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# War has returned to Europe: Three reasons why the EU did not see it coming

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*Credit: JOHN MACDOUGALL / AFP*

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# Executive summary

Before 24 February, Europe decidedly defined itself as 'post-war'. But since Putin's full-scale, cold-blooded invasion of Ukraine, war again defines the Union's reality. This startling turn of events has triggered widespread indignation and driven the EU into damage control mode: sanctioning belligerent Russia, aiding the Ukrainian resistance and taking in migrants who seek refuge. Putting out fires is, by necessity, the main priority. But knee-jerk reactions and moral outrage do not amount to a strategy.

To create a future that stops perpetuating the past, the Union and its member states must also start to critically contemplate how they got into the current predicament and change course. **Three lessons** stand out:

First, since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, **overconfidence** in its own allure and model has impoverished the EU's perspective of itself and the rest of the world. While freedom, pluralism and liberal democracy remain attractive, liberal expectations that the Union would be able to convert even its immediate neighbourhood – let alone the world – to its own image have proven illusory. Despite almost two decades of European integration, democratic performance has still not acquired a positive dynamic in the Balkans. Yet, the membership card has now confidently and imprudently been put on the table also for Ukraine and other eastern countries, posing as some sort of solution to the current crisis. Without practising humility, the EU stands to persevere in its confirmation biases and continue to evade learning.

Second, the EU's unrealistic aspirations to global hegemony have long been concealing a policy of double standards both at 'home' and abroad, piling up

accusations of **hypocrisy**. While the EU was pretending to still be a shining example of liberal democracy, several member states have taken full pages from Putin's autocratic playbook. As long as the EU's own 'house' is not in order, the Union's claim to the moral high ground will remain vulnerable to criticism. And it will not get any easier for it to hold others, like the Balkan countries, to democratic standards that member states themselves do not meet. Moreover, the fact that the EU has been fudging the interpretation and implementation of its sacred democratic values whenever it suited its own or its members' interests has enabled illiberal actors, like Putin, to 'weaponise' the Union's hypocrisy – dressing up the EU's foreign policy ambitions as efforts to revive global democracy will remain a hypocrisy trap, including in Ukraine now.

Third, a **misplaced acceptance of the status quo** has prevented the EU from getting to the bottom of the many crises that have confronted it for decades. But the Union cannot wish away systemic risks or escape the fact that dealing with today's enormous challenges will require deep and brave reforms across the board. The stresses of cumulative crises, crowned now by the ongoing war, give the Union a chance to plan the future. The choices that the EU will make in the coming years will determine what the Union truly values and whether it will be able to preserve its own way of life. If the EU is keen to maintain the normative power of its liberal values in an increasingly illiberal environment, it should obsessively focus on making liberalism its sign of distinction from the outside world, not a model to transform others. The Union has to learn to live by example and will have to work hard to become exemplary.

# Introduction

Once more,<sup>1</sup> war rages on the European Union's (EU) borders. What happened to the 'never again' mantra of the liberal world? Why was Putin able to blindside us and launch a full-scale invasion of Ukraine? It's not like we lacked warnings<sup>2</sup> or signs of what Russia is capable of. We just did not listen. Nor did we take seriously Russia's earlier brutal tactics in Chechnya and Georgia, its military propping up of an authoritarian and cruel regime in Syria, its illegal seizure of Crimea or its expanding sphere of influence in Belarus and Central Asia. When Russia was repeatedly raising concerns about NATO enlargement, why did we – its neighbours – not worry as well?

It would be too convenient to justify our fallacy by putting all this mess down to one rogue individual: Vladimir Putin. Yes, this is Mr. Putin's war<sup>3</sup> and it is possible that, to get to the currently sinister state of affairs, something must be off with the man;<sup>4</sup> something which makes him difficult to 'read' and prone to unspeakable acts. But it would be wrong to simply point the moralising finger towards Putin the pariah without also taking a good look in the mirror at ourselves. If Putin lost his mind and lives in "another world"<sup>5</sup>, the EU only has itself to blame for losing its way and ending up in his surreal world too.

Clearly, in times of mind-bending crisis, with atrocities unfolding daily on the ground in Ukraine, the EU and its allies are too busy putting out fires to be able to practice introspection. The natural order of priorities dictates that the EU acts fast to rally behind the long list of economic and political sanctions it enacted against Russia; to agree on the arms and other aid it sent to support Ukraine's heroic resistance; and to show solidarity with the millions of Ukrainian refugees that member states, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, took in. A firm and unified EU response – so far still of [questionable effectiveness](#) – was and remains necessary. But knee-jerk reactions and moral outrage do not amount to a strategy.

The Union and its member states must also start to critically contemplate how they got into the current predicament and change course by (1) practicing humility, (2) renouncing hypocrisy and (3) daring to reform as a way to preserve the EU's liberal exceptionalism. Otherwise, they will miss on the opportunity to create a future that stops perpetuating the past.

To contribute towards this reflection, three observations suggest where the EU went awry:

## Lesson #1: Self-confidence is not always a virtue

For the West, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 marked not only the defeat of communism but also the triumph of liberal democracy over any other form of government.<sup>6</sup> But this prophesy failed to anticipate that "with no alternative centre of power challenging its claim to the future of mankind, liberalism fell in love with itself"<sup>7</sup> and would lose its capacity for self-criticism.

As time went by, the idea that liberal democratic institutions and norms are the best way of organising society graduated to conventional wisdom. And therein lies the rub because "when we grant an entity infinite wisdom, we enter the realm of faith'. And faith can guide life but blind policy."<sup>8</sup> According to Walt<sup>9</sup>, unrealistic aspirations of global hegemony prompted liberals to divide the world into "good states" (those that embody liberal values) versus "bad states" (pretty much everyone else), and to identify the latter as the cause of conflicts. "The solution" from this perspective: "topple tyrants and spread democracy, markets, and institutions based on the belief that democracies don't fight one another, especially when they are bound together by trade, investment, and an agreed-on set of rules." And this is how the international agenda of the EU and USA in the post-Cold War era became 'transformative' and generally supporting of regime change.

Krastev<sup>10</sup> explains that "[t]he expectation that others should adopt Western-style liberal democratic institutions and norms seemed as natural as the rising of the sun." In fact, Central and Eastern European (CEE) and Balkan countries, for example, did initially embrace imitation of the West as the surest path to modernity and prosperity. But by now, reality has profoundly challenged liberal illusions that the EU would be able to convert even its immediate neighbourhood – let alone the world – to its own political model. Democratic backlash became evident soon after the EU accession of many CEE countries in the early 2000s<sup>11</sup> and carries on to this day. In addition, democratic performance has still not acquired a positive dynamic in the Balkans, despite almost two decades of European integration.<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps the EU is experiencing, as Krastev<sup>13</sup> argues, its own version of the Galapagos Syndrome, which in the past saw Japanese companies that produced the best 3G phones in the world unable to sell them abroad because no other country could catch up with the technological innovations needed to use these 'perfect' devices. Indeed, "[i]t may be that Europe's post-modern order has become so advanced and particular to its environment that it is impossible for others to follow."

Of course, there are also countries who are either not interested in playing the liberal game (e.g. China) because they would rather be “ingenious appropriators”<sup>14</sup> – borrowing or stealing Western means (like technology) to get rich without sacrificing their political ideology in the process. Or else, there are states (e.g. Russia) who act as “strategic impostors”<sup>15</sup> – faking a democratic makeover only to hide behind the smokescreen of elections their power grabbing and wrongdoings. While the former tactic has proven less inspiring to others, the latter has in time bred followers, including in the Balkans.

But it is also the case that the poly-crisis<sup>16</sup> of the past decades has undermined the promise of a semi-utopian European future predicated on prosperity, order and opportunity, which the Union held in its heydays for EU-hopeful countries, like in the Balkans. Also, member states have over time become more preoccupied with internal challenges and progressively raised the bar for EU accession<sup>17</sup> without a realistic post-crises membership narrative. These developments made it effectively more difficult for the EU to extract ever-stricter concessions from the Balkan countries, and the Union’s transformative leverage in the region increasingly withered. In parallel, the Balkan aspirants started to [question the credibility of the European offer](#) and began flirting with the likes of Russia.

The irony is that, even if EU enlargement policy and its democratic conditionality have been struggling to reap successes in the Balkans (and Turkey), the membership card was recently put on the table for Ukraine and other eastern countries, posing as some sort of solution to the current crisis. In early April, during her first visit to Kyiv since the start of the war, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen even handed to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy a questionnaire – normally, a first symbolic step in the standard enlargement procedure. Such a gesture – albeit well-meaning – could backfire. It risks giving Ukrainians false hope since all decisions on enlargement have to meet the unanimous approval of all 27 member states, which continue to be divided on the subject.<sup>18</sup>

The issue here is not whether a ‘fast-track’ EU accession process is feasible for Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova, who have now submitted official membership applications.<sup>19</sup> Where there is a political will, a way can normally be found. The problem is that the Union seems to have learned the square foot of nothing from its vast experience with enlargement and democracy promotion beyond its borders. Instead of doing some much-needed soul-searching first (e.g. reconsider its current approach to enlargement and explore ‘alternative ways of belonging’, short of full membership, for future aspirants), it is now confidently but imprudently jumping to discussions about prospective new members in an already delicate context.

This overconfidence in its own allure and model is precisely what has long impoverished the EU’s perspective of itself and the rest of the world. While freedom, pluralism and liberal democracy remain attractive, the Union’s focus on projecting self-assurance and judging what is wrong with everyone else around it, has impeded the EU from practising humility.<sup>20</sup> The humble is candid about the limits of one’s expertise and knowledge. It admits mistakes and reviews any assumptions against new information (e.g. from crises) before taking new decisions. It does not claim to have a “monopoly on what democracy is”<sup>21</sup>. The humble recognises and prepares for surprises, no matter how unlikely they might seem. It acknowledges that war is always possible, more and tougher sanctions might not help, a deal could fail, a nuclear attack could happen or any other undesirable eventualities. The humble sets its eyes on the horizon but also sees from the periphery. It considers issues and engages from the perspective of others, avoiding blackmailing and the ‘heads I win, tails you lose’ logic in favour of a strategy of [mutual backscratching](#) if not consensus-building. The EU has many virtues and talents but humility is not exactly its forte. It should become though.

## Lesson #2: [Hypocrisy is the ultimate vice](#)

Self-confidence is not only a liability when it promotes confirmation biases and prevents continuous learning. It is also problematic when it conceals a policy of double standards both at ‘home’ and abroad.

While the EU lulled itself into believing that it was a beacon of democracy in the world, for decades its political model has been challenged from within. Systematically, public opinion polls have been showing European citizens growing [deeply dissatisfied with the functioning of their political systems](#). Their frustration is generally linked to popular beliefs that national political elites are dishonest, self-serving and unresponsive to the opinions or interests

of ordinary citizens.<sup>22</sup> Ever-more distrustful of their leaders and institutions<sup>23</sup>, people in many EU countries increasingly support radical and populist contenders, who claim democratic credentials but defy democratic norms. The average vote share for populist parties of various stripes and persuasions contending national and European elections has more than doubled since the 1960s,<sup>24</sup> and some have even come into power.

[The democratic malaise of the past decades has permeated several of the oldest and most developed democracies in the EU but it is especially palpable in the CEE region](#). Repeated attacks on the judiciary, media

and civil society in member states like Hungary and Poland, where demagogues are in office, often leave the EU scrambling for effective responses and [cast doubts on whether the Union is still a 'club' of liberal democracies](#). As long as the EU's own 'house' is not in order, the Union's claim to the moral high ground will remain vulnerable to criticism. And it will not get any easier for it to hold others, like the Balkan countries, to democratic standards that member states themselves do not meet.

The EU does not only pretend to still be a shining example of liberal democracy when, in fact, several member states have taken full pages from Putin's own autocratic playbook.<sup>25</sup> The Union is also fudging the interpretation and implementation of its sacred democratic values whenever it suits its own or its members' interests.

Take, for example, the reaction of some CEE countries to the ongoing wave of refugees crossing EU borders to escape the war in Ukraine. Poland, Hungary and Slovakia, among others, have all gone out of their way to show solidarity with the millions of Ukrainians entering their countries. Such efforts are commendable and attuned to liberal principles. However, this outpouring of generosity bears no resemblance to the "compassion deficit"<sup>26</sup> and [illegal pushbacks](#) that these same member states displayed over the past decade when refugees from the Middle East, Asia or Africa were fleeing conflict and trying to find shelter in the EU. Now they invoke the Geneva Conventions on humanitarian treatment in wartime but earlier they were [building razor-wire fences](#) to keep non-Christian asylum-seekers out<sup>27</sup> on grounds that European societies risk 'browning' and being 'polluted' by the arrival of non-white races and cultures.<sup>28</sup> And [their hypocrisy persists](#) even at present in the unequal treatment that Poland, for example, displays towards Belarusian asylum seekers *while* welcoming Ukrainian refugees. What is it then? Are human fundamental rights universal or only selectively so?

But before foreigners even get to compromise Europe's welfare and liberal model, as many fear, the EU is more likely to sabotage itself by relativizing its democratic values. Just in the current context, appreciation for Poland's generous hospitality towards Ukrainians could prompt the European Commission to become more lenient in negotiations with Warsaw for the release of funds from the EU's COVID-19 recovery package. Before the war, the EU was withholding this financial support due to Poland's disdain for judicial independence. Now, the EU could try to seize the opportunity provided by the fallout between Warsaw and Budapest over the war in Ukraine<sup>29</sup> to up the pressure on both of these wayward countries. But since Poland has not suddenly become more democratic in the past few weeks, if in the process the EU eschews its rule-of-law mandate for the sake of wartime unity,<sup>30</sup> it will effectively undercut its democratic standards.

It would not be the first time, though. Back in 2015, when Turkey was becoming more illiberal, the EU promised Ankara to revitalise accession talks in exchange for the latter's support in stemming the flow of migrants

into the Union. Such transactional deals might provide short-term benefits but can have long-term negative consequences for democracy.<sup>31</sup> The Balkan countries are a case in point. Despite reporting on state capture in the region<sup>32</sup>, the Commission repeatedly turned a blind eye to law-defying Balkan politicians whenever they delivered on issues of high priority for the member states, like closing borders to refugees, radicalisation and terrorism or regional stability. Little surprise then that authoritarian tendencies still linger in the Balkans and candidate countries like the Putin-friendly [Serbia refuses now to align with EU sanctions against Russia](#).

Utilitarianism has trumped democracy and the common good in other areas too, including the EU's climate and energy policies. The Union's dependence on fossil fuels, for example, has not only dented the [EU's credibility as a climate leader](#). It has also filled Putin's coffers and helped finance his war.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps key member states, like France or Germany, did not know any better that for all these years they were helping to sponsor a dictator and his cronies when buying Russian gas and oil<sup>34</sup> or selling military technologies to Moscow.<sup>35</sup> But with the war now a reality, such commercial links smack of self-interest poorly understood rather than validating Europe's much-flaunted democratic authority. A complete EU embargo on Russian energy is still lacking.<sup>36</sup> However the Union intends to not let Putin succeed in Ukraine (whatever that means), in pure numbers, its 'strategy' is confounding: EU paid Russia €35 billion for gas and oil since the start of the war but it only sent €1 billion to Ukraine to arm itself.<sup>37</sup>

The Union's current warnings to Putin about the fundamental evils of war also ring hollow in light of [the wilful disregard for international law](#) that EU countries themselves displayed in the past. The US and UK-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 or the NATO-led military intervention in Libya in 2011 set unfortunate precedents that Putin can exploit to justify his own aggressive acts. Such instances, in which the West itself used liberal rhetoric for power reasons, when in fact [it was bending the rules of 'the New World Order'](#), fostered resentment and allowed illiberal actors to weaponise "Western hypocrisy"<sup>38</sup>. As if wanting to make an in-your-face joke at the EU's expense<sup>39</sup>, Putin copy-pasted into his declaration on the annexation of Crimea full paragraphs from Kosovo's declaration of independence, which the West endorsed.<sup>40</sup> If the Union was in doubt about the illiberal perils of liberal hypocrisy, Putin has now laid them bare.

Trying to dress up the Union's ambitions to expand its sphere of influence as efforts to revive global democracy will not spare the EU from having to make necessary choices between selfish geopolitical interests and the consistency of 'European values'.<sup>41</sup> And those who despise democratic values will keep calling out any contradictions in the Union's foreign policy practices, using them against the EU.

This is also why continuing to frame the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine as a battle between democracy and authoritarianism is a hypocrisy trap for

the Union. To contain Russia as an authoritarian power, the [USA and EU are now looking to make up for Russian hydrocarbons with oil from the Gulf States, Algeria or Venezuela](#). But [none of these countries are democracies or 'liberal democracies'](#). The uncomfortable truth is that restoring peace on the continent is likely to demand difficult compromises on all sides, whether or not the EU wants to get candid about it. Because Putin sees Ukraine's

geopolitical alignment in Russia's vital interest,<sup>42</sup> and went to war for it, negotiating a solution cannot be seen as a zero-sum game. The Union might wish to reconcile the goal of stopping Russia with its desire to spread democracy and get justice done. But the more it tries to have its cake and eat it too, the more difficult it will be to settle issues about Ukraine's neutrality and territory, and the more a Third World War will become a distinct possibility.

## Lesson # 3: Complacency does not bode well for ethical leadership

Irrespective of how the EU will in the end play its hand in this war, it is quite clear that this new crisis prompts a re-evaluation of old assumptions and approaches. [Russia's war signals the end of an era that began with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989](#) and in which liberal democracy held "unrealistic and self-defeating aspirations to global hegemony".<sup>43</sup> The new 'normal' is defined by a return to a pluralistic and competitive world, which "is anything but unprecedented, since [t]he primary feature of the world history tends to be cultural, institutional, and ideological diversity, not homogeneity."<sup>44</sup> Uncertainty might reign supreme in this new reality but clinging to post-Cold War certainties will not help the EU navigate the present or the future.

A misplaced acceptance of the *status quo* has in fact prevented the EU from getting to the bottom of the many crises that have confronted it for decades, including the financial crunch, the migration/refugee mess, the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated economic shock, or the pressures of climate change and the 4th industrial revolution. Especially when temporary relief was secured through emergency policy intervention or when the threat was identified as laying somewhere far away in the future, complacency set in and the need to embark on structural reforms eased off. But the Union cannot wish away these systemic risks or escape the fact that dealing with today's enormous challenges will require reforms "as deep as the phenomena that reveal the fragility of the existing order and as fast as the re-ordering of the geopolitical order currently underway."<sup>45</sup>

The good news is that "what we have before us are some breath-taking opportunities disguised as insoluble problems".<sup>46</sup> The stresses of cumulative crises, crowned now by the ongoing war, give the Union a chance to plan the future in such a way that will not only allow it to weather storms but literally to make the weather. This is a time of tearing down and building new economic and social engines, new forms of energy, new infrastructure, new modes of production and learning, new systems of communication, new decision-making processes, new technological and military capabilities, and new ways of acting and speaking in the world. In some areas (e.g. democracy, climate or energy), reform-oriented work or

thinking has already started and should continue.<sup>47</sup> But the breadth and depth of the reform challenge in all these areas remain vast. The choices that the EU will make in the coming years will determine what the Union truly values and whether it will be able to preserve its own way of life.

Prior to the war in Ukraine, Carney<sup>48</sup> pointed out that the three most significant crises of the 21st century, i.e. credit, Covid and climate, had all been driven by a common crisis of values. During the global financial crisis, the EU undervalued the risks of unfettered market liberalism; during the health crisis, it undervalued resilience; and in the growing climate crisis, it undervalues the impact of pollution and environmental degradation for future generations. In the current war, it also seems to be grossly undervaluing realism. And throughout, the member states have been also misjudging the value of European cooperation for their individual ability to control outcomes and respond to their citizens' needs. Member states' confusion of independence with sovereignty could prove the Union's undoing. The EU cannot speak the language of narrow national interest like a traditional nation state. "Liberalism is the EU's native language"<sup>49</sup> and it will be crucial in the future for the EU to resolve the often illusory tension between the national and supranational levels.

If the EU is keen to preserve the normative power of its liberal values<sup>50</sup> in an increasingly illiberal environment, it should obsessively focus on making liberalism its defining characteristic<sup>51</sup> – not as a model to transform others but as a sign of distinction from the outside world.<sup>52</sup> This means that closing ranks behind the Union's liberal exceptionalism and relentlessly implementing liberal values in practice should become the strategy whereby the member states mobilise to confront the new age of disruption and the only way in which they can hope – not seek – to inspire beyond EU borders. By daring to be creative and inclusive<sup>53</sup> when taking decisions on extensive reforms, the EU will be able to give itself the means to consolidate its exceptional project. In short, the Union has to learn to live by example and will have to work hard to become exemplary.

- 1 After, more recently, the Srebrenica genocide in 1995 and Kosovo war 1998-1999.
- 2 See, for example, De Gruyter, Caroline, [Warnings from past – Otto van Habsburg raised alarm on Putin](#), *EUObserver*, 5 April 2022; Applebaum, Anne, [There Is No Liberal World Order](#), *The Atlantic*, 31 March 2022; or Enzensberger, Magnus Hans (1995), *Civil Wars: From L.A. to Bosnia*, The New Press.
- 3 Krastev, Ivan, [“We’re all living in Putin’s world now”](#), *The New York Times opinion*, 27 February 2022.
- 4 Marks, Simon, [“Is Putin mad? US debates if there’s something off with Russia’s president and how it affects the Ukraine war”](#) *Inews*, 16 March 2022.
- 5 Words used by former German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, in a telephone call with former US President, Barack Obama, to describe Putin. Quote from Weber, Peter, [Germany’s Merkel: Vladimir Putin is living ‘in another world’](#), *The Week*, 9 January 2015.
- 6 Fukuyama, Francis (2012), *The End of History and the Last Man*, Penguin Books.
- 7 Krastev, Ivan and Holmes, Stephen (2019), *The light that failed – A reckoning*, Penguin Books, p. 204.
- 8 Tomasso Padoa-Schioppa cited in Carney, Mark (2021), *Value(s): climate, credit, covid and how we focus on what matters*, William Collins.
- 9 Walt, Stephen M., [Liberal illusions caused the Ukrainian crisis](#), *Foreign Policy*, 19 January 2022.
- 10 Krastev and Holmes (2019), *op. cit.*, p. 204.
- 11 See, for instance, Rupnik, Jacques (2007), “Is East-Central Europe backsliding? From democracy to populist backlash”, *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 18, Number 4, pp. 17-25; all contributions to this special issue of the journal are dedicated to this topic.
- 12 See, for example, Kmezić, Marko and Bieber, Florian (eds.) (2017), [“The crisis of democracy in the Western Balkans. An anatomy of stabilitocracy and the limits of EU democracy promotion”](#), *Biepag Policy Study*.
- 13 Krastev, Ivan (2017), *After Europe*, University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 9.
- 14 Krastev and Holmes (2019), *op. cit.*, p. 193.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 van Rompuy, Herman (2016), [“20 years of European Policy Centre”](#), *Speech at EPC Annual Conference*, Brussels: European Policy Centre.
- 17 Balfour, Rosa and Stratulat, Corina (eds.) (2015), [“EU member states and enlargement towards the Balkans”](#), *EPC Issue Paper*, Brussels: European Policy Centre.
- 18 [“Europeans support Ukraine joining the EU – but not yet”](#), *POLITICO*, 16 March 2022. It could also provoke resentment among the Balkan countries, which have been undergoing a strict and rigorous process of integration with the Union for some two decades now. They too had seen war.
- 19 Gehrke, Laurenz, [“Georgia, Moldova follow Ukraine in applying to join EU”](#), *POLITICO*, 3 March 2022.
- 20 See Carney, Mark (2021), *op. cit.*, especially pp.: 449-456.
- 21 Krastev, Ivan, [“Biden can’t decide what counts as democracy”](#), *The New York Times*, 12 May 2021.
- 22 See also, Raines, Thomas, Goodwin, Matthew and Cutts, David (2017), *The Future of Europe: comparing public and elite attitudes*, London: Chatham House.
- 23 Dalton, Russell J. and Wattenberg, Martin P. (2000), “Party change and the democratic process” in Dalton, Russell J. and Wattenberg, Martin P. (eds.), *Parties without partisans. Political change in advanced industrial democracies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. See also *Standard Eurobarometer 94*, winter 2020-2021, [“Public opinion in the European Union”](#), pp.: 8-11.
- 24 Only in April 2022, more than [80% of the votes](#) cast in the first round of the French presidential elections went to radical right or left candidates and in Hungary, Victor Orban’s *Fidesz* party – who repeatedly clashed with EU institutions over rule of law issues, was [re-elected with a two-thirds majority](#). For the general trend, see Norris, Pippa and Gromping, Max (2017), “Populist threats to electoral integrity: the year in elections, 2016-2017”, p. 24. Calculated from Döring, Holger and Manow, Philip (2016), *Parliaments and governments database* (ParlGov), “Elections” [dataset](#).
- 25 Pornschlegel, Sophie, [“The EU should not turn a blind eye to Putinist methods at home”](#), *EurActiv opinion*, 5 April 2022.
- 26 Krastev, Ivan, [“Eastern Europe’s compassion deficit”](#), *The New York Times*, 8 September 2015.
- 27 Migrant crisis: [“Slovakia will only accept Christians”](#), *BBC*, 19 August 2015.
- 28 Krastev (2017), *op. cit.*, p. 39.
- 29 Przybylski, Wojciech, [“The end of the Budapest-Warsaw axis”](#), *POLITICO opinion*, 2 April 2022.
- 30 Bayer, Lili, [“War in Ukraine envelops EU rule-of-law fight at home”](#), *POLITICO*, 17 March 2022.
- 31 Dixon, Hugo, [“The EU’s hypocrisy on Turkey”](#), *POLITICO opinion*, 16 December 2015.
- 32 For example in the Commission’s 2018 Communication on enlargement, “A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans”, COM(2018) 65 final, p. 3. See also, Tomanić, Aleksandra, [Enlargement 2021: Captured states, captured Commission](#), *EurActiv*, 5 November 2021.
- 33 Blas, Javier, [“Europe’s hypocritical gas policy is not sustainable”](#), *Bloomberg opinion*, 6 April 2022.
- 34 Hedberg, Annika, [“The EU has been sleepwalking into war – but it’s Germany and France who have a lot to answer for”](#), *Euronews opinion*, 4 March 2022.
- 35 Jermalavicius, Tomas and Kaas, Kaarel, [“France and Germany should stop arm sales to Russia”](#), *EUobserver opinion*, 11 March 2014.
- 36 Moens, Barbara and Hernandez, America, [“EU closes in on Russian oil ban – but how tough will it be?”](#), *POLITICO*, 20 April 2022.
- 37 *Euronews*, [“EU has spent €35bn on Russian energy since the war began and just €1bn on aid to Ukraine – Borrell”](#), 6 April 2022.
- 38 Krastev, Ivan (2019), “The missionary that has to become a monastery”, *Policy Paper*, Centre for Liberal Strategies Sofia.
- 39 Krastev and Holmes (2019), *op. cit.*, p. 76 argue that also Prime Minister Viktor Orban has strategically employed imitation to assemble an illiberal whole out of illiberal parts copied from one or the other member states. And Orban did not hesitate to point it out to the Commission, whenever it accused him of breaking democratic rules.
- 40 Example from a *Spiegel* interview with Ivan Krastev, [“Putin lives in historic analogies and metaphors”](#), 17 March 2022.
- 41 [“The necessary hypocrisy of a geopolitical Europe”](#), *Financial Times*, 13 April 2022.
- 42 Walt, Stephen M., [“Liberal illusions caused the Ukraine crisis”](#), *Foreign Policy*, 19 January 2022.
- 43 Krastev and Holmes (2019), *op. cit.*, p. 205.
- 44 *Ibid.*
- 45 Carney (2021), *op. cit.*
- 46 John Gardner cited in Carney (2021), *op. cit.*
- 47 One of the most recent and prime examples in this regard is the ongoing Conference on the Future of Europe, which took a major leap forward in democratic innovation by experimenting with citizens’ participatory elements on an unprecedented scale. It is also notable because it raised the stakes of the conversation by inviting inclusive and ambitious decisions on a broad range of key strategic policy issues for the EU. See, for example, the High Level Advisory Group Report on [The Conference on the Future of Europe: What worked, what now, what next?](#), February 2022, Brussels: European Policy Centre; and Stratulat, Corina and Greubel, Johannes (2021), [Una casa para todos: Observations from the first European Citizens’ Panel of the Conference on the Future of Europe](#), *EPC Report*, Brussels: European Policy Centre.
- 48 Carney (2021), *op. cit.*
- 49 Krastev (2019), *op. cit.*
- 50 According to Article 2 of the Treaty on the European Union (TEU), the EU is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including minority rights.
- 51 Emmanouilidis, Janis A. and Zuleeg, Fabian (2016), [“EU@60 - Countering a regressive and illiberal Europe”](#), *Paper prepared for the EPC’s 20th Anniversary Conference*, Brussels: European Policy Centre.
- 52 Krastev (2019), *op. cit.*
- 53 See also Stratulat, Corina (2021), [“Forging a new democratic frontier in Europe”](#), *Input paper prepared for the EPC Annual Conference ‘Is Europe still in the global race?’*, Brussels: European Policy Centre.









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