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History's protracted end

Why Francis Fukuyama still believes liberal democracy will triumph

Read this interview in German.

In your book 'The End of History' you proclaimed the victory of liberal democracy. But now, over 25 years later, liberal democracy seems to be on the retreat. Is the age of liberalism over?

I did not say that democracy was victorious everywhere. The question of 'The End of History' is about the direction history will take. Its 'End' is not meant in the sense of termination, but of objective.

For 150 years, Marxists said the end of history is communism and that we're evolving in this direction. I said, no, if we're evolving anywhere, it's towards liberal democracy tied to a market economy, and I still believe that's right.

I think it's extremely premature to declare that project to be somehow over. If you look around the world then, yes, you have these new populist countries like Hungary and Poland, but that's not the dominant trend. Of course, it's definitely worrisome because there's that pushback against globalization and elites. But it's not at all clear that the end of history is Hungarian illiberal democracy, or that Putin's model will become a universal model that people will follow.

I think liberal democracy is still the best form of government for a lot of reasons; it's the most sustainable model, and I think that it's likely to correct itself.

What about China? The Chinese authoritarian model is quite successful these days.

Yes, but you can't judge the success of a particular regime type in the short run. The question is: How can China succeed over a longer period of time? There are a lot of reasons for thinking China's economic and political model may not be that sustainable.

One of the bigger advantages they had in the past is that they were a

more institutionalized form of authoritarian government. Their communist party had a lot of institutional rules like term limits and mandatory retirement ages.

Recently, President Xi Jinping has been dismantling that. In a way, he's pushing China in the direction of being more like an African dictatorship. I think there are some real questions as to how long this thing will survive.

In contrast to populism, social democracy's facing historic decline. Working class voters and public sector workers who used to vote for traditional left-wing parties are now turning to the extremes. What's caused this shift?

There are economic, political and cultural reasons for this problem. The economic reason has to do with the fact that, basically, the benefits from globalization have been heavily concentrated among well-educated people living in big cities. The political drivers are based on the fact that many democracies have been insufficiently responsive in addressing these problems. A lot of elites look like they are out of touch and not aware of what citizens are feeling.

But the most important reason is the cultural one, which is related to immigration. In Europe, a big part of the issue was triggered by the migrant crisis. A lot of countries feared losing control over their own cultural identity due to the threat of high levels of migration. Europeans must respond to some of these underlying fears. In all three of these areas, there are things you can do to take care of people that are not doing that well economically. Adjustments could be made in migration policy. However, there's also a moral issue where people just have to be more willing to defend liberal democracy as the best form of government.

Many would argue that adopting stricter immigration policies would mean doing exactly what right-wing populists want.

That's not a reason for not doing it. I think what Chancellor Merkel did during the migrant crisis – her motives for that – were very laudable. Given Germany's history, a liberal policy towards refugees was very understandable.

However, it also created a huge practical problem because Germany does not have a history of being very accommodating with foreigners and there are just some realistic limits to how much tolerance Germans have for that. So I think slowing the rate down was a reasonable response, even if it is what the right-wing parties wanted.

We are currently sitting in Kyiv, Ukraine, a place which probably represents better than any other the current struggle between Russia and the West. Do you see any way out of this spiral of mutual escalation?

I would place far more blame on Russia and Putin for this crisis than on the West. Most Western countries have been open to cooperation with Russia. It's the Russians who invaded Crimea and the Donbas, and they even poisoned their former agent, Sergei Skripal, on British soil. Without Russia changing its behavior, it's hard to see how the relationship can get better.

Russia did well economically after Putin first became president 18 years ago, but real incomes have been declining for a few years now. Why's he still so popular with the Russian people?

He's legitimating himself by promoting a certain kind of Russian nationalism. This started in the 2000s, when he could argue that he's the one who saved Russia from the chaos of the 1990s and the Yeltsin years. He built Russian pride and, since he can control the media, he's put out a narrative blaming everything bad that's happened over the last few years on foreigners and on opposition from the West – even though his own policies are actually to blame.

Isn't the West at least partly to blame? Surely the expansion of NATO and the EU has irritated ordinary Russians?

Concerning the expansion of NATO, we will never know the answer to that. A lot of Eastern European countries which wanted to get into NATO would say that Russia has this long history of imperialism, and even if they had stayed outside of NATO, Russia still would have gotten to a point where they wanted to dominate their neighbors. When that happens, of course, it is better to be inside NATO than to be outside.

You cannot prove either one of those assertions, but I'm inclined to believe these countries are entitled to get in, and even if we had not expanded NATO that Russia would have ended up in the same place that it is now.

The European Union is in deep crisis. It's facing challenges to its values on the inside from Viktor Orbán in Hungary, and from Poland too, and it's also still dealing with the economic and migration crises. What does the EU need to do to get back on track?

There are two big drivers of the crisis in the EU. The first was the Euro, and that still hasn't been fixed. In order to fix it, you either have

to go backwards or forwards. You either go forwards to a fiscal union or you've got to somehow undo the Euro.

Right now, I don't think either of those options is very feasible. The other thing has to do with migration. People don't like to hear that because Viktor Orbán is saying the same thing, but I think in this particular case he's right.

You can't have something like the Schengen system if the EU doesn't have secure outer borders, and it doesn't right now. So, we still have this big inflow of people through Greece and Italy, and it's creating lots of tensions in both of those countries. It is driving populism, too. Europe really needs to fix that particular problem.

What role should Germany play here?

If I were the German Chancellor, I would be giving lots of support to Greece and Italy to help them solve this problem. They've tried doing that by basically bribing Turkey to keep as many migrants from coming in the first time, but there are lots of other sources of migration – a lot of people are coming from Africa and other places. I don't think the solution to Africa's problem is open immigration into Europe. I think it will do more to destabilize Europe than it will to help Africa.

This interview was conducted by Nikolaos Gavalakis.



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Francis Fukuyama is an American political scientist, political economist, and author. Fukuyama is known for his book *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), which argued that the worldwide spread of liberal democracies and free market capitalism of the West and its lifestyle may signal the end point of humanity's sociocultural evolution and become the final form of human government.