



DIALOGUE AND DEBATE: ESSAY

## *E Pluribus Unum* – A dangerous concept for the world since not always those who are not like us are against us

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### Abstract

Today's world is less stable than the Cold War international system. Why didn't the high expectations for a peaceful world materialise that existed 30 years ago? This Article singles out two interrelated trends that stem from mistakes made when it seemed that humanity, having learned from history, was entering a period of the 'end of history'. This forms the very basis for today's negative tendencies to flourish. The triumphant West tried to unify the whole world under one leadership and to make it uniform. Yet, the world is simply too big, complex and diverse for only one ideology, be it Judeo-Christian, Anglo-Saxon, Confucian, Muslim or secular liberal-democratic, to dominate. Therefore, those states that couldn't or didn't want to follow Washington, began to claim their own place and the right to go their own way. Until it is recognised that there is a value in acceptance of diverse ways of life within a society and in the existence of diverse political systems, economic models and societal arrangements, there will not be even a relative peace in the world. Equally, recognition and acceptance of balance of power in international relations is even more important than the adherence to the principle of separation of powers within states. The second trend is expressed in conflicts between elites and masses, whose grievances are exploited by populists. The idea that globalisation would lead, if not to the disappearance of the State, then at least to a considerable shrinking of its role, turned out to be wrong.

**Keywords:** International Law; populism; illiberal democracy; balance of power; undemocratic liberalism

### 1. Introduction

Writing about the dangers facing humankind in the post-Brexit United (still) Kingdom is, of course, somewhat safer than doing it in war-torn places like Yemen, Iraq, Libya, Ukraine or Russia. However, today most Brits, including many of those who in 2016 voted against remaining in the European Union, have come to the understanding that leaving the EU has been a grave mistake. At the same time, in many, if not most, EU Member States considerable parts of the population are not at all happy with the policies of their pro-European and cosmopolitan elites. Moreover, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has caused such a shock and awe in the Western world that even wars in Afghanistan or Iraq hadn't achieved (notwithstanding that the US led attack in 2003 on Iraq was proudly baptised Operation Shock and Awe) that European leaders have stopped even talking about Europe's strategic autonomy and have fully aligned their countries with Washington's policies. And this applies not only to their policies *vis-à-vis* Russia but also against China. This has prompted eminent French anthropologist and historian Emmanuel Todd to announce that 'the third world war has already started'.<sup>1</sup> The conflagration of

<sup>1</sup> E Todd, 'La Troisième Guerre mondiale a commencé' *Le Figaro*, 12 January 2023) <<https://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/monde/emmanuel-todd-la-troisieme-guerre-mondiale-a-commence-20230112>> accessed 8 November 2023.

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the Middle East after Hamas's terror attack of Israel in October 2023, Israel's responses that slaughter mostly Palestinian civilians and its continuing occupation of Palestinian territories have given credence to Todd's assessment. Not being at all nostalgic of the Cold War stability, especially having been brought up in that part of the world, divided by the Iron Curtain, which was indeed less free and less prosperous than the opposing part, I wonder where and when it all went wrong since the end of the Cold War had been solemnly declared by political leaders of many countries. While 30 years ago many – including myself – sincerely, though somewhat naively, believed in the triumph of the law over power-politics, today an analysis of most important events and tendencies in the light of international (and often even domestic) law may look like a mockery of the latter or a caricature of common sense. Having followed and analysed post-Cold War military conflicts, be they in the Balkans, in the Middle East, in Africa or in Ukraine and having tried to ascertain glimpses of truth covered by the fog of propaganda wars accompanying these conflicts, I have come to the conclusion that currently there are only three main approaches to international relations: naïve, hypocritical and cynical. Even though at first glance they all seem to be mutually exclusive, it is not always the case; gullibility and hypocrisy are particularly good bedfellows in attempts to explain world politics. As to the cynical approach, one may, as I do, justify it by using Reinhold Niebuhr's analysis of politics in his book with a self-explaining and non-ambiguous title *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. There the American philosopher and theologian argues that 'the selfishness of nations is proverbial.'<sup>2</sup> And he explains:

Since there can be no ethical action without self-criticism, and no self-criticism without the rational capacity of self-transcendence, it is natural that national attitudes can hardly approximate the ethical. . . . For self-criticism is a kind of inner disunity, which the feeble mind of nation finds difficulty in distinguishing from dangerous forms of inner conflict. So nations crucify their moral rebels with their criminals in the same Golgotha. . . . While critical loyalty toward a community is not impossible, it is not easily achieved. It is therefore probably inevitable that every society regards criticism as proof of a want of loyalty.<sup>3</sup>

Therefore, the favorite philosopher of President Obama<sup>4</sup> believes that those moral norms that guide, or must guide, interpersonal relations or relations within smaller communities are not necessarily appropriate guides in relations between states. Or as Carl Schmitt, slightly modifying Proudhon, wrote, 'whoever invokes humanity wants to cheat'.<sup>5</sup> Of course, like all catchphrases, this one also shouldn't be taken at face value but in international relations, in the domain of great power rivalry, where Machiavellian approaches prevail, it is safer to be on the alert.

## 2. On current geopolitical reconfigurations

Since the end of the 1980s the world is in the process of passing through two interrelated revolutionary processes, one of which is global, affecting practically all the nations in the world, the other being more specific for Western societies. The first revolutionary change is geopolitical. Starting from about the end of the 1980s the world has entered into a period of radical geopolitical reconfiguration, whose results cannot be predicted with any certainty even today. The arrogant and simpleminded triumphalism of the winners of the Cold War, their confidence in the end of history and the belief that from unbridled globalization everybody would benefit form the background of this failure. Attempts to homogenise the world, to control it from one centre,

<sup>2</sup>R Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (Continuum 2005) 57.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>4</sup>See D Brooks, 'Obama, Gospel and Verse' (*The New York Times*, 26 April 2007) <<https://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/26/opinion/26brooks.html>> accessed 8 November 2023.

<sup>5</sup>C Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (University of Chicago Press 2007) 54.

inevitably and sooner rather than later lead to geopolitical confrontations, which are today epitomised by the war in Ukraine.

The second revolutionary transformation, not unrelated to the first, is the crisis of liberal democracy that was meant, and for a while even seemed, to triumph when the failure of its main ideological rival, at the end of the 1980s, had become obvious. One of the results of this crisis is the rise of populism. If this phenomenon existed mainly in some Third World countries decades ago, today it is also tormenting Western societies. The disappearance of the Cold War rival and the following hyper-globalization revealed and exacerbated conflictual aspects of the two interrelated phenomena – democracy and liberalism, which had so far co-existed in relative harmony. Hence, conflicts between masses and elites, between populists and progressives.

Revolutionary processes, as if by definition, put pressure on all kinds of normative systems, including law and morality, since, as being *normative* phenomena, they function well in circumstances that could be called *normal*. During revolutionary periods in any society – be it, say, in France at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, or in Russia at the beginning of the Twentieth, when normalcy was an exception and revolutionary expediency ruled, law broke down and even morality often lost its guiding force. In that respect, international society is not an exception.

The process of geopolitical reconfiguration of the world started with the collapse of the rather stable bipolar system, going then through a unipolar moment of the long 1990s and has today a tendency of moving with jolts and jerks towards some kind of multipolarity or non-polarity. While the West, led by Washington, tries to perpetuate its dominance acquired after the collapse of its erstwhile rival (the USSR), those belonging to the Rest, led by China, Russia, India, Brazil, South Africa, Mexico and other nations, use different means, if not to put an end to Western hegemony, then at least to limit its effects *vis-à-vis* themselves. The war in Ukraine epitomises the relentlessness of this geopolitical transformation of the world, unfortunate victims of which are mostly the people of Ukraine and Russia. In Ukraine, the collective West, notwithstanding Russia's illegal use of military force against its neighbour that was provoked, first of all, by the movement of NATO to the frontiers of Russia, is using Ukrainian territory and Ukrainian people to bring down Russia as one of the nations that has openly disobeyed American hegemony.

French journalist and economist François Lenglet wrote about the situation in the world in 2022: 'During 32 years the United States dominated the process of globalisation by means of the rules created by them, using their money and their navy while doing it. Geopolitical risks seemed to have disappeared together with the fall of the Berlin Wall and even the usual trouble-makers had accepted, even if sometimes grudgingly, the leadership of "the American hyperpower", as described by the former French Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine. Now this all is gone'.<sup>6</sup> Agreeing with such a diagnosis of the recent past, one is justified in asking: what has come to replace it? In my opinion, the war in Ukraine is a concentrated illustration of the main controversy that has replaced the Cold War's ideological struggle. This is a battle between the 'collective West', led by Washington, and Russia about the future world order. Russia, being an aggressor *vis-à-vis* Ukraine, and risking its own future, is doing a dirty work on behalf of those who strive for a multipolar world instead of the continuation of the unipolarity of the 1990s. Therefore, Moscow's war in Ukraine is met with some understanding, if not sympathy, in many countries, though the referenda of autumn 2022 under the banner of the right of peoples to self-determination, organised by the Kremlin in the occupied (or as Russia puts it, 'liberated') territories of Ukraine, and their incorporation into the Russian Federation is not welcome even in those capitals that have not condemned the Russian invasion. Beijing or New Delhi are certainly not happy with such a 'liberal' interpretation of the right of peoples to self-determination, though minorities aspiring to have their independent statehood, like the Catalonians in Spain or the Kurds in the Middle East, may find some comfort in such an understanding of international law.

<sup>6</sup>F Lenglet, *Rien ne va mais* ... (Plon 2022) 41.

Therefore, the war in Ukraine, in its essence, is not a conflict between Moscow and Kiev, but a symptom and reflection of the collision of the two irreconcilable visions of the future world order – the perpetuation of the 1990s unipolarity under Washington’s dominance and the strive for a new multipolarity. The view, widespread in the Western media and expert community, that President Putin is obsessed with Ukraine is one-sided and misleading. If Moscow is obsessed, it is obsessed, and obsessed with reason, by Washington’s and NATO’s use of the territory of Ukraine to encircle Russia militarily. This has been understood by many also in the West. So, William J. Burns, the current Director of the CIA, when serving as the American Ambassador to Russia (2005–2008), wrote in one of his long emails to the then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in February 2008 about granting Ukraine a roadmap to NATO’s membership: ‘But it is equally hard to overstate the strategic consequences of a premature MAP [Membership Action Plan] offer, especially to Ukraine. Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all redlines for the Russian elite (not just Putin). In more than two and a half years of conversation with key Russian players, from knuckle-draggers in the dark recesses of the Kremlin to Putin’s sharpest liberal critics, I have yet to find anyone who views Ukraine in NATO as anything other as a direct challenge to Russian interests. . . . Today’s Russia will respond. Russian–Ukrainian relations will go into deep freeze . . .’.<sup>7</sup> Writing in the same email about Georgia’s prospects for NATO membership half a year before the short Georgia–Russia military conflict, the American Ambassador predicts: ‘The prospects of subsequent Russian–Georgian armed conflict would be high’.<sup>8</sup> The same could have been said about Ukraine. If a trigger mechanism of the Georgia–Russian war was Saakashvili’s preposterous invasion of South Ossetia, the war between Russia and Ukraine was triggered by series of events that started with the coup d’état (or revolution) in Kiev at the beginning of 2014 and supported by the West, the Russian annexation (or reunification) of the Crimea in May of the same year and the conflict between Kiev and Eastern Ukrainian rebels, supported by Russia and the remilitarization of Ukraine by NATO countries.

This war is waged beyond the pale of international law, though the Kremlin often refers to its norms, yet interpreting them in a way that serves its own interests, while the collective West tries to conceal its violations of basic norms of international law (eg, non-use of force or non-interference in internal affairs) by references to some kind of nebulous ‘rules based international order’.

On 17 February 2022, Jean-Yves Le Drian, France’s Foreign Minister, said in the interview to the Financial Times: ‘there are “no more rules” governing European security and stability because arms control pacts covering everything from intermediate-range nuclear missiles to transparency on military force movements have become “nearly obsolete or irrelevant”’. And the situation is the same in several other parts of the world. Wolfgang Friedmann of Columbia University, one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s greatest legal minds, already in the 1960s predicted a trend towards a bifurcation of international law into the law of coexistence and the law of cooperation.<sup>9</sup> If the first corresponds to the traditional inter-state international society where states, their sovereignty and independence from outside interference prime, the latter would correspond more to what Friedmann believed to be an emerging world society where not only or not even so much states but also individuals with their rights and various other entities, including supranational ones, would be influential actors. Since then, the development of international law has indeed diverged. In Europe, instead of international law we have EU law. And human rights are no longer – and not only in Europe but worldwide – a matter exclusively within states’ domestic jurisdiction; we even have international criminal courts and tribunals, though their functioning so far has also shown that mechanisms that work rather well within states have relatively limited, sometimes even distorted, effects when transplanted into the domain of international relations. We live in a world that has become Lockean in some places (Europe) but remains Hobbesian in many other regions, or as Robert

<sup>7</sup>W J Burns, *The Back Channel. American Diplomacy in a Disordered World* (Hurst & Company 2021) 233.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>W Friedmann, *The Changing Structure of International Law* (Columbia University Press 1964).

Kagan has written, ‘Americans are from Mars, Europeans are from Venus’.<sup>10</sup> If in Europe the law of cooperation, even supra-national law, has indeed emerged, in the wider – Hobbesian – world where men from Mars act, the world still needs stricter observance of the law of coexistence with its principles of respect of sovereignty of states notwithstanding differences of their political and economic systems, non-use of force and non-interference in domestic affairs.

The world, notwithstanding Kantian hopes prevailing at the end of the Cold War, is today more and more revealing its Hobbesian characteristics. Maybe it would have been better, at the turn of the centuries, instead of following Kantian instincts, to concentrate our efforts on taming Hobbesian reflexes. And those, who rather naively, like myself, but much more importantly those like Mikhail Gorbachev, believed and acted upon their naïve beliefs, contributed to the rise to power of those who have high-jacked positive, but immature, fruits that had emerged at the end of the Cold War. However, on a more optimistic note, I believe that all is not lost. It would be necessary to strive for a realistically achievable status of international relations where no State, or group of States, would impose its visions and values on the whole world that is too big and diverse to be ruled from one centre. The main role of international law should be the prevention and resolution of misunderstandings, tensions and conflicts between States without trying to impose uniformity on differing societies. This simply doesn’t work. Moreover, it is counterproductive. Therefore, when in January 2017 the then British Prime Minister Theresa May during her visit to Washington declared that there is no ‘return to the failed policies of the past. The days of Britain and America intervening in sovereign countries in an attempt to re-make the world in our own image are over’,<sup>11</sup> I felt cautiously optimistic. The British Prime Minister vowed never to repeat the ‘failed policies of the past’ in reference to Western military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, breaking from ‘liberal interventionism’ advocated by her distant predecessor Tony Blair and carried to fruition by her immediate predecessor David Cameron in Libya. It is necessary to add that not only military interventions have all been failures but intervening in domestic affairs of other countries by means of economic sanctions or political pressure, if not authorised by the UN Security Council, have more often than not made things worse rather than better. Therefore, Hubert Védrine, the former French Foreign Minister, was right in emphasising that ‘in the future, democracy and human rights will progress much less through the prescriptions and interference from the outside by the West than depending on the internal dynamics of individual societies.’<sup>12</sup> These are right ideas not followed up by corresponding practices.

Among the active participants in the war in Ukraine, like amid the staunchest supporters of the one or the other side, there aren’t blameless parties, they all are wrong in one way or other; wrong both morally and legally. Wrong was the collective West in expanding NATO to the borders of Russia notwithstanding assurances given to President Gorbachev in 1990,<sup>13</sup> supporting the 2014 *coup d’état* in Kiev, militarising Ukraine, making of it a *de facto* member of NATO (though without Article 5 guarantees), creating a kind of Damocles sword overhanging Russia. Russia was wrong to respond to NATO’s provocations by invading its neighbour, making thereby the

<sup>10</sup>R Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the World Order* (Alfred Knopf 2003).

<sup>11</sup>T May ‘US and UK Will No Longer Invade Foreign Countries’ to Remake the World in Their Own Image” (*The Independent*, 27 January 2017) <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/theresa-may-donald-trump-us-uk-no-longer-foreign-intervention-iraq-afghanistan-a7548551.html>> accessed 8 November 2023.

<sup>12</sup>H Védrine, *Le Mond au Défi* (Fayard 2016) 79.

<sup>13</sup>In December 2017, the National Security Archive published 30 documents unequivocally testifying that during the 1990 negotiations between Soviet and Western leaders, the highest officials of leading NATO countries had indeed promised that while a unified Germany would be in NATO, the alliance will not move an inch closer to Soviet (now Russian) borders (<https://nsarchive.gwu.edu>). Svetlana Savranskaya and Tom Blanton therefore conclude: ‘The documents show that multiple national leaders were considering and rejecting Central and Eastern European membership in NATO as of early 1990 and through 1991, that discussions of NATO in the context of German unification negotiations in 1990 were not at all narrowly limited to the status of East German territory, and that subsequent Soviet and Russian complaints about being misled about NATO expansion were founded in written contemporaneous memcons and telcons at the highest levels’. See <<https://nsarchive.gwu.edu>> accessed 8 November 2023.

reconciliation between these brotherly, as many may be justified to say, nations almost impossible. And it goes without saying that every armed conflict is a tragedy for millions of people.

Besides epitomising the current main geopolitical and geo-economical struggle in the world, the war in Ukraine also shows that, for political leaders of major powers, international law, human rights and humanitarian concerns are mainly propaganda tools. The crocodile tears of most political leaders serve as propaganda purposes, though the empathy among the common people for the victims of those who either died in Eastern Ukraine under the bombardments of Kiev's regime between 2014–2022 or those who today lose their lives and property because of the Russian attack is usually genuine while unfortunately also often one-sided due to respective media brainwashing.

And this is not something new or unexpected. Let me fetch for the reader a couple of examples from the Cold War era to show that things, unfortunately haven't changed since then. For example, after the Vietnamese invasion in 1978 of Cambodia (then called the Democratic Kampuchea) and the overthrow of the regime of Pol Pot, the United States continued to politically support the genocidal regime and its representatives in the United Nations. As Debbie Sharnak wrote:

The Carter Administration confronted the difficult choice of whether to vote to seat the Khmer Rouge's genocidal regime; support Samrin's communist, Vietnamese-installed government; or, to abstain from voting altogether. *After weighing geopolitical concerns about human rights costs against national interests in a Cold War context* [emphasis added], Carter's representative to the Credentials Committee, Robert Rosenstock, cast the vote in favor of seating the Khmer Rouge. As he rose from the table, someone grabbed his hand to congratulate him. Rosenstock looked up to find to his horror that he was shaking hands with Pol Pot's foreign minister, Ieng Sary. 'I felt like washing my hands', Rosenstock reported.<sup>14</sup> Rosenstock's reaction to this episode, a mixture of disgust and resignation, encapsulates well the contradiction of what this vote ultimately signified. In the act of keeping the Khmer Rouge at the United Nations, Jimmy Carter, the supposed human rights president, aligned himself with an ousted genocidal regime. In addition, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has eerie parallels with another episode from those times. In 1998 Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter's National Security Advisor, proudly confirmed that by giving in the 1970s covert support to radical Islamic forces in Afghanistan, President Carter and he had induced Moscow to intervene on the side of the pro-Soviet government in that country, thereby mirroring the Soviet Union in its own 'Vietnam'.<sup>15</sup> Asked as to whether he had any regrets in having supplied arms to 'freedom-fighters'-turned-terrorists, President Carter's Security Adviser responded: 'What is most important to the history of the world? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? Some stirred-up Moslems or liberation of Central Europe and the end of the cold war?' When confronted with the statement that 'Islamic fundamentalism represents a world menace today', Brzezinski retorted: 'Nonsense'.<sup>16</sup>

Didn't NATO's 'barking at the gates of Russia', using Pope Francis's eloquent definition, and its efforts of remilitarisation of Ukraine between 2014 and 2022<sup>17</sup> and constant bombardment by

<sup>14</sup>D Sharnak, 'Sovereignty and Human Rights: Re-examining Carter's Foreign Policy Towards the Third World' 25 (2014) *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 303.

<sup>15</sup>J St. Clair and A Cockburn, 'How Jimmy Carter and I Started the Mujahideen' (*Counterpunch*, 15 January 1998) <<https://www.counterpunch.org/1998/01/15/how-jimmy-carter-and-i-started-the-mujahideen/>> accessed 8 November 2023.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup>On 9 December 2022, German ex-Chancellor Angela Merkel said in her interview to *Die Zeit* that 'The Minsk Agreement was an attempt to buy time for Ukraine. Ukraine used this time to become stronger, as you can see today'. According to her, 'it was clear for everyone' that the conflict was suspended and the problem was not resolved, 'but it was exactly what gave Ukraine the priceless time'. See <<https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2022/12/13/merkels-confession-could-be-a-pretext-for-an-international-tribunal/>> accessed 13 December 2022. This shows that not only Ukraine but also France and Germany, as guarantors of Minsk agreements, were not going, from the very beginning of their conclusion in 2015, to implement them.

Kiev, that considerably intensified in mid-February 2022<sup>18</sup> of rebel-held territories in the Eastern Ukraine serve a role of inviting Russia to invade the neighbouring country? Of course, even a provoked aggression remains an aggression and Russia should have known better, learning also from the sad Soviet experience in Afghanistan.

However, if Russia may have been wrong both morally and legally, it was behaving quite in accordance with the logic of great-power politics. In his excellent book *The Ambassadors: Thinking about Diplomacy from Richelieu to Modern Time*,<sup>19</sup> Robert Cooper analyses, inter alia, the 1962 Cuban missile crisis that has quite a few parallels with today's Ukrainian crisis. He correctly observes that the Soviet nuclear weapons in Cuba would have constituted a significant new threat to the United States; they would have been 'a cheap way to change the military balance, and that [was] Khrushchev's main motive'.<sup>20</sup> That is why Washington threatened to destroy the facilities being built on Cuba if the Soviets wouldn't withdraw them, notwithstanding that this could have quite foreseeably triggered a nuclear war, or the fact that neither Moscow nor Habana were in breach of any norms of international law. Dean Acheson – a distinguished American diplomat and also an international lawyer, the Secretary of State from 1949 to 1953 – when commenting on the 1962 crisis, said: 'The power, position and prestige of the United States had been challenged by another state; and law simply does not deal with such questions of ultimate power–power that comes close to sources of sovereignty.'<sup>21</sup> A frank admission. Today, Russian politicians and diplomats could have used the same language in justification of their behaviour *vis-à-vis* Ukraine (or rather NATO's presence in Ukraine). And they would not be wrong. As President Putin of Russia said on 18 March 2014, 'You know, I cannot imagine that we will visit NATO marines based in Sebastopol. Though most of them are good guys, we prefer to invite them to visit us in Sebastopol.'<sup>22</sup>

Robert Cooper is also right that Soviet nuclear weapons in Cuba would have enhanced Soviet security, but they wouldn't have done much for Cuba – 'the reverse, in fact: they make it a target'.<sup>23</sup> The same is true with NATO's, particularly American, military presence in countries neighbouring Russia. This may enhance American security, but it makes Russia's neighbours potential (or real, as the case may be) targets for Russia's military. Robert Cooper, praising the leaders of the two superpowers for saving the world in 1962, writes of John Kennedy, whose opponents in Congress were eager to go to war, that the President had followed to the letter advice from a book by Basil Liddell Hart that the future President had singled out when reading it: 'Keep cool. Have unlimited patience. Never corner an opponent, and always assist him to save his face. Put yourself in his shoes. . . . Avoid self-righteousness like the devil – nothing is so self-blinding'.<sup>24</sup> However, to follow this great advice, one must be a politician of John Fitzgerald Kennedy's calibre, which in the political climate prevailing in most societies today is almost an impossible demand. Henry Kissinger, in his latest book entitled *Leadership*, having studied the strategies of some great political leaders such as Konrad Adenauer, Charles de Gaulle and others, bemoans the scarcity of visionary political leaders in today's world.<sup>25</sup> In his interview to *The Spectator* in summer 2022 he was even more explicit: 'All the pressures of modern political activity are so consuming that the long-range thinking and lived sense of history that for Churchill was

<sup>18</sup>See J Baud, *Opération Z* (Max Milo 2022) 186–8.

<sup>19</sup>R Cooper, *The Ambassadors: Thinking about Diplomacy from Machiavelli to Modern Times* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson 2021).

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 326.

<sup>21</sup>D Acheson, 'The Cuban Quarantine: Remarks by the Honorable Dean Acheson' 57 (1963) *Proceedings of the American Society of International Law* 13, at 14.

<sup>22</sup>Statement of the President of the Russian Federation of 18 March 2014 (official site of the President of Russia <<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>> accessed 8 November 2023).

<sup>23</sup>Cooper (n 20) 327.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 341.

<sup>25</sup>H Kissinger, *Leadership: Six Studies in World Strategy* (Penguin Press 2022).

second nature is almost impossible to arise. I can't cite a current example of a western leader who embodies it. That is a great danger, because it means that any demagogue who can exploit immediate resentments can achieve a disproportionate influence. It is the biggest problem for the future of democracy. Great leaders have to understand their society and believe in it. But they also have to be able to transcend it, to point society from where it is to where it has never been'.<sup>26</sup>

Today's world is short of leaders of the caliber of Klemens von Metternich, Alexander I, Viscount Castlereagh, who having defeated Napoleon Bonaparte, created in Vienna in 1815 the Concert of Europe, based on the balance of power, that also importantly, though for quite a few at that time controversially, also included the defeated France. Today's political leaders seem to be more like colorless copies of those, who after the World War I in Versailles humiliated defeated Germany, paving thereby the way for the World War II, or those who after the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, believing in the ascension of the American century, excluded Russia from European security systems. In 1971, President Richard Nixon, speaking with the editors of *Time* and referring to the 19<sup>th</sup>-century European Concert, stated: 'We must remember the only time in the history of the world that we have had any extended period of peace is when there has been balance of power. It is when one nation becomes infinitely more powerful in relation to its potential competitor that the danger of war arises. So, I believe in a world in which the United States is powerful. I think it will be a safer world and a better world if we have a strong, healthy United States, Europe, Soviet Union, China, Japan, each balancing the other, not playing one against the other, an even balance'.<sup>27</sup> There is a lot of truth in these words notwithstanding that the Nixon-Kissinger tandem didn't always follow up such ideas, especially when trying to balance China against the Soviet Union. Balance of power in international relations is not less, maybe even more, important than separation of powers within societies, since concentration of power inevitably corrupts, makes one believe in its military and even moral superiority.

The tendency of concentration of power, be it in economics (the penchant for monopolisation absent regulation) or in politics, seems to be a general rule of societal life. Even in academia we can see that some universities, think tanks and laboratories are successful in imposing their schools of thought, while effectively suppressing and marginalising dissenting views and opinions. In international society the tendency of a concentration of power, if not counter-balanced, leads to its super-centralisation. Swiss politician and journalist Guy Mettan observes that 'a power when becoming hegemonic, as Great Britain was after the Napoleonic wars, has a tendency to establish permanent supremacy, trying to destroy any rivalry until there is somebody who would bring it to its senses'. And he emphasises:

Any power without counter-power has a tendency to become absolute whether this takes place within a state or outside, if there is no other power (powers) who would be able restrain it; law in itself is not the sufficient guarantee against such tendencies. A candidate for a dictatorship can always change the constitution in his favour if there is nobody strong enough to challenge him and a power that is dominant internationally is able to "interpret" or re-write international law in accordance with its own interest if there is no other power able to resist. And law becomes simply a façade that is called to conceal the pure relations of power.<sup>28</sup>

If in nature the concentration of matter leads to the emergence of black holes and big bangs, within societies concentration of power usually ends with authoritarianism or totalitarianism

<sup>26</sup>A Roberts, 'Henry Kissinger on Ukraine and China' (*The Spectator*, 1 August 2022) <<https://thespectator.com/topic/henry-kissinger-on-ukraine-and-confrontation-with-china/>> accessed 8 November 2023.

<sup>27</sup>H Kissinger, *World Order* (Penguin Books 2014) 303.

<sup>28</sup>G Mettan, *Russia-Occident. Une Guerre de Mille Ans: La Russophobie de Charlemagne à la Crise Ukrainienne* (Syrtes 2015) 239.



resulting in uprisings and revolutions, in international relations this leads to imperial domination resulting in attempts to counterbalance and wars. A balance of power world is not and cannot be an ideal world. However, one must not forget that attempts to put into practice ideal concepts, while ignoring local or temporal realities, not only fail; they are counterproductive and increase suffering.

### 3. Liberalism versus democracy

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the bi-polar world, it seemed that it was exactly liberal democracy that had prevailed, and it would continue to flourish until the whole world would become the same. However, the disappearance of the main enemy, combined with a new wave of globalisation, started revealing, though not immediately, internal contradictions of liberal democracy.

Modern democracy, originating in Western European societies, has had dialectical relationships (ie situations, where different phenomena, depending on concrete circumstances, have a kind of friend/enemy relationships) with three other phenomena that have, on the one hand, supported democracy's emergence and growth while also putting limits on its expansion and deepening. These three phenomena are nationalism, capitalism and liberalism. As in the post-World War II world the last two have been considered almost inseparable (ie individual liberties and market freedoms have been often seen as two sides of the same coin), the controversial (ie dialectical) relationship of democracy with capitalism and liberalism can be dealt with as one dialectical controversy, notwithstanding that there have been societies and periods where and when free market has coexisted (or still coexists) with conservative, even authoritarian and anti-liberal, social policies.

In this Article I will not dwell at length on an important and controversial issue of the relationship between democracy and nationalism since I have recently written about it elsewhere.<sup>29</sup> The process of globalisation has revealed and made acute the contradiction between democracy and nationalism, whose ideal had become enshrined in the concept of the nation-state and where modern democracy emerged and evolved (the nation-state and democracy as a kind of twin brothers though not always in best terms). Without nationalism there wouldn't have been nation-states, without nation-states there would not have been democracy, at least in its current form. Therefore, I conclude in the aforementioned Article that without and beyond nation-states (even if they are multi-ethnic) there could hardly exist democracy, though nationalism may also undermine democracy, especially in multi-ethnic or multi-confessional societies.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the positive aspects of the relationship between democracy and liberalism, which for decades had prevailed in the post-Second World War West, have become overwhelmed by negative features. Democracy and liberalism, which had rather peacefully and with mutual benefits coexisted for many decades, are now undermining each other's potential. The main reason for such a turnaround lies in the negative aspects or consequences of the processes of globalisation, which the French call *la mondialisation malheureuse* (unfortunate globalisation) in contradistinction to that of *heureuse* (fortunate). As Dani Rodrik has argued, there is a fundamental incompatibility between hyper-globalisation, on the one hand, and democracy and national sovereignty, on the other.<sup>30</sup> You cannot have all of them at the same time.

The spread of market economy and democracy – the concepts that are considered by many to be as obvious goods as God, motherhood and apple-pie – have in practice turned out to be a mixed

<sup>29</sup>R Müllerson, 'Nation-State: Not Yet Ready for the Dustbin of History' 20 (2021) Chinese Journal of International Law 699.

<sup>30</sup>D Rodrik, 'The Inescapable Trilemma of the World Economy' (27 June 2007) <[https://rodrik.typepad.com/dani\\_rodriks\\_weblog/2007/06/the-inescapable.html](https://rodrik.typepad.com/dani_rodriks_weblog/2007/06/the-inescapable.html)> accessed 8 November 2023.

blessing. If the planned economy of the Soviet type left everybody, and society as a whole, poor and market freedoms may indeed be one of the preconditions for political freedoms and personal liberties – the shock introduction of markets, especially unbridled markets, make a few extremely rich while many become even poorer than they were under the previous system. As one of the central tenets of democracy (with some important qualifications of course) is that the voice, interests or values of the many count for more than those of the few, it should be clear that economic ‘shock therapy’ and political democracy are incompatible and one either has a shock or democracy, not both. Cambridge economist Ha-Joon Chang goes even further while writing that ‘free market and democracy are not natural partners’,<sup>31</sup> though it must be emphasised that Professor Chang is speaking rather of ‘unbridled markets’, as advocated by Milton Friedman or Alissa Zinovievna Rosenbaum (alias Ayn Rand) and their followers.

However, already more than half a century ago one of the most persistent market-friendly advocates of political freedoms, Karl Popper, incisively wrote: ‘Even if the state protects its citizens from being bullied by physical violence (as it does in principle, under the system of unrestrained capitalism), it may defeat our ends by its failure to protect them from the misuse of economic power. In such a state, the economically strong is still free to bully one who is economically weak, and to rob of his freedom. Under these circumstances, unlimited economic freedom can be just as self-defeating as unlimited physical freedom, and economic power may be nearly as dangerous as physical violence.’<sup>32</sup>

Free market (capitalism) and liberal democracy, phenomena that on the one hand presume each other, are at the same time also in constant rivalry. The freer a market, the greater is economic inequality; the greater inequality, the less would there be democracy, and *vice versa*. Strong democracy attained by curbing inequality almost inevitably also bridles market freedoms. Economic inequality *de facto* and predictably also increases political inequality, while political equality puts breaks on the widening economic inequality. Democracy tries to make a society more equal, while unbridled market increases inequality. The result of such constant balancing has been that in Western European liberal democratic societies these two spheres – political and economic – while supporting each other have also constantly tempered each other’s effects, softened each other’s excesses.

However, this balance has not withstood the impact of the latest wave of globalisation. John Dunn has observed that within the liberal democratic movement ‘the partisans of the order of egoism’, ie capitalists, have defeated ‘the partisans of equality’,<sup>33</sup> ie democrats. One of the important causes of equality’s defeat in the hands of economic egoism has been that in the long run the uncompromising instruments for attempting to realise equality and the rigidities inherent in its pursuit have blunted equality’s appeal as a goal.<sup>34</sup> Both the French and especially the Russian revolutions, where contrary to the American revolution, the aim was not, as Hannah Arendt wrote, the ‘freedom from oppression’ but ‘freedom from want’, and one of the main requirements therefore was *égalité* (equality), have contributed to such a misbalance within today’s liberal-democracy. Hannah Arendt observes that ‘the inescapable fact was that liberation from tyranny spelled freedom only for a few and was hardly felt by the many who remained loaded down by their misery. These had to be liberated once more and compared to this liberation from the yoke of necessity, the original liberation from tyranny must have looked like child’s play’.<sup>35</sup> Excesses of radical attempts to get rid of the ‘yoke of necessity’, be it as a result of the French or the Russian or the Cuban revolutions, have always led to radical suppression of individual liberties. These facts, in turn, have been used by proponents of liberalism or neoliberalism to suppress calls for more

<sup>31</sup>H-J Chang, *Bad Samaritans. Rich Nations, Poor Policies & the Threat to the Developing World* (Random House 2007) 18.

<sup>32</sup>K Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Volume 2. Hegel & Marx (Routledge 1996) 124.

<sup>33</sup>J Dunn, *Setting the People Free. The Story of Democracy* (Atlantic Books 2005) 134.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>35</sup>H Arendt, *On Revolution* (London 1965) 74.

equality and also more democracy, while equality has often been defined only as an equality of opportunity – you have the right but cannot.

The process of globalisation has revealed and made acute not only the contradiction between democracy and nationalism, whose ideal had become enshrined in the concept of the nation-state and where modern democracy emerged and evolved, but also between democracy and liberalism – both economic and social. Moreover, there is a bundle of interlinks that cannot be unraveled without irreparably damaging at least some, if not all, of them. Contemporary democracy, ie the government by the people and for the people, emerged and evolved within nation-states and seems inseparable from it. Yet, economic liberalism with uncontrolled global financial markets, together with social liberalism, putting the primacy of the individual with her interests and desires above the interests of society, are destroying social bonds that have helped hold societies together, and are, as a result, also undermining nation-states – the cradles of democracy.

As it often happens, rare early warnings usually remain unheard. It was more than 20 years ago when Richard Rorty published a small book ‘Achieving our Country’, where he wrote that the American liberal left, concentrating on the rights of ethnic, racial, religious, cultural and sexual minorities, had neglected the widening gap between the rich and the poor. At some point, Rorty warned, ‘something will crack. The nonsuburban electorate will decide that the system has failed and start looking around for a strongman to vote for – someone willing to assure them that, once he is elected, the smug bureaucrats, tricky lawyers, overpaid bond salesmen, and postmodern professors will no longer be calling the shots’.<sup>36</sup> Sounds eerily familiar and up to date, doesn’t it? Rorty considered himself to belong to the category of liberal left, though as one of the brightest representatives of American pragmatism, he could hardly be branded as a post-modern professor. And differently from many, if not from most, he did not ridicule, deplore or detest those who were different, but tried to understand them, which doesn’t necessarily mean to justify.<sup>37</sup>

#### 4. On the adaptability to rapid change

The recent wave of globalisation has also exponentially increased the rapidity of changes in technology, economy, politics and in ways of life generally. This speed of changes is exacerbating the rift between the elites and the masses since they have different adaptabilities to multiple challenges coming all together as a row of roaring cars that too long has been held stationary at the red light. French philosopher Barbara Stiegler, in her excellent study with a emblematic title *Il faut s’adapter* (*It is Necessary to Adapt*),<sup>38</sup> has shown how, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, two prominent American philosophers Walter Lippmann and John Dewey had offered different answers to the question of the adaptability to the rapid societal change caused by the industrial revolution. This all has significant parallels with the current revolutionary period. She writes about the 1920s:

For the first time in the evolution of life and living beings, one species – our human species – finds itself in the situation, where it is not adapted to the new environment. For Lippmann, it was the situation where there was a huge gap between the natural inclination of the human species to remain as they are, inherited from the long and slow history of biological and societal evolution, and the demands of the rapid adaptability to the new environment, brutally imposed by the industrial revolution. Hence, the central theme of Lippmann’s political studies: how to adapt human species to constantly and rapidly changing environment. . . . The fundamental question for Lippmann was how to avoid that this tension between the change and stasis, openness and closing, do not lead the masses to

<sup>36</sup>R Rorty, *Achieving Our Country* (Harvard University Press 1997) 90.

<sup>37</sup>In my opinion, Baruch Spinoza’s ‘non ridere, non lugere, neque detestere, sed intelligere’ (don’t ridicule, don’t deplore, don’t detest, but try to understand) is a must in social sciences, preventing one to slip into propaganda.

<sup>38</sup>B Stiegler, *Il faut s’adapter: Sur un nouvel impératif politique* (Gallimard 2019).

choose nationalism, fascism and generally all forms of isolationisms, in their effort to oppose to the rapid change, to restore the stasis and isolation.<sup>39</sup>

So, it was this abyss between slow historical and biological evolution of human species and the rapidly changing physical and social environment, caused by the industrial revolution, that worried Walter Lippmann. If at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was the industrial revolution, also combined with economic globalisation, at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century it is the revolution in information technology and whipped up hyper-globalisation of economic, and particularly financial, markets that have, once again, uprooted masses of people in different countries, where only those who are adaptable to the change can survive. This may be seen as a bio-social experiment of the survival of the fittest and the fittest are the rationally thinking experts and managers and impartial judges using rational laws, who know in which direction humankind must and will evolve. The masses should be taught to suppress their irrational impulses and follow the lead of enlightened experts, who have been able to adapt and readapt to the constantly changing environment. One of the main aims of public education should be ‘the manufacture of the consent’ of the masses with the policies manufactured by the experts. As to the role of politicians, Lippmann writes that, ‘though he (the statesman) cannot himself keep the life of the nation as a whole in his mind, he can at least make sure that he is taking counsel from those who know.’<sup>40</sup> A politician has to be only an expert in the choice of experts. While Lippmann, and all the neoliberals after him, saw the solution to the gap between rapidly changing environment and the inability of the masses to adapt to the new environment, in the combination of expertise of specialists and the application of rational laws, John Dewey would rely more on the collective intelligence of masses. Dewey was also the first detractor of neoliberal thinking. He wrote:

A class of experts is inevitably cut off from the common interests to such an extent that it becomes a class with its own private interests. Every governance by experts where masses are unable to inform the experts of their needs cannot be anything else than an oligarchy that rules in the interest of some. And enlightened information has to force the specialists to take account of the needs of masses. The world has suffered more from leaders and authorities than from masses.<sup>41</sup>

We see that this almost a century old intellectual confrontation that had influenced policies of Western governments for decades, has today acquired a new acuteness. It is a conflict between elites and masses, between self-proclaimed progressives and those who are denigrated as populists. We see also that due to the spread of the Internet and social media governments, be they democratic or autocratic, are losing their ability to ‘manufacture the consent’ of the masses with policies of the elites. It should not be forgotten what Edward Bernays wrote in 1928:

The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country [ . . . ] We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of. This is a logical result of the way in which our democratic society is organized. Vast numbers of human beings must cooperate in this manner if they are to live together as a smoothly functioning society [ . . . ] In almost every act of our daily lives, whether in the sphere of politics or business, in our social conduct or our

<sup>39</sup>Ibid. 14.

<sup>40</sup>W Lippmann, *A Preface to Politics* (Mitchell Kennerley 1914) 104.

<sup>41</sup>J Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems, Now in in The Later Works of John Dewey 1925–1953*, vol. 2 (Southern Illinois University Press 1984) 364–5.

ethical thinking, we are dominated by the relatively small number of persons [...] who understand the mental processes and social patterns of the masses. It is they who pull the wires which control the public mind.<sup>42</sup>

Although Bernays writes about manipulation of public consciousness in democracies, it goes without saying that autocracies do the same. However, the more advanced a country, the more sophisticated the manipulation, the more difficult to recognise that you are manipulated.

## 5. Populism – an inadequate response to the conflict between the elites and the masses

One of the most visible aspects or results of the aforementioned bundle of controversies is the phenomenon of so-called populism. Already in 2008 in my lectures at the Hague Academy of International Law I spoke about the dialectical contradictions between nationalism, liberalism and democracy and the rise of populism.<sup>43</sup> However, then these contradictions hadn't yet reached today's acuteness, while populism was still a marginal phenomenon, not worthy of lengthy discussion. Those who were accused of being populists were primarily leftist leaders of some third-world countries like Hugo Chavez of Venezuela or Rafael Correa of Ecuador.

Today, populism has become more and more also a Western phenomenon. French writer and journalist Alexandre Devecchio writes that notwithstanding variances between populisms in different societies, they have something important in common: 'A desire to defend national sovereignty and identity against globalisation, to significantly limit immigration, a certain hostility towards multiculturalism and support of programmes of social protection that benefit only citizens of the country'.<sup>44</sup> This is indeed what unites politicians such as Donald Trump, Boris Johnson, Matteo Salvini, Victor Orban, Marine Le Pen and others. One more important thing in common between populisms is that differently from so-called (self-defined) progressives, who, like President Emmanuel Macron of France, are leaders of cosmopolitan political, economic and intellectual elites, populist leaders find support mainly, though not only, among those who are left behind or have suffered from negative aspects of globalisation.

The rise of populism, besides such effects of globalisation, has been boosted also by the revolution in information technology. Alexander Devecchio compares the effect of the spread of the Internet to that of the invention in 1454 of the printing press by Gutenberg. The latter undermined the power and position of the Roman Church and the clergy, which had controlled the peoples' minds, and had led to the emergence of Protestantism, as well as religious wars. Devecchio asks: 'But if the invention of the Web is going to provoke a similar fracture? This time not between Catholics and Protestants, but between traditional elites, who are in the process of losing their monopoly, which they have so far had over the mass media and the spread of information, and a new elite that can convey their populist message through the non-traditional means of communication'.<sup>45</sup> Yascha Mounk observes that 'the social media networks have closed the gap between the people and the elites, between those who have the power and those who don't'.<sup>46</sup>

Traditional media has been considered, already for some time and with some justification, as the 'fourth power' of the State, together with legislative, executive and judicial powers, though ideally independent, but nevertheless in the service of the economic, political and intellectual

<sup>42</sup>E L Bernays, *Propaganda* (Horace Liveright 1928) 9–10. Later this book was published in French with the following and more descriptive title: *Propaganda: comment manipuler l'opinion en démocratie* (La Découverte 2007), ie how to manipulate public opinion in democracy.

<sup>43</sup>R Müllerson, 'Democracy Promotion: Institutions, International Law and Politics' 333 (2008) *Collected Courses of the Hague Academy of International Law* 9.

<sup>44</sup>A Devecchio, *Recomposition: Le nouveau monde populiste* (Les Editions du CERF 2019) 47.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>46</sup>Y Mounk, *The People vs. Democracy: Why our Freedom is in Danger and How to Save It* (Harvard University Press 2018).

elites, similar to the other three powers. For decades this separation of powers has been relative, all of them served interests and reflected the values of economic, political and intellectual elites.

The dialectical controversy between democracy and liberalism has been like a ticking bomb waiting for its time to explode. Though these two phenomena – liberalism and democracy – have often been supportive of each other, there has also been, as if by necessity, a constant balancing necessary between them. Most Western, especially Western European, societies have until recently managed this controversy relatively well. In some, democracy has had an upper hand (eg, in Scandinavian social democracies), while in others liberalism has prevailed (eg, in the United States), but there has not been an open conflict between these phenomena. However, already for decades, due, first, to the rapid globalisation of the world and later also to the changing balance of power in the international system, this controversial friend/enemy relationship between democracy and liberalism has become less friendly and more inimical. It is reflected, *inter alia*, in the fact that liberal elites in most Western countries have started labelling those democrats, whose policies and ideas (or/and personalities) they do not like, as populists (let us recall that Ralf Dahrendorf has noted that, ‘one man’s populism is another’s democracy, and vice versa’, though he has also qualified this statement by claiming that ‘while populism is simple, democracy is complicated’<sup>47</sup>). At the same time, democrats (or populists) have started considering liberals to be arrogant elitists who have become alienated from the people, from their needs and ways of thinking, believing them to be losers and ill-informed (let’s recall Hillary Clinton’s characterisation, though later hypocritically retracted, of Donald Trump’s supporters as ‘racist, sexist, homophobic deplorables’).

British author David Goodhart distinguishes between those Europeans whom he calls *Anywheres* and those who according to him are *Somewheres*.<sup>48</sup> If the members of the first category (no more than 20–25 per cent of the population in the West and much less in the Rest) belong to the cosmopolitan elite that has benefitted from the globalisation and feels at home in different places in the world, the majority (more than 50 per cent in the West) feels a need to maintain solid links to their country, to its history, traditions and language. To the latter category belong, naturally, not only those who believe that globalisation has by-passed them.

Tensions between solidarity and diversity, between the welfare state and mass immigration have worsened, giving way to a growing divide between the ‘people from anywhere’ and ‘people of somewhere’ or as Alexander Devecchio puts it, between ‘sedentaries’ and ‘nomads’.<sup>49</sup> It is a conflict between those who care for their ‘rootedness’ or entrenchment in a definitive place, be it a local village, a town or a nation-state, and cosmopolitans, ie, those who feel at home in different places. There has always been a minority who see the whole world, or Europe as the case may be, as their home, and a majority who feel at home only there, where they were born and among those who speak the same language and profess the same religion. For centuries, the first category was a relatively small minority, while most of the people were born, lived and died in the same place, except for mass movements of population that have several times occurred in the history of humankind.

In the globalised world it is not only authoritarian regimes that suppress democratic impulses in their countries and may also constitute a threat to democracy elsewhere. The spread and liberalisation of global, particularly financial, markets are curbing democracy everywhere. Increasing the overall GDP of many countries, unbridled liberal markets make a few extremely rich while the majority of people are left behind. In that respect it is of interest to note that Nicolas Sarkozy in his recent memoirs, while strongly advocating economic (ie productive) capitalism and attacking egalitarianism in various domains, writes that ‘financial capitalism has perverted the

<sup>47</sup>R Dahrendorf, Acht Anmerkungen zum Populismus/Eight Remarks on Populism <[https://www.aspeninstitute.de/wp-content/uploads/A4\\_FNF\\_DAHRENDORF\\_lay.pdf](https://www.aspeninstitute.de/wp-content/uploads/A4_FNF_DAHRENDORF_lay.pdf)> accessed 8 November 2023.

<sup>48</sup>D Goodhart, *The Road to Somewhere: The New Tribes Shaping British Politics* (Hurst 2017).

<sup>49</sup>Devecchio, (n 44) 117.

very logic of capitalism since in contradistinction to productive capitalism it is a system of irresponsibility.<sup>50</sup>

The wealth gaps are increasing practically in all countries. If in autocracies people are powerless *vis-à-vis* their own rulers, in the globalised world people are powerless *vis-à-vis* global markets, even if they live in so-called liberal democracies, even if they belong to the so-called middle class. This is how economic liberalism is undermining democracy. At the same time, the rise in importance of individual rights and the rights of a multitude of minorities, who aggressively promote their – often newly-found – identity, is undermining social cohesion and common values. This is how social liberalism undermines democracy. Societies that become ‘atomised’, to use the English title of Michel Houellebecq’s novel *Les Particules élémentaires*, become non-societies, where there is no place for democracy. That is why today liberalism and democracy have become less and less supportive of each other and often even more antagonistic.

There seems to be a disturbing parallel between the struggle for decolonialisation with its mixed results and negative effects of the current (at least before the COVID 19 hit the world) wave of globalisation. Those who fought against colonial imperialism in Africa or elsewhere were considered and revered as freedom-fighters, though it would be more correct to qualify them as independence-fighters since the end result was usually independence (often more formal than substantial) from colonial masters, and not at all freedom for the people. Some of such leaders of national liberation movements were populists and quite a few (eg, Gamal Abdel Nasser, Fidel Castro and Robert Mugabe) of them ended up as genuine dictators. However, when they fought against imperial forces, they were seen by many, particularly in the countries they led to independence, as real heroes. They were fighting against colonialism as a specific form of globalisation of previous centuries. Today’s Western populists are considered by cosmopolitan elites (and not only by those in their own countries since one of the characteristics of current Western elites is that they are generally cosmopolitan) to be narrow-minded, inward-looking protectionists, at best, or xenophobic nationalists, at worst. Yet, aren’t the effects of the forces today’s populists are against, similar or sometimes even identical to the forces that the anticolonial freedom-fighters were struggling against? Globalisation, global markets, particularly financial markets, deprive peoples of any say on their future. These impersonal forces that have become uncontrollable make democratic decision-making meaningless. These are not only masses of people in small or underdeveloped countries, who become voiceless. Therefore, populists can be seen as freedom fighters against the excesses of globalisation, against the rules established, say, by GAFAs, pharmaceutical companies, military-industrial and military-intellectual complexes<sup>51</sup> or governments which they control or influence. This tendency exists almost everywhere. Only small groups of those belonging to cosmopolitan elites benefit from surfing on the waves of globalisation, though quite a few of them also fall and drown in the process. One of the few, but significant exceptions in that respect may be China, where the central authorities have retained and even strengthened, with the coming to power of President Xi Jinping, control over processes of globalisation, but China has its own problems.

Globalisation and the current migration tide, as one of its manifestations, are exacerbating today’s crisis of the European Union, where those who can be *anywhere* do not understand those who want to be *somewhere*. The first category, being dominant in politics, the economy and the media, are behaving like liberal autocrats *vis-à-vis* those whom they consider belonging to the mob. Such myopic arrogance carries a heavy political price-tag. Without resolving this contradiction between the aspiration of European peoples to be somewhere (to feel at home in France, in Germany, in Italy, in Estonia, in Hungary) and ambitions of transnational elites to be anywhere, Europe will not come out unscathed from the current crisis.

<sup>50</sup>N Sarkozy, *Les Temps des Combats* (Fayard 2023) 33.

<sup>51</sup>See, P Conesa, *Vendre la guerre: Le complexe militaro-intellectuel* (Editions de l’Aube 2022), where he analyses the role of intellectuals and think-tanks in paving the road to armed conflicts.

Populists are accused of dividing societies with their criticism of democratically elected governments and by-passing traditional media, which has been and remain generally supportive of authorities, being critical only of some aspects or excesses of the authorities. But this is confusing cause and effect. The populist parties and leaders have become prominent namely because Western societies have become more and more unequal and divided. There is quite a lot of truth in the accusations from both sides – from the side of self-declared progressives, as well as from the side of those whom their critics call populists. In a way and simplifying a bit, both Brexit and Trump's victory have been triumphs of populism over elitism (or if you like, democracy over liberalism). Personally, I don't like Boris Johnson because of his rude manners and being too often, even for a politician, economical with the truth; as an Estonian national living in London with his family, who are all Estonian passport holders, I don't like Brexit either. Yet, this doesn't mean that I cannot see genuine concerns of Brexiteers. As Canadian essayist Mathieu Bock-Coté writes, 'there are, no doubt, among populist politicians extreme rights who nurture crazy and repulsive ideas, but it would be wrong to confuse ideological obsessions of such politicians and those real issues related to claims of significant parts of the electorate, which are, however, censured by the dominant ideology.'<sup>52</sup> These are the faults of so-called mainstream political parties, be they of centre-right or centre-left, which have neglected these real issues. Populist leaders can exploit only what is exploitable.

Populist parties or movements may face setbacks in coming elections and their popularity ratings may suffer. However, the phenomenon is not going away, as its sources persist. Moreover, so-called mainstream parties are using populist slogans and policies more and more. The clearest example of this tendency is the metamorphosis of the British Tories, who under Boris Johnson were not any more a traditional conservative party, as we had known it. Having used some traditional Labour Party precepts and slogans as well as Nigel Farage's Brexit Party ideas, luring voters from both of them, the Tories have become a populist party – partly left-wing, partly right-wing.

## 6. 'Illiberal democracy', 'undemocratic liberalism' and 'liberal imperialism'

After Fareed Zakaria published, more than a quarter of a century ago, an Article on 'illiberal democracy',<sup>53</sup> the term, reflecting various degrees of reality, has become firmly anchored in both academic and political discourse. Agreeing with Zakaria that there are democracies where liberal values are not in high esteem, I have always wondered whether the reverse can also be true? Could there exist political regimes that may be defined as liberal but undemocratic? Of course, there have been authoritarian regimes that have been economically liberal, but socially conservative, like Chile under General Pinochet or South Korea under the military rulers. However, in Western democracies these two sides of liberalism – economics and social affairs – have been, more or less, like the two sides of the same coin.

If in illiberal democracy it is democracy that trumps liberalism, under undemocratic liberalism it is liberalism that has the upper hand and puts constraints on democracy. And my answer is that there can be, and in practice there are, political regimes that may be defined as 'liberal', but which have serious deficit of democracy. Undemocratic liberalism could be defined as a political regime, where out of the triptych – the government of the people, by the people and for the people – only the first still fully stands, ie where the participation of the people in governance is both formal and ineffective and where the governance is exercised not in the interest of the majority of the people. Leaving aside societies where there is neither democracy nor liberalism, like Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan (be it under the Soviets, Americans or the Taliban) or North Korea, and concentrating attention on societies where these phenomena – democracy and liberalism – have

<sup>52</sup>M Bock-Coté, *Le Multiculturalisme comme Religion Politique* (Les Editions des Cerf 2016) 291–2.

<sup>53</sup>F Zakaria, 'The Rise of Illiberal Democracy' 76 (1997) *Foreign Affairs* 22.



existed for some time and still exist, it seems that many, if not most, Western societies have been infested with the germ of ‘undemocratic liberalism’. While liberal ideas are prevalent among European elites, values of democracy are today often expressed by populist parties and movements. There is a lot of truth in Chantal Delsol’s observation that ‘[T]he populists, contrary to what some may be say, are really democrats, but they are not liberals. At the same time, universalist elites, like those in Brussels, are really liberals, who are not any more democrats since they don’t like it when people vote to limit some liberties.’<sup>54</sup> Using sanctions against ‘illiberal democracies’, be they members of the EU, like Hungary or Poland, or beyond, ‘undemocratic liberals’ (the prime example of them being the European Union itself) are imposing their will and vision (values) on those who from their point of view are on the wrong side of history.

Therefore, there exists not only undemocratic (or authoritarian) liberalism, but we are also facing the rise of liberal imperialism, euphemistically described as ‘liberal international order’, giving additional impetus to the rise of nationalistic populism. Liberal imperialism, ie attempts to impose liberal values, either by persuasion or by force, as universal values to all and everybody, is a wake-up call for those for whom, say, collectivistic ideals, historical traditions, stability or national independence are more, or at least not less, important than individual liberties. Many influential liberal authors, be they philosophers or economists, have been campaigners for liberal imperial order. Friedrich Hayek, one of the most important theoreticians of liberalism of the last century, believed that the idea of interstate federation would be ‘the consistent development of liberal point of view’,<sup>55</sup> while Ludwig von Mises advocated the end of nation-states and creation of a ‘world super-state’.<sup>56</sup>

In an interesting, though controversial (often these two adjectives are interlinked) book, the Israeli author Yoram Hazony writes that when the struggle against communism ended, ‘the Western minds became preoccupied with two great imperialist projects: the European Union, which has progressively relieved member nations of many of the powers usually associated with political independence; and the project of establishing an American “world order”, in which nations that do not abide by international law will be coerced into doing so, principally by means of American military might. These are imperialist projects, even though their proponents do not like to call them like that’.<sup>57</sup> In defence of international law it should be said that it is not this rather noble normative system, which willy-nilly worked even during the Cold War, that Washington tries to impose by its military might and financial domination, but the so-called ‘rules-based liberal international order’, ie the order based on rules determined in Washington that has little to do with international law. And it is not accidental that the only aspiring global empire is accusing those opposing its imperial ambitions, especially China and Russia, of building, or restoring, their own empires.

It would be unfair, in my opinion, to accuse the European Union of being an imperial project, though one may agree that promising (and acting on this promise) to create an ‘ever-closer union’, a kind of federal Europe, European political elites gradually became more and more detached from the aspirations of their peoples. It is becoming increasingly obvious that European societies, in contradistinction to political elites, are not (not yet, at least) ready to throw the nation-state into the dustbin of history. Both the liberal lefts and the conservative rights have become concerned about their identity. However, if the first try to find their identity in the belongingness to a multitude of small, often marginalised, groups (depending on sexual orientation, specific interests or ways of life), the second usually try to find or restore their affinity within bigger communities,

<sup>54</sup>Chantal Delsol, ‘Populiste, c’est un adjectif pour injurier ses adversaires’ (*Le Figaro*, 6 Septembre 2018) <<https://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/monde/2018/09/06/31002-20180906ARTFIG00389-chantal-delsol-populiste-c-est-un-adjectif-pour-injurier-ses-adversaires.php>> accessed 8 November 2023.

<sup>55</sup>F. Hayek, ‘The Economic Conditions of Interstate Federalism’ 5 (1939) *New Commonwealth Quarterly* 131 <<https://fee.org/articles/the-economic-conditions-of-interstate-federalism>> accessed 8 November 2023.

<sup>56</sup>L von Mises, *Liberalism: In the Classical Tradition* (San Francisco Cobden Press 1985) 150.

<sup>57</sup>Y Hazony, *The Virtue of Nationalism* (Basic Books 2018) 3–4.

like nations, nation-states or traditional religions. However, even if the EU in itself is not an imperial project, the ongoing war of the collective West against Russia – the war that dare not speak its name – after the Kremlin’s reckless invasion of Ukraine, shows that the European Union has become a part of the American imperial project. Moreover, joining, against their own best interests, Washington’s anti-Chinese policies, European nations have lost the remnants of independent decision-making in world politics. Therefore, Yoram Hazony is right when asserting that: ‘For all their bickering, proponents of the liberal construction are united in endorsing a single imperialist vision: They wish to see a world in which liberal principles are codified as universal law and imposed on the nations, if necessary by force. This, they agree, is what will bring us universal peace and prosperity’.<sup>58</sup>

Although today no European leader is openly calling for the establishment of the ‘ever closer union’ (today, it is replaced by the phrase ‘we need more Europe, not less’), there is still a dominant trend towards the federalisation of Europe that has, however, become counterbalanced by calls for the union of nation-states instead. Even States, members of the European Union, are not in a hurry to get rid of their sovereignty. Mathieu Bock-Coté is right when he observes that ‘when one attacks national sovereignty and historical identity of the people, its cultural heritage or civilizational roots of the Western world, one undermines knowingly or inadvertently what has helped democracy survive. The men and women fought against totalitarianisms not only to save their rights but also to save their country, their culture and their civilisation’.<sup>59</sup> Around the competition of these two trends – a further federalisation of the Union *versus* retaining or even strengthening the sovereignty of its Member States – there is a host of more specific problems: the criticism of widening the Union (ie extending it to the Central and Eastern Europe, including the Baltic states) instead of deepening the integration of the historical core of the Union; the issue of a multi-speed Union; difficulties with the Schengen zone, not to mention the difficulties (probably unsurmountable) of EU membership for Moldova and Ukraine. Attempts to resolve this bundle of controversial topics indeed amount to the Herculean (or rather Archimedean) task of squaring the circle.

On the one hand, Europe really needs more unity (not only economic but also political and strategic) to adequately face contemporary global challenges. Even the biggest European States are too small to play in the weight-category of China or the United States, to say nothing of smaller States. Strategically Europe has, since the end of the Second World War, been wholly dependent on the United States. If during the Cold War such dependence was understandable, with the disappearance of the Soviet Union and the end of the bi-polar world it has lost its credibility, at least for Europe, if not for the United States. Having provoked Russia to invade Ukraine, Washington’s arm in Europe – NATO – has finally renewed its *raison d’être*. In the end, ‘NATO’s existence became justified’, as Richard Sakwa observed already in 2015, ‘by the need to manage the security threats provoked by its enlargements’.<sup>60</sup>

To become one of the poles in world politics that would correspond to its economic weight and potential, Europe must transform itself into an even more integrated entity, especially on such important matters such as fiscal policies or defence. It ought to become a kind of federal Europe. However, many, if not most European peoples are not ready for that, they don’t want it. This is, in my opinion, one of the main obstacles on the path of Europe becoming a powerful pole in a multi-polar world that is emerging (or has already emerged). The political and strategic weight of Europe in the world is well below its economic potential. To protect and develop economic potential in competition with other poles, Europe must also have a political weight equaling that of the US, China, Russia or India.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>59</sup>Bock-Coté (n 53) 326.

<sup>60</sup>R Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands* (I.B. Tauris 2015) 4.

Trump's withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear deal and Washington's use of its extraterritorial legislation *vis-à-vis* its allies and sanctioning them brought home for many Europeans the need to lessen Europe's dependency from Washington's whims. Hence, the need for strategic consolidation against America's dominance. Equally, the economic rise of China is not only benefitting, but also worrying Europe, lest it become too dependent not only on Washington but also on Beijing. Once again, there is a need for more unity. However, as we have seen above, European peoples still value the sovereignty of their states and are not ready to sacrifice it on the altar of a 'ever close union' even if we call it 'more Europe, not less'. This is indeed a problem of squaring the circle.

Although the squaring of this circle may be impossible, at least for the foreseeable future, the European Union may still increase its strategic autonomy, especially *vis-à-vis* Washington and Beijing. This can be done by considerably improving relations with Moscow, though after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and following sanctions that have brought more damage to Europe than to Russia, this is even more difficult than before. If Washington, in the attempt to perpetuate its global domination, may be interested in the simultaneous containment of both China and Russia (though a dangerous and probably even counter-productive endeavour), Europe is suffering from its poor relations with Moscow not less than Russia. Having at least normal relationships with Russia would not only be economically beneficial for Europe; it would also widen the space of strategic manoeuvring for Europe even without creating a European super-state. As Caroline Galactéros, a French political scientist, has incisively put it: 'Strategic rapprochement of the EU with Russia would add additional value to Europe in new geopolitical games.'<sup>61</sup> Alternative to that, assuming that a hot third World War could be avoided, would be a rigid block-based confrontational international system, led respectively by a 'democratic thalassocracy' (sea-powers) and 'authoritarian tellurocracies' (land-powers), where those not formally belonging to these blocks would opportunistically maneuver between them. And European nations would be on the frontline of this confrontation.

## 7. Is *E Pluribus Unum* indeed replacing *Ex Uno Plures*

The motto *E Pluribus Unum*, written on the US dollar in Latin, in plain English reads: 'out of many – one'. It symbolises not only the union between the 13 states forming a Federation in 1776, but also the melting pot idea of the American political system, aimed at making Americans out of various migrants of European, mostly Anglo-Saxon, extraction. Now, two and a half centuries later, Washington is in the vanguard of spreading the American way of life, including the melting pot experience, all over the world. The greenback itself has been the reserve currency of the world since the end of World War II, serving as an instrument of American domination. Attempts by Russia, China and some other nations, who suffer or potentially may suffer from American 'sanctions', to dedollarise the world economy, and thereby undermine the foundations of American dominance, is one of the underlying causes of Washington's efforts to aggressively push back Russia and contain China. The BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) summit in Johannesburg in August 2023 accepted six new countries (Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates) and is now known as BRICS+. Some potential candidates are already queuing to join the club. BRICS+ is not going to replace existing global or regional economic and financial institutions but its development aims to make the world economy and financial system more democratic and less dependent on Western (American) dominance.

However, tens of thousands of years before anybody used Latin, or any other known language for that matter, another, opposite process had begun that could be called 'out of one – many' (*Ex*

<sup>61</sup>C Galactéros, 'Un nouveau partage du monde est en train de se structurer' (*Figaro Vox*, 9 November 2019) <<https://www.lefigaro.fr/vox/monde/caroline-galateros-un-nouveau-partage-du-monde-est-en-train-de-se-structurer-20191109>> accessed 8 November 2023.

*Uno Plures*). It began (allegedly, since new discoveries may further change the dates and locations) more than 50,000 years ago when the Homo Sapiens started his journey from an East African village to all over the world. During that pilgrimage, our forefathers and foremothers, who at the beginning of this migration obviously did not differ much from each other as to the colour of their skin, slant of their eyes or the ways in which they communicated between themselves, acquired visible physical and profound cultural differences, though remaining members of the same species of Homo Sapiens. This process of the colonisation of planet Earth, during which ‘out of one emerged many’, was slow; it took tens of thousands of years until foot-and-fingerprints of Homo Sapiens could be found in all hospitable, and today even inhospitable, places on Earth. Being always genetically (ie fundamentally) very similar, humans became visibly (superficially) rather different (some blue-eyed, others dark-eyed, some tall while others much shorter and so on). However, in contradistinction to these superficial (therefore easily visible) differences, groups of Homo Sapiens, gradually forming tribes, ethnic groups, nations and civilisations, became profoundly different from each other in terms of their cultures, religions, mores and languages spoken. As American philosopher Michael Walzer once aptly put it: ‘Every human society is universal because it is human, particular because it is a society’.<sup>62</sup> Cultural differences between peoples, be they historical, religious or ethical, that may or may not be immediately visible, have become over the millennia huge and they still remain profound. As physical or biological beings we are rather similar, as social animals we may be worlds apart.

American social psychologist Jonathan Haidt has persuasively demonstrated that even in today’s world there still co-exist at least three different categories of societies: those with the ethics of autonomy, those with the ethics of community, and those with the ethics of divinity. In the first category, the individual with her wants, needs and preferences runs prime; in the second, concepts such as duty, hierarchy, respect, reputation and patriotism are predominant, while in the third the idea prevails that people are, first and foremost, only temporary vessels within which a divine soul has been implanted.<sup>63</sup> Professor Haidt concludes his essay with a warning against moral monists: ‘Beware of anyone who insists that there is one true morality for all people, times, and places – particularly if that morality is founded upon a single moral foundation’.<sup>64</sup> However, notwithstanding such learned voices and warnings, there have been, and still are, those who in their provincial ignorance of the complexities and societal differences existing in the world try not only to unify the world but also make it uniform, be it, say, communist, liberal democratic or Muslim. Such worldviews have their roots in the Judeo-Christian and Enlightenment’s belief in a universal history and in constant progress leading inexorably towards some specific goal where history ends. Those who don’t recognise this truth, it is argued, are ‘on the wrong side of history’. If the communist experiment of the realisation of universal history has, at least for the time being, miserably failed, then liberal democratic projects for the whole world are, notwithstanding all the red lights blinking here and there, still actively promoted. Even Islamists have joined the ranks of such ‘practical utopians’ by their attempts to Islamise the globe, beginning with the Middle East. All these movements contain a mixture of determinism and voluntarism: the belief in an unavoidable unilineal course of history (ie determinism), and the burning desire to accelerate the coming of inevitable bright future in one or another form (ie voluntarism).

One may, of course, reasonably argue that the process of global heterogenisation, expressed in *Ex Uno Plures*, has by now if not come to an end, then at least considerably slowed down. Indeed, there are signs of global homogenisation, as articulated in the formula *E Pluribus Unum*. Within the general process of globalisation, we can distinguish global homogenisation combined with the heterogenisation within individual societies, ie if societies become a bit more similar to each other, there is more diversity within most of them. To an extent, these are natural processes. It is to be

<sup>62</sup>M. Walzer, *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* (University of Notre Dame Press 1994) 8.

<sup>63</sup>J. Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (Penguin 2013) 116.

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, 368.

expected that different societies interacting, rubbing shoulders and borrowing from those with whom they interact, may become, at least in some respects, more similar to each other. It may indeed be that instead of *Ex Uno Plures* humankind has already begun a reverse journey towards *E Pluribus Unum*. However, the processes of heterogenisation that went on for tens of thousands of years, if not longer, cannot be undone within decades and probably even within centuries, if ever. Even if some individuals from different societies can cross the boundaries of their cultural and ethical communities, to step, so to say, outside of their ‘moral matrix’, or sometimes even straddle and enjoy more than one of them, communities themselves change much more slowly, and changes that are instigated and forced on them, either from above or from the outside, may have lasting negative effects. Yet, there are those who seek to artificially accelerate the processes of global homogenisation, using, *inter alia*, human rights discourse, exportation of democracy and liberal values, carrying out operations of regime change, sometimes using military force for that purpose. Such ‘one size fits all’ policies foreseeably spread chaos and destruction instead of democracy and human rights. The much advertised ‘Arab spring’, enthusiastically welcomed by the West, led to the collapse of statehood in Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen, while in other Middle East nations the authorities, to avoid likely implosion, returned to authoritarian rule (eg, Egypt, Tunisia).

Although societies have often borrowed from their neighbours what seems to work well, these are usually technological novelties or management practices and not ways of life. In anthropology, there is a notion of schismogenesis,<sup>65</sup> meaning that peoples, instead of plagiarising ideas and practices from other societies try, on the contrary, to remain or even become more, distinctive, to retain and develop their special identity. I see this, for example, in Russia in the form of what President Putin has called healthy, moderate or reasonable conservatism, as a kind of reaction to the attempts to Westernise Russia. I am not going to discuss here the meaning of this conservatism and to what extent it corresponds to the characteristics and history of Russian society, but for me, one thing is clear. The Kremlin has become more conservative and also more authoritarian thanks, at least partly, to the Western interference in Russia’s domestic affairs and its encirclement by NATO and President Putin, who during his first presidential term at the beginning of the 2000s spoke of Russia as a country of European culture,<sup>66</sup> now speaks of Russia as a unique civilization that has firmly undertaken a pivot to the East. Here we see how an ideological turn is meant to support geopolitical and geo-economical conflicts.

Even admitting that the process of ‘out of one – many’ has ended, and the tendency of ‘out of many – one’ is manifesting itself in the processes of globalisation, it would be irresponsible to try to artificially accelerate this movement. Moreover, the end of history, be it either à la Karl Marx or à la Francis Fukuyama, would also be the end of social experimentation. The uniformity of social, economic or political systems would also mark the end of societal progress. Diversity between societies is no less important than biodiversity or diversity within societies organised as States. Moreover, the world is simply too big, complex and diverse to have its rich tapestry flattened into a carpet where only one pattern, be it a Judeo-Christian, Anglo-Saxon, Confucian, Muslim or even secular liberal-democratic, dominates.

Jean-Mari Guéhenno, the former Under-Secretary General of the UN, is right when he insightfully writes about the need for a new Copernican revolution, this time not in astronomy but in world affairs: ‘Radical reconfiguration, similar to one that happened 500 years ago, of the picture of the world is today needed. It should help us leave behind the Western-centric picture of the world and embrace the humanity in all its diversity. It is necessary to see world history not as an unstoppable movement towards worldwide liberal democracy. We have to find a more

<sup>65</sup>See, eg, D. Graeber and D. Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (Allen Lane 2021) 180–6.

<sup>66</sup>See, eg, D Hoffman, ‘Putin Says “Why Not” to Russia Joining NATO’ (*The Washington Post*, 6 March 2000) <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2000/03/06/putin-says-why-not-to-russia-joining-nato/c1973032-c10f-4bff-9174-8cae673790cd/>> accessed 8 November 2023.

adequate and less simplistic way of describing the world than one where democracies oppose dictatorships's.<sup>67</sup> In his well-argued opinion, one of the biggest mistakes, made by many in the West, is reducing the complexity of the world to these two modes of organisation of power: autocracy and democracy.<sup>68</sup>

## 8 Conclusions

In 1924 one of the most popular Russian poets Sergei Yesenin wrote: 'When face to face, we cannot see the face. We should step back for better observation'. Although these words were written by the great poet in the verse entitled 'A Letter to a Woman', such stepping back in order to see what is great and what is mediocre, what is essential and what is momentary, is especially important during the periods of radical historical transformations. Today such stepping back is even more essential due to the upsurge of the role of means of communication where propaganda and counter-propaganda have replaced the search for truth. This is true in the case of the so-called mainstream media that has lost even pretensions of impartiality, while in social media the glimpses of the pursuit of truth are drowned in the cacophony of various conspiracy theories and pure nonsense. Only a few non-mainstream sources give a voice to balanced and reasoned views, free from stirred up frenzied support for (or denunciation of) specific causes, opinions or policies. Most people live within their information bubbles that have become their comfort zones; venturing out of which makes most people uncomfortable.

Having recently read Michel De Jaeghere's excellent book on the Ancient Greece of the period of battles between the Greeks and the Persians as well as of the Peloponnesian war,<sup>69</sup> I discovered, or rather I was confirmed in my opinion, that notwithstanding the immense scientific and technological progress since those days, human nature has very much remained the same. Even today human societies, be they formed as nation-states or empires, which today dare not to utter their name, behave very much in the same manner as their ancient predecessors did. Today's United States with its seven fleets all over the world and its transatlantic arm in the form of NATO very much reminds us of the Athenian thalassocracy (sea power) and the role of the Delian League dominated by Athens. Its main opponents are the two tellurocracies (land powers) China and Russia, which are reminiscent of Ancient Sparta. Yes, thalassocracies have often been democracies, while tellurocracies have been autocracies. However, what is important to note is that their behaviour vis-à-vis others has been the same, differences being in degrees, not in substance. Both Ancient Athens and today's USA have been brutal vis-à-vis their rivals and intolerant of any dissent in the ranks of allies. Dissidents are welcome only if they are in the ranks of opponents. Furthermore, it was democratic Athens, not authoritarian Sparta, that was not content with the military and financial support of Athens imperial policies by its allies (subordinates); Athens also tried to impose their ways of life on those who were within the sphere of their influence. Isn't this also reminiscent of today's regime change operations and the attempts to spread democracy all over the world, including the most barren places (Afghanistan, Iraq etc.)?

As a result of their short-sighted policies, egoism, personal ambitions, desire not to lose face, not to be seen weak by making compromises, both Athens and Sparta lost their influence and for many centuries Greece disappeared from the political map of the world. Other powers in their stead emerged and vied for power and influence. However, though human nature has remained very much the same, two things have considerably changed since those bygone times. One of them is that today it is the whole world and not a relatively small part of the Eurasian continent where the battles are taking place. The other is that due to scientific and technological progress, humanity has acquired the capacity to destroy itself and most of the life on Earth. As today's confrontation is

<sup>67</sup>J.-M Guéhenno, *Le Premier XXIe Siècle: De la globalisation à l'émiettement du monde* (Flammarion 2022) 248.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, 328.

<sup>69</sup>M De Jaeghere, *La Mélancolie d'Athènes: L'invention de patriotisme* (Les Belles Lettres 2022).

global, an imprudent behaviour of major participants will not leave anybody to take over in this eternal struggle for power and influence. If even the prudent John Fitzgerald Kennedy was in 1962 ready to envisage a nuclear war in order to protect vital interests of his country, as they were defined by the American political elite, what may lead somebody to believe that President Putin would be more flexible and less tough in protecting Russia against threats that he and the Russian political elite consider as existential? The compromises that prevented the Caribbean crisis ending in a nuclear holocaust are more difficult to make today and this is not only due to the absence of visionary politicians. Propaganda running amok would wreck not only political, but also physical, lives of any visionary rising his/her head above the crowd.

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