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PLUS: HOW TO REBUILD THE ECONOMY
by Kristalina Georgieva and Gita Gopinath



The Most Important Election. Ever.

by Michael Hirsh

The perils of
a long transition.

by Timothy Naftali

How to prevent
foreign interference.

by Elisabeth Braw



WHY EUROPE WINS



Tourists wearing protective face masks visit the Louvre in Paris on Aug. 6 after the lifting of some coronavirus restrictions.



**EVERYONE WRITES OFF THE
EUROPEAN UNION AS DULL
AND PRONE TO FRACTURE.
BUT THE LAST DECADE SHOWS
THAT BRUSSELS IS SMARTER
THAN BEIJING, LONDON,
MOSCOW, AND WASHINGTON.**

by **ANDREW MORAVCSIK**

SEVERAL MONTHS AGO, WHEN COVID-19 STRUCK EUROPE, headlines portrayed overflowing hospitals in Italy, policy mistakes in Britain and Sweden, mismanaged senior care in Belgium, and misbehaving youth in Spanish discos. Two months later—after European governments imposed lockdowns, mask-wearing, testing, and tracing—the incidence of new cases plummeted. By July, vacationing Europeans were strolling through Piazza Navona in Rome, attending the opera in Salzburg, and dining in Paris.

Americans are not welcome to cross the Atlantic, however, because the United States has failed to match Europe's resilience. Instead, new cases trended upward through the summer, leaving the average American 10 times more likely to contract the coronavirus than the average European.

Europe's success is not coincidental. Studies show that countries with higher income equality and sound expert-based government regulation—areas in which European countries excel—tend to combat disease better. They are also desirable places to live and do business: In a global poll, European countries grabbed seven of the top 10 spots on *Forbes's* 2019 list of the nations with the best reputation for social, economic, and political success, whereas the United States barely cracked the top 40.

The coronavirus pandemic is only one of many examples of a general tendency among journalists, analysts, diplomats, and politicians to underestimate Europe. For a generation, observers have bet against Europe's future, arguing that it lacks the high growth, centralized political institutions, domestic legitimacy, and hard military tools required to have an effective global presence. Many observers confidently predicted that the euro would collapse, enlargement from 15 to 28 members would fail, and voters would reject European ideals. Yet the pundits were proved wrong: None of this came to pass.

Nowhere is Europe's ability to confound the skeptics clearer than in foreign policy. Over the past decade, Europeans have faced four epochal foreign-policy challenges involving the strongest great-power competitors and most powerful forces of globalization in today's world. In 2014, Russia attacked Ukraine. In 2015, waves of migrants flooded across the Mediterranean, and the next year, amid rising populist Euroskepticism, the Brexit referendum threatened to dissolve the European Union. And since 2016, Donald Trump, first as a candidate and then as U.S. president, has challenged NATO and trans-Atlantic trade.

In each case, newspapers published lurid reportage and think tanks issued dire predictions of Europe's imminent collapse while politicians in Washington, Beijing, and Moscow wrote Europe off as strategically irrelevant. But in each case Europeans quietly prevailed.

Europeans have succeeded by deploying nonmilitary capabilities that they wield more effectively than anyone else in the world today: foreign aid, trade and employment

agreements, the imposition of regulatory standards, the cultivation of international law and organization, firm but quiet diplomacy, and the promotion of democracy. Europe's distinctive pragmatic use of civilian power may be too dull, slow-moving, and technocratic to attract attention. Yet in the end, it gets the job done more cost-effectively than other means employed by rival great powers.

IN 2014, RUSSIA ATTACKED UKRAINE, ANNEXED CRIMEA, and covertly supported separatism in two of its eastern provinces—a flagrant violation of international law that posed the most serious security challenge to Europe in a generation. Since Russia enjoys unquestioned local military superiority and accords Ukraine greater historical, cultural, economic, and strategic importance than any other country, traditional realists such as Henry Kissinger and John Mearsheimer counseled Europe to let Ukraine go. Moscow, they warned, would respond ruthlessly, leading inevitably to a Western defeat.

European leaders ignored the naysayers and, instead, led a Western effort to face Russia down in its own backyard. Just six years later, the result is as favorable as is realistically possible. Ukraine—minus the 7 percent of its territory occupied by Russia and its sympathizers—is now an independent country forging an ever closer relationship with the West. The war in its eastern provinces is winding down: After more than 9,000 deaths by the end of 2015, Ukrainian military and civilian fatalities have dropped to around 100 per year. While Russia seems determined to stay in Crimea, negotiations over the eastern provinces inch forward, achieving an effective cease-fire and prisoner exchange this year.

Meanwhile, Ukraine is enjoying robust economic growth. Its democracy continues to consolidate: The election of Volodymyr Zelensky in early 2019 placed the country's presidency in the hands of politicians far less tainted by corruption, oligarchy, or Russian ties. In separate polling, nearly 80 percent of Ukrainians now have a favorable view of the EU, and almost two-thirds believe that further external cooperation should be directed at eventual membership.

While primary credit lies with Ukrainians themselves, who sustained high military casualties, their sacrifice would have been futile without massive Western backing. Europe alone possesses the nonmilitary instruments needed to prevail against Russian President Vladimir Putin.

For decades, EU officials had been quietly helping the Ukrainian government integrate with the West by adapting its market legislation to EU standards—a process meant to culminate in an association agreement with the EU in 2014. Fearing that such an agreement would tie Ukraine to the West in perpetuity, Putin pressed then-Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich to reject it. What no one could have foreseen was that, in response, pro-Western protesters would occupy Kyiv's Independence Square for three

months, many waving EU flags—ultimately triggering a revolution that ended only when Yanukovich fled to Russia and a pro-Western president took office.

If the soft power of European values helped spark the revolution, Europe's coordinated economic, political, and legal aid sustained it. EU and member state aid has kept war-torn Ukraine solvent, providing about \$20 billion since 2014, compared with less than \$2 billion in economic aid from the United States. Europe supports about twice as much aid as the International Monetary Fund does as well. An estimated 4 million Ukrainians work abroad, most of them in Europe, remitting back nearly \$16 billion annually—10 percent of the country's GDP—whereas only a few thousand go to the United States. Under the EU association agreement, Ukraine has expanded trade with Europe, which

extensive integrated program of economic, political, and legal reform, aimed at aligning Ukraine over the long term with the West. The EU Commission wields competition law and infrastructure spending to limit the power of Gazprom, the Russian fossil fuel monopoly, and to ensure continued energy supplies to Ukraine. Working through the Normandy Format, French and German leaders have led the diplomatic effort to defuse the military conflict—initiating, according to one study, eight times more high-level diplomatic communication with Russia and Ukraine than their U.S. counterparts.

To be sure, the United States does provide most of Ukraine's military aid, yet such assistance totals just a 10th of EU civilian aid discussed above—and the Ukrainian government is constrained to spend it on U.S.-produced conventional arms, training, and medical

supplies largely available on the open market. The Trump administration's much-heralded sale of lethal military equipment—Javelin anti-tank missiles—to Ukraine arrived only in 2018, long after Russian forces had pulled back, unlikely to return. And the United States has imposed the explicit condition that the missiles must be stored almost a thousand miles from the front and cannot be used in combat. In contrast to European aid, U.S. military assistance is more symbolic than real.

IN 2015, JUST OVER 1 MILLION IRREGULAR MIGRANTS arrived in Europe—an influx higher than in any period since the immediate aftermath of World War II. Many were Syrian refugees seeking asylum. Hundreds of millions of people across the globe desire to migrate, and European countries remain some of the most desired destinations, leading many to view such waves of mass migration as inevitable and irresistible. Conservative

pundits proclaimed “the death of Europe.”

Yet Europe's spectacularly swift and successful response demonstrates that mass migration can be controlled. Since 2015, the flow of irregular migrants has declined by 88 percent—from just over a million to about 123,000 in 2019—and has continued to trend downward this year. Since fewer people brave the journey, fewer die at sea: Last year's total of 1,319 dead and missing is lower than any year on record—though, of course, this calculation ignores the fate of those stuck in transit camps.

European governments achieved this goal by adopting tough but effective policies. They constructed walls, fences, and high-tech sensing systems. They criminalized the transport of migrants, even on commercial ferries or aircraft. They removed EU policing and rescue boats from the seas. They cracked down on NGOs that assisted migrants (and, allegedly, helped



From left: Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, and French President Emmanuel Macron before the start of the first in-person EU summit of the pandemic on July 18.

now takes nearly \$25 billion annually in Ukrainian exports, more than 20 times that which goes to the United States.

European governments have voted unanimously every six months to renew trade, investment, and travel sanctions on Russia despite Moscow's punishing countersanctions. They do so despite the fact that while the United States, Canada, Japan, and Australia all imposed common sanctions (and faced countersanctions from Moscow), 90 percent of the costs fall on Europeans, who are the ones with a traditional trading relationship with Russia.

The EU's European Neighborhood Policy provides an

coordinate their movements) by placing police on their vessels, impounding boats, and initiating prosecutions. When European navies spotted migrant vessels in international waters, they towed them back to an uncertain fate in Africa or Asia.

Europe struck deals with transit countries such as Turkey, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, and Egypt. All have agreed to police their shores, house millions of potential migrants, and work with the EU's border control agency, Frontex. In exchange, they receive foreign aid, trade concessions, visa-free travel, and border control equipment. Further EU migration missions are now dotted through Chad, Mali, and the rest of Africa.

European idealists and migrant rights activists accuse European governments of hypocrisy: Are they not betraying the spirit of their ethical and international legal obligations to permit any refugee or migrant to seek international protection? Conditions in European detention areas are indeed often overcrowded and uncomfortable, as attested by the images that recently circulated from Greece's burned-down Moria camp. Extra-European detention camps are especially troubling. This year, even before the pandemic, the United Nations suspended operations at its transit center in Tripoli, Libya, because it could not ensure safety. Ramona Lenz of Medico International—a public health NGO funded in part by the German government—has criticized European governments for enlisting neighboring states to serve as the “bouncers of Europe”—and then averting their gaze as those states abuse the human rights of migrants.

Yet European governments have remained unsentimentally resolute. Donald Tusk, then-president of the EU's most important decision-making body, the European Council, declared when the policy was adopted: “We may not agree on everything, but we agree on the main goal, which is stemming illegal migration to Europe.”

European governments chose this strategy because they are pragmatic. Their citizens consider immigration the most important issue facing Europe, with majorities of up to 10 to 1 opposing more migrants, even before the 2015 wave. Migration threatens the stability of Europe's moderate political systems: No government would last long today if it supported uncontrolled entry from culturally dissimilar regions. This would undermine other policies. In Britain, for example, citizens listed migration as one of the most important political issues facing the country in every year from 2001 to 2016, with a substantial majority of those polled wanting to reduce the number of migrants—a trend that eventually helped fuel the Brexit vote.

In the long term, European leaders view the reduction of uncontrolled migration, brutally if necessary, as the only way forward. Yet there is a silver lining. Doing so can create the political space to admit more migrants on selective economic and humanitarian grounds. Recent polls suggest that this may be correct: Public concern about migration is slowly declining.

OVER THE PAST TWO DECADES, extreme-right populist parties with anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant, anti-terrorist, and anti-Europe appeal have increased their vote shares across Europe. They now participate in government in six countries. In Britain, they spearheaded Brexit. And in the last two decades, scholars—and, it seems, journalists—have written more about extreme-right populist parties than all other European parties combined.

Leading foreign-policy pundits argue that homegrown extremism in Europe, the United States, and elsewhere—and not rising great-power challengers—now poses the greatest threat to the post-Cold War liberal international order. In Europe, many fear that extremist governments might win more EU exit referendums or join Trump and Putin in adopting protectionist and pro-Russia stances.

Yet this proved to be journalistic hype. Rather than panicking over populist threats, European leaders calmly drained their energy by dampening migration and terrorism and hanging tough in negotiations with Britain—to which they can now add the political benefit of managing the coronavirus pandemic well. Today, European unity—in any case, a practical necessity for small and highly interdependent states—is more popular than at any time in recent history.

In fact, populists were never as powerful as headlines made them seem. Consider the case of Marine Le Pen, who heads the French extreme-right National Rally party. When she ran for the French presidency in 2017, newspapers across the globe proclaimed, as one *New York Times* article put it, that “the next president of France will be Marine Le Pen” and speculated what her administration would do once in office. Yet her campaign was clearly hopeless from the start. All of her potential rivals, polls showed, could defeat her by comfortable double-digit margins, and Emmanuel Macron eventually did so by winning twice as many votes. Today, the National Rally holds just seven of 577 seats in the National Assembly.

The impotence of the extreme-right in France is no exception. Outside of Britain, extreme Euroskepticism enjoys scant support. Of 27 EU members (plus Britain), 12 have no extreme-right or Euroskeptic party at all or none that scores above 10 percent in national elections. In 10 more countries, including France and Germany, other parties consistently exclude extremists from government coalitions. In three more—Latvia, Estonia, and Bulgaria—extremists participate only as minority coalition partners, which reduces their influence close to zero.

Only in Britain, Hungary, and Poland does an extreme-right or Euroskeptic party actually lead the government. Of course, their extremism poses threats to the quality of democracy and rule of law, as in the United States, but their effect on foreign policy is slight. Migration is the only EU issue on which policy has moved in a direction extremists favor—but this, as we have seen, is only because the posi-

tion held by extremists happens to be that of large majorities of moderate voters in nearly every country. Otherwise, Poland and Hungary, both of which are among the biggest beneficiaries of EU policies and have exceptionally pro-EU populations, follow their neighbors on nearly every aspect of external policy, from sanctions on Russia to development aid to Africa—dissenting occasionally only on symbolic declarations. That leaves Brexit as the only major Euroskeptical achievement of a populist party in recent years.

Yet Brexit is, at best, an exception that proves the rule. That it happened at all reflects a perfect storm of astonishingly unlikely circumstances unrepeatably elsewhere. Britain is the only European country where Euroskepticism attracts more than a tiny fringe of the electorate. Even so, Brexit could happen only because a prime minister over-

U.K. negotiations have gone nowhere after the United States badgered the British about agricultural imports and aircraft subsidies. Trump embarrasses prime ministers on his visits, remains unpopular among the British public, and is struggling to be reelected. Britain is running out of options.

These realities, combined with the more general lack of support for their Euroskeptical views, have led populists elsewhere to moderate their ideas rather than follow London's lead. Five years ago, 15 extreme-right parties, including Le Pen's National Rally, advocated a Brexit-style withdrawal from the EU or the eurozone. Today none do. Even so, the most worrisome populist challenger in Europe, Matteo Salvini of the League party, is hemorrhaging popular support to the Brothers of Italy, a new and less Euroskeptical right-wing party. The wave of populist Euroskepticism seems to have crested.

AMONG EUROPE'S MAJOR GEOPOLITICAL ASSETS is its close partnership with the United States, which has formed the bedrock of Western defense and economic policies for 75 years. In 2016, as a presidential candidate, Trump called all this into question, declaring NATO "obsolete" and threatening to withdraw if Europeans failed to meet their informal pledge to spend 2 percent of their GDPs on defense—a threat he has repeated often since. He seems obsessed with Europe's bilateral trade surplus with the United States—especially that of Germany.

Yet as president, Trump has been more bark than bite. European defense spending has risen only marginally, with just the United Kingdom and a half-dozen Eastern European countries likely to exceed 2 percent anytime soon. Nonetheless, within three months of entering office, the new president took credit for the problem being fixed and declared NATO "not obsolete." Vice President Mike Pence, backed by cabinet officials, assured

allies that Washington's commitment remained "unwavering." The most Trump has done was to approve plans in July to remove about 6,000 of more than 60,000 troops in Europe. But commentators agree that this bit of pre-election theatrics is unlikely to result in real policy change, which would take years to execute and cost billions of dollars and would be strategically insignificant even if it did.

Longer term, Europe need not worry that the United States will leave NATO. European countries remain America's most trustworthy and capable allies. U.S. Defense Department planners, important domestic constituencies, and an overwhelming bipartisan majority in Congress favor both defending Europe and deterring Russia. Moreover, more than half of U.S. forces stationed in NATO countries are not there to defend Europe from Russia but to provide indispensable logistical support for the projection of U.S. power in the



Health care workers respond to applause outside a hospital in Barcelona on April 13 amid the coronavirus pandemic.

ruled his advisors to call an unnecessary referendum, which happened to fall at the only brief moment in the last five years when a majority of Britons opposed EU membership. Brexit was later ratified by an election in which a 44 percent vote share gave Boris Johnson a comfortable majority: Without Britain's electoral institutions, the most biased in Europe, a pro-EU majority would have ruled instead.

Today, Brexit remains stalled. Britain is much smaller and dependent on Europe's good will to gain access for nearly half of its exports, particularly of services like banking. This allows Europe to take a tough stance in negotiations over the terms of the U.K. withdrawal. British Brexiters once hoped that Trump would bail them out with a quick trade agreement. Yet U.S.-

Mediterranean, Middle East, Africa, and Eurasia. They man Air Force bases, transport hubs, headquarters, and hospitals in Germany, as well as the U.S. Navy's 6th Fleet, based in Naples, Italy. U.S. Africa Command, for example, is headquartered in the German city of Stuttgart because the United States was unable to find an African country to host it. Without NATO, every delivery of troops or materiel, evacuation of a wounded soldier, naval mission in the Mediterranean, rapid reaction action, multinational training exercise, heavy bombing mission, or trip to headquarters would require an extra 6,000-mile trip to or from the United States.

Trump also took aim at European economic interests, grabbing headlines by repeatedly threatening to impose tariffs on EU exports. Pundits worried that trans-Atlantic disruption might upend the global trading system. Yet the administration has provoked only two small squabbles: In 2018, Trump imposed tariffs on European steel and aluminum, and last year he blocked a bundle of goods in response to European subsidies to Airbus. Neither was new. All but one U.S. administration since that of Richard Nixon has placed special tariffs on steel—a large unionized industry concentrated in U.S. swing states. And the World Trade Organization fully authorized the compensatory tariffs on Airbus products in October 2019 as part of a settlement of a 15-year dispute.

Yet these two sets of tariffs targeted just \$7.5 billion in European exports each—minuscule compared with the \$300 billion in Chinese products hit by Trump tariffs. As a result—until the COVID-19 crisis—trans-Atlantic exports and affiliate sales continued to increase more than 20 percent after 2016, whereas U.S. trade with China declined significantly.

No trans-Atlantic trade war erupted because Trump did not dare provoke it. The backlash would be fierce since U.S. and European firms are far more heavily cross-invested than firms in any other part of the world: 61 percent of total U.S. foreign direct investment (FDI) is in Europe, and 68 percent of FDI coming into the United States comes from Europe, so U.S. corporate interests are inseparably linked to Europe. Even when EU and U.S. economic interests diverge, Trump must tread even more carefully than with China because the world's largest trading bloc with a population of almost 500 million is a powerful adversary. Trade authority is centralized in Brussels. When Trump imposed tariffs, Europe swiftly retaliated with sanctions carefully targeted at voters in U.S. swing states.

The EU plays offense as well. Quietly taking advantage of Trump's diffidence toward globalization, Europe concluded ambitious trade agreements with Japan, Mexico, and Canada, with Australia, Brazil, and other countries to follow. Exploiting the threat of exclusion from the lucrative European market, the EU has become the world's de facto regulatory authority—something the Columbia Law professor Anu Bradford calls the “Brussels effect.” Farmers in Nebraska, for instance, grow pesticide-free products so that they meet EU

standards. Europe recently imposed tough privacy standards on U.S. tech giants and is considering new digital taxes. The Trump administration objected, but Europe did not back down. Instead, it helped convince California to adopt similar regulations, which went into effect in January.

JOURNALISTS, PUNDITS, AND POLITICIANS overlook Europe's record of success because it is, in a word, dull. Europe's quiet and patient style of foreign policy lacks the flash and charisma of old-fashioned crisis diplomacy conducted in the shadow of coercive force. Unlike Trump's America, Europe does not grab headlines by precipitously launching trade wars—or real ones. Unlike Putin's Russia, it does not subvert elections and pollute the internet. Unlike Xi Jinping's China, it does not incarcerate ethnic minorities or provoke military clashes along its borders. Old-school geopoliticians are baffled (and often bored) by decisions taken by Brussels-based institutions where it is difficult to tell who is in charge—or even, as Kissinger once quipped, whom to call.

Europe's pragmatism also often frustrates idealists. European leaders, knowing that they cannot solve all the world's problems, pick their battles carefully. They eschew precipitous actions and hopeless causes that in retrospect so often seem ill-judged, such as toppling Saddam Hussein or ejecting Russia from Crimea. Instead, they slowly advance, often for decades, workable solutions to problems such as European enlargement, Iranian nuclear weapons, or climate change, punctuated by setbacks. In a case like Belarus today, it is perhaps overambitious to ask whether Europeans can topple the current authoritarian government tomorrow—but it seems reasonable to ask whether they can create incentives for its peaceful and positive evolution over the next decades. And what they do serves Europe's interests.

Boring though this incremental and technocratic policymaking may be, it works. This has been shown not just by the examples above but in Europe's recent decisions to provide 750 billion euros (\$826 billion) in added financial firepower to stabilize the euro; to craft a system to screen Chinese investment in Europe; to switch to European-built 5G mobile networks; to promote peace and development in the Western Balkans; and now, without fear of a British veto, to coordinate tax policies.

In the wake of COVID-19, many in the United States have asked themselves whether democratic countries can sustain farsighted, data-driven, expert-based policies. Would-be Trumps and Putins question whether such policies are even desirable, preferring to appeal to national greatness. The answer is in Europe: In the 21st century, such policies are not only sustainable but successful. Europe is the future. ■

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