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Explaining Eastern Europe

THE CRISIS OF LIBERALISM

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In his essay *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe,* written in the heat of the moment, sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf tried, in the manner of Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France,* to define the meaning of 1989 and the stakes of the transitions that were then beginning in the eastern part of the continent.[1] For Dahrendorf, it was not a question of the "end of history" (the lack of any alternative to "market-based democracy"), nor even the victory of the "capitalist system" over the "socialist system," but rather the victory of the "open" over the "closed" society. For Dahrendorf, as for sociologist Ernest Gellner, this was the deep meaning of 1989, which presented an opportunity for liberal democracy in Central and Eastern Europe.

The fading away of totalizing visions made it possible to envisage diverse postcommunist trajectories, whose outcome would depend on the ability of new political elites to carry to completion a simultaneous triple transition with distinct, interdependent, and asynchronic dimensions: There would be free elections and the founding of law-based rule (the work of six months), followed by a market economy (the work of six years), and then a civil society (the work of sixty years). The year 1989 stood for a "bourgeois revolution" without a bourgeoisie, a democratic revolution that would have to construct the conditions of its own existence—the "conditions of liberty," to borrow Gellner's words.[2]

Yet 1989 was also experienced by its protagonists (and not only by a few exiled or dissident writers) as the "return of Central Europe" and of nations recovering their liberty by leaving the Soviet empire. The cul-

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tural resilience of Central Europe's societies had prevailed over a decaying communist structure. If Central Europe's "tragedy" was, as Milan Kundera wrote, to be a "kidnapped West," "culturally in the West and politically in the East" but "situated geographically in the centre,"[3] then 1989 signified the possibility for the countries of the "other Europe" to finally reconcile their politics with their culture and their geography.

The parallel emergence of liberalism (human rights and civil society) and the affirmation of cultural belonging to the West in the dissident movements of the 1970s and especially the 1980s had paved the way for the end of the *ancien régime*. Both the "Havel moment" and the "Kundera moment" found fulfillment in resistance to totalitarianism and in the "velvet revolutions" of 1989. The open society and a sense of European identity went hand-in-hand.

A quarter-century later, one cannot help but notice that these two elements, and above all their complementarity, have been called into question. Between "illiberal democracy" and heightened concerns about identity in the face of the migrant wave, the authoritarian and sovereigntist turn in Central Europe has revealed a rupture in the fabric of the European Union. In addition to the resuscitated East-West split, we must analyze the emerging doubts about post-1989 liberalism. This involves some circumstances peculiar to Central Europe, but the rise of populisms and the rejection of liberalism are traits shared in the rest of Europe as well.

The Populist Turn and the Rejection of Liberalism

Several countries in Central Europe, principally Hungary and Poland (though we observe analogous tendencies in Slovakia and Croatia), have in the course of the last several years explicitly raised doubts about the liberal model adopted after 1989. Three main aspects merit discussion here: the rule of law, the recourse to nationalism, and "culture wars."

After having been built for two decades, the rule of law is being dismantled before our eyes in Poland and Hungary. Former Hungarian president László Sólyom—he was also the founder of his country's Constitutional Court—declared in 2013 that "the rule of law has ceased to exist" in Hungary.[4] The recent authoritarian turn takes aim at the separation of powers, media independence, and the political neutrality of the civil service. Constitutional courts have been the first targets for attack in Hungary as in Poland, since such bodies are suspected of hindering the expression of popular sovereignty and establishing a sort of "legal impossibilism," as Jarosław Kaczyński once put it. The Venice Commission has concluded that the measures taken by the Polish government toward the Constitutional Tribunal "endanger not only the rule of law, but also the functioning of the democratic system."[5]

The purging of public media, in Poland as in Hungary, represents a

second aspect of regression from the democratic accomplishments of the post-1989 era. With the political opposition weak and divided, power holders are targeting those who might take its place—namely, the organizations of civil society. In Hungary, these now find themselves forced by a June 2017 law to divulge the names of their foreign donors.[6] This doubtless was aimed mainly at the Open Society Foundations of George Soros, who is also the founder of the Central European University, the target of a new law that directly threatens its existence.[7]

Orbán, the Opposition, and the Academy

By going after civil society and academic freedom, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán is attacking not just the opposition, but a sphere that has heretofore been independent of power, one in which he suspects the politically defeated opposition has re-entrenched itself. Here we find a pattern that recalls the *ancien régime,* with the cultural sphere taking the place of the political. First the opposition, then civil society, then the culture: It adds up to a reprise of the notorious "salami tactics" that Hungarian communist leader Mátyás Rákosi applied back in the 1940s. This bears more resemblance to Vladimir Putin's Russia or Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Turkey than to the mainstream of the European Union.

It is essential to note, however, that these attacks on countervailing powers and civil society groups are being carried out in the name of the people's will as expressed via the ballot box. The leading trait of populist parties is to claim a monopoly on representing the people. Commanding an electoral majority provides authorization to cast off the constraints of the constitution or to revise it. Political scientists have long been studying the crisis of representative democracy and the rise of populist parties. It is less common for politicians to take up concepts first elaborated by political science. We have seen Pablo Iglesias, the leader of Podemos in Spain, do this with the populist theories of Ernesto Laclau (updated by Chantal Mouffe for Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unbowed France movement). Viktor Orbán, for his part, has borrowed the concept of "illiberal democracy" laid out twenty years ago by Fareed Zakaria, a political scientist turned journalist.[8] Zakaria had observed that the formidable post-1989 expansion of electoral democracy as a mode of choosing governments was not necessarily going to sit easily with liberalism, since the latter places both constitutional and institutional limits on democracy. Orbán took over Zakaria's formula (but not his inquietude), calling liberal democracy only one option among others and adding that it was incapable of accomplishing the first task of government, which is to defend the national interest.[9] Orbán declared himself in favor of an "illiberal state," which would also allow the best economic performance, as shown by Singapore, China, India, and Turkey). Donald Trump's election to the White House was taken by Orbán

as a confirmation of his approach. "Liberal non-democracy is over," he exulted. "What a day! What a day! What a day!"[10]

The second aspect of the democratic regression concerns the resurgence of nationalism in countries which, unlike those in the Balkans, had avoided allowing a return of nationalist sentiment to throw their democratic transitions off course in the years following 1989. In the course of the last decade, however, the mantle of legitimacy has passed from technocratic liberalism to populist nationalisms that harbor an organic conception of the nation as a historic, cultural, and religious community that the state must protect. In 1989, the return of democracy and the return of nationalism had combined in seeking the dissolution of the Soviet empire. That is why 1989, like 1848 before it, could be thought of as "a springtime of peoples." Today, however, popular sovereignty is invoked in Budapest or Warsaw to undermine the separation of powers. It is linked with the affirmation of national sovereignty against EU interference, whether this takes the form of issuing warnings about attacks on the rule of law or imposing quotas for accepting migrants.

"I've been going to Brussels regularly for eleven years," said Orbán. "The European elites—the political decision makers and the people who run the media—imagine that human development moves forward via the liquidation of our identities; that it is not modern to be Polish, Czech, or Hungarian; that it is not modern to be Christian. Instead, a new identity has appeared in their place, that of the European. . . . The British have said 'no.' They have decided to remain British. . . . The identity of European does not exist. There are Poles, there are Hungarians. . . . All these phenomena observed today in Europe show that a cultural counterrevolution is possible."[11]

Once, dissidents such as Adam Michnik and Václav Havel met in the mountains at the Czech-Polish border to talk about strategies for the democratic opposition. More recently, two former dissidents, Orbán and Kaczyński, met in September 2016 at Krynica (Poland) in those same Tatra Mountains to call for a cultural "counterrevolution" in Europe.

The "culture wars" are the third part of the antiliberal turn in Central Europe. Political polarization is not only internal; it also has an external dimension where one can hear echoes of Putin's contempt for a decadent and permissive Europe, and of Donald Trump's praise, delivered in his July 2017 speech at Warsaw, of Poland as a rampart of Western civilization fighting "for family, for freedom, for country, and for God."[12]

Former Polish foreign minister Witold Waszczykowski said in 2016 that his government's task was "to cure our state of some diseases" spread by hostile media organs convinced that the direction of history is necessarily leading to "a mix of cultures and races, a world of cyclists and vegetarians who rely solely on renewable energies and fight against every symbol of religion." He added that these pathologies were incompatible with the "Polish values" shared by the majority of the popula-

tion, who look to "tradition, historical consciousness, patriotism, faith in God, a normal family life between a man and a woman."[13]

On the "politics of values" as on democracy, the country is divided. Former president Bronisław Komorowski remarked during the 2015 presidential campaign that the election was a choice between a "rational Poland" in the heart of Europe and a "radical Poland" on the fringe of Europe. There are indeed two Polands, as there are two Hungaries.

Two Disturbing Questions

How can we account for the democratic backsliding and the antiliberal turn in Central Europe? What importance should we accord to the influence of the legacies left behind by communism or other forms of political culture unfavorable to liberalism?

Since the revolutions of 1989, two troubling questions have haunted the transition. The first has to do with the cultural underpinings of politics, and the second with the relationship between democracy and the market. Are the cultures that proved the most resistant to communism, such as Poland's combination of nationalism and Catholicism, also favorable to the introduction of liberal democracy and the market economy? 1989 was not about the project of creating a new kind of society. It was, to use François Furet's term, a "revolution-restoration." But since these nations exiting from Sovietism claimed to be reviving a precommunist past, was there not also a risk of recovering, in a new context, the old faults of the interwar period, which had been marked by the growing eclipse of post-1918 democratic advances and the rise in the 1920s of authoritarian and nationalist regimes?[14]

What about the Czech tradition associated with its first president Tomáš Masaryk, which featured a "social-democratic" ethos in a more secularized and egalitarian society? It had proved to be more vulnerable to the communist project after the war; but might not this tradition furnish a political culture favorable to the post-1989 democratic transition?

The answers, twenty years later, can be summed up as follows: The fears about Hungary and Poland—countries where the post-1918 transition to democracy had given way to authoritarian tendencies—were exaggerated, and after 1989 they became liberal democracies. Bronisław Geremek, one of the most respected figures in the new political elite, would explain that he had reservations regarding the recourse to historical analogies.[15]

The second question had to do with the compatibility of simultaneous transitions toward democracy and the market economy. Considering the dilapidated state of socialist economies, the issue was how to build democracies atop an economic disaster. Eminent specialists in "transition studies" such as Claus Offe and Adam Przeworski did not discount the possibility of a South American scenario for Eastern Europe: "The East wants to move toward the West, but risks ending up in the South,"

is how Geremek put it in 1992, in what was meant as a warning to Westerners and a plea for a new Marshall Plan that never came.

The two fears—one having to do with political culture and the other with economic conditions—that haunted the passage to democracy did not come true, and the countries of Central Europe came to be held up as models of "consolidated" democracy. The first reason for this outcome was the convergence, during the period leading up to 1989, of the democratic aspiration with liberalism. By the same token, the current backsliding and the rise of populism can be traced, in great part, to the decoupling of liberalism from democracy.

While the idea of democracy had solid antecedents in Central and Eastern Europe, liberalism was long seen as an import or a weakly rooted product of imitation, due to the region's level of socioeconomic development as well as to the national question. This situation changed during the period leading up to communism's fall, a time marked by a liberal renewal that took place as much on the plane of political ideas as on that of economic remedies.

The USSR's crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968 signified not only the end of the notion that "really existing socialism" could reform itself from within, but also (as Leszek Kołakowski put it) the "clinical death of Marxism," ground to dust beneath the treads of Soviet tanks rolling through the streets of Prague. The years after 1968 saw a profound transformation of the intellectual and political landscape. With the dissident and human-rights movements came a rediscovery of the ideas of civil society and the primary importance of the rule of law. The dissident writings called for a new citizenship combining the responsibility of each for the fate of society (a theme dear to Havel) with a new and conscious individualism (a theme dear to György Konrád). The latter's "praise for the crisis" in 1987 announced a new paradigm: "*Homo eticus* opens like a closet, and out steps the citizen. He does not want to be managed; he wants to be represented."[16]

During the first stage of this rediscovery of liberalism, there was a deep reshaping of the intellectual landscape and of the lines of cleavage in the Polish, Czech, and Hungarian political cultures.

In Poland, the tone was set by a memorable article that Kołakowski penned under the title "How to Be a Conservative-Liberal Socialist."[17] This was a hint that the old ideological labels no longer applied. Michnik carried forward the work with two essays that appeared almost simultaneously. "The Church and the Left" inquired whether a dialogue and even a convergence could be possible between two historic rivals, the Catholic Church and the secular Left, not only as a tactic to be used against those in power, but also around the values of human dignity and truth.[18] In "A New Evolutionism," Michnik set out to overcome the other division, the classic dilemma (inherited from the nineteenth century) between Marshal Józef Piłsudski and Foreign Minister Roman Dmowski, between revolution and

accommodation, by means of a new strategy of self-organization to be undertaken by civil society acting independently of official structures.[19] The unifying power of the Solidarity movement in 1980 rested precisely on the overcoming of these two aforementioned cleavages. Even after Solidarity was crushed in December 1981, this political reorientation would prove favorable to liberalism.

In Czechoslovakia, the Charter 77 movement represented a cohabitation rather than a convergence between intellectual and political currents that had been opposed to each other in 1948, but were brought back together by their joint refusal to accept defeat in the wake of 1968. In 1980, there appeared a volume of *samizdat* in honor of Tomáš Masaryk, who had founded the Czechoslovak state in 1918. The writing's list of contributors read like a "who's who" of the Czech intelligentsia at the time, including former revisionist Marxists, veterans of the Prague Spring, Christians, and liberals such as Václav Havel. Masaryk, whom Karl Popper once dubbed a "philosopher-king," had been a "liberal with a social conscience" *avant la lettre* and offered the opposition a point of ideological convergence on which Havel was able to capitalize while symbolically taking over in 1989.

In Hungary, the emblematic personality of a comparable convergence of oppositions was István Bibó (1911–79). A political thinker and the author of *On the Misery of Small East European States,* a book key to the understanding of the national question, he had been a member of the national government during the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. The grand cleavage in twentieth-century Hungarian political culture separated "urbanists" (whether liberals or social democrats), who took their inspiration from Western political and economic models, from "populists," who saw Hungary's peasants ("the people of the *puszta*" or plains[20]) as the repository of the "true values" of a nation anchored in the popular masses. The populist current also was preoccupied with the "national question." The fate of ethnic-Hungarian minorities living in neighboring countries—a third of all Hungarians had been separated from the "mother country" by the 1920 Treaty of Trianon—was and remains a major source of trauma. It was exploited by the regime of Admiral Miklós Horthy between the wars, played down under communism, and more recently revived by Orbán's government.[21]

Bibó, a democratic thinker coming out of the populist tradition and a protagonist of the 1956 revolution, would become in the 1980s a shared reference point among oppositionists seeking to overcome the divisions between the two grand currents within the Hungarian political tradition. Bibó served also as a kind of bridge between the dissidents and those trying to achieve reform from within the system. The other theme of convergence had to do with the rule of law. For János Kis and the democratic opposition, it was no longer a question solely of enlarging the autonomy of civil society, but of establishing insti-

tutional and constitutional guarantees. This approach then found its counterpart among the reformers inside the system who envisaged the separation of the Hungarian Communist Party from the state. "There are three key notions in the current transformation of the Hungarian political system," said Hungary's justice minister in October 1989. "The rule of law, the Constitution, and the rights of man. Together, these represent nothing less than the disintegration of an authoritarian and bureaucratic system and the transition toward a pluralist and democratic system."[22]

At the same time, the decomposition of the socialist economy and the failure of efforts to reform it encouraged the rediscovery of economic liberalism. Especially in Poland and Hungary, but also in Czechoslovakia, liberal economic thought was able to set itself up as an alternative to failed statism. But if the blockages in the socialist command economy were all too evident, the actual workings of "really existing capitalism" in the West were not. After forty years of statism, the minimal state seemed to be an adequate response, especially in the context of the 1980s, which were marked by the influence of "neoliberalism" in the West. Thus liberals living under socialism ended up turning willingly to the free-market theorists of the "Chicago School." The best guarantee of preserving an "open society," they concluded, was to minimize the state's interference in the economy and society. This message would be taken to heart by the liberal economists who laid out the economic reforms that followed communism's fall in 1989.

The proper role of the state also became a point of convergence between liberal politicians coming out of the dissident movement and liberal economists coming out of think tanks. For the former, the question was how to safeguard human rights and to emancipate society, culture, and then the political realm from the grip of the party-state. For the latter, the question was how to free the market economy from its bonds. For a short time, the two groups joined in a common "liberal" project of dismantling the state. This allowed the forging of a political consensus for radical economic reforms, but it also lies at the root of the connivances and misunderstandings that partly explain today's antiliberal thrust—or to put it more precisely, the decoupling of democracy from liberalism.

What Has Become of the Liberals?

How to explain the antiliberal turn of recent years? Was the "liberal moment" indeed only a moment, a unifying notion that served the need to leave communism behind but today faces a new world that has been created precisely by liberalism's success—this world of "globalization"? In assembling the elements of a response, let us begin with a quick stock-taking.

First, we must note the political eclipse of the first bearers of political liberalism in Central Europe, the former dissidents. In 1989, they were propelled to the forefront of the political scene by grand unified movements, but everywhere they failed in the next phase of institutionalizing pluralism—the creation of viable political parties.[23] All attempts to found lasting parties bringing together intellectuals and liberals of the "center-left" met with failure. Havel became president, but he was the tree who hid the forest; his allies in the Civic Movement failed to enter Parliament in the 1992 elections. Power was in the hands of the party founded by economist Václav Klaus, whose government was composed for the most part of his colleagues at the Institute for Forecasting of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences. The liberal economists had replaced the former dissidents.

The only party founded by ex-dissidents that succeeded at implanting itself durably in the political landscape has been Orbán's Fidesz. Created by promising young people (you had to be under 35) who were adepts of political, economic, and social liberalism, the party pitched its appeals to the educated urban middle classes. Fidesz prospered, and a decade later even took power, but it did so by transforming itself into a nationalist, conservative party that today stands for the "illiberal state." As Hungary's Socialist Party (the ex-communists) converted to economic liberalism in the 1990s and as the center-right Hungarian Democratic Forum went into decay, Orbán and his friends in Fidesz, moved first by opportunism and later by conviction, decided to occupy the right-wing nationalist and antiliberal part of the political spectrum.

The best illustration of the decoupling of liberalism from democracy is furnished to us by the evolution of two Polish ex-liberals, Marcin Król and Ryszard Legutko. Each for reasons of his own has now become one of liberalism's critics.

Król is a brilliant historian of ideas who, as the 1980s were about to begin, founded the influential liberal review *Res Publica* as a *samizdat* publication. In 2015, he published a small book called *We Were Stupid* in which he bluntly takes on the indulgence with which ex-dissidents treated the radical free-market reformers, led by the father of "shock therapy" himself, Leszek Balcerowicz.[24] In an irony of history, the liberal model of the market economy was introduced into Poland under the banner of a union named "Solidarity"! And the ethos of Solidarity, upon which the alliance of intellectuals with workers had been based for more than a decade, fell apart.

In other words, and this has a more general bearing on Central Europe, the current decoupling of democracy and liberalism has a good deal to do with the confusion or the collusion of political liberalism with economic liberalism. The communists considered intellectuals and other "fellow travelers" to be "useful idiots" who went along after 1945 with the building of socialism "with a Stalinist face." Must we, with

Marcin Król, consider ex-dissident intellectuals who forgot the "social question" to be the "useful idiots" of the building of capitalism with a liberal face? This points to the hypothesis that economic neoliberalism's triumph a quarter-century ago prepared the ground for political antiliberalism today.

Societies that had displayed a remarkable capacity to adapt as they went through the post-1989 "great transformation" today reveal both fears about identity and a loss of confidence in the institutions of liberal democracy.

The second journey of an ex-liberal is revelatory of another dimension of the question concerning society and culture. Ryszard Legutko, a product of the liberal movement of 1989, has recently published a book titled *The Demon in Democracy: Totalitarian Temptations in Free Societies*.[25] What "totalitarian temptations" are at issue here? For Jean-François Revel, this phrase had referred to socialist statism; today, according to Legutko, it designates the temptations of liberalism. Where once communists were obsessed by social class, liberals are now allegedly obsessed by matters of race, gender, and sexual orientation. Yet, says Legutko, the goal remains the same—namely, the dissolution of traditional values, including the family, the Church, and the nation. For him it is not the "social question" that is liberalism's sin of omission, but the "societal questions." Legutko, a member of the European Parliament belonging to Poland's ruling Law and Justice party, accuses the EU of promoting in this area a "left-liberal" agenda (feminism, LGBT rights, gay marriage, multiculturalism) that must be resisted.

It is also in this context that we must understand the opposition of the four Visegrád Group countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) to the policy of the EU and of Germany in particular regarding the migrant wave of 2015. This wave laid bare the contrast between two European approaches. Political leaders in Central Europe are on guard against the dangers that the migratory influx poses for the security and the identity of the nation and of Europe. Those who govern in other parts of Europe, such as German chancellor Angela Merkel, advocated the admission of migrants without limit in the name of "European values," which in her eyes flowed from the universality of human rights. Central European countries perceive the redistribution of migrants across national borders according to quotas established by the European Commission as an attempt to impose on them a multicultural model of society that they consider a failure. We can observe in these countries the return in a new (or wayward) form of a discourse about defending national culture and European civilization—today against Islamism coming from the South, as yesterday it had been against Sovietism coming from the East.

Independently of the political exploitation of this theme by ruling parties, we can see in Central Europe the affirmation of a conservative critique of liberalism. A volume bringing together a dozen Polish contributors identifies the principal themes that, according to the authors, were hidden by post-1989 liberalism.[26] These themes are memory, collective identity, and state sovereignty. Memory was eclipsed by the illusion of "the end of history" in its liberal rather than Marxist version. In the name of a project of modernization oriented toward the future, it had been deemed no longer necessary to confront the communist past (consider the Tadeusz Mazowiecki government's 1990 policy of drawing a "thick line" around that past). Second, the liberalism that dominated the scene for twenty years favored the proliferation of individual rights at the expense of the collective dimension of national identity. Finally, the liberals—in the name of a Kantian project of "perpetual peace" now embodied by the European Union—were reluctant to think of the state as the political entity *par excellence,* internally as well as externally. It is no longer particular policies of successive governments that are being criticized; it is now the whole of the liberal vision underlying all these policies that is being called into question.

One could stop there and rest content with our observations concerning the ex-dissident intellectuals who, after having worked for the rediscovery of political liberalism, lost the battle of ideas or repudiated their former views. One could also try to reassure oneself that the success of populist parties from the Baltic to the Adriatic is nothing but a fit of passing fever. It is advisable, however, to connect up our account with the profound currents of public opinion that are running through the societies of Central Europe. Some recent opinion polling conducted throughout the EU allows us to substantiate our diagnosis.

Societies that had displayed a remarkable capacity to adapt as they went through the post-1989 "great transformation" today reveal both fears about identity and a loss of confidence in the institutions of liberal democracy, starting with parliament and the justice system. The level of distrust expressed regarding parliament is at 75 percent in the Visegrád countries (the European mean is 60 percent). Only 11 percent express confidence in political parties and political elites. The key to this loss of trust is primarily the magnitude of corruption: 90 percent of respondents say that politicians are corrupt; at least some discredit attaches to the entire political class. This distrust of liberal elites and democratic institutions is linked to the legacy of the 1990s, when whole economies were privatized in just the space of a decade, often with a contempt for the rule of law and societal sentiments about equity.

Two-thirds of Poles, 83 percent of Hungarians, 88 percent of Slovaks, and 91 percent of Czechs perceive immigration as having negative consequences (the average across the whole EU is 63 percent, and in Germany the figure is 50 percent). Beyond the risk of terrorism, it is

the cultural and religious origins of the migrants that pose the problem. Islam is perceived as a threat by most inhabitants of the EU; the figure is two-thirds in Poland and Hungary, 78 percent in Slovakia, and 85 percent in the Czech Republic, a country where there are virtually no Muslims. Migrants are not welcomed since "we do not share the same values," and this "bars the way to living together." This is what most of those interviewed in EU countries say, but the share of those who feel this way is 75 percent in Hungary and more than 80 percent among the Czechs and Slovaks.[27]

The ethnocultural reshaping of Western societies is perceived with great concern in Central and Eastern Europe, and this has put into question the liberal paradigm that had prevailed since 1989. Societies that once displayed remarkable capacities to adapt to the opening of their countries' economies today fear that openness will mean destabilization and appear increasingly receptive to the discourse of closure. If the European liberal project cannot avoid becoming confounded with open borders and multiculturalism, there is a real risk that Central Europe will opt for the "closed society." In Dahrendorf and Gellner's telling, this was already at issue in the revolutions of 1989.

A Trans-European Phenomenon

The "other Europe" indeed remains in certain respects "other." Yet apart from a few specific features, the tendencies that we see in evidence there are trans-European. To begin with, the tension or decoupling between democracy and liberalism is an old question in political thought, from Benjamin Constant to Isaiah Berlin. The East is revisiting it in a new context, that of globalization, which is also forcing Europeans to rethink the questions obscured in 1989 by the linkage between political and economic liberalism. The same is true for the other great question posed anew today in Central Europe, that of the links between liberalism and the nation. For József Eötvös (1813–71), the "Hungarian Tocqueville," the challenge for Central European liberals could be summed up in three words: liberty, equality, nationality. Or to put it another way: How can individual and collective liberty be reconciled? István Bibó wrote in 1944 that the greatest threat to democracy would come when "the cause of the nation" became separated from "the cause of liberty," bringing about "the fear of seeing liberty threaten the nation." The questions of migration and of multiculturalism have been framed in this way in Central Europe, but they have a more general bearing.

The populist and antiliberal wave is a trans-European and even a trans-Atlantic phenomenon. With Brexit and the election of Donald Trump to the White House, it is the Western anchor of the Central European democracies that is vacillating; Orbán and Kaczyński see in this a

legitimation of their own politics. Their response to those in the Western media who attribute their populist turns to a democratic "lag" in the postcommunist space is that they are the avant-garde of the antiliberal movement, the cultural "counterrevolution" on the march. In July 2017, Orbán underlined how much things had changed since 1989: "Twenty-seven years ago here in Central Europe we believed that Europe was our future; today we feel that we are the future of Europe."[28]

The post-1989 liberal cycle is exhausted. In Central Europe, it represented a triple transition: democracy, the market economy, and Europe. These three objectives were successfully attained, but all three are now in crisis. Democracy faces the populist wave; the market economy has been confronted since 2008 with a global crisis; and Europe is divided within while being challenged in its own neighborhood. The liberals of Poland's Civic Platform party lost elections not because of the economy (which was performing rather well), but because they no longer had any collective project to put forward. Meanwhile, their adversaries in the Law and Justice party (who make a mockery of the law in the name of justice) do have such a project—a return to the nation and the values of the Church. This situation parallels the "paradox of liberation" described by Michael Walzer: In India, in Israel, and in Algeria, modernizing secular elites coming out of movements of national liberation were swept out of power 25 years later by nationalist, religious, and conservative movements.[29] In Central Europe as well, a quarter-century after 1989, the antiliberal swing of the pendulum is bringing to power a conservative reaction. This draws to a close the post-1989 liberal cycle, but perhaps also the longer cycle associated with the Enlightenment, which is now more than two-hundred years old.[30]

Liberal elites are having a rough time of it everywhere, but the fate of the post-1989 liberal heritage will depend on two complementary elements: civil society and Europe. No one in Central Europe is recommending any regime other than democracy or renouncing the individual liberties achieved in 1989, but it is difficult to know to what extent the past twenty years of liberal democracy have created a buffer of political institutions and civil society that can contain the national-populist wave. The Europe said to be disintegrating showed in the Low Countries and then in France that the populist push was not irresistible. In adversity—or perhaps because of it (Islamism to the south, Putin to the east, Brexit and Trump to the west)—political Europe is making a comeback. It is not impossible that it will attempt a refoundation of the European project that proceeds at multiple speeds around a nucleus of the founding countries. If such were to prove the case, the dilemma of populists in the East would become explicitly geopolitical: to secure a place for themselves in the inner core (with all the constraints that this would place on their power), or to drift toward an authoritarian periphery of Europe. This choice, and more generally the EU's capacity to find its second

breath, will be decisive in determining the future of Central Europe's post-1989 liberal achievements.

NOTES

1. Ralf Dahrendorf, *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe* (New York: Crown, 1990).

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5. Venice Commission (acting at the request of the Council of Europe), "Opinion on Amendments to the Act of 25 June 2015 of the Constitutional Tribunal of Poland," 11 March 2016, *www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2016)001-e*.

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12. "Remarks by President Trump to the People of Poland," 6 July 2017, *www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-people-poland*.

13. "Poland Minister Defends Controversial New Media Law," EBL News, 4 January 2016, *https://eblnews.com/news/europe/polish-minister-defends-controversial-new-media-law-5001*.

14. Hugh Seton-Watson, *Eastern Europe Between the Wars, 1918–1941* (London: Archon, 1962); Antony Polonsky, *The Little Dictators: The History of Eastern Europe Since 1918* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975).

15. Bronisław Geremek, interview with Jacques Rupnik, *Transeuropéennes,* no. 1 (1993), 81.

16. György Konrád, "Éloge de la crise," *L'Autre Europe* 15–16 (1988): 103.

17. Leszek Kołakowski, "How to Be a Conservative-Liberal Socialist: A Credo," *Encounter,* October 1978, 46–47, *www.unz.com/print/Encounter-1978oct-00046*. The essay famously begins: "'Please step forward to the rear!' This is an approximate translation of a request I once heard in a tram-car in Warsaw. I propose it as a slogan for the mighty International that will never exist."

18. Adam Michnik, *The Church and the Left,* ed. and trans. David Ost (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

19. Adam Michnik, "A New Evolutionism," in *Letters from Prison and Other Essays,* trans. Maya Latynski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 135–48.

20. This is the title of one of the emblematic novels of the populist tradition, a 1936 work by Gyula Illyés (1902–83).

21. It is not well understood in the rest of Europe just how important the Trianon trauma has been for an aggrieved nationalism that still feeds, even a century later, on feelings of resentment toward a West that, even as it proclaimed the self-determination of peoples, cut off Hungary from a third of all its people. This "unjust and hypocritical" West is said to have no legitimate claim, today as yesterday, to interfere in Hungarian affairs.

22. Kálmán Kulcsár, "Conditions d'une transition vers l'État de droit: Entretien avec Jacques Rupnik," *Lignes* 10 (June 1990): 75.

23. In Poland, there was ROAD, the coalition that came out of Solidarity, then Geremek's Union of Liberty; in the Czech Republic, there was the Civic Movement (which came out of Civic Forum), which flopped in the June 1992 parliamentary elections, winning just 4.6 percent of the vote. In Hungary, there was the Alliance of Free Democrats (SDSz), the liberal party that János Kis founded. After taking part in government alongside the Socialists in the 1990s, it faded slowly into extinction.

24. Marcin Król, *Byliśmy głupi* [We were stupid] (Warsaw: Czerwone and Czarne, 2015).

25. Ryszard Legutko, *The Demon in Democracy: Totalitarian Temptations in Free Societies* (New York: Encounter, 2016).

26. Maciej Ruczaj and Maciej Szymanowski, eds., *Pravým okem: Antologie současného polského politického myšlení* [The right eye: Anthology of contemporary Polish political thought] (Prague: Centrum pro stadium demokracie a kultury, 2010).

27. Dominique Reynié (director), *Où va la démocratie? Une enquête internationale de la Fondation pour l'innovation politique* (Paris: Plon, 2017).

28. "Full Speech of V. Orbán: Will Europe Belong to Europeans?" *Visegrád Post,* 24 July 2017, *https://visegradpost.com/en/2017/07/24/full-speech-of-v-orban-will-europe-belong-to-europeans*.

29. Michael Walzer, *The Paradox of Liberation: Secular Revolutions and Religious Counterrevolutions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).

30. On the filiations of reactionary thought, see Mark Lilla, *The Reckless Mind: Intellectuals in Politics* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2001).