

# The End of Europe: Dictators, Demagogues, and the Coming Dark Age

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James Kirchick

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Kirchick presents a dark picture of contemporary Europe in his ambitious and eye-checking book *„The End of Europe: Dictators, Demagogues, and the Coming Dark Age“*. He argues that we are witnessing the end of Europe as a place which we have granted peace, prosperity and democracy, claiming that “Europe today is breaking apart; it is increasingly undemocratic, economically stagnant, threatened by extremists of all stripes from the illiberal left to the authoritarian right, and slowly heading down the once unfathomable path to war” (pp. 1-2). Kirchick provides examples that Europe is in its deepest crisis since World War II. The book includes a vivid tour of eight geographic areas divided in thematic chapters that analyze recent socio-political trends in seven countries Russia, Hungary, Germany, France, the UK, Greece and Ukraine.

Providing the readers with a detailed account of 20<sup>th</sup> century European history, Kirchick explores the reasons that brought the continent to the brink of a deep and serious crisis, including anti-Semitism, nationalism, rise of separatist and independence movements, Brexit, lack of solidarity, the imbalances created by the single currency, migration, refugees, right-wing populism, Ukraine as “the new West Berlin”, etc. He believes that any of these issues can trigger dissolution of the European Union (EU). All the issues together represent a crisis of liberalism and a serious threat that could tear the European postwar consensus apart. Reading the Kirchick’s *End of Europe* a reader might think that Europe is back in the 1930s and 1940s. However, unlike the Europe of the 1930s and 1940s, today’s Europe has to fight against fascism; it has far-wing political parties instead of authoritarian Stalinist populism; and instead of anti-Semitism, it has a trend of racism and xenophobia. In addition, Europe is becoming more Islamophobic, and certain

European countries even passed discriminatory laws against Muslims. Kirchick documented about the challenges about immigration, identity, and Islam, by saying that all of these issues are dismissed by European politicians and “motivated solely by racism and anti-Islamic hysteria” (p. 126). This issue is a growing threat in Europe, and if Europe were to come to an end it would probably become worse.

Despite several decades of promotion of democracy, rule of law and intricate institution building, the EU often lacks internal consensus. The migrant crisis, economic inequality, sense of lost national identity, as well as the feeling that the EU bureaucrats control all the governments of the EU member states helped the far-right political parties to garner unprecedented support. In many EU countries, the far-wing expanded their electoral base, and consequently the trend of voting for far-wing parties is increasing across the continent. The last election results in many of the EU countries, such as Hungary, Czech Republic, Austria, Greece, the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, and Italy illustrate this trend. As a result, the economic and political institutions established after World War II in order to foster the EU integration are now losing support. This brought the EU into a crisis of legitimacy, undermining the fact that the retreat to nation-states will only benefit the far-wing parties.

Even though Kirchick writes about the above-mentioned issues, the ‘triumph of the anti-European project’ and agreement among far-right political parties and organizations in Europe could have been elaborated in more detail. These parties condemned many of the EU policies and they often work together against the main values and norms of the EU, while their own policies sometimes contradict even the anti-fascist tradition of the EU. It would provide readers with a valuable insight, if Kirchick dedicated more room to the cooperation of the far-right political parties in Europe. One of the questions is also whether any form of cooperation among them would exist in the ‘post-EU era’, as well as whether the far-wing political parties will turn their countries against each other?

As already explained, the EU dissolution becomes increasingly possible and Kirchick sees the EU as one of the most ambitious political projects in history that is slowly

crumbling. The British decision to leave the EU is the beginning of the EU disintegration. He also writes about the threat posed by Russian expansion that is not thousands of miles away but at the doorstep of the EU. A credible threat of force could stop Putin, but NATO does not seem to be determined enough to contend Russia, not just in Ukraine but also in Georgia and the Baltic states. NATO deployed multinational battalions in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, but it still needs to develop a mechanism to diminish the Russian influence in the EU. An additional pressure on NATO came with the election of Donald Trump who claimed that NATO is an 'obsolete' organization. However, several weeks ago, he supported NATO and prioritized security of the EU.

Kirchick's analysis also includes the Hungarian political spectrum that reoriented its "traditionally Atlanticist and pro-European foreign policy towards Russia and other authoritarian regimes" (p. 56-57). Also, Viktor Orbán brought 'illiberal democracy' in Hungary and the anti-Soros project might be a good example to illustrate it. Since he came to power in 2010, Orbán was constantly expanding ties with Moscow. In addition, *End of Europe* explores the Russian and EU influence in countries like Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine and Hungary. The Eastern Europe became a contested space between Russia and the EU. Reading the *End of Europe*, as already mentioned, a reader might think about Ukraine as the "the new West Berlin", for which Kirchick writes "the West's desire to safeguard the international system on which Europe's existence as a democratic community depends is stronger than Russia's desire to replace that system with one where might makes right, the rules-based liberal order will collapse" (p. 222). He also documented the sympathy by some Germany's business elite and left to Russia. Moreover, Kirchick analyzes Spain and Greece, two indebted countries suffering from unemployment that believe that the big EU powers, especially Germany, have too much control over them. However, without the Union, smaller and weaker countries would be probably marginalized in the European politics.

Eventually, Kirchick explains that "there are many arguments in favor of the European integration, perhaps the strongest is that the alternative is so much worse" (p. 226). There might be arguments that people of Europe are too different; Greeks have nothing in common with Portuguese, but the fact is that

nobody has died in wars between two EU member states. The EU proved to be a valid example that former enemies can unify and work together towards common prosperity. The collapse of the EU would certainly mean nothing less than a new 'dark age', a catastrophic scenario for Europe. He warns us about the 'existential crisis' of the EU. Although many EU member states seem to be unhappy with the EU, there is still enough room for the EU to solve its issues. It is clear that the EU must redefine itself just like it did in the past with people like Havel, Kohl, Thatcher, and Walesa.

Lastly, *End of Europe* is an interesting read, and I highly recommend it to all students of geopolitics and EU studies. It is an impressive work on the EU challenges. Although the EU and NATO are not the same, the dissolution of the EU would undoubtedly affect the reliability of NATO.

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