

MARCH 2018

CURRENT HISTORY

A Journal of Contemporary World Affairs



EUROPE

Varieties of Populism

Poland's Illiberal Path
Anna Grzymala-Busse

**The Catalan Dream
of Secession**
Diego Muro

**The Far Right Gains
in Germany**
David Art

Fragile Coexistence

Northern Ireland in Limbo
David Mitchell

Bosnia's Dayton Problem
Azra Hromadžić

Plus:

Postsocialist Bulgarian Lives
Maria Todorova

Climate Adaptation in the EU
Laura Booth and Anthony Patt



CURRENT HISTORY

March 2018

Vol. 117, No. 797

CONTENTS

- 83 The Stillbirth of the Catalan Republic** *Diego Muro*
A hasty push for unilateral secession by headstrong regional leaders triggered a backlash among Spaniards with conflicted feelings about nationalism, putting Catalonia's future on hold.
- 89 Northern Ireland's Twenty Years of Troubled Peace** *David Mitchell*
A power-sharing model of government brought peace to a region once wracked by sectarian violence, but political stability and intercommunity trust have proved elusive.
- 96 Poland's Path to Illiberalism.** *Anna Grzymala-Busse*
The ruling conservative party has moved swiftly to capture institutions and silence dissent. Most Poles still voice support for democracy, but the political opposition is weak.
- 102 Disillusioned with Dayton in Bosnia-Herzegovina.** *Azra Hromadžić*
A treaty that aimed to usher in postwar reconciliation has instead hardened boundaries between three ethno-religious groups. Young people see little future at home and many are leaving.
- 108 The Push for Proactive Climate Adaptation in Europe** *Laura Booth and Anthony Patt*
Faced with intensifying climate change impacts on cities, rivers, mountains, and coastal regions, the European Union has focused its policy-making resources on the problem. *Sixth in a series on climate adaptation around the world.*
- PERSPECTIVE**
- 114 The Radical Right's Gains in the Heart of Europe** *David Art*
Xenophobic nationalists have entered Germany's federal parliament and Austria's ruling coalition. Will the far right shed its pariah status or will it succumb to infighting as it has in the past?
- BOOKS**
- 117 Intimate Explorations of Postsocialist Lives** *Maria Todorova*
Two books offer different takes on everyday life in Bulgaria since 1989, one a lament for the loss of social solidarity, the other a lyrical portrait of a wild frontier region.
- THE MONTH IN REVIEW**
- 120 January 2018**
An international chronology of events in January, country by country, day by day.

CURRENT HISTORY

March 2018

“Legality and legitimacy must be reconciled to address political disaffection and find a more stable accommodation for Catalonia within Spain.”

The Stillbirth of the Catalan Republic

DIEGO MURO

There is no instruction manual for how to give birth to a sovereign state; no clear guidelines exist for those who want to secede and form an independent country. The main obstacle is that there is no universal right to secession under international or domestic law. Precedents from the era of decolonization are often seen as historical exceptions, not as models that can be applied in a variety of democratic contexts. In the absence of internationally recognized rules, proponents of national self-determination can learn by doing or emulate the examples of independence movements in other countries.

Catalans recently tried to emulate the Scottish model of holding a binding referendum on independence. However, the steps taken by the Catalan regional government—from holding an illegal referendum on October 1, 2017, to unilaterally declaring independence from Spain on October 27—proved that Catalonia is very different from Scotland. The controversy over Catalonia’s place within Spain has become the country’s biggest political crisis since it made the transition to democracy in 1978. There is little prospect of it being resolved soon.

Spain’s harsh response to the declaration of independence—invoking Article 155 of the Constitution to dissolve the regional parliament, call fresh elections, and assume direct control of Catalonia—was very different from Britain’s pledge to enter into negotiations for a Scottish exit if a majority voted for independence in a referendum. (In the end, Scotland’s 2014 vote resulted in a narrow defeat for independence supporters.) Catalan separatists say Madrid’s draconian actions prove

that they had no alternative but a unilateral declaration of independence. These uncompromising positions reflect the fact that the relationship between the Spanish and Catalan governments has been bad for years.

Since 2010, Catalan politics has been an emotional rollercoaster in which negotiations, ultimatums, threats, and messianic promises follow each other in quick succession. The origins of the drama are to be found in a 2012 nationalist initiative to negotiate a new funding system for Catalonia, a culturally distinct northeastern region that accounts for 16 percent of Spain’s population and 19 percent of its gross domestic product. That initiative swiftly evolved into a movement led by both civil society and the regional government. Their objective was to hold a referendum on Catalonia’s relationship with Spain.

In principle, Catalonia’s quest for independence concluded with the October 1 referendum, which was held despite Spain’s Constitutional Court having preemptively declared it illegal. The pro-independence side won with 92 percent of the vote, on a turnout of 43 percent. The referendum was followed on October 10 by an equivocal proclamation by the regional president, Carles Puigdemont, who declared that the “Catalan republic” was “an independent and sovereign state.” That gave birth to the shortest-lived republic the world has ever known: 57 seconds later, Puigdemont suspended his own declaration to allow for more “dialogue” with Madrid and to involve the international community.

Skeptics thought the Catalan republic was an illusion all along, but advocates of unilateralism believed it was a utopia worth pursuing. They prevailed in the legislature, which officially declared independence on October 27. In light of the Con-

DIEGO MURO is a lecturer in international relations at the University of St. Andrews.

“It remains an open question whether power-sharing can operate with sufficient mutual trust when the main parties have diametrically opposed aspirations for the future of the region.”

Northern Ireland’s Twenty Years of Troubled Peace

DAVID MITCHELL

April 2018 will mark twenty years since representatives of Britain, Ireland, and various parties in Northern Ireland signed the Good Friday Agreement. The political and security reforms set out in the document, with a power-sharing assembly devolved from London at their core, were designed to bring stability to a region that had suffered thirty years of insurgency and intercommunal bloodshed known as the Troubles. The leaders of the opposing ethnopolitical blocs that entered into the agreement received the 1998 Nobel Peace Prize, and Northern Ireland, so long synonymous with urban violence and political unrest, was rebranded as a paragon of peacemaking. However, the twentieth anniversary inevitably prompts reflection on the legacy of the agreement, and on close inspection a contradictory picture emerges.

On the one hand, some key indicators are remarkably positive. Political violence is rare, tourist numbers are soaring, and central Belfast increasingly resembles a normal, prosperous European city. The international appetite for learning from Northern Ireland is still strong; a steady flow of visitors moves between the province and countries around the world, sharing experiences and expertise in conflict resolution.

On the other hand, the 1998 agreement now faces unprecedented threats. The power-sharing arrangement collapsed in early 2017 and had not yet been restored at the time of writing. That, combined with the prospect of collateral damage from Britain’s exit from the European Union and the ongoing failure to implement transitional justice

measures to deal with past violence, raises serious questions about the sustainability of the governance model set out in the agreement. It may also call into question Northern Ireland’s reputation as a model for peacemaking.

ROOTS OF DIVISION

British political involvement in Ireland dates back to 1169, but the origins of the modern conflict in Northern Ireland (also known as Ulster) are usually traced to the “Plantations” of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a colonial project in which Protestant settlers from Scotland and England were sent to confiscated Irish lands. (That said, migration between Scotland and Ireland, which are separated by just twelve miles of sea, occurred for centuries before the Plantations, and continued afterward.) Religious differences led to entrenched social divisions, precluding intermarriage and assimilation. This encouraged mutual mistrust and stereotyping, and enforced a distinctive pattern of separation.

In the nineteenth century, Protestant-dominated Belfast became a world-leading industrial city. The region’s burgeoning economic productivity and prosperity cemented Ulster Protestants’ political attachment to Britain and its empire. They took this success as evidence of their own cultural advancement, ingenuity, and work ethic.

The emerging Irish push for autonomy from Britain—the “Home Rule” campaign that gathered strength in the late nineteenth century—met with virulent Protestant opposition. This period saw the divisions rooted in earlier centuries of settlement crystallize into two modern nationalist movements that were secular in aim but often religious in their expression and self-understanding. One was Protestant, “unionist,” and centered in the north of

DAVID MITCHELL is an assistant professor of conflict resolution and reconciliation at Trinity College Dublin’s Irish School of Ecumenics in Belfast.

“The one bright light in this darkening landscape is that Poles remain committed to democracy.”

Poland's Path to Illiberalism

ANNA GRZYMALA-BUSSE

Poland, long the postcommunist poster child for democratic and economic reform, has lately become known for an increasingly illiberal regime that has drawn fierce criticism from both the domestic opposition and the European Union. Since the 2015 victory of the right-wing Law and Justice Party (PiS) in an election in which it won 38 percent of the vote and 52 percent of the seats in parliament, its government has systematically sought to undermine the independence of the judiciary, the media, civil society, local government, and election laws. More broadly, the party openly views the post-1989 democratic transformation and accompanying market reforms as products of an illegitimate compromise between the former communist regime and the opposition liberals who allegedly sold out Poland's interests when they held power.

These actions and ideas amount to illiberal populism. It is illiberal because the governing party has attacked the critical institutions of liberal democracy, starting with the independence of the courts and their ability to exercise judicial oversight, not least of elections. The party's control of public media (especially television) outlets has remade them into propaganda mouthpieces. And PiS denounces the post-1989 elite establishment as a corrupt cartel, while repeatedly claiming that it alone represents “the real people,” a textbook example of University of Georgia political scientist Cas Mudde's definition of populism.

PiS has vowed to institute sweeping changes in governance that would eliminate all traces of the alleged elite cartel (*układ*) between former communist parties and Solidarity, the independent labor union that led protests against the communist regime and helped form the first postcommunist government. That cartel, PiS claims, was a self-

serving, criminal, anti-Polish, liberal-communist mafia, which also happens to comprise the current political opposition to the ruling party.

In its quest to represent the “true Poland,” PiS has redefined “real Poles” as Catholic, conservative, anticommopolitan, and above all, faithful to the ruling party. Its leader, Jarosław Kaczyński, has divided Poland into two camps: party loyalists and the “worst sort of Poles,” those who have the temerity to criticize the party's rule.

While Kaczyński himself does not have a formal position in the government, he is the acknowledged power behind the throne. Long a fixture of Polish politics (he was active in Solidarity, founded PiS in 2001 with his brother Lech, and served as prime minister from 2005 to 2007), Kaczyński has centralized power both within PiS and in the government.

Kaczyński chose the party's successful presidential candidate, Andrzej Duda, in 2015, and selected Beata Szydło to serve as prime minister after the party's victory in parliamentary elections that same year. Subsequently, he picked her cabinet (sending Szydło on vacation while he composed the lineup). Then he summarily replaced her with Mateusz Morawiecki in December 2017, compounding the humiliation by naming Morawiecki on the same day that Szydło's government won a vote of confidence in parliament. Morawiecki is unlikely to gain any more autonomy or power within the party than Szydło had. He, too, serves at the pleasure of the party's leader.

Since 2015, the party has governed alone thanks to its unprecedented parliamentary majority. Unhampered by a powerful opposition or even a coalition partner (forces that, along with a powerful judiciary, moderated its behavior in its previous stint as the governing party in 2005–7), PiS has the discretion to reverse the policies of the elite “cartel” and to remake political and economic

ANNA GRZYMALA-BUSSE is a professor of political science at Stanford University.

“[T]hrough the complicated, long-term effects of converging postwar and post-socialist forces, the Bosnian state continues to be emptied of its citizens.”

Disillusioned with Dayton in Bosnia-Herzegovina

AZRA HROMADŽIĆ

After Slovenia and Croatia's declarations of independence from Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, Bosnia-Herzegovina found itself faced with a choice between following suit and remaining in the Yugoslav federation. Among the three main ethnic groups, the majority of Bosniaks and Croats supported independence, while most Serbs preferred staying in Yugoslavia. In February and March 1992, a statewide referendum, boycotted by Serb leaders, resulted in an overwhelming vote in favor of independence. The European Community recognized Bosnia-Herzegovina's independence on April 6. On the same day, Serbian paramilitary units and the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA) attacked the Bosnian capital, Sarajevo.

The army of the self-proclaimed Serb Republic (RS) within Bosnia-Herzegovina, with the help of troops and weapons from Serbia, conquered close to 70 percent of the country's territory by the end of 1993. It also perpetrated some of the most brutal acts of violence against the non-Serb populations, including mass killings, ethnic cleansing, rape, and torture. After more than three years of failed negotiations, over 100,000 deaths, and the displacement of some 2 million refugees, the Dayton Peace Agreement, brokered by the United States, brought an end to the Bosnian war on December 14, 1995.

The agreement constituted the state as a consociational democracy (that is, one based on ethnic power-sharing). This was envisioned as a way to accommodate sociopolitical diversity while safeguarding the sovereignty and integrity of the state.

The aim was to contain ethnonationalism and limit its opportunities to take over the state's political and social spheres.

In order to achieve these goals, the agreement divided the nation into two entities: the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina (FBiH), which held 51 percent of the territory and was inhabited mostly by Bosniaks and Bosnian Croats; and the RS, with 49 percent of the territory, populated almost exclusively by Bosnian Serbs. These entities were given all the characteristics of states—with developed governmental institutions, decision-making power, and clear borders—within a larger, more complex state. Furthermore, the agreement separated the FBiH into ten largely autonomous cantons, with little intermixing between the ethnic groups. This produced an intricate and layered system of governance. The new country had three rotating presidents, one from each ethnic group, and, in some areas, 13 levels of government.

While proclaiming reconciliation, democracy, and ethnic pluralism as its objectives, the Dayton agreement inscribed into law the ethnic partitioning of Bosnian Serbs (mostly Eastern Orthodox), Bosnian Croats (mostly Catholic), and Bosniaks (mostly Muslim). As the political scientist Florian Bieber put it, Dayton created a state that was “an empty shell with the Serb Republic governing itself autonomously and the Croat cantons in the Federation having a comparable degree of self-governance.”

This massive state-building project required a huge investment by the so-called international community, composed of mostly Western governments, political and economic institutions, nongovernmental organizations, charity and voluntary groups, and a variety of “experts.” In the immediate years after the war, their presence and influence was so substantial that the country was

AZRA HROMADŽIĆ is an associate professor of anthropology at Syracuse University and the author of *Citizens of an Empty Nation: Youth and State-Making in Postwar Bosnia and Herzegovina* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

“Europeans are taking the risks presented by climate change seriously, and responding.”

The Push for Proactive Climate Adaptation in Europe

LAURA BOOTH AND ANTHONY PATT

Europe, and the European Union in particular, have struggled with major policy challenges in recent years, from the Greek debt crisis to an influx of refugees from the Middle East and Africa. But climate change adaptation is one area where things are working relatively well. The need for long-term planning that incorporates scientific insights is

Changing with the Climate

Sixth in a series

a good match for the technocratic competence to be found at EU headquarters in Brussels. Indeed, responding

to climate change is an area where the continent can provide world leadership. French President Emmanuel Macron is particularly vocal on this front, promising to replace every dollar cut by the Trump administration from US funding for climate scientists, and even offering them multi-year, all-expenses-paid, “Make Our Planet Great Again” grants to relocate to France.

Part of this European ambition is in the area of climate mitigation—reducing greenhouse gas emissions—but adaptation is on the same political agenda. In Brussels, and in many European capitals, mitigation and adaptation are handled in the same government offices and ministries.

Whatever the motivation, there is growing evidence that Europeans are taking the risks presented by climate change seriously, and responding. Legislative frameworks, tied to government funding, are emerging. There is a desire to adapt in a way that does not repeat some of the mistakes of the past. Hard engineering options, which might fix the immediate problem but create additional sources of vulnerability, are giving way to softer methods

that increase longer-term capacity to adapt. For example, managed realignment schemes allow the sea to regain territory from the land in some places; authorities “pick their battles,” choosing to sacrifice some areas for the sake of others. Rather than working against nature, they are learning to work with it. Along with better-informed decision-making, we are seeing more cooperation between neighboring states.

European experts working on climate change adaptation identify their single biggest challenge as keeping the public informed about climate risks. Funding for climate impact and adaptation research requires scientists to maintain closer collaboration with the media and policy-makers. The hope is to ensure that decision-making is objective and based on the best available data.

RISKS AND VULNERABILITY

Europe faces an expanding array of climate risks. Rising sea levels threaten to flood low-lying coastal cities; increasing warm temperature extremes and longer heat waves adversely affect human health; longer periods of drought worsen water scarcity; desertification prompts migration of habitats and species and raises the risk of forest fires. Increasing water temperatures in rivers and seas along with rising acidity levels affect fish stocks, as decreasing crop yields place additional pressure on agriculture. Glaciers are thinning and thawing slopes have become more unstable in mountainous areas, leading to greater risks of landslides.

European winters are expected to become more humid, while summers will be drier. At the same time, periods of heavy rainfall have increasingly subjected Europe to severe flooding (notably in 1993, 1995, 2002, and 2013). Rising snow lines in the Alps not only affect the ski industry—which is roughly three times the size of its US counterpart—

LAURA BOOTH is a postdoctoral fellow in climate policy at ETH Zurich (the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology), where ANTHONY PATT is a professor of climate policy.

The Radical Right's Gains in the Heart of Europe

DAVID ART

Two thousand seventeen was a very good year for the radical right in the German-speaking world. In December, the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) entered into a ruling coalition with a mainstream conservative party—formerly the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP), now rebranded as the Sebastian Kurz List—making Austria the only Western European state apart from Switzerland with an anti-immigrant party currently in government. In September, the Alternative for Germany (AfD) became the first radical right party in postwar Germany to enter the national parliament, winning 12.6 percent of the vote and 94 seats in the Bundestag. For its part, the Swiss People's Party (SVP)—the largest party in Switzerland—spent the year proposing various schemes to prevent “mass migration” to the country, and picked a fight with the European Union in the process.

What are we to make of the success of the radical right—a family of parties founded on nativist appeals and fueled by ethnic resentment—in three of the most affluent and stable countries in Europe? Has the combination of two massive international challenges within a few short years—the Eurozone sovereign debt drama that exploded in 2010 and the refugee crisis that began in the fall of 2015—led to a sudden surge in voter support for nativist positions? Is the radical right more powerful now than it ever has been in the post-World War II era? And perhaps most importantly, has one of the most significant features of postwar German democracy, the political irrelevance of the radical right, now come to an end?

Let us consider the Swiss case first. In the elections of October 2015, held in the midst of the first, chaotic stages of the refugee crisis, the SVP won 29.4 percent of the vote. This not only made it the largest party in parliament but also was the highest vote share for any Swiss political party since the adoption of proportional representation in 1918. At the same time, however, it should be

noted that the SVP was not dramatically more successful in 2015 than it was in 2007 (28.9 percent), or even in 2003 (26.6 percent).

Since its transformation from a farmers' party to an anti-immigrant one in the 1980s, the SVP has always been an important part of the Swiss party system. It has also been represented in government since 1958, as part of Switzerland's “magic formula” whereby the seven seats of the federal council (the government's executive branch) are divided among the four major parties. Given its electoral power, direct influence in government, and frequent use of referenda to push its anti-immigrant policies, the SVP has a strong claim on being the most influential radical right party in Europe. But this was true long before the economic and humanitarian crises of the past several years.

One can make a similar point about the radical right in Austria. Yes, the FPÖ did well in the October 2017 elections (taking 26 percent of the vote) and the party now controls the powerful foreign, defense, and interior ministries. But let's not forget that this is now the third time the FPÖ has been in government in postwar Austria, and that its vote share peaked back in 1999 at 26.9 percent. Founded in 1956 as the party of former Nazis, the FPÖ tried to refashion itself as a standard European liberal party (along the lines of the German Free Democratic Party) in the 1970s and 1980s, but when Jörg Haider became its leader in the 1990s he rallied its nationalist base and honed its anti-immigrant message. Although the firebrand left the party in 2005 and died in 2008, the FPÖ remains very much the party that Haider built.

Arguably more important than the FPÖ's recent performance was that of the revamped ÖVP under the leadership of the 31-year-old Sebastian Kurz. As foreign minister, the precocious Kurz took credit for closing the Western Balkan route used by refugees from Syria and other countries in the Middle East and Africa trying to get to Western Europe, and also pushed, successfully, for a ban on the burqa (a face-covering veil for Muslim women) in public spaces. Yet this hardly marked the first time the ÖVP had tacked rightward during election

Intimate Explorations of Postsocialist Lives

MARIA TODOROVA

In a gesture of virtual parricide, the late Tony Judt wrote an ambivalent eulogy for Eric Hobsbawm, then approaching his 90th birthday, in which he conceded Hobsbawm's giant status as a fellow historian but declared that he could not forgive him for never leaving the Communist Party or denouncing communism. Hobsbawm couldn't care less. When, at a conference I attended, he was confronted with the same question, he calmly responded that he was never asked this in Latin America or Asia. Nineteen eighty-nine—the *annus mirabilis* of the fall of communism—was fêted as a global phenomenon but it was, in fact, a European one. When I visited Cuba in the early 2000s, it looked like the rotting late socialism of Eastern Europe, only worse. The people were critical of the regime, yet they kept insisting that they would not repeat Eastern Europe's mistake and dismantle their social welfare system, especially health care and education.

Over a quarter-century after 1989, the neoliberal covenant is broken. No one wants a return to "real socialism," but there is plenty of postcommunist nostalgia for the things that were recklessly washed away in the shock-therapy shower. At a time when even mainstream sociologists and economists lament extreme inequality and speak of the incompatibility between capitalism and democracy, only fundamentalist neoliberals (of which there are quite a number among East European intellectuals) bemoan such observations as communist propaganda.

Kristen Ghodsee, a professor of Russian and East European studies at the University of Pennsylvania, wants to rescue democracy from its "unhappy marriage" with capitalism. She sides with critics of "the disenfranchisement and gross in-

equities" of free-market global capitalism, but she parts ways with those who insist that twentieth-century socialism in Eastern Europe is forever tainted by the Stalinist gulag while democracy remains a pure ideal. Exposing the hypocrisy of scholars and politicians who acknowledge that "one ideal political form can be corrupted by economic realities and historical exigencies while denying that another political ideal might have suffered the same fate," she asserts that this obstinacy prevents critical reengagement with the state socialist past.

Her model is a kind of convergence theory, in which one should "recognize the pros and cons of both liberal democracy and state socialism, in an effort to promote a system that gives us the best of both." This is her core argument, which she develops with gusto in *Red Hangover* with a series of pieces ranging from personal reminiscences to anthropological études to short stories (even a fable on the model of Orwell's *Animal Farm*). She sets out to emancipate the legacies of lived socialism by showing the costs of sanctifying neoliberalism and demonizing communism.

Ghodsee is a prolific and passionate anthropologist. Her first book, *The Red Riviera: Gender, Tourism, and Postsocialism on the Black Sea*, published in 2005, was a tour de force, proving her to be a born ethnographer who can make her way into groups and situations closed to many. This was followed by *Muslim Lives in Eastern Europe: Gender, Ethnicity, and the Transformation of Islam in Postsocialist Bulgaria*. Beginning with a thick description of a society with which she had established a good amount of "cultural intimacy," she made an unexpected theoretical contribution. Interested in the Bulgarian women's movement, she advanced a bold hypothesis, namely that the activism of Eastern Bloc women on behalf of counterparts from the developing world was a key reason why the US government started to take the issue of international

Red Hangover: Legacies of Twentieth-Century Communism
by Kristen Ghodsee
Duke University Press, 2017

Border: A Journey to the Edge of Europe
by Kapka Kassabova
Graywolf Press, 2017