

## Journal of Geography, Politics and Society

2021, 11(4), 18–28

<https://doi.org/10.26881/jpgs.2021.4.02>



---

# EU AND AGENDA 2030 – PEACE, JUSTICE & STRONG INSTITUTIONS

**Daniel Silander**

Department of Political Science, Linnaeus University, SE-35105 Vaxjo, Sweden  
e-mail: [daniel.silander@lnu.se](mailto:daniel.silander@lnu.se)

### Citation

Silander D., 2021, EU and Agenda 2030 – Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions, *Journal of Geography, Politics and Society*, 11(4), 18–28.

### Abstract

In 2015, the United Nations (UN) decided on 17 sustainable development goals. Goal 16 focused on peace, justice and strong institutions and on the importance of democracy for global sustainable development. This study explores the status of democracy in Europe and highlights tendencies of authoritarianism in some post-communist states. This happens in a global context of resurgence of autocratization. Although the European Union (EU) continues to be a solid liberal democratic order, challenges in post-communist Europe exist, especially in Hungary as a new authoritarian state within the EU.

### Key words

UN Goal 16, democracy, European Union, post-communism, Hungary.

**Received:** 27 April 2021

**Accepted:** 24 September 2021

**Published:** 24 January 2022

---

## 1. Introduction

In September 2015, a special United Nations (UN) Summit, including 193 member states, adopted *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. The Agenda included a political declaration and 17 sustainable development goals (SDG), embedding economic, social, cultural, political and environmental sustainability (UN General Assembly, 2015). Since 2015, the UN Agenda 2030 has become the blueprint for Europe's ambition to become sustainable and the European Union (EU) has committed itself to implementing all necessary reforms (European Commission, 2016). In 2016, the EU Commission launched the Communication *Next Steps for a Sustainable European Future – European*

*Action for Sustainability* (European Commission, 2016) including changes and challenges ahead (European Commission, 2016).

The UN Sustainable Development Goal 16 addresses political sustainability; the sustainable development goal means promoting and protecting peace and inclusive societies based on strong institutions and the rule of law. The political declaration of the Agenda highlights the importance of democratic governance. It declares how democratic norms and values are essential to promote and fulfil the remaining sustainable development goals. Democracy is a fundamental goal and a means to sustainable development (UN General Assembly, 2015). In July 2019, the Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed stressed the importance of expanding

democratic governance around the world and how Goal 16 had to be promoted in all UN activities. She acknowledged that democracies may have different forms of governance, with different historical and cultural legacies, but how democracy, as free and fair elections, transparent institutions, fair and balanced rules for people/state relations and checks and balances are universal freedoms for everyone and everywhere (UN Secretary-General, 2019).

This study explores the status of democracy in Europe in the last two decades by using well-established democracy indexes, namely the Freedom House Index, the Nations in Transit Index and the V-Democracy Index in addition to research on democratization and autocratization. The main question is: what is the status of democracy in Europe in a context of the Agenda 2030 and Goal 16? It is stated that, although the EU is a global frontrunner on the Agenda 2030 and Goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions, there are new alarming challenges in the European democratic landscape and especially so in some post-communist states such as Hungary and Poland. These challenges could become serious hindrances for the consolidation of democracy in individual states and the implementation of Goal 16 in post-communist societies, but also

undermine further EU integration based on a liberal democratic order.

## 2. The UN Agenda 2030 – Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

Agenda 2030 was a result of a long political process of debates and negotiations, which started in June 2012 with the Rio-20 Conference on Sustainable Development, where participating states finally agreed to develop global sustainable development goals based on the previous Millennium Development Goals and the 2005 World Summit Outcome. The Agenda 2030 of 2015 included 17 goals (see Table 1.).

The Agenda 2030 embedded a wide array of sustainable development goals. The UN declared how billions of citizens around the world faced challenges to sustainable development goals. Such challenges were poverty and unsafe drinking water, hunger and diseases, social, economic and gender inequalities, poor education, conflicts and human rights abuses. In addition, the UN also acknowledged climate changes consequences with a severe impact on people and societies, such as natural

Tab. 1. Summary of Agenda 2030

GOALS	CONTENT
1. Ending poverty	Reduction and, in the long term, eradication of poverty
2. Food security	Ending hunger and promoting sustainable agriculture
3. Health & well-being	Health systems, health coverage and countermeasures against diseases
4. Quality education	Inclusive and equitable education as well as life-long learning opportunities
5. Gender equality	Girls' and women's empowerment, plus social and economic participation
6. Clean water & sanitation	Sustainable management of water to provide safe water and sanitation
7. Sustainable energy	Sustainable energy services, and sure access to affordable, reliable and modern energy
8. Work and growth	Promoting decent work and full employment through inclusive and sustainable economic growth
9. Industries and innovation	Sustainable industrialization and fostered innovation
10. Reduced inequalities	Structural transformation to address income inequalities
11. Sustainable community	Sustainable urbanization to enhance effective local development
12. Responsible consumption and production	Responsible supply chains and business practices, as well as promotion of green economy
13. Climate action	Combating climate change and its impacts
14. Life below water	Conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources
15. Life on land	Protecting and promoting sustainable terrestrial ecosystems on land, and combating unsustainable management of forests, desertification and land degradation
16. Peaceful societies & strong institutions	Promoting inclusive societies based on strong institutions and the rule of law
17. Global partnerships & implementation	Strengthening and monitoring means of implementation of development goals based on global partnerships

Source: United Nations, General Assembly 2015.

disasters, desertification, drought, land degradation, rising sea levels and ocean acidification. Although progress has been made in many states and regions, the Agenda called for the implementation of urgent global reforms (UN General Assembly, 2015).

The Agenda 2030 in Goal 16 addresses the importance of peace, justice and strong institutions in providing for sustainable development. The UN declares how the different goals in the agenda are dependent on peaceful, just and inclusive societies with effective public institutions. Goal 16 is essential to obtain other goals; lack of justice and stable and accountable institutions is a major hindrance to socioeconomic development in quality education, healthcare, fair economic policies, social inclusion and environmental protection. As stated by the UN, "Institutions that do not function according to legitimate laws are prone to arbitrariness and abuse of power, and less capable of delivering public services to everyone" (UN, 2019, pp. 1–2).

The importance of Goal 16 for sustainable development is highlighted in the Political Declaration of 2015. Agenda 2030 is to "envisage a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality" (UN General Assembly, 2015, p. 3). Such a world is "one in which democracy, good governance and the rule of law, as well as an enabling environment at the national and international levels, are essential for sustainable development" (UN General Assembly, 2015, p. 4). Therefore, democracy is a fundamental aspect of Agenda 2030 and the overall UN Charter (UN Charter, 1945). However, goal 16 is in great need of global promotion and protection. States and regions around the world are highly divided regarding the level of peace, justice and strong institutions, wherein some states and regions are free from serious challenges, while other states and regions are undermined by conflicts, dysfunctional institutions and democratic and human rights abuses. Therefore, the UN provides electoral assistance in about 60 countries every year in addition to partnerships with regional, international and governmental organizations (Freedom House, 2019). Such work focuses on promoting aspects of Goal 16 in the rule of law and equal access to justice, effective, accountable and transparent institutions, responsive, inclusive and representative decision-making and public access to information (UN Goal 16, 2015).

### 3. Europe – Peaceful Societies and Strong Institutions

The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights addresses the importance of dignity, freedoms, equality, solidarity

and citizen's rights and justice within the EU. It sets out shared European norms and values and a platform for European integration and peace. It declares how the EU "is founded on the indivisible, universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity: it is based on the principles of democracy and the rule of law" (Charter, 2000, preamble) as institutionalized in the European Coal and Steel Treaty (1951) and the EC- and EU Treaties thereafter. These treaties acknowledge the founding ideas of peace, liberty, democracy, rule of law and human rights. As stated in the TEU of 1992: "The Union is founded on the principle of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law, principles which are common to the Member States" (The Maastricht Treaty, 1992, article 6:1).

The notion of the EU as a peace-prone region of democratically elected governments based on strong institutions and the rule of law have attracted great scholarly attention for decades. Studies on European integration have explored how European states have domestically developed democratic institutions and on a European level shared institutions with other EU member-states. Studies on international relations have analyzed how the EU member-states have developed normative power based on shared democratic norms and values. In consistency with the democratic peace theory, scholars have acknowledged how the development of democratic institutions, norms and values, within European states, have consolidated a European democratic peace order among states and favored an EU normative power externally (Manners, 2002; Pace, 2007; Russett, Oneal, 2001; Russett, 1993). The democratic norms and values have also guided European states on how to pursue politics regionally and internationally (Pace, 2007) in the areas of trade, development of cooperation, common foreign policy and security and enlargement (see The Maastricht Treaty, 1992; The Treaty of the European Union, 2012). In the fall of 2012, the Norwegian Nobel Committee announced the Nobel Peace Prize to the EU. The committee stressed how European integration facilitated peace, stability, democracy and human rights for decades. "The Norwegian Nobel Committee wishes to focus on what it sees as the EU's most important result: the successful struggle for peace and reconciliation and for democracy and human rights. The stabilizing part played by the EU has helped to transform most of Europe from a continent of war to a continent of peace" (The Nobel Prize organization, 2012).

In addition, the transformation and stabilization of a continent of peace has provided for EU external relations based on shared norms and values. Perhaps the enlargement policy has been the EU's

most efficient tool in external relations, offering EU membership based on absorption of European democratic norms and values domestically (Commission of the European Communities, 2001; Bosse, 2009). Another important part of EU external relations is the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), launched at the European Council Meeting in Copenhagen of December, 2002 (Council of the European Union, 2003). The ENP has embedded “a mutual commitment to common values” (Commission of the European Communities, 2004), such as democracy, rule of law and human rights, towards EU neighboring states.

Beyond the regional scope, the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) has promoted democratic institutions, justice and human rights and human rights defenders at risk as well as favored EU Election Observation Missions and the nexus between democratic governance, peace and conflict management (European Commission, International Cooperation and Development). The EU also constitutes the largest aid donor in the world. Based upon EU treaties, the 2006 European Consensus on Development and the 2017 New European Consensus On Development, the EU declares how “Progress in the protection of human rights, good governance and democratization is fundamental for poverty reduction and sustainable development” (European Parliament, Council and Commission, 2006, p. 13, Council & Representatives of Member-states, 2017 pp. 5–7). Finally, in June 28, 2016, the High Representative launched the *Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy*, identifying objectives of EU foreign policy, including security, conflict prevention, democracy and sustainable development (Mogherini, 2016).

#### 4. Status of Democracy – Contemporary European Challenges

It could be argued that Goal 16, on peace, justice and strong institutions, is institutionalized in democratically elected European states, within the EU community of shared democratic norms and values as well as in many areas of EU external relations. In a global comparison, the European landscape is by far the most democratic one in the world. In the early 2000, however, scholars shed light on a democratic decline in the world. The retreat of democracy included the development of authoritarian activities within repressive states, but also increased activities internationally questioning established democratic institutions, norms and values (Diamond, 2021; Lührmann, Lindberg, 2019). Studies showed how authoritarian

states continued to oppress rights and liberties at home, limiting freedoms in the political system and the civil society, but also how these authoritarian regimes pointed out democracy as a western phenomenon jeopardizing security, safety and progress (Brady, 2016; Nathan, 2016). Authoritarian regimes challenged international treaties, norms and values that had founded the global and European order (Merloe, 2016). Studies focused on sharp power, including authoritarian regimes promoting cultural and education exchange, media enterprises and broadcasting, think-tanks and strategic investments plans in infrastructure and technology, to promote authoritarian norms and values within democracies. Overall, authoritarian sharp power has embedded strategic actions to socialize others into specific narratives, suppress alternative narratives, monopolize ideas and exploit international institutions for the sake of national interests (Walker, Ludwig, 2017a, 2017b).

In addition, a weakened democratic leadership has also challenged democracies. Studies have shown how stable democracies have faced hindrances in socioeconomic crisis, migration, populism, xenophobia and political fragmentation (Silander, 2020). Some democracies have seen a growing number of dissatisfied democrats demanding improved democratic performances while other democracies have faced illiberal and anti-democratic movements and leaders. The many and complex challenges have existed on both sides of the Atlantic leaving the world with a weaker democratic leadership (Noury, Roland, 2020). On the U.S. side, the Presidency of Donald Trump has led the U.S. into a path of democratic decline (Carothers, 2019). The government launched institutional pressure on electoral integrity and judicial independence, questioning the role of media and used harsh and hostile political rhetoric against opponents (Ghitis, 2020). In addition, the U.S. foreign policies showed lack of coherence regarding democracy and human rights, at times speaking out against authoritarianism, but at other times excused political misbehavior by economic and security collaborates (Carothers, 2017). On the European side of the Atlantic, democratic challenges also existed in clash of interests between democracy, security and trade, but more obviously in elected leaders pursuing populist agendas, restricting rights and liberties in the name of national interests and allowing human rights abuses against minority groups and immigrants. Some established European democratic leaders have seen an “ethical decay” (Repucci, 2020) where mostly right-winged populist politicians have challenged rights and liberties (Freedom House, 2020). In sum, “The unchecked

brutality of autocratic regimes and the ethical decay of democratic powers are combining to make the world increasingly hostile to fresh demands for better governance” (Repucci, 2020 p. 1 ).

Based on the methodology used in the Freedom of the World, the Nations in Transit and V-Democracy, the status of democracy in Europe may be explored. Freedom in the World is published annually on political rights and civil liberties, and the methodology is to large extent based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948. Each country receives 0 to 4 points on 10 political rights indicators and 15 civil liberties indicators, where 0 represents the most limited degree of freedom and 4 the greatest degree of freedom. While the political rights questions are categorized into Electoral Process, Political Pluralism, Participation and Functioning of Government, the civil liberties

questions are categorized into Freedom of Expression and Belief, Associational and Organizational Rights, Rule of Law and Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights. The highest score for a country on political rights is 40 (a score of 4 for each 10 question) and for civil liberties 60 (a score of 4 for each of the 15 questions). These scores reflect a) political rights and b) civil liberties, where 1 represents the freest conditions and 7 the least free. There are three categories of countries’ freedom – an overall status of 1 = free, 2 = partly free, or 3 = not free (Freedom House Nations in Transit, 2021).

Based on the Freedom in the World Index, Europe stands strong as a community of shared democratic norms and values. Over the last decades, the EU has widened and deepened based on the notion of a democracy–justice–security nexus as embedded in Goal 16. Table 2 below illustrates the scope of

Tab. 2. Status of Political Rights and Civil Liberties among EU Member States

Country	2000			2005			2010			2015			2020		
	PR	CL	Status												
Austria	1	1	Free												
Belgium	1	2	Free	1	1	Free									
Bulgaria	2	3	Free	1	2	Free	2	2	Free	2	2	Free	2	2	Free
Croatia	2	3	Free	2	2	Free	1	2	Free	1	2	Free	1	2	Free
Cyprus	1	1	Free												
Czech Republic	1	2	Free	1	1	Free									
Denmark	1	1	Free												
Estonia	1	2	Free	1	1	Free									
Finland	1	1	Free												
France	1	2	Free	1	1	Free									
Germany	1	2	Free	1	1	Free	1	1	Free	1	1	Free	1	2	Free
Greece	1	3	Free	1	2	Free	1	2	Free	2	2	Free	1	2	Free
Hungary	1	2	Free	1	1	Free	1	1	Free	2	2	Free	3	3	Partly Free
Ireland	1	1	Free												
Italy	1	2	Free	1	1	Free	1	2	Free	1	1	Free	1	1	Free
Latvia	1	1	Free	1	2	Free	2	1	Free	2	2	Free	1	2	Free
Lithuania	1	2	Free	2	2	Free	1	1	Free	1	1	Free	1	1	Free
Luxembourg	1	1	Free												
Malta	1	1	Free	2	1	Free									
Netherlands	1	1	Free												
Poland	1	2	Free	1	1	Free	1	1	Free	1	1	Free	2	2	Free
Portugal	1	1	Free												
Romania	2	2	Free	3	2	Free	2	2	Free	2	2	Free	2	2	Free
Slovakia	1	2	Free	1	1	Free	1	1	Free	1	1	Free	1	2	Free
Slovenia	1	2	Free	1	1	Free									
Spain	1	2	Free	1	1	Free									
Sweden	1	1	Free												

Source: based on Freedom House, 2000, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2020.

political rights and civil liberties within the EU member-states. At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, all EU member-states were consolidated democracies with ensured wide range of rights and liberties for its citizens. The EU with member-states symbolized a pro-democratic community and a peace-prone community. Freedom House's assessment is very important to understand the EU member states' stand on Goal 16. Goal 16 refers to the rule of law, accountable and transparent institutions, political pluralism and participation, freedoms of expression, beliefs, association and personal autonomy in protecting fundamental freedoms. The European scores on freedoms regarding rights and liberties shed light on a region of consolidated democratic states that to large extent embeds Goal 16.

However, when scrutinizing the last years of development, the European democratic landscape has worrying tendencies. There are signs of growing illiberal populism that has attacked the idea of liberal democracy (Freedom House, 2020). Some European states are challenged by a global trend of threats against independent institutions, civil society and media and where elected leaders and parties pursue policies to undermine checks and balances, concentrate power and limit basic rights and liberties. Hungary is the most alarming case, as it dropped from Free to Partly Free between 2000 and 2020. Minor decline on democratic score is identified in Latvia, Malta and Poland, although they still remain as Free states.

*The Nations in Transit Index* explores 29 post-communist states in Central Europe and Central Asia focusing on the status of democracy by assessing each country on a scale of 1 to 7 in the following categories: National Democratic Governance, Local Democratic Governance, Electoral Process, Independent Media, Civil Society, Judicial Framework and Independence and Corruption. Each country receives a democracy score from 1–7 where 1 being the most democratic and 7 the least. The ambition is to explore institutions in place and the impact of such institutions on actions taken. The Nations in Transit then classifies countries into different types of regimes using Consolidated Democracies (CD, score 5.01–7.00), Semi-Consolidated Democracies (SCD, scores 4.01–5.00), Transitional or Hybrid Regimes (THR, scores 3.01–4.00), Semi-Consolidated Authoritarian Regimes (SCA, scores 2.01–3.00) and Consolidated Authoritarian Regimes (CA, scores 1.00–2.00) (Freedom House – Nations in Transit, 2021).

*The Nations in Transit Index* identifies an overall antidemocratic tendency in Central European states in patterns of misuse of state authority against judicial independence, civil society and the hollowing

out of electoral frameworks and the role of the parliament. A number of political leaders have acted illiberal and antidemocratic by invoking restrictions of democratic rights and liberties in the name of safeguarding the nation. In 2020, the Nations in Transit stresses how the region of countries covered in the Index have fewer democracies today than ever since the assessments began in 1995. The democratic decline is foremost visible in some EU member-states in Central Europe (Nations in Transits, 2020). The Nations in Transit points out Hungary, but also Poland, as alarming examples of resurgence of authoritarianism. As illustrated in Table 3, the Index classifies Hungary as a transitional/hybrid regime that no longer is democratic in nature. Hungary has thereby descended by two regime categories becoming a transitional hybrid regime (Nations in Transits, 2020, pp. 1–2). In addition, Poland has transformed from a consolidated democracy to a semi-consolidated democracy. The Nations in Transit also identifies issues over developments in Bulgaria and Slovakia, but not to such an extent that would result in a change of the regime type.

## 5. The Resurgence of Authoritarianism in Post-communist Europe: the Case of Hungary

Hungary is today the worst EU case of authoritarian resurgence as illustrated by the Freedom House Index and the Nations in Transit Index. The Freedom House Index illustrates how Hungary has dropped from a free state to a partly free state, and the Nations in Transits Index sets out a transformation of Hungary from a consolidated democracy to a transitional/hybrid regime. The resurgence of authoritarianism in Hungary is also supported by *V-Dem Institute*, which produces the largest dataset on democracy in the world, including 202 countries from 1978–2021. Based on V-Dem's Electoral and Liberal Democracy Index, Figure 1 illustrates a decline of democracy (Interval from low to high, 0–1). The Electoral Democracy Index measures the *de facto* existence of the share of population with suffrage, the degree to which government policies are vested in elected politicians, free and fair elections, freedom of expression and association and the availability of alternative sources of information. On the other hand, based on the electoral democracy index, the Liberal Democracy Index measures equality before the law and individual liberty, judicial constraints on the executive index and legislative constraints on the executive index (see V-Dem Institute, 2020, pp. 33–34). Overall, V-Dem stresses how "the global decline during the past 10 years is steep and

Tab. 3. Nations in Transit – Post-communist EU-member states

Country	Year	National Democratic Governance	Electoral Process	Civil Society	Independent Media	Local Democratic Governance	Judicial Framework & Independence	Corruption	Democracy Score	Regime
Bulgaria	2005	4.50	6.25	5.25	4.50	4.50	4.75	4.00	4.82	SCD
	2010	4.75	6.25	5.50	4.25	5.00	5.00	4.00	4.96	SCD
	2015	4.25	5.75	5.75	4.00	5.00	4.50	3.75	4.71	SCD
	2020	4.25	5.50	5.50	3.50	4.75	4.50	3.75	4.54	SCD
Croatia	2005	4.50	5.00	5.00	4.25	4.25	3.50	3.25	4.25	SCD
	2010	4.50	4.75	5.25	4.00	4.25	3.75	3.50	4.29	SCD
	2015	4.50	4.75	5.25	4.00	4.25	3.50	4.00	4.32	SCD
	2020	4.25	5.00	5.25	3.75	4.25	3.50	3.75	4.25	SCD
Czech Republic	2005	5.50	6.00	6.50	6.00	6.00	5.50	4.50	5.71	CD
	2010	5.25	6.50	6.25	5.50	6.25	6.00	4.75	5.79	CD
	2015	5.25	6.75	6.25	5.25	6.25	6.25	4.50	5.79	CD
	2020	5.00	6.75	6.00	5.00	6.25	6.00	4.50	5.64	CD
Estonia	2005	5.75	6.50	6.00	6.50	5.50	6.50	5.50	6.04	CD
	2010	5.75	6.25	6.25	6.50	5.50	6.50	5.50	6.04	CD
	2015	5.75	6.25	6.25	6.50	5.50	6.50	5.50	6.04	CD
	2020	6.00	6.50	6.25	6.25	5.75	6.50	5.25	6.07	CD
Hungary	2005	6.00	6.75	6.75	5.50	5.75	6.25	5.25	6.04	CD
	2010	5.50	6.25	6.25	5.25	5.50	6.00	4.50	5.61	CD
	2015	4.25	5.25	5.50	4.25	5.00	5.25	4.25	4.82	SCD
	2020	3.25	4.25	4.50	3.25	4.75	4.75	3.00	3.96	THR
Latvia	2005	5.75	6.25	6.25	6.50	5.50	6.25	4.50	5.86	CD
	2010	5.50	6.00	6.25	6.25	5.75	6.25	4.75	5.82	CD
	2015	6.00	6.25	6.25	6.00	5.75	6.25	5.00	5.93	CD
	2020	6.00	6.25	5.75	6.00	5.75	6.25	4.50	5.79	CD
Lithuania	2005	5.50	6.25	6.50	6.25	5.50	6.25	4.25	5.79	CD
	2010	5.25	6.25	6.25	6.25	5.50	6.25	4.50	5.75	CD
	2015	5.25	6.00	6.25	5.75	5.50	6.25	4.50	5.64	CD
	2020	5.25	6.25	6.00	5.75	5.75	6.00	4.50	5.64	CD
Poland	2005	5.50	6.25	6.75	6.50	6.00	6.00	5.00	6.00	CD
	2010	4.75	6.25	6.50	5.75	6.25	5.50	4.75	5.68	CD
	2015	5.50	6.50	6.50	5.50	6.50	5.50	4.50	5.79	CD
	2020	4.00	6.50	5.50	5.00	5.75	3.50	4.25	4.93	SCD
Romania	2005	4.50	5.25	5.75	4.00	5.00	4.00	3.75	4.61	SCD
	2010	4.00	5.25	5.50	4.00	5.00	4.00	4.00	4.54	SCD
	2015	4.25	4.75	5.50	3.75	5.00	4.25	4.25	4.54	SCD
	2020	4.00	5.00	5.50	3.75	4.50	4.25	4.00	4.43	SCD
Slovakia	2005	6.00	6.75	6.75	5.75	5.75	6.00	5.00	6.00	CD
	2010	5.00	6.25	6.25	5.00	5.50	5.00	4.25	5.32	CD
	2015	5.00	6.50	6.25	5.00	5.50	5.00	4.25	5.36	CD
	2020	4.75	6.25	6.25	5.00	5.50	5.00	4.25	5.29	CD
Slovenia	2005	6.00	6.50	6.25	6.50	6.50	6.50	6.00	6.32	CD
	2010	6.00	6.50	6.00	5.75	6.50	6.25	5.50	6.07	CD
	2015	6.00	6.50	6.00	5.75	6.50	6.25	5.50	6.07	CD
	2020	5.75	6.50	6.00	5.50	6.50	6.00	5.25	5.93	CD

Source: Freedom House – Nations in Transit, 2021.

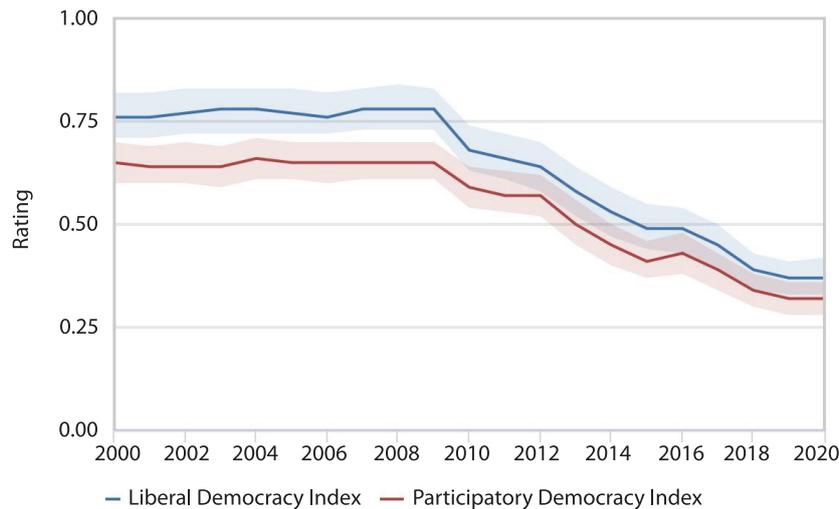


Fig. 1. Democratic Decline in Hungary

Source: V-Dem Institute Index Hungary, 2021.

continues” and how “electoral autocracy remains the most common regime type.” (V-Dem Institute, 2021, p. 4). In particular, V-Dem Institute recognizes how “Hungary is no longer a democracy leaving the EU with its first non-democratic member-state” (V-Dem Institute, 2020, p. 4). V-Dem Institute classifies Hungary as an electoral authoritarian regime and the first authoritarian regime ever within the EU (V-Dem Institute, 2020, p. 9). In fact, Hungary is first among the top-10 most regressing countries in the world transforming from a liberal democracy in 2009 to an electoral autocracy one decade later. The resurgence of authoritarianism in Hungary is substantial over the last decade with systematic government attacks on the media, civil society and academic freedom, disrespect towards and harassment of political opponents, assaults on the judiciary, distribution of false political information to provide social polarization and undermine electoral frameworks and procedures (V-Dem Institute, 2021, pp. 9, 18–19).

Based on the three Indexes, the rule of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and the Alliance of Young Democrats–Hungarian Civic Union (Fidesz) has resulted in limited independence of core institutions through constitutional and legal changes, policies challenging political opposition, journalists, universities and civil society organizations as well as reforms centralizing power and the electoral framework. In addition, the government has initiated populist and illiberal policies against migrants and asylum seekers, as its impasse with European institutions over its migrant policy leading the European Commission to launch a legal investigation (Freedom House, 2020). The Hungarian development has led the European Parliament to suspend Fidesz, and the EU has triggered the use of Article 7 against Hungary due to

the suspicion that Hungary does not fully commit to Article 2 of the EU’s fundamental norms and values. Article 7(1) allows the EU to take action if there is suspicion that a member state does not adhere to the EU’s fundamental norms and values (requires absolute majority of four-fifths of the Council), whereas Article 7(2) includes possible sanctions on a member state (requires unanimity) (The Treaty of the European Union, 2007).

Hungary’s democratic decline also comes with other worrying signals in post-communist Europe. Figure 2. by V-Dem. illustrates Hungary’s autocratization in 2020, although Bulgaria and Poland may also become new challenges within the EU, as in 2020 they moved in a wrong direction compared to in 2000 (V-Dem Institute, 2021, pp. 19, 23; 2020, p. 22).

## 6. Conclusion

On September 14, 2016, in the context of the new UN Agenda 2030, Jean-Claude Juncker, the former President of the European Commission, delivered the State of the Union *Towards a Better Europe – A Europe that Protects, Empowers and Defends*. He described numerous challenges to Europe and called upon all European actors to show leadership and strength; one of the challenges identified was the fight for human rights and fundamental values (Juncker, 2016). Goal 16 of the UN Agenda 2030 is institutionalized in most EU member-states. The consolidation of democratic institutions, norms and values has served individual states very well and left Europe as a peace-prone region of like-minded states. Today, the EU symbolizes not only a democratic peace project, but also a global force for rights and liberties. However,

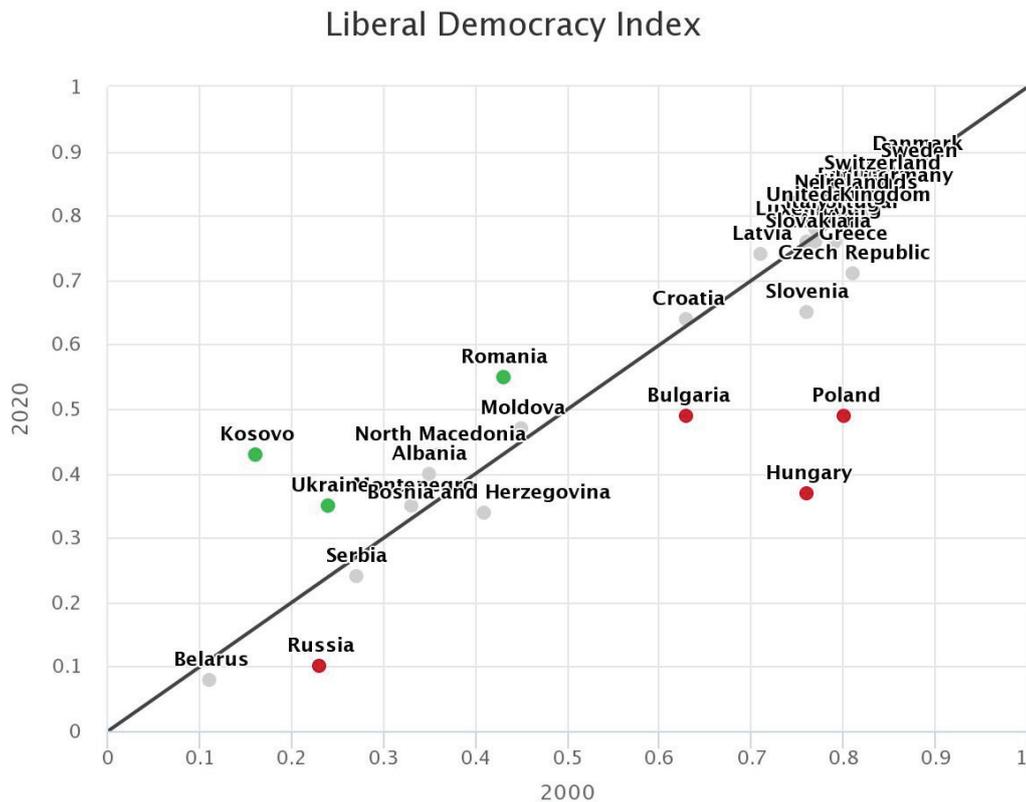


Fig. 2. V-Dem Index on Liberal democracy, 2000 and 2020  
Source: V-Dem Institute Index Europe, 2021.

while the world faces resurgence of authoritarianism, Europe also sees signs of populism and illiberal politics challenging the very founding democratic norms of the EU. This study has highlighted the return of authoritarianism in Hungary, but with worrying tendencies in some other post-communist states as well. V-Dem. raises alarms over a rapid democratic decline in Poland symbolized foremost by media laws from 2015–2016 restricting freedom of expression, actions diminishing judicial independence and tightening government grip over democratic institutions.

## References

- Bosse G., 2009, Challenges for EU governance through neighbourhood policy and eastern partnership: The values/security nexus in EU–Belarus relations, *Contemporary Politics*, 15(2), 215–227. doi: 10.1080/13569770902858152
- Brady A.M., 2016, China's Foreign Propaganda Machine, [in:] L. Diamond, M.F. Plattner, C. Walker (Eds.), *Authoritarianism Goes Global: The Challenge to Democracy*, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 187–197.
- Carothers T., 2017, *Democracy Promotion Under Trump: What has been Lost? What Remains?* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/09/06/democracy-promotion-under-trump-what-has-been-lost-what-remains-pub-73021> (accessed 11 March 2021).
- Charter, 2000, *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text\\_en.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf) (accessed 11 September 2019).
- Commission of the European Communities, 2001, *COM 2001: 700 final-Making a success of enlargement. Strategy paper and report of the European Commission on the progress towards accession by each of the candidate countries*, EU Commission, Brussels.
- Commission of the European Communities, 2004, *COM 2004: 373 final-European Neighbourhood Policy – Strategy Paper*. Brussels: EU Commission, [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/2004\\_communication\\_from\\_the\\_commission\\_-\\_european\\_neighbourhood\\_policy\\_-\\_strategy\\_paper.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/2004_communication_from_the_commission_-_european_neighbourhood_policy_-_strategy_paper.pdf) (accessed 15 January 2020).
- Council & Representatives of Member-states, 2017, *The New European Consensus on Development 'Our World, Our Dignity, Our Future'*, The Commission, Brussels.
- Council of the European Union, 2003, *Copenhagen European Council 12 and 13 December 2020 – Presidency Conclusions*, Council of the European Union, Brussels, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/20906/73842.pdf> (accessed 09 September 2019).
- Diamond L., 2021, Democratic regression in comparative perspective: scope, methods, and cause, *Democratization*, 28(1), 22–42. doi: 10.1080/13510347.2020.1807517

- European Commission, 2016, *Next Steps for a Sustainable European Future: European Action for Sustainability*, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2016%3A739%3AFIN> (accessed 12 October 2018).
- European Parliament, Council and Commission, 2006, *The European Consensus on Development*, [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:42006X0224\(01\)&from=SV](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:42006X0224(01)&from=SV) (accessed 13 April 2021).
- Freedom House Nations in Transit, 2021, *Methodology*, <https://freedomhouse.org/reports/nations-transit/nations-transit-methodology> (accessed 19 April 2021).
- Freedom House, 2000, *Freedom in the World 2000 – The Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties*, Freedom House, Washington.
- Freedom House, 2005, *Freedom in the World 2005 – The Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties*, Freedom House, Washington.
- Freedom House, 2010, *Freedom in the World 2010 – The Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties*, Freedom House, Washington.
- Freedom House, 2015, *Freedom in the World 2015 – The Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties*, Freedom House, Washington.
- Freedom House, 2019, *Democracy in Retreat*. Accessed January 7<sup>th</sup> 2019 at <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2019/democracy-in-retreat>
- Freedom House, 2020, *Freedom in the World, 2020 – A Leaderless Struggle for Democracy*, Freedom House, Washington.
- Ghitis F., 2020, *Trump's alarming war on democracy*, CNN, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/12/10/opinions/trump-war-on-democracy-ghitis/index.html> (accessed 11 March 2021).
- Juncker J.C., 2016, *State of the Union Address 2016: Towards a better Europe – a Europe that protects, empowers and defends*, European Commission, [https://ec.europa.eu/ireland/news/%C3%B3r%C3%A1id-staid-aontais-2016-armhaithe-le-heoraip-n%C3%ADos-fearr-%E2%80%93-eo-raip-ina-nd%C3%A9antar-daoine\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/ireland/news/%C3%B3r%C3%A1id-staid-aontais-2016-armhaithe-le-heoraip-n%C3%ADos-fearr-%E2%80%93-eo-raip-ina-nd%C3%A9antar-daoine_en) (accessed 24 April 2021).
- Lührmann A., Lindberg S., 2019, A third wave of autocratization is here: what is new about it?, *Democratization*, 26(7), 1095–1113. doi: 10.1080/13510347.2019.1582029
- Manners I., 2002, Normative power Europe: A contradiction in terms?, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 40(2), 235–258. doi: 10.1111/1468-5965.00353
- Merloe P., 2016, Election Monitoring vs. Disinformation, [in:] L. Diamond, M.F. Plattner, C. Walker (Eds.), *Authoritarianism Goes Global: The Challenge to Democracy*, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 135–151.
- Mogherini F., 2016, Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe – A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy, Publications Office of the European Union, <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/3eaae2cf-9ac5-11e6-868c-01aa75ed71a1> (accessed 03 November 2019).
- Nathan A.J., 2016, China's Challenge, [in:] L. Diamond, M.F. Plattner, C. Walker (Eds.), *Authoritarianism Goes Global: The Challenge to Democracy*, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 23–39.
- Nations in Transit, 2020, *Dropping the Democratic Façade*, Freedom House, [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/05062020\\_FH\\_NIT2020\\_vfinal.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/05062020_FH_NIT2020_vfinal.pdf) (accessed 10 April 2021).
- Noury A., Roland G., 2020, Identity Politics and Populism in Europe, *Annual Review of Political Science*, 23, 421–439. doi: 10.1146/annurev-polisci-050718-033542
- Pace M., 2007, The Construction of EU Normative Power, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 45(2), 1041–1045. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-5965.2007.00759.x
- Repucci S., 2020, *A Leaderless Struggle for Democracy*, Freedom House, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2020/leaderless-struggle-democracy> (accessed 06 February 2021).
- Russett B., 1993, *Grasping the Democratic Peace*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Russett B., Oneal J.R., 2001, *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations*, W. Norton, New York.
- Silander D. 2020, Agenda 2030 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, [in:] C. Karlsson, D. Silander (Eds.), *Implementing Sustainable Development Goals in Europe*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, 162–184.
- The Maastricht Treaty, 1992, *Treaty on European Union*, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, Luxembourg, [https://europa.eu/european-union/sites/europaeu/files/docs/body/treaty\\_on\\_european\\_union\\_en.pdf](https://europa.eu/european-union/sites/europaeu/files/docs/body/treaty_on_european_union_en.pdf) (accessed 05 October 2019).
- The Nobel Prize organization, 2012. The Nobel Peace Prize, <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2012/summary/> (accessed 5 May 2021).
- The Treaty of the European Union, 2012. *Treaty on EU*, [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf140bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e6da6.0023.02/DOC\\_1&format=PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf140bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e6da6.0023.02/DOC_1&format=PDF) (accessed 26 April 2021).
- UN Charter, 1945, *UN Charter*, <https://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/un-charter-full-text/> (accessed 16 October 2019).
- UN General Assembly, 2015, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, United Nations General Assembly, New York, [https://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E) (accessed 16 October 2019).
- UN Goal 16, 2015, *Promote just, peaceful and inclusive societies*, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/peace-justice/> (accessed 08 December 2020).
- UN Secretary-General, 2019, *Deputy Secretary-General's remarks at ECOSOC side event "What is democracy? Stepping up engagement around goal 16"*, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/dsg/statement/2019-07-15/deputy-secretary-generals-remarks-ecosoc-side-event-what-democracy-stepping-engagement-around-goal-16-prepared-for-delivery> (accessed 17 October 2019).
- UN, 2019, *Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions: Why they matter*, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/16.pdf> (accessed 09 January 2019).

- V-Dem Institute, 2020, *Autocratization Surges – Resistance Grows: Democracy Report 2020*, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg.
- V-Dem Institute, 2021, *Autocratization Turns Viral: Democracy Report 2021*, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg.
- V-Dem Institute Index Hungary, 2021. *Country Graph Hungary 2000-2020 – Liberal Democracy Index and Participatory Democracy Index*, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, <https://www.v-dem.net/en/analysis/CountryGraph/> (accessed 22 September 2021).
- V-Dem Institute Index Europe. *Regional Comparison Europe 2000-2020 – Liberal Democracy Index*, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg. <https://www.v-dem.net/en/analysis/regional/> (accessed 22 September 2021).
- Walker C., Ludwig J., 2017a, The Meaning of Sharp Power – How Authoritarian States Project Influence, *Foreign Affairs*, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2017-11-16/meaning-sharp-power> (accessed 05 March 2021).
- Walker C., Ludwig J., 2017b, *From ‘Soft Power’ to ‘Sharp Power’ Rising Authoritarian Influence in the Democratic World*, National Endowment for Democracy, <https://www.ned.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Introduction-Sharp-Power-Rising-Authoritarian-Influence.pdf> (accessed 5 April 2021).