

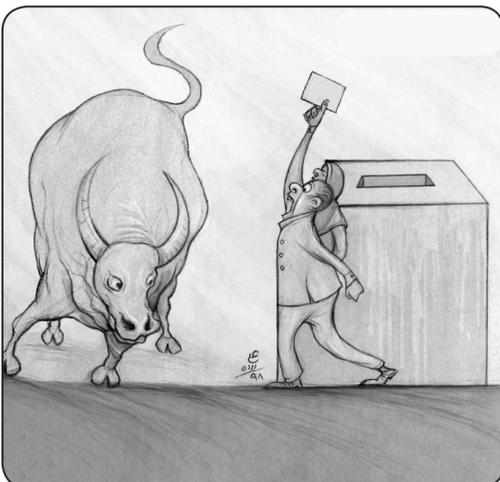
In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind



September 29, 2019

Afghans are the Symbol of Resilience

Afghan people went to the polling stations yesterday. This round of presidential election is somehow different from the previous ones. During the US and the Taliban peace talks some of the Afghan leaders stood in the same line with the Taliban. In other words, republicanism, human rights, basic rights, minority groups and women rights, and preserving the 18 years' achievements, did not matter for them. These Afghan leaders and Taliban pursued for delaying the presidential election and establishing a care taker government. Afghan citizens said no to those Afghan leaders who chanted the same slogan as Taliban did. Afghan citizens, women and men, rushed to the polling stations to vote. They know that there were many risks and threats on their way, but they also know that the sustainable solution to the political crisis and decades of conflicts in Afghanistan is supporting the democratic system of the country. They know that if they do not support democracy they will witness a new round of civil war here. Afghan people came to the polling stations to say not to discriminatory practices that are the main roots of many decades of conflicts in Afghanistan. In most parts of the history of Afghanistan, specific ethnic and religious groups have deliberately been denied of even basic services and they were denied of the Administrative opportunities. This trend made these ethnic and religious groups the poorest segment of the society in Afghanistan. However, in the new constitution of Afghanistan, all Afghans, men and women, are equal. This may look an ordinary issue for the citizens of other countries, but for those Afghan who have always been neglected and marginalized by the Afghan rulers, it is a historical shift in the governance approach. In fact, they are the main winner of the terror war against the terrorist groups. These people have defended the country against the terrorist groups, and they are giving victims now. Taliban, IS Khorasan and AL-Qaeda kill them intentionally terming them as their main enemies in the country; they attack these people on the streets, attack their mosques, education centers and kidnap them on the highways. In general, Afghan citizens value democracy and its principles. All Afghan ethnic groups want to live a peaceful life in Afghanistan. They want to develop their country, have a responsive governance system and ensure its security. They want to change Afghanistan to the economic and transit hub of the south and Central Asia. They have a big dream. Afghan presidential election was conducted yesterday. Taliban and other terrorist groups did their best to disrupt the election process and prevent Afghans from voting. However, Afghans rushed to the polling stations to support democracy and say no to terrorism. The clearly voted to democracy; because it is the only option that enables the Afghans to live a peaceful live. It is democracy that can ensure Afghans can achieve their big dream. Afghans showed yesterday that they will never give up; in fact, they are the symbol of resilience.



What's Freezing Europe-Russia Relations?

By: Joschka Fischer

Although the European Union and Russia are part of the same landmass, they don't have all that much in common. In fact, Russians have yet even to decide where their country resides in the world. The bulk of its territory is in Asia, but over 70% of its people live west of the Ural Mountains. Russians have no interest in associating themselves with East Asia or the Islamic South, so their only choice is to go it alone or orient themselves toward Europe. But going it alone is risky. Russia is a nuclear-armed colossus, yet it is declining demographically, economically, and technologically. The country still earns its living by exporting fossil fuels and other commodities, which is hardly sufficient for maintaining superpower status in the twenty-first century. It is increasingly at risk of becoming a junior partner to China. The only alternative, then, is Europe. But both sides are prisoners of their respective histories. Memories of oppressive rule under the czars and the Soviets remain raw in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly in Poland and the Baltics, and Russian President Vladimir Putin's annexation of Crimea and military campaign in Eastern Ukraine have reinforced distrust of Russia across the region. Russia's relationship with the rest of Europe is also determined by its history. Reeling from the Soviet collapse throughout the 1990s, Russia has adopted a nineteenth-century mentality since Putin came to power in 2000. The Russian elite, harking back to the Czarist period before the Bolshevik Revolution, regards their country as a European great power – even a hegemonic one, in the case of Eastern Europe – which pits it directly against the EU. The EU's *raison d'être* is to transcend zones of influence in Europe, because that is the only way to prevent a return of the power struggles and catastrophic wars that culminated in the first half of the twentieth century. And yet Russia is simply too large to be integrated into the EU (indeed, it is unclear who would be integrating with whom). Even if that were not the case, Russia – or at least its leadership – does not share the EU's values. In addition to championing democracy, judicial independence, and the rule of law, the EU has renounced any revision of borders by force. While geographic proximity demands that Russia and the EU manage their relationship in a mutually advantageous manner as possible, the Kremlin's ongoing war in Ukraine's Donbas region makes this all but impossible. Nonetheless, French President Emmanuel Macron has made renewed efforts to improve EU-Russian relations, not least by meeting with Putin in the run-up to the G7 summit in Biarritz last month. In Macron's view, it is not in Europe's interest to drive Russia further into China's arms, or to stand by and watch

the ongoing disintegration of US-Russian arms-control treaties. With respect to arms control, American and European interests are not the same, and today's US administration cares little about Europe or its views on any given issue. But Macron's efforts raise many questions. For starters, isn't obvious what role Europe could play in renewing the global arms-control regime. Without the US, Europe has little to offer Russia on the issue of intermediate missiles. It would be stuck in the position of trying to convince two unwilling parties to reach a new agreement. And that doesn't even account for China, which has also developed an intermediate-range-missile capacity. Europe does have something to offer Russia economically. But improving economic relations is simply impossible without verifiable progress in the implementation of the Minsk Protocol to end the conflict in Donbas. It is unclear if Putin would be ready for that. But the real problem between Russia and the EU is the issue of democracy. Putin and the Russian oligarchy's greatest fear is that Ukraine's 2014 Maidan revolution could be replicated on Moscow's Red Square. The Kremlin does not blame NATO for that possibility; it blames the EU. Anti-NATO rhetoric is a tried and true propaganda trope that exploits many Russians' ingrained fear of a Cold War bogeyman. But the real threat in the eyes of the Russian oligarchy is the EU and its promotion of democracy and the rule of law. The Russian and European systems are fundamentally incompatible, representing contradictory values and vastly different approaches to foreign and domestic policy. In the nineteenth century, czarist Russia was the leader of the "Holy Alliance," a reactionary bulwark against the bourgeois revolutions sweeping in Europe. This dynamic was reversed under the Bolsheviks after 1917, when Russia became the cradle of revolution. But under Stalin, it returned to pursuing essentially the same aims as the czars, particularly when it came to crushing independence movements in Central and Eastern Europe. Putin's regime has followed a similar trajectory, retreating to the nineteenth century, allying with the Orthodox Church, and launching attacks on the "decadent West," with tirades against homosexuality and liberalism. The Kremlin's active support for illiberal, nationalist forces in Europe and the United States is just one part of this larger picture. As desirable as an improvement in relations between the EU and Russia would be, it will come neither quickly nor easily. On the main questions of Ukraine and democracy, Europe can scarcely give an inch. *Joschka Fischer, Germany's foreign minister and vice chancellor from 1998 to 2005, was a leader of the German Green Party for almost 20 years.*

The Mainstreaming of Corruption

By: Sławomir Sierakowski

As we have seen in recent years, domination by a populist party can lead to the deep polarization of an electorate. But it also erodes the ethical fabric of political life. Unable to defeat populists through the usual methods, traditional parties have begun to emulate their opponents, leaving voters with no alternative but to embrace cynicism. In many countries, even supporters of anti-populist parties have begun consciously accepting pathological behavior, rule-breaking, and even illegal acts on the part of their chosen political representatives. Following Gresham's Law, which holds that bad money drives out the good, opposition forces increasingly feel compelled to scheme and cheat in order to win. As a result, politicians with scruples will find themselves at a disadvantage. With more and more voters concluding that populists must be beaten at their own game, opposition parties are faced with a choice between upholding their ethical standards and saving liberal democracy. Under these conditions, politicians do not have to worry about losing their supporters' trust if they break the law in service to the party. But this tends to favor the populists already in power. Hence, Poland's ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party and Fidesz in Hungary have enjoyed an unprecedented degree of immunity from political scandals. Distinguishing between corruption in the name of the party and corruption in the interest of the individual is key. In Poland, PiS Chairman Jarosław Kaczyński condones outright nepotism and institutional corruption, but condemns other forms of self-dealing. PiS officials are routinely hired by state-owned enterprises, but with the understanding that they will donate a share of their earnings to the party. And Kaczyński himself has reportedly pursued a deal with an Austrian businessman to build two skyscrapers on land owned by a PiS-connected firm. By contrast, when it was revealed that Polish Prime Minister Beata Szydło had paid her ministers bonuses equivalent to ten months' salary, Kaczyński demanded that the money be donated to charity and pushed through legislation to cut parliamentary and top government salaries. Polish MPs now earn about €1,800 (\$2,000) net per month (members of the European Parliament earn nearly €8,800), which is good for the party image, but not good for preventing corruption. More recently, Kaczyński forced the resignation of a long-time political ally, the marshal of the Sejm (parliament), Marek Kuchciński, following revelations that he had used a government plane for private travel. Kaczyński understands that PiS supporters will accept "institutional" corruption that benefits the party, but not corruption that benefits the

individual. When a politician embezzles money or misuses government resources (as Kuchciński did), voters can see that such acts do not benefit them. But when a politician is found to have offered bribes or awarded cushy jobs in exchange for donations to the party, voters can see how those corrupt dealings might advance the "greater good." The University of Warsaw's Przemysław Sadura and I have just published research into Polish voters' attitudes one month prior to Poland's October 13 parliamentary election. Our findings reveal the extent to which cynicism has taken hold of the Polish electorate. Consider, for example, the following representative responses from a PiS voter: Should politicians like Kaczyński be forgiven for engaging in corruption to some degree? – Not necessarily. If we're talking about individual material benefit, then no, he's finished. What if it weren't to benefit himself, but his mother? – If it were for the party, for the greater good, then yes, I'd be inclined to forgive him. For the party, not for himself? – Yes. Individual corruption may be bad not only because it violates moral standards, but also because it damages the image of the party. It is easy to imagine that hardline supporters of US President Donald Trump or British Prime Minister Boris Johnson would offer similar responses. Across the West, political cynicism is upending the rules of politics, and creating two separate ethical spheres. Acts that voters would regard as unacceptable in most other domains of life suddenly become virtuous in a partisan political context. Politicians like Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and Kaczyński started their careers in the mainstream and embraced populism as a tool to realize their political ambitions. But politicians who have been populists from the outset have proven even more scandal-proof. Trump and Matteo Salvini of the League party in Italy, for example, actually derive legitimacy from scandal. By antagonizing elites, the media, foreign institutions (above all European), and the judiciary, and by violating norms with abandon, they have claimed the mantle of "authenticity." Political scandals, no matter how numerous, do not undermine such figures; on the contrary, they make martyrs of them. By definition, opposition parties have fewer opportunities to engage in public corruption, because they are not in power. But if they can find a way to overthrow ruling populists by taking the low road, the evidence suggests that their supporters will not judge them too harshly for it. *Sławomir Sierakowski, founder of the Krytyka Polityczna movement, is Director of the Institute for Advanced Study in Warsaw and Senior Fellow at the German Council on Foreign Relations.*



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