Transatlantic Democracy Workshop 2021

THINK TANKS GO REGIONAL

A collaboration between DAIS and Transatlantika

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Preface

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A lot of hard work and idealism culminate in this publication. The organizers of the Transatlantic Democracy Workshop 2021 have worked with students in the United States and Germany for almost a decade to encourage and strengthen younger and regional perspectives in transatlantic relations.

In recent years, such non-traditional voices have gained a more central role in transatlantic relations. This ongoing shift in perspective is relevant for two reasons. First, structural and demographic changes will noticeably alter our societies in the future – whether at the local or international level. The realities of lived transatlantic relationships increasingly diverge from what long-established institutions, NGOs, and think tanks represent. Young and regional perspectives give these structural changes a voice.

Secondly, transatlantic relations have become less relevant for younger generations. The strong affinity of post-war generations to transatlantic cooperation no longer exists and cannot be replicated. Yet, this perception is misleading. The U.S. continues to be a central reference point for German politics, society, and culture. In that sense, transatlantic relations are stronger than ever. They are filled with life on a daily basis, on a regional level, especially by younger generations, and in that sense often imperceptibly. This makes it all the more important to give a voice to those who will be future decision makers in transatlantic relations.

For our first Transatlantic Democracy Workshop, we invited advanced undergraduate and graduate students from various disciplines to bring a fresh impetus to the debate. What these talented young voices produced in just a short time is remarkable. Rarely do such voices receive the attention they deserve. They should be read and taken seriously.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Friedrich W. Opitz
Project Lead Global-Regional Relationships · »Mitteldeutschland in der Welt«
German-American Institute Saxony

Think Tanks Go Regional – The Why and How

The first Transatlantic Democracy Workshop at DAIS, in cooperation with Transatlantika, brought students from as far as Turkmenistan, Ukraine, California, and Italy to Leipzig. Together with Thomas Kleine-Brockhoff, Vice President at the German Marshall Fund's Berlin office, John Austin, Director of the Michigan Economic Center, and Paul Jürgensen as well as Diego Rivas, experts from Das Progressive Zentrum, a Berlin-based think tank, we elaborated on issues relevant for transatlantic relations, and their implications for regional audiences. But what does that mean?

Global challenges like climate change, digitalization, and globalization have specific regional implications for societies and democratic systems. The Central German region, for instance, which comprises the states Saxony, Thuringia, and Saxony-Anhalt, underwent a remarkable transformation over the past 30 years. For many residents, the experiences of socioeconomic and demographic change translated into political resentment which continues to polarize society.

At the same time, the region and many people living there successfully shouldered the weight of these transformations, turning some of the area into most promising hubs for future development in Europe. Many similar regions on both sides of the Atlantic yearn for future strategies and visions that incorporate regional perspectives and experiences.
Global transformation produces winners and losers. Ensuring social stability and cohesion through balancing gains and losses is key for democracies. Shaping structural change needs regional inclusion and is a diverse societal task. Otherwise, losing-out regions will destabilize and backslide into further systemic dysfunction.

Regions that backlash against exclusionary implications from transformation can cause disruptions for the national and global arena, too, as the recent decade of populist turmoil has shown. Technological change, globalization, but also the climate crisis can fan the flames of populist movements, especially in structurally challenged regions, and increase wider political polarization. What is to be done about this?

We launched our Transatlantic Democracy Workshop series to gather, multiply, and attract new voices to shape the future of democracies. When addressing global dynamics in Central Germany and beyond, understanding, discussing and challenging polarization matters. We believe making transatlantic politics more regionally inclusive and accessible can help curb polarization, and in turn, help to address global challenges like decarbonization more sustainably and successfully.

Our workshop introduced students to the theory and practice of policy-related consultancy work with the example of think tanks. Together, we discussed opportunities and shortcomings of think tanks in engaging with local, transatlantic, and global challenges. The cohort employed and further developed strategic thinking and writing skills, and learned how to translate their analytical work and ideas into policy-compatible formats.

This process culminates in the present report. It is part of our biannual EVA-reports, featuring emerging voices in transatlantic relations. The EVA-reports are meant to provide young voices with a platform to feature their ideas and suggestions for global-regional affairs.

In the following think pieces, participants covered a great variety of topics. For example, they engage populist understandings of free trade, discuss gender (in-)equality in Ukraine, detect "postcolonial traps," or reflect critically on the role of pluralism and fragmentation in transatlantic democracies. We could not be happier to have such a wide-ranging field of contributions in this first volume.

Thank you to everyone who helped make it possible!

Dr. Tim Luecke
CEO and Co-Founder
Transatlantika

A New Generation of Transatlantic Perspectives

The transatlantic community is facing a global environment of ever-increasing uncertainty and complexity. A wide range of international challenges – including climate change, economic crises, the pandemic, or disputes with China or Russia, just to name a few – are placing high demands on governments on both sides of the Atlantic to develop and execute bold and innovative policies. At the same time, the rise of populism and the increasing polarization of Western societies – symptoms of what we at Transatlantika have labeled "The Crisis of the West" – are creating further pressures from within the transatlantic community.

In this environment, governments rely heavily on think tanks to provide guidance and expertise. Most think tanks are located in the largest cities and capitals of their respective host countries in order to be in proximity of decision-makers in both government and business. However, many of the global challenges that exist today exert their effects on a very local level. For example, shifts in global energy consumption directly affect coal miners in Ohio, the Ruhr area, or Saxony.

The main question that this workshop tried to address is: do we need to create think tanks on a more regional level – institutes, staffed with experts that are more attuned to the regional manifestations of transatlantic and global challenges? Over the course of two days, we explored this question with a group of ten excellent students from Leipzig, Erfurt, and beyond. Yet, we wanted to make sure that the participating students did not only attend a series of lectures, but also that we engage with them in a critical discussion about think tanks and their role in politics.

In addition, by inviting a series of experts from top-notch think tanks in Germany and the U.S., the students were provided with an in-depth look into the actual workings of think tanks. We topped all of this off with a practical exercise, in which students were asked to develop a think piece on a topic of their own choosing. Overall, we were amazed by the intellectual depth of the discussions, the enthusiasm that students brought to the table, and the creative papers that came out of this workshop. We look forward to using this first, and very successful, weekend as a stepping stone for future workshops.

Student Essays and Expert Voices

Ojarmyrat Gandymov
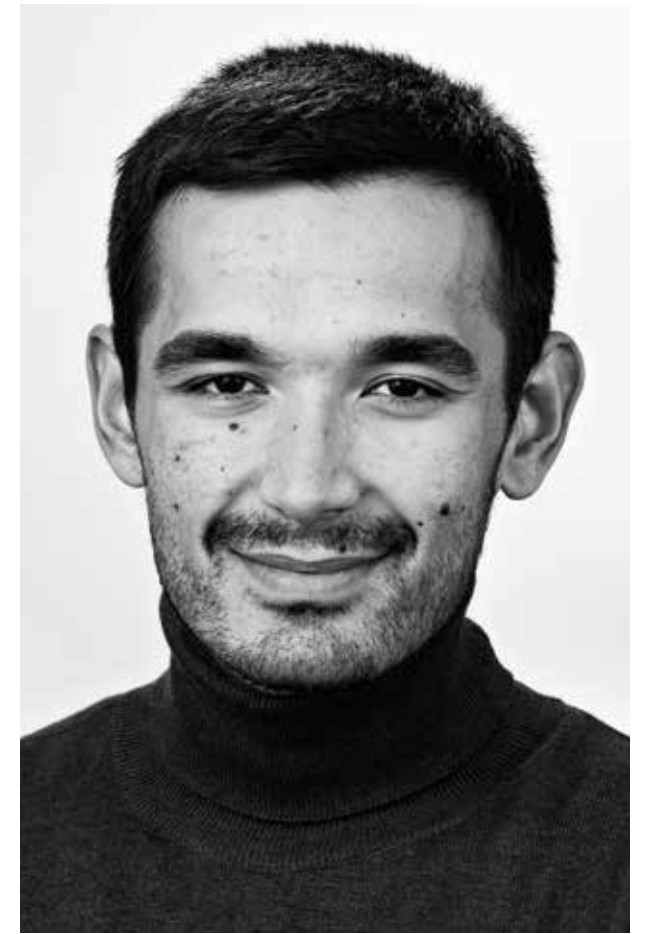
How Common Misconceptions about Free Trade Intensified Populism in the US

Ojarmyrat Gandymov was born and raised in Turkmenistan. He is a Master's student of International Relations at the University of Bremen. In his think piece about gaining trade diversification due to joining the WTO as a resource-dependent country, he seeks to explore how common misconceptions about free trade intensified the populist movements in the US from both sides of the political aisle.

In the past decades, support for populism and populist leaders has been rising throughout the Western world, and it spans both sides of the political spectrum. Populism, be it on the left or right, can bring severe damage to liberal democratic institutions on both sides of the Atlantic. These include threats to elections, the rule of law, protection of private property, political and civil liberties, and checks and balances on executive power. In this paper, I will try to link the phenomenon in which common misconceptions about free trade can intensify the support for populist leaders. Trade openness and globalization were some of the most critical factors behind economic growth in many countries. As a result, millions of people in the developing world have been lifted out of poverty.[1] Despite having numerous advantages, it resulted in some unintended consequences, such as domestic job losses due to outsourcing, which fueled the support for populist leaders in the US like Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders. The solution to this complex problem is not straightforward and might involve different procedures. However, the key should not be limiting trade through protectionism but helping those who lost their jobs with social safety nets and job training programs.

What is populism?

Although populism has been primarily linked to right-wing ideology, left-wing populism has also been quite common especially across Latin American countries. Even though populism appears across the political spectrum, the different types share common characteristics. These characteristics are anti-establishment, representing "the people" against "the elites," and opposition to globalization and liberal economics. So, populism means only the righteous people against evil and corrupt elites who benefited from globalization and unregulated free-market capitalism. Populists also present themselves as political outsiders who can change the system for good by

rejecting established institutions. Interestingly enough, although Brexit is considered a populist movement, as far as free trade is concerned, they supported free trade and ran on the platform to negotiate trade deals with many countries on their own.

The causes of populism are different from one country to another. For instance, right-wing populism in Europe is gaining ground due to the rise of immigration and globalization. Its popularity increased after the so-called European "refugee crisis." However, Latin American countries have been primarily ruled by left-wing populists since the 1930s. In recent decades, the most prominent left-wing populist was Hugo Chavez and later Nicolas Maduro from Venezuela in recent decades. Left-wing populists ran on the platform to expand the government's size and scope, nationalize big industries and tackle the income inequality between the "1%" and the rest of the 99% of the population. They claim that all of the country's problems derive mainly from "greedy" and "evil" corporations. They believe that if governments can step in and clean everything, then they will be able to improve the welfare of the masses.

What are these misconceptions about trade?

Despite its numerous benefits, free trade has become the target of populist politicians in the US, namely Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders. Their opposition to free trade is presented differently. Donald Trump, a right-wing populist leader, argued that protectionism is necessary to improve the welfare of American workers, especially in the manufacturing industry. He threatened to impose tariffs to give leverage to the US during trade negotiations. Trump believed that trade deficits with other countries were terrible, and as a result, Americans were losing their jobs to other countries. During his state of the union speech, Trump stated that unfair trade was the single biggest reason he ran for presidency.

When it comes to the arguments of Bernie Sanders, he claims that previous trade agreements were "unfair" and were written by multinational corporations. Therefore, he supports the trade policy that benefits American workers and creates living-wage jobs. Moreover, to prevent the outsourcing of American jobs, Sanders suggests fundamentally renegotiating trade deals that the US has signed before. He also wants to sign an executive order which will end federal contracts to corporations that outsource American jobs. Sanders also supports the expansion of the size and scope of the US government that would expand government policies such as "Buy American" and "Buy Local" to increase jobs.

Essentially, in trade, Trump's "us vs. them" rests on trade deficits that portray the scenario where a zero-sum game is used between American and foreign companies, especially with China. On the other hand, Sanders' "us vs. them" is focused on American workers and American multinational corporations, who are eager to outsource jobs to other countries. Thus, right-wing populism in trade is nationalistic, while left-wing trade populism describes the class struggle, namely the working class being the victim of outsourcing of American multinational corporations.

Benefits of Free Trade

Free trade, in basic terms, is defined as people being able to freely buy and sell goods and services without government interference in the form of import tariffs, quotas, and other trade barriers. Engaging in trade openness encourages domestic companies to compete with other foreign companies, which will make products more affordable with better quality. Thus, consumers are the biggest beneficiaries of free trade, especially those with lower incomes. For instance, if 30% of the monthly income of a poor person goes to buy groceries, then cheaper prices mean more food for the same amount of money that they otherwise would spend. According to the calculations of Xavier Jaravel and Erick Sager,[2] engaging in trade openness benefited the US consumers in the form of extra spending of $260 per year for the rest of their lives. Based on Peterson Institute's calculations, as a result of trade, the US GDP grew by $2.1 trillion between 1950 and 2016 and increased per capita of the US GDP by $7,014 and $18,131 between the same period.[3] Trade also makes wars costly due to the economic cooperation between the countries. For that reason, the more interdependent countries become, the less likely they will wage wars. Thus, it is in the interest of both parties to trade with each other and improve economic growth rather than starting a costly war.

Free trade is relatively popular among the general population. Based on the recent survey conducted in 2019, 65% of Americans believe that free trade agreements have been a good thing for the country, while 22% disagree with that statement. In terms of political parties, 73% of Democrats and 59% of Republicans agree with that statement. However, twice more Republicans than Democrats believe that free trade agreements were terrible for the country, with 29% and 15% of respondents answering that way, respectively.[4]

Responses to Popular Misconceptions related to Trade

Unilateral import tariffs are risky as it encourages the other side to retaliate and introduce tit-for-tat tariffs for your exports. This happened when Trump unilaterally imposed import tariffs for most products coming from China and tariffs for steel and aluminum coming from Europe, Canada, and Mexico. He also imposed import tariffs on French wine, Italian cheese, and Scotch whiskey. Protectionism also opens a door for corruption as governments pick and choose winners and losers by imposing import tariffs for specific industries. Other industries might also want to jump into the bandwagon and lobby the government to impose import tariffs for products from other countries related to their industries. Since local producers do not face heavy competition from abroad due to tariffs, often the local consumers end up footing the bill for these expensive tariffs. As a result of spending more money on products affected by import tariffs, consumers will have to spend less on other products, causing unemployment in affected sectors. Therefore, saving jobs through tariffs might cause unemployment in other sectors, which are not visible immediately.

Free Trade is not perfect

Although trade has many benefits to consumers and companies, it might have some trade-offs, at least in the short term. For instance, if a local company outsources its jobs to another country by leaving thousands of employees unemployed, the workers will face some difficulties until they find a new job. Although the US economy will benefit from free trade and its benefits can outweigh the risks, we should not forget what happens at the micro-level to an individual worker employed in the company that outsourced its productions abroad. Therefore,

the affected worker might never find a job in that industry. Outsourcing also created regional differences and inequalities, as one might notice in certain parts of the US or Germany. To solve this problem, introducing a domestic social safety net for people who lost their jobs to outsourcing might help them with job training programs to find new employment in other industries. Limiting or restricting free trade to prevent outsourcing or trade deficits will bring more harm than good and eventually make things even worse.

Conclusion

International trade has been under attack by populist leaders in the US in recent years despite its numerous benefits to consumers, businesses, and the public, in general. Donald Trump ran on the platform on trade deficits with China and proposed protectionism in the form of import tariffs to solve that problem. On the other hand, Bernie Sanders claimed that current US trade deals were written by multinational corporations and were "unfair" for American workers. However, they both used the "us vs. them" approach to highlight the problem. As shown in this paper, most of their concerns were not warranted, and once implemented, protectionism and trade tariffs will make matters worse rather than improve them. For that reason, introducing social safety nets for workers who lost their jobs to outsourcing and providing job training programs for them might help as a last resort in case market-type mechanisms won't work.

[1] IMF (2001): Global Trade Liberalization and the Developing Countries.
[2] Xavier Jaravel and Erick Sager (2019): What are the Price Effects of trade? Evidence from the US and Implications for Quantitative Trade Models.
[3] Gary Hufbauer and Zhiyao Lu (2017): The Payoff to America from Globalization: A Fresh Look with a Focus on Costs to Workers, Peterson Institute for International Economics.
[4] Statista (2019): Share of people in the United States who think free trade agreements have been a good thing for the country in 2019, by political preference. Accessed 15 October 2021 (https://www.statista.com/statistics/913366/share americans-think-free-trade-good-country-party/)

Nora Peulen

The Postcolonial Trap—Rethinking Organizational Practices

Nora Peulen holds a Bachelor of Arts in Languages, Cultures, and Economics from the Justus Liebig University of Giessen as well as a Master of Arts in Global Studies from the Universities of Ghent and Leipzig. In her think piece, she addresses the importance for organized individuals intending to co-create a peaceful, just, and sustainable world to align their organizational structures with the promoted values. She argues that aligning values and organizational structures fosters a whole institutional approach and prevents organized individuals from getting stuck in the "postcolonial trap." In this context, special attention will be drawn to diversity and finances.

Our historical past has significant effects on our understanding of the world today. Values and societal dynamics have been passed on to fellow generations through lived principles and established systems of political and economic order systems. The violent history of colonial oppression under imperialist projects has led to hierarchical solid power relations – institutionally as well as in mental conceptualizations of the world.

These relations derive from the theory of progress. This Western European invention is based on the idea that advances in technology, science, and social organization will improve the human quality of life. In this context, the commodification of labor, land, money, and concurrent economic progress play a pivotal role: the new commodities have facilitated exploitative projects and global inequalities were thus strengthened. By perceiving non-industrial states as "underdeveloped," European colonizers have legitimized their oppressive measures that are meant to foster global progress.

However, the theory of progress assumes that all nations have the will, as well as necessary preconditions to establish a modern society of high-mass consumption. It hence neglects relations of interdependencies between exploitative and exploited actors. Rather than conceptualizing modernization as a linear process that all nations desire to undergo, modernization needs to be understood within an interconnected complex system. In other words, the developments of nation-states or other actors have effects on the development of conditions of others. Consequently, colonialism has a long-term impact on the relations between colonizers and colonized that continue until today. Although a historical reappraisal has been partly taking place, many people continue to

suffer under the effects of unequal power relations that are reinforced through the repercussions of our current climate crisis. Today, we are amid a process that aims to deconstruct power inequalities that are rooted in the history of colonial oppression to foster global peace and justice.

A deconstructivist process requires constant self-reflexivity as individuals and a collective to avoid getting stuck in entrenched structures that reinforce power relations established under imperialist rule. Furthermore, an effective deconstruction of colonial power relations supposes the will and determination of individuals or organizational units to do so. As long as personal aims and economic benefits prevail over the interests of the global community, individuals and organizations will continue to make use of their privileged position within a hierarchical system of oppression and exploitation.

Whereas a lack of will requires a fundamental rethinking of values, this paper instead addresses those organized individuals who have the intention to co-create a peaceful and just world. This essay makes the problems of organizational structures visible and that bear the danger of unconsciously feeding into the same system of colonial oppression that the respective organization aims to combat – referring to what I call 'the postcolonial trap.' In this way, food for thought on the topics of diversity and finances is aimed to be provided, meant to foster an alignment of promoted values and their implementation within organizations.

Diversity

One long-term effect of colonialism is a Western knowledge hegemon and a constructed ideal of how societies should look like. This implicates the perception of modernization as a homogenizing process that does not leave space for alternatives to modernization and progress. Through forcefully disseminating the Western idea of progress since colonial times, other worldviews and values were repressed and declared as "untrue" or "backward." Consequently, today's political and scientific discourse is still being dominated by Western ideas, whereas indigenous knowledge is neglected within the global discourse, although gaining momentum recently. To counteract the global imposition of the Western "ideal society," organizations should foster diversity. A diverse team with employees from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds brings in a variety of perspectives. It hence enables an organization to build up a just and sustainable future.

To encourage marginalized people to participate in the application process, several aspects need to be considered. First, the language of a job posting can be decisive for what groups of people it attracts and should thus be inclusive, for example, by explicitly addressing people beyond binary gender norms. Depending on the working language, a job posting in several languages should also be published. Second, publishing a job posting in advance may give applicants the chance to improve their skills and thus meet the required standards, including working language proficiency. Third, using different communication channels increases the outreach of a job posting and acknowledges limited digital access of potential applicants. Besides channeling a job posting via online job markets, organizations may additionally communicate via printed newspapers notice boards, or reach out to affiliated associations, such as volunteer groups. This way, room for multiplicity is already fostered in the application process, a necessary precondition for a diverse working group.

Room for alternative perspectives can be further fostered through education. Education is a constant process that fosters critical thinking and thus helps to unveil entrenched structures that feed into a system of colonial power relations. By learning about alternative perspectives, employers and employees are enriched to rethink their own convictions and strategies as individuals and as a collective. Integrating educational training into one's organization thus incites new ideas and fosters a holistic strategic approach. Training could include topics such as deco-

lonization, racism, postcolonialism, indigenous knowledge, or nonviolent communication. As a result, individuals are enabled to reassess their own thinking patterns and concomitant behavior which is in turn reflected in the values and practices of the organizations they work at. Integrating educational measures into one's workplace further strengthens people's understanding of themselves as life-long learners. This prevents individuals from developing a conviction that their work is free from imperfections. Instead, self-reflexivity is fostered and room for improvement and different perspectives maintained.

Finances

Financial means are fundamental to maintaining a working group and realizing projects. Income sources and expenditures need to be critically reflected in terms of their effects, which risk strengthening a system of colonial power relations. Especially when accepting funds from donors that feed into a neoliberalist system based on colonial power hierarchies, it needs to be made sure that the respective organization is free of conditionality. This way, the organization prevents itself from being obliged to use given financial means according to the interests of the respective donor. Besides the establishment of rules by which funding is accepted, organizations can further avoid a dependency on single donors by diversifying their funds. Further fundraising strategies, such as gaining members who agree to provide financial assistance regularly or hosting events, further facilitate the independent work of organizations.

At the same time, mechanisms that grant a say to financial contributors based on the amount of money they give feed into a system of capitalist power inequalities. When affluent members remain the determinants of the organization's development, the organization risks becoming path-dependent, implicating entrenched structures that reinforce colonial power hierarchies. Funding hence constitutes a determinative factor that needs to be considered when aiming to work towards a just and sustainable future holistically. Furthermore, an organization that aims to contribute to global justice must stay attentive to its own consumer choices. When it comes to means of transportation, electricity provision, bank account, equipment, material, and the type of drinks and snacks accessible to the working group or affiliates, the respective organization makes consumer choices that have social implications on a global scale. Using cargo bikes, second-hand furniture, and ecological material, installing solar panels, and buying local and mostly plant-based products at fair prices hence foster sustainability and the development towards global justice.

In this context, transparency can help organizations self-improve as it fosters supervision and criticism by civil society stakeholders. By disclosing information about one's organization's funds and spending, as well as values, convictions, organizational structures, and strategies, the public is invited to participate in a thinking process that pursues a holistic approach to global justice. By acknowledging criticisms as a chance for self-improvement rather than seeing it as an attack on one's organization, criticisms can substantially contribute to a just and sustainable world. Transparency hence provides room for criticisms by delivering information to civil society that can contribute to a critical examination of the information provided.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that promoting global peace and justice values is merely one side of the coin when aiming to achieve a more just and sustainable future. To sustainably deconstruct colonial power relations and avoid getting stuck in the postcolonial trap, it needs to be complemented with putting into practice these values. As an organization, this means the establishment and maintenance of a socio-economically and culturally diverse team, awareness and alignment of funding mechanisms to one's underlying values, being transparent, making ethical

consumer choices, and fostering critical thinking and self-reflection through education. Regular team meetings can function as a space to rethink current organizational structures and practices with the aim of aligning them to the underlying values of the organization. As a result, the organization implements a holistic approach to global justice while being in a constant process of self-reflection. By aligning ideological orientations with one's own practices, the risk of getting stuck in the postcolonial trap is reduced. At the same time, the effectiveness of the organization is strengthened.

Expert Voice:

Thomas Kleine-Brockhoff
Vice President
German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF)

Thomas Kleine-Brockhoff is Vice President at the German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) where he oversees the organization's activities in Germany. Prior to joining GMF, he served as an advisor to Joachim Gauck, the president of Germany. From 2013-17, he oversaw policy planning and speechwriting for the president. At our workshop, Kleine-Brockhoff delivered a keynote address. Please find an excerpt below.

My name is Thomas Kleine-Brockhoff. I work for the German Marshall Fund's Berlin Office. As a think tanker, I'm trying to make sense, understand, and communicate an emerging new world order with numerous momentous events around us – what they mean to me as a German, for German interests, and as an Atlanticist, for transatlantic relations.

Currently, due to changes in the course of foreign policy, there are a lot of analytical questions to be addressed. At the German Marshall Fund, we turn these questions into projects. To give an example, last year, a group of people who work in the transatlantic space came together from different walks of life, organizations, and political preferences and wrote a paper called "More Ambition, Please!" In this paper, we asked the German government to respond to the Biden administration's offer for a renewed partnership and detailed a set of proposals as to how that could be approached and done.

What is interesting about this field is that the issues are momentous, and the privilege of working on them motivates me each day. Therefore, my advice to anybody wanting to get into the field is to pick an area of interest and expertise, delve into it, and not get lost in the details. Instead, retain the idea of the big picture. You could best do that in organizations like ours. But also, there's a whole host of foreign policy institutions where the combination of expertise and big picture contextualization is being valued.

What we also need is young voices in this field. That is because we're in an age of generational change, where one generation, which is a large cohort, is slowly going off the scene. But also, there are generational preferences: preferences of emphasis and focus and a change of language, and we have an opportunity to bring these preferences to the table. Good luck to you all!

Jan-Malte Schulz

Pluralism or Fragmentation: Reflections upon the Future of Transatlantic Democracies

Jan-Malte Schulz is a BA student of International Relations and History at Erfurt. During his time in Thuringia, he was increasingly confronted with rising right-wing populism and nationalism. Hence, he decided to take this opportunity and write a text on this issue to better understand and gain insight.

Among the core values of Western or Transatlantic Democracies has been the shared belief in the inherent value of pluralism. A value cherished on the individual level but even more so on the level of an entire society in which multiple and very different interest groups peacefully coexist and cooperate. The space currently inhabited by Transatlantic Democracies has experienced numerous religious and ethnic conflicts. As a result, societal pluralism evolved and allowed the emergence of the West as a political construct and normative project. Moreover, limiting intra-societal violence became of crucial importance within this framework. However, throughout the 21st-century, belief in pluralism and its value as a core tenet of society has come under increased criticism by voices throughout the political spectrum. These voices are fearful of the dissolution of civilization as we know it.

Given the drastic increase in diverse and non-conformist identities and their acceptance by society, an inevitable pushback by more conservative individuals and interest groups became noticeable, which often took the form of tribalism, undermining any attempt at meaningful discourse. Finding the enigmatic social consensus appears to have become increasingly complex, and some controversial voices have already begun to predict the end of either democracy, society, or even the entire world as we know it. It appears that western, plural society is pluralizing itself into oblivion, that one of the foundational values of Transatlantic Democracies is responsible for its crisis. Considering these developments, this paper is intended to reflect upon the current importance of social pluralism, contextualize it within the rise of populism and explore future pluralism avenues in Transatlantic Democracies.

The term pluralism mainly refers to its meaning in a social context, with political connotations. In contrast, the notion of fragmentation is negatively connoted and often mentioned in connection with fatalistic assertions. Narratives about society's fragmentation, culminating in a dysfunctional coexistence mode or even outright social strife and civil war have to be confronted. Considering the constantly globalizing world we inhabit with its

growing economic, political, and social interdependencies, the return to a simple, homogenous society that some groups demand is unachievable.

The shared belief in core values such as human rights and dignity is crucial for cohesion and forms the ethical framework of any social discourse. Nonetheless, it is also necessary to be aware of its limits and the possible detriments of an overbearing shared conviction. Appeals to this shared set of beliefs (for example, "Leitkultur") have been utilized to oppose integration and, to a degree, even contributed to exclusion, resulting in further fragmentation.

Among the negative consequences which have emerged due to this fragmentation is an increase in nativist and isolationist rhetoric, which often blends xenophobia with notions of national superiority. Bearing in mind these tendencies, which disrupt ongoing political discussions and limit the ability of polities to confront much more pressing issues like migration or the climate crisis, it is apparent that these issues demand more attention. Said discourses do not only play out in academic circles with little impact beyond these "ivory towers" but have genuine implications for societies that, by necessity, have to become more inclusive to attract migration to cope with aging domestic demography.

Especially looking at the concept of inclusive societies, it is also necessary to critically reflect upon existing narratives regarding integration and inclusion. There is little doubt concerning the enormous importance of the successful integration and inclusion of individuals and groups which, through their own identities and backgrounds, differ from the established "mainstream." We also have to include said mainstream in ongoing discourses and discuss its very nature. Failing to create an atmosphere that is open to newcomers in society and considers the experiences of already established members of society leads to fragmentation. Additionally, in its most negative sense, it is a pivotal contributor to the emergence of populist movements.

Feeling left-behind and shut out from the ongoing social and political discourses, these individuals and groups began to retreat from social life and promote narratives that stress the necessity for society to return to an older and more collectivist state. The appeal of this nativist and populist rhetoric definitely can partially be explained by taking into consideration the economic dynamics of the 21st century, which threaten the standard of living and have caused considerable structural financial problems. Presenting the success of various populist groups in Transatlantic Democracies only through this lens of economic considerations runs the genuine risk of simplifying the issue to such a degree that any solution becomes too one-dimensional to work. Instead of conforming to this straightforward materialist paradigm that stipulates that populism is the consequence of economic disparity, we must consider how alienation from society (whether voluntary or involuntary) has also contributed to this genuine crisis of democracy.

Painting a more detailed picture of this problem to formulate a solution thus requires a bottom-up analysis of issues rather than the usual top-down perspective. Regional differences have crystallized during the recent elections in various Transatlantic Democracies, and it has become apparent that enormous divergences are starting to develop. They are not rooted in material or economic causes but rather the consequence of regional and local dynamics, which have largely been neglected in analyses of issues on the national level. Failure to include these groups in a pluralistic society or to give them a chance to contribute to ongoing discourses has not only alienated them from the very core values of Transatlantic Democracies but often led them to oppose them violently.

Ironically, these fringe groups are the beneficiaries of a pluralistic system that allows them to express themselves and their xenophobic, nativist, and collectivist opinions. While it would be extremely optimistic, bordering on outright foolish, to think of reintegrating all of these groups and individuals, there is a very real chance to successfully motivate at least the moderates

to productively and constructively (re-)participate in ongoing discourses again. Doing so would require a rethinking of lived pluralism in our daily lives, simultaneously from a top-down and bottom-up perspective, and the expressed willingness to exclude those from the ongoing discourse which exhibit hostility to democracy, human rights, and inclusive society.

Confronting and solving multi-dimensional issues, often characterized by intersectionality cannot simply be achieved through the imposition of new rules, legislation, and the establishment of hard and soft norms expectations. Instead, it requires a concerted effort to engage those who feel left behind within their usual social context to encourage bias-free discourse and identify issues on the regional and local levels. Consequently, this creates an inclusive atmosphere and results in a productive and meaningful exchange and dialogue. The first very basic step of translating these ideas into action might be taken by opening region-specific dialogues specifically targeting

regions that have exhibited high approvals for populism, which usually coincides with narratives about being left behind or shut out. Given the relatively limited successes of recent citizen assemblies, this concept has to be carefully reconsidered, although these forms of governance exhibit some promising characteristics.

Certain social, economic, and political issues profit from the inclusion of local voices and actors instead of one-dimensional top-down action. Beyond making people feel part of the larger society and included within the larger framework of state and democracy, this could also be one of the direly needed steps towards more democratic legitimization of polities like the EU. Beyond this rather localized action, there also has to take place a general and open discourse over the future development path of Transatlantic Democracies. A greater degree of local self-government and local involvement will be combined with further supranational integration. Balancing local interests against national and even supranational concerns will present enormous problems and challenges for policy-makers, but few alternatives are apparent. Securing the future of Transatlantic Democracies requires a profound rethinking of our current understanding of pluralism and governance to meet the various challenges of the 21st century. Foundational values will have to be reevaluated under the light of transforming society, and open discourse is needed to determine the path towards a shared future.

Alona Biriuk

Gender Inequality in Ukrainian Politics, and Why it Means Corruption, Poverty, and Brain Drain

Alona Biriuk is from Ukraine and is now completing her BA in American Studies in Leipzig. Her fields of interest revolve around transatlantic relations, relations between East-Europe and West-Europe, and issues of gender equality. In September 2021, she was one of the editors of "Polyphonie einer Städtepartnerschaft (Kiew - Leipzig)." In October 2021, she took part in the workshop "Think Tanks Go Regional. Her think piece concerns the discrimination of women in Ukrainian politics which leads to obstacles in the country's development.

Introduction

There are more than three billion women in the world. In each country, they make up approximately half of the population. In Ukraine, for example, women make up 54% of the population. But that does not mean that women in Ukraine have the same rights as men or the ability to become a part of the Ukrainian political process. Since the independence of Ukraine, equality has increased, but still, the women in Ukraine stand behind the men in many political processes. This problem leads to many other significant issues such as poverty, corruption, and brain drain. If the situation would change for the better, Ukraine would have an opportunity to sustain a better economic system, get rid of corruption, and become a part of the EU. This is an enormous issue that needs much time and patience to result in long-term improvements. If the changes start now, then Ukrainian citizens would observe significant improvements in ten to fifteen years.

The Problem

Participation of both sexes in politics is a fundamental component of modern democratic governance. Gender equality is measured by whether or not women are in positions where they can make decisions or influence society on an equal level as men. The involvement of women in political activity is a key factor of gender equality in society. According to international standards, men and women have equal rights for participation in political processes. However, in real life, the representation of women in the Ukrainian government causes much controversy. Ukraine has a tendency: the higher the level of the government system, the fewer women there are. According to

the last national elections results, 28% of women became a part of the regional government in small cities, 21 % of women in the Ukrainian parliament (87 out of 423), and only 6% of women held the position of minister and deputy minister. Even though this statistic is a record for Ukraine since its independence, it remains comparatively low to other countries. In the EU countries, women in parliament have a higher representation – 26%, while in Sweden, Finland, Spain, this number is more than 40%.[1]

The 1995 Beijing Platform emphasizes that equality between sexes on a governmental level is an inevitable part of the representation of women's rights and a necessary aspect for the representation of women's interests. The task of the political system of every country is to represent and protect the interests of every age, gender, ethnicity, religion, and socio-demographic group. But the low representation of women is a challenge to democracy because more than 50% of citizens are de facto excluded from public administration. This means that the interests of women are not taken into consideration in the decision-making process.

In connection to this, a number of current problems in Ukraine, such as poverty, corruption, the safety of country borders, healthcare, and education, are not being addressed properly. The problem of representation of women's interests also leads to the problem of immigration. The statistics show that in 2017 only 15% of the Ukrainian population moved to the US or Europe, and 46% of them were students. Lack of opportunities to have a good income, social insecurity, and gender inequality lead to "human capital flight." If the Ukrainian parliament and local authorities have more educated women in high positions, the situation in Ukraine would improve, and some of the above problems would solve in a short time. Stability and improvement for all demographics give hope for students to stay as it signals development in the country.

Why is it important?

To have women on all governmental levels of Ukraine does not mean just adding a „female component" to the politics. It means taking into account different requirements and needs for women and men. A "combined gender approach" provides better results and opens an opportunity to change the country for the better for both sexes.

Gender equality is also one of the components that can help to overcome the poverty of the Ukrainian population and reduce corruption. A wide range of research shows that there is a direct connection between increasing gender equality and reducing poverty. That means women have an opportunity for self-realization, which leads to a better income for a family or a community. It is not a coincidence that the highest living standard belongs to those countries (such as Norway, Finland, and Sweden), where genders have equal terms and opportunities.

Gender equality would also prevent a further brain drain from Ukraine. As mentioned, 46% of Ukrainian students choose to go to Europe for their education and qualifications.[2] Later on, more than half of them stayed in foreign countries to pursue their careers. The main arguments to stay in foreign countries are financial stability and social equality in terms of race, age, ethnicity, and gender. If Ukraine would give a chance to females to become a significant part of the society, many Ukrainian activists and nationalists would come back home and would not need to work for Ukraine abroad.

What is a solution?

First of all, *professional skills* must become the primary filter for job requirements for the government at all levels. In this case, the „European and the US organization of sexes in government" can serve as a good example. Ukraine can use a program similar to America's "350" program, where during four elections, 350 women candidates were purposely nominated. In the beginning, the program could be conducted in small cities and villages, where women have fewer opportunities and lower incomes compared to the bigger cities and the capital. But the whole organizational preparation and campaign must be also conducted by two sexes, not only by the male majority. The Ukrainian population has many prejudices and stereotypes regarding the role of women, which comes from Soviet-Union education. Nowadays, 26% of the population does not consider women as strong leaders or chiefs, so the next goal for Ukraine is to educate young students differently and re-educate the post-Soviet Union generations. Regrettably, this sentiment is a long-term problem, which could be solved in 12-17 years, beginning with changes in the education system of young generations.

Secondly, studies conducted by the Council of the European Union show that the most effective way to increase the percentage of women in power is to introduce gender quotas in parties to a minimum fixed percentage of women at 20 to 50%. At these first stages, "positive discrimination" can serve as a mechanism to change the political system. In the end, this is a radical change, especially for the Ukrainian population, but it would work, and the gender injustice can be solved.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, the percentage representation of females in the Ukrainian parliament and local government is not corresponding to the norms. As a result, this issue leads to further problems such as corruption, poverty, and economic challenges. Ukraine does not have the proper democracy because males are in charge of both sexes in the country. This aspect needs changes with a help of both sexes. As we have a huge number of "brain drain" the government should give an opportunity for students who have studied abroad to implement the knowledge and best practices about gender issues in our country. If this project were to start now, significant changes will be seen in only a few years from now.

1 New quota in Ukrainian parliament. Ukrainian Truth, 23.07.2019.
2 Pyrozok. Oksana. "Brain drain" – how to stop it. Economic Truth, 26.03.2018

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Maria Luce Napoliello

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We are at a moment when growing divides between the places and people who are finding success in a globalized, technology-driven, knowledge economy—and those being left further and further behind—poison the politics of all countries, and weaken the fabric of democracies. Residents of regions that, while once prosperous as they led the industrial era, today struggle in making an economic transition, are receptive to a politics of nostalgia, nationalism, resentment, and xenophobia. A politics that makes villains of immigrants and perceived urban elites, fosters retreat from the international community and family of nations and too often builds up authoritarian strongmen.

That is why it is so critical that today's young people—perhaps more motivated than any generation prior to confront and attend to the biggest challenges of the world–from racial and social inequities to the climate crisis—are organized to think regionally—as they did at the Transatlantic Democracy Workshop hosted by the German-American Institute Sachsen in Leipzig. They did so to understand better and to learn to work together to attend to the great variance in regional opportunities and shortcomings. Similar regional challenges are principal drivers of the nativist, nationalist, and nostalgic populist politics that threaten our countries from within, and the health of our alliances.

The Geography of Euroscepticism – A Roadmap to Enhance the EU's Public Support (and Democratic Survival)

Maria Luce Napoliello received her BA in Political Science at the University of Bologna and studied in Belgium, Germany, Poland, and South Africa. She is currently based in Leipzig, completing the European Master in Global Studies. As an EU enthusiast, Luce participated in the DAIS workshop, presenting an opinion piece on think tanks' role in confronting Eurosceptic parties. She says the DAIS workshop has been a fantastic opportunity to meet brilliant students and share reflections on our complex contemporary world without falling into conventional mainstream ideas.

Introduction

The advance of anti-EU claims continues unabated as the ills of the member states are being remitted to the supranational policies of the EU. At the same time, the EU is enjoying a record level of public support. By looking at regional economic and social dimensions behind support or opposition towards the EU, this paper aims at providing think tanks with the instruments to target the most Eurosceptic regions of the continent. It concludes with a strategy to confront Eurosceptic rhetoric with their same weapons, expressing the vital need for a Europe that is louder and closer to its citizens.

Euroscepticism and why it matters to Member States' democracy

The foundations of the European Union (EU) have been shaken as a ruling of the Polish Supreme Court has come to reject the primacy of EU law over national law, a core principle of the EU. The decision of the Court represents a victory for the country's conservative government, which has been campaigning for years against what it considers the EU's misappropriation of national sovereignty. The discourse over the loss of national sovereignty to the EU is a recurring theme in anti-EU, Eurosceptic groups. This diverse and non-homogeneous movement ranges from mere criticism towards EU policies to more radical claims that advocate for a scale-back of European powers and competencies, to disengagement from the EU. The latter could pose a potential danger for a domino effect

of national withdrawals amongst the member states, thus threatening the stability of the EU in its entirety. Besides this, the issues associated with the rise of anti-EU parties are multiple, ranging from a slow-down in the EU's decision-making process, to a stronger alignment with non-democratic partners abroad, as seen, for instance, in the case of Italy's *Five Stars Movement* endorsing the Chinese *Belt* and *Road* Initiative, Orban drifting away towards China, or Salvini travelling to Russia once too often.

Promising data (for the EU) show that public support for the Union is at an all-times high. On the other hand, a less encouraging figure shows that the support for anti-EU parties is equally high and rising. This apparent paradox lies in the fact that studies of Euroscepticism so far have relied on aggregate data. However, on a regional level within countries, there are extreme variations with respect to the social and economic regional specificities in which such parties collect most of the votes. The regional level is where the EU should look at if it is committed to enhancing its public support.

Unraveling the mechanism of (anti-)EU public support and its geography

The immediate surrounding environment largely shapes political preferences. An all-encompassing study on the geography of EU discontent finds that areas with lower population density and rural areas tend to vote more for anti-EU/anti-establishment parties. Consequently, this contributes to the belief that discontent towards the EU lies in that sentiment of the "left behind," of "*those having witnessed long periods of decline, migration and brain drain, those that have seen better times and remember them with nostalgia, those that have been repeatedly told that the future lays elsewhere, have used the ballot box as their weapon.*"[1] In these "left behind areas," where citizens fear losing their status, radical Eurosceptic parties appear to receive more popularity.

The electoral basis of Eurosceptic parties reflects or is reflected perhaps, in their policy goals. Anti-EU movements, overall, strenuously resist globalization and all the bad things it entails, i.e., migration, outsourcing, erosion of sovereign rights, the disintegration of national identity, and so forth. Eurosceptics have a record of blaming the ills within their borders to the shift of policy-making at the EU level where they say the people's interests are not considered. In their view, the EU is responsible for the disastrous effects of globalization. The truth is, the EU has become the perfect scapegoat for national policymakers' short-term political goals and electoral success. Its increased sphere of competence covers very salient policy areas (such as migration, trade, and monetary policy) previously decided at the national level by elected representatives.

On this basis, Eurosceptic parties lament a democratic gap between the EU institutions and its citizens, claiming that people do not have a direct voice in the executive decisions of the Commission, viewed as the "dictatorship of the Brussels" bureaucracy that prevents citizens from acting in their interest. As these policy areas are decided on a supranational level, and citizens cannot change them *within* the system, they work *against* the system by electing parties that reject the EU altogether.

On the EU side, the situation is just as bad on the EU side, with policymakers and experts labeling Eurosceptics as one homogeneous group that they like to call "populists," or "far-right" movements, visibly failing to acknowledge the complexity behind anti-EU stances or perhaps, pretending not to understand. The result is the two sides, Eurosceptics on one end and EU representatives on the other, declaring open war and failing to find common ground.

It is too easy to dismiss the claims of Eurosceptic parties as belonging to that small fraction of the populace that has „lost out" from globalization. While tempting, this view is counterproductive, especially because social cohesion matters so much for the EU. Many anti-EU parties adopt a somewhat dangerous nationalist and far-right

rhetoric, a prominent example being the Italian Lega Nord or the French National Rally. Yet, Salvini or Le Pen is not representative of the full spectrum of anti-EU parties, many of whom fall somewhat under far left or moderate views. What brings Eurosceptic parties together, though, is a sentiment of dissatisfaction with the veiled democratic processes and institutions of the EU.

Additionally, the EU apparatus officials are perceived as technocrats and out of touch. Legitimate affirmations should come as a red signal for European democracies and should not be dismissed as "populist rhetoric." Many of the leaders of these parties can be categorized as "populist" per se, and do not point out anything negative, as the EU likes to portray.

Populism is the form, rather than the substance. Populist movements appeal to the audience, reducing complex

social and economic issues to simple stories. Yet, the fact that Eurosceptic parties collect so much support, and continue to grow, should raise some questions over the problem they address, rather than how they do so. Their claims rest on genuine concern, backed by experts and academics, that is, a democratic gap between the EU institutions and its officials and the citizens of the EU. Closing this gap (whether this latter is accurate or perceived) could regain a lot more trust in the EU. Initiatives, such as the Conference on the Future of Europe, the events on citizens' participation, and the involvement of the youth, seem not to be enough. Those "left-behind" citizens who yield more votes for Eurosceptic parties were reached by these initiatives. Below, I will explain why it is so, and I will provide some answers on how the EU's strategies plan to get closer to its citizens.

Mimicking the Eurosceptic rhetoric: What the EU can learn

The strong rhetoric used by anti-EU parties appeals to the problems people perceive as closer to them, using an emotional, simple, and 'black and white' rhetoric that easily resonates with the broader public and not only to more 'educated' citizens. Generally, the geography of European sentiment is fueled primarily by lower employment opportunities and low levels of education. On the contrary, higher levels of education are less linked to anti-EU parties, as voters should generally be more aware of the political landscape and more knowledgeable and closer to the work of the EU. For instance, people with higher levels of education are more likely to have benefited from European integration and the free movement of people and capital (the Erasmus program for mobility abroad is a good example). Pro-EU parties, indeed, usually are central-left parties that tend to gain more votes from urban areas and upper strata of society. Pro-EU discourse is less present in public debate, and its rhetoric is milder. Therefore, there is a need for pro-EU rhetoric that also addresses "less-educated" parts of the population, which so far seem to be reached only by populist rhetoric and what is generally known as "fake news."

For this reason, think tanks involved in European integration should establish a solid regional network that would coordinate projects aimed at educating the general public. They could employ equally simple rhetoric to reach that electorate not generally addressed by pro-EU parties and initiatives. Citizens need to learn about what the EU does, how it functions, why it has gained competence on such salient issues. They could then find out that Member States' representatives negotiate the EU's policies that citizens have elected. This "EU League" should target those regions that show more Eurosceptic tendencies, rotating and 'campaigning' around the EU in territorial constituencies, and not only in big cities, regularly. The European Union is not even present in national school programs in some European Member States. Think tanks should pressure governments to address this gap. Many of the Eurosceptic voters may not be aware, for instance, that the EU is involved in a proposal to introduce a global corporate tax to mitigate the effects of outsourcing and job losses, while Italian voters, on the other hand, have been well informed about Lega's proposition for a flat tax to counter the austerity measures of the EU. [2]

Conclusion

This paper argues how the advance of anti-EU parties not only challenges the integrity and survival of European integration. It emerges mainly as a symptom of a deeper crisis and dissatisfaction with the EU's democratic processes. In portraying the EU as a globalizing force against "people's" interests, anti-EU parties appeal to "the left-behind." On the other hand, no equally strong rhetoric seems to exist for a pro-EU discourse. Think tanks could jump in and reach closer to the general public, moving away from the "ivory tower" reserved to a smaller fraction of citizens.

1 Dijkstra, L., Poelman, H., & Rodríguez-Pose, A. (2018, December). The Geography of EU Discontent (WP12/2018). European Commission. https://doi.org/10.2776/61870
2 Ibid. p. 12

Leonora Schulze

Winning back votes and Fighting Populists with Taxes

Leonora Schulze is a Political Science BA student at the University of Leipzig. She is originally from a small town in Lusatia and, in her work, seeks to explore the bad image taxes have - the one-sided discourse about them and how this even chips away at the image of the democratic state and plays into populists' hands. In her think piece, she worked out a solution with which a positively connoted image around taxes can be implemented, reinforcing a more flattering idea of the democratic state, making parties win back votes, and helping defeat populists.

Taxes – a topic that divides society, and a topic that is being discussed endlessly, especially when the words "taxes" and "scandal" mix. So, it is quite a precarious topic for politicians, but still, one that should be taken earnestly. The bad image of taxes can cause an even worse image of the (democratic) state and play into a populist's hands. Not to forget, it can be a crucial factor when it comes to election decisions. This Think Piece explains how this bad imagery works, how all of that works and how a new image of taxes can strengthen the democratic state and parties.

The tax discourse is often one-sided, which has negative consequences for the state and political parties. It is no secret that taxes are a controversial issue. Despite receiving tax returns, many consider them a burden and focus on the money they lose. Many citizens also think that their money isn't used reasonably.[1] This is typical for the discourse around taxes in society, the economy, and especially in social media. When people see their livelihoods and communities deteriorate drastically, as has been the case for example in many places of former eastern Germany, tax duty can evoke a feeling of robbery by the state.

But it's not just people facing difficulties in life that share this feeling; it's also some people who are doing *very* well. A list of German influencers on social media and gamers with a high income complain about their high tax rates—though not at the local regulars' table (more or less flashy), but on social media platforms in front of their millions of young followers. As comments show, some followers even support the complaints or state that they can understand it considering the many ways taxes get wasted and that one wouldn't know what is finally done with all that money.[2] So, with a little post on the right channel, a topic becomes an issue of dispute and a certain

opinion is heard by many. This is problematic. But we can also learn from that, as we will show later.

While there is extensive debate about how to change the tax system for the better, right-wing populist parties and organizations instrumentalize specific uses of tax money for their propaganda. Thereby, they make themselves out to be the voice of the common man and woman, speaking up against the establishment.[3] At the same time, they refrain from mentioning that their very own tax schemes would hurt middle-to-low incomes, and benefit higher incomes.[4] Of course, acting as the opposition to "the establishment" can be found on the other side of the political spectrum, too.

On the left, many see taxes as an overall positive means to benefit everyone, but the achievement of this goal is promised through enormously high taxation of rich people, which ignores behavioral adaptations.5 Another notable actor in this twisted discourse is the mainstream Media and their functional logic, which also feeds into the negative narrative.

There are sections of German satire magazines and whole books revolving around the waste of tax money. When the German Health Ministry bought an unnecessary amount of FFP2 masks it was all over the papers. Surely, this makes for a drastic and news-worthy example. But building streets, paying teachers, and supporting the socially disadvantaged must be newsworthy, too. However, because they are perceived as daily business they do not find coverage. Even if the building of a new school or community center is part of the local news, it's not connected to the fact that tax money made it possible. And to find out and understand what one's tax money was finally used for requires quite some effort. Eventually, most of the discourse suffers from a lack of knowledge and revolves around social inequality, unfairness, waste, and paying, but not about caring, giving, and receiving.

This tax-image problem needs to be solved to retain a strong democracy, avert an even bigger swing to the right, and maintain political balance. Otherwise, the image of the state always taking too much, reproducing unfairness and caring mostly for itself or the upper class is nourished. That erodes trust in the democratic state and its support for it. But every state, every political system needs essential, indisputable support that will make people hold on to it despite the promises of another, even if problems occur. The combination of the dubious image with other adverse political decisions or factors that destabilize people's lives (like structural change) makes for quite an explosive mixture. That can lead the affected into the arms of those that reject the democratic state or make them cast their votes for parties that promise more than what is possible. Especially if these promises are not critically reflected concerning their feasibility. Furthermore, emerging in young generations, suspicion of the state and its servants will destabilize the state's future since it contradicts the establishment of an internalized democratic attitude in those that'll once carry the state. Needless to say that intentions to raise taxes will be

harder to implement. Finally, all these things will make the other established parties, especially those behind the government, lose votes and influence.

The improvement of the image of taxes and the knowledge of dynamics around tax increase and lowering can be achieved with a new frame around taxes, implemented through and including formal and informal education and an image campaign. That might not be enough to stop the spread of democracy mistrusting attitudes or get citizens to agree with expensive means for whatever reason, but it certainly is one step in the way of reaching such goals.

What does this frame look like?

Taxes shall no longer be seen as "the state taking," but as "citizens giving and caring." Giving not only to that diffuse construct called state but also to their communities, caring for these people. Another big element is re-

spect. The people should get respect back for paying so much and be ensured that they can be proud of what they made possible with their taxes. Showing that taxes are used in ways that benefit the man on the street would also weaken the anti-establishment argument of certain parties. Furthermore, it should be aimed at a basic knowledge about taxes, the tax system, etc. It should emphasize that tax money that seemingly only others profit from (higher education, social security) is beneficial to those but to the state itself. For example, better-educated people, e.g., may get better-paid jobs, pay higher taxes, and are less likely to need unemployment benefits. Said benefits are beneficial for the generality too since they help people maintain a stable life situation to be ready to be a productive member of the community again. Eventually, they are also part of respecting human rights.

How to implement this frame?

The first element is formal education. Taxes and the tax system should become a part of high school teaching. It could be included in existing subjects like civic education or economic studies. These lessons should not be a PR campaign; they can be critical and show unpleasant aspects of the topic. But if they are done well, they will enable the students to comprehend the importance of taxes, which they already have for their own lives. The students will also realize when topics are politically instrumentalized and know when to seek objective data. That would also help weaken the claim that citizens don't know what happens with their taxes. Essentially, this is a seed for a critical but positive attitude towards taxes. Besides, integrating it in school teaching also means that it would reach *everyone*.

The second element is supporting informal forms of education. In Germany political education organizations like the "Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung" (BpB) are already writing about the topic on their website. This should be complemented by well-known online formats like "Deutschland3000" and "Your. Money," that do markedly young and modern political/economic education and news. Contrary to BpB they use more prominent platforms to share their content (YouTube, Instagram, TikTok). Hence, they reach a bigger audience and people who weren't looking them up in the first place – here, we use a similar effect to the one the mentioned influencers profited from. These formats should pick up the topic (more) and explain it in easy-going ways. They could draw on different realities of life, views and they'd be free and open to watch for everyone. The also existing information-sites from the Federal Ministry of Economy are comparatively quite laborious to use. The proposed formats could feel less connected to the state itself and less biased.

The third element now is an image campaign to reach (older) people outside the formal education system and highlight the topic in a certain way. The first part is a yearly advertising campaign, which should bring information about what was done with the tax money to the people. Therefore, it must be tailor-made for every region (e.g. administrative district) and present concrete projects, not just indistinct terms like "traffic system." The ads should also inform where to get further information but contain factual content themselves – because how many will look it up eventually? The emphasis should be put on the taxpayers and what they made possible with their money, not what the *government* did. Different people, with various jobs and incomes, should be shown and addressed to prove that everyone plays their part and is appreciated. Not to forget, it's essential to be relatively neutral and not use this for political party campaigns, which would have legal consequences and would be met with disapproval by the people. The tricky thing is, that there mustn't be too much money spent on this – because the campaign should not cause claims of tax waste. This is where the second part comes into play. To generate free and independent promotion, the impact of tax money must be *made* a topic – just like when influencers post about it. Hence, ministries and politicians should post about it on their social media accounts, talk about it in interviews and use contacts to journalists to make them pick it up and report about it.

To conclude, the bad image of taxes and the one-sided negative discourse, and the limited knowledge about the topic need to be changed. Otherwise, growing incomprehension and rejection of the state can lead to an increasing loss of votes for established parties, harm democracy, and help populists rise. The change can be achieved by implementing a new image frame around taxes. They shall no longer be seen as "the state taking", but as "the people giving and caring." The means to implement this are formal and informal education and an advertising campaign, consisting of state-paid adverts and free advertising through reporting media. Being tailor-made for small regions and realities of life, the campaign will close the gap that budget reports, which are difficult to find and to revise, couldn't close. Causing a stronger bond between inhabitants and state citizens and can help hold and winning votes, even when tax increases are planned. Last but not least, it is a step in the right direction to overcome the right-wing upsurge and generally stabilize democratic attitudes.

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Expert Voice:

Paul Jürgensen
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Paul Jürgensen is a Policy Advisor at the Berlin-based Think Tank Das Progressive Zentrum. In his role, Paul oversees projects on representation and participation, democratic innovations and visions, and dealing with right-wing populism and extremism. He is co-author of the book „Schleichend an die Macht" (Dietz Verlag, 2020). Before joining Das Progressive Zentrum he held a teaching position at the University of Hamburg. Paul studied Political Science and Politics, Economics and Philosophy in Passau, Hamburg and Cardiff.

Without broad social acceptance the great transformation towards a climate neutral society and economy will not succeed. Especially people in economically weak regions, who have made negative experiences with structural changes in the past, often regard themselves as affected by the transformation, but not as actors with a say in shaping it. For them to become co-authors of the transformation instead of mere addressees, we must think of better ways of democratic participation and invest more money in public infrastructure and innovative regional business.

One important task of Think Tanks is to engage in a direct dialogue with people from economically weak regions instead of just speaking about them. I have really enjoyed being a part of the workshop and discussing these issues with the students. Together we picked up on the question of how, in the face of transformation, democracies can change in a way that allows them to act faster and be more inclusive at the same time.

Luise G. Domina

Putting Empathy back into Politics – Why Yelling at Populist Voters Doesn't Work and What Can be Done Instead

Luise G. Domina studies Political Science at the University of Leipzig. Currently, she is writing her Bachelor thesis on the transnational dimension of the "Crack and Opioid Epidemics" in the United States. Luise enjoys researching and writing about political psychology, political education, historical politics, and, more generally practical solutions to large-scale problems. She strives to drive solutions by understanding why people think the way they do, for example, with right-wing populist voting choices.

Most, if not all, western democracies have seen a surge in right-wing populist rhetoric and voting choices in their public arena and elections. Right-wing populist parties are aggressively campaigning against minorities, the elites, and the system in general. A myriad of factors contributes to this, including economic changes in a global economy that disproportionately impact rural areas and insufficient transparency and information on the limits and possibilities of the political systems. Additionally, the media often echoes populist talking points. Their feelings of frustration and anger guide many populist voters.

Vocal parts of the (more left-leaning) public have publicly condemned populist party leaders for their speeches or personal connections and branded those who vote for populists as stupid and bigoted. Answering the question of their emotional voting decision and deriving solutions from that doesn't seem to be a priority. Neglecting that voting decision, populist ones especially, are more about emotions than actual policy and not finding a way to sway voters will destabilize democratic political institutions in the long run. Additionally, the incendiary populist rhetoric sows mistrust and polarization that make compromises almost impossible to achieve and puts the (often already vulnerable) groups targeted by it at risk for verbal and even physical attacks.

Combating populist parties' rise is intertwined with complex economic solutions, such as transforming rural economies and eliminating structural disadvantages. Still, it should also be supplemented by a two-pronged, more empathetic approach. First, petition governments to rethink political education and adjust it to include phenomena like misinformation to help young citizens navigate the political landscape better. Second, target rural

communities with cooperative initiatives to expose them to different ideas and lifestyles without alienating them.

Democracy relies on educated and civic participation in elections and beyond them; the lack of it puts democracy in danger of populism. Easy solutions sound enticing, and fast change evokes fear in a globalized and increasingly complex world. Consequently, right-wing populism responds to these emotions by promising to roll back progressive policies and get things "back to normal." Yet, in rural areas especially, many citizens are at a structural disadvantage and experience the rapid changes in lifestyles, their workplace, and their community as threatening. They feel left behind. Even if welfare systems are in place and their financial situation stable, the perceived fear of losing status and financial security still looms over them. It makes them susceptible to manipulative campaigning and fear-mongering. Furthermore, sensationalist news coverage incites even more anger, fear, and alienation and often distorts the view of what the world outside the community appears.

Even in areas that are not affected by the refugee influx of the last few years, the media coverage of people at the borders, who have a different culture, language, and appearance evoke conflicting feelings of fear and entitlement in often very ethnically homogenous rural communities. It is especially hard to make sense of complex political processes when political education is insufficient. It is often not mandatory, occupies significantly fewer lessons per week than other important subjects, and prioritizes factual knowledge over discussions and critical thinking as well as basic researching skills.

Another part of the problem is the way people in charge, often urban and academic elites, as well as politicians, speak about those motivated to vote populist based on their emotions, calling them uneducated, backward-thinking, and discriminatory. While this might be true in many cases, it will only increase the divide and lead to even more adverse reactions, such as increased voter turnout for populist parties, more hostility, and susceptibility to their inflammatory rhetoric. Therefore, it is vital to acknowledge the feelings behind voter choices and react not by belittling citizens but by meeting them where they are without compromising democratic ideals. At a time where much needs to be done, from battling scientific phenomena like climate change and pandemics to regulating out-of-control corporations and increasing wealth gaps, societies can't afford more fragmentation and mistrust within their electorate and institutions that hinder any meaningful policy from getting passed, especially when populist parties are elected into parliaments with significant percentages and are able to block legislation.

Obviously, the line needs to be drawn at people who commit hate crimes, spread disinformation, and hate speech. Parliamentary collaborations with populist parties openly advocating for human rights violations are also unacceptable. Furthermore, meaningful investment in rural economies and a sustainable welfare system are necessary to curb negative sentiments in the population. These approaches are essential but not the focus of

this think piece. To give citizens—young and old—more opportunities to contextualize their emotions about the political system, this think piece presents two more possible initiatives.

Many scholars and public figures shy away from discussions about modernizing political education in fear of sounding condescending ("People are too stupid to vote right and need to be taught better!") or being accused of advocating indoctrination ("What's next? Pledging allegiance to the European Union in classrooms?"). At the same time, one can argue that it is the comparatively most achievable partial solution and advocating for it as a politician is less controversial than pushing for larger-scale economic changes. Re-thinking political education in secondary schooling is an investment in the future electorate. It should aim to not only convey dry factual knowledge about parliaments and parties but create spaces in schools where open and critical discussions about the positive and frustrating aspects of democracy are encouraged. Additionally, media literacy skills have to be incorporated to help young citizens maneuver the overwhelming amount of information and misinformation at their disposal.

Adolescents are much more observant of their surroundings than older generations give them credit for. Opening up the classrooms to share their experiences helps them contextualize their feelings about society, learn how politics affects them personally, and get informed about the many ways they can participate. In increasingly diverse classrooms, it can be enriching if students from minorities feel safe sharing their cultural insights or experiences of discrimination.

Teachers could encourage discussions about the origins of intolerance and what could be done to counter this. There are already many non-profit organizations that offer bias or anti-bullying training but inviting them to schools is still up to the administrations and therefore not mandated. Intolerance is a learned behavior and

young people are especially susceptible to discriminatory rhetoric in their families and communities. Standardized political education curricula would be able to provide a counterweight and equip adolescents with additional viewpoints, as well as support to form their own opinions.

Approaching adults and encouraging them to open themselves up to new experiences and narratives is a much harder task than reaching adolescents. Adults have much more agency in where they live, what events they visit, and what media they consume. Advertisers and psychologists know that people need to be exposed to experien-

ces and opinions that are different from their own to develop a positive emotional response. Intolerance towards marginalized groups or functional elites is often rooted in the privilege of not having to deal with the problems of the difficult decision-making they do.

One way to approach rural, isolated, and homogenous communities is by a collaborative effort of regional political offices (mayors, regional parliaments), non-profit organizations/think tanks, and community actors in organizing events and programs. Involving community members to gain the population's trust and combining it with the organizational and didactic skills of non-profit organizations constitute the foundation to successful outreach and exposure programs. Some additional factors that need to be kept in mind when organizing these events are: choosing familiar locations, tailoring the contents to the community, training speakers, and providing their safety when sharing their experiences; events need to be free of charge, easily accessible, engaging and interactive as well fact-based while still acknowledging the audiences' emotions.

In practice, this can be done in different formats. They can work with trained speakers and members of marginalized communities (for example local refugees) and feature Q&A sessions, workshops, and festivities to celebrate local traditions. The formats can include different cultural practices (for example, food, dance, music, arts and crafts) and the funding and founding of non-partisan youth organizations that can help plan and provide volunteers. Churches can play a part, too. They are often the most trusted actors in rural communities and have extensive networks that could gather funds and acquire speakers. Trusted local media actors can also be involved to reach less socially active citizens.

There are many non-profits, think tanks, and media outlets who are trying to change the narrative on divisive topics. Oftentimes, they are concentrated in urban areas and have no idea how rural communities think and how to approach them. They also operate with limited funding, entrenched hierarchies and rarely cooperate with regional government actors. The given recommendations are a tiny part of a massive change that needs to be implemented. Still, they can serve as an impulse for communities, regional organizations, governments, and think tanks to collaborate on local solutions to approach rural voters and future voters. Policies might appear rational, but those who make them and those who have to live by them are not. Ignoring emotions in politics is forgetting what makes us human, and lacking basic empathy will only tear our societies further apart.

Svenja Frank

Misinformation Kills

Svenja is in her 5th semester of majoring in American Studies at Leipzig University, focusing on society and politics. Originally raised in north Bavaria, she moved to Leipzig for her studies where she now lives with her two roommates and a beloved cat. She enjoys spending her time online where she has developed an interest in media, communities, and social activism. As a moderator of several international online communities, she developed an interest in the problems of misinformation. During the Transatlantic Democracy Workshop, she investigated possible solutions to the spread of misinformation, a topic she intends to develop further for her upcoming Bachelor's thesis.

This piece is not about the current Covid pandemic, Climate Change, or the Trump presidency. The demand for these topics has been more than saturated. Instead, this piece will tackle any issue as rampant as Covid-19, as dangerous as Climate Change, and as polarizing as former President Donald Trump, all while being inextricably linked to these topics: This is a piece about misinformation. It will examine the ways misinformation can spread the dangers associated with it and discuss possible countermeasures.

Misinformation is by no means a recent issue. There were plenty of examples from all across time I could have drawn on for my opening paragraph. I deliberately chose contemporary instances because we are facing a recent surge of misinformation. The culprit is as apparent as it is omnipresent: Thanks to social media, we can share information faster and easier than ever. And of course, the same goes for misinformation which often spreads even faster than the truth. It's not hard to imagine why: Misinformation is a lot more concrete than its factual counterpart.

Let's take one of the most infamous illustrations of misinformation: The claim that the average person eats eight spiders in their sleep per year. Such a bizarre and mildly disturbing "fact" definitely deserves to be shared on Facebook. An article explaining that the average person consumes zero spiders in their sleep isn't nearly as captivating. That was already the assumption unless we had been exposed to the eight spider myth beforehand. The

eight spider myth was popularized in 1993 in a column about fake facts being passed around via email.

Conveniently, this also illustrates the evolution of misinformation spreading with new technology. Back in 1993, it would spread via e-mail, possibly through chainmail or your uncle's weekly newsletter. Modern social media platforms hadn't been created yet: MySpace wouldn't exist for another year, and the giant that is today's Facebook was still over a decade away. Misinformation wasn't a side effect of the invention of email. However, the ability to send emails all across the globe in a short time and to as many people as desired made the spread of misinformation so much more effective. And social media would then take this efficiency and bring it to an uncontrollable degree.

Social media platforms and the ever-growing popularity of instant messenger apps skyrocketed the potential to share all of your thoughts with the world, truthful or not. Of course, spreading a myth about arachnid-based midnight snacks is pretty harmless. At worst, you will lose some sleep. The real danger of misinformation lies in purposeful disinformation and misconceptions that can lead to real harm.

Let's look at some of the dangers misinformation bears with it. There are concrete, direct examples, like the popular kitchen "life hack" that an egg submerged in water can safely be poached in the microwave. In reality, the egg has a chance of exploding and covering the unsuspecting, misinformed victim in scalding water, leading to severe burns. Life hacks like these have become very popular on video-sharing platforms, mass-produced and recycled by large channel networks to capitalize on ad revenue. Since the main focus of these companies is sizeable financial gain, they're often willing to promote potentially harmful practices that will get attention either for their danger or coolness factor.

People who were hurt by copying these videos have filed lawsuits in the past. But this has not resulted in any substantial change or consequences for those who produce or distribute the misinformation. Some damage from misinformation isn't as physical and, therefore, harder to observe. Since a lot of misinformation relies on fearmongering, it is quick to delve into xenophobia and bigotry, spreading and reinforcing those beliefs among its victims to create an increasingly hostile environment. This is especially effective in combination with pre-existing stereotypes. These hostile environments can then either harm the minorities directly through violence or indirectly systemic discrimination.

It does not necessarily have to be intentional either. Doctors in training may still be taught that black skin is thicker than white skin and requires more force to pierce. Known as Medical Bias, this is an extremely dangerous form of persisting misinformation for minorities who need medical attention. Luckily this brand of misinformation isn't nearly as susceptible to inflammation and spread via social media. A type of misinformation that also causes indirect damage but is rampant on social media is the anti-vax movement. While all of its points get repeatedly disproven, its supporters are steadfast in their belief that vaccinations are harmful, resulting in vaccine hesitancy or outright refusal. It is hard to quantify the exact impact this has; vaccine hesitancy has been listed as one of the ten biggest threats to global health by the WHO.

I'd like to note the final form of damage caused by misinformation is isolation. Those who fall victim to continued misinformation will often distance themselves from others who do not believe the same things. In some cases, this is due to the isolating nature of some false information in the vein of "you can't trust anyone else." In most cases, it is due to the victim trying to convince others of their newfound facts only to be met with ridicule. When these victims then seek solace with others in similar situations, it is easy for an echo chamber to form. There, new misinformation can breed, and its inhabitants get further away from reality, thereby their friends and family outside. Once

a person has fallen down the near-endless spiral of misinformation, it gets very difficult to pull them back to the real facts.

Because recovering from this spiral is so difficult, it is all the more important to combat misinformation from the very beginning. Many organizations, like Snopes and the EU DisinfoLab, have already dedicated themselves to countering misinformation. Yet these can only counter false claims if they are actively sought out. Social Media like Twitter and Instagram have started to flag posts that contain misinformation and add disclaimers with the correct information. While the software still has room for improvements, this is a crucial step to containing the spread of misinformation. However, it cannot target misinformation spreading through direct messengers like WhatsApp or those who distrust official sources altogether.

While we tackle limiting the spread of misinformation, we also have to work on making the facts able to compete with the spread. When information is served on a silver platter, we cannot rely on people seeking out fact checks by themselves. Easy-to-understand infographics and simple language explanations will have to be developed from numerous reputable outlets to compete with the constant flow of misinformation. In an age where misinformation is easy to consume and even easier to spread, facts have to be just as accessible, easy to understand, and distribute.

As established, misinformation spreads rapidly because of its more engaging nature. There have been attempts of creators seeking to share information in more entertaining ways to keep their audience engaged. This so-called infotainment is a common genre of shows and documentaries already. It reaches a substantial number of people

aside from morals, there is no incentive for them to be accurate, nor are there any consequences to spreading misinformation. But the truly devastating fact is that this applies to social media platforms as well. By claiming that they are not responsible for the content their user's post, the sites have avoided nearly all accountability for the misinformation that spreads. They even have an incentive to encourage misinformation, increasing engagement and thereby revenue.

In order to combat misinformation, we must demand accountability from the platforms that allow it to grow. We must rely on their ability to remove and block genuinely harmful claims, not only when an active violent uprising is encouraged by the most powerful man in the world. Overcoming the distribution of misinformation is as much of a group effort as spreading it. While we push for the big players to take responsibility, we also have to educate ourselves, our friends, and our family, especially those who are vulnerable to misinformation. Aside from that, the areas of social media where correct information, clarifications, and debunking of misinformation are spread in entertaining ways have to be extended to allow facts to spread as quickly as misinformation.

through, for example, Last Week Tonight, but cannot be shared around quickly and expand their reach past their current viewers who are willing to dedicate a set amount of time to the show.

Many smaller social media creators have made it their brand to circulate information they've researched in easy-to-digest packages. You will find this in Twitter threads, Instagram slideshows, and TikTok videos. This can efficiently function as a blueprint for a more significant effort to distribute information and clarifications since it already proves that creators like this can find an audience. Even more, this content is adjusted to the short attention span of the average social media user. The big problem with these creators remains the same as with all content on social media: There is no easy way to verify the creator's intent or the accuracy of the content. And

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Dialogue is at the core of progress. Successful dialogue is based on translating concepts, ideas, hope and fear between different contexts. In our intertwined world, North America and Europe are connected in more ways than we can even imagine. Culturally, economically, and politically, to name a few. And more often than not, dialogue at the state level does not accurately reflect the ties that exist between people on both sides of the Atlantic. That is where city and regional exchanges come in.

Whether a community, city, or region, we should empower new actors to participate in international dialogue. Finding new formats to increase dialogue on an international scale is about giving a voice to people who are often affected by global systems, but do not have a say. Bringing more people to the table allows us to share knowledge, build trust in our democratic institutions, and illuminate how we can best make political and economic systems more equitable, sustainable and for all.

How Transatlantic Countries Violate Human Rights in Developing Countries

Nasrullah Ali is an Erasmus Mundus scholar from Pakistan pursuing his Joint Masters in Global Studies from the University of Wroclaw, Poland, and the University of Leipzig, Germany. He holds a BA degree in International Relations from the University of Pécs (Hungary) and is currently associated with Leipzig Research Centre Global Dynamics as a research assistant. In his think piece, he highlights how transatlantic countries have been violating human rights in South Asia for their economic gains. His paper also focuses on the issue of climate change in developing countries and ends with suggestions to resolve these issues.

As many European countries move towards becoming greener to tackle climate change, the point is to what extent they would do so. The recent elections in Germany already portray that many youngsters and first-time voters voted for the Greens – making them potential coalition partners. This paper will try to highlight how Transatlantic countries are failing to resolve the issue of Human Rights and, subsequently the case of climate change; since a healthy environment is a Human Right. For instance, factories in the Global South working predominantly for Western countries violate human rights within the workplace and pollute the atmosphere. The paper will begin with the issue of climate change followed by human rights violations in the factories.

Climate change is a collective goods issue. It cannot be resolved by any state alone. Unfortunately, that also means that the efforts of any single state might prove futile if other states do not care about climate change. Therefore, transatlantic countries must understand and resolve the root cause of the issue that lies miles apart, mainly in the Asian region. Germany might close all the coal stations, but would it be willing to stop importing cheap products from the Asian countries where factories are purely operating from coal energy? Yes, Germany and other western countries depend on Asian countries to import most of their textile goods.

Let's take the example of the garments being imported by the EU countries. According to the EU's official website, clothes imports mostly come from countries that rely heavily on coal. Imports from China rank first (23 billion Euro, or 29% of total extra-EU clothes), followed by Bangladesh (15 billion Euro, 19%) and Turkey (9 billion Euro,

11%), the United Kingdom (5 billion Euro, 6%), India (4 billion Euro, 5%), Cambodia and Vietnam (both 3 billion Euro, 4%). It is essential to realize that this practice goes against the norms and values that the 27-member bloc is based on, especially in the proposed European Green Deal. This import practice also goes against the vital interest of transatlantic countries to become more independent from fossil fuels and to curb emissions drastically.

There is no silhouette of doubt that it would take a lot of time for the countries in the Global South to switch entirely to renewable energy. However, since Western countries have already started doing so, the obligation lies on them (the developed countries) to assist and help the developing countries build renewable energy infrastructures. Until that is done, it would be in the vital interest of the West to temporarily halt the import of cheap products coming from the coal-based industries. Once the industries start working on environment-friendly energy resources, the Transatlantic countries can resume their import activities. Although as difficult as it may sound, there is no other way to resolve the issue.

According to a report in 2020, out of the top 50 most polluted cities, 40 were from Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. At the time of writing this paper, Pakistan's Lahore is the world's most polluted city in the world. Media re-

ports have suggested a sudden rise in health issues in Lahore, putting pressure on the hospitals which are already working on emergency mode due to Covid-19. These issues, if not resolved soon, might result in environmental disasters.

Besides the issue of climate, transatlantic countries also have failed to pay heed to check the supply chain of the imported goods and make sure that the imported products do not violate any human rights. It should be a priority for European countries since the bloc foundation is established on democratic norms and principles, including but not limited to respecting human rights such as child labor and ensuring better working conditions.

In many South Asian countries, the exported products do not meet human rights standards. Consequently, Bangladesh has remained one of the worst impacted countries where a gross violation of human rights occurs, yet no action has taken place against the country by the US and EU. Tragically, in 2013 an eight-story garment factory called "Rana Plaza" collapsed. Around 1,134 died, and approximately 2,500 people were injured. Thousand peo-

ple died while sewing clothes for American and European brands. Initially, global brands denied association with the factory. However, activists later dug through the rubble and found the labels of 29 Western fashion brands sourcing from these deathtrap factories. Unfortunately, "Rana Plaza" is not an isolated incident, but only one piece of the appalling problem that the EU needs to resolve with determination and coherence; our current response to this challenge is far from satisfactory.

Eight years later, the truth is that many European fashion companies still commit human rights abuses daily. Workers are underpaid, forced into excessive overtime, denied sick leave, in dangerous conditions, and trapped in child and forced labor. Worse, workers are even threatened and intimidated when they claim their rights. It is high time the European Commission stops dragging its feet and presents a legislative proposal to ensure corporations' respect for human rights. In doing so, European companies must abide by diligent requirements, including access to justice avenues for victims.

Transatlantic countries should take concrete steps to avoid such tragedies. Therefore, they should introduce a rigid monitoring system to check if all the supply chain standard operating procedures were well followed. For instance: EU delegations in those countries should be given the right to carry out snap checks to ensure that no rights were violated; Human rights are universal. Hence, the responsibility to respect them also lies in the EU.

Every top bought in Europe negatively contributes to human rights in other countries. All these sales during the seasons are at the expense of people suffering in the other corner of the world who can barely earn enough money to meet their necessities of life. Several reports also suggest that the garments imported from China might have been produced through forced labor cotton production from the Uighur populace. Additionally, when some international brands like *Nike* and *H&M* raised concerns, they met a massive backlash from Beijing. Many products of the earlier mentioned brands were removed from the listings on Chinese e-commerce platforms.

To conclude, every care should be taken that the products ending up in the people's homes in the West did not violate any human rights. Similarly, the transatlantic countries should reconsider their current stratagem of diverting the issue of climate change to the developing countries.

About DAIS

The German-American Institute Saxony (DAIS) is a non-profit organization dedicated to strengthening Saxon-American, German-American, and European-American dialogue. We stand for a liberal-democratic political culture in Saxony, Central Germany, and beyond. DAIS is the first institution of its kind in the former eastern part of Germany. Our project *Mitteldeutschland in der Welt* is an initiative to promote exchange between global and regional perspectives. Together with students, practitioners, diplomats, experts, and many more we are finding ways to connect international affairs with ideas in the region to address global challenges and their regional implications.

About Transatlantika

Transatlantika was co-founded by Sonja Niemeier and Tim Luecke in 2020 in Cologne. We are a growing network of scholars, artists, experts, academics, students, and other engaged citizens who pursue the mission of promoting transatlantic cooperation and of developing creative solutions to the crisis of the West. Transatlantic cooperation is not just a matter of bringing politicians and experts from both sides of the Atlantic together. We believe that it is just as essential to strengthen the cultural and societal bonds that have developed between us over time. While Transatlantika operates as a think tank that develops new ideas and provides expertise, we therefore also host cultural events, organize networking, and promote the work of artists, musicians, and other cultural actors.