Chapter 1

The Rise of Threatened Majorities

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The pivotal scene in many science-fiction novels has the protagonist traveling back into the past to rewrite the rules of the experiment in order to undo the catastrophic results that unfolded the first time round. In history this option does not exist. Yet many in the West have reached the point when they want that everything would have been done differently in 1989.

The post-1989 liberal order is unraveling before our eyes, in three distinct but interrelated ways: (1) The West is losing power and influence in the international system, as reflected in a rising China, a resurgent Russia, and a proliferating number of armed conflicts in different parts of the globe, (2) The Western model of market democracy is losing its universal appeal, as we can see from the widespread backlash now taking place against globalization (understood as the free movement of goods, capital, ideas, and people around the world), and (3) The West's own liberal-democratic regimes are facing an internal crisis that is usually encapsulated as "the rise of populism."

This unraveling is working its most devastating and far-reaching effects in Europe, where the post–Cold war order was born and shaped. After Brexit, the prospect of a full or partial disintegration of the European Union is no longer unthinkable. An increasingly authoritarian Turkey could leave NATO—perhaps voluntarily, or perhaps by expulsion. Belgium, Spain, and the United Kingdom could break up. The establishment of illiberal regimes in Hungary and Poland—complete with media controls, hostility to NGOs, disrespect for judicial independence, and intense polarization—has many fearing that central Europe is sleepwalking its way back to the 1930s.

Poland is a particularly worrying case. It is the poster child for successful post-communist transition, and its economy has been Europe's strongest performer for at least the last decade. Thus the 2015 election wins of the conservative-nationalist Law and Justice (PiS) party came as a shock. In

light of what has happened in Poland, it is hard to explain away the degeneration of liberal regimes as primarily due to global economic woes.

Unlike many of the rising stars of European populism, PiS leader Jaroslaw Kaczynski is not a corrupt opportunist who simply tries to capture the mood of the masses and dances along EU red lines while being careful not to cross them. Instead, he is a true ideologue of the twentieth-century sort. And not unlike Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, he understands politics in terms of Carl Schmitt's distinction between friends and foes.

Why have Poles voted for the very same populists whom they threw out less than a decade ago? Why have Polish voters, who opinion polls tell us still form one of Europe's most pro-European electorates, put Euroskeptics in power? Why have central and east Europeans increasingly begun to vote for parties that openly loathe independent institutions such as courts, central banks, and the media? These are the questions that define the new central and east European debate. It is no longer about what is going wrong with post-communist democracy; it is about what we got wrong regarding the basic nature of the post-communist period.

Back to 1989

A little more than a quarter-century ago, in what now seems like the very distant year of 1989—an *annus mirabilis* that saw rejoicing Germans dancing on the rubble of the Berlin Wall—an intellectual and U.S. State Department official named Francis Fukuyama captured the spirit of the time. With the Cold War's end, he argued in a famous essay, all large ideological conflicts had been resolved.[1] The contest was over, and history had produced a winner: Western-style liberal democracy. Taking a page from Hegel, Fukuyama presented the West's victory in the Cold War as a favorable verdict delivered by History itself, understood as a kind of Higher Court of World Justice. In the short run, some countries might not succeed at emulating this exemplary model. Yet they would have to try. The Western model was the only (i)deal in town.

In this framework, the central questions were: How can the West transform the rest of the world and how can the rest of the world imitate the West? What institutions and policies need to be transferred and copied?

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[1]   Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *National Interest*, Summer 1989, pp. 3–18.

Coincidentally, on the heels of "the end of history" came the dawn of the internet as a mass phenomenon deeply affecting economies, societies, and everyday life. The two seemed to go together, so that the end of history entailed *imitation* in the sphere of politics and institutions at the same time that it called forth *innovation* in the field of technologies and social life. Global competition would increase, but it would be competition among firms and individuals rather than ideologies and states. Its net result would be to bring countries together.

"The end of history" vision had some doubters—Fukuyama himself put a question mark on the title of his original essay—but many found it attractive owing to its optimism and the way it put Western liberalism, and not this or that anti-liberal revolutionary movement, at the heart of the idea of the progress. What Fukuyama articulated so effectively was a vision of post-Utopian political normality. Western civilization was modern civilization, was normal civilization, was the natural order of the modern world.

It is this vision of the post–Cold War world that is collapsing as we watch. It is only by contesting its major assumptions that we can address the problems we face today. The question posed by the unraveling of the liberal order is not what the West did wrong in its efforts to transform the world. The pressing question is how the last three decades have transformed the West.

Rumor has it that after the Germans tore down the Berlin Wall, the British diplomat Robert Cooper, then the top planner at the Foreign Office, had rubber stamps made reading "OBE!" ("overtaken by events"). Cooper then asked his colleagues to go through the existing files, stamping as needed. It is time to bring out the OBE stamp again. In order to make sense of the changes now afoot, we need a radical change in our point of departure. We need to reimagine the nature of the post-communist period.

At the same time that Fukuyama was heralding history's end, U.S. political scientist Ken Jowitt was writing of the Cold War's close not as a time of triumph but as an epoch of crisis and trauma, as the seedtime of what he called "the new world disorder."[2] A respected Cold Warrior who had spent his life studying communism, Jowitt disagreed with Fukuyama that its end was "some sort of historical surgical strike leaving the rest of the world largely unaffected." In Jowitt's view, the end of communism "should

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[2] Ken Jowitt, "After Leninism: The New World Disorder," *Journal of Democracy* 2 (Winter 1991), pp. 11–20. Jowitt later elaborated his ideas in *The New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), see especially chapters 7–9.

be likened to a catastrophic volcanic eruption, one that initially and imme-diately affects only the surrounding political 'biota' [i.e., other Leninist regimes], but whose effects most likely would have a global impact on the boundaries and identities that for half a century have politically, econom-ically and military defined and ordered the world."[3]

For Fukuyama, the post-Cold War world was one in which borders between states would officially endure even while losing much of their rel-evance. Jowitt instead envisioned redrawn borders, reshaped identities, pro-liferating conflicts, and paralyzing uncertainty. He saw the post-communist period not as an age of imitation with few dramatic events, but as a painful and dangerous time full of regimes that could be best described as political mutants. He agreed with Fukuyama that no *new* universal ideology would appear to challenge liberal democracy, but foresaw the return of old ethnic, religious, and tribal identities. Jowitt further predicted that "movements of rage" would spring from the ashes of weakened nation-states.

In short, Jowitt foretold in outline al-Qaeda and ISIS.

For more than two decades, at least as regards Europe, it looked as if Fukuyama was right and Jowitt was wrong. Yet it is Jowitt's analysis of the post–Cold War era as a time of global identity crisis and redrawn state and communal boundaries that can help us make sense of the current state of politics in Europe generally, and in central and eastern Europe in particular.

For two decades, Europe's new democracies scrupulously adopted the West's democratic institutions and the EU's required laws and regulations. Voting was free and fair, and elected governments colored within the dem-ocratic lines. Voters were able to change governments, but not policies. Social inequalities were growing, some groups lost status, and populations moved within and across national borders, but none of this stirred the waters of electoral politics much. In many ways, Europe's young democ-racies were like diligent first-generation immigrants, trying hard to fit in and going quietly home after work.

There was some noisy populism, but it seemed to be more style than substance, a matter of reform's "losers" blowing off steam with protest votes. Populism, however, was always more than that. Jan-Werner Müller convincingly argues that populism "is not anything like a codified doctrine but it is a set of distinct claims and has what one might call an inner logic."[4]

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[3]   Ibid.

[4]   Jan-Werner Müller, *What Is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), p. 10.

It is more than what Cas Mudde calls "an illiberal democratic response to undemocratic liberalism."[5]

Populism's key feature is hostility not to elitism but to pluralism. As Müller says, "Populists claim that they and they alone, represent the people." "The claim to "exclusive representation is not an empirical one; it is always distinctly moral."[6] Kaczynski is not representing all Poles but the "true Poles." Almost half of Turkey opposes Erdogan's policies, but he feels sure that he is the only spokesperson for the people because the "true Turks" vote for him. It is populism's exclusionary identity politics that bears out Jowitt's grim vision.

Migration and the Rise of Identity Politics

Of the many crises that Europe faces today, it is the migration crisis that most sharply defines the changing nature of European politics. Many Europeans associate migration with the rising risk of terror attacks, with the Islamization of their societies, and with the overburdening of the welfare state. Worries over migration are behind the popularity of right-wing populism, the victory of Brexit, and the growing East-West divide within the EU that is casting doubt on the idea of "irreversible" European integration.

Migration is about more than influxes of people; it is also about influxes of images, emotions, and arguments. A major force in European politics today is majorities that feel threatened. They fear that foreigners are taking over their countries and endangering their way of life, and they are convinced that this is the result of a conspiracy between cosmopolitan-minded elites and tribal-minded immigrants. The populism of these majorities is not a product of romantic nationalism, as might have been the case a century or more ago. Instead, it is fueled by demographic projections that foreshadow both the shrinking role of Europe in the world and the expected mass movements of people to Europe. It is a kind of populism for which history and precedent have poorly prepared us.

The migration crisis, whatever EU officials in Brussels might say, is not about a "lack of solidarity." Instead, it is about a clash of solidarities—of

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[5] Cas Mudde, "The Problem with Populism," *The Guardian*, February 17, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/feb/17/problem-populism-syriza-podemos-dark-side-europe.

[6] Müller, op. cit., p. 3.

national, ethnic, and religious solidarity chafing against our obligations as human beings. It should be seen not simply as the movement of people from outside Europe to the old continent, or from poor member states of the EU to richer ones, but also as the movement of voters away from the center and the displacement of the border between left and right by the border between internationalists and nativists.

The scandal of central and east Europeans' behavior, at least as seen from the West, is not so much their readiness to build fences at the very places where walls were destroyed only twenty-five years ago; it is rather their claim that "we owe nothing to these people." Publics in the east seem unmoved by the refugees' and migrants' plight, and leaders there have lambasted the EU's decision to redistribute refugees among member states. Prime Minister Robert Fico of Slovakia has said that his country will accept only Christians, citing a lack of mosques in Slovakia. In Poland, Kaczynski has warned that newcomers may bring disease. Hungary's Premier Viktor Orbán has argued that the EU's first duty is to protect its member states' citizens, and called a referendum on whether Hungary should obey the Brussels requirement to accept foreigners. Such votes are no longer exceptional: There are now 34 EU-related referendums under consideration in 18 of the 27 remaining member states.

This regional resentment of refugees may look odd, given that for most of the twentieth century central and east Europeans so often emigrated or took care of immigrants, so it could be expected that they will easily identify with people running from hunger or persecution. Moreover, at least as far as Syrian refugees are concerned, hardly any are to be found. In 2015, only 169 entered Slovakia, and only eight asked to stay. But what remains most striking is how much ethnic and religious identities matter despite almost three decades of European integration.

Central and eastern Europe's position on refugees is no accident. While it represents a local version of the popular revolt against globalization, it also has roots in history, demography, and the twists of post-communist transitions. History matters in this history-wracked region, where tragic experience so often cuts against globalization's rosier promises. More than any other places in Europe, the post-communist countries know not only the advantages but the dark sides of multiculturalism. These states and nations emerged in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. While western Europe's attitudes toward the rest of the world have been shaped by colonialism and its emotional legacy, central and eastern European states were born from the disintegration of empires and the outbursts

of ethnic cleansing that went with it. Before Hitler and Stalin invaded in 1939, Poland was a multicultural society where more than a third of the population was German, Ukrainian, or Jewish. Today, Poland is one of the most ethnically homogeneous societies in the world—98 percent of its people are ethnic Poles. For many of them, a return to ethnic diversity suggests a return to the troubled interwar period. It was the destruction or expulsion of the Jews and Germans that led to the establishment of national middle classes in central and eastern Europe.

Curiously, demographic panic is one of the least discussed factors shaping central and east Europeans' behavior towards migrants and refugees. But it is a critical one. In the region's recent history, nations and states have been known to wither. Over the last quarter-century, about one of every ten Bulgarians has left to live and work abroad. And the leavers, as one would expect, have been disproportionately young. According to UN projections, Bulgaria's population will shrink 27% between now and 2050. Alarm over "ethnic disappearance" can be felt in these small nations. For them, the arrival of migrants signals their exit from history, and the popular argument that an aging Europe needs migrants only strengthens a gathering sense of existential melancholy.

At the end of the day, however, it is central and eastern Europeans' deeply rooted mistrust of the cosmopolitan mindset that stands out most sharply. They have no confidence in those whose hearts are in Paris or London, whose money is in New York or Cyprus, and whose loyalty belongs to Brussels. Being cosmopolitan and at the same time a "good" Bulgarian, Czech, Hungarian, Pole, or Slovak is not in the cards. Was not communism, after all, a form of "internationalism?" For Germans, cosmopolitan attitudes may offer a way to flee the Nazi past; for central and east Europeans, they are reminders of something very different. In western Europe, 1968 was in large part about solidarity with the non-Western world; in central and eastern Europe, it was about national awakening.

Two Faces of 1989

At the core of the populists' claim to legitimacy is a revision of the legacy of 1989. They see 1989 as "a revolution betrayed." In reality, there were two 1989s. One was the "1989" of cosmopolitan intellectuals such as Václav Havel and Adam Michnik, while the other was the "1989" of nationalists such as Kaczynski. For a while, they coexisted peacefully because joining the West and the EU was the best way to guarantee a per-

manent escape from Russia's zone of influence. Yet the tension between cosmopolitanism (as represented by European integration) and nationalism never went away. The Yugoslav wars of the 1990s muted the nationalists for a time, but the paradox of European integration is that it weakened class identities (the very identities on which the west European democratic model had been built) while strengthening the ethnic and religious markers of belonging. For these small states, integration with Europe and "structural adjustment" meant that major economic decisions such as the size of the budget deficit were effectively removed from the arena of electoral competition. What remained was identity politics.

Central and eastern Europe could import Western political institutions, but could not import the social identities that support them. There were social democrats but not strong trade unions, and classical liberals but not much of a real business community. The Cold War sealed the borders between capitalism and communism, but kept the internal class borders inside each system fairly easy to cross, at least compared to what is the case in a traditional society. The post–Cold War world reversed this situation. After 1989, previously impermeable territorial borders became easy to traverse while borders between increasingly unequal social classes became harder to cross.

Until the 1970s, democratization was making societies less unequal. The promise of democracy, after all, was also the promise of egalitarianism. In countries where millions could vote in competitive elections, it was assumed that those at the top would need the electoral support of the have-nots. Western Europe's post-1945 social democratic compromise reflected a calculated effort by the "haves" to make capitalism legitimate in the eyes of mass electorates. Central and eastern Europe's failure to import Western-style social identities after the Cold War also reminds us that these identities were already on the decline in post–Cold War western Europe. The welfare state and liberal democracy in western Europe were not simply shaped by the Cold War; in an important sense, they were pre-conditioned by it.

What we are seeing now in Europe both east and west is a shift away from class-based political identities and an erosion of the consensus built around such identities. The 2017 Austrian presidential election and the Brexit referendum revealed alarming gaps between the cities and the countryside, between the more and less educated, between the rich and the poor, and also between women and men (far-right populism's supporters tend to be found mainly among the latter). The migration of blue-collar

workers from the moderate left to the extreme right is one of the major trends in European politics today. Economic protectionism and cultural protectionism have joined hands. The internationalist-minded working class is no more, having faded along with Marxism.

It is not facts or rational arguments that shape political identities. Democracy is supposed to be government by argument. Yet in Poland, Law and Justice has profited greatly at the polls from conspiracy theories about the April 2010 Smolensk air crash. Belief in these theories—and not age, income, or education—is the strongest predictor of whether someone backs Kaczynski's party.

The belief that President Lech Kaczynski (Jaroslaw's twin brother) was assassinated when his plane went down in Russia has helped to consolidate a certain "we." This is the "we" that refuses to accept official lies, that knows how the world really works, that is ready to stand for Poland. The theory of the Smolensk conspiracy mined a vein of deep distrust that Poles harbor regarding any official version of events, and it fit with their self-image as victims of history. Law and Justice supporters were not ready to accept Donald Tusk's claim that Poland is now a normal European country, run by rules and not by shadowy puppet masters. It should come as no surprise that the new Polish government does not believe in accidents. In its view, all of its critics are connected with one another, and they are all working together to undermine Poland's sovereignty. Trust, in this mindset, must not extend beyond some inner circle (of, say, the ruling party). "Independent" institutions such as courts, the media, or the central bank cannot be trusted because their independence is an illusion: Either "we" control them, or our enemies do.

For populists, the separation of powers is a piece of elite trickery, a devious mechanism for confusing responsibility. People who refuse to place trust still want to place blame. The paradox of the current populist turn is that while many voters think making the executive all-powerful is the only way to make it accountable, the likelier reality is that the undermining of all independent institutions will open the road to an even greater lack of accountability.

The Polish case poses the question why we should expect people given the right to elect their own government to choose shielding minorities over empowering the majority. The sobering truth is that liberal democracy is an unlikely development: Property rights have the rich to champion them and voting rights have the support of the many, but respect for civil

rights and liberties—including those of minorities who may be unpopular—is what makes *liberal* democracy truly liberal, and it is more a matter of happy accident than we might like to think. Only in very rare cases do the powerful feel a need not just to guard their own property but also to protect the rights of powerless minorities. Similarly, it is rare for a majority to think of itself as a possible future minority and thus be willing to embrace constitutional provisions that limit the majoritarian concentration of power.

The real appeal of liberal democracy is that losers need not fear losing too much. Electoral defeat means having to regroup and plan for the next contest, not having to flee into exile or go underground while all one's possessions are seized. The little remarked downside of this is that to winners, liberal democracy denies full and final victory. In pre-democratic times—meaning the vast bulk of human history—disputes were not settled by peaceful debates and orderly handovers of power. Instead, force ruled. The victorious invaders or the winning parties in a civil war had their vanquished foes at their mercy, free to do with them as they liked. Under liberal democracy, the "conqueror" gets no such satisfaction.

So perhaps we should be asking not why liberal democracy is in trouble in central and eastern Europe today, but rather why it has done so well at the task of consolidation over the last two decades. Here we must note that this success was rooted in a certain political identity that was doomed to disappear. This was the identity of the post-communist voter, haunted by shame at having been a part (even if a small one) of the old, unfree regime, but also inspired by the desire to find a place in the new order of freedom and democracy. Having seen real state repression, this voter was ready to "think like a minority" even when in the majority. Communism's role in shaping the self-restraint of this voter was communism's unintentional gift to the cause of liberal-democratic consolidation.

The defining characteristic of the populist moment in central and eastern Europe is the disappearance of this ex-communist identity and the fading of communism as the central reference point. The migration crisis made it clear that other identities had taken center stage.

Migration: The Twenty-First Century Revolution

A decade ago, the Hungarian philosopher and former dissident Gáspár Miklós Tamás observed that the Enlightenment, in which the idea of the

EU is intellectually rooted, demands universal citizenship.[7] But for meaningful citizenship to be available to all, one of two things has to happen: Either poor and dysfunctional countries must become places in which it is worthwhile to be a citizen, or Europe must open its borders to everybody. Neither is going to happen anytime soon, if ever. In a world of vast inequalities and open borders, migration becomes the new form of revolution.

People no longer dream of the future. Instead, they dream of other places. In this connected world, migration—unlike the utopias sold by twentieth-century demagogues—genuinely offers instant and radical change. It requires no ideology, no leader, and no political movement. It requires no change of government, only a change of geography. The absence of collective dreams makes migration the natural choice of the new radical. To change your life you do not need a political party, you only need a boat. With social inequality rising and social mobility stagnating in many countries around the world, it is easier to cross national borders than it is to cross class barriers.

In a world where migration to Europe is the new form of revolution, European democracy easily turns counterrevolutionary. The failure or unwillingness of governments to control migration has come to symbolize the ordinary citizen's loss of power.

Migration also dramatically changes the lives of host communities. The media are full of stories about people who have found themselves in a totally foreign world, not because they moved but because others moved to them. Left-wing intellectuals in the West like to talk passionately about the right to preserve one's way of life when the subject is some poor indigenous community in India or Latin America, but what about middle-class communities closer to home? Have they such a right? If not, why not? Can democracy exist if the distinction between citizens and non-citizens is effectively abolished?

History teaches us that liberal democracy fares poorly in times of identity-building and the redrawing of borders. Democracy is a mechanism of inclusion but also of exclusion, and counter-revolutionary democracy is not an oxymoron.

The unraveling of the liberal order renders problematic the European project of trying to extend democracy beyond the nation-state. Elections

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7 Gáspár Miklós Tamás, "What is Post-Fascism?" September 14, 2001, https://www.open-democracy.net/people-newright/article_306.jsp.

can help to manage the inner tensions of an existing political community, but can they create a new one? The process of European integration has put into question some of the political communities defined by European nation-states, but it has failed to bring into being a European *demos*. Leaders such as Orbán and Kaczynski offer illiberal democracy—majoritarian regimes in which the majority has turned the state into its own private possession—as an answer to the competitive pressure of a world where popular will is the only source of political legitimacy and global markets are the only source of economic growth. One might argue that the rise of such majoritarian (and hence illiberal) regimes is an inevitable result of the backlash against globalization. And one may question how stable these regimes will prove to be. But one thing is clear: the European project as we know it cannot long survive in an environment dominated by populist governments. The critical question, then, is who has more staying power, the EU or these regimes?