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QI Panel:

The Results of the European Elections and Their Implications for European External and Domestic Policy

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Anatol Lieven 0:36

Hello everyone, I am Anatol Lieven from the Quincy Institute for Responsible statecraft and the webinar today we'll be discussing the results of the European elections and the dramatic consequences in France which appear to have become perhaps even more dramatic and in the past 15 minutes, and before doing so just like to flag on Thursday at the same time. We have a book talk by Ian Proud, former British diplomat about his book a misfit in Moscow, and the breakdown of relations between Russia and the United Kingdom. But as part of course of this wider breakdown of relations over the past generation. Before I forget, questions, please put them in the q&a at the bottom of the screen and then I will pass on as many as we have time for to the participants. And we will talk for about half an hour and then I will I'll throw it open to questions. So it's a great pleasure today to introduce our panel. Our panelists are Molly O'Neal, who is a non resident fellow of the Quincy Institute, a former US Foreign Service officer, who from 1989 was when I moved to Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union was devoted to US relations with Central and Eastern Europe, Russia and Eurasia. And Molly has conducted research lectured and written extensively on these areas. Wolfgang Streeck is the Emirates director at the Max Planck Institute for the Study of societies in Cologne, Germany, and a member of the British Academy of the Berlin Brandenburg Academy of Sciences, under the academia are a pair. And Wolfgang writes extensively for the New Left Review, among many other publications. Matthias Matthijs holds the Dean Acheson chair at syce here in Washington. He is associate professor of international political economy at Johns Hopkins University. And he is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations to this extremely topical subject, I thought, since it is very much the issue du jour, if I begin by asking you Matthias, to say something about President Macron was shocked decision to hold elections, parliamentary elections in France, but also a suggestion that I understand he has made about what he might do. And why this decision and where do you see things going in France?

Matthias Matthijs 3:36

Yes. And thank you, Anatol, first of all, to Quincy Institute for for hosting this event and for having me along. Such two great co panelists will eventually and Molly O'Neill so on. Again, I'm in Brussels right now. I landed from DC on Sunday morning. And I was I was hoping mostly following the Belgian elections actually, and, you know, were quite interesting in their own right. And, you know, this looked like, somewhat fairly predictable European elections, because it was, you know, the broad aggregate polls headed about rights, right. I mean, the European

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elections seem to be going with the greens and the Liberals are each losing 20 seats, and then those 40 seats are redistributed amongst the center, right and the far right. So from a kind of EU point of view, to seem the rudder, almost a bore, and you can talk more about election. But then came this kind of rather astonishing announcement by Emmanuel Macron. Very shortly after Jordan Bardella, the leader of the European elections for Assemblyman as you know, and Marine Le Pen's far right party who had called on the French president to respect the French vote and call this ban parliament, the National Assembly and as soon as and call for an early election. Just for context, right and Assemblyman as you know, had something over 33% of the vote Macron with his, you know, kind of A party and alliances if you want for Europe ended up very low like 15%. So Macron, I think, astonished everybody by very shortly after saying, Okay, I'm disbanding Parliament, and we'll have new elections on June 13, and July 7. So his rationale I think, was, I'm gonna call their bluff. European election turnout is low at 50%, for France that is low. It's a second order election for many French where they enjoy giving the incumbents a good kick in the butt. And when we have a national election, where much more is at stake, turnout, maybe 80%, there'll be some sort of Republican majority anti far right, that will come together. And actually, I may end up winning with a workable government that I can do business with for the next three years and achieve many of my goals both in Europe and in France.

So there was also this idea that even if somehow, the far right wins, LePen does very well, she wants to have Jordan BARDELLA as prime minister, because she would never do this herself and be having to serve under macro, because she'd want to keep away from that. Then if their scales, they will own it. And then in three years, if LePen runs for a fourth time for the presidency, she will not be the anti establishment candidate, because they will have been in power. Right? So this is the kind of stuff that EU circles and very clever EU studies, people talk to each other about it. Oh my god, that's so clever. And that was my reaction was like, wait, what? That that is rule number one in politics, you keep your opponent's out of power. He is He is offering it to them. He is taking a major risk here. And so what has happened in just the last 24 hours, is the man who fought from the center in 2017. To destroy the left and right to make them irrelevant, has given new energy on the right where their stock of a kind of party family were LePen will be joined by the move on the far right as well as even Larry probably can. The president of leg up began, God announced it even though that's going to be internally contested. At the same time, the four lefty parties have been talking about having a United Left front. And so you now see that macro and the center is being outflanked by a United Left potentially a united right, potentially, and he can end up with with very little that said it's a very fluid situation. He I think is starting to wake up to the fact that he made a very rash, very quick decision, probably should have slept on it. And now we're starting to say things like, well, maybe I might resign, if if that does happen. And the presidency isn't that sacred either. And so it's hard to comment at the moment sitting here in Brussels where these things seem to be changing every hour. But that's that's where we are right now.

Wolfgang Streeck 7:52

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Wolfgang, how how big a shift is this? In Europe, do you think? And how important are and how radical are deeper shifts in European Economic Society, political culture that underlie these these changes?

Wolfgang Streeck 8:24

Okay, good. No, no, I mean, it is important to distinguish between the national effects of these elections and the European Union as a whole. And then third thing is sort of the general social and political condition behind the tool. And and if I if I want to say something on the sort of commonalities of of European countries, that on which then national events sort of build up and grow, then we have seen in the last 20 years, sort of permanent decline of the confidence of the trust of citizens in the political parties and governments and institutions. And that was not from nothing. Now we have what people now call poli crisis is something that is also experienced in the United States and that limit, but look, looking at the Euro up here. Did we have financial instability after the 2008 crisis? We have no real solution to this. We have stagnant growth. See seriously rising, seriously rising public debt, the experience of the immigration crisis and the cold crisis that have not been managed very well by by almost any country, on the European continent, a stagnant wages, the increasing precarity, of, of employment, all of these things come together, and people will revolt, then don't look back, we have, we've had it so good, they look into the future, who can offer us some kind of sense that things will get better, rather than getting worse, that we don't have to work harder in order to stay in place. And, and these are sort of very deep centers. And, and then, and then the yellow vests in France expressed this sentiment in Germany, the fact that what used to be the left in the sense the greens, having mopped up what was left on the left, so to speak, have become part of the governing establishment, and things haven't become better. In fact, they have become more sort of uncertainty creating is and and put all this together, then it is not surprising that at least in some countries, you will see a reshuffling in the party systems that play themselves out in different ways. And in Germany, for example, the greens decline, the AfD increases, increases to a level of let's say, 15 15%, the greens fall down to a level of 50.

I thought in the last last year, I had this idea that what we saw in Germany in particular, was a sort of cultural war between two 15% parties. One is the AfD, one is the greens and in between the others have to find a place so to speak, or something new, arises like this very interesting party the the witness our bank name, BSW which comes out like, like nothing. Then I did one more point on that generalities in this general sense of uncertainty, but it also peculiarities. And if you look at Germany, then you have this fascinating, fascinating picture, that the East Europe, East German, former GDR states are now sort of all with a majority of relative majority of the ifd. All of these five states, now the old, and in West Germany, this is a little bit different. But I think if you take up this theme of the sort of confidence in the future, then one has to remember that East Germany is a country that has undergone undergone a convulsive change in the 1990s sort of dramatic change from the bottom of social life to the to the top, whereas Germany sort of went like nicely, like we had our best journey. We had our sort of social revolution in the 1950s and late 1940s. And my generation grew up with a sense of whatever happens, we'll sort of get along. This is not the case in East Germany, if you tell them now, folks, we all have to go

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through a major transformation and everything eat no need anymore, do this sort of thing. Then they remember the 1990s they have just gone through it. Yeah. And, and who in the party establishment, including the greens is willing to offer them some sort of hope that they will be protected from the worst things that can happen in such in such a transition. Nobody can. And, and I say something more on the new members of the Austro German party system. final final point on this in Germany, the idea was in the last two years or so that you found a huge sort of block or Popular Front of all democratic forces against against the AfD. And they they sort of led lose the domestic intelligence service, the courts, the police and the press, and everybody was sort of beating on beating on the on the IFT, the new Nazis, the new Nazis, they never marched in the streets and brown unified that there was no industry that financed them. There was no Eastern nobility, that that sort of brought him to power. The Eastern nobility doesn't exist anymore because the Russians finished them off after 1940 The five. Yeah, there's nothing that like this. But everybody says AfD as the new Nazis. What happens? They get 15%. What happens among the young people, like even they even get 17%? B because people perceive that this bunch of parties that tell us basically the same thing. We don't want to give our confidence to them. Who is there as an alternative alternative for for Germany, and then we vote for them?

Anatol Lieven 15:32

Yeah. Molly, how? How do you see this affecting the European Union as such, and European politics, including European foreign and security policy as presented up to now?

Molly O'Neal 15:54

Right. Yes, thanks. I think it might be useful, just just sketching a little bit of what did change as a result of these elections. And I think that the emphasis given a lot of the press coverage and analytical community to the rise of the far right isn't fallacious. I think it actually is a real thing. So I was firstly out of the fact that there are three different categories of far right, shall we call them in the groupings in the, in the, in the parliament, the European conservatives and reform as this one includes Meloni's party and Melania is a highly influential figure in I think, in this new shifting set of coalition's she has, of course, the Brothers of Italy party, the I'm very familiar to politics in Poland and the other one you're all familiar with to I'm sure that's an important party in this. In this grouping is the Law and Justice Party headed by Kaczynski and the former former Prime Minister Mr. Biscay. So and then far to their right is this identity and democracy grouping. This includes my lip pens party with some Lamont not Nasional, the Freedom Party of Austria which came first in the elections in their country, geared builders of Freedom Party in the Netherlands and the Lego, which is another right. To the right of issue. This party is in the government headed by Meloni. So what happened in the days just prior to the election, as Abdi was expelled from that grouping, so that some of the gains of the far right that are are somewhat obscured by the fact that the AfD shows up in the unaffiliated category, they had they won 15 seats, it's you know, substantial. And then also in the unaffiliated category is fi dish, the Hungarian governing party, they won 10 seats, they all came first, of course in Hungary, although not they weren't they were more contested than they had been previously. So there is a substantial set of votes

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or seats and better for the far right is broadly understood better in the end the unaffiliated category currently.

So it is true that overall, the governing coalition, which is the centrist Coalition, which is supported by a wide range of parties, and is really essential to the working of the European Parliament, it did stand up pretty well, with the exception, of course of the liberals who lost quite substantially. So the governing coalition potential governing coalition is about 400 seats, and you only need 361 to govern. So it should put von der Leyen in a position to be reelected. Although it's worth noting that this is a secret vote and there's no real whipping the way there isn't a lot of national parliaments. So we don't we cannot be certain what how much dissatisfaction may be still looming there even even if I think she will be designated by the the member of the Council, in other words, the summit of leaders. And I think that's happening next week. So the greens were also a huge loser. And I do think that's a substantial and important and important development. So So what's happening now is that because von der Leyen isn't certain that she can get the votes she's actually been flirting a bit with Meloni in terms of trying to get votes from brothers of Italy. The trouble with that strategy is that these socialists members as Socialists and Democrats have will not keep will not vote for her if she does that. So there may be some interesting intrigue yet to come from this rather what on the surface a rather boring outcome so One of the things that could happen is, is a formation of a block of whip to encompass both the Meloni ECR group and the identity and democracy group, the per if that could be accomplished this delegation would be the second largest after the European People's Party. So why is all this important to actual policy? Well, I think you have to inquire into what and to what is, to some extent Wolfgang has already done this masterfully, as always, is that what is really driving the success of these parties, because after all, the far right in this broad definition came first in the elections in France, Italy, Austria, Hungary, and Slovakia, if you count the ruling party as being it's really left populous, but it has much in common with this group. And strong second position very in Germany, very, very critical. In fact, for the AfD to come second after the Christian Democrats and surpass the the result of all three of the parties in coalition, I think that's kind of almost seismic, I think, is very, very important. And it's also interesting that the recent protests against AfD, resulting from different different scandals related to they're potentially receiving money from Russia or from China and other other scandals of that nature. That took them down from about 22%, about six weeks or six months ago. So they it has affected their standing, but it wasn't enough to prevent the result that we've seen. So I think that's also very telling.

So what's interesting also is to look at the possibility that certain, including Meloni, there's also LePen, herself or more of iski, the former Polish Prime Minister, and Orban have all suggested that forming a right grouping encompassing all these parties would be would be desirable thing and aim that they might seek. The difficulty is that the reasons that these parties succeeded, relatively, have been discussed, and it should be a result of a lot of different factors. Migrant arrivals, of course, has been a primary concern all of them have weak economy, of course, is something that they're they're building upon grievances about the performance of the economy, and opposition to the green transition. But and also just nationalism, anti EU politics, which is a theme in domestic politics, and all these countries is the refusal or the rejection of excessive power exercised by the European Commission. But then finally, I think the one that gets at the

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heart of the foreign insecurities, security policy question is the one is the extent to which these parties and only some of them, not all of them, do not or question the support for the war in us, for the Ukraine Ukrainian fight against the against Russia. So So to the extent that this any any sort of new energy is imparted to these right wing forces within the within the parliament, we might see some impact on foreign insecurities. So foreign insecurities, security policy?

Anatol Lieven 23:24

Well, I'd like to pick up on that because we have several questions from the floor precisely about that. Whether this is likely in either in the short term, or in, in the longer term, to lead to serious change in European policies towards the the war in Ukraine and relations with Russia. And Matias, what do you think on that score?

Matthias Matthijs 23:50

I think this outcome is neutral. The main question over Ukraine's future, I think, is in the White House in the United States in November rather than in Europe, right. I mean, in the end, we can if you get rid of all the noise of this election, and you look at the path ahead over the next six months, I think the EU heads of state or government will give it to von der Leyen for a second term. It will be up to her as I think Molly rightly pointed out to cobble together a majority in the European Parliament and it will be just as as difficult as last time, if not more, right because the fluidity of these party, family families. I think they'll also try to get you know the other top jobs in place before Orban on July one takes over with Hungary the rotating presidency of the European Union. But the end of the day, I mean, look at how Meroni her old sympathies for Putin a few years ago has put them aside. I mean, it seems like when people come to power even Marine LePen herself, it speaks a very different tune, you know, applauded Zelinsky and all that when he showed up in the D Day They actually did a better job of Marine LePen and Rishi Sunak did electorally there on the Normandy beaches, you know, kind of taking the side of the landscape in this war. I mean, Marine LePen is on a path to become, she wants to become president of France. So I don't think she cares too much about the European Parliament if Meloni wants to form a super grouping, great. But her point kicking out the AfD, from the ID grouping and European Parliament was to become president of France was to show I am not as radical as, as those guys, right. So in many ways, I see a kind of it's not as strong a consensus on supporting Ukraine as it might have been two years ago or even one year ago. It's but it's there. Right? I mean, it this would be a clear taboo that any government leader would break apart from Orban Of course, where we know where he stands, but he seems to go along with most of EU support for Ukraine most of the time anyway. Right. So I mean, I think the main question mark is, is the US support and not in the EU? I think this doesn't move the needle much, even though you could you could interpret it as maybe not great news, this shift to the right. But yeah, as we've seen from Meloni, it's not clear that the far right, sticks to that sort of principle, either.

Anatol Lieven 26:20

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No, I suppose if the war in Ukraine drags on and on, with further Russian successes and no prospect for in fact, to Ukrainian victory, then people might perhaps start reverting to their former positions in future, but not exactly. I mean, not today. But Wolfgang, what do you think on that school?

Wolfgang Streeck 26:52

Yeah, I think that in many ways, the pivotal country is Germany. And Germany is sort of the economically strongest country, better able than all others to stand a long, long drawn, sort of Warren position in, in Ukraine. On the other hand, it's also very exposed, the closer to the event, and then France. It has 38,000 American troops on its soil and an unknown number of American nuclear warheads. Which the Germans have no, no control of, they are not a nuclear power. If something gets really serious in, in, in Ukraine, Germany will be very, very hard hit and more than others that are outside. So So yes, there is a possibility that at some stage, this sort of unwavering support for for you, which one, so it wasn't so unwavering at the beginning, and fall on the line played an important role in this, she sort of herded the entire European community behind the demand that the Germans do more for, for Ukraine, she called all these wonderful conferences, to travel to Kyiv, I don't know once a week to, to sort of reassure the Ukrainian government, which not necessarily represents sort of the the wish of a majority of Ukrainian men to die on the on the on the frontline reassured them to have and then I must also say, this default on the line was extremely, extremely instrumental in grasping the opportunity of the war, to try to restore a central ballistic dynamic in the politics of the European Union that had long been sort of gone. Everybody was clear that the union that this sort of ever closer union of the European peoples and and the centralization of government in in Brussels, rather than in the in the member states that this was sort of gone, especially after the COVID crisis and enter financial crisis, financial crisis was solved by Maga and Sarkozy, not by not by the European Union. It wasn't really solved. It was put on the backburner. Now, now now then, in the In, she made commitments to for Ukrainian membership in the European Union, membership of the West Balkan's membership of Georgia in the European Union. That is the entire American strategy around the around the A Black Sea sort of became, by stealth, the strategy of the European Union. Now, now if you know the internal life of this, of this being of this beast a little better, then the consequences for voting funding all of these things, the ability to take up to take on credit that on policy.

It would, who would command who would command a European military strategy if it comes to that? The French president because he sits on the on the on the internet on the Security Council and has nuclear arms, or the German, the German chancellor, or a fall from the Alliance, some some person in in Brussels, it's totally unclear. But what I want to say is that in these commitments made in the context of the Ukrainian war, the European Union has entered on a gamble, more risky, or even as risky as the gamble of the French President, when when he calls these these elections, is sort of blindly walking into a tunnel without knowing where it ends. Yeah. And, and, and she was able to get this entire generation of European, of European governments to always raise their hands when they went when they met in Brussels and promised more and more and more support. Even at the point, when it became clear that after

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the elections in the United States this year, there would be much less support for Ukraine, from the United States, if at all, because the United States will turn to another enemy, which was located in the Chinese sea. Yeah. So what is Europe going to do? And and I would say, the really dangerous thing in Europe is not the result of this election. And also not the composition of any group in this in this Parliament, a parliament, incidentally, that cannot recall the government that doesn't even elect the government that has no legislative initiative. No right of legislative initiative, it rests with the Commission. Yeah, the parliament that is not really a parliament. I think that the things that the council did, in making these sort of very strange, half baked commitments to Ukraine, to replace the United States, if it came to this, that is the real the real. I say, combustion combustion thing that that is coming upon on the European Union. And and that may be this next five years. And then the parliament is totally irrelevant. What is much more? What what will be relevant is the interplay between Germany and France in playing out these these commitments?

Anatol Lieven 33:09

Well, I wanted to ask about that. Because given your the degree of, as you said, in popular discontent with existing establishments, in the aisle makes is going to make further expansion of the European Union. significantly more difficult, whatever. Brussels may have, in theory committed itself to.

Wolfgang Streeck 33:39

Yeah, it couldn't. It couldn't be so but but under the pressure of war, and with without, and then and then with the, the question will be internally, what kind of commitment will Germany make in this context? In order to bring in the other remember how fast shots changed from sort of initially they sent to 200. Helmets to, to, to Ukraine? No, no, they about to send the Patriots and, and the Belgians are delivering the F 16. But although they are saying, I think in four years, the last F 16 will be there, which, which to me means that they are already beginning to assume that that war is going to drag on for years.

Anatol Lieven 34:31

Yeah. And Matias, what do you think about the implications for further EU expansion?

Matthias Matthijs 34:40

I mean, you're right, in a sense that the EU has made these commitments. I think it does feel that in the Western Balkans, it dropped the ball right that not admitting them or not accelerating or not engaging at least or heavily investing in them then opens up these places to you know, the influence of Russia and China. And I think they're equally worried about that. in Moldova and Georgia and so on. But again, that's all the theory in Brussels, right? I mean, let's not forget enlargement is a very long process, this is going to be very much more difficult than the big bang in 2004. Because and also with higher risk, and let's not forget, these things need to be

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ratified in every single member state. I mean, so So, yeah, they can, they can have a different process than previously and give some carrots along the way for the good performance. I can see carrots for Montenegro, and things like that. But you know, there's 10 countries. And remember, also at a time where they feel that Orban vetoes everything that they want to do, do they want to have 10mMore veto, so they need an internal reform. And then the last bit, of course, is money budget. I mean, nobody wants to talk about that yet, but everybody becoming a net contributor. So Ukraine can be admitted in the politics of death or toxic, right. And so at a time, as you mentioned, none at all have an anti establishment mode. This seems like a very elite project. Indeed.

Anatol Lieven 36:04

I would be surprised in the future if you do not have German commentators adapting Bismarck's famous remark about the Balkans and saying something to the effect of the Balkans are not worth the healthy income of a single member of the German Mittelstand. Or, or agriculture. Yeah, I mean, it was already going to be complicated. It looks even more complicated.

Wolfgang Streeck 36:32

But absolutely, I think it looks absolutely messy. And, and it is sort of in the long run, one can think well, one can withdraw from these things, and so on. But the way to get there, it will sort of occupy the politics of the European Union, it will sort of erase hostilities, there will be all sorts of intermediate stages in which these men dominate the the agenda, which will cause divisions internally in many of the member countries. And And while the war is going on. At this point, I can't even see the war being frozen in its it's like John Mearsheimer in the I think already a year ago, in a very insightful article suggested that, after everything that had been planned on in on the part of the West with respect to what to do with with Russia, now the Russians sort of have become almost like the most the most successful war party, shouldn't they think it in their interest, now to slowly destroy Ukraine as a viable civil society, waiting for the oligarchs to go to Moscow, not to go to New York or or London, for the population no longer willing to serve in the army. And the Russians just have no interest anymore in a ceasefire, they know that that is a nightmare for the European Union, then they would face they would face defeat as a group of 27 countries and able to muster the capacity to really do what they always have. We want Ukraine to win. Yeah. How do you do this? If you have a dispersed nuclear capacity facing the big nuclear capacity of the other side? I don't see how that can happen. Yeah. So years and years of desperate, desperate struggle on our side, what to do with this sort of open wound that will be bleeding for years.

Anatol Lieven 39:11

So, Molly, what do you think on this? Is there any chance any significant chance of the Europeans taking a new view of the of the Ukraine conflict?

Molly O'Neal 39:25

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I'm not muted. Am I okay, good. No, I am. I am. I was just going to say that, you know, it is true that under von der Leyen, there's been a great deal of ambition in the European Commission to end and European Europe as a whole to play a geopolitical role and enter into questions around defense, industry development and things like that. And the thing is, though, when you really look at it, at least in my understanding is that it's very unlikely that the national governments are going to relinquish that much authority or funding to the To the European Union, so that fundamentally any kind of rearmament that's meaningful in in Western Europe or in Europe, on your mind, the European Union member countries or NATO countries, is going to have to be driven by national governments. And this brings me back to the fact that these kinds of developments in domestic policy as reflected here in the elections, I think they really do have a very, they have a an impact in the sense that the engine of of European, the energy behind those sorts of different steps of European deepening and broadening it's all down to the Franco German tandem. And what we're looking now at is a Germany in a very powerless situation where it's 30% of the electorate alone is supporting his governing coalition. I don't necessarily see any, any how that's going to change quickly, or who can replace the governing coalition and when I guess elections will be next year. But then with, with France going into what seems to be an incredibly dangerous or open ended political crisis, I guess it is not easy to be optimistic about any either diplomatic or, or other kinds of concerted action taking place that would, would have make a difference on the trajectory of this war.

Anatol Lieven 41:32

Several questions inevitably about immigration, because these results and of course holds succession of European election results over the years do seem to show a clear reaction against very heavy levels of migration in European populations. But equally, I mean, all the measures taken so far, including outside the European Union by the British government have essentially failed significantly to change this trajectory. Do you expect to see in future much more radical measures? And could these also contribute to weakening the European Union or it because of actions by states on on this unilateral actions would go clearly against core rules and institutions of the European Union? Matthias, how do you see this developing?

Matthias Matthijs 42:39

Yeah, I think gain dangerous precedent here has been set by the Netherlands, right. So the Netherlands formed a coalition led by far right hate builders. And I think the kind of key ingredient of that government on immigration is basically all kinds of opt outs from what the EU is doing, right. And coming originally from Belgium, as I am, I was like, Oh, great, so you're just gonna leave them all at the Belgian border and for that matter, at the German border, and that's going to make you a lot of friends in the EU. Right. So but it's clear that they have kind of doubled down on this sort of, like, almost British style opt out, right, from the things in the EU that we don't like, but in this case, it's not the euro, or, or, to some extent that it's something like Schengen, right? It's like we want to control our own sort of asylum seekers, immigrants, and we don't want to be part of any sort of EU solidarity scheme or anything like that. So that's, that's

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one, I think, dangerous strength for EU cohesion that I can see happening in many other governments because, again, this is not Orban doing this. This is the Dutch doing this, right? An original member, supposedly very progressive people that are open to all kinds of, you know, seafaring people, let's not forget, right, that are worldly and all that. So that's that's one element. The other element is when you look at Meloni. Right. And I think to some extent, also the British Tories how they have governed immigration, they heavily focus on illegal immigrants who come in boats right across the channel across the Mediterranean, we're cracking down on this, we're not going to let them board ships. We're not we're going to make deals with countries, we're going to send them to Rwanda, we're going to keep them in Albania, whatever, right? But at the same time, legal immigration is going up dramatically. Right, which, as we've seen, in the case of the UK, and even Meloni herself has admitted, you know, like average age here is now close to 50. If not above, unlike China in the US where average age is 39 39 and a half, but we need people right but in the in the care sectors and the hospitality sector and all these things. And so we're basically going to by stealth very quietly, do do these things, right. And so that's where I think the current tension is on that debate.

Anatol Lieven 45:00

Wolfgang how, where do you see this going in in Germany?

Wolfgang Streeck 45:05

I first of all, I would say I'm, I'm very much in agreement with Matthias that we're going to see more opt outs in, in Europe, generally speaking, which is part of the fact, which comes with the fact that we now have 27. Members don't forget, we had 28 and one opted out really, yeah. And, and if you have such a heterogeneous collection of countries, and such a big collection of countries, the idea that you can govern them, sort of from the top, all in the same way, is totally unrealistic. There. There are different sort of political conditions or social conditions and so on in different countries. And they have to have the capacity to respond to these peculiarities of their own of their own situation, without being interfered with by sort of an authoritative bureaucracy in Brussels. Remember, the COVID crisis when when for the line insisted that there could be no border controls inside Europe. But what happened? We had border controls all over the place, because national governments being being urged by their population to protect them from from death, whatever deaths there, there was, they acted, responding responding to them. Now, as far as Germany is concerned, do we remember Denmark, which, during the immigration crisis, so close their borders, and the only border Denmark has is with Germany? So so they they were there that everybody else? I mean, I mean, the most migrants want to go to Germany. At the same time, Germany has a has a do need to have people who can work in s, Italy, in eldercare the general health health care system but but beyond this. And so, one has to find a way of no longer making immigration something that a particular part of a population has to ask to be afraid of. In what sense? Are they afraid? For example, my migrant daughters go to school? They are children young, 10 12 years old. Yeah, these schools have a lot of children that can't speak German. Yeah. If you don't, if you like us, the sort of thing that is something that can be handled. If you're a teacher, or if you do not have that confidence, then

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you really feel that this is a problem for your family, for your children for the the same the same with healthcare the same with housing. We have a housing crisis in Germany, we don't know where we have now 1 million Ukrainian refugees enter. Yeah, where? Where can they live. And so you have to handle the infrastructure problem.

First, before you open up more doors for legal immigration, I see no other way. That however, means that you have a lot of sort of collective expenses to I mean, public money to invest in an infrastructure that is capable of receiving a lot of immigrants that are needed in this country in order to keep the country going. That is the puzzle that that they have to solve. There is no constructive discussion on the order of this problem. People sort of pretend that either the one side of the problem doesn't exist, infrastructure doesn't matter. We just let let in whoever whoever wants to come in or on the other side, people who are denying that this country has to become a multi cultural if you want, multi ethnic country in order to be able to keep going. Yeah, if you look at this new party, Vanessa Wagner's most very interesting most of the leading people in his in this group have immigration background. Yeah. And and some of the most Some of the most articulate members of this of this group will be willing to, to explain to you that they don't want others to have to go through the same misery that their families and they themselves went through before they were able to find a way into that society, that they are not excited about repeating the the errors of the of the former immigration policies. Of course, it will be possible to do to say something honest on this, and then start some honest action to do something. I don't know. But that is what would be required.

Anatol Lieven 50:48

And of course, at the same time, European states are saying or promising that they're going to radically increase their military spend. Yeah, I'm not easy to see how all of these things are compatible at the same time. Um, questions on when it comes to expansion? Or are we perhaps going to have to look at, you know, Macron hinted at this in the form of, you know, his idea of European political community that people will eventually have to move to, to too much tighter core European Union and a looser outer one unit precisely because it won't be possible, in fact, to to bring in new states, Matias, what do you think on that is, is that a likely way forward?

Matthias 51:51

And I'm aware of time, I'm gonna actually pass this on to Molly, I'd like to hear what she thinks. Molly?

Molly O'Neal 52:00

Oh, actually, am I okay, I don't. I think there's a very strong disposition against doing that in the European Union against a two speed or a, you know, a core in and out, or I think that your Ukrainians and other countries that want to exceed would be very unhappy with that as well. And so, I think, I think what's gonna have to happen is that there would need to be a root and

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branch reform of the programmatically the, you know, the support for agriculture and, and thing and other sorts of programs like that that result in like, Matthias indicated there is going to be a great large number of countries that have been net recipients of EU funding for the time since they exceeded are going to find themselves being net contributors. And that will make the whole accession very hard to stomach politically. So I think the only thing to be done would be it would take a lot of courage and a lot of ingenuity is to come up with a way to reform these structures, so that there would be a not such a generous support for Ukraine, but not for anybody else either. In other words, you know, equalize that across the board.

Matthias Matthijs 53:15

That's one one thing I would add to what Molly said is that I mean, when it comes to the organization of a European defense, this doesn't have to be done by the European Union, right? I mean, it's very clear and that's the thing, which is an interesting development by labor, likely coming to power on July 4 in the UK that David Lammy and Labour have already offered this basically implicit deal to the European Union saying, Listen, we will make a defense pact with you, we will, you know, help lead the European defense effort, basically in return for let's be honest, easier single market access or something, right. I mean, they, they, they're going to want something. That's of course going to be tricky if Brussels is still in the same spirit that they were the way they negotiated the Brexit deal, of course, that was pre Ukraine was pre pandemic actually was during pandemic, but pre Ukraine, if you have a situation, or Donald Trump comes back to the White House, for that matter, even if Biden is in the White House, that threat of an America that's going to withdraw from Europe is not going away. Right. So I mean, at some point, the Europeans will have to wake up. And if you organize defense and foreign and security policy, with the EU playing a role, but not the EU, organizing it for the EU, right? So basically doing procurement, or maybe you know, coming up with money or a joint fund or whatever, making the single market rules more flexible for the fundamental, this is all very hard stuff. Because I mean, you have to get out of a kind of paradigm from the 90s in the 2000s that they still quite haven't left. But there you could see other European countries that aren't quite members of the EU yet joining in then the EU would then focus more on things like single market in the euro and and making that work, but Molly is absolutely right. I mean, the candidate countries don't want it and I think many Any, especially the countries in the East, including Poland, the Baltics don't want it either, right, they want to be in the middle of a of a bigger European Union rather than at the edge. And so in many ways, I mean, these are still these are very hard questions going going forward.

Wolfgang Streeck 55:19

I mean, just very, two very short remarks. I mean, wars are about killing and getting killed. And in a political community, you want your own government to represent you on these questions, so to speak. Yeah. It is impossible, ultimately impossible, to sort of bring in the United Kingdom to decide who's going to die on the continent. And, and the problem with Europe and its nation states is that it is very hard to conceive. So a common strategic Center. In Washington, DC is the United States, one continent, one big country. In Europe, it's one continent and 27 countries,

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and who wants to die for the German security policy problem was always either protected by France or by the United States. When it came to goal, the goal is in the German foreign policy establishment. They were always asked, Do you really think that people will, the French will sacrifice Paris for Berlin? And of course, then, of course, the answer is no. Yeah. That makes it very easy. And then the other thing that Molly mentioned that reform, the problem with the European Union, is that its constitution basically doesn't exist. It consists of two unbelievably complex treaties, that can be changed only unanimously by all 27 Member States. Plus class. The European Court of Justice, not the Parliament, the parliament doesn't doesn't decide much. But the European Court of Justice is the source of the permanent updating of our Constitution. That by sort of adding to the to the treaties and and interpreting them, can you imagine Can you imagine a an assembly of 27 states that would be willing to open up these treaties and replace them with a less centralist stick? Image? I was very much interested in what Matthias said, on the on the need to, to get to find a more decentralized sort of constitution of this, of this unit? They did, it will be the question whether the small ones will allow the big ones to go on their own, because the small ones we can hope to be more numerous, and thereby to tell, especially the Germans, what to do, and, and for whom it is an absolute mess. And, and the idea of irreversible constitution, which is exactly what the neoliberal turn of the 1990s sort of imposed on the European Union, and irreversible constitution became because we now know how this got this sort of thing, capitalist economy, plus state system can can be governed. And now we're, we're stuck with a sort of huge amount of rules that do no longer fit what is going on now. And we do not have the capacity to revise them so that they do fit, what the what is demand.

Anatol Lieven 58:59

And certainly, I think there is a chance of more and more states simply rejecting judgments by the European Court of Justice. I mean, that played a big part in the whole Brexit debate in Britain. Absolutely. So yes, I mean, the further future looks, well, very unclear. And which gives us a lot, a lot to discuss in future, which, of course, we're all very good at. I'm afraid that's all we have time for I apologize to people in the in the audience whose questions I couldn't manage to pass on. But thank you all so much. I hope I will see some members of the audience at the book talk on Thursday with Ian proud. And my thanks to all the participants for a really interesting discussion on some key issues, which I think here in Washington are often not nearly well enough understood when it comes to Europe. So thank you, and I look forward to seeing you all again soon, I hope all right, thank you.