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EASTERN EUROPE: Rising Authoritarianism Likely to Continue

Summary: The shift to authoritarianism in Eastern European countries and weakening of the democratic checks and balances established after the fall of the Soviet Union likely relates to factors such as nationalism, anti-immigration sentiments, and historical struggles, facilitated by media management. Hungary, Poland, and Czechia, among other nations in the region, exemplify these factors. Authoritarianism will likely continue to rise in Eastern Europe and may cause other countries to eschew EU membership in favor of preserving national identities.

Leaders Consolidate Power: Governments are slowly transforming their laws to centralize authority, including undermining the authority of courts to challenge government policies.

- On 12 December 2018, the Hungarian Parliament passed a law allowing the Justice Minister to directly oversee the courts, including authority over the appointment and promotion of judges, thus reducing the power of the supreme court. The passage of this law led to fears of an erosion of checks and balances and a rise of politicization in the judicial system. As early as September 2018, the EU recognized early signs of these shifts and moved to place sanctions on Hungary for flouting EU rules for democratic practices, protecting civil rights, and fighting corruption. Hungary rejected EU sanctions and continues to make efforts to consolidate power within the country.
- In Poland, the EU made similar efforts to challenge the Polish government's continuing power grab in Polish courts. On 19 February, the EU warned it would act against Poland should its government harass judges seeking European Court of Justice (ECJ) guidance on the legality of recent Polish judicial reforms to offset separation of power.

By gaining control of the media, political leaders can shape public perception, limit opposition, and deflect scrutiny on their actions, all to aid the passage of authoritarian policies under the guise of democratic legislation.

- In Hungary, Prime Minister Orbán and the Fidesz party dominate the state media, while applying pressure to independent media sources to support Orbán.
- Polish media maintain more independence and express a variety of opinion, both supportive of and against ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party, but the rise of the PiS has greatly challenged media access and power. In December 2016, with a PiS majority, the Sejm passed a law limiting media access within parliament, charging media with disrupting the legislative process.
- Prior to 2008, German and other international investors controlled 80% of Czech media. After the financial crisis, local oligarchs, especially Andrej Babiš, current prime minister of Czechia and former minister of finance, replaced many foreign owners of Czech media. Babiš gained two of the main Czech newspapers, in addition to his other holdings, including most free media and Czechia's most popular radio station. Babiš frequently uses his media to shape public opinion and discredit political opposition, with many examples of Babiš's direct interference in the content his holdings produce. May 2017

saw the release of secret recordings of Babiš directing reporters how to write articles to damage a rival of his party, ANO. As minister of finance, Babiš also used his political power to threaten independent media with financial audits.

Nationalist and Anti-Immigrant Ideologies Increase Authoritarianism: Taking advantage of advancing nationalist sentiment, leaders of Hungary, Poland, and Czechia are dismantling liberal checks and balances and facilitating a rise in authoritarianism. The EU questioned legislation passed in both Hungary and Poland, which leaders used to emphasize the differing values of national identities in the EU. Although Hungarian and Polish governments took steps to consolidate power, they did so with the justification of promoting national identity, which leaders leveraged despite pushback from some sectors of their populations.

Anti-immigration sentiments and policies limit outside challenges to the consolidation of power. Many Europeans feel wary of immigration, and the immigration crisis of 2015-16 helped nationalist leaders strengthen their platforms and garner more support. Portraying immigration as an existential threat to the largely ethnically homogenous populations allows leaders to justify the advance of their authoritarian policies in the name of protecting identity.

- In Hungary, government passed legislation criminalizing the act of aiding illegal immigrants in direct defiance of policies supported by the EU and human rights organizations. Legislatures also passed a constitutional amendment stating that an “alien population” cannot be allowed to settle in Hungary, going against a migrant-quota proposed by Brussels. Interior Minister Sandor Pinter justified these bills by claiming he wants to “use these bills to stop Hungary from becoming a country of immigrants.”
- The PiS in Poland echoed these sentiments, using the immigration crisis to strengthen its platform for the 2015 parliamentary election. After securing the majority, PiS moved quickly to roll back all previous Polish promises to take in asylum seekers. PiS leader Jarosław Kaczyński stated in May 2017 that “Poland would have to use some repression” to protect itself from the threat of immigration.
- Czech President Milos Zeman won a second term in 2018 bolstered by his hardline views against immigration. Although the immigration crisis failed to reach Czechia, its anti-immigrant stance follows Poland and Hungary’s policies. As these countries continue to limit immigration and thus weaken opposition, leaders will experience greater flexibility to enact further authoritarian policies under the facade of protecting ethnic identity.

The immigration crisis likely led many Eastern Europeans to fear a less secure, multicultural future. Population declines due low birthrates and emigration of the younger population, along with the fear of immigrants, has set up a demographic crisis ripe for nationalist parties to exploit.

- In Hungary, Orbán has tried to increase the country’s fertility rate, offering economic incentives to encourage women to have more children. Orbán painted support for immigration “as surrender” to the EU’s values of globalization and diversity. Orbán likely also seeks to more directly challenge the EU with his own nationalist policies,

using immigration to demonstrate how the EU's policies negatively affect sovereignty.

- Poland faces similar decline, with 1 million Poles residing in the UK alone in 2016. Threatened by population decline and the fear of immigration, voters turn to nationalist leaders who promise economic and ethnic security, further empowering and entrenching the movements.

Implications and Outlook: Nationalism, anti-immigration sentiments, and historical struggles, facilitated by media manipulation, have driven a shift away from democratic principles and toward authoritarianism—a trend that will likely continue in Eastern Europe as governments continue to exploit these ongoing factors.

The EU will also likely continue to push back against authoritarian policies, leading Eastern European countries to further entrench themselves with nationalism and authoritarian legislation, although with little effect. While Hungary and Poland have already faced criticism from the EU, Czechia's trajectory indicates it will also soon face backlash from such democratic bodies.

As a result, nations that may view the EU unfavorably may build more of a platform against the EU. Russia has a greater opportunity to capitalize and build influence in the region by supporting these Eastern European nations as Hungary, Poland and Czechia untether from their EU moorings. The conservative values held by Russia such as illiberal governance and strong leadership may increasingly appeal to Eastern European nations, especially as authoritarianism grows and leaders continue to exploit nationalism to build their power. Already aligning with Orbán and Zeman, Russia may continue to find legitimacy to push its influence to Poland (although it continues to view Russia with suspicion) and beyond in Eastern Europe. Creating this foothold within Eastern Europe may help Russia project its goal to keep developing Eastern European nations away from NATO and slow their ascent to EU membership. As authoritarianism continues to grow in Hungary, Poland, and Czechia, Russian economic and political influence will continue to grow as well.

A tipping point in this trend may come if the governments cannot deliver on promises to strengthen the economy. If the economy cannot improve, morale could decline, leading citizens to question whether nationalism alone can boost the economy or if the country should pursue a more globalized approach. So long as these governments can portray nationalism as a viable option for a secure future, the media will remain an instrument to support authoritarian policies.

[Gianna Geiger, Alli McIntyre, Caitlyn Aaron, Cassie Hettmansperger, Cameron Zarnich]

CHINA-SAUDI ARABIA: Economic Agreement Likely to Strengthen Bilateral Ties

Summary: Economic agreements between China and Saudi Arabia will likely increase cooperation between the two, benefiting both nations in their respective policy goals.

Development: On 24 February, China and Saudi Arabia signed 35 economic agreements, totaling \$28 billion. The agreements included establishing Huajin-Aramco Petrochemical in Panjin, China—a \$10 billion refinery capable of producing 300,000 barrels of oil a day. Chinese Vice-Premier Han Zheng, in his meeting with Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, stated that their countries should further work together on law enforcement, counterterrorism, security, and deradicalization. In return, Salman stated that Saudi Arabia supports China’s counterterrorism efforts as well as its One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative.

Analysis: Chinese and Saudi cooperation on the deal demonstrates a mutual agreement to strengthen bilateral ties between the two countries. It also indicates Beijing’s goal of solidifying a strong presence in the Middle East as well as Riyadh’s likely goal of further expanding its market and reestablishing itself as China’s top supplier. China will most likely use this opportunity with Saudi Arabia to further develop the OBOR initiative by intertwining Chinese and Middle Eastern economies and markets—which seems highly probable because Saudi Arabia supports the initiative. Beijing’s intent on establishing Huajin-Aramco Petrochemical will likely decrease its dependence on other countries for oil and increase economic opportunities in China. Furthermore, amid tensions regarding the death of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, Saudi Arabia will probably rely on China to avoid isolation from the international community.

[Tyler Smith]

ETHIOPIA: Government Announces Rebel Disarmament

Summary: Many Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) fighters have disarmed, providing the Ethiopian government an opportunity to gain OLF cooperation via integration, possibly encouraging other ethnic groups to also pursue peace.

Development: On 13 February, around 1,000 OLF fighters gave up their arms and entered rehabilitation camps, according to government authorities in the Oromia state. These fighters claimed they chose to engage in a peaceful struggle and encourage the other several thousand OLF fighters to do likewise. This report of disarmament follows the OLF signing a ceasefire agreement on 24 January and government promises to integrate OLF soldiers into the armed forces. OLF officials, however, have accused the government of not holding to its promise of integration. With the ceasefire, the government reportedly plans to return to providing basic services, such as education, to the Oromia state. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed shares an ethnic background with the Oromo people.

Analysis: If the government fully integrates the disarmed OLF fighters into the armed forces and strengthens basic services, many more fighters may also give up their arms, possibly inspiring other violent ethnic groups to disarm and leading to a large decrease in ethnic violence. At first, this violence will likely only decrease in the Oromia state, but as other ethnic groups see the peaceful cooperation between the OLF and federal forces, they may consider taking alternative, peaceful measures to improve basic services and advocate for independence. Other ethnic groups could also remain hesitant to disarm because they do not hold significant political representation like the Oromo people. Even if the government can only achieve disarmament with the OLF, the newly minimized threat of OLF violence would allow government forces to place greater focus on combating terrorism in the Horn of Africa rather than combating internal ethnic violence.

[Caitlyn Aaron]

MOLDOVA: Contested Parliament Election Results Show No Clear Majority

Summary: Preliminary results from Moldova's parliamentary election do not clearly show a party winning a majority, leading to accusations of corruption.

Development: On 25 February, results from the 2019 Moldovan parliamentary election presented a hung parliament amid allegations of corruption. The pro-Russia Socialist party claimed a narrow lead, earning 31.2% of the vote, while the pro-European Union group, ACUM, had 26.6%. The incumbent Democratic party earned only 23.8% of the vote following corruption scandals. Following reports of vote-buying and other corruption concerns, ACUM party leader Maia Sandu released a statement saying that the ACUM does not recognize the elections as free and democratic, while the Socialist party stated their lawyers were studying the elections and also may not recognize the results. President Igor Dodon, the former leader of the Socialist party, proposed calling a new election in June if this vote is declared illegitimate.

Analysis: Due to the concern surrounding this vote, the government will likely call a new election. Political leaders such as Dodon and Sandu will likely advocate for more investigation into the election, as whichever party holds the majority will have greater influence on the future of Moldova. If the Socialist party gains the majority in parliament, they will likely push the country towards forming closer ties with Russia, a change that the ACUM and Democratic parties will almost certainly oppose. Both the ACUM and Democratic parties favor closer ties with the EU and could see closer ties with Russia as a hindrance to better relations with the EU. Until a definite majority can be determined, the uncertainty, corruption rumors, and lack of a concrete government will likely send the country into a period of instability.

[Alli McIntyre]

SOUTH KOREA: Seoul Increases Protection Payments in Short Term

Summary: South Korea struck a deal with the United States to increase its contribution to the cost of the US military presence. South Korea's more internally focused government may wish to move away from its reliance on US military support as North-South relations improve.

Development: On 3 February, South Korean officials agreed to pay \$924 million to the United States over the course of 2019 to partially offset the cost of the US military footprint in South Korea. South Korean President Moon Jae-in, along with several senior South Korean government officials, belonged to a student democracy movement in the 1980's that viewed US military presence skeptically. The current agreement has a potential renewal clause for one additional year.

Analysis: South Korea likely agreed to the cost increase in response to improving relations with North Korea. Given North Korea's stated intentions to denuclearize and decrease hostilities, South Korea likely believes it can now shift away from relying on the US for defense. Furthermore, members of Moon's party may pressure him to reduce US involvement as peace draws closer. If North Korea continues to make actionable steps towards de-escalation, Moon can easily justify the short-term increase if a partial or total withdrawal of US troops follows. Otherwise, Moon may seek a long-term renegotiation at the expiration of the current agreement.

[Morgan Breneiser]

VENEZUELA: Maduro Breaks Ties with Colombia, Limits Options for Both Sides

Summary: Venezuela formally severed diplomatic ties with Colombia, signifying that President Maduro remains committed to his current course amid lacking alternatives.

Development: On 23 February, Maduro announced that Venezuela would break all diplomatic and political ties with Colombia amid regional and domestic turmoil. Venezuelan Vice President Delcy Rodríguez cited “serious threats against [Venezuela’s] sovereignty” as grounds to close border crossings and subsequently refuse aid already deployed. Juan Guaidó, the leader recognized by most regional countries as the legitimate president, met with the presidents of Chile, Colombia, and Paraguay as an expression of solidarity.

Analysis: As Maduro continues to cling onto power among worsening humanitarian conditions, he may expect to continue losing loyalty and military manpower. The regional support for Guaidó will likely make it more difficult for Maduro to receive tangible support from the various countries that argue in favor of respecting Venezuela’s sovereignty.

[Bryce Leech]

This is a global intelligence briefing prepared by the students of the Global Security and Intelligence Studies program at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Prescott, Arizona. The views expressed in this briefing are those of the students, not the university.

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