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CLIFF-HANGERS

GEORGIA
TURBULENCE
NATIONALISM
SECURITY
SECTARIANISM
AUTHORITARIANISM
DEMOCRACY
LEADER
CENTRAL ASIA
BELARUS
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- **AUTHORITARIANISM AND NATIONALISM**
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HOW AUTHORITARIANISM AND NATIONALISM AFFECT EUROPEAN SECURITY

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For several decades already, the fundamental approach to European regional security has been built upon democratic values and institutions. Peace between some democratic states may not necessarily be the result of their being democratic. It can be due to a high level of economic interdependence or the structure of alliances or any other factors. Growing authoritarianism at both supranational and national levels impacts regional security in several important ways, as it weakens the effects of democratic peace and partially restores the security dilemma, but also makes states internally weaker. There are also reasons to believe that nationalism is on the rise in Europe once again.

Introduction

European security is going through difficult times. Major foundations, upon which the regional security system has been built and has been functioning since the Cold War, have been severely damaged in recent years. Institutions have become weaker; while geopolitical tensions have significantly increased. There is no normative unity and no clear understanding of what's right and wrong in international politics. Hard power has become a valuable and effective asset; while traditional alliances and international organizations are experiencing difficulties in elaborating any joint policy.

Russia's revisionist foreign policy is a threat; but not the only one. Moreover, it is perceived differently in various European capitals, which results in the broad space for bargaining Moscow currently enjoys. While Russia is promoting its agenda and concerns, Europe is often lacking its own ones. Trans-Atlantic relations are not in perfect shape. China's growing geopolitical activity is also adding another nuance to a changing international landscape.

These developments are accompanied by changes at institutional and ideological levels. European society is also transforming – partly in response to security threats. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated these processes. In particular, there is a growing problem with democracy and nationalism in Europe. While the former is in retreat, the latter is gaining momentum. This combination is important not only for the internal politics of some European countries. It can also bring about considerable effects on security.

These effects may lead to deteriorating bilateral relations, internal crises, and overall damage to the regional security system.

Democratic Peace Theory

For several decades already, the fundamental approach to European regional security has been built upon democratic values

and institutions. It has been assumed that more democracy would bring about a more durable and sustainable peace. The lasting peace in Europe is often attributed to the high proportion of democratic states in the region; while the lack, weakening or even retreat of democracy is often seen as a potential threat. Behind this reasoning there is the theory of democratic peace.

Democratic peace theory (DPT) holds that on a bilateral level, democracies are exceptionally rarely engaged in wars. This is a striking regularity. Jack Levy once called the democratic peace phenomenon 'the closest thing we have to an empirical law in the study of international relations'[1].

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DPT puts forward several possible explanations as to why democracies are at peace with each other. The structural approach is focused on institutions and decision-making machinery. Democracy implies a government's dependence on public opinion, which is rarely supportive of a war, especially a long-lasting or unjust one. It also would prefer low-intensity military conflicts over major wars; and wars with a high probability of a quick victory over any other type.

The major problem with this explanation is that democracies do fight wars, albeit not with each other. Thus, another possible way

to reason within the structural approach is linked to perceptions and expectations. Democratic governments trust each other, and because of that they can usually avoid preventive wars, which break out because of the security dilemma[2].

The alternative explanation is the normative one. This focuses on common norms, which guide democratic states' approaches to conflicts. It is assumed that common procedures and rules expand the area for compromise, and diminish the probability of violence. An additional effect appears on the bilateral level: democracies are not only more inclined to non-violent decisions, but also expect the same of other democracies. Common norms and values, thus, shape networks of alliances and help define potential threats – because the neoliberal approach generally assumes states to be after a balance of threats more than a balance of power. Norms and institutions may also create a joint effect by reinforcing positive expectations. Transparent democratic procedures decrease strategic uncertainty – and the probability of war.

DPT has been one of the key elements of the neoliberal approach to international politics. For several decades it was the conceptual basis for building and enhancing European security. Democratization seemed important. EU and NATO membership, in particular, have been conditioned by a functional and sustainable democracy. Along with that, democracy was seen as the best framework for dealing with new types of threats, such as internal conflicts, separatism, and transnational challenges. Democratic institutions have been credited with preventing discrimination and the institutional weakness of states, which are the key triggers of internal instability.

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1   Levy J., *The Origin and Prevention of Major Wars*, "Journal of Interdisciplinary History", 1989, 18 (4): 653-673.

2   See forthcoming Kapitonenko M. *International Relations Theory*, 2022, New York: Routledge.

Post-conflict settlements have also been carried out primarily through strategic democratization.

More than thirty years after Levy's statement, there is growing scepticism about democratic peace. When it comes to statistics, it turns out that the omission of additional variables can significantly distort the whole picture[3]. Peace between some democratic states may not necessarily be the result of their being democratic. It can be due to a high level of economic interdependence, for instance, or the structure of alliances, or several other factors.

There is also growing scepticism about democracy. It may no longer be considered by everyone as the best political regime possible, a natural destination point of political evolution. Currently there is growing competition from non-democratic regimes of all kinds; and democracy itself is demonstrating various types of deviations.

However, there is still a significant correlation between joint democracy on a bilateral level and peace. There is also the historical record of Europe, once the most belligerent continent, which has been enjoying decades of peace – most likely due to democratic institutions and values. Thus, the lack of democracy looks like a troubling signal. It may cause further deterioration of Europe's security, especially under the current turbulent circumstances.

Europe's Turbulent Security

(Geo)political developments in the world are rapidly changing Europe's security environment. The rise of authoritarianism and nationalism may be one of the ways states are responding to the new challenges.

The recent blow to the international order caused by Russia's annexation of Crimea has been accompanied by several other challenges, which together generate a quite different strategic environment for Europe – a much more complicated one.

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The EU has become somewhat smaller. With the UK gone, there has been a significant drop in power projection capabilities, normative influence and, probably, attractiveness. The EU's great power status has been to a large extent conditioned by its ability to be a centre of gravity for its member states and for numerous neighbours. In recent years, that has begun to be questioned. Internal problems, of which Brexit is just one, have deepened. Europe is not quite united, especially on political and international issues. There have always been differences in the agendas of, say, Spain and Poland, but today these are often insurmountable. The recently debated Nord Stream-2 project may be seen as an illustration of the point, and certainly not the only one.

Europe has become less secure. There are not only more challenges and risks at regional, bilateral and national levels;

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3   Imai K., Lo J., *Robustness of Empirical Evidence for the Democratic Peace: A Nonparametric Sensitivity Analysis*, "International Organization", 2021, 75: 901-919.

but it also seems that Europe has lost its understanding of what security should look like. The previous mode of thinking about security, enhanced by established norms, values, institutions and interdependence, is not working properly. Institutions and interdependence still exist, as well as the rules of the game, but they are not providing as much security for all as is needed. Issues of structural violence, social injustice and inequalities, along with old-fashioned geopolitical clashes, are surfacing far more often than before.

Europe has been affected by global geopolitical developments – and it does not seem to have a grand strategy for the new circumstances. The EU is not a classic major power; it is a very specific international actor. At some point, that specificity could have been seen as a competitive advantage over the old-fashioned nation-states. The Union was an image of the future and a new type of framework for settling political issues.

But international politics is harking back to the age of the classics. Nation-states are gaining momentum, and countries like the US, China, Japan, Russia, the UK, Germany and France are recollecting some traditions and habits of realpolitik and classic geopolitics. Some of these actors are EU members, and they have to bear several identities simultaneously. Germany may have different foreign policy agendas as a state and as a part of the EU. That makes the EU politically fragmented and vulnerable; and it is doubtful whether the issues can be resolved by repeated appeals to unity.

The mounting pressure of the US-China rivalry is becoming a key factor. On the one hand, this will multiply the risks to internal cohesion on issues of international politics, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, heavily involved in Chinese geopolitical initiatives. On the other hand, the EU as a whole may find less room for maneuver globally.

Russia may seem to some to be a game-changer under such circumstances. But that temptation should be dealt with carefully. Exploring Russia's potential to counter China and the US – another manifestation of classic geopolitics – would require important preliminary steps, including settling conflicts on post-Soviet space. At the same time, Russia's revisionism will continue to be a problem for European security, a problem demanding a much more nuanced response than just applying sanctions.

European security, which has been far from a success story since 2014, or even earlier, is facing another fundamental challenge. Shifts at the global level of international politics are generating more risks than opportunities. Restoring the EU's normative attractiveness and turning it into a power asset; finding a proper response to US-Chinese rivalry and a proper balance in relations with Russia; deescalating or resolving running military conflicts – this is a menu which requires much more attention to detail on issues of foreign policy and international security at all levels.

Effects of Declining Democracy

Numerous reports suggest that Europe is experiencing some problems with democracy[4]. These problems are manifested at both supranational and national levels. The authoritarian trend may be observed both in the EU and in certain member states.

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4   See, for example, *Report by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe "State of Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law. A Democratic Renewal for Europe," 2021; International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance.* "The Global State of Democracy. Building Resilience in a Pandemic Era", 2021.

At the supranational level, rising authoritarianism is mostly about an excessive concentration of power in institutions, and lack of democratic control or legitimacy. It is reflected in more centralized decision-making in the EU itself, with less accountability and constraint upon executive authorities. Certain areas, such as healthcare or finance, eventually generate crises, which are used for further centralization of decision-making at the expense of democratic procedures. This, in turn, may provide the big powers with additional leverage, since their impact on European institutions is significantly larger than that on smaller states. The age-old and well-known problem of the democracy deficit in the EU can be made more complicated by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

On the other hand, increasing authoritarianism at the national level is also possible. This implies fewer liberties and some limitations on civil rights, more populist rhetoric, often accompanied by anti-European connotations and nationalistic claims, which are waiting to be addressed further. Governments within European countries may find it increasingly convenient to criticize Brussels for anything perceived as bad and credit themselves for all good outcomes.

The COVID-19 pandemic contributed to these trends, which have manifested themselves since about 2008. At that time, democracies all over the world, Europe included, were weakened by the economic impact of the global financial crisis. Since then, a number of countries have found it economically impossible to maintain democratic regimes. Now, in 2021, these effects have been reinforced by the limitations on the freedom of speech and by disinformation stemming from the pandemic.

As a result, there is an expanding list of not-so-democratic countries in Europe – in addition to already existing authoritarian regimes. The latter have been firmly installed in the cases of Russia and Belarus, and consolidated recently. Turkey has been going along the path of tightening the grip of its political regime. Democracies in such post-Soviet countries as Ukraine or Moldova, even if one can label them as such, are weak and difficult to sustain. These countries are poor, unstable and vulnerable to external pressures. Democracy usually appears in these countries as a symptom of a general weakness of state institutions or a result of yet another revolution.

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But along with these problematic cases, there is also unexpected trouble in countries like Hungary, Poland, Romania or Slovenia. These have not turned into non-democracies overnight; but something has happened to raise suspicions and concerns. From a formal perspective, they still qualify: there are competitive political systems, elected governments, as well as free and fair elections. However, some civil liberties appear to have become limited; opposition is often discriminated against, and the rule of law may be under question. Such regimes may experience the merger of branches of power, the marginalizing of parliaments, misuse of structural power, tightening of the state's control over the media. As a result, opposition parties in such regimes have significantly lower chances

of winning the next elections. Sometimes this type of deviation from democracy is referred to as a 'hybrid regime', 'competitive authoritarianism'[5] or 'nascent autocracies'[6].

Growing authoritarianism at both supranational and national levels impacts regional security in several important ways. First, it weakens the effects of democratic peace and partially restores the security dilemma in relations between states. Second, it makes states internally weaker. Lack of democracy generates institutional fragility and may lead to discrimination, which in turn increases the probability of internal unrest. Third, the existing frameworks for dealing with political conflicts may become non-functional. The political culture, values and approaches, which brought about a durable peace in Europe, may be damaged, since democracy is fundamental to all of them.

A less democratic Europe is likely to become a less secure one. Hardly will it once again be an arena of major military conflicts; but its effectiveness in dealing with transnational, internal and new types of threats will be diminished.

Effects of Rising Nationalism

Europe is certainly not nationalistic in the way it used to be in the 19th and first half of the 20th century. European norms are important and shared; and European unity is preserved, no matter how often it is questioned. With very rare exceptions, nationalists do not hold presidencies or control governments. The rights of minorities are protected and the borders between states are largely symbolic.

However, there are still reasons to believe that nationalism is on the rise in Europe once again. The United Kingdom set a precedent by leaving the EU. Xenophobia in different countries is getting stronger, against the backdrop of numerous refugee crises. Nationalist and right-wing parties are enjoying stronger support. Globalization, immigration and supranational identities are increasingly criticized.

The Right-wing Identity and Democracy political group in the European Parliament consists of about 70 MEPs. Nationalist parties enjoyed considerable support at the recent elections in countries like Hungary, Austria, Switzerland, Denmark, and Belgium. They are also quite visible and active in Italy, France, Spain, and the Netherlands. Nationalist ideology is often accompanied by populism and Euroscepticism, which means that every next election in the countries where nationalists are strong can significantly change the political landscape in Europe.

Nationalism has always been influential. This is an exceptionally sustainable ideology, which probably made the strongest impact on international politics in the last two hundred years.

But nationalism was not always the same. A product of modernity, it has been transforming and has manifested itself in different historical contexts. The nationalism of the early 19th century was in many ways different from the nationalism at the time of World War II or in the era of decolonization. However, in most cases nationalism is linked to a modern sovereign state. The concept of nation corresponds to the norms and standards of a Westphalian order.

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5   Levitsky S., Way L. *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*. 2010, New York: Cambridge University Press.

6   Kelemen R. *Europe's Other Democratic Deficit: National Authoritarianism in Europe's Democratic Union*, "Government and Opposition", 2017, 52(2): 211-238.

Usually the rise of nationalism accompanied dramatic geopolitical shifts and the emergence of new states after various empires collapsed. It was accompanied by the creation of national symbols, and featured clashes over minorities, quarrels over interpretations of history and occasional irredentism. As a rule, any rise of nationalism promoted a more assertive foreign policy and weakened the multilateral institutions of international politics.

> **The nationalism we witness in Europe today is focused on several key tasks. First, it aims to make the national level of decision-making important again. Euroscepticism is integral to modern European nationalists**

The nationalism we witness in Europe today is focused on several key tasks. First, it aims to make the national level of decision-making important again. Euroscepticism is integral to modern European nationalists. They want power to be returned to the state, and they want national capitals to have more political weight than Brussels. Second, it is about more strict measures against immigration. This used to be a long-term problem on the European agenda, with some countries taking more risks than others. The influx of immigrants generates social, economic and cultural problems, as well as maybe triggering transnational challenges. No less important is the fact that dealing with immigrants is a conceptual issue, since it is linked to equal rights, non-discrimination, and fundamental freedoms. A balance is difficult to achieve; thus, the more radical stance of nationalists may seem more and more appealing.

The nationalist agenda also contains the issue of minorities. They not only want the rights of ethnic minorities to be protected in other countries, but occasionally use minorities as an instrument of political competition at home and pressure abroad. Raising the problems of ethnicity, history, religion or language creates a chain reaction and promotes nationalism in neighbouring countries as well. That is why the effects of nationalism on security may be felt when only a few countries adopt these policies. These policies can trigger changes in the neighbourhood as well.

Nationalism changes perceptions of neighbours. As an ideology, it puts heavy emphasis on minorities, history, symbols and territory. Economic nationalism may lead to protectionism and disrupted trade and, eventually, to decreased interdependence. It also weakens common institutions and prioritizes national agendas. As a result, the security system is being transformed toward a more traditional inter-state structure.

Conclusion

Europe nowadays finds itself in an increasingly problematic international environment. The challenges posed by Russian revisionism, the crisis in Trans-Atlantic relations, and the rise of China have not been properly addressed. The risks generated by the unstable situation in the neighbourhood also remain considerable. Security concerns have gained additional significance.

European security is a product of the interaction of states, societies and supranational institutions in various areas. They may respond to changes in the security environment in their own ways. As a result, transformations may be seen

at different levels. At some of these levels a changing international order may demand more nationalism and less democracy from Europe. What we see in some European countries and at the level of the EU as well reflects shifts in the perception of threats. The demand for more nationalist policies and the weakening of democratic institutions may be interconnected.

But following up on that demand may turn out to be a bad strategic choice for Europe. Less democracy could lead to less trust and more zero-sum thinking; while more nationalism may turn out badly for the common good.

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