Is Europe Failing?

On Imitation and Its Discontents

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As the rumor has it, once the legendary actor Gary Grant arrived at a Hollywood charity function and confessed to the dragon at the welcome desk that he had forgotten his ticket. Without looking up, she said, "You don't have a ticket, you can't go in." "I understand but . . . I'm Cary Grant." The grim lady looked up at him and made her final verdict, "You don't look like Cary Grant." "Nobody does"- responded Grant. And he was absolutely right.

The way Gary Grant in life does not look like Gary Grant on screen, no political system is in reality alike the idealized image of people who were longing for it. So, is the current crisis of the European Union suffers a normal crisis fueled by the discrepancy between citizens' idea of the EU and the reality of the Union or do we experience a much more fundamental challenge threatening the very fundamentals of the European project? In other words, are Europeans disappointed with the way the European Union functions/dysfunctions or are they disappointed with the project of post-national liberal Europe itself?

It is not easy to answer these questions. Three different versions of Europe constitute the one that we know today: the postwar Europe after 1945, the post-1968 Europe of human rights, and then the united Europe that emerged after the end of the Cold War. And all three Europes are now cast into doubt.

Take postwar Europe, which is the original foundation of the European project. This is the Europe that remembers the horrors and destruction of World War II, the Europe that once lived in constant fear of, and determination to prevent the next war — a nuclear one — which would be the last war. The blind spots of postwar Europe first came into view in the 1990s, when Yugoslavia descended into chaos, despite the prevalent belief that a major war was no longer possible on the continent.

Postwar Europe is failing today because, for the younger generations, World War II is ancient history. For them the past doesn't matter anymore to the present. At best, Europe's younger generations have passively absorbed the lessons of history while failing to think historically.

Two other factors undermine the cementing power of the memories of WWII as a foundation of today's European Union. First, the generation of survivors is already gone, and second, for most of the refugees and migrants who come to European societies from outside

the continent, World War II is not their war. When referring to "war," Syrian refugees mean the destruction of Aleppo and not the destruction of Warsaw or Dresden.

But postwar Europe is also failing because the majority of Europeans continue to take peace for granted while the world is turning into a dangerous place and the United States can no longer be assumed to be interested in protecting Europe in the same way it was interested in the days of the Cold war. Brussels' insistence that what matters is soft power while military might is obsolete is starting to ring false even to those making the claim in the context of Russia's annexation of Crimea and the escalation of the global arms race. In that way, Europe's postwar thinking has become its vulnerability, rather than an advantage. It is not any more that Americans are from Mars and the Europeans are from Venus. Postwar Europe today does no longer mean Europe as a peaceful power, it means a Europe that is unable to defend itself.

But there's another Europe that is failing: Europe as a post-1968 project — the Europe of human rights and particularly the Europe of minority rights. The powerful impact of 1968 on the European mind is defined by the widely drawn conclusion, amid that year's unrest and revolutions, that the state is something that defends citizens but also threatens them. The incredible achievement of the 68ers was that they made Europeans perceive the state with the eyes of the most vulnerable and persecuted groups in their societies. This revolutionary turn in the way Europeans felt about the world and their role in it was largely the result of the process of decolonization but also of the global expansion of the democratic imagination. If post-1968 Europe would be defined by one word, it is inclusion.

But this post-1968 Europe is also in question today. The dramatic demographic and social changes that transformed European societies in recent decades threatened majorities — those who have everything and who therefore fear everything, who make up the major force in European politics. Threatened majorities now express a genuine fear that they are becoming the losers of globalization and particularly the losers of the intensified movement of people that accompanied it. The defining characteristic of the politics of threatened majorities is that when they vote, they do it imagining a future where they will be a minority group in their own countries, where their culture and lifestyles will henceforth be endangered. It would be a major political mistake if liberals simply ignore or ridicule these fears. In democratic politics, perceptions are the only reality that matters. Democratic institutions are both inclusionary and exclusionary in their nature. And many of the political movements that are gaining popularity today are very much about the rights of the majorities and particularly their cultural rights. Majorities insist that they have the right to decide who belongs to the political community and to protect their own majoritarian culture. In this regard, the 2015 immigration crisis was a turning point in the way European publics viewed globalization. It marked both the end of post-1968 Europe and opened the cracks in a certain idea of post-1989 Europe, as we are witnessing a once unifying consensus falling apart. It is symptomatic that while surveys indicate that members of the younger generation across Europe are much more tolerant when it comes to the rights of sexual minorities, there is no significant difference between generations when it comes to the perception of non-European migrants as a threat. It is also indicative that while people with higher education tend to be more tolerant when it comes to religious, cultural or sexual

differences, these same people are the least tolerant towards people who do not share their political views.

The refugee crisis of 2015 in a sense was Europe's 9/11. In the way 9/11 pushed Americans to change the lens through which they see the world America has made, the migration crisis forced Europeans to question some of the critical assumptions of their previous attitudes toward globalization.

The migration crisis also led to questioning of the reality of a unified post-1989 Europe, not simply because Europe's west and east took very different positions when it comes to what they owe other people in the context of the refugee crisis, but because it revealed the existence of two very different Europes when it comes to ethnic and cultural diversity, and questions of migration. One irony of history is that, while in the beginning of 20th century Central and Eastern Europe was the most diverse part of the continent, now it is extremely ethnically homogeneous. Meanwhile, while today's Western Europe is preoccupied by questions about how to integrate the growing number of foreigners living in their countries, many of them coming from culturally very different societies, Central Europeans are preoccupied with the challenge of reversing the trend of young Central Europeans leaving for life in the West. While the West struggles to deal with diversity, the East struggles to deal with depopulation.

The massive flow of population out of Central and Eastern Europe in the post-Cold War period, especially because so many young people were the ones voting with their feet, had profound economic, political and psychological consequences for the emerging East-West divide in the EU. When a doctor leaves the country, she takes with her all the money that the state has invested in her education and deprives her country of her talent and ambition. The money that she would eventually send back to her family could not possibly compensate for the loss of her continued participation in the life of her native country. The exodus of young and well-educated people has also seriously, perhaps fatally, damaged the chances of liberal parties to perform better in elections. Youth exit also explains why, in many countries in the region, you can see beautiful EU-funded playgrounds for kids but no kids to play in them. It is telling that liberal parties perform best among voters who cast their ballots abroad. In a country where the majority of young people want to leave, the very fact that you have remained, regardless of how well you are doing, makes you feel like something of a loser. [1]

This fear of depopulation is seldom openly voiced. Instead it is expressed indirectly in the nonsensical claim that invading migrants from Africa and the Middle East pose an existential threat to the existence of the nations of the region. But in reality it is the combination of the impact of out migration and the fear of demographic decline that best explains the illiberal turn in post-communist Europe. According to UN projections, Bulgaria's population will shrink by 27 percent between now and 2040. Almost one-fifth of the territory of the country

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[1]   In the period 1989-2017, Latvia hemorrhaged 27 percent of its population, Lithuania 22.50 percent, Bulgaria almost 21 percent. Two million East Germans, or almost 14 percent of the country's pre-1989 inhabitants, went to West Germany in search of work and a better life. 3.4 million Romanians, vast majority of them younger than 40 left the country only after the country joined the EU in 2007. The combination of an aging population, low birth rates and an unending stream of out-migration is the unspoken source of demographic panic in Central and Eastern Europe.

is predicted to become "demographic dessert". And more Central and Eastern Europeans left their countries for Western Europe as a result of the 2008-2009 crises than all the refugees that came there as the result of the war in Syria. In a world of open borders where European cultures are in constant dialogue and where the new media environment permits citizens to live abroad without leaving their national information space, the threat that Central and Eastern Europeans face is a similar to the one that GDR faced before the Berlin Wall was erected. It is the danger that working-age citizens will evacuate their homelands to pursue lives in the West, particularly if we keep in mind that businesses in countries such as Germany are desperately seeking workers while Europeans in general are increasingly reluctant to allow non-Europeans to settle in their countries. Panic in the face of a nonexistent immigrant invasion of Central and Eastern Europe should be understood as a distorted echo of a more realistic underlying fear that huge swaths of one's own population, including the most talented youth will leave the country and remain permanently abroad. The extent of post-1989 out-migration in Eastern and Central Europe explains the deeply hostile reaction across the region to the refugee crisis of 2015-2016 and the emergence of the new East-West divide that tears up the EU.

Post-1989 European Union as the End of History

When the Cold War ended, Europe was a stage set up for the performance of George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion, an optimistic and didactic play where a professor of phonetics over a very short period of time succeeds in teaching a poor flower girl to speak like the Queen, only for the transfigured girl to insist that she henceforth be treated accordingly. But with the passing of time while we were busy enjoying the transformative power of imitation and celebrating the success of the East to integrate in the West we suddenly realized that instead of watching the performance of Pygmalion we somehow ended up attending a theatrical version of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, a pessimistic and didactic novel about a man who decided to play God by assembling replicas of human body parts into a humanoid creature. The defective replicant, perhaps inevitably, felt doomed to loneliness, invisibility and rejection. And envying the unattainable happiness of its creator, it turned violently against the latter's friends and family, laying their world to waste and leaving only remorse and heartbreak as legacies of a misguided experiment in human self-duplication.

So, the question is, why did the attempt to help seemingly compliant countries reorganize their societies along Western lines result in a shocking rejection of liberal-democracy's most basic principles in the West as well as the East? Why did exporting and importing Western models fuel resentment and the rise of political movements organized around virulent hatred of "inner enemies"? Why did Eastern imitators of Western institutions feel like impostors? Why did an inspiring tale of Pygmalion turn into an unnerving story of Frankenstein?

It has been three decades since Fukuyama turned the foreign policy world on its head with his claim that Western-style liberal democracy had become the ultimate norm and form of human existence. Today, Thomas Bagger, one of Germany's most respected policy intellectuals, looks back, like the owl of Minerva, on an intellectual framework that is now

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universally regarded as dead and buried. He argues, interestingly, that the Europeans rather than Americans were the true believers in the end-of-history illusion. For the same reason, the Europeans and particularly the Germans have turned out to be those most vulnerable to the ongoing collapse of the liberal order.

What fascinated Europeans and especially Germans about the end-of-history paradigm, Bagger claims, was that it liberated them from both the burdens of the past and the uncertainties of the future. After a brutal century during which it had been on the wrong side of history not to mention basic human decency, Germany, according to Fukuyama's reading of 1989, was finally on the right side. What for decades had looked impossible, even unthinkable, suddenly seemed to be not only achievable but inevitable. The observable transformation of Central and Eastern European countries into parliamentary democracies and market economies was taken as empirical proof of the validity of Fukuyama's bold claim that humanity, in its pursuit of freedom, need look no further than Western-style liberal democracy. We were apparently living in an email-based world society where military power no longer mattered and commerce was king. Even better from a German point of view, personal leadership in politics was no longer decisive. For a country so badly burnt by a catastrophic "Führer" that the very word "leader" could not be innocently translated into the German language, Bagger asserts, it was deeply reassuring that larger forces, not charismatic political saviors, would take care of history's general direction. Individuals, vested with a mere pittance of power, would matter only at the margins. They would, at most, administer the advent of the inevitable. In a world governed by the moral imperative to imitate the insuperable model of Western-style liberal democracy, no country need be burdened by its past or compelled to take responsibility for its future. Reducing political life to the more or less successful imitation of this preexisting political and ideological "supermodel" gave humanity in general and Germans in particular both past and future for the price of one.

The end of History was tacitly but almost universally understood to be the Beginning of an Age of Imitation. This is an important insight because festering resentment at the post-1989 mandate to conform to Western prototypes is arguably the most powerful force behind the wave of populist xenophobia washing across much of the world today, starting in Central and Eastern Europe. The pronouncement of an influential Hungarian populist: "We don't want to copy what the Germans are doing or what the French are doing. We want to continue with our own way of life."[2] has become the battle cry of illiberal counter-revolution in the post-communist world.

Because Germany was the champion imitator of America, it was Germany that would show post-communist nations how imitation was expected to work. The proximate model for newly liberated states of the East was not America itself but Germany, the country that had imitated America most successfully in the past.

Germany's role as the implicit model for post-communist political reform is important because the East's backlash against the imitation of the West is rooted not only in the

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2   Maria Schmidt, Viktor Orbán's intellectual-in-chief, as cited in Philip Oltermann, "Can Europe's new xenophobes reshape the continent?," *The Guardian* (February 3, 2018).

experience of trading in one's inherited identity for an allegedly superior identity imported from abroad but also in the fact that, when it came to facing up to their troubled history, Central and Eastern Europeans were asked to follow the path taken by Germany, a country whose anomalous history was obvious for all to see. The radical misfit between the democratization process in post-WW2 West Germany and the democratization process in post-1989 Central and Eastern Europe goes a long way toward explaining the disheartening rise of ethnic nationalism all over the post-communist world.

The Bulgarian artist Luchezar Boyadjiev has come up with the perfect visualization of what has long been the official Brussels version of the end-in-view of European history. Titled On Holiday, his work is based on the famous statue, located on Berlin's Unter den Linden, of the Prussian king Frederick the Great on horseback – only this time without the king mounted on the horse's back. By unhorsing the imposing leader of men, the artist had transformed the monument to a national hero into a monument of a riderless horse. All the complexities attached to an important but morally controversial figure of the past are suddenly eliminated. The idea of Europe that Boyadjiev aimed to convey is a Europe "on holiday from history," without hopes of domination or fears of oppression. For some, at least, being truly European, in the early twenty-first century, means being unapologetically anti-heroic as well as anti-nationalistic. And the Germans today are the foremost exemplars of how to be both. After all, they had navigated the transition from authoritarianism to liberal democracy with unparalleled success and have become an "exceptionally normal" country in the Western sense. But for East Europeans following the German model turned into a problem.

The identity politics that is roiling Eastern Europe today represents a delayed backlash against the three decades of identity-denial politics, otherwise known as Westernization, which began in 1989. Overheated particularism is a natural reaction to universalism fatigue. The eagerness of the formerly captive nations to join the liberal West in 1989 stemmed at least as much from nationalist outrage at Moscow's forty-year hegemony as from a deep-seated commitment to liberal values and institutions. But the intellectual climate of the 1990s, when nationalism was associated with the bloody Yugoslav wars and the anti-nationalist talking points of the European Union were being eagerly exported eastward, militated against total candor in this regard. Attempts by the relatively small number of liberal elites in Central Europe to give "German lessons" to their fellow citizens have backfired, in any case. While the liberal elites were talking the language of universal rights, their nationalist counterparts took control of the national symbols and national narratives. Liberals would have been wise to heed Mihail Sebastian's warnings about the psychological power of symbols and signs. [3]

Imitating Germany would have involved building national identity on the basis of national guilt and regret. Rightwing populists will have none of this. They focus instead on national victimhood and undeserved suffering. What distinguishes the national populists is that they never apologize for anything their nation has ever done in its entire history. To act the power as a villain while having the moral right to feel like a victim is national populists' paradise.

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3   "I've only ever been afraid of signs and symbols, never of people and things," wrote the Romanian novelist Mihail Sebastian at the start of *For Two Thousand Years*, the marvelous 1934 book that conveys his country's suffocating atmosphere of antisemitism and toxic nationalism between the two world wars.

In the framework of democratic transitions, it was a commonplace to view fascism and communism as two sides of the same totalitarian coin. When it comes to the potentially murderous consequences of the two ideologies and their associated regimes, this is a completely legitimate comparison. But viewing communism and nationalism as twins creates an unrealistic expectation that, in the democratic age, nationalism will disappear just as communism has disappeared. This hope, as we know, has been dashed by events. The reason is that communism was a radical political experiment based on abolishing private property, while nationalism – in one form or another – is an organic part of any democratic political scene. Liberal democracies are not designed to abolish nationalism but merely to tame and civilize it.

In short, imitating the way post-1945 Germany dealt with history turned out to be problematic for Central and Eastern Europeans in at least four respects.

First, German democracy was built on the assumption that nationalism leads ineluctably to Nazism (Nationalismus führt zum Faschismus). The transnational EU originated as part of a geopolitical strategy to block a potential dangerous reassertion of German sovereignty by integrating the country economically into the rest of Europe and by giving the Federal Republic a "post-national" identity. As a result, ethno-nationalism came close to being criminalized in post-WW2 West Germany. Central and Eastern European countries, by contrast, find it difficult to share such a negative view of nationalism because, first of all, these states were children of the age of nationalism following the breakup of multinational empires after WW1 and, second, because nationalism played an essential role in the basically non-violent anti-communist revolutions of 1989.

In Eastern Europe, for historical reasons, nationalism and liberalism are more likely to be viewed as mutually support than as mutually incompatible. Poles would find it absurd to cease honoring the nationalistic leaders who lost their lives in defending Poland against Hitler or Stalin. The fact that communist propaganda was doctrinaire about denouncing nationalism is another reason why Central and Eastern Europeans were suspicious about Germany's obsessive desire to detach citizenship in the state from hereditary membership in a national community. During the 1990s, as mentioned, the Yugoslav wars led Europe as a whole including Central and Eastern Europe to see or pretend to see nationalism as the root of all evil. In the long run, however, the identification of liberalism with anti-nationalism has fatally eroded national support for liberal parties. Liberalism also is views ethnonationalism, or the belief that current citizens have some special moral connection to their biological forefathers, as barbaric and irrational. That is a perfectly rational stance to take. But it does not necessarily make good politics. From the viewpoint of those voters with strong nationalist feelings, "constitutional patriotism" seems to be a new "German ideology" designed to belittle the eastern periphery of Europe and govern Europe in the interests of Berlin.

Secondly, postwar German democracy was organized in response to the way the Nazis came to power through competitive elections. This is why non-majoritarian institutions like the Federal Constitutional Court and the Bundesbank are not only powerful but also the most trusted institutions in Germany. In 1989, by contrast, Central and Eastern Europeans were

thrilled to be regaining their long-lost sovereignty and, as a consequence, tended to view constraints on the elected government as attempts to limit the right of the people to govern themselves. After WW1, the newborn Central and Eastern European states at the time were organized around a fusion of the German idea of the Kulturnation, the nation as a cultural community, with the French idea of the interventionist centralized state. This distant legacy has faded with time, of course, but it has not entirely disappeared from political sensibilities of the region. That helps explain the slowly developing domestic resistance, in the decades after 1989, to reorganizing these states in line with two alternative foreign models: the new German idea of a de-centralized state and American multi-culturalism. Their reservations about both represented the first stirrings of the anti-liberal counterrevolution to come.

Thirdly, when sharing their postwar transformation experience of incorporation into the West with the post-communist countries, Germans fell into a trap. They were proud of the success of their transition from a totalitarian society into a model democracy but at the same time, in many cases, they counseled the Central and Eastern Europeans not to do what they did in 1950s and 1960s but to do what they believed they themselves should have done back then. German democracy after WW2 has a complicated relation with country's Nazi past. While Nazism was officially denounced after the war, it was not a subject that Germans were eager to discuss in any detail. For one thing, there were many ex-Nazis among the post-war West German elite. But when time came for the incorporation of East Germany into a unified liberal-democratic Germany, the approach adopted was the opposite. The silent treatment became a gabfest. A wholesale purge of ex-communists became the order of the day, and many of the East Germans who today willingly vote for the far-right Alternative for Germany interpreted the post-1989 "lustration" process not as a sincere search for historical justice but as an instrument of the West's domination over the East aimed at opening up employment opportunities for Westerners by firing "Ossi" elites from their jobs.

And fourthly, Germany was and is very proud of both its welfare state and its system of co-determination, by which labor unions were given a pivotal role in corporate governance. But these were aspects of their political system that the West Germans never pressed the EU to export to the East. The official reason they gave was that Central and Eastern Europeans could not afford them, but perhaps also because they thought that weakened state protections for Central and Eastern European workers and citizens would create favorable conditions for German industry. Of course, various other factors were also involved, especially the evolution of the globally dominant form of American liberalism from Roosevelt's New Deal to Reagan's deregulated market. The general refusal to invest heavily in the political stability of the new entrant states by supporting the economic importance of labor unions, while totally in line with the Thatcherite Zeitgeist, deviated radically from the Allies' policy toward West Germany after WW2. The most important reason for this change was presumably the disappearance of a communist threat and the corollary that no special efforts needed to be made to maintain the loyalty of workers to the system as a whole.

So, not surprisingly, the process of imitating the West, over time, fomented a mood of national resentment. Discomfort about the politics of imitation has now erupted into outright revolt, triggering a struggle between Western-style liberal constitutionalism, which

has been thrown on the defensive, and an insurgent demagogic appeal to the xenophobia and status anxieties of politically manipulated democratic majorities.

The old German question revolved around the idea that Germany was too small for the world and too big for Europe. The new German question is different. In the post-Cold War world, it turns out that Germany's transition to liberal democracy was too unique and historically path-dependent to be imitated by countries hostile to the very idea of a post-ethnic society. The post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe refused to build a new national identity around half-repressed feelings of contrition for the past. That explains their full-fledged revolt against the wholly alien New German Ideology of de-historicized post-nationalism and culturally vapid constitutional patriotism.

What makes imitation on a national and regional scale so irksome is not only the implicit assumption that the mimic is somehow morally, culturally and humanly inferior to the model. Because copycat nations are legally authorized plagiarists, they must, on a regular basis, seek the blessings and approval of those who hold the copyright to the political and economic recipes being borrowed and applied second-hand. They must also unprotestingly accept the right of Westerners to evaluate their success or failure at living up to Western standards. Needless to say, prostration before foreign judges bereft of serious knowledge of one's country is galling.

The post-communist imitation of the West was a free choice of the East, but it was supervised and licensed by the West and this explains why an isomorphism that was initially "desired" ended up being experienced as "imposed." What matters to the region's new breed of antiliberal may be less the violation of national sovereignty than the affront to national dignity.

The rise of authoritarian chauvinism and xenophobia in Central and Eastern Europe has its origins in political psychology not political theory. It reflects a deep-seated disgust at the post-1989 Imitation Imperative with all of its demeaning and humiliating implications. And it is fueled by the contestation of the minorities-centered cultural transformation that followed the 1968 protest movements in the West. The origins of Central and Eastern European illiberalism are therefore emotional and pre-ideological, rooted in rebellion against the "humiliation by a thousand cuts" that accompanied a decades-long project requiring acknowledgment that foreign cultures were vastly superior to one's own. Illiberalism in a philosophical sense is a cover-story meant to lend a patina of intellectual respectability to a widely shared visceral desire to shake off the "colonial" dependency an inferiority implicit in the very project of Westernization. When Kaczyński accuses "liberalism" of being "against the very notion of the nation"[4] and when Maria Schmidt says "We are Hungarians, and we want to preserve our culture,"[5] their overheated nativism embodies a refusal to be judged by foreigners according to foreign standards. The same can be said of Viktor Orbán prnouncement: "We must state that we do not want to be diverse and do not want to be mixed… We want to be how we became 1,100 years ago here in the

4   Adam Leszczyński, "Poland's leading daily feels full force of Jarosław Kaczyński's anger," *The Guardian* (February 23, 2016).
5   Cited in Philip Oltermann, "Can Europe's new xenophobes reshape the continent?," *The Guardian* (February 3, 2018).

Carpathian Basin."[6] (It is remarkable that the Hungarian prime minister remembers so vividly what it was like to be Hungarian eleven centuries ago.) The premise of such remarks is that "we" are not trying to copy you, and therefore it makes no sense for you to consider us low-quality or half-baked copies of yourselves.

But nationalist resistance to the Imitation Imperative has a perverse unintended consequence. By passionately invoking tradition as the antidote to imitation, East Europe populists are forced into regularly rewriting their national histories. In the days of the Cold War, when resisting Moscow's demand that they copy the Soviet model, Central Europeans described "their tradition" as fundamentally liberal and European. It was just another current in the broad stream of Western civilization. Today, by contrast, they invoke "their tradition" to justify their opposition to being incorporated against their will into the liberal West. This startling volte face makes one doubt that there really is any such thing as "their tradition."

This brings us back to Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, already mentioned in the Introduction. Without pushing the analogy too far, the American sociologist Kim Scheppele describes today's Hungary (presided over by another Viktor) as a "Frankenstate," that is, an illiberal mutant composed of ingeniously stitched-together elements of Western liberal democracies. What she shows, remarkably enough, is that Orbán has succeeded in parrying threats to his power by implementing a clever policy of piecemeal imitation. When attacked by Brussels for the illiberal character of his reforms, the Hungarian government is always quick to point out that every controversial legal procedure, rule and institution has been faithfully copied from the legal system of one of the member states. Instead of suffering imitation passively, the Prime Minister employs it strategically. Selective imitation has allowed Orbán to stymie EU attempts to penalize Hungary for the regime's attacks on freedom of the press and judicial independence. By assembling an illiberal whole out of liberal parts, Orbán has managed to turn the Western Imitation Imperative into an in-your-face joke at Brussels' expense.

Rather than censoring the press, in the old communist manner, Orbán has forced the closure of hostile newspapers on trumped-up economic grounds. And he has subsequently arranged for his wealthy friends and allies to buy much of the national and local media and to turn TV channels and newspapers alike into organs of state power. This is how he has shielded from public scrutiny both his electoral manipulation and epic levels of insider corruption. By packing the courts with loyalist judges, he can also claim to have legality and constitutionality squarely on his side. The legitimacy of such a system depends less on electoral victories, therefore, than on the rulers' claim to be defending the genuine nation against its inner as well as outer enemies. The Orbán-style illiberal regimes that on the rise in Eastern Europe thus combine a Carl Schmittian understanding of politics as a melodramatic showdown between friends and enemies and the institutional façade of liberal democracy. This game of hide and seek has allowed Orbán not only to survive inside an EU that defines itself as a union of values but also to become a leader of an increasingly powerful pan-European "Frankenstein coalition" that explicitly aims to transform Europe in a

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6   Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's speech at the annual general meeting of the Association of Cities with County Rights (February 8, 2018).

Union of Illiberal Democracies. And it is this specter of reverse imitation, when the liberal West starts to see illiberal East as its model that is the case with Salvini in Italy that presents an existential threat for the post-1989 version of Europe.

Conclusion

The first Europe, postwar Europe, is failing because memory of the war is fading and because it has contributed to a Europe incapable of defending itself. The second Europe, post-1968 Europe, is failing because it was the Europe of minorities; it's still trying to find a way to address majorities' demand that their cultural rights should be protected, too, without turning democracy into instruments of exclusion. Post-1989 Europe is failing because Eastern Europeans no longer want to imitate the West and be judged by the West but rather want to build a counter-model.

Do Europe's failures mean that Europe is irrevocably falling apart? Fatalism would be a mistake. Europe has its moment. It does mean that European Union should invest in its military capabilities and stop taking America's security guarantees for granted. It also means that, in the same way European liberal democracies in 1970s and 1980s succeed at de-radicalizing the far-left and integrating some of its legitimate demands in the mainstream, it should do the same with the far-right. People who today are scared by some of the radical ideas coming from the far-right should remember that many centrists of the 1970s regarded Germany's anti-establishment leftists such as Joschka Fischer — later to become Germany's foreign minister — as a threat to the capitalist, democratic West. And when it comes to West-East relations in Europe, the challenge is to find a way to strongly criticize the authoritarian turn in the East without insisting that imitating the West is the only meaning of democracy or naively imagining that a commitment to democracy can be bought with cohesion funds from Brussels.

Seventy years ago, Europe managed miraculously to turn the destruction of World War II into the foundation of its peace project. It succeeded at turning the anti-establishment anger of 1968 into political progress. It succeeded in less than two decades at uniting a Europe divided by 50 years of Cold War. If Europe has managed to turn so many failures into success, one can certainly hope that it will achieve the same miracle again today.