

ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИ АНАЛИЗИ

POLITICAL ANALYSIS

Нов български университет
ДЕПАРТАМЕНТ
ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИ НАУКИ



New Bulgarian University
DEPARTMENT
OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИ АНАЛИЗИ, БР.4: 1-2018

ГЛАВЕН РЕДАКТОР: ИВАН НАЧЕВ

ТЕХНИЧЕСКИ РЕДАКТОР: ЕЛИЦА УЗУНОВА

РЕДАКЦИОННА КОЛЕГИЯ:

ВЕРОНИКА АЗАРОВА, ГЕОРГИ ПРОДАНОВ, ЕВЕЛИНА СТАЙКОВА, ЖИВКО МИНКОВ, ИРЕНА ТОДОРОВА, КАТЯ ХРИСТОВА-ВЪЛЧЕВА, КИРИЛ АВРАМОВ, ЛЮБОМИР СТЕФАНОВ, ПЕТЪР НИКОЛОВ, ПЕТЯ ГЕОРГИЕВА, ХРИСТО ПАНЧУГОВ

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МЕЖДУНАРОДЕН РЕДАКЦИОНЕН СЪВЕТ:

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ISSN 2534-9902

УВАЖАЕМИ КОЛЕГИ,

ПРЕД ВАС СЕ НАМИРА ЧЕТВЪРТИ БРОЙ
НА НАЙ-НОВОТО АКАДЕМИЧНО
ИЗДАНИЕ ЗА СОЦИАЛНИ,
ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИ И ИКОНОМИЧЕСКИ
АНАЛИЗИ И ТЕОРИИ В БЪЛГАРИЯ.

СПИСАНИЕТО СЕ ИЗДАВА НА
БЪЛГАРСКИ, НО ПРИЕМА ПУБЛИКАЦИИ
НА АНГЛИЙСКИ, ФРЕНСКИ, НЕМСКИ И
РУСКИ ЕЗИЦИ.

ТОЗИ БРОЙ НА СПИСАНИЕТО Е
ПОСВЕТЕН НА ЕДИН ОТ НАЙ-
АКТУАЛНИТЕ ДЕБАТИ В СЪВРЕМЕНОТО
ОБЩЕСТВО: ДОЙДЕ ЛИ КРАЯТ НА
ЛИБЕРАЛНИЯ РЕД?

ПРЕДСТАВЯМ НА ВАШЕТО ВНИМАНИЕ
ЕДНА ДИСКУСИЯ, ПРОВЕДЕНА В НОВ
БЪЛГАРСКИ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ.

ПОЖЕЛАВАМ ВИ ПРИЯТНО ЧЕТЕНЕ!

ИВАН НАЧЕВ

СЪДЪРЖАНИЕ

The End of the Liberal Order?	4
CONFERENCE PROGRAMME	5
Introduction	6
Conference Proceedings	7
WHAT IS/WAS LIBERAL ORDER?	38
Hristo Todorov (NBU)	
Brutality of Language and the Liberal Order.....	41
Evgenii Dainov	
The fake news of the demise of the liberal order.....	50
Ruzha Smilova	
What went wrong with liberalism?.....	57
Lyubomir Stefanov	
Identity politics: How the radical left ruined liberal democracy	64
Toncho Kraevsky	

New Bulgarian University / Centre for Social Practices

Conference – Room 310, Building 1 (main), New Bulgarian University

6 June 2017

The End of the Liberal Order?

The aim of the Conference is to look for answers, in an academic setting and through rational critical discourse, to questions such as:

*Why has liberal democracy become a culprit?

*What are the failings of liberal democracy that have made it look weak and defenseless in the eyes of so many?

*Why is liberal democracy under siege not only from without, but also – from within?

*Is there a systematic set of critiques against liberal democracy – from the Left as well as from the Right?

*Is there a viable alternative to liberal democracy?

*Should we try to preserve liberal democracy and, if yes – by what actions?

ПОЛИТИЧЕСКИ АНАЛИЗИ, БР.4: 1-2018

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

6 June, Room 310, Building 1 (main), New Bulgarian University

10.00-10.10am Opening remarks: Dr. Evgenii Dainov

10.10-11.20 **Session 1:** *What is /was the liberal order (basic values and principles)?*

Key speaker: Dr.Hristo Todorov, NBU (20 mins)

Panel interventions: Dr.Stefan Popov, Dr.Ruzha Smilova, Mr.Hristo Panchugov (20 mins)

Discussion (30 mins)

11.20-11.40 Coffee Break

11.40-12.50 **Session 2:** *Opponents of the liberal order*

The Critique from the Right: Mr. Toncho Kraevski, Institute for Right-Wing Politics (20 mins)

The Critique from the Left: Mr. Petar Volgin, journalist and publicist *or* Mr. Alexander Simov, journalist, Member of Parliament (20 mins)

Discussion (30 mins)

12.50-13.30 Lunch Break

13.30-14.40 **Session 3:** *What went wrong (did anything really go wrong) with the liberal order?*

Key speaker: Dr. Daniel Smilov, Centre for Liberal Strategies (20 mins)

Panel interventions: Dr. Lyubomir Stefanov, Dr. Antonii Todorov, Ms. Julia al-Hakim (20 mins)

Discussion (30 mins)

14.40-15.00 Coffee Break

15.00-16.10 **Session 4:** *Beaten on home ground? The liberal order and Brexit.*

Key speaker: Mr. Robert Whitford, journalist (20 mins)

Panel interventions: Dr. Metodi Metodiev, Ms. Lyuba Devetakova, Ms. Vessela Cherneva (20 mins)

Discussion (30 mins)

The End of the Liberal Order?

Introduction

The year 2016 was not very good for people who, like us at the New Bulgarian University, have put into our Mission Statement things like:

“The mission of New Bulgarian University is to be an autonomous liberal education institution dedicated to... cultivating critical and creative thinking, sensitivity to cultural difference, and problem-solving”.

Brexit, the election of Donald Trump to the US Presidency, plus the passage of repressive legislation in Hungary against a University very much like ours – all of this could not but worry us. Is – we asked ourselves – the age of liberal tolerance truly entering its twilight? If it is, then – why? What has changed? How did we come to this? And what is the “this” that we have come to?

So we decided, as University people will, to hold a conference on this, under the name “The End of The Liberal Order?”. We invited participants across the board, including self-avowed enemies of “liberalism”, such as the extreme Left (calling itself, in Bulgaria, “New Left”) and the far Right (going under the name, lately, of “Conservatives”).

The extreme Left promised to come and did not. The far Right did attend and, filling the time freed by the absence of their extreme-Left colleagues, provoked a lively and revealing exchange, reported in *Conference Proceedings* (below). From this exchange we learned some illuminating items to broaden our horizons – such as that there is no such thing as equality among citizens, and that Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher cannot claim to be true Conservatives, being far too far to the Left.

In any case, ultimately there seemed to emerge a cautious kind of optimism that liberal democracy (and the values and principles underpinning it), while being under attack, has the resources to defend overcome, rather than going out with a whimper.

We have organized the material thus: a section presenting an edited version of the proceedings (*Conference Proceedings*), followed by a collection of written contributions, deposited by

participants specifically for this publication, for which we are grateful. We still badly miss contributions from the extreme Left, but they seem to have gone underground.

Universities cannot save the world. But sometimes they can illuminate the path to salvation. We hope to have contributed to this, in however a small measure.

The End of the Liberal Order?

Conference Proceedings

Introductory remarks

Evgeni Dainov: The problem we are addressing: Is the liberal order under attack or is it dying? We started thinking about this conference at the end of last year. We had the Brexit referendum, we had Mr. Trump as President. Things were looking very worrying for all of us who actually believe in stuff like human rights and freedom and all the rest of it. And we were thinking: Are we facing a systemic problem? And this is why we call this “The end of the liberal order” with a question mark.

We have key speaker who will speak for 20 minutes, then we will have the panel interventions for another 20-ish minutes, which means 6-7 minutes per panelist, which is better than the conference we were at yesterday, where we panelists had three minutes. Then we can have half-an-hour’s discussion and that rounds off a seventy-minute academic hour, after which we have breaks.

We start with the philosophical foundations of the whole thing, presented by our very good friend Hristo Todorov, whom we expect to tell us if there was ever such a thing as “the liberal order”, is it under attack, or are things more simple or maybe more complicated than they seem.

Please, all of you present: write us a paper so that we can publish it. If you don't plan to, please speak and deliberate now; we will publish your speaking and deliberations. Initially we declared that we would only accept papers in English. But we are going to be liberal about this. We will accept papers in languages you feel comfortable in. Chinese may be difficult...

First Panel: *What is /was the liberal order (basic values and principles)?*

Hristo Todorov (*New Bulgarian University*, key speaker): My task is to make a short summary of the principles of the liberal order. I will start with a differentiation.

When we talk about liberal order we use this expression, at least, in two different ways, meaning two different things. The first thing is the liberal order as a system of government, in which individual rights and liberties are protected; and the exercise of political power is limited by the rule of law. The second thing is the set of norms, rules and institutions, known as liberal international order, established after the Second World War. When we nowadays are worried about the crisis or even collapse of the “liberal order”, we should keep in mind the difference in the two meanings of this expression .

I will confine myself to reminding you of some basic and very well known things.

So, in the first place, liberal democracy is a system of government, which may take different constitutional forms: **A:** constitutional monarchy, like the UK, Belgium, **B:** Republic with parliamentary system, like Germany or Austria. **C:** presidential system, e.g. the United States. And **D:** a republic with semi-presidential system, the standard example being France.

The purpose of this liberal democracy is the protection of individual rights and liberties, such as the right to life, to property, the freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom from slavery, right to fair trial. Power, in a liberal democracy, is established through an initial social contract. The liberal democratic state is not a divine institution; rather, it is an artificial human construct which, as all human constructs, has a purpose.

The content of the initial social contract is embodied in Constitutions. The exercise of political power is limited by the rule of law. The source of power is the will of the people; that is why we talk about popular sovereignty. Liberal democracy is a system of self-governance of the people. Usually, it takes the form of representative democracy.

In order to secure the expression of the people’s will, the liberal democratic countries have established universal suffrage, granting all adult the vote, regardless of race, gender, educational level, property ownership and so on. The right to vote presupposes the possibility of fair and free competition of political parties. So, liberal democracy is a system of political pluralism. That’s why we talk about democratic political pluralism.

In order to prevent the concentration of power in the state, to secure political pluralism and to guarantee the rule of law, liberal democracy establishes a system of separation of power into different branches (legislative, executive, and judiciary). This is a system of mutual control of the different branches, a system of checks and balances. The classic example is liberal democracy in the United States.

Liberal democracy is usually a representative democracy, where decisions are made by majority vote. At the same time, the rights and liberties of minorities are protected, purposefully protected. Liberal democracy is meant as an inclusive system of government, the aim of which is to integrate possibly all citizens, by giving them the opportunity to express their beliefs and their will.

Here emerges an important question: Are there any *enemies* in liberal democracies? This is not a trivial question. Standard opinion in democratic theory holds that liberal democracies have no enemies at all. There are only competitors or rivals. Nowadays, this is going to change. Listen carefully to this short speech given by Theresa May after the London terrorist attack last Sunday. The last word of this short, but very important speech, was “enemy”: “our enemies”. She talks directly about enemies of the liberal democracy.

Now I am going into my second part. The liberal international order is a set of norms, rules and institutions of international relations, established after the Second World War. The liberal international order envisions to base the international relations on binding rules, not simply on power and strength.

The founding document of the liberal international order is the Atlantic Charter (1941), a joint declaration by the American President, Franklin Roosevelt, and British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill. The Charter was signed in August 1941. The principles set out in the Charter are as follows: Firstly, peace and security, including the right of self-defense. Secondly: self-government, open societies, rule of law. Thirdly: economic prosperity, economic advancement, improvement in labor standards and living standards, social welfare. Fourthly: free trade and preservations of global trade.

The Atlantic Charter speaks of four freedoms: Freedoms of speech, Freedom of worship, Freedom from want and Freedom from fear. The Charter’s principles and freedoms were incorporated in the UN Charter by the 50 original member states in June of 1945.

The international liberal order is a fusion of two principles, two projects. The first project would be the modern state system, established in the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, based on the concept of sovereignty of state. And the second concept, this is the so called liberal vision of Western democracy. This includes open markets, international institutions, collective problem-solving, shared sovereignty, and rule of law.

There has always been a tension between these two projects: between the Westphalian project and the liberal vision. The main institutions of the liberal order are first of all the UN, the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organizations, International Criminal Court and so on.

Nowadays, there is a significant difference in the way that the liberal international order is perceived in the Western and the non-Western world. In the Western world, the liberal international order is perceived as a universal order which guarantees peace on the basis of mutual gain. The US is seen as a kind provider of shared goods, such as security, free trade, freedom of navigation, financial stability. At the same time, in China, Brazil, India, Russia and so on, this liberal international order is perceived as a kind of incorporation into the American value system – a specifically Western model of international relations. On the basis of this perception, such countries strain to reform this order into a new order, the so called Multi-Polar World Order.

Lyubomir Stefanov (*New Bulgarian University*, panel moderator): Thank you Professor Todorov for this extremely insightful introduction and for setting the tone for this discussion. You touched upon many key issues that will inevitably pop up with each and every speaker we have invited today, but I would like just to stress one. We often fall into the trap of identifying liberal order with democracy. And we have this problem teaching our students, what is the difference between liberalism and democracy? Democracy: is it a political idea or a philosophical concept? You probably know best and during the discussion you will hopefully bring more light upon that.

And now I will pass the floor to the panelists.

Stefan Popov (*Risk Monitor*): When I received Evgenii's invitation it occurred to me: OK, thanks, glad to be there, but what is, after all, this *liberal order*? I decided to ask Evgenii: Evgenii, what do you mean by liberal order? He said: "Well, that's the tricky part. That's why

we have a conference. Because we are not quite sure, and people say different things, so let's get together and discuss it". He left the question open and I decided to focus on the very title of the conference.

Fortunately or not, Hristo Todorov said most of the things I was planning on saying, namely, the difference between *the international liberal order* and what we mean by *liberal democratic governance* in today's constitutional states. I will leave aside the first part, the international liberal order; but I would like to make just one brief remark. If you were to throw the phrase *liberal order* at anyone anywhere around the world, 99% of the knowledgeable people – academics, political scientists, politicians and so on – would understand it as meaning the *international* liberal order. Few people would associate this word, this phrase, with internal affairs within the national state. On the other hand, the phrase, and the entire terminology of the international liberal order presents a kind of a technical language, which has been in circulation since the end of the Second World War. But it doesn't have exactly the substantive content, nor essence implied by the words themselves related to "the liberal"; it is rather a conventional technical language, somehow established after the war.

I saw a couple of days ago the President of the Council on Foreign Relations, Richard Haass, a person whom I admire greatly, say something relevant to this aspect of linguistic convention. (He was also president of the policy planning staff at the State Department, which was created for George Cannon in 1946-1947.) He says in an article that "this buzz word (i.e. "international liberal order") reminds us of Voltaire's words on the Holy Roman Empire". And Voltaire famously said: "it's neither Holy, nor Roman, nor an empire". This can be argued for the international liberal order. Of course, it's international. Yet, it's not global in the sense of being completely international. It is hardly liberal, because it is clearly supported by American power, standing behind its institutions. And it is not order *per se* or literally, for it switches from order to disorder at different times. Therefore, the words shouldn't be taken in a literal sense.

Now, let me proceed to the other part. What is liberal? What do we mean by liberal order in and by itself? This question refers to the question: what comes prior to the established language of the international development and the institutional arrangements after the Second World War?

I will propose several points on this question, without going into details; just making a couple of statements that can be further developed and internally articulated.

First of all, I would like to state that there is no such thing as order that is liberal and based on what we call liberal. *The liberal* is not an order and does not create a societal order. By this I mean that *the liberal*, what we call the liberal or liberalism is not something substantive, a given, a thing or structure that is out there and can be observed from outside. It is first and foremost a guiding concept, based on the idea of human rights as a condition for the modern constitutional state.

This view of „liberal“ does not by any means diminish its significance. On the contrary, it is even more important than any substantive concept, because it is a polemical concept. So, I would say that the liberal, as well as so-called liberalism and the entire nest of similar predicates, constitute a polemical attitude, a political concept and consciousness. It is not a concept of an entity, the way that those of apples and grapes and bottles are. There is no way to conceive of it thus, although it is very often spoken of in exactly this fashion.

Second, what comes immediately after this first statement, as its necessary implication, is that the concept of the liberal is in a specific sense content-free, or content-less. It doesn't have a precise, perpetual, constant, hard-core semantics. This means that in specific contexts the same thing can be liberal or not liberal. When we have a concept that is content-free in itself, what provides it with specific substantive content is some specific context wherein it is being used. I could also say that it is not a virtue in itself, in the Aristotelian sense of the word, as it is not „out there“. Or, in a more modern, say Heideggerian manner, I could point out that the liberal is not present-at-hand (it is not of the order of *die Vorhandenheit*, entitative phenomena).

Third, even if we agree that the liberal is not a substantive but rather a contextual concept, we are still far from having clarified what the essence of the liberal could be. The condition of contextuality may relate to many types of concepts not exclusive to the liberal. So, one more step is required for coming closer to a proper understanding of the concept. Here comes a next definition: the liberal is a polemical concept. Just like any other polemical concept, it is contextual. But by only being defined as contextual, it is not yet necessarily polemical. Yet, this polemical character is, I would claim, the essence of the *concept of the liberal*.

What follows from this way of conceiving the concept of the liberal is that it is an idea operating in specific contexts. We are guided by ideas of what we see as liberal and act correspondingly, defend certain political positions, stand up and insist publicly on concrete policies, in the first

place, in the realm of human rights. Thus, theoretically, this leads to conceiving the liberal as a process, as a perpetual fight, if you wish. Now, what kind of fight does the whole process and its dynamics refer to is a different question, and it depends on contextual features. For instance, letting women drive cars should be seen as a liberal reform in a country as conservative as Saudi Arabia; whereas in a Western country this is simply an irrelevant question, as the opposite is a fantasy. Or, legalizing prostitution would be an extreme liberal act in Italy, whereas in Germany it is a question of labor law. These things vary from context to context, be it country, or larger contexts.

In all these varieties, however, it is important to retain this restriction, namely to abstain from presupposing entities, but rather to think of historicity, historical dynamics, contextual conditions.

Fourth, what kind of reality is referred to by the idea of the liberal? It is not exactly the constitutional state of late modernity. I would argue that the liberal is closely related to the constitutional state. Yet it does not follow immediately from it. It is essentially connected to something that does not come out from a modern constitution and that is the public sphere. I mean public sphere in the sense of constant communication or the constitution of society, i.e. what Jürgen Habermas, Karl-Otto Apel and others call *Kommunikationsgemeinschaft*. The idea of mutual recognition and argumentative discourse, whereby I am ready to listen to you, and you are ready to listen to me, is implied in the very pragmatics of language. The practical consequence of this is the way we solve our problems and the problems of society. This ideal, which is formal, empty of specific content, is something that constitutes the dimension of the liberal. That does not give it substantive content, though.

Fifth, what are the risks of a possible disintegration of the liberal dimension? These are the risks that undermine or could lead to a collapse of the public sphere and the argumentative discourse, where after mutual recognition disappears. And these typical risks today are, let's say, some kind of revolution: it could be an Islamic revolution, a Christian revolution, a nationalist revolution, God knows what. This is also terrorism, or a guerilla movement. As far as Bulgaria is concerned, this is the corruption continuum, wherein we have milder forms of corruption, such as administrative transactions, and then stronger ones, such as political, institutional and still more powerful, as is state capture. This extreme form of corruption, called state capture, is a typical

phenomenon in this country. It could become fully materialized, which would lead to the transformation of the constitutional state into a full blown criminal state, or, for instance, a socialist dictatorship. Thus, conceptually, we also have the boundary case of disintegration of the constitutional state. All these and other risks, of course, are at the same time direct risks to the dimension the liberal.

Let me briefly sum up. The liberal in itself is a formal concept. It acquires concrete substantive content in a specific context. All such contexts are socio-political. The liberal is thus not an object of a theory, but an attitude and a political position. As a political position, it is bound to a matrix of specific sets of questions and their historical relevance, their historicity. Thus, there are two levels of conceptuality here: one, the concept of the liberal is a formal, i.e. meta-concept; two, it becomes substantive, full of specific content through a contextual political process. In this process, the liberal is a guiding principle for change. And this course of change is essentially a struggle. It never reaches a final state of affairs.

Lybomir Stefanov: Thank you Dr. Popov. I would suppose we proceed further Ruzha Smilova and then pass to Hristo Panchugov. Keep writing your questions, there will be a floor for discussions.

Ruzha Smilova (*Sofia University and Centre for Liberal Strategies*): I will address two questions in my talk and they both are related to the major questions we are talking about in the conference: is the liberal order dying?”

The liberal order I will be speaking about is liberal democracy, the first dimension of the liberal order that Hristo Todorov mentioned. Liberal democracy as a dominant political regime, as a form of political government, is it really dying?

And my second question I will address is who is to blame, if anybody is to be blamed for the decline of liberal democracy as the dominant political order today?

I would argue that there is no immediate danger of extinction of liberal democracy. Rather, the danger is of gradual subversion or of malignant mimicry of core values and substantive principles; and I would here oppose what Dr. Popov said. I believe that there are substantive principles underlying the liberal democratic regimes. There is a danger of gradual subversion and

even of malignant mimicry which is due to reinterpretation of the core values and principles that underlie liberal democracy.

The critics of liberal democracy know that they have to pay at least lip service to the principles of liberal democracy. This shows a wide post-transition consensus in our society and also across the continent. We are all liberal democracies right now and we will likely remain such. Yet what we witness is a process of reinterpretation that risks subverting its rational underlying values.

What is being reinterpreted? Rights and freedoms equal for all members of the community. This is substantive and this is what is being subverted by the malignant interpretations.

The individual is at the centre of the moral universe. This, during transition, was locally interpreted as radical individualism, outside the context of community. This was removed from the liberal idea of a moral community made of individuals. Community was seen as mechanical collection of individuals. So dissatisfaction with the lack of community was to be expected. But instead of trying to re-establish community and equality, this went into the idea of the majority being the community, with minorities being excluded. A community of un-equals. This has been gladly used by the post-transition elites in order to strengthen their power while declaring groups of society as enemies.

The moral equality of the individual members of the democratic community, placing breaks on the will of the majority, is being subverted in favour of majority diktat.

What we see is populism, orchestrated by an aspiring new elite against the old liberal meritocratic elite.

What is the alternative presented? Tribal elites protecting the tribe from outsiders. Way out: meritocratic elites to be less arrogant and acknowledge their debt and loyalty to community – i.e. to return to liberal principles, correctly interpreted.

Hristo Panchugov (*New Bulgarian University*)

Liberalism is not an intrinsic characteristic of democracy. Non-democratic regimes can be liberal. But democracy is not possible without at least some liberal principles.

The challenge today is not against liberalism, not do we witness a debate of boundaries between individuals and communities or individuals and states. We see a challenge against liberal democracy.

Liberal democracy believes that there are no such differences between individuals as would give rise to different political rights. Equality is fundamental here. The achievement of democracy is making these equal individuals part of state power.

But this all happens within a national environment. Universal suffrage is only for nationals of that state, not for foreigners. What happens when foreigners want to participate in the political process? How to deal with this was the first problem of the modern liberal order. If you keep someone out, you go back to Aristotle – some people are not capable of being citizens.

The moment you start believing that there are individuals less capable of citizenship than you are, you end up with making democracy the rule of the majority, rather than rule for the common good.

This is the challenge we are facing: collapse of the ability of public sphere to deliberate between equals. This collapses when you start believing that some people are not entitled to participate.

The problem is not ideological, it is political; the challenge is not to liberal ideology, but to the political regime of liberal democracy. It is not about ideas; it is about power.

Discussion

Questions from the floor:

- * Are we not witnessing a reversal of Inglehart's "silent revolution" – the movement from material to post-material; now, however, we see physical assaults?
- * How can the liberal order be non-substantive?
- * Can the liberal order be used as a façade for some countries' national interests – serving their interests rather than the international liberal order?
- * Is not the liberal order losing its strength because people feel betrayed by it; today people feel insecure, as violence coming from countries invaded or attacked by West?
- * Rights of minorities: do not minorities receive more rights than the average taxpayer and this angers the majority?

Ruzha Smilova:

* Reverse revolution? Not really. But we see dissatisfaction, on the part of the majorities, by the way they have been led by the liberal elites. This is used by aspiring new elites to take power. Majorities do not have ideology, they have interests. They will follow elites which seem capable of serving their interests.

* Any order can be used as a façade for interests. The question is, whether there is a balance for other actors to also pursue their interests under a liberal order; or are some not allowed to do this? Even if some benefit more, it is in the interests of everyone else to participate and take opportunities available. Superpowers have been known to serve primarily their interests, but they usually pay the price – eg. The US paying 75 % of NATO's budget. As long as others can also pursue their interests, the order is beneficial, ultimately.

Stefan Popov:

I am not a political scientist and I do not see all things as given. If liberalism is a universal object, we lose the sense of liberalism.

The USA in the 18th century was liberal in aspiration, but it also had slavery. This does not mean that US was not liberal. The Swiss have been liberal for centuries, but only allowed their women to vote in the 1970s. Liberalism is a perspective, not a universal object.

Hristo Panchugov:

* No, Spreading democracy cannot be an instrument for spreading national interest. Transitology was wrong: democracy cannot be started anywhere and at any time; previous experiences matters, time and place matters.

* The problem of exporting terrorism is a problem of failing states, not a question of exporting democracy or liberalism.

Second panel: *Opponents of the liberal order*

(The far-Left has not turned up)

Toncho Kraevsky (*Institute for Right-Wing Politics*, key speaker):

I have been cast, by the organizers, as “Opponent from the Right”, but it is difficult to offer a critique from purely the right. The reason is that what we today conceptualize as Left and Right is part and parcel of the liberal order. Every political issue exists on many different levels of analysis; the Left-Right division is just one of the possible levels.

Let's take abortion. The Left calls for the right to abortion and equal access to it. The Right does not see it as a right. Both positions are inherently liberal. The Left-Right debate is a policy debate – a debate over solutions. Over and above this is the real debate – that between Liberal and Conservative. For example: on the abortion issue, the Left and the Right argue over access. Conservatives problematize abortion *as such*.

I prefer a liberal order – where we can debate, sharing some presuppositions – to no order. This is not typical of young liberals, however, who riot and block conservatives, rather than arguing with them. Liberals carry their share of responsibility for the lack of discussion in today's world.

The liberal, or any other order, means that certain precepts exist that you have to accept in order to have any discussion at all. There is, however, a problem, within the liberal-order discussion, relating to clarity. For example: within the liberal-order debate, le Pen is seen as far right, but her programme is communist; Tsipras is seen as far left, but his actions are capitalistic.

The prefix “far” is more meaningful than “left” or “right”. The “far” want to change the presuppositions, on which debate is based.

In the history of ideas, the liberal order is far older than the post-war period. Its presuppositions date to the Enlightenment. At some stage, knowledge and rationalism overtook and eclipsed Christianity. But Christianity *is* doubt, as much as Descartes, because doubt is a feature of free will and free will is Christian.

Which is why atheism is only possible within Christianity: you show a steam engine to a Christian and he says there is no God. This is how reason eclipsed Christianity. But there is a problem with Reason when you put it in the place of God. Which is not useful, because when you ask Reason *how* you should act, it is silent: no *must* can be extracted from *is*.

Neitzche was right: If there is no God, then everything is possible. Ideologies came to replace religions, becoming “crippled religions”. Which is why nationalism and socialism never

succeeded in countries where God continues to exist – eg. The USA, where God is in the Constitution.

With no God, in the 20th century we ended up with *procedural* democracy, which ended up in a vacuum. Which is why the Western world is today existentially depressed and self-defeating, leading to a postmodern crisis as the opposite of ideology. In this crisis, things begin to change places. Today's violent liberal students have been raised by the liberal order, but they are in fact violent Leftists.

It is true that the liberal order does not have a specific content. The neo-Marxists have taken advantage of this, filling it from 1970s with whatever they like, eg. Marxist deconstructivism and hatred of Western civilization. Today's US Universities have become facilities for the indoctrination of radical leftists. These Universities are state-funded. The West is subsidizing its own destruction.

The point is: the liberal order's *culture* is in decline. That *culture* was the basis of the liberal institutions.

Liberals believed that political systems are independent of cultural context and that, therefore, the liberal order can be applied anywhere in the world. But it turned out that different cultures develop different political institutions. From this viewpoint, the so-called Liberal triumph in 1990s was just Western civilization's triumph over others, who are now hitting back.

The liberal consensus has been taken over by post-modern Marxists and is unable to defend itself. Liberal order attacked by: other civilizations; internally – by neo-Marxists, attacking from the blind side, wanting to deconstruct Western culture; by the reactionary movement wanting to replace it with a conservative order, capable of defending the West – by those who want to concentrate on politics rather than on the policy debate. Meaning: a/ give up on idea that the Western model can be applied elsewhere; b/ fight Marxism.

Discussion:

Daniel Smilov (*Sofia University*): I understand the clash on the level of policies. What, however, is this clash on *politics* – a meta-debate? What is this debate about? I see Conservatives and Liberals as part of the contemporary pluralistic world, living within a common frame. Liberal

democracy has been this common frame. We do not have an alternative to this. Are you saying that there is an alternative? Which parts of the liberal-democratic project do you reject?

There is a wide spectrum of Conservative positions, with some of which I am fine. But please tell me: you market your Institute as believing in (Christian) God, capitalism and nationalism. There are fascists subscribing to that. On the other hand, there are liberals who happen to be Christians and will sign up to this as well.

So: which bits of liberal democracy would you throw away?

Questions:

*We need to know – what is there on the level beyond policies? And also: what people who call themselves Conservative in Bulgaria seem to be about is limiting and taking away rights. Which rights are you afraid of and why?

* How does it make you feel that new Left and you new Conservatives seem to agree on two points: how bad is Soros; both new Left and Right seem to be different labels of liberalism? These similarities are truly striking.

* How do you think Universities in the UK facilitate Marxism? I've been taught by liberals and Marxists; and both have facilitated debates, rather than ideological indoctrination.

* Why do people hate the West? Why does the West – the US – have dictatorial allies and organizes coups in other countries?

* Bulgaria's New Left is a follower of Dugin, a deeply reactionary-conservative Russian thinker. The Bulgarian "new Conservatives" are working within the Gramscian – reform-communist – hegemonic tradition. How do you account for these paradoxes – for things, as you say, changing places?

* What is the difference between conservatism and nativism? How do you describe yourself to the world as a modern conservative? What do you believe in and what do you fear?

Toncho Kraevsky:

*On God/nation/capitalism: we are not nationalists. Nationalism is progressive and enlightened; we are patriots. Nationalists are a product of democracy; patriotism pre-dates democracy, it is

royal – love for country and home. Patriotism allows a multi-ethnic state. Nationalism does not – it sees people in a nation as self-sufficient, having all the resources for being.

* On fascism. Fascism is not capitalism, so the fascists are not like us. But bear in mind that Franco was not a fascist, nor was Pinochet. Mussolini's fascism is closer to socialism, whereas Franco and Pinochet had a laissez-faire economy. Fascism is against capitalism and is therefore incompatible with conservatism. In a sense, Franco and Pinochet perform a conservative function, but are also not conservative. The last real conservative was Carlyle. There have been no conservatives in the 20th century. Maybe Peel and Disraeli were conservatives, in the 19th, but not Thatcher or Churchill.

* On Universities. In the era of rationalism, Universities are churches: sources of validity for the order imposed by the state after royalty could no longer validate itself with the will of God. We need to keep Universities away from the state, as well as the church. Otherwise the state will use its funding to force Universities to produce certain ideologies and validations.

* On modern conservatism. It is Christian in a capitalist environment. I am afraid more of communism and neo-Marxism - radical left – than of liberals. I criticize liberals for the fact that their lack of content opens the way for Marxists to hi-jack it, also to fascists and other radicals.

* Western culture is not inherently conservative; it is about peaceful meaningful discussion of all viewpoints. My problem with the liberal order is not that it is contrary to Western culture, but that it lacks immunity against ideologies that reject Western civilization. Liberalism is not non-Western, it is part of the Western tradition, as is Marxism. The West and Christianity have the same strength / weakness: free will, including the freedom to develop ideologies that reject our existence, such as Marxism.

* On secular democracy. By this I mean a political regime of separation of church and state. Secular does not mean atheist. US democracy is secular, but not atheist, which is why it has escaped progressivist atheistic ideologies such as communism and nationalism.

* On Putin. His regime is inherently non-western, it carries none of the characteristics of western civilization, and Russia is not part of that civilization. Putin may be a quasi-Asian conservative, but not a western conservative.

* On the overlap between my Institute and the New Left. I find it offensive to be lectured on tradition by socialists like Peter Volgin. These people and their ideology rejected all the accomplishments of Western civilization at the beginning of 20th century. Now they pretend that nothing like this happened. They pretend to be conservatives, but they killed conservatives in 1917. They killed conservatives and Christians and now they pretend to be such.. Overlap there may be between us and them, but they do not have the moral right to be like us or even call John Lennon a “leftist hippy”. I have the right to call him a leftist hippy; they were communists, so they can’t do this.

* On Dugin and Gramsci. I strongly oppose Gramsci, having a serious problem with cultural Marxists. In a way what they say is true, but the moral they take out of this is that they should deconstruct Western culture as oppressive, which it is not – it is productive.

(An unscheduled and somewhat heated discussion erupts at this stage of the proceedings, using the time freed by the non-appearance of the New left’s representatives):

Evgenii Dainov: A question has occurred to me – to my far-right “reactionary” friends. It is a fundamental, existential, methodological, philosophical one.

By saying that only Christians can become conservative, aren’t you overturning the entire foundations on which civilized society can exist? That is: a society of equals, in which everyone has to right of access to everything, including membership of an ideology. You’re telling me that because I am not a Christian, I cannot be a conservative, even if I chose to believe in your political values.

This is discrimination. This is nigger-bashing...

Toncho Kraevski: You can’t cherry-pick the values that you’re going to believe in. It’s is part of the transcended authority.

I don’t think that there is anything wrong that we can’t have access to all identity groups. You cannot just pick all but one and say that you’re entitled to say that you’re a conservative. You need to have the whole package of these values to part of it.

Evgenii Dainov: Can I be a conservative?

Toncho Kraevski: Of course you can, when you convert to Christianity...

Evgenii Dainov: Do you believe in citizen equality?

Toncho Kraevski: No, I do not.

Evgenii Dainov: There you go. You believe in political in-equality, which is why you won't allow me to be part of the Conservative party

Toncho Kraevski: Yes and that is why I am not allowed to be a liberal.

Evgenii Dainov: Of course you can become a liberal, at any second and anywhere. That's the whole point of liberalism.

Toncho Kraevski: What was missed in today's discussion is that there are these lines that cannot be crossed between liberalism and conservatism. Of course there are shared common values. There are limited things that never change and one of them that conservative believe that inequality is good and liberals do not.

And the other thing that is the main difference is that conservative don't buy the concept of the social contract.

Evgenii Dainov: Really? How about this, from Edmund Burke: "Society is indeed a contract. It is a partnership . . . not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born."

Or do you class Burke as some kind of leftist?

Toncho Kraevski: He believes that society that is a natural fact...

Hristo Panchugov: I am really pissed off with this new-fangled "Bulgarian conservatism". Conservatism is about community and how you see yourself in the community. It has never been about opposing immigrants. Conservatism is about evolutionary change, about what has been before and accepting it and moving on. Muslims can be conservative.

This business with inequality – with someone else deciding, what you can be and what you cannot be – is a really dangerous road and has nothing to do with conservatism. If you want to frame Bulgarian conservatism meaningfully, then this is not the way to do it.

Ever since the 1970s, the extreme right wing parties have been allowed to flourish because none of the right-wing parties would ever consider undertaking the extreme right populist claims. Now

the extreme is engulfing the mainstream. The Left mainstream found it easier to adapt - postmodern claims, ecology, gay right.

What changes now and is that some people refusing to discuss things in such a manner. Our new-fangled conservatives are powerless to frame an actual political claim and instead of this are engaged in finding an enemy. This is not about lib democracy, liberalism, conservatism. This is simply not normal.

Third panel: *What went wrong (did anything really go wrong) with the liberal order?*

Daniel Smilov (*Sofia University*, key speaker)

I just need to highlight certain basic features which are under some strain at the moment.

1. Liberalism was based on the understanding of *equal citizenship*, so we have to start from the notion of equality between individuals.

2. The second key notion of liberalism is the idea of *limited power*.

Thomas Hobbes was a champion of equality between individuals, but not – limited power. He thought that the solution to the various problems of the state of nature was autocratic, we might say centralized power, which he called the Leviathan. Liberalism went into a different direction and it stands behind the Idea of limited powers.

Power is limited in three different ways:

2.1. Separation of powers

2.2. Rule of law. A key idea here: whenever rights need to be limited for reasons of survival, limitation must be proportional and you should not limit rights more than is necessary to address a particular problem

2.3. Individual sphere autonomous from state. The existence of individual rights which define a certain autonomous sphere in which individuals can decide on things by themselves. J.S.Mill famously argued that unless your actions do harm to others, they must not be restricted.

This is the normative core. Liberalism is a substantive construct, not “empty”, as has been suggested.

Also it has little to do with notions of relativism, postmodernism etc. Some people who espouse this happen to be liberals, but liberalism does not necessarily lead to this.

Liberalism *is* in trouble. Lots of actors criticize the above set of ideas, reject them and see themselves as their enemies. This opposition to liberalism is on the rise. In the West, this happens in an institutional framework which is still liberal – it implements the above liberal normative ideas.

How bad is the situation? We still don't know. Enemies exist, but there is uncertainty as to their final ends – what are their ultimate goals? Are we dealing with Conservatives who accept the liberal-democratic framework, or – with adherents of Franco's model of power? This ambiguity is worrying when we come to regimes like Victor Orban's. He acts on the edge of the accepted framework, but in some of his actions he goes beyond.

Now we have probably to look onto the reasons *why* this is happening. What are the causes for this troubling, by any standard developments? Here I'll offer four types of reasons, two of which are more important than the others.

1. The first is much talked about, it's the backlash against globalization. Liberalism is under pressure because increasing numbers are seeing themselves as losers in globalization, particularly as regards economic interests. *Prima facie* evidence supports this. Even in the advanced West there are regions where globalization has not been as beneficial as in other regions. Globalization has been, overall, an incredible success, generally speaking. But the distribution of benefits has been unequal. This is one source of discontent with the liberal order responsible for globalization.

Empirical research results clash. Some suggest that culture is behind the retreat from liberalism, others – that interests motivate disillusion. We need more research.

One thing is striking: in fact people angry at inequality vote for parties that are not egalitarian. Why would an egalitarian vote for Trump or May?

Various exotic explanations have been offered for the backlash against globalization:

a/ A ridiculous explanation: "identification with the aggressor" (Stockholm syndrome). This is just not serious.

b/ My favourite: "these majorities are conservative in a specific sense – in that they do not believe any more that through public authorities they could improve their situation.

They see such authorities not as solutions but as problems. Their solution: throw in a spanner and disable the authority – eg. electing Boris Johnson.

c/ Not only potential losers support populists – but people who think that they could do even better in globalization, if they break with some of the agreements created by the liberal order – eg. the drive to renegotiate major trade agreements by countries in good bargaining positions, such as US and UK.

2. There are also cultural explanations for the backlash against liberalism and they go on something like this. There is a cultural war between liberal culture and conservative culture. We already heard some of this here – “God, patriotism and capitalism against liberal normative principles”, seen as political correctness, neo-Marxism etc. This is superficial.

But let’s take the “two cultures” explanation seriously. What can we say about this? Such a cultural clash may be benign. We live in a pluralist society, in which sometimes one position wins and then the other. People vote for liberals and next time for conservatives; this is normal.

Conservatism has always been a strong political force inside liberal democracy, conservatives are a legitimate player in pluralist liberal democracy. But the problem with this cultural war is that it may really *be* a war; and the cultural clashes run deep.

If conservatives retreat only into “God, capitalism and nation”, it could recruit true enemies of the liberal order. From this perspective, Vladimir Putin could be seen as a conservative, Franco – also.

If “cultural war” is understood as radicalization in terms of conservatives going down this definition, there *is* a danger to the liberal order. The danger is on the periphery of European liberal democracy. Russia has espoused “God, nation and capitalism”, which has gone hand-in-hand with the undermining of key constitutional principles. And there are those in the middle, the ambiguous political regimes that are emerging in Central Europe.

3. This is an explanation offered by Ivan Krastev. In 2004 he first spoke of the trap of “no alternative”: Left and Right have converged so much that whoever came to power, the

policy package would be much the same. So the only alternative would be a radical rebellion against this status quo.

This explains part of what we are seeing. It would not be an existential problem of the liberal order, because alternatives under it always emerge. Today we not only have radical alternatives, like le Pen, but also – positive alternatives to the status quo – Macron.

Liberal democracy institutionally has instruments for self-correction that can deal with the situation of “no alternative”. Even in the EU, after years of “no alternative” we now see no less than five alternatives emerging in the “White Book” on the future of Europe.

4. One aspect of globalization has to do not only with economic prospects, but also with security of people as regards global terrorism. Is this an existential challenge to the liberal order – the thing to convince us to adopt something else?

Again, it is not such a grave threat. The liberal order – liberal-democratic countries – have enormous, disproportionate resources for the threat they face. If they could point these resources to the danger, terrorism would disappear. The problem is not terrorism, but the conflicts in the Middle East, which can be settled also.

We *can* tackle the problem by sticking to the liberal normative principles. Liberalism is not a suicide pact, neglecting dangers. It just says that the measures that you take must be means-ends tested, be proportionate.

The problem is: given the emergency-state of mind spread by media and government, we *could* jump right into deprivation of rights, without going through everything else first.

Antonii Todorov (*New Bulgarian University*): The topic of this session reminds me of something I saw at the office of our NBU president – a picture, taken in the South of France of a sign, in English: When nothing goes right, go left.

Sp, what went wrong with liberal democracy?

Liberal democracy is a democratic regime based on some liberal principles, as resulting from the long history of liberalism. Today this is not the Liberalism of the 19th century.

I will attack this topic through Tzvetan Todorov and his book entitled “Inner Enemies of Democracy”.

The original Liberal idea – that democracy is possible anywhere and at any time – has turned out to be *not* true. It *can* be a universal model, but it must be adapted to the specific cultural environment where it needs to be implemented.

Tzvetan Todorov maintained that *only* the existing Western model of liberal democracy can exist. But this thesis hurts the spread of democratization through the world, as we saw in the attempts to democratize the Middle East.

There is also the problem of linking liberal democracy with market capitalism. Anywhere in world, liberal democracy comes in a package with market economy and its specific version – capitalism. But we now must ask: does the market economy *need* democracy? No. You can have one without the other.

If we turn to two Hungarian philosophers Polanyi and some others, they speak of market economy and democracy as two separated developments, whose combination is not easy; so their combination in West is unique, being based on deep, pervasive notions of equality arising in classical Athens. The idea of this equality being that *every* citizen has the capacity to carry out *every* political position in the *polis*. This I like to call “deep equality”.

Today’s democracy is not like that, its principles and roots are different. Its roots are based in the struggle between lords and commons.

What of the market? Is it just a neutral mechanism for settling conflicts in society? No – it is a machine for producing inequality, which is a logic totally opposite to democracy. Combining it with democracy is difficult. When living in democracy, we need to regulate the market so that it does not transform everything into commodities, eg the public services that maintain society.

Apart from market capitalism, another problem we have is populism. It is seen as opposing democracy. But the truth is different: populism is one result of democracy, it is a democratic phenomenon; and this makes it very dangerous.

Populism is a very *intimate* enemy of democracy, as Tzvetan Todorov would say. Populism uses democratic procedures and bases its activities on democratic principles, such as elections.

So what is wrong here? Our liberal democracy became mostly an electoral democracy – not only because it is based *on* elections, but because it has become limited *to* elections. But elections are not necessarily and always democratic. Elections can produce anti-democratic results; Hitler won elections.

The problem is that elections are based on the idea of the rule of the majority. This is where populists thrive: the rule of *the people* becomes the rule of the *majority* – as seen in the Brexit referendum. People are saying “the people have decided”, whereas only 1/3 of the people have decided, a thin majority of those who voted.

Liberal democracy would be able to survive the challenges only if it makes the effort to renovate itself – to renovate electoral democracy. How? Reintroduce election by lot, as in ancient Athens? Or by encouraging constant citizen participation?

Unless we revive participation, all we get is early representative government, not modern democracy.

Lyubomir Stefanov (*New Bulgarian University*): Recent critiques of liberal democracy are possible because of liberalism itself. Conservatism is not an offspring of liberalism, but its right wing, unlike the radical Left, which is a radical alternative.

So I am struck with hearing that Conservatism is an *alternative*, particularly – that only Christians can be conservative.

Liberalism is successful because it is universal. It does not divide people along religious lines. Tolerance is seen as liberal weakness and it is being seen as a lack of capacity to maintain security.

What is wrong with liberalism is that it forgot what its strength is. It forgot to teach its citizens what is the value of liberalism and of politics – the common good. Liberals forgot that politics is not a business, nor a profession – that the Minister of Health does not need to be a medical doctor, but needs to know how to implement values through policies.

As to the difference between liberal democracy and the authoritarianism that is being increasingly offered as an alternative – that's simple. Under liberal democracy, thanks to John Locke, in the final analysis we have the right to rebellion. We have no such right under authoritarian regimes.

Discussion

***To Smilov:**

Can people throwing a spanner in the works this time really derail everything? (Smilov - Yes).

Have conservatives never been marginalized? Would you agree that the political centre has been moving to the left for a century? And what was seen as moderately conservative is now seen as unacceptable? So: while conservatives are not excluded from the debate, has not the consensus been shifting away from them, limiting the things they can legitimately say?

***To Todorov:** Why don't we think about populism as a potential instrument of reinventing democracy?

On "deep equality": the idea that liberalism sees everyone as completely equal – that was invented by Christianity, in this liberals follow the Christian tradition.

It is not the market that is problem, but the idea that democracy is related to competition, the market being a part of this and yes, it is a problem. So how do we deal with competition so that it does not undermine democracy? What if democracy and capitalism are in a state of divorce, as Zizek says – with which of these two do we stay?

Does market artificially produce inequality, or is it making evident an inequality that already exists?

Re. participation: totalitarian regimes believed in totally involving all citizens in participation in politics. Is mass politicization not a potential danger, leading to potential social conflict?

Daniel Smilov:

On derailing liberal democracy. This is a particular danger in newly democratic countries, such as ours. Here we have transplanted institutions, but we have omitted large parts of the culture

that goes with them. So we end up with shallow institutions, easy to hi-jack by enemies of democracy.

On consensus. Yes, it has shifted over the last 100 years and it is a good thing. Europe and the US have changed, but there is no marginalization of conservatives, because it has happened in a pluralist democracy; it is the people who have changed their mind; and these discussions will continue. This competition is not a marginalization. I do not complain being marginalized when the parties I support do not get in. But certain views need to be marginalized – extremists and radicals. This is where militant democracy comes in – a concept emerging in Germany just before the war – the banning of extremist political parties. Even the US has this mechanism – the concept of clear and present danger, used in the 1950s against communists. Certain views, calling for violence, must be marginalized – we can debate proportion and standards, not the principle.

On why is culture so important? I do not have a good explanation. One explanation for the rising importance of culture is the lack of alternatives in economics, so political competition shifted to culture and / or corruption-anticorruption; little else has been left to argue about.

Antonii Todorov:

Re. populism reinventing democracy. It is a symptom for the need to reinvent democracy – a symptom of a situation where liberal democracy is a spectacle and the citizens play the role of audience, not participating in the process and the decisions. The solutions proposed by populism are not solutions to the problems of democracy.

Re. market and competition. The market is based on competition – the best remains and the worst disappears. Is this approach possible to implement in society? The political order is *exactly the opposite* of this kind of competition in a “state of nature”. Limiting competition so that people can live together – that is one of the tasks of politics. So we do not accept political projects based on market competition, but – on limiting the logic of competition in society.

Is the market natural and regulation artificial? The human being as such is artificial, we do not behave as natural beings. So: is democracy based on competition? Democracy is pluralism – but why competition? Greek democracy by lot was exactly a non-competitive democracy. Elections for representatives introduced the element of competitiveness.

We must renovate democracy by transforming competition into pluralism by way of participation.

Re participation: Of course participation does not mean totalitarian mobilization – the state pressurizing people to take part in state activities.

Re. natural inequality. Of course there are such inequalities. But the fact remains that human beings organize their lives in a society, in which they are trying to reduce the social effects of such natural inequalities.

Fourth panel: *Beaten on home ground? The liberal order and Brexit.*

Robert Whitford (*journalist, key speaker*): While Brexit was surprising, it was fed by long-standing tendencies:

1.General British Euro-skepticism. Even when inside, the British were not terribly enthusiastic, while a sizeable minority has been always vocally against membership.

2.All this has been fed by a press that never tires to attack “Brussels”.

3.Politicians, especially Tory, were always able to score political points by being nasty to Brussels in order to report back “victories for the national interest”; this does not make for a very constructive relation with the EU. This started with Mrs Thatcher, a master of this adversarial approach. We Brits have always been an awkward lot.

4.Euro-skepticism or opposition to the EU has been important in the Tory party, especially among activists and also MPs. This goes back a long time. It was a serious problem for John Major as far back as the early 1990s and he ended up with civil war in his party over EU membership.

5.Pacifying this Tory minority, plus fears that the UKIP was stealing Tory votes prompted Cameron to promise a referendum.

6.The Labour Party had a pro-Remain stance, but it too has always had reservations about the EU. While its centrists were pro-EU, the Left was skeptical, seeing the EU as a capitalist conspiracy. The Left were in the driving seat during the referendum and ran a weak campaign.

There have also been contingent factors:

- 1.Cameron did not *have* to call a referendum; he could have avoided doing so and saved us this trouble
2. The result was close, it could have gone the other way.
- 3.Allowing ex-pats to vote might have tipped the balance
- 4.The campaign was badly organized, there was no really good debate on either side, but the Remainers were not good at stressing specific EU benefits, and they missed out on targeting the young vote.

But: how much has Brexit *in fact* changed the British political scene? It was a bit of an earthquake, but it has destroyed remarkably few political structures. Here is British continuity again.

In party terms, not a lot of difference has been made, apart from UKIP heading for electoral disaster.

The Tories have a fine instinct for power, except when the EU is concerned. Since the referendum they have positioned themselves as the party of Brexit, although May campaigned for Remain, not very well. She may bite the dust.

Liberal-Democrats had a good elections in 2010, then went into a disastrous coalition with the Tories and had a bad election 2015. They are trying a firm anti-Brexit stance, but seem to be not successful in terms of votes.

Brexit is of its time. Does it herald new populist events? Lots of people have indeed been fairly pissed off for years with the status quo. There has been much miscommunication between marginalized people and a self-satisfied elite. People have had it with austerity, with Cameron's exclusive, non-meritocratic Old Etonian government, with immigration, with metropolitan elites. Much of this is still to play out.

Vessela Cherneva (*European Council for Foreign Policy*): I see at least four assumptions driving the UK position:

- 1.That global growth will continue.

2.That the international liberal order would remain secure

3.That, once liberated from the EU, the UK will find many eager partners for new deals.

4.That there would be no security implications – that the US and NATO would continue to safeguard the UK.

Big assumptions are these. There are reasons to worry.

On the EU side, we hear Donald Tusk: “Hard Brexit or no Brexit” – to discourage others. This, combined with UK intransigence, may lead to non-negotiated Brexit.

Also: the EU is of more critical importance to UK security than is NATO. Over the last eight years, the EU has moved to secure peace around Europe, it pacified the Balkans, made the Iran deal, responded to Russia after Crimea. The British are miscalculating here.

2016 was a horrible year for Europe, but it was the culmination of something coming after the financial crisis: the shift from the West to the rest, the appearance of sovereigntism, the crumbling of the liberal order “1.0” – i.e. the post-war2 order, in which Central and Eastern Europe did not participate. After 1989, the rise of the West created order “2.0” a Western-driven upgrade that produced, for example, the international court, driven by Kosovo crisis.

Today, both of these international liberal orders are at risk. We see the burgeoning of ethno-religious proxy wars, the weaponization of globalization – the use of migration and trade against the liberal order.

There are three strategies available to cope with this; the choice between them is ours:

1.The Germany strategy – trying to keep 2.0 inside the EU, while keeping to 1.0 globally

2. The Turkey strategy – profit maximization: deal with whoever is around, which places NATO in weak position as Turkey bends the rules of membership and behavior.

3.The UK strategy: Theresa May is ready to strike a deal with Trump on principles not quite of the liberal order kind, which puts a strain on NATO as a family of values. This is the most dangerous strategy.

Metodi Metodiev (*New Bulgarian University*): I am struck by the title of this panel: “Losing on home ground?” England invented football, but it always loses international matches.

Liberal democracy as a system, founded in the British tradition, may lose its position in Britain, but the rest of us are not bound to also give it up.

It seems to me that the generation gap that provoked Brexit is important. I see the older generation choosing to go backwards in time – to get back to a time before they even remember. This is important. Generational choices are crucial, structurally speaking – eg in Bulgaria the older generations make the electoral choices that shape the outcome of elections.

Geography we also see in this, as in: regions and masses against the metropolitan elite. This turmoil goes beyond British politics.

Democracy has become an elitarian instrument; people who believe in democracy are seen as an elite. This makes it difficult to convince other people of the benefits of democracy. So, here is a Brexit lesson: we should not look down on people who do not believe in democracy and call them fascists, but stand our ground.

Discussion:

* Today we seem to have agreed that the liberal order, internal and international, is more resilient than we thought. But is not society truly dividing into an elite that can use all the benefits of globalism and technology and truly become superhuman – live longer; and the rest? Can any version of the liberal order survive this? Or have we just seen, in 2016, a glitch in the system and we go on as usual? Or have we seen the end of the durability of the system?

*What, in the UK, happened to its unique form of *politeia* – Aristotle’s best possible “mixed government”, that famous mixture of aristocracy, democracy and oligarchy?

Vessela Cherneva: Over past years we have learned the impossibility to predict. What we know is that the international order has changed several times in a very short time: Westphalia went on for a couple of centuries; then came a series of shocks; today we see radical seizure coming at an

even faster pace. So we can say one thing: the stability of the order of pre-1989, its predictability and clarity is something older people crave as against the current flux, but such a clarity and orderliness is no longer possible. So it is not about shock absorbance, or in the capability to return to the status quo ante, but rather about whether values, principles and the institutions arising out of them can today be upheld.

Metodi Metodiev:

The current situation is the best moment in terms of the history of the international order. Compare it to the beginning of the 20th century – we are in an obviously very different situation.

What we are leaving now is an Enlightenment paradigm of things rising and falling. We are not in a situation of rise and fall of democracy.

Robert Whitford: What happened in the UK over the last 30 years is a gradual marginalization of quite a lot of the population – cultural marginalization, marginalization in representation and in the economic sense. This creates instability and undermines the “mixed government”.

There is a lot of anger and discontent among the marginalized that has been defused by this magical concept of Brexit. As it becomes clear that the elite cannot deliver, that’s when things may become unstuck.

The elite have a problem they can’t really solve. Communicating with the disenfranchised, listening respectfully, not dismissing them as less rational – in the longer term, there will be some attempt to do this. But it will have to overcome a lot of hostility that has been accumulated on both sides.

One encouraging thing: the UKIP is doing badly, whereas we see a good surge in support for Labour, despite a lot of the negative press on Corbyn and despite a very left-wing Labour manifesto. All this does not seem to be putting young people off. This bodes well for the capacity of part of the elite to communicate with some of the marginalized.

But the generation gap remains to be dealt with. If they had left the referendum for a few years, it would have taken care of itself.

Concluding remarks:

Metodi Metodiev:

According to movie maker Milos Forman, the most difficult thing about making films is telling the truth while being boring. As people upholding the liberal order, we should be able to tell the truth without being boring.

Our guests today from the far Right were not boring, while obviously being enemies of the liberal order.

There is a lesson for us in this.

WHAT IS/WAS LIBERAL ORDER?

Hristo Todorov (NBU)

When we talk about “liberal order”, we mean at least two different things: a) liberal democracy as a system of government, in which individual rights and liberties are protected and the exercise of political power is limited by the rule of law; b) a set of norms, rules and institutions known as the liberal international order, established after the end of World War II.

When nowadays we are worried about the crisis or even the collapse of the “liberal order”, we should keep in mind the difference between the two meanings of the expression. So this intervention will be divided into two parts – the first will be about the main principles and values of liberal democracy, whilst the second one will relate to the liberal international order. Here I won’t be able to offer extensive analysis, so I will confine myself to recalling some basic and well known things.

Liberal democracy

Liberal democracy is a system of government, which may take different constitutional forms: a) constitutional monarchy (UK); b) republic with parliamentary system (Germany); c) republic with presidential system (United States); d) republic with semi-presidential system (France).

The main purpose of the Liberal democracy is the protection of individual rights and liberties (right of life, right of property, freedom of expression, freedom of religion, right of fair trial etc.).

Power in Liberal democracy is established through an initial social contract. The liberal democratic state is not a divine institution, it is, rather, an artificial human construct. The content of the social contract is embodied in a Constitution.

In Liberal democracy, the exercise of political power is limited by the rule of law.

The source of the political power in Liberal democracy is the will of the people, so we talk about “popular sovereignty”. Liberal democracy is a system of self-governance; usually it takes the form of representative democracy.

In order to secure the right of expression of the people's will, liberal democratic countries have established universal suffrage, granting all adults the right to vote regardless of race, gender, education property ownership.

The right to vote presupposes the possibility of fair and free competition between different political parties. Liberal democracy is a system of political pluralism.

In order to prevent the concentration of power in the state, to secure political pluralism and to guarantee the rule of law, Liberal democracy establishes a system of separation of powers into different branches of government (legislature, executive, judiciary). This is a system of mutual control of the different branches, a system of checks and balances.

Liberal democracy is usually also a representative democracy, in which decisions are made by majority vote. At the same time, the rights and liberties of minorities are protected.

Liberal democracy is an inclusive system of government, which aims to integrate all the citizens by giving them the opportunity to express their beliefs and their will. Bearing in mind the inclusive character of Liberal democracy, it is difficult to answer questions such as, who are the enemies of Liberal democracy?

Liberal international order

The Liberal international order is a set of norms, rules and institutions of international relations, established after the end of World War II.

The Liberal international order endeavours to base international relations on binding rules, not simply on power.

The founding document of the Liberal international order is the Atlantic Charter – a joint declaration by the President of the USA, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill. The Charter was signed in August 1941.

The principles set out in the Charter are: a) peace and security (including the right to self-defence), b) self-governance (open societies, rule of law), c) economic prosperity (economic advancement, improved labour standards, social welfare), d) free trade and preservation of global commerce.

The Atlantic Charter proclaimed four freedoms: a) freedom of speech, b) freedom of worship, c) freedom from want, d) freedom from fear.

The principles and the freedoms of the Atlantic Charter were incorporated in the United Nations Charter, signed by the 50 original member states in June 1945.

The post-war international order is a fusion of two projects: a) the modern state system, dating back to the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, based on the concept of the sovereignty of states, b) the “liberal vision” of Western democracies, including open markets, international institutions, collective problem-solving, shared sovereignty, rule of law. There has been, from the beginning, a tension between the Westphalian project and the “liberal vision”.

Main institutions of the Liberal international order are: a) UN, b) the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT), c) the so-called “Bretton Woods institutions” – the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), d) the World Trade Organization (1994), e) the International Criminal Court.

Nowadays there is a significant difference in the way the Liberal international order is perceived in the Western and in the Non-Western world. Whereas in the Western world the Liberal international order is perceived as an universal order, which guarantees the basis of mutual gain (the US is a provider of public goods such as security, free trade, freedom of navigation and financial stability), in China, Brazil, India, Russia and other countries it is perceived simply as incorporation of the American value system. On the basis of this perception these countries claim to reform the international order and to establish a new “multi-polar world order”.

Brutality of Language and the Liberal Order

Evgenii Dainov

The spirit of liberal democracy has been under relentless onslaught for many a year, from opponents both within and without. There would have been no problem with this – after all, critical reflection and self-reflection is at the very basis of Modernity – had the onslaught presented alternatives, to liberal democracy, that are compatible with that human dignity on which all rights and freedoms are based.

The alternatives presented, however, all boil down to one universally propagated model: the rule of a strong man. Whether it be the “illiberal democracy” of Messrs Orban (in Hungary) and Erdogan (in Turkey), or the „managed democracy” championed by Mr Putin in Russia; whether it be a nostalgic harkening after the strong men of the past, such as Stalin, Pinochet, Franco, Antonescu, Horthy – the message of modern ultra-critics of liberal democracy, from both Left and Right, is the same: the replacement of “the rule of the weak” (liberal democracy) with the “rule of the strong (men¹)”.

The desire to replace the rule of the weak with the rule of the strong (men) is as cataclysmic as it has been unexpected. It is to our peril that we have for too long taken equality as a given – as a fixed and immovable feature of the political landscape.

The truth is that what Aristotle called “political power” (power between equals) has been seen as the norm for no longer than the last 7-8 generations. Prior to that, most people would have been living under what Aristotle named “despotic power” – power between un-equals, such as the master-slave or husband-family (as it was then) relationship.

Despotic power has never been far away, as seen in the dictatorships of the 20th century and in the ongoing revival of slavery. More generally, today it is returning as that alternative to liberal democracy, which its extreme Left- and Right-wing critics are propagating. As Ronald Reagan warned, long ago, in his 1964 speech “A Time for Choosing”:

¹ Which makes it utterly amazing that there are women who participate in the anti-liberal offensive. Do they not realize that, if victory is secured, the men around them will relegate them to the kitchen (as strong men are prone to doing)?

You and I are told increasingly we have to choose between a left or right. Well I'd like to suggest there is no such thing as a left or right. There's only an up or down: [up] man's old -- old-aged dream, the ultimate in individual freedom consistent with law and order, or down to the ant heap of totalitarianism

The “ant heap” need not take the specific form of totalitarianism; it could come, as we see today, in the shape of racism, anti-immigrationism, xenophobia, rampant nationalism, anti-semitism, homophobia, machismo, misogyny and – rampant anti-liberalism. All of these are all-out attacks on the basis of modern civilization: *equality*, and the rights and liberties that come with it.

The political outcome of this equality – the constitutional settlement attacked by the enemies of liberal democracy – has been best described by, again, Reagan (from the same speech):

And this idea that government is beholden to the people, that it has no other source of power except the sovereign people, is still the newest and the most unique idea in all the long history of man's relation to man.

In the second decade of the 21st century, this “newest idea” is under attack from the oldest – “despotic power”. This time, we can trace the attack – and understand the structure of the ideology it carries – through *language*. The language used by liberalism’s enemies tells us everything we need to know about them, about the reasons behind their burning anger with liberalism; and about the alternative they are, in effect, proposing.

The use of language as a weapon to degrade and disintegrate liberal democracy comes together with two other instruments of destruction: “post-truth” and fake news. It is easy to see, why post-truth and fake news are destructive to liberal democracy, where decisions are taken after discussion, debate and agreement (between equals). Post-truth and fake news, with their disregard for facts and truth, make such discussions simply impossible (how can you debate and agree on facts, if facts do not exist?) and thereby take away the deliberative basis of liberal democracy.

And, once facts disappear, taking with them reasoned debate and rule of law, brute force becomes the only way to arrive at binding decisions. We suddenly find ourselves amid Thomas Hobbes’ “state of nature”, in which life is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short”.

The role of what we may call “brutal language” – deliberately offensive and intentionally vulgar – is less obvious, but just as lethal to dignity, freedom and, ultimately, societal peace.

“Despotic” power comes in a package with brutality of language. In a despotic situation, everyone who wants to be someone must find ways to constitute themselves as masters over someone else. The easiest way to do it is to be publically offensive to others and not suffer any consequences (because those others bow to your brutality).

Conversely, in the situation of “political power” – power among equals – politeness of address is the rule. Why? Because equality generates it. If you are equal to me, you have an equal to mine right to not have your dignity offended by me.

This situation is encoded in the origins of the words we use to describe such a situation. The word, for example, that Aristotle used for “citizen” (i.e. a participant in “political power”) – *politês* – eventually gave birth to the French *politesse* and the English *politeness*. Also, at the basis of the word “civilization” we clearly hear the root “civil”; among other things (eg. “government by civilians”) *civil* also means well-behaved, polite.

An attack on politeness is, therefore, an attack on the very basis of citizenship and the civilization that rests on it – the one that we live in and that we have come to call “liberal democracy”. Brutal language, addressed to other people, is the tip of the spear in this attack. Before he became dictator, Russia’s President Putin used brutal language against his enemies. “I will squash them in the shit-house”, he promised in 1999. He then went on to do just this.

Not many thinkers have picked up on the direct link between brutality of language and brutality of political action. One who did was, oddly enough, Leon Trotsky. Having spent the Russian civil war as commander-in-chief of the Red Army (not known for its gentlemanly conduct of affairs), by the beginning of the 1920s Trotsky became worried by the revival, as he saw it, of rudeness and offensive language. For him, offensive language carried with it the danger of a revival of despotic power – something, which indeed happened later under Stalin.

Writing in April 1923, Trotsky wrote:

With us, civility, as a general rule, does not exist. But of rudeness, inherited from the past, we have as much as you please... coarseness of speech and conduct (is) a mark of the old slavery...

He must have come against complete lack of understanding, because a month later, in May 1923, he wrote on the subject again, in an article quaintly named “The Struggle for Cultured Speech”:

Abusive language and swearing are a legacy of slavery, humiliation, and disrespect for human dignity—one’s own and that of other people... (such language signifies) not only accepting slavery as a fact, but also submitting to the humiliation of it.

“Abusive language and swearing” being, today, at the forefront of the assault on liberal democracy, its thrust is clear – to deconstruct respect for human dignity, in order to get to the end point: “slavery and humiliation”.

Recent research² has shown that, in Bulgaria, abusive language in various media, specifically aimed at “liberals”, has increased many-fold since 2013. The targets of this language reveal its political intentions:

- *a 30-fold increase of attacks on democracy

- *a 16-fold increase of anti-European propaganda

- *a 34-fold increase in propaganda against NATO and the USA

- *a 23-fold increase in attacks on civic leaders, the political elite, experts, NGOs and civic movements.

These are, according to the research, the main messages of the onslaught:

- *“The USA and NATO want global hegemony and this is why they are waging war on Europe.”

- *“The EU is Europe’s enemy; Europe is disintegrating, because it is united under a liberal elite.”

- *“Russia is the victim of Western aggression; nevertheless, Russia is rising from its knees and is ready to employ its armed might for world peace.”

- *“All media, politicians, activists who, in Bulgaria, demand the effective separation of powers and the rule of law, are agents of hostile foreign interests.”

² Антилиберални дискурси и пропагандни съобщения в българските медии: разпространение и социално възприятие: http://hssfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/SUMMARY_Bulgaria-and-Russian-propaganda_BG.pdf

More generally: anyone, who is in some way different from the “national ideal” (in Bulgaria’s case – white, Orthodox follower of strong men, who see Russia and its regime as an example and the West – as degenerate) – any such person is declared a traitor, or a degenerate, or both.

Bad language is a direct attack on liberal democracy and, what’s more, those who employ this kind of language know exactly what they are doing.

Let us see how all of this works in the Bulgarian context. I have taken my examples from the more prominent of the anti-liberal media in Bulgaria, as well from as prominent opinion-formers on the extreme Left and the extreme Right.

Here is a major publisher, let’s call him H.H., writing in his publications as well as in the Facebook:

The Frenchies are heavily perverted and have sick brains. They call their perversion “liberalism”...

That stain on the carpet, Emil Jassim,³ has been beaten up in the street. He wails in his profile of heavy traumas. Not heavy enough, if he can cry in the Facebook. Jassim is that pederast...

This year’s pederast stupidity of St Valentine’s Day is coming to a close...

...(we must introduce) testing for homosexuality and drug dependence for all members of parliament. And then – throw them out. There is no other way. These benders are on all levels in power, they take money from the Sorosoid foundations, from Western Embassies...

...(regarding the Gay Pride parade) I refuse, while taking my child to play tennis in the park, to stumble across some zombified semi-creatures of unclear status, with feathers stuck up their arses...

In a comment under one of H.H.’s posts, we read:

...where would we be without democracy, they told us? We did not understand that this is a snake – still a small snake, but a snake... It grew in front of our eyes, poisoned everything and suffocated what was left...

In more lyrical mode, H.H. himself condemns democracy thus:

³ Noted Bulgarian teacher and progressive intellectual

Democracy took away our hearts, or at least – substituted them with lumps of ice. Democracy is Andersen's Snow Queen...

The message is clear. Liberal democracy is a perversion of sick Westerners, who spread their sickness via their embassies, festivals and foundations, so as to feed the snake of democracy, which poisons and suffocates the Bulgarian nation that stood so tall before democracy was imposed on it.

The far Left shares this position, uncharacteristically concerned about defending “the state”. According to the Bulgarian far-Left magazine “a-specto”, Western agencies – even public ones, such as USAID – have one aim:

...to support non-government organizations of a wide variety, which pursue anti-state activities, such as maintaining human rights, the rights of gay minorities, multiculturalism and all kinds of tolerance against “hate speech”...

The extreme Left is very revealing and, in a sense, honest. Human rights are cast as anti-state activities (paid for by foreign agents), much in the spirit of the young Mussolini. Here we see how the attack against “liberalism” necessarily turns into an onslaught on democracy as such.

The far Left has gone even further, declaring democracy to be just another dictatorship. Here is a snippet from the far-Left magazine “a-specto”:

Real dissidents have for a long time escaped eastward, to Russia, as did Snowden, or have dug themselves in at embassies, as has Assange, or are being killed in front of their homes, as Oles Buzina in Kiev. Democracy is incompatible with dissidence.

Bringing all the above examples together, we see violent homophobia (everyone seems to be a “pederast” or a “bender”), hatred of people of different ethnicity (Jassim) and the degradation of others to the status of “under-men” (as last seen in Hitler's speeches) – in H.H.'s case, “semi-creatures with feathers stuck up their arses”. Anti-Semitism can't be far behind, we think; and, indeed, it is not.

The main enemy of all anti-liberal forces, in Europe and beyond, is George Soros, a Hungarian Jew, whose Open Society foundations helped, back in the 1990s, for the collapse of communism not to be followed by the rise of fascism. As we have seen, our respondent, major publisher

H.H., hits out at “Sorosoid foundations”. But Soros is not the only culprit who also happens to be a notable Jewish person. Here is H.H. again:

The “spontaneous” protests in America and Europe against Donald Trump are nothing but a counter-revolution, inspired by the CIA and financed with the billions of Soros, Rothschild and Rockefeller.

Once Trump is cast as the strong man to replace those “pederasts” who run liberal democracy, all his enemies are, themselves, pederasts and semi-creatures:

I will not be watching the “dazzling show of the Oscars” (writes H. H.). The ceremony will turn into a tolerast⁴ political agitation against Trump. Former “greats”, waning stars, drug addicts, gays, lesbians and paid servants of the Democratic Party will be falling over each other to swear at the choice of the American people.

Liberal tolerance is turned on its head and re-invented as an attack, by a perverted minority, on the champion of the people. This is how H. H. describes protesting environmental activists in Bulgaria itself:

...beatniks, drug addicts and grant-eaters⁵...

This seems almost delicate, when compared to the way that liberal media and politicians are labeled by one Jambazki, a Member of the European Parliament from Bulgaria’s nationalist Ataka party:

Disgusting, evil-smelling, corrupt, foreign-bending⁶, grant-motivated pseudo-intellectual impotents and national nihilists... baring their arses for uncle Soros... piss-pants... sexless, impotent, constipated, cow-eyed, trans-gender slugs...

There seems to be a general fascination, in anti-liberal circles, with “arses”; but let’s pass on this. The above tirade, as many of H.H.’s, ends with a call for direct violence against all thus

⁴ “Tolerast” – a term of abuse, originating in Russia, aimed against liberals who keep talking about tolerance.

⁵ “Grant-eater” (грантаджия) – used by anti-liberals to describe progressives who, the former think, take “grants” from Western (Sorosoid) foundations.

⁶ Foreign-bending (чуждопоклонна) – a term of abuse, invented by the Communist regime in the 1960s, to signify someone who thinks that some foreign way of life (usually – of the West) is better than ours.

described. H.H. calls for “clan-based violence”, while Jambazki promises imminent street justice with the help of sticks.

This kind of language has now entered into the Bulgarian parliament. Standing at the rostrum, a Deputy-Chair of the National Assembly recently refused to answer a question, posed by a Socialist Member, with the following argument:

I refuse to answer any questions posed to me by an obvious homosexual.

In a flurry of interviews, that same person clarified his position by saying that all gays are not independent in their decisions and that, therefore, all gay MP’s must be “outed”, adding, somewhat confusingly:

I will never become homosexual in order to be liked.

The fundamental message of those who attack liberal democracy with vulgar language, in Bulgaria, Hungary, France, America, Russia, Turkey, Netherlands and elsewhere – that message is as clear as it is primitive: the “tribe” (nation, state, religion) must fight off everyone who, hiding behind tolerance and democracy, intends to corrupt it with ideas of equality, diversity, human rights and good manners. Being under attack, the tribe must re-state its homogeneity and cleanse itself of everyone who is different; because everyone who is different is a degenerate in the pay of foreign enemies.

You cannot, Aristotle warned, construct a state with people who are “too similar” to each other. States require diversity, because a homogenous state will inevitably be headed by a strong man. Despotic power will, of necessity, prevail over political power.

This – despotic power – is the aim of the enemies of liberal democracy from Left and Right. This is why they all come together in the worship of strong men, irrespective of whether these strong men see themselves as on the Left or on the Right. The best way to undermine “political power” is to attack its basis – equality. And the best way to do this is to replace politeness and civility (only possible between equals) with vulgarity and rudeness – the hallmarks of despotic power and of slavery.

There is no contest. The survival of civilization depends on the survival of equality, which in turn depends on the continuing survival of liberal democracy as its political embodiment. The

alternative we are being presented with is: living in warring tribes, headed by strong men, eradicating everyone who looks, speaks and thinks differently.

What we, who believe in civility and good manners, are striving to defend has been best described by Winston Churchill in a famous aside:

There are few words which are used more loosely than the word "Civilization." What does it mean? It means a society based upon the opinion of civilians. It means that violence, the rule of warriors and despotic chiefs, the conditions of camps and warfare, of riot and tyranny, give place to parliaments where laws are made, and independent courts of justice in which over long periods those laws are maintained. That is Civilization—and in its soil grow continually freedom, comfort, and culture. When Civilization reigns, in any country, a wider and less harassed life is afforded to the masses of the people.

Instead of comfort and a wider and less harassed life, the anti-liberals are evidently offering discomfort and a narrow and harassed life.

This needs to be resisted. It started with bad language; and there it must be confronted.

The fake news of the demise of the liberal order

Ruzha Smilova

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Until recently, liberal democracy was seen as the only game in town. Yet in the wake of recent developments in Europe (the Brexit vote in UK) and in the US (the election of Trump as President, something considered unthinkable until the day it was happening) it has become almost a cliché to claim that the liberal order is dying.

In this short text, I first ask whether the liberal order is really dying, as its critics claim today. The liberal order I am discussing here is understood as the dominant, until recently universally preferred political regime, i.e. as liberal democracy. While arguing that the news for its death is grossly overstated, I admit that there is decline in popular support for this type of political regime. This leads me to the second question addressed in this text, which is, what/who is to blame for its decline?

With regard to the first question, I argue that the liberal order is of no immediate danger of extinction. The widely circulated news of liberal order's demise is a gross overstatement – it is fake news. Rather, I see the real danger in its gradual subversion. It is the danger of malignant mimicry of liberal democracy. And this mimicry is due, I would argue, to re-interpretations of the core values and principles of liberal democracy – those of “moral individualism”.

In Central and Eastern Europe, liberal democracy is certainly in crisis, yet neither the ruling elites nor the electorates are ready to altogether abandon it. It is telling that popular support in the region for the European Union, largely believed to come packaged with liberal democratic values and principles, still remains high– even if recently declining. And it is not so much external pressure (like the threats on the part of the European Commission of invoking Article 7 of the Lisbon Treaty for systematic breaches of its values and principles), but the internal unpopularity of questioning adherence to the EU and its core principles, that partly accounts for this reluctance to openly abandon them.

To demonstrate the risks of openly questioning those principles, one recent case may suffice. “Democracy has taken a lot away from us”, declared Kornelia Ninova, leader of the

Bulgarian Socialist (ex-Communist) Party in the run up to the parliamentary elections of March 2017. This *lapse* almost certainly cost the socialists the almost-certain electoral victory in these snap elections. The critics of the liberal democratic regime now know that they have to pay at least lip service to the principles of democracy, if not to “liberalism” per se.

A conceptual clarification is here in order. There is a growing confusion in Bulgaria, but not only here, about what precisely is the “liberal order” – or liberal democracy. Does it simply denote the dominance of liberal democracy as a preferred political regime comprising various components – such as popular rule, limited by respect for individual rights, limited government and rule of law, and competitive market? Or does it also imply the dominance of liberalism as a specific ideology, as a doctrine?

It has recently become a commonplace, almost a mainstream attack on liberalism to criticize its “exaggerated” concern with liberal individual and minority rights. Yet this critique does not necessarily mean an attack on the liberal democratic regime as such, as few are ready to openly follow in the steps of Hungary’s PM Victor Orban and his endorsement of what he calls *illiberal* democracy. Thus the critics rarely dare go all the way to challenging the core principles of liberal democracy, such as popular rule with limited government and rule of law, which are still largely seen as serving the interests and indeed - the rights of every individual citizen.

All this indicates that there is still a strong post-transition consensus on the direction taken – that we are all liberal democracies now and will likely remain such, even if liberalism is not considered the dominant political ideology.

1. Misreadings of the core principles of liberal democracy

What we witness today is a process of re-interpreting the fundamental principles of liberal democracy – a reinterpretation that risk subverting its rationale and its underlying values.

I would argue that this process of re-interpretation has started much earlier. It is not just a post-transition phenomenon. And this reinterpretation, I would argue, is partly responsible for the crisis of liberal democracy we are witnessing now.

The reinterpretation is (at least) a two-step process, which has been going on for some time. Already during the transition, at the first step, there were considerable misreadings of the principles. These misreadings may be due to at least two features of the democratization process

in Bulgaria. The first is that, because there were no other available alternative regimes to adopt (or these alternatives were not seen as attractive), liberal democracy with its institutions and practices was perceived as almost a “forced” choice. To this, secondly, we may add the swift adoption of new institutions without the necessary time for developing the conventions needed to sustain them. Thus the right ethos, which makes the institutions capable of truly realizing the principles they were built to implement, failed to develop in due time.

Whatever the explanation for the causes of these misreadings of the principles, they resulted in either unintentional or maybe sometimes even well-intentioned efforts to fill the empty shell of institutions with context-specific content.

We witness today a second wave of reinterpretations, which is neither neutralizing nor correcting the initial transition-era misunderstandings. These re-interpretations, furthermore, are much less well-intentioned, bringing in even less benign confusion.

It seems that the post-transition national elites, which displaced the much hated transition elites, often intentionally, fully self-consciously reinterpret the fundamental principles. The aim behind the reinterpretation is, not surprisingly, self-interested – clinging to power at all costs. Clinging to power at all costs ultimately requires subverting the principles of liberal democracy – as those principles limit power. So, if one cannot openly abandon them, then one can try to truncate them by reinterpreting them.

The end result of this series of mis-readings and re-interpretations is not even “empty shell” institutions, which was the fear at the beginning of the transition. The danger now is much more urgent – it is a malignant mimicry of liberal order, produced by opportunistic post-transition elites.

These post-transition elites act much like freeriders, capitalizing on the sacrifices of the transition elites, on whose backs they climbed to power.

Yet, what are, in substantive terms, those reinterpretations of the fundamental principle of liberal democracy, which may partly explain its current crisis?

Take the fundamental principle of liberal democracy - *equal rights and freedoms* for all members of the democratic community. This is the ideal of liberal equality, which requires equal respect for the freedom and autonomy of each citizen. It is well captured by the slogan

“Everyone counts and counts equally.” Under this principle, the individual is at the centre of the moral universe. Ronald Dworkin called this normative ideal “moral individualism”

This normative ideal behind liberal democracy was, at the first step of misunderstanding, interpreted as “radical individualism”. The vision of a democratic community we were presented with during the transition was that of self-sufficient individuals, owing their success only to themselves, owing nothing to anybody else. This distorted vision of democratic community is far removed from the genuine normative ideal of “moral individualism”, which demands a moral community of equals to cherish and advance it. Its mis-interpretation as radical individualism, on the contrary, destroys any community.

Understandably, there has been a justified popular dissatisfaction with this radical reinterpretation of moral individualism. Yet the form this dissatisfaction took was not, as one would expect, of going back to the original aspirations behind “moral individualism” - i.e. to the aspiration for equal rights and fair equality of opportunity for all.

Rather, there was a further transformation, re-interpretation of this ideal – and this is the second step in its reinterpretation already in the post-transition period. Now we are told that equality of rights and freedoms is, at best, a relationship that holds within the majority, within the presumably homogeneous core of the nation, and does not include those we do not like, those we perceive as different, those we perceive as “other”, those with whom we disagree. The vision here is that of a community of un-equals, with a core - the majority – enjoying privileges, which it is ready to defend with majoritarian means against the outsiders, be it dissenting individuals or disliked minorities..

It is in line with this second reinterpretation that one can understand why some (right-wing, avowedly pro-EU) political parties in Bulgaria openly argued for the introduction of a *de facto* literacy test for the exercise of political rights. This was their explicit justification for the introduction of exclusive machine voting in parliamentary elections. The aim was to exclude the Roma, as they are “corrupting our democracy by selling their votes” – an often voiced concern.

To sum up. The normative ideal behind liberal democratic institutions – the moral equality of individual members of the democratic community, which justifies putting breaks on the popular will of majorities – is currently being transformed into an opportunity for those

majorities to retain their higher status and privileges against what they perceive as adverse developments and threats to such privileges.

2. Who is to blame? Meritocratic elites and the ideal of fair equality of opportunity

The mis-interpretation of the principles of liberal democracy I outlined above is only partly responsible for the crisis which this political regime is currently undergoing. The misinterpretation did not fall from the heavens, however, but was given by the governing elites – both transition and post-transition ones.

The current crisis of liberal democracy is often described as the rise of populism, which is defined, among other things, as a revolt of the people (bearers of true sovereignty) against the corrupt elites.

Yet let us be clear about one thing – what we witness today is *not a revolt of the sovereign against the elites, but a revolt, orchestrated by an aspiring new elite, against the old elites it wants to displace*. The success of the newcomers depends on how attractive is their new vision of a relationship between the elite and the people and on whether it is seen by the people as more attractive than the outgoing alternative. Success is all that counts.

The populist revolt epitomizing the current crisis, we are told, is a revolt against a particular type of elite, characteristic of liberal representative democracies. This is the so-called meritocratic elite. Indeed, some authors (Nancy Fraser, Ivan Krastev, Stehen Holmes) describe the current global crisis of liberal democracy as a crisis of meritocratic elites, of meritocracy as the model of liberal democracy under late capitalism.

This diagnosis is not, in my opinion, a fully satisfactory account of what is happening in Central and Eastern Europe. For one, transition elites were rarely *meritocratic*, as indeed they did not emerge as victorious – did not win the right to rule - under fair competition terms.

But, secondly, even in developed, consolidated democracies popular representation through meritocratic elites was never a fully realized aspiration, simply because in no country the underlying premise of meritocracy –the principle of fair equality of opportunity – has been fully met.

But this is not the only trouble with representation by meritocratic elites, we are told by its critics. Even if fair equality of opportunity would be somehow guaranteed, meritocracy would

still be in trouble – simply because the average citizen rarely identifies with a representative of such elites, even if they emerged under fair competition rules.

Fully in accord with this picture of mistrust of the people towards their meritocratic elites, the elites that took over in the post-crisis period are media savvy personalities, with whom the average citizen more readily identifies.

The defining feature of the post-transition national elites (that displaced the elites, responsible for the transitional institution-building) is thus *not merit, but belonging*. They are claiming to have a quasi -“natural” right to represent the people, being uniquely qualified to express the authentic concerns and interests of the respective nations.

The important question to ask is, why is this view of national quasi-tribal elites currently appealing? To answer it one should clarify what has contributed to the discreditation of the meritocratic elites in the first place.

It must be emphasized that meritocracy is both *ex ante* and *ex post* the best way to recruit elites in a representative democracy. It is *ex ante* the best, because it is the most fair way to recruit leaders - based solely on their personal achievements. It is also *ex post* the best, as it tends to produce the best results in terms of government, as it elects the best qualified to rule. Yet these two premises – fair equality of opportunity and success based solely on personal achievement – may account for the current troubles of the meritocratic model.

Both the psychological profile of meritocrats – highly individualistic, arrogant, self-made and self-reliant, opportunistic “mercenaries” with no loyalty to any community, and also the fact that losing in fair competition makes the loser more, not less miserable (he is only to blame for his failings) are responsible for the growing distance between such elites and their communities.

Yet is there a better alternative? The alternative - non-meritocratic, tribal elites, seems even worse.

Tribalistic elites promise closing the competition to outsiders, without guaranteeing that it will be fair or open for the insiders. The nativist anti-immigrant policies, in conjunction with a considerable decrease in the level of redistribution, is the recipe advocated by the tribal leader Donald Trump. The bitter losers from the meritocratic competition may be OK with such a platform, which may partly explain their support for the anti-establishment candidate for US

president. These voters may reason along the following lines – better close the competition for outsiders: if we are not succeeding, then they should also not be allowed to compete and to have the chance to succeed. What such voters gain from this is less clear, but the sentiment is certainly present among wide segments of the population.

In conclusion, I would hypothesize that the meritocratic elites need to learn to be less arrogant and to acknowledge their loyalty towards their communities, along with their duty to keep the opportunities open for all within the community. They may indeed be capable of surviving this crisis, but only if they start interpreting correctly the values and principles behind liberal democracy – if they start practicing the principle of moral individualism rather than mimic it.

The meritocratic elites have lost their credibility today, but this loss may be their chance to realize that they need to change their ways if they are to survive as a governing elite. And so may liberal democracy restore its credibility as the best, compared to the available alternatives, political regime.

What went wrong with liberalism?

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Well, nothing but liberalism itself would be the metaphysical isomorphic answer. Yet this does not prove to be sufficient, nor informative for the purpose of addressing the issue. An answer much closer to the question posed would be: the same that went wrong with democracy. Yes, democracy but not as a political ideology, rather as a political formula.

That is the most common of misunderstandings regarding both liberalism and democracy – they are mistaken with their applied ego, i.e. the liberal order based on the agreements, principles and norms of all-inclusive representative participatory democracy under the rule of law. Only when we differentiate philosophy from practice will it be possible to proceed further in the quest for the supposed demise of the liberalism as a political establishment. Because ideas and ideologies respectively, unlike political systems, are of a different realm – that which addresses the spiritual and looks for the eternal balance between “good” and “bad”.

Given this brief remark, it looks as if the world around us is full of evidence that liberalism has finally reached the point of no return and has crashed under the weight of its own promises and principles. The advocates of its end both from the left and the right appear to be quite happy with the fall of the giant they so ardently accused of having clay feet since their debuts on the political arena some 100 years ago. Unfortunately, the news about the collapse of the liberalism, not mentioning its death, is ... fake news.

The liberal idea, so despised by its opponents, is in fact, if not flourishing, then for sure gaining strength today despite many efforts aimed at its denigration. And this happens in quite surprising places, rather than in the traditional fortresses of liberal political order.

For example, the Republic of Ireland is having its first Prime Minister who admitted publicly, though reluctantly, that he is gay. Mr. Leo Varadkar became the Republic of Ireland's incumbent *taoiseach* after winning the leadership of the Fine Gael party. On top of the fact that a gay will be leading a country, in which until 1993 being a gay was considered illegal, Mr. Varadkar is the son of an Indian migrant. "If my election shows anything, it's that prejudice has

no hold in this Republic,"⁷ he said when the results were announced and after receiving greetings from his party colleagues, including his opponent for the leadership, Housing Minister Simon Coveney.

The liberal idea, that of tolerance, universal human rights and freedom has apparently many weaknesses, as demonstrated by the terrorist attacks in some of the most iconic cities across Europe – London, Manchester, Paris, Nice, Brussels, Madrid, Berlin. Still, the victims of the terror and their families and nations, no matter how blatantly violent and brutal the terror was (it was mainly children who died and were wounded in Manchester during a pop concert) do not seek vengeance, but justice. The governments of France, UK, Germany and Spain responded adequately and, instead of pursuing solely the physical war on terror, multiplied their efforts to neutralize home-grown wannabe terrorist through education, integration and under the rule of law. In contrast, in Turkey or Russia presidents Erdogan and Putin respectively ordered mobilization, installed curfew and sent their military forces to strike back at nominated terrorists targets, surprisingly or not on ISIS-controlled territory in Syria and Kurdish minority controlled areas.

This is not to say that liberalism makes people better individuals. It is, like any other political philosophy, just a set of ideas based on values channeled and structured in laws and norms. For any given society, which has exercised the choice as to the nature and the principles of its political system and social order, liberalism has proven to be the most popular alternative over the past century.

Demanding unconditional respect for human rights, beliefs, gender, age and life, liberalism became integral to the evolution of modern democratic political systems around the world. However, today many people tend to believe that it is the liberal set of ideas that are to be blamed for all the misfortunes that come to their societies. And they bring out what looks like quite compelling arguments. Still, the liberal order remains strong and vivid enough to withstand the attacks of the competitors, predominantly authoritarian in nature.

What, if anything at all, went wrong with liberalism was that it forgot to educate people, as it has done in the past, what life looks like before and without its principles. As Thomas Hobbes (1561) famously put it: *“during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that conditions called war; and such a war, as if of every man, against*

⁷ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-40139428>, (accessed on June 5th, 2017)

every man...To this war of every man against every man, this also in consequent; that nothing can be unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice have there no place. Where there is no common power, there is no law, where no law, no injustice. Force, and fraud, are in war the cardinal virtues...No arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death: and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short."

The state of nature for humans before the rule of law was of fear and misery.

It was not just liberalism that saved humankind from its own appetite for destruction. Unexpected help came from the likes of Russia/USSR, Nazi Germany, Cuba and China over the decades of modernity, for they applied in practice the moral relativism ascribed to Machiavelli, but actually invented and sharpened as a political tool by a group of notorious sociopaths: Lenin, Trotsky, Hitler, Stalin, Castro and Mao. On the back of the lessons learned from the tragic destiny of the people in those countries, liberalism established and shaped itself as centered on the individual and not the class, the mass, the nation or the clan. Unlike those regimes which shared common nature – that of authoritarian and totalitarian tyranny, liberalism manifested itself into politics through many faces – from Christian-democracy and Conservatism to Greens and Social-Democrats.

However, one thing cannot be doubted - Liberalism failed spectacularly when it started to assume that every society would gladly learn from its success and that every society would love to be governed along its principles. By assuming that, liberalism failed its own core principle – that of tolerating diversity and difference. The counter-strike against liberalism these days is structured mainly along the red line that separates “us” – locals, natives, patriots, nationalists, isolationist, chauvinists and protectionists from “them” – global citizens, children of love and peace, tolerant individuals, intellectuals, self-made persons.

The liberal order of post-Second World War Western Europe, US, Canada, New Zealand and Australia failed to understand, especially after the collapse of the Soviet Union, that history did not end, unlike Fukuyama’s prediction. On the contrary, as Robert Kagan (2009) wrote, history returned dramatically, demonstrating that no lessons from the past seemed to have been learned by the proponents of the liberal idea.

The fact that Mao and Stalin are once and again revered as great leaders, after quite a period of unofficial ban on their figures, just makes things clearer; and yet many people seem to

fail in perceiving what is going on. Resistance against liberalism and democracy is considered to be aimed at one and the same target. Europe and the USA, as flag bearers of the liberal model, are quite naturally the main targets of people who simply see them as wrong and unnatural entities in every aspect imaginable. The domination of the West (though more as a metaphor rather than as a precise geographical location) over the rest during the past five hundred years has irritated too many people, who unsurprisingly started befriending each other in the face of a common enemy, though for different reasons. The cheerfully manifested prosperity of the liberal societies angered many others, as they came to certain conclusions about the origin of this well-being – colonization, plunder, slavery, protectionism and war that the West offered in abundance to the rest of the world in the past.

Not surprisingly, therefore, each and every approach from the liberal West is seen as a potential breach of national security for the targeted country, nation or community. The result is religious fundamentalism, tribalism, nationalism, spreading chauvinism and a growing preference for strong-arm rule, as opposed to the corrupting values which the liberal virus brings with it, in the form of tolerance, respect of and for diversity, economic and individual freedom under the rule of law.

Liberalism forgot to teach people of its major achievement – that when living together and communicating with each other under democratic liberal rules, people are less inclined to violence and more to cooperation and peace. Yet, they have the right to revolt against any ruling entity that violates their mutually negotiated rights and freedoms, because liberalism teaches that it is their utmost sovereign natural right to protect themselves from the oppressors. For as famously John Locke, seen as the Father of liberalism, put it in paragraph 155 (Chapter 13, 1689) of his Two Treatises on Government:

“What if the executive power, being possessed of the force of the common-wealth, shall make use of that force to hinder the meeting and acting of the legislative, when the original constitution, or the public exigencies require it? I say, using force upon the people without authority, and contrary to the trust put in him that does so, is a state of war with the people, who have a right to reinstate their legislative in the exercise of their power: for having erected a legislative, with an intent they should exercise the power of making laws, either at certain set times, or when there is need of it, when they are hindered by any force from what is so necessary

*to the society, and wherein the safety and preservation of the people consists, the people have a right to remove it by force. In all states and conditions, the true remedy of force without authority, is to oppose force to it. The use of force without authority, always puts him that uses it into a state of war, as the aggressor, and renders him liable to be treated accordingly”.*⁸

To sum it up, liberalism has long ago declared itself for values which are considered to be of universal human validity. Their preservation and protection occurs under the superiority of a rule-of-law system, which is based on explicit and precise separation of powers and their mutual control through an architecture of checks and balances. The “means-goals” model, established under the liberal political idea, holds firm to the principle that no asymmetric power should be used regarding whatever issue and matter that must be addressed by the polity. Of course, there is the situation of unforeseen and unexpected conditions, but still, a liberal state should not over-exceed its normative prerogatives, as explicitly formulated by the members of the society, without justification and public sanction, be it even retroactively, as in the case with the retroactive monitoring and approving regime established by the US Congress over the president’s right to govern through executive orders.

Because Liberalism is all-inclusive, it is so heavily criticized, both from the anti-system extreme Left and the ultra-conservative alt-Right. Those two political rivals of Liberalism have actually quite a lot in common and that is easily traced by the fact that both of them point their arrows at the same targets – the same politics, the same politicians, the same values, the same norms are considered unacceptable and oppressive, though for slightly different reasons. They share not just a common enemy, but a common origin, regardless of the fact that none of them will ever admit it.

The militant Left and the self-described alt-Right, which even pretends to be purist Conservatism, do belong to a political tradition that can only be described with one word – totalitarianism. Both of them have had their manifestations in the past century, under various names: communism, socialism, Nazism, fascism. And while for the revolutionary Left it seems always to be the same story – fight the ruling elite and destroy the established system, the alt-Right has embarked on a new strategy, which relies on selling itself to the world as patriotic, Christian and capitalist, inspired by the pure and original spirit of Conservatism.

⁸ <http://www.constitution.org/jl/2ndtr13.htm> (accessed on June 7th, 2017)

However, for the purpose of being accurate it is important to note that Conservatism, while being a party-political rival to Liberalism, is – when placed into the larger frame of ideas – Liberalism’s critical wing, placing value on tradition and on prudence of action. This is what modern wannabe conservators fail to acknowledge: the origin of Conservatism and its basic historical principles. This just makes them look grotesque in their effort to oust Liberalism for alleged ideological malfunctioning. Generally speaking, they fail to admit and follow one of the core teachings of Conservatism which, paraphrasing Russel Kirk (1982), would read something like: we are different and that is natural, because tolerance for variety is the key for individuals to live successfully together.

In the end, we might conclude that Liberalism did not fail over the past 70 (and counting) years. Rather, it piled on a number of mistakes, which accounted for growing dissatisfaction with its core values and principles, as epitomized by the modern liberal democracy of the Western type. The emanation of liberalism – democratic state, run under the domain of separation of powers, rule of law and free enterprise by a civil society of equals – is under fire today because it did not match the high expectations it raised during the past decades.

Despite the expectations and projections of its enemies, the liberal idea will once again prevail, but not by using the instruments of its enemies, such as exclusion from the political process. Liberalism will overcome them by using the very same means pinpointed as its major weaknesses – tolerance, inclusion, equal rights, freedom of expression, rule of law, innovation and progress.

After all, Liberalism saved the world after the Second World War so there is hope that the democratic state is going to be reclaimed from those who malevolently captured it, and that the civil society of equals will take care of its interest once again. Because, in order to remain equal, individuals need to know and feel, on a permanent daily basis, that there is justice brought to every one regardless of gender, religion, residence, age, race, social status or public position.

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Identity politics: How the radical left ruined liberal democracy

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The 2016 election in America has been and will continue to be subject of intensive debate. The current text seeks to draw attention to problems and aspects to it, which for one reason or another have not been identified as important and thus they were not subjected to due critical examination. For example, why are we discussing identity politics, but not the philosophical foundations of identity politics; why are we discussing their influence over the 2016 election, but nobody says a word about the fact that they've been around as early as the 1970s; why are we so preoccupied with defending liberal democracy against the menace of right-wing populism, when its enemies from the left are in fact older and more powerful; why are we panicking over post-truth, as if truth has ever been a virtue of political ideologies?

I dare to propose here that liberal democracy was not dismantled overnight. It has been subjected to quiet, yet intentional and persistent erosion for decades and even its most fierce apologists have to some extent been involved in its deconstruction.

What is liberal democracy?

What is the essence of liberal democracy is a vast and not uncontroversial question. I will thereby intentionally avoid it by putting aside the philosophical substance of liberal democracy and accepting its most successful and widely acknowledged practical manifestation, the constitutional system of the United States, as the default definition of „liberal democracy” for the purposes of this article.

The United States constitution articulates and codifies the most meritorious philosophical achievements of the Enlightenment. It creates a political system, in which individuals are recognized not merely as the main, but as the only constitutive parts of society. Every American citizen counts for one and everybody is granted the same rights, but only as individuals. There are no collective rights and no collective authority – rights, interests, property and power may only be shared between consenting autonomous individuals. No “collective interest” of “the

nation” can be assumed *a priori* by political leaders - because this is basically what happened in 19th and 20th century Europe, where leaders decided that nations had collective rights, interests and responsibilities that transcended the rights, interests and responsibilities of the individual. And we have to accept that these collectivist and murderous ideologies such as nationalism and communism are as much children of the Enlightenment as is American constitutionalism. It was World War 2 and the Cold War that judged in favor of American constitutional liberalism, as opposed to the political projects of other Enlightenment ideas.

What is identity politics?

Identity politics is *the understanding that people of marginalized groups who share racial, cultural, religious, sex or gender identity must come together and operate as a bloc in order to advance their interests and fight oppression*. However, identity politics is different from the traditional exercise of the freedom of assembly, because it is not rooted in democratic or liberal ideas, but in neo-Marxist philosophy.

To understand the essence of identity politics, one must go into Michel Foucault’s ideas about cultural imperialism and its role in the neoliberal order. In Foucault’s view, culture plays an important role in what he describes as *governmentality* – the government’s effort to produce and modify the kind of citizens it needs.

Government, of course, is an institution of power and according to centuries-long Marxian tradition, power pretty much exhausts the meaning of all human institutions. Foucault proposes that the exercise of power is closely connected to the concept of truth. Culture as a mean of production of truth is therefore the most important power instrument.

The neoliberal order, according to Foucault, seeks to impose Western patriarchal hetero-normative culture through media and economic instruments and by promoting Western democracy – a seemingly culturally neutral system of government, which in fact carries Western normativity deeply embedded in it. Marginalized groups must therefore protect and embrace their identity, because they would otherwise fall victims of false consciousness, another age-long Marxian concept according to which the oppressed class does not realize its natural opposition to the oppressive class. The essential American constitutional idea, i.e. that all people are created

equal and individuals only belong to groups by means of voluntary association and not by nature, contradicts the concept of class conflict in its core.

But the mere realization of oppression and the consolidation of minority groups are not sufficient to protect and advance their interests. Half-a-century before Trump proclaimed that “the system is rigged”, the first man to express this view was actually the prominent Marxist revisionist, Herbert Marcuse. In 1965, he wrote his perhaps most popular and influential essay *Repressive Tolerance*, which lays out the doctrinal basis of identity politics as an anti-democratic, anti-liberal idea. According to Marcuse tolerance, as understood and practiced in the liberal democratic order, is dysfunctional and does not properly serve the purpose of empowering and uplifting marginalized groups. In fact, the classic liberal concept of tolerance serves exactly the opposite purpose; by leveling out the rights and obligations of citizens regardless of their social and economic status, by being equally permissive of different opinions regardless of whether they are progressive or reactionary and by institutionally imposing rules and framework for political discussion which favor the oppressors. Marcuse writes:

“These background limitations of tolerance are normally prior to the explicit and judicial limitations as defined by the courts, custom, governments, etc. (for example, 'clear and present danger', threat to national security, heresy). Within the framework of such a social structure, tolerance can be safely practiced and proclaimed. It is of two kinds:

- 1. the passive toleration of entrenched and established attitudes and ideas even if their damaging effect on man and nature is evident, and*
- 2. the active, official tolerance granted to the Right as well as to the Left, to movements of aggression as well as to movements of peace, to the party of hate as well as to that of humanity I call this non-partisan tolerance 'abstract' or 'pure' inasmuch as it refrains from taking sides--but in doing so it actually protects the already established machinery of discrimination.”⁹*

⁹ Marcuse, Herbert. *Repressive Tolerance, A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969)
<http://www.marcuse.org/herbert/pubs/60spubs/65repressivetolerance.htm> Accessed: December 12, 2017

Marcuse inferred two things: first, true tolerance requires not mere formal equality of rights and obligations, but also substantive redistribution of power to the point where the oppressed become oppressors and the oppressors become oppressed:

“Surely, no government can be expected to foster its own subversion, but in a democracy such a right is vested in the people (i.e. in the majority of the people). This means that the ways should not be blocked on which a subversive majority could develop, and if they are blocked by organized repression and indoctrination, their reopening may require apparently undemocratic means. They would include the withdrawal of toleration of speech and assembly from groups and movements which promote aggressive policies, armament, chauvinism, discrimination on the grounds of race and religion, or which oppose the extension of public services, social security, medical care, etc. Moreover, the restoration of freedom of thought may necessitate new and rigid restrictions on teachings and practices in the educational institutions which, by their very methods and concepts, serve to enclose the mind within the established universe of discourse and behavior--thereby precluding a priori a rational evaluation of the alternatives.”¹⁰

And second, legitimate political activism and reasonable discussion are useless in the attempt to overthrow the system, because every time one engages in a reasonable discussion with the oppressors one legitimizes their traditional institutions and their operational criteria for judging what is true:

“According to a dialectical proposition it is the whole which determines the truth--not in the sense that the whole is prior or superior to its parts, but in the sense that its structure and function determine every particular condition and relation. Thus, within a repressive society, even progressive movements threaten to turn into their opposite to the degree to which they accept the rules of the game. To take a most controversial case: the exercise of political rights (such as voting, letter-writing to the press, to Senators, etc., protest-demonstrations with a priori renunciation of counterviolence) in a society of total administration serves to strengthen this administration by testifying to the existence of democratic liberties which, in reality, have

¹⁰ Marcuse, Herbert. *Repressive Tolerance, A Critique of Pure Tolerance* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969)
<http://www.marcuse.org/herbert/pubs/60spubs/65repressivetolerance.htm> Accessed: December 12, 2017

changed their content and lost their effectiveness. In such a case, freedom (of opinion, of assembly, of speech) becomes an instrument for absolving servitude."

Neo-Marxists' conflict with traditional logic is not limited to Marcuse. It was not even started by him. For instance, one colleague of Marcuse's, Max Horkheimer, explicitly denounced formal logic as a characteristic of bourgeois law in the book *Dämmerung*. The ideal of the *Rechtsstaat* (rule of law and judicial universality independent of politics) treasured by classic liberals as one of the pillars of civilized society is regarded by Horkheimer as „perpetuating the status quo". In his most notable work, *The Eclipse of Reason*, he claims that formal logic is merely a product of "instrumental reason" and that true logic must go beyond form to include substantive elements in order to tell us objective truths about the world.

How did neo-Marxist philosophy influence actual identity politics?

All the neo-Marxists, forced by events in Europe, at some point moved to the United States where they taught philosophy in the best universities. Horkheimer, Marcuse, Foucault, Adorno, Fromm and many others assumed teaching positions in Harvard, Columbia, Berkeley, Chicago and etc. Thanks to the interdisciplinary approach in American higher education, their ideas quickly disseminated across the humanities. They influenced and mentored an entire generation of philosophers, politicians, political scientists, political consultants, journalists and etc. Today, all these people simply act out different fragments of neo-Marxist philosophy and it only starts to make sense when you put them together. Put together, they represent a frighteningly coherent doctrine for the erosion of an entire political system.

We are not living in a post-truth era since last year. We have been living in a post-truth era ever since the radical left in American universities turned the political and even the scientific discussion into an ugly power struggle, where truth equals authority. Long before „post-truth" became word of the year, they had already waged war on biology in their preposterous claim that „gender is a social construct" and "it exists on a spectrum"; a view which is now established in university campuses where students are required "to respect" made-up gender pronouns (they, xe, ze) and is reflected in many pieces of public policy, namely in Obama's transgender bathroom law. They started making up black and Muslim history that did not happen in order to "empower" minorities. They started persecuting white students in campuses for "cultural appropriation".

American democracy was not broken by the 2016 election – it has been broken ever since the left embraced political violence as something defensible. Universities are creating safe spaces in campuses¹¹ where free speech is banned and the discussion of non-progressive ideas is forbidden^{12 13}. In some universities, black students have decided to segregate themselves into black-only spaces¹⁴ and events¹⁵, where they can “feel safe”¹⁶. Students are protesting, sometimes violently, every conservative speaker who holds an event at their institution¹⁷. They storm the halls, block the stage, scream and shout in order to sabotage the discussion¹⁸. Antifa and Black Lives Matter protest conservative events by destroying property and assaulting people^{19 20} and every time a reporter tries to ask them why they are protesting, they just remain silent and look angry. They intentionally sabotage all attempts for dialogue and discussion. They sure have learned their lesson from Marcuse – don’t engage in dialogue with conservatives, don’t legitimize their bourgeois logic. But it’s the mainstream left that should have denounced this type of behavior. They instead decided to tolerate it,^{21 22} even after the FBI issued a report stating that violence from black identity groups^{23 24} is ideologically motivated²⁵

Identity politics paid off well for Obama’s political consultants, who targeted every group with specific messages, pandering to their class consciousness. But it all backfired when the largest identity group also started to vote together as a bloc. Ironically, the right-wing reaction

¹¹ <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2016/08/finding-the-line-between-safe-space-and-segregation/496289/>

¹² <http://time.com/4530197/college-free-speech-zone/>

¹³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/22/opinion/sunday/judith-shulevitz-hiding-from-scary-ideas.html>

¹⁴ <https://mystudentvoices.com/uc-berkeley-protesters-demand-racially-segregated-safe-space-d8d2c3d0ce4c>

¹⁵ <http://claremontindependent.com/safe-spaces-segregate-the-claremont-colleges/>

¹⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3R6dzZdceT4>

¹⁷ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2017/09/14/uc-berkeley-braces-for-protests-as-conservative-writer-ben-shapiro-speaks-on-campus/?utm_term=.ccf9ccf81e21

¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1mzqtB1DI1g>

¹⁹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/08/28/black-clad-antifa-attack-right-wing-demonstrators-in-berkeley/?utm_term=.c09c0037742a

²⁰ <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/02/01/us/milo-yiannopoulos-berkeley/index.html>

²¹ <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/450722/stop-normalizing-political-violence-use-fighting-words-instead>

²² <http://dailycaller.com/2015/08/29/black-lives-matter-protesters-chant-pigs-in-a-blanket-fry-em-like-bacon-video/>

²³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016_shooting_of_Dallas_police_officers

²⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2016_shooting_of_Baton_Rouge_police_officers

²⁵ <https://assets.documentcloud.org/documents/4067711/BIE-Redacted.pdf>

used the playbook of the left to get Trump elected. It is still difficult to say whether this is a catastrophe or a success for neo-Marxist thought. On the one hand, Donald Trump, the embodiment of everything they despise, got elected; on the other hand, Republicans are finally seduced into the leftist game of identitarian tribalism.

No matter what this means for Marxism, there is no doubt it is a huge blow for liberal democracy.

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За статия: Iliescu A. (2003) Political Manichaeism in contemporary public debate: the Romanian case.- *Southeastern Europe*, vol. 30, 1-12.

За интернет източник: Bello T. East Timor's ruling party ahead in vote count. In: Reuters web site.
<http://www.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUSJAK23659320070702?feedType=RSS>
(5 July 2007).

Позоваванията в текста да следват следния модел: (Кръстева 1997: 45).

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