the EU documents treat it according to the agreements signed between Belgrade and Pristina (with asterisks and footnotes). Kosovo's accession to the EU is based on a "stabilisation mechanism", followed by the Stabilisation and Association Agreement which came into force in 2016. Even though it was close to liberalising its visa regime and fulfilled a series of conditions to that end, the decision was postponed several times at the insistence of several EU members, so that the citizens in Kosovo still need a visa to travel to an EU country, which is very frustrating for Pristina (Kosovo being the only "state" in the Western Balkans subjected to such a regime).

The leaders in Pristina have disregarded the recommendations of the EU not to overthrow the government led by Albin Kurti, which came to power in the beginning of February 2020, after long and difficult negotiations that followed the parliamentary elections in October 2019. Nevertheless, several parliamentary parties in Kosovo, led by the Democratic League

of Kosovo and its leader Isa Mustafa, sided with Washington and voted a no-confidence motion to overthrow Albin Kurty's government. Washington's support for the motion came because the new prime minister refused to take into account the US' recommendation (which came on various channels, and was accompanied by a series of "warnings") to immediately eliminate the custom tariffs (100%) imposed by Kosovo (November 2018) on goods imported from central Serbia and BiH. Defying the US recommendations, the prime minister decided to impose the gradual lifting of the tariffs, and conditioned this action by Serbia's reaction (it should have eliminated all commercial and non-commercial barriers for Kosovo and give up the diplomatic campaign to revoke the decision regarding the recognition of Kosovo's independence). It went so far that the initiators and supporters of the motion declared that the failure of the motion would result in the serious deterioration of the strategic partnership between the USA and Kosovo. In exchange, approving the motion affects the prestige of the EU and the Union's relationship with Kosovo. On the eve of the motion, the French and German ministries of foreign affairs issued a joint communique where they requested Kosovo to postpone the vote until the end of the COVID-19 crisis; however, the political leaders in Pristina ignored this request.

There is a "light" at the end of the enlargement process, and it refers to Albania and North Macedonia.

On 24.03.2020, the EU General Affairs Council (GAC) met via videoconference and decided to take into account the repeated recommendations of the European Commission and start the EU accession negotiations for Albania and North Macedonia. The conclusions of the Council were adopted by a written procedure on the 25<sup>th</sup> of March. On the 26<sup>th</sup> of March the European Council validated, via videoconference, the decision adopted by the GAC and ordered a series of measures to implementing the decision.

The main provisions of the decision adopted by the European Council are:

- The enlargement of the EU will continue based on a new “methodology”, made public by the European Commission on 05.02.2020.[i]

- After having examined the Commission’s report in 02.03.2020 (on progress), the Council decides to open the accession negotiations with Republic of North Macedonia and the Republic of Albania and invites the Commission to develop the negotiation framework taking into account the new “methodology” as well. The first intergovernmental conference with the two countries (to start the negotiations) will take place after the preparation of the framework.

- Before the first intergovernmental conference, Albania has to fulfill a few more conditions, its key priorities being:

- The implementation of the electoral reform (according to the recommendations of the OSCE/OHR).

- The further implementation of the justice reform.

- Establishing the necessary structures to fight corruption and organised crime.

- Measures to repatriate the fake asylum seekers in EU member states.

The European Council tasked the Commission to monitor the implementation and continuation of the reforms by the candidate countries which have been allowed to start the negotiation process – Albania and North Macedonia.

Washington (through the voice of secretary of state Michael “Mike” Pompeo) welcomed the decision of the European Council to start negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia. Besides, the USA have decided in 2019 to engage more in stabilising the situation in the Western Balkans, while focusing on normalising the relations between Serbia and Kosovo. Matthew Palmer was assigned as Special Representative for the Western Balkans, and the ambassador to Berlin, Richard Grenell, was assigned the US President’s Special Envoy for Belgrade-Pristina.

The pragmatic American approach scored a first success (during the Munich Security Conference in 2019) when Belgrade and Pristina signed two agreements in principle to allow the resumption of the air and railway traffic

between Serbia and Kosovo, as well as when the two sides reconfirmed their decision to build the Nis-Pristina freeway. So far, the only ongoing project is that of the freeway, while the other two agreements need more negotiations between the parties involved.

Two other European mechanisms meant to accelerate the European integration of the candidates from the Western Balkans and collaboration between them are the “Berlin Process” and the French-German initiative to normalise the relations between Serbia and Kosovo. The “Berlin Process” focuses on the reconnection of the economy and infrastructure of the candidates from the Western Balkans, while president E. Macron and chancellor A. Merkel’s initiative focuses on bringing Belgrade and Pristina to the negotiating table in order to find a real and sustainable compromise.

### **The Prospects of the EU and NATO Enlargement in the Western Balkans**

As already shown before, we can only refer to an EU enlargement in the entire area of the Western Balkans, not to a NATO enlargement as well.

As far as NATO’s enlargement in the Western Balkans is concerned, no short or medium term changes are looming. Serbia will not want this process (and will act in order to consolidate its military neutrality), Bosnia and Herzegovina’s progress will continue to be hindered by its “Serbian entity” (the Republic of Srpska) and Kosovo is out of the picture, as long as it still is not recognised by Serbia and is not a member of the UN.

North Macedonia started acting as a NATO member even before it joined the Alliance. While in the midst of the COVID-19 epidemic, the authorities in Skopje decided to take steps in order to join NATO’s Defence Planning Process and tasked the responsible structures with a view to draft two reports a year (January and June) on the matter. The following are among the responsible structures: the ministries of defence, foreign affairs, internal affairs, finances, economy, transport, health and the National Registry Office for Classified Information etc.

Furthermore, the Working Committee for NATO Integration of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia must propose, no later than 30.04.2020 (before it starts its consultations with the Alliance, in Brussels), the structure responsible for preparing and the new national security strategy, in accordance with NATO's recommendations.

In the case of the EU enlargement, the European Commission is expected to adopt the negotiation framework with Albania and North Macedonia; however, we can already witness several effects of the new "methodology": the Albania-North Macedonia "tandem" exists no more and there is a state of confusion regarding whether it should be applied to Serbia and Montenegro.

Under these circumstances, it looks like North Macedonia has the opportunity to start the negotiations before its former partner in the "tandem", Albania, which must fulfil more conditions in order to set the date for the first intergovernmental conference. However, those conditions are difficult to fulfil, and the date to start negotiations with North Macedonia could be postponed indefinitely. On the other hand, it may be influenced by the results of its early elections. As for North Macedonia, the date to start negotiations can be influenced by the early parliamentary elections in this country. They had been planned for the 12<sup>th</sup> of April, but have been postponed because the country declared a state of emergency in order to more efficiently counter the COVID-19 epidemic. A victory of the current opposition and a stalling of the attainment of concrete and significant results in the fields of the justice reform and the enforcement of the rule of law could result in postponing the start of the negotiations. Besides, North Macedonia is currently benefitting from a wave of sympathy due to the enormous compromise it made when signing the Agreement in Prespa and agreeing to change its constitutional name.

In the current context (the difficulty of reunions, which practically take place via videoconference), one can estimate that the new negotiation frameworks could be submitted to

the European Council no sooner than June this year. Most likely, every candidate will be able to discuss with the Commission on the framework. A first draft of the framework may be discussed in May, during the EU Western Balkans Summit. Anyway, the month of May is when the first report on the progresses of the Western Balkans candidates are due to be published. The details of the new "methodology" could be also made public in May.

It is highly unlikely that Serbia and Montenegro should agree with the new "methodology" in their accession process. Anyway, we have already witnessed blocking or delay mechanisms as far as the opening or closure of a negotiation chapter. These two countries are expected to continue negotiations, although in Serbia's case, its confidence in the EU has been shaken by the latter's hesitancy to show solidarity in the debut of the SARS-CoV-2 crisis in Serbia.

Kosovo's integration remains a great unknown, especially after the main political parties chose to side with Washington and ignore the requests coming not only from Brussels but also from a series of European capitals (especially Paris and Berlin) with regard to the government led by A. Kurti.



Belgrade, a humanitarian aid shipment financed by the EU, 26.03.2020  
<https://twitter.com/FabriziSem/status/1243297894754549760/photo/3>

Washington is expected to continue its endeavours for the accomplishment of the agreements regarding the resumption of the air and railroad traffic and the construction of the Nis-Pristina freeway, which the EU is also expected to continue support. The key, however,

is restarting the dialogue.

At this time, there is no “magic formula” in sight for the expected agreement between Belgrade and Pristina. Besides, Serbia must hold parliamentary elections right after the state of emergency ends, and in Kosovo such an action is not possible because of the fall of the government led by A. Kurti. This situation can result in postponing the dialogue even if the main obstacle is surpassed – the tariffs on Serbian and Bosnian goods.

It would perhaps be worth mentioning that the blunders of the past two years related to the stagnation of the EU enlargement and, most recently, the EU's reaction to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic have contributed to Serbia and the Republic of Srpska looking for a closer partnership with Russia and China, even though they still wish to join the EU. It remains to be seen whether the COVID-19 pandemic will have the power to postpone or cancel the first Serbian-Chinese bilateral military exercise, which is planned to take place this year in Serbia. **Not** to mention the fact that the Serbian-Chinese partnership during the pandemic has been named “the friendship of steel”, and the Serbian president called his Chinese counterpart “brother” several times, which he didn't do with any of the European leaders despite the huge and constant support Serbia received from the EU during its European integration process.[ii]

Finally, instead of conclusions, the author offers some general observations.

The EU enlargement process in the Western Balkans is expected to continue, even if it is slow and subjected to many conditions due to the EU domestic reform and the effects of Brexit.

Very many analysts believe that the EU's decision to open negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia was decisively influenced by the COVID-19 epidemic in Europe and by the need to prove to the candidates the Union's solidarity in actions. Besides, at present the French president E. Macron is more preoccupied with properly managing the crisis in his own country than by the shortcomings in Albania's and North Macedonia's reforms.

Paradoxically, the EU enlargement process in

the Western Balkans, more precisely in Serbia and Kosovo, is held back by the competition between the Euro-Atlantic partners – the EU and the USA – since Washington is significantly involved in the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, as well as in the overthrow of two governments in Pristina (which did not want to remove the extra tariffs).

The USA's deep involvement in the Western Balkans resulted in Montenegro's and North Macedonia's swift accession to NATO, which considerably reduced the Russian Federation's leverage over the political decisions in these two countries.

The presence and involvement of the EU and NATO in the Western Balkans remain vital. Otherwise, there is a risk the security situation in Kosovo and BiH will deteriorate and of instability transfer, including to the new NATO members, Montenegro and North Macedonia.

To all this we add China's economic and commercial offensive and Russia's “malevolent influence” in the Western Balkans, especially in Serbia and the Republic of Srpska.

#### Footnotes

[i] Enhancing the Accession Process – A Credible EU Perspective for the Western Balkans. Instead of chapters, they simply chose thematic clusters. The candidate must fulfill all the initial conditions from the chapters in those thematic clusters. The necessary condition (*sine qua non*) is the progress regarding chapters 23 and 24, referring to the rule of law. They will be the first and last chapters to approach. Any setback from these chapters will negatively influence negotiations from the other chapters. Furthermore, there is an increase in rewards and sanctions. The sanctions can represent financial cutbacks or the cessation or resumption of negotiations.

[ii] In the last decade of March 2020, the EU gave almost 93 million Euros for countering the effects of the COVID-19 epidemic in Serbia: 15 million for emergency actions (acquisitions and transport of necessary medical supplies to Serbia) and 78 million Euros for countering the economic and social effects of the epidemic. Overall, since 2014, the EU has given Serbia almost two billion Euros in grants to modernise the country. In medicine alone, the EU gave 200 million Euros worth of grants and offered a loan of 250 million Euros.

## THE MEDITERANEAN SEE

# Military Cooperation between Israel, Greece and Cyprus

**Dr. Eugene KOGAN** Greece, Italy and US, took place in November

The trilateral military cooperation, begun in November 2017, has all the necessary components to become decisive for the three countries in the eastern Mediterranean in the long-term. In addition, the US is fully behind the three countries, sending a clear signal to Ankara not to provoke conflict in the region.

Turkey, which is still a member of NATO, is not in a position to prevent Israel from cooperating with NATO, although such cooperation is a thorn in the side of Turkey. Although Cypriot military exercises with Israel upset Turkey, it cannot prevent the two countries from cooperating. That is why we see a new military architecture in the eastern Mediterranean, which will shape the security relations of the three countries in the coming years.

The new architecture was not created in a vacuum, but is a by-product of the steadily deteriorating Israeli-Turkish relations, which reached a nadir with the 'Marmara incident' in May 2010. Although the Israeli government has officially apologized for operational mistakes in dealing with the Turkish flotilla ships and compensation package has been negotiated in mid-2016, bilateral relations remain frosty. Moreover, the military component of Israeli-Turkish relations, which used to be a backbone of relations, is still missing and is unlikely to reappear in the near future. For this reason, Israel began looking for like-minded partners in the eastern Mediterranean as early as 2012. And these partners are not only Greece and Cyprus but also other NATO members, since Greece is a member of NATO.

## From Air Forces and Navy Multinational Cooperation

Trilateral military cooperation began in November 2017, while the first 'Blue Flag' multinational exercise in Israel, including

Greece, Italy and US, took place in November 2013. In October 2015, a follow-up air drill pitted Israel, Greece, Poland, and US, against a fictional enemy state. Another air drill with participation of France, Germany, Greece, India, Israel, Italy, Poland and US took place in March 2017. Lieutenant Colonel Richard Hecht, Israel Air Force's (IAF's) Chief of International Affairs, said that "the Blue Flag exercise is not a competitive event. It is about partnership. Furthermore, it is not only the exercise itself but the build-up to the exercise where we have all the participants planning together, getting to know one another, building relations and talking about how we fight."



An Israeli Sailor during Exercise "Noble Dina 2016" in Souda Bay, Greece, in 2016. "Noble Dina" is an annual trilateral exercise involving US, Hellenic and Israeli forces to increase interoperability and tactical expertise in a number of warfare areas

In March 2017, the IAF participated in the joint exercise 'Iniohos 2017' in Greece in which Italy, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and US also took part. The follow-up exercise 'Iniohos 2019' of the Air Force with participation of Cyprus, Greece, Israel, Italy, UAE and US took place in April 2019. The most recent 'Blue Flag' exercise, in which Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy and US participated, took place in November 2019. It served as an opportunity to improve

interoperability between the aforementioned air forces.



During exercise "Iniohos 2017", a US Air Force officer prepares for a local area orientation flight at Andravida Air Base, Greece, in March 2017. The origin of the exercise dates back to the late 1980's, when it was established as a small scale air warfare exercise with only aircraft of the Hellenic Air Force

In November 2017, officers and sailors of the Israeli Navy were invited by the Greek Navy to participate in a NATO exercise. Crews from Bulgaria, Greece, Israel, Italy, Romania, UK and US, as well as international observers, held land briefings and planning meetings. In the second week, they went into action, and rehearsed a series of scenarios. Such scenarios included sea-based anti-terrorist operations, handling enemy swarm boats loaded with explosives, making threats from the air, and practicing how to rescue stranded ships and provide medical care to injured people. Lieutenant Colonel Yaniv Lavi, Commander of the Israeli Navy's 32nd Squadron, said that "the learning process was mutual. We learned from the others, and we passed on our knowledge. We are improving all of the time."

Lieutenant Colonel Assaf Boneh, Head of the Israeli Navy's International Cooperation Planning Branch, noted that Israel has benefited immensely from the growing maritime partnership. For example, Greece operates similar vessels to Israel's – such as German-made air independent propulsion submarines. Boneh acknowledged that "Maintaining such submarines is a complex matter and requires a lot of knowledge. The Greeks have technical knowledge on maintenance and we are happy to

learn from them. We expect our cooperation with Greeks and others to only increase."

That is exactly what happened. In August 2019, the Israeli navy, with the participation of ten other navies, led an exercise to prepare the country for a devastating earthquake. This was the first time that the navy has conducted a large-scale exercise focusing on the sea-based response to a severe earthquake. The ten foreign navies included Canada, Cyprus, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, NATO, UK and US and the non-aligned country of Chile.

Another naval exercise was the 'Noble Dina' exercise, which began in April 2012 with the participation of Greece, Israel and US. It has been conducted annually since then. The most recent exercise, 'Noble Dina', in April 2019, stretched from the north of the island of Crete to the eastern Mediterranean Sea, and involved ships from Greece, Israel, US and Cyprus.

It can, therefore, be expected that multinational cooperation between like-minded nations such as Israel and Greece will intensify in the coming years, as the participants not just learn each other's tactics and strategy, but also gain insights into the strengths and weaknesses of pilots and sailors in an unfamiliar air and sea space operations.

### **Bilateral Cooperation**

The first-ever IAF and HAF joint exercise in Israel took place in December 2016. Colonel Amnon, Commander of the Ramat David Air Force Base (AFB), noted that: "The Greek deployment was of historical significance because the AFB usually does not host foreign fighter division deployments. This was a trailblazing event. The last time foreign fighter aircraft were hosted in the AFB was in 1956." Colonel Amnon acknowledged that "the Greeks are our long-time partners and the current exercise is a step forward in our cooperation. The fact that this was a relatively small deployment (total of three squadrons) allowed us to create an intimate training exercise and develop tighter relationships." Major Dimitrios Gritzaliotis, Commander of the Greek deployment, commented, "I hope to profit from



this cooperation in a way that both sides see the scenarios they train for daily and from a different point of view. We expect to continue the cooperation between the two air forces and in the near future host the Israeli aircrews as they did us.”

In June 2018, IAF together with HAF conducted a joint exercise over Greek skies, during which long-distance flights and dozens of aircraft in unknown territory were trained with air-to-air refuelling exercises and mutual acquaintance of flight crews. About 40 Israeli fighter planes from 10 fighter squadrons as well as tanker planes, which never landed during two missions, participated in the exercise. The exercise was part of a series planned for 2018 to improve the operational readiness of the Israeli armed forces.



### Joint Exercises

In November 2018, the IAF F-16I fighter jet squadrons returned from a combined training in Greece alongside the HAF. Major Y., a pilot at the 201st Squadron that operates the F-16I aircraft, said that: “We are happy about the cooperation with the HAF.” According to Major I., Head of the IAF’s Europe and Asia International Affairs Branch, “the exercise in Greece provided us with the opportunity to fly over expansive terrain, and the tall mountains helped simulate the operational theatre.” An additional advantage in the joint exercise is that Greece, as a member of NATO, operates according to NATO combat doctrines. These doctrines differ from the ones used by the IAF, and this, in turn, provides an opening for mutual learning and exchange of

opinions.

In addition to air force exercises, Greece and Israel conducted a joint naval exercise as early as July 2012. Israeli Navy ships conducted five exercises in the Mirto Sea. The exercises included firing missiles at the rocky islet of Karavia west of Milos.

In November 2017, three Israeli missile ships and a naval helicopter participated in the Hellenic Navy’s autumn ‘war games’. The main aim was to provide training in how to deal with modern maritime threats while conducting evacuations of civilian populations. During the drill Lieutenant Colonel Lavi, Commander of the Israeli delegation, said that “the naval forces carried out advanced training in search and rescue, prevention of maritime terrorist attacks, as well as advanced maritime medical evacuations.” This is an indication of the enhanced military cooperation between Israel and Greece in the naval sector and we can expect further naval exercises between the two countries. Alongside Israeli-Greek cooperation, Israel-Cyprus military cooperation has intensified. For instance, in March 2017 Israel participated in a three-day joint military exercise with Cyprus, in the course of which the IAF F-16s were seen in the skies over Paphos International Airport and subsequently tested Cypriot air-defences. A military spokesman of the Greek Cyprus Ministry of Defence said that: “Air and ground forces from both countries took part in the exercise. The drill aimed to maintain the readiness of the forces for any emergency.”

In June, more than 500 elite Israeli commandos, supported by attack helicopters and fighter jets, held a three-day intensive drill on Cyprus. The unnamed senior IDF officers said the exercise was the first of its kind and one of the largest exercises by the commandos on foreign soil. It was the largest drill since 2014, when both countries agreed to hold joint exercises as part of their military cooperation.

Cypriot troops also visited Israel for a two-week counter-terrorism training in October 2017 at a mock Arab town in the Israeli Army’s Tzeelim training base.

The aforementioned Israeli-Greece naval

exercise in November 2017 was followed by a major military exercise in Cyprus, involving air and ground forces from both countries. The exercise, which is part of the ongoing cooperation between the IDF and the Cypriot military, was pre-planned as part of the Israeli 2017 training programme and is designed to maintain the competence and readiness of the forces. Therefore, it can be said that 2017 marks a turning point in military cooperation between Israel and Cyprus.

In addition, Cyprus conducted three joint exercises in Israel in early 2018, while the IDF conducted military exercises with the Cypriot military in December 2018 and then again in December 2019. During the latter exercise, IDF Chief of General Staff Aviv Kochavi travelled to Cyprus to visit the exercise where he met with his Cypriot counterpart, Lieutenant General Ilias Leontaris, Chief of the National Guard General Staff of the Republic of Cyprus. According to Christoforos Fokaides, the Cypriot Minister of Defence, "the aim of the exercises was to improve the operational capabilities of the National Guard by sharing expertise. The Cypriot army was at a good level and had efficient personnel."

The subsequent joint military exercises not only brought the two military forces closer together, but also improved their competence, cooperation and mutual understanding.

### **From Bilateral to Trilateral Cooperation**

In November 2017, the first trilateral defence summit between Israel, Cyprus and Greece took place, which can be considered a milestone in trilateral relations. The defence ministers of all three countries met in Athens and discussed strengthening cooperation to promote maritime and energy security, terrorism, stability and peace in the Eastern Mediterranean. Cyprus Defence Minister Fokaides stated that "Cyprus, Greece and Israel defend in this volatile and fragile region not just their common interests, but also the interests of Europe and, I would say, those of the international community in general." Fokaides added that, "Our vision is to gradually turn the wider region from a conflict

zone to an area of peace, stability and cooperation." It seems, however, that Fokaides vision has only a small chance of being realized at the end of 2019, as Turkey is gradually undermining a peaceful vision, which, according to Turkey, was aimed at marginalising and excluding Turkey in the region. It should be recalled that Israel, Greece and Cyprus are extremely suspicious of Turkey and, as a result, intend to strengthen their cooperation in the military and security field.

Trilateral security cooperation (also known as the Eastern Mediterranean Partnership or EastMed/MEP) encompasses counter-terrorism, counter-proliferation, search-and-rescue, and maritime security. Souda Bay Naval Base in Greece and the UK bases in Cyprus known as Akrotiri, or the Western Sovereign Base Area (WSBA) and Dhekelia Cantonment, or the Eastern Sovereign Base Area (ESBA) are hubs for cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean.

### **The Pipeline Project**

The growing military cooperation between Israel, Cyprus and Greece is based on the ambitious joint declaration signed by their political leaders in June 2017, which provided for cooperation between the three countries in areas such as energy, the economy, telecommunications, the environment and underseas.

On 2 January 2020, Israel, Greece and Cyprus signed agreement on gas pipeline that will transport gas from Israel, via Greek Cyprus to Greece and from there to the EU. The main hurdle to be overcome by the three countries is a pipeline route that passes through territorial waters to which Turkey claims to be entitled. Turkey and its new partner Libya have declared a new maritime border in the area, giving Erdogan a veto right. Tensions between Israel, Greece, Cyprus and Turkey are likely to arise here. It remains to be seen whether or not such tensions will lead to military conflict.

### **A Radar on Crete**

Another spectre for Turkey is the Israeli plan to build an advanced long-range naval radar

(known as Long Horizon over-the-horizon (OTH) radar system) on the Greek island of Crete to monitor the route of the planned natural gas pipeline. It is not known what type of Israeli OTH radar system will be used.

The Long Horizon OTH project was first developed during the visit of the Greek Minister of Defence Panos Kommenos to Israel in 2015, but was temporarily suspended due to Greece's deepening financial difficulties. The project, revived in March 2019, would have the capacity to monitor most of Turkey's coasts. The installation of the Long Horizon OTH radar system in Crete, with its extensive coverage area superior to that of traditional radars, would give three partners a competitive advantage. Apart from its wide radar coverage, the new radar system also gives the missiles new capabilities in terms of target acquisition.



A satellite image of the Aegean Sea. For decades, Greece and Turkey have been arguing over sovereignty and related rights in the Aegean Sea. The dispute has had a major impact on Greek-Turkish relations since the 1970s. On two occasions it led to crises that came close to the outbreak of military conflicts, in 1987 and early 1996.

With a series of UAVs, the radar system is capable of monitoring an area with a radius of 600 km. In other words, the entire region of Cyprus, part of the Aegean Sea extending to the

Dardanelles, and the entire Aegean and Mediterranean region of Turkey. With this radar, Israel, Greece and Cyprus can monitor Turkish airspace and the movements of ships in the eastern Mediterranean around the clock. In the joint radar station, Israeli experts will carry out the first tasks and Greece will receive data collected by the radar. As soon as Greece's economic circumstances allow, Greece intends to acquire the radar equipment. It is not yet known whether Cyprus will buy the radar or not.

### US Support

In March 2019, following a meeting with representative of Israel, Greece and Cyprus, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo underscored US support for its trilateral mechanism for better cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean. The three countries agreed to strengthen regional cooperation and to defend themselves against external threats in the Eastern Mediterranean and wider Middle East. In September 2019, it was reported that a bipartisan bill (known as the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act) in the US Congress, and ratified by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, allowed the US to fully support the trilateral partnership of Israel, Greece and Cyprus through energy and defence cooperation initiatives and proposed lifting of the long-standing arms embargo on Cyprus. The bipartisan law was adopted on 19 December 2019.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, trilateral military cooperation will continue in the coming years. Even if Israel is reluctant to engage militarily on the side of Greece and Cyprus against potential adversaries, the IDF must prepare plans for such action. At the same time, neither Greece nor Cyprus will wage war on Israel's side. Indeed, Israel does not expect its partners to support it militarily, since Israel conducts its wars on its own. It should be stressed, however, that security around the Mediterranean will keep all three countries united for the foreseeable future. Therefore, the implicit support of Israel is indeed crucial for the two countries.

Greece has gradually replaced Turkey as Israel's partner in NATO's multinational air and naval forces exercises and in the naval forces of Israel, Greece and the US navy exercise. In addition, despite protests from Turkey, Israel is increasingly participating in NATO exercises on the Greek coast. The Israeli Greek air and sea exercises will continue, providing both sides with additional experience for operations in unknown terrain, whether in Israel or in Greece. Israeli Cypriot military exercises have improved the capabilities and readiness of the Cyprus

military compared to the Turkish forces. Turkey has tacitly acknowledged this point. US and EU support for the construction of a gas pipeline from Israel via Greek Cyprus to Greece and from there to the EU puts Turkey under pressure. Whether Turkey will seek a military solution is beyond the scope of the article. Nevertheless, it can be said that Turkey will probably consider all the measures at its disposal.

**N.B.:** The article was first published in the European Security Defence, March 2020, pp. 22-25.



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## THE MIDDLE EAST

# Idlib: Another Monstrous Face of the Syrian War

**Ambassador Professor Dumitru CHICAN**

In the history of wars – whether large or small – there is a stylistic and methodological tendency to overstate some of their episodes, most of the times subjectively chosen. Remembered as such either after the names of enemy commanders or the locations where confrontations took place, many of these martial actions were ennobled with epithets such as “historical” or “memorable”. Those labelled as “historical” especially, being scarcer, remained in the collective and historical memory as defining landmarks of the entire war.

In the current context of conflicts in the Middle East, the Syrian civil war is an obvious exception, as not just a few, but *all* its episodes have been proclaimed as historical – from Deraa to Aleppo and Raqqa, through Afrin and Kobane, Al-Hasakah, all the way to Damascus’ Ghouta and the ruins in Palmyra. They were all historical, heroic, strategic, decisive, epic and so many such appellations, depending on the imagination, interests and positions of the players involved as well as on the frontline’s capricious evolution. Unfortunately, this “historicity” has been snobbishly ignoring the huge dramas and humanitarian crises, the massive material, social and identity damages, caused by “military exploits”, and which are the real reasons for the breakdown of a people transformed into waves of wandering ghosts in search of everyday survival.

Starting late 2019, we have been witnessing a new “historical episode” in Syria, where everybody is involved whether they want it or not, and if they want it they do it away from the spotlight and the public eye – whether Syrian, Arab, regional or international. And this episode is called Idlib, where for a few weeks now there has been a real war, which has already produced

around one million refugees. Why is this district and city so important and what is its weight in the equation of war and peace in Syria? The following lines intend to provide a few possible answers to these questions.

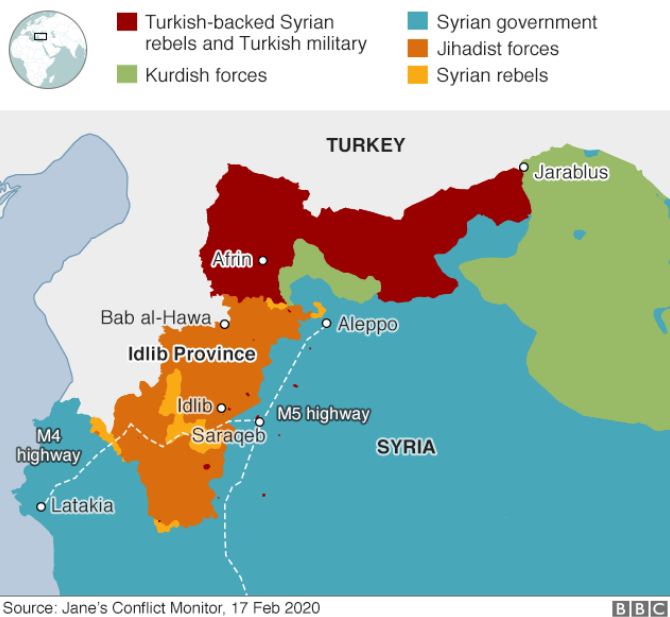
## Why Idlib?

The Idlib province (or governorate, *muhàfaza*) and its capital bearing the same name, situated in northwest Syria by the Turkish border, and the neighbouring provinces of Hama, Latakia and Aleppo are, nowadays, the last refuge and stronghold of the armed Syrian opposition as well as Islamist-Jihadi groups led by the former Syrian branch of Al-Qaeda. Successively named “Jabhat Al-Nusra” (the Al-Nusra Front) and “Hayat Tahrir Al-Sham” (Syrian Liberation Front), it has been fighting, ever since 2011, for the ousting of the Assad regime. This area is also a stronghold of groups of fighters from the former Islamic State (ISIS). From a military perspective, the province controls the only border crossing in north-east Syria, through Bab Al-Hawa; it has in the north a common border with Afrin (the capital of the Rojava province, where a Kurdish minority resides) and controls, through Saraqib, the highways connecting with Aleppo in the north-east and Damascus, as well as the strategic motorway M4, which goes to the port city of Latakia.

Following the agreement reached in Sochi, in May 2017 between the Russian Federation, Turkey and Iran, the Idlib province was declared a “de-escalation zone”, while Turkey was required to continue its actions against the Islamist rebels and insurgents. Following the incursion of the Turkish military in the Syrian territory, Ankara didn’t go through with its commitment and provided military and logistic support to the Assad opposition, including to Al-Qaeda, which is why the relationship between

Recep Tayyp Erdogan and Vladimir Putin has become increasingly tense.

### Idlib province



accused of war crimes, the two, of course denying all of it, while the refugee exodus continues.



Idlib, 4<sup>th</sup> of March. The latest refugees – where to?  
(Source: Khalil Ashawi/Reuters)

### Between Putin and Erdogan

I have written these lines in the context of the latest meeting between Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyp Erdogan, which took place in Moscow, on the 5<sup>th</sup> of March, with the stated purpose of reaching a consensus and putting an end to the humanitarian tragedy in north-eastern Syria, as well as identifying a new way to prevent a further escalation of the relationship between Turkey and the Russian Federation. The fact that reaching this consensus is getting more and more difficult, is proven by a series of indications: the unprecedented exchange of accusations between Moscow and Ankara, which blame each other for the violation of the Sochi agreements in 2018 regarding the disarmament of the Idlib province and the cessation of military support that the two players provide to the Damascus regime (Russia with its aviation, artillery, military police and fighters from Wagner - the famous mercenary “company”) and the insurgents respectively (Turkey helping the Syrian rebels and the Islamist-Jihadi groups). A no less worrying signal is also given by the fact that, while waiting for the Turkish president’s visit to Moscow, the Russian Federation started, on the 28<sup>th</sup> of February (meaning after 34 Turkish soldiers being killed in the Syrian air raids) to swiftly strengthen its military presence in Syria and in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. Some Arab analysts see, in these steps, an

Late February 2020, the loyalist Syrian army launched a large-scale offensive to take over the Idlib province, however, the operations degenerated into clashes with troops from the Turkish observation points and the conflict spread rapidly – a few tens of Turkish troops were killed by Syrian airstrikes and several Turkish drones were destroyed. In retaliation, the Turkish attacked and shot down three Syrian fighting jets and two air defence systems, while several Syrian troops were killed by Turkish air and artillery strikes.

President Erdogan appealed to the European Union and NATO several times, asking for support to his offensive against Bashar Al-Assad’s regime, but these calls remained unanswered. And Erdogan’s reaction was swift, as he opened the Turkish borders for the refugees in his country, an action whose effects threaten the countries of the European Union with a new crisis.

### A New Humanitarian Crisis

UN officials believe that the most recent crisis in north-western Syria has taken “a terrible toll”, mostly on civilians. The fighting in Idlib has led to Russia and the Assad regime being even

indicator for the level of tension the present situation has reached and which, in the absence of an immediate agreement, could lead to military confrontations between the Turkish and Russian armed forces in Syria.

To what extent can one count on the tensions between Putin and Erdogan as a determining factor for a compromise between the ambitions of the leader in Kremlin and those of the Golden Horn leader, in the competition over Syria?

It is true that between Turkey and the Russian Federation there are clear and major differences, when looking at the reasons and strategies which have determined both their military interventions on the chessboard of the Syrian civil war. But it is also true that Moscow and Ankara are kept together by common interests requiring from each of them extreme caution and concern for keeping their conflicting disputes in an area as limited as possible. This explains the regular public reiterations, by both the Russians and the Turkish, of their commitment to the agreements reached in Astana and Sochi. If Russia manages to avoid and keeps on avoiding to be dragged in a dirty war of attrition, Turkey too does not have the willingness and the resources to engage in a similar war of attrition against a Syrian regime which is less and less willing to obey Russian or Iranian orders and directions, precisely out of the need to prove that it is independent, powerful and capable to fight against "foreign conspiracies" at any cost. In an extreme scenario, Turkey is not interested in Russia's presence in Syria and in the Middle East, and even more importantly, it can find a way to strike a deal with the Assad regime if that will help stave off, or even eliminate the Kurdish "existential threat".

Not in the least, while analysing the dysfunctions between Russia and Turkey one should not forget the fact that the two states have economic and commercial relations worth 30 billion USD in 2019, while Turkey accommodated no less than 6 million Russian tourists over the same year, and not to mention the joint nuclear and hydrocarbon energy projects.

Under these circumstances, the six-hour summit between Putin and Erdogan mainly focused on military issues. The only exception was the matter brought up by the Turkish President, who believed that a return to the Geneva process was also needed with a view to finding a general political solution to the Syrian conflict. The matter was not taken into consideration. So, the agreement between the two leaders, which will be considered an integral part of the Sochi agreements sums up the following:

- The cessation of all military operations at the contact lines between the Syrian and the Turkish armed forces; this truce will then be gradually and quickly implemented in the entire Idlib province;

Turkey and Russia will establish a security corridor 6 km wide on each side of the strategic highway connecting Idlib to Aleppo, Latakia and Damascus. The security of the corridor will fall into the hands of both the Russian and the Turkish armed forces.

- Starting with the 15<sup>th</sup> of March, joint Russian-Turkish patrols will be conducted along the strategic lines and towns in the region.

- In order to make the truce permanent, the Syrian armed forces will give up all attempts to enter Idlib (whether it is permanent or temporary they do not say); the farthest point they can reach is the city of Saraqib, in the eastern part of the district. These are the terms imposed by president Erdogan, who warned that any military action by the Syrian regime in the north-eastern part of the country will be answered accordingly by the Turkish military forces deployed in the region.

Many Arab analysts believed that the Erdogan-Putin summit, far from satisfying the needs of the Turkish leader, has proved once again that the Russian president continues to be the one pulling the strings of the outcome of the Syrian conflict. What they decided in Moscow on the 5<sup>th</sup> of March was but a comeback, with slight amendments to the solutions elaborated by Russia both in the "Astana Process" and during the Sochi rounds of negotiations. It is obvious that Vladimir Putin didn't take any extra

commitments as far as the guarantees to observe the truce and, much less as far as the involvement of the Russian war machine in operations alongside Bashar Al-Assad's armed forces.

Erdogan's attempt to "free" himself from under the Russian guardianship established in Sochi with a view to bringing back the Syrian dossier to the "Geneva process" – that is involving the UN and the Security Council – has also failed. And following the recent and considerable human losses amongst the Turkish military caused by Syrian air bombardments, Erdogan's

"Spring Shield" operation seems to have failed in assuming control over the Syrian north-east. Moreover, the fact that he asked for a meeting with Putin and requested for help from the European Union and NATO is, according to the Arab press, a clear "sign of weakness" from Erdogan.

Under such circumstances, the competition for Syria is ongoing, the refugee and migrant waves will also keep on causing trouble, and Idlib, just like other Syrian "historical episodes" will be forgotten sooner or later. At what cost, it remains to be seen.

## The Palestinians and the "Deal of the Century" - No News, No Deal

*Dinu COSTESCU*

The last year's Middle East political agenda was mainly dominated by the redundant paradigm called the "Deal of the Century". A promising title for the latest initiative of president Donald Trump who, setting aside the US plans to building the "new" or "great" Middle East (that the former secretary of state Condoleeza Rice launched in 2000), came up with an objective of his own – equally "modest" and complex and difficult – to find a final and long-lasting solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Jared Kushner, presidential advisor and son-in-law (married to Ivanka Trump), who was very knowledgeable of the Arab mindset, was assigned to handle this troublesome file and so he did, steadfastly following the old Arabic saying *Al-Sabr Fadhila*, which translates into "Patience is a virtue". And everybody waited. With little hope and satisfaction, the Palestinians, led by president Mahmoud Abbas did the same. They waited for the moment when Trump's magic wand would pull the lucky bunny of the deal out of the hat.

And, little by little, out of Jared Kushner's magic repertoire, surprises kept on coming:

- Donald Trump stated that the USA recognised Jerusalem as Israel's united and eternal capital, forgetting that the Knesset had annexed it by a



Donald Trump and the Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas, May, 2017. Photograph by Issam Rimawi/Anadolu Agency/Getty/www.newyorker.com

law that the international community and the UN had dismissed and still dismiss today.

- The Trump administration proceeded to the "divine miracle" of transferring the US Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to the "united city" of Jerusalem – *Al-Quds*.

- By order of president Trump, the Palestinian diplomatic office in Washington was closed.

- The USA decided (in 2019) to suspend the financial and humanitarian assistance to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA).

During the Doha Forum in 2019, organized under the slogan "From Peace to Prosperity",



Jared Kushner unveiled the economic aspects of the “deal”, which basically proposed giving the Palestinians a 10 billion USD “incentive”, provided by none other than his Royal Highness, the magnanimous Muhammad Bin Salman, the heir to the Saudi throne. As for the political aspects of the “deal”, ..... we must once again make reference to that famous “virtuous patience”. The Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu felt elated once more, while the Palestinians and their president, Mahmoud Abbas unanimously decided: “Jerusalem and our dignity are not for sale”.



www.m.startribune.com

As regards the political segment of the “Deal of the Century” announced by president Trump during a press conference, it consisted in the de facto formalization of the position of both the US and Israel. This position dismisses any idea of a Palestinian state, whether an entity alongside Israel or not, and reduces the “rights of the Palestinians” to a regime of autonomy in the territories left to Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. These territories would be connected by a highway and a tunnel built after the new Israeli government led by Benjamin Netanyahu will have implemented the intention to take under Israeli sovereignty the Jewish settlements in the autonomous territories, as well as the one to annex the Jordan Valley and the territories north of the Dead Sea.

After the early elections on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of March 2020 (the third round of early elections this year), consultations and negotiations for the formation of a governing coalition between the two front runners – Benjamin Netanyahu, the

leader of the far-right Likud party and general Benny Gantz, the leader of the right wing party, Blue and White (named after the colours of the Israeli flag) have started and are still under way. So, what about the “Deal of the Century”? No news so far. Patience is the most beautiful virtue! For the Palestinians, of course.

The world has other priorities. The world goes about its own isolation, while searching for elixirs to free itself as soon as possible from the nightmare that is COVID-19.

As for Jared Kushner...well, according to early April news, the former “handler” of the “Deal of the Century” was assigned another important task. He is to manage, at federal level, the fight against the new Coronavirus pandemic.

*O tempora, o mores!* Said the great Cicero.

# Afghanistan: from „Enduring Freedom” to „Enduring Peace”?

**Ambassador Professor Dumitru CHICAN**

## A Brief Remember

- On the 5<sup>th</sup> of February 1989, the former Soviet Union withdrew its last troops from Afghanistan, following a 10-year war in support of the pro-Soviet communist regime in Kabul.

- 12 years later, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October 2001, the USA launched the operation “Enduring Freedom” against the Taliban insurgents accused of supporting the terrorist network Al-Qaeda, which was behind the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

- In January 2015, operation “Resolute Support” was launched by NATO in Afghanistan. At the peak of the expedition in Afghanistan, US and coalition forces amounted to 98,000 troops. On the 20<sup>th</sup> of February 2020, their number reached 16,500 people of 38 countries, the main human contributions coming from the USA (8000), Germany (1300), the UK (1100), Italy (900), Georgia (870) and Romania (800).

- On the 30<sup>th</sup> of September 2019, the Pentagon estimated that between 32,000 and 60,000 Afghan civilians have died as direct and indirect casualties of war.

- According to the same source, the total costs of the campaign in Afghanistan has reached 776 billion USD, however Other US sources (Brown University) say that the amount reaches 6,400 billion USD.

After two years and several rounds of peace negotiations, on the 29<sup>th</sup> of February 2020 a ceasefire agreement was signed in Doha (the capital of Qatar). The agreement was signed by Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation and Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the political co-founder of the Taliban movement.

## The First Analyses

After 18 years of war, the USA and the Taliban

insurgents decided to conclude an agreement that many analysts considered as having a historical dimension and significance. It is meant to pave the way for the withdrawal of the US and NATO troops, as well as for the start of a peace process between the insurgents and the government in Kabul led by the president Ashraf Ghani – who wasn’t present in Doha for the negotiations, as it is seen by the Islamist Taliban as a “US and Western puppet”.

A first analysis of the document on the 29<sup>th</sup> of February highlights the fundamental reality deriving from its scope and the real chances for an overall and long-lasting pacification of Afghanistan. And we are specifically referring to the fact that the Doha Agreement is, first of all, a military agreement between the foreign troops who fought in Afghanistan, on one hand, and the Islamist political and military entities who have fought under the generic name of Taliban Movement, on the other.

However, the agreement isn’t, at the same time one between the Taliban insurgents, on one hand, and the civil society and the government in Kabul led by Ashraf Ghani (who, just like his predecessor, Hamis Kharzai is accused by the Islamists of being “a US tool and puppet”), on the other.



The signatories of the agreement, Zalmay Khalilzad and Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar,

source: <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/>

One may say it is an agreement where diplomacy has made use of Clausewitz's famous definition, in the sense that it has manifested itself as a "war by other means" leading to the following:

1. The Taliban will give up all connections to Islamist terrorism associated to Al-Qaida and possibly ISIS.

2. In 14 months' time all foreign expeditionary forces – whether US or NATO – will withdraw from Afghanistan.

3. Only after these two - mostly military - objectives have been reached will the Afghan political peace process, social contract and reconciliation among all Afghans be launched.

### **Afghan Peace – An Equation More Complicated than War**

Afghanistan is a geopolitical and polymorphic area much more complicated than shown by the binary propaganda of "good guys/bad guys". The experience of a 30-year war with two of the greatest world powers – not to forget the British occupation, which ended in 1919 – resulted in the slow, but progressive erosion of the tribal fault lines between the 20 major ethnic communities, between the tribal traditionalism and the birth of the idea of a modern Afghan state, more and more aware of the fact that it has a national identity. However, this nation claims all the ethnic, linguistic and confessional segments as its own, the representativeness of its identity in connection to all the other social segments and especially in connection to the foreign expansionist interferences. On the other hand, the same historical experience, deeply rooted in the collective mind, makes the Afghan society to be perceived not as a coherent entity dedicated to the common prosperity, but more like a conjunction of local client communities motivated by custom-like, confessional, cultural linguistic and mercantile subnational interests. Hence a dynamic fragmentation of the Afghan chessboard, which hosts various players – the tribal leaders, the political and military communalism, the confessional insurgents and the Afghan establishment, whose relationship is strongly undermined by mutual suspicion,

scepticism, as well as conflictual and competitive feeling.

### **Twenty Years Later**



Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/>

Given the fact that the "Afghan peace" was negotiated between the USA and the confessional insurgency, one may say that the Doha agreement on the 29<sup>th</sup> of February is a *deal*. Besides the US withdrawal from Afghanistan – that president Donald Trump promised ever since the electoral campaign – the deal is meant to create the proper setting for a political peace process; nevertheless, it is entirely a "family business" that doesn't effectively engage the insurgents, nor Ashraf Ghani's government in a process to negotiate a course of action meant to move Afghanistan from war to peace. Moreover, even the name of the document is confusing, dense and subject to interpretation. Thus, in Doha was signed an "Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan which is not recognized by the United States as a state and is known as the Taliban and the United States of America".

The next 35 days following its signing, which is by 10<sup>th</sup> of April, the number of US troops in Afghanistan will be decreased from 16,000 to 8,600 and five bases of the international coalition closed down. The rest of the troops will be withdrawn within 14 months. As for political peace, the document mentions that the Taliban will start intra-Afghan negotiations for a "permanent and comprehensive ceasefire". We must highlight the fact that there is no mention

of an obligation for the Taliban to “start” the peace negotiations and that we find the answer to the question regarding “whom will the Taliban negotiate with” equally confusing, since the government in Kabul has not been part of the peace negotiations in Doha (and therefore not obliged to accept the Islamist “initiative”) nor did the Taliban recognise the authority of this government. What drew our attention in this regard was the warning of the secretary of defence Mark Esper, who said that “if the Taliban do not fulfil their obligations, they will lose the opportunity to sit at the negotiating table with the Afghans and discuss the future of their country”. In this case, the US won’t hesitate to terminate the agreement. For his part, the secretary of state Mike Pompeo stated: “I know there will be a temptation to declare victory. But victory – victory for Afghans – will only be achieved when they can live in peace and prosper”.

In the name of the Afghan government, the document proposes the release of 5000 insurgent prisoners, in exchange for 1000 governmental prisoners. This provision was rejected the very next day by the Afghan president Ashraf Ghani, with the argument that it is an intra-Afghan matter and a foreign interference in the matters of Kabul’s sovereign government. It was a first obstacle on the path to national reconciliation.

The armistice agreement states that the withdrawal process of the US troops from Afghanistan starts in the first decade of March. Which is what happened on the 9<sup>th</sup> of March when US officials announced the beginning of the repatriation of US troops deployed on Afghan soil. According to general Scott Miller, the commander of the US Forces in Afghanistan, it is not a “rotation” or a “refreshment” of troops but a reduction within 14 months from 13,000 people (at present) to 8,600; these troops will continue to provide assistance to the Afghan military and to fight against terrorism.

From the point of view of Afghanistan’s demilitarization and its transition from war - with the Islamist insurgents - to peace, the promptness with which the USA started to the

implement the agreement signed on the 29<sup>th</sup> of February cannot be but welcomed. However, the process of political pacification is shaping up to be delicate and difficult, as not only the political and institutional systems, but also the entire Afghan society are marked by severe disagreements and rifts which put into question the perspective of an intra-Afghan national consensus. And a first warning sign was given by the very leaders of the Afghan establishment. Thus, the new president, Ashraf Ghani (who barely won his second presidential mandate last September), as well as his opponent Abdullah Abdullah (who claimed electoral fraud and proclaimed himself president of Afghanistan) celebrated by separated rallies their “investitures” and risked opening the door for a double-headed state leadership. Or, a reiteration in Afghanistan of the situation in Libya would be a serious threat and challenge to a domestic dialogue which could, even before its start, light the spark of a civil war in this country. Regional and local diplomatic circles are talking about the possibility of initiating political negotiations, in Oslo (Norway), however, this involves overcoming some of the deepest resentments and uncertainties. On one side, the Taliban keep on accusing the president Ashraf Ghani of being a Western and US puppet, while his followers advertise his past as a “warlord” and “supporter of the Islamic Jihad”. Besides, another development which complicates the situation takes shape. We are referring to the return on the political chessboard of Ahmad Massoud (the son of the legendary military commander Massoud and fierce enemy of the Taliban), who announced the formation of a new political party and called on all “true Afghans” to join him in his fight against the Taliban ambitions of reinstating the radical Islamist regime removed from power upon the intervention of the US troops. The 30 years old Ahmad Massoud graduated from the Sandhurst Military Academy in UK and seeks the resurgence of the Northern League led by his father, in order to attract the true Mujahedeen fighting against radical Islam and to set the country on the path to modernity and democracy. “Hundreds of thousands of young men are ready to take arms and join us” stated

Ahmad Massoud. Which suggests an unwanted perspective of a never-ending Afghan civil war.

The Doha agreement isn't perfect; however, it is a first step towards ending the war and taking the road to peace.

Twenty years later, there still is a chance that following the bloody "Enduring Freedom"

operation, Afghanistan would transition to a welcome "Enduring Peace" operation. This can only happen if the Afghans themselves understand this imperative, to whose accomplishment the international community, through the United Nations can bring a necessary and valuable contribution.



Ahmad Masoud, source: <https://gandhara.rferl.org/>

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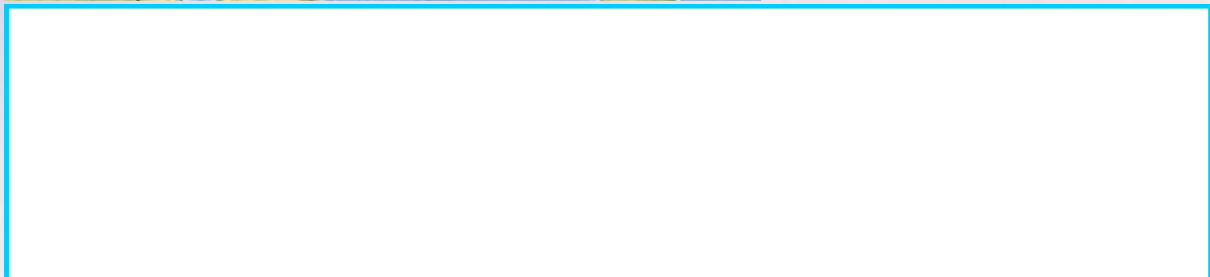


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