

EXPERIENCE DAY PBL ASSIGNMENT BA ES

THE EUROPEAN UNION - A UNION OF DEMOCRATIC STATES?

The end of the 1980s brought about the end of the Cold War, and opened a window of opportunity for the unification of the European continent. Eastern Europe which was kidnapped and hidden behind the Iron Curtain for 45 years re-emerged on the map of Europe, and embarked on a transition from planned economy and totalitarian political regimes to free market economy and liberal democratic institutions. Guiding principles of this transition were the core values of the European Union (EU). They were succinctly formulated by the European Council of Copenhagen in 1993. The so-called Copenhagen criteria became a blueprint for achieving membership in the EU and defined a reformist agenda. The majority of Eastern European states fulfilled this agenda and joined the EU in the course of the first decade of the new millennium.

A decade later, however, the successful transition of Central and Eastern Europe to liberal democracy began to erode. Various countries, including some EU member states, have witnessed democratic backsliding in recent years. Consider this excerpt from an infamous speech of the Hungarian Prime-Minister:

Honourable Ladies and Gentlemen a trending topic in thinking is understanding systems that are not Western, not liberal, not liberal democracies, maybe not even democracies, and yet making nations successful. Today, the stars of international analyses are Singapore, China, India, Turkey, Russia. And I believe that our political community rightly anticipated this challenge, and if we think back on what we did in the last four years, and what we are going to do in the following four years, than it really can be interpreted from this angle. We are searching for and we are doing our best to find – parting ways with Western European dogmas, making ourselves independent from them – the form of organizing a community that is capable of making us competitive in this great world-race... in the past twenty years the established Hungarian liberal democracy could not achieve a number of objectives. I made a short list of what it was not capable of. Liberal democracy was not capable of openly declaring, or even obliging, governments with constitutional power to declare that they should serve national interests. Moreover, it even questioned the existence of national interests.

Viktor Orbán's speech on 26 July 2014

What does it mean for a Union of democratic states to witness backsliding in some of the member states? Can European integration proceed in the future, if some member states do not abide (fully) to the political foundations and principles of the EU?

Recommended Readings and Materials

Jurova, Vera (2020). "[The EU was 'naive in the past' over rule of law breaches](#)". Press Conference Speech, EU Debates Video form 30 September 2020 (eudebates.tv)

Krastev, Ivan (2018). "Eastern Europe's Illiberal Revolution". *Foreign Affairs*, 97(3), 49-56.

Radulova, Eissaveta (2020). "A Democratic Union?". UM pre-recorded lecture

Zakaria, Fareed (1997). "The rise of illiberal democracy". *Foreign Affairs*, 76(6), 22-43.