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PANDEMOCRATISM AND THE COLLAPSE OF WESTERN VALUES

“Russia, an aging tyranny, seeks to destroy Ukraine, a defiant democracy. A Ukrainian victory would confirm the principle of self-rule, allow the integration of Europe to proceed, and empower people of goodwill to return reinvigorated to other global challenges. A Russian victory, by contrast, would extend genocidal policies in Ukraine, subordinate Europeans, and render any vision of a geopolitical European Union obsolete. Should Russia continue its illegal blockade of the Black Sea, it could starve Africans and Asians, who depend on Ukrainian grain, precipitating a durable international crisis that will make it all but impossible to deal with common threats such as climate change. A Russian victory would strengthen fascists and other tyrants, as well as nihilists who see politics as nothing more than a spectacle designed by oligarchs to distract ordinary citizens from the destruction of the world. This war, in other words, is about establishing principles for the twenty-first century. It is about policies of mass death and about the meaning of life in politics. It is about the possibility of a democratic future.”

This is how Timothy Snyder, one of the most prominent academic representatives of the Western establishment, describes what’s at stake in the war in Ukraine, in the September 2022 issue of the American journal *Foreign Affairs*. Defense of “European values” against barbarism, democracy against dictatorship, heroic virtues against war crimes. Such is the narrative that has been served up to us, day after day, by Western leaders and media, since February 24, with a tone and a unanimity that broaches no dissent.

Are we really sure that this vision corresponds to reality and that this war corresponds to a struggle between the good guys and the bad guys? And what are these famous values that we hear so much about, but which we are careful not to define and, above all, to put to the test in our own behavior? For what is the value of a “value” that has been rendered useless because it has been adulterated or devalued by attitudes that are even more criminal than those of which the adversary is accused? These questions are not insignificant because, seen from the rest of the world, Europe is showing that it has failed to share its internal model – cooperation between member nations on an egalitarian basis of mutual respect – with the other nations of the world and that it is losing its honor and its credit with them.

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An inventory is necessary.

The first problematic observation is that the founding value of Europe since 1945, the one that was proclaimed for seven decades to justify the creation and success of the European Union – peace between nations – has totally disappeared from official and media discourse since last April.

It is true that peace had already suffered a serious setback in the 1990s, during the Yugoslav war, when Germany’s premature recognition of the independence of Slovenia and Croatia set off a firestorm; and in 1999 the German and NATO chiefs concocted the false Operation Horseshoe and staged the Raçak massacre, allegedly planned by the Serbs to liquidate the Kosovars, and thus justifying the bombing of a European state for 78 days at the cost of dozens of deaths and billions of damages. This ideal of peace was also undermined by the gradual transformation of NATO into an increasingly aggressive alliance after the demise of the Soviet Union, as evidenced by the aforementioned attacks on Serbia, Iraq, Libya, Syria and Afghanistan, most of them committed in violation of international law. Not to mention the continuous bombing of the civilian population of Gaza or the deportation of the inhabitants of the Chagos Islands by the British to install a military base (Diego Garcia), recently condemned by the International Court of Justice.

Despite these deviations, peace, officially at least, remained a foundation for action and a claimed “value” of Europe and the West. It was in the name of preserving peace that President Sarkozy rushed to Moscow in the summer of 2008 to meet with President Putin after the failure of the war in Georgia, unleashed by Saakashvili.

It was also in the name of peace that Europe, led by France and Germany, negotiated and guaranteed the Minsk Agreements that followed the overthrow of the Ukrainian government and the uprising in Ukraine’s Eastern provinces after the February 2014 riots and the joining of Crimea to Russia. There had even been hope that peace would be possible between Ukraine and Russia in late March of this year, until the media coverage of Bucha and the visit of Boris Johnson in early April put an end to any hint of negotiations on the Western side.

Since then, peace has disappeared from the European horizon. Moreover, ministers and the media, led by the President of the European Commission, are constantly calling for more war, more arms deliveries, more sanctions, more financial support, more energy austerity, stigmatizing the few voices that dare to call for de-escalation and diplomacy – as traitors. This wide gap between proclaimed values and actual behavior undermines the entire Western discourse on values.

In the same vein, how are we to interpret the discourse of European leaders and media, who have no words harsh enough to castigate the nationalism of Serbia, Russia, Hungary, Turkey, China (vis-à-vis Taiwan), the chauvinism of the so-called “far-right” parties in France, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria and elsewhere, as well as the separatism of the Catalans, of the Donbass and Crimean republics – but who then have every possible consideration for the secession of Kosovo, the independence of Taiwan, the occupation of the Golan Heights and the colonization of the West Bank, which are not recognized by international law, and for the “righteous struggle” of the Ukrainian ultra-nationalist battalions, which has been condemned by the United Nations in the resolutions against Nazism? How can one praise the nationalism of some by providing them with arms, financial support and political recognition, while condemning the nationalism of others, who, unlike the former, have not started any war? What is a value that deserves all respect, even when it is stained with blood, but is given no respect when it is expressed peacefully through the ballot box?

The second value defended by the West is democracy. As for peace, we want to applaud. But on closer inspection one has doubts. How can one justify the unconditional support to a country, Ukraine, under the pretext of democracy, when this same country has banned all opposition parties (last March), closed all non-governmental information channels (in 2021 and 2022), banned all opposition parties (last March), closed all non-governmental news channels (in 2021 and 2022), banned minority languages (and even majority languages, since Russian is spoken by two thirds of the population), has had dozens of journalists, political opponents and even negotiators murdered by its security services, and allowed rampant corruption to develop (122nd position in the world corruption ranking, not far from Russia), sold off 17 million hectares of good agricultural land to three American multinationals despite popular opposition, forcibly enlisted the male population in its army, executed prisoners of war, used its own civilian population as human shields (see the Amnesty report), filled its army and its administration with notorious neo-Nazi sympathizers – to name but a few of the facts that have been acknowledged by the dominant media? Is this really the model of democracy we want to defend?

And what about our own appetite for democracy when US supported or planned so many violent *coups d'état* and bloody *regime changes*, from Iran's Mossadegh and Guatemala in 1953 and 1954 to Maidan in 2014, when the West rushes to Baku to cajole the dynast Aliyev who keeps attacking Armenia, to Saudi Arabia to coax Prince MBS who had the Yemen broken into pieces, to Qatar to smile at the emir, or to Cameroon to make friends with President Biya who has been in power for 40 years – for the sole aim of getting a little gas or oil? All this to boycott Vladimir Putin, who has only been president for 18 years and who is ready to deliver us less polluting gas and oil for cheap?

Similarly, there are no words harsh enough to denounce Russia's interference in the affairs of democratic countries, as was the case throughout Donald Trump's term and during the 2017 French elections. But what is the response when two American special prosecutors (Messrs. Robert Mueller and John Durham) establish the opposite? Nothing! On the contrary, we enthusiastically endorse our interference

in the political functioning of third countries, as was the case in Venezuela in 2019 with the support for the self-proclaimed president Juan Guaido, with the putsch against Bolivian president Evo Morales and with all the color-revolutions designed to overthrow legitimate governments like the one in February 2014 in Ukraine.

Australian journalist and filmmaker John Pilger recounts that during his eighty-three years of life the United States government has succeeded in or attempted to overthrow fifty foreign governments, most of them democratic; that it has interfered in the elections of thirty countries; that it has waged war or dropped bombs on thirty countries, most of them poor and defenseless; that it has fought liberation movements in twenty countries and tried to assassinate the leaders of fifty nations – all this at the cost of carnage, massacres and destruction beyond reckoning. A fine example of democracy and respect for the people!

And finally, what are we to think of our own democratic functioning when we support a war without having consulted the citizens, when we scuttle neutrality without debate, as is the case of Switzerland, when we are engaged in warmongering against the opinion of the people? Let us recall in this regard the poll conducted in Germany and published on August 30 by the magazine *Stern*, to the absolute indifference of the Western media, because it is contrary to the dominant doxa: 77% of Germans are in favor of peace negotiations in Ukraine (as opposed to 17% who believe that nothing should be done); 87% believe that it is necessary to talk to Putin (as opposed to 11%); 62% that heavy weapons should not be delivered to Ukraine (as opposed to 32%). Another survey in Austria gave more or less the same results. These are popular opinions that we should not listen to.

The third category of values we are supposed to defend in Ukraine is human rights. Western ideologists claim that Russia committed a crime of aggression, the worst of all crimes according to the Nuremberg Tribunal, by launching its “special operation” against Ukraine. This is possible. But the Russians, in the same fashion as the Western accusations about the Uyghurs in China, counter that they have only responded to the crime of “genocide”, perpetrated by Ukrainian forces since 2014 in the Donbass, at the cost of 14,000 deaths, attested by the UN. Ditto for violations of humanitarian law, the taking of civilians as hostages, the execution of prisoners. According to estimates in August, the UN put civilian casualties at 5587 dead and 7890 wounded since February. That's 6,000 dead and 8,000 wounded civilians too many, but it's a far cry from the widespread massacre and hundreds of thousands of civilians killed by NATO troops and pro-Western armies in Iraq, Afghanistan or Yemen.

Crimes against crimes, accusations against accusations. We are no further ahead if we look at things from a little distance. And in any case, if we are honest, we have to admit that we do not know enough at the moment and that, if we wanted to judge the supposed aggressor for his crimes, we would have to start with ourselves.

In the same way, the West, and Europe in particular, likes to present itself as a model of freedom of expression, compared to a Russia that would shamelessly flout them. But how to explain then that our sycophantic media trample all the criteria of objective information by unanimously taking sides with Ukraine, without listening to the other party?

Altera pars audiatur say journalism manuals. Almost every day, you can hear three experts debating on TV and radio channels, all of them viscerally anti-Russian. Where is the famous pluralism of the press? The diversity of opinion? And why were the Russian media *RT* and *Sputnik* banned from the EU? Isn't this a crass attack on freedom of expression, even when it is justified under the pretext of countering "Russian propaganda"? Since when is censorship democratic and representative of freedom of expression? And how can we justify the despicable treatment inflicted on Julian Assange, Edward Snowden or Chelsea Manning, because they denounced the turpitude of the NSA, the American crimes in Iraq, or the compromises of Hillary Clinton and the Biden son?

The last point, for a list that could be lengthened – is the flagrant violation of the right to private property, with the confiscation of the assets of the Russian Central Bank, the private assets of the oligarchs, and the sequestrating of billions of Afghan and Venezuelan assets by the American and British central banks?

The fourth and final category of values betrayed by Western practices is ecology and the fight against climate change. Since the Rio Summit in 1992, the West has posed itself, not without difficulty and with much internal debate, as the champion of the fight for the "preservation of the planet" and the development of green technologies by declaring war on CO2 emissions. In 2019, its political and media elites were swooning over Greta Thunberg and the youth-strikes, while at the same time calling on the countries of the South, which account for almost nothing of greenhouse gas emissions, to join the pack in exchange for huge investments, which the manipulative President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, estimated at hundreds of billions of dollars.

Three years and six months of war in Ukraine later, what has happened? Nothing but an abandonment of all the promises made and the betrayal of the countries of the South. In the name of the fight for Ukraine and the "bringing of the Russian economy to its knees," Europe has begun to import, at great expense and with great quantities of oil tankers and polluting bulk carriers, gas and shale oil that were once reviled. Coal-fired power plants are being reopened in Germany and Poland with the blessing of environmental ministers who would have cried scandal only 12 months ago. And soon it will be the turn of nuclear power plants.

All over Europe, the Greens, who were once at the forefront of the anti-nuclear and pacifist struggle, have become leaders of the most warmongering and anti-environmental policies, under the pretext that this would be temporary and that it would not compromise the climate objectives! Like the socialists who voted for military credits in 1914, today's Greens have put on the green-gray uniform to adhere to the most virulent militarism and convert to the benefits of fossil fuels certified as "democratic" even though they are bought in Qatar, Saudi Arabia or Azerbaijan. Look for the error!

As for the countries of the South, they feel more cheated than ever. At the last Euro-African summit on climate change held in Rotterdam on September 5, not a single European head of state made the trip, with the exception of the Dutch host! This is a slap in the face that Africans will not soon forget, as the continent has only contributed 3% of

historical greenhouse gas emissions and was promised \$100 billion per year in aid from 2020. The European heads of state were too busy fine-tuning the latest sanctions against Russian natural gas.

The preceding catalogue of small and large violations of the values professed by the West in the context of the war in Ukraine is symptomatic not only of the hypocrisy of the West – which is nothing new – but of the collapse of the moral principles and exemplary behavior which it used to pride itself on, in order to justify its domination over the rest of the world. It was in the name of these values that it fought and won the Cold War against the Soviet adversary. The great diplomat and Cold War theorist George Kennan had already written in 1951 that "...the most important influence that the United States can bring to bear upon internal developments in Russia will continue to be the influence of example: the influence of what it is, and not only what it is to others but what it is to itself... Any message we may try to bring to others will be effective only if it is in accord with what we are to ourselves, and if this is something sufficiently impressive to compel the respect and confidence of a world which, despite all its material difficulties, is still more ready to recognize and respect spiritual distinction than material opulence."

We in the West have to admit that we are not on this path. Fed on propaganda, to the point of indigestion, Europe is convinced that it still embodies a moral ideal and that it can be satisfied with declaiming the moral clichés of the Cold War – Good against Evil, democracy against dictatorship – without having to apply them. Whatever the outcome of this conflict, whatever the responsibilities of each party, it is clear that it is only deceiving itself, and that this war, waged in the name of morality through the Ukrainians, is only the mask of a desire for universal predation and world hegemony that has never been satisfied and that no longer deludes – nor amuses – the other six billion inhabitants of the planet.

In conclusion, we can say that the West is practicing what I call *pandemocratism*, i. e., a totalitarian vision, a weaponization of democracy which is used for extending the imperial hegemony of the West onto the world. *Pandemocratism* has nothing to see with democracy but everything to do with its instrumentalization in favor of geopolitical purposes. It functions on the same patterns as *pangermanism* 125 years ago, when German nationalists pretend to unify all the German speaking people of Europe and were launching crusades for that. The so-called "summits of democracies" and crusades "for Western values" are playing the same game nowadays.

That's an extension of the concept of *democratism* as it has been developed by Richard Sakwa: "Democratism does not preclude support for democracy, but too often democracy promotion and support for indigenous democracy advocacy groups become part of broader regime change agendas. When democracy becomes an ideology and an instrument in great power competition, then it becomes democratism. The instrumentalization of democracy not only undermines diplomacy but works to delegitimize democracy itself. Democratism inevitably gives rise to double standards, the selective applications of ostensibly universal principles to favor allies while inflicting punitive measures on adversaries. It also imposes a rank order on

states and serves to delegitimize some while elevating others.”¹

Pandemocratism pretends to favor democracy at the national states level but curiously prohibits it at the supranational level, imposing a dictatorial model of world gov-

ernance under the guise of democracy. In that sense, that’s the exact opposite of the multipolar world, which proposes a supranational democratic governance of the planet as a necessary condition for the freedom and sovereignty of peoples and nations.

¹ See: *Саква Р.* Опасности демократизма // *Полис. Политические исследования.* 2023. № 2. С. 88–102. URL: <https://www.politstudies.ru/files/File/2023/2/Polis-2023-2-Sakwa.pdf> (accessed: 04.05.2023).