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DEMOCRATIC STRAIN AND POPULAR DISCONTENT IN EUROPE: RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGES FACING LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES

**Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs
and International Development**

Michael Levitt, Chair

**JUNE 2019
42nd PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION**

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NOTICE TO READER

Reports from committee presented to the House of Commons

Presenting a report to the House is the way a committee makes public its findings and recommendations on a particular topic. Substantive reports on a subject-matter study usually contain a synopsis of the testimony heard, the recommendations made by the committee, as well as the reasons for those recommendations.

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has the honour to present its

THIRTIETH REPORT

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(2), the Committee has studied the threats to liberal democracy in Europe and has agreed to report the following:

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LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of their deliberations committees may make recommendations which they include in their reports for the consideration of the House of Commons or the Government. Recommendations related to this study are listed below.

Recommendation 1

The Government of Canada should work with its European partners and allies, including in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, to reinforce a rules-based international order and to strengthen liberal democratic norms and institutions, and within United Nations fora to reinforce and strengthen a rules-based international order..... 22

Recommendation 2

As part of its international support for democratic development, the Government of Canada should support projects that would strengthen parliaments in European democracies that continue to face challenges as a result of post-Soviet and post-Communist legacies. 23

Recommendation 3

The Government of Canada should engage with governments, civil society organizations and academic institutions in Europe to develop new, and to reinforce existing, academic partnerships and youth-oriented exchanges. 23

Recommendation 4

The Parliament of Canada should look to create a youth parliamentary internship program in the House of Commons for nascent democracies which would, over multiple years, provide training in the fundamental principles and practices of liberal democracy. 24

Recommendation 5

The Government of Canada should review the diplomatic resources earmarked for EU- and NATO-member states, especially in the nascent democracies where additional support for civil society and democratic institutions may be required. As part of this review, the Government of Canada should look at

whether dedicated, in-country embassies would better serve these requirements. 24

Recommendation 6

The Government of Canada should increase the financial envelope available for the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives so that Canadian diplomatic missions in Europe can fund projects specifically related to democracy and democratic governance. 24

Recommendation 7

The Government of Canada should enhance its bilateral and multilateral engagement with its European partners and allies in support of democratic governance and peace-building in the Balkans..... 25

Recommendation 8

The Government of Canada should, using our electoral missions and practices in Ukraine between 2004 and 2019 as an example, look for opportunities to engage in numerically substantive long-term and short-term election monitoring in European democracies that face challenges as a result of post-Soviet and post-Communist legacies, as well as in other regions of the world where democratic processes are at risk. 26

Recommendation 9

The Government of Canada should continue to work, and expand its engagement on an ongoing basis, such as through the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism Coordination Unit and other means, with its allies to counter disinformation campaigns and digital distortion. As part of this effort, the Government of Canada should work with its G7 allies to fulfil the commitments of the *Charlevoix Commitment on Defending Democracy from Foreign Threats*..... 27

Recommendation 10

The Government of Canada should strengthen and increase its work within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, focusing on the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence and the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, to continually review and develop mechanisms to counter disinformation, digital distortion and cyber-attacks that are targeted against Allied countries. 27



DEMOCRATIC STRAIN AND POPULAR DISCONTENT IN EUROPE: RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGES FACING LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES

INTRODUCTION

No regions typified the advance of liberal democracy in the post-Cold War years more than Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans. This period saw countries across these regions begin a transition toward democratic governance and systems grounded in respect for civil and political liberties and the rule of law. This period also witnessed the beginning of deeper political, economic and security cooperation and integration within Europe; between 1999 and 2007, most Central and Eastern European countries completed accessions to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU). For a brief period in the 1990s, even Russia seemed to be in transition and on the verge of a democratic breakthrough.

The House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development (the Committee) heard that the dramatic wave of democratization that began in the years leading up to the end of the Cold War, and which continued after the collapse of the Iron Curtain and the Soviet Union, has subsided. Testimony indicated that, after decades of expansion, global freedom and democracy have entered a period of stagnation or even decline.

This is the context in which the Committee conducted its study on the threats to liberal democracy in Europe. The purpose was to examine the causes and consequences of these threats and to consider the implications for Canada. As part of its study, the Committee heard from European, American and Canadian academics and practitioners working in the areas of democracy, governance and pluralism.

The following report presents the Committee's main findings. It begins with witness perspectives on the state of liberal democracy in Europe and around the world. The report then considers some of the causes and consequences of democratic strain and rising popular discontent in Europe. The report concludes by examining the implications of these developments for Canada, and discusses ways in which the Government of Canada can and should support liberal democratic norms and institutions.



LIBERAL DEMOCRACY AT A CROSSROADS

As a starting point to understanding the threats facing liberal democracies in Europe, it is first necessary to unpack the terminology itself. While definitions vary, liberal democracies are generally understood to be characterized by democratic processes and criteria, such as elections, pluralism and political participation. At the same time, they are also typified by systems that ensure legislative and judicial constraints on executive power, the guarantee of individual liberties and minority rights, and respect for constitutional frameworks and the rule of law.

Research by the Variety of Democracies Institute in Sweden indicates that the number of countries making advancements in their liberal democratic character has declined every year since 2008.¹ The Committee heard from the institute’s director, Staffan Lindberg, who testified that a “third wave” of autocratization is unfolding, primarily in democracies and “large influential countries.”² According to Professor Lindberg, this wave of autocratization is incremental, moving slowly and gradually, which “makes it hard to detect and hard to react to.” In fact, a study co-authored by Professor Lindberg suggests that there has been a decline in the most blatant forms of democratic backsliding—such as military coups and election day vote fraud—in favour of a slower and less conspicuous manner of consolidating power. According to this research, such “democratic erosion,” whereby leaders legally gain power and then gradually, but substantially, undermine democratic norms, has become the model tactic for autocrats in recent years.³

These findings complement the perspective offered by Daniel Fried, Distinguished Fellow at the Atlantic Council and former United States Ambassador to Poland, who argued that the West is suffering a period of “testing” and a “democratic sag in self-confidence.”⁴ According to former Ambassador Fried, the vision of a Europe “whole, free and at peace” is under assault by doubts from within the West and by a counter-vision led by authoritarian powers from outside. Benjamin Haddad, Director of the Future Europe Initiative at the Atlantic Council, echoed this assessment. He indicated that parts of

1 Variety of Democracies Institute, *Democracy for All? V-Dem Annual Democracy Report 2018*, University of Gothenburg.

2 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development [FAAE], *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 9 April 2019.

3 Anna Lührmann and Staffan I. Lindberg, “[A third wave of autocratization is here: what is new about it?](#),” *Democratization*, 1 March 2019.

4 FAAE, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 9 April 2019.

Europe are witnessing the rise of an alternative model of governance, defined by authoritarianism, and attacks on the rule of law, the legislative branch and civil society.⁵

Against this backdrop, former Ambassador Fried argued that authoritarian powers such as China and Russia have become emboldened. He described “a narrative in which the authoritarians, including especially the Chinese, may believe that their time has come and that the authoritarian model is actually more effective.”⁶ William Galston, Ezra K. Zilkha Chair and Senior Fellow, Governance Studies, Brookings Institution, similarly observed that “China is not a status quo power.”⁷ He told the Committee that China does not accept that liberal democracy is “the template for good government everywhere,” but that it is instead seeking to change the Western-led rules-based international order. According to Mr. Galston, President Xi Jinping’s address to the 19th Party Congress in October 2017, “made it very clear that he regarded the Chinese model as preferable and exportable.”⁸

The Committee heard that Russia has made a strategic decision to undermine liberal democracy in Europe, with the intent of sowing distrust, fomenting popular discontent and exploiting societal polarization. Moreover, the Committee was informed that Russian aggression in Europe and Eurasia—such as in Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova—is part of its larger geopolitical strategy of weakening NATO and the EU and maintaining control over what it considers to be its sphere of influence. As Zoe Dugal, Deputy Director, Field Operations, CANADEM, said, Russia’s fear of seeing some European countries “turn to the European Union, NATO and other symbols of western democracy has pushed the Russian federation to intervene militarily in Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova and to offer veiled threats to the Baltic States.”⁹

Amidst these broader regional and global trends, Europe has experienced a rising tide of what many refer to as “populism.” While the term lacks precision (discussed in more detail in a subsequent section), witnesses generally referred to populism as a political phenomenon or ideology embodied by a broad cross-section of anti-establishment, far-right, far-left and radical political parties and leaders. According to Yascha Mounk, Associate Professor, School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University,

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 For an analysis of President Xi Jinping’s address to the 19th Party Congress, see: Chris Buckley and Keith Bradsher, “[Xi Jinping’s Marathon Speech: Five Takeaways](#),” *The New York Times*, 18 October 2017.

9 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 11 April 2019.



populism is no longer a marginal political force but, in fact, the “dominant political force in large swaths of Europe.”¹⁰

These and other challenges have created a political and social environment within Europe that has become increasingly volatile and uncertain. The strength and unity of the European Union is also being tested. Deep political divisions have emerged within the EU over the past decade, including in relation to the 2008 global financial crisis and ensuing European debt crisis, the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis, and the ongoing issues of burden sharing and political, economic, social and regulatory integration. The EU has also been tested by the uncertainty and complexities surrounding “Brexit,” the term used to describe the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the EU. The proliferation of anti-establishment parties, many of whom are skeptical or openly hostile to the EU, has also complicated the European Parliament’s ability to achieve consensus.

POSSIBLE CAUSES FOR RISING POPULAR DISCONTENT IN EUROPE

Witnesses offered several explanations for why Europe is experiencing rising popular discontent and an increase in support for political parties and movements that have ultra-nationalistic, anti-EU, and, in some cases, even anti-democratic tendencies. While the Committee heard different perspectives on the relative weight that individual factors have had on the outgrowth or acceleration of popular discontent in Europe, testimony also revealed the degree to which many of these factors are interconnected. This section summarizes three possible explanations that witnesses offered for rising popular discontent in Europe.

Economic Disaffection and Dislocation

In the opinion of several witnesses, the political turbulence experienced in parts of Europe is, at its core, being driven by economic challenges and grievances. Increasing income inequality, slowing wage growth, prolonged economic stagnation, and high youth unemployment were all factors that witnesses cited as having contributed to popular discontent. More generally, Martin Chungong, Secretary General, Inter-Parliamentary Union, said that many Europeans feel that their economy is failing them, that economic benefits are not being enjoyed by the ordinary person, and that the economic system “is heavily skewed in favour of the wealthy.”¹¹

10 Ibid.

11 FAAE, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 April 2019.

Many of the current economic challenges facing Europe are the consequence of larger global trends. William Galston, for example, argued that globalization and technological advances have contributed to steadily rising inequality, including a growing income divide between those living in rural and urban areas. Relatedly, he argued that the collapse of the traditional manufacturing sector in parts of Europe has “hit the industrial working-class very hard” and left them “feeling resentful and politically homeless.”¹² In response to what they perceive as political neglect, Mr. Galston suggested that many of these people “decoupled from their traditional alliances with centre-left parties and became the most unstable force in European politics...”¹³

The Committee was told that rising popular discontent in Europe is also the result of challenges that have been “self-inflicted.” For instance, Benjamin Haddad said that governments across the West have not been responsive enough to issues surrounding economic inequality and youth unemployment. William Galston suggested that the European response to the 2008 financial crisis was another trigger for rising popular discontent in Europe. More broadly, the Committee heard from Lucan Way, Professor of Political Science, University of Toronto, that rising populism in Europe “can be seen as a result of failures by mainstream parties to sufficiently address the legitimate concerns of those left behind.”¹⁴

Immigration and Identity

Daniel Ziblatt, Eaton Professor of the Science of Government, Center for European Studies, Harvard University, told the Committee that economic factors are only one of several possible explanations for rising popular discontent in Europe. Professor Ziblatt agrees that economic challenges have stoked voter disaffection, but he indicated that there is no direct causal line between poor economic performance and populism or, conversely, strong economic growth and liberal democracy. In his words: “[e]conomics matters, but it’s not the whole story.”¹⁵

The Committee was told that national identity, and the politicization of issues related to culture, religion and, principally, immigration, have been key contributors to the growing strength of populist and anti-establishment parties in Europe. The Syrian refugee crisis of 2015—the most significant refugee crisis to affect Europe since the Second World War—

12 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 9 April 2019.

13 Ibid.

14 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 11 April 2019.

15 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 2 May 2019.



and ongoing issues of irregular migration were highlighted as catalysts for mounting popular resentment. In the words of Zoe Dugal, the influx of migrants and refugees “has tested, and continues to test, the limits of European openness.”¹⁶

The Committee was informed that the 2015 refugee crisis triggered a host of identity concerns in Europe. Some of these concerns were based on the belief that more refugees and immigrants would result in fundamental changes to European culture. Other concerns were rooted in the perception that EU “elites” were forcing their cultural preferences on populations that may hold a more traditional set of views. Benjamin Haddad underlined the relevance of this concern in Europe, where “you have countries that come with very different historical cultural traditions, very different relationships to the notion of sovereignty and national identity.”¹⁷

As Mr. Haddad said, varying perspectives on the issue of immigration must be understood in the context of the different historical experiences of European countries, many of which spent almost half a century behind the Iron Curtain. Rather than seeing European integration as a means of sublimating national concerns and identities, as was the case in Western Europe, the countries that had been dominated or occupied by the Soviet Union “to a large extent saw the integration in the European Union and NATO as a way to protect their national identity and sovereignty.”¹⁸

The Committee was told that the issue of immigration has been “hijacked” by certain political parties as a tool for domestic political gain. Cas Mudde, Stanley Wade Shelton Professor of International Affairs, University of Georgia, said the “so-called immigration crisis” has been crucial to the success of populist parties.¹⁹ In a similar vein, William Galston told the Committee:

Suffice it to say that we have the [Alternative for Germany party] in Germany, the League in Italy and Brexit in the U.K. in no small measure as a direct response to public concerns about immigration policy.²⁰

16 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 11 April 2019.

17 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 9 April 2019.

18 Ibid.

19 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 11 April 2019.

20 The Alternative for Germany (AfD) entered the Bundestag in 2017. For more information of the AfD, see: “[AfD: What you need to know about Germany’s far-right party](#),” *Deutsche Welle*, 24 September 2017. The Italian League is currently part of a coalition government in Italy with the Five Star Movement. FAAE, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 9 April 2019.

Moreover, Benjamin Haddad argued that legitimate concerns about immigration have been “exploited by leaders for domestic purposes to bolster their own power and sometimes take measures against the rule of law.”²¹ The Committee heard that, in some cases, concerns about immigration and identity have been exploited by parties that espouse xenophobic, Islamophobic and anti-Semitic beliefs.

Digital Distortion and Political Polarization

A third factor highlighted by witnesses for rising popular discontent in Europe concerns digital distortion and political polarization. The Committee learned that the rapidly evolving global media and information environment, in which traditional news organizations and broadcasters are seeing declining revenue and facing ever greater competition from free social media platforms and partisan news websites, is enabling a kind of information distortion. Moreover, the Committee heard that the Internet is increasingly being used by individuals, political groups, and by some governments, to subvert truth and distort reality.

Timothy Snyder, Richard C. Levin Professor of History, Yale University, argued that the way people think is being “increasingly determined by the algorithms that have been designed to distract us or to draw us into particular directions.”²² He pointed to research that shows that techniques used on the Internet, and on social media in particular, “tend to polarize us politically as well.” Professor Snyder also cautioned the Committee to keep in mind that neither the digital beings “nor usually the people who program them have any affiliation whatsoever with the idea of democracy, so we need to be very sure that the people are in fact ruling.”

Similar points about the connection between the Internet, social media and polarization were underlined by Anne Applebaum, Professor of Practice, Institute of Global Affairs, London School of Economics. She stated:

Social media accelerates and accentuates this phenomenon because it allows people, and indeed its algorithms, to sometimes force people to see only the news and opinion they want to hear. These algorithms reinforce narratives that have created homogenous clusters online. These are sometimes known as echo chambers. Members of an echo chamber share the same prevailing world view, and they interpret news through this common lens.²³

21 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 9 April 2019.

22 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 April 2019.

23 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 2 May 2019.



Such polarization, Ms. Applebaum observed, has generated distrust toward both traditional democratic institutions and “traditional political parties, which were once based on real-life organizations, like trade unions or the church.” With this “fragmentation” has come “increased partisanship.”²⁴

The Committee was informed that these types of partisan, on-line “echo chambers” undermine attitudes about compromise within a democracy. Indeed, William Galston said widening polarization can lead parties on different ends of the political spectrum to view each other not as competing political visions but as “a fundamental threat to the democratic order.” According to Mr. Galston, under those circumstances, “compromise becomes a form of betrayal” and “everything becomes a matter of partisan warfare.” Mr. Galston warned the Committee that “[t]his is not the formula for a healthy democracy.”²⁵

The erosion of “forbearance” is another possible consequence of rising polarization. According to Professor Ziblatt, forbearance is an unwritten rule—or norm—that rests on the assumption that elected leaders will exercise self-restraint in deploying their executive prerogatives while in office.²⁶ However, Professor Ziblatt said that when “each side views the other side as deeply threatening, then of course you'll use extreme measures to block the other side.” This tendency, he suggested, represents a broader threat to the principles of liberal democracy.

The Committee was advised that the new digital environment is also more conducive to the spread of false information, either generated domestically or spread by external actors through campaigns of disinformation and Internet manipulation. To take one example, Anne Applebaum said that Russia has deployed “trolling operations as well as fake websites and Facebook pages” with the aim of increasing polarization in Europe. Ms. Applebaum pointed to research by the London School of Economics, which found that messages put forward by the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party were “boosted on social media by pro-Russian media, as well as by trolls and artificially created botnets.” She told the Committee:

Some of them were originally created for commercial use and then repurposed for the election. They echo and repeat divisive messages—anti-immigration, anti-NATO, anti-Merkel, pro-Russia and pro-AfD.

24 Ibid.

25 FAAE, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 9 April 2019.

26 The concept of forbearance is discussed in the following book: Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, Crown, New York, 2018.

Most of those who read mainstream media in Germany never even saw those messages, but the AfD's alternative echo chamber read them every day, and that was one of the factors that contributed to the surprisingly large support for the AfD in that election.²⁷

In fact, the Committee was informed that Russia was one of the first countries to understand how to manipulate the new information network in support of its foreign policy. According to Ms. Applebaum, this type of Internet manipulation is part of “a larger Russian-backed assault on liberal democracy in Europe.”²⁸

DEMOCRATIC STRAIN AND CHALLENGES TO LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

Recent turbulence in Europe has been influenced by both bottom-up and top-down factors. As discussed above, popular discontent in Europe is the result of many long-term challenges, and a reflection of people’s legitimate concerns about the economy and globalization coming to the surface. It is also the result, however, of deliberate strategies employed by some online groups, political leaders and even some governments, to sow distrust and to generate fear in pursuit of political objectives. Broadly speaking, the Committee was informed that rising popular discontent in Europe has manifested in two ways: namely, in the increasing popularity of anti-establishment parties and leaders, and in the advancement of an alternative model of “illiberal” governance. The following section discusses these two issues in greater detail.

The Subversion of Liberal Democracy

The understanding that free and fair elections are a necessary but, on their own, insufficient condition for the realization of liberal democracy, is critical to assessing the degree to which democratic governance may be under threat in parts of Europe. In other words, to understand the challenges facing liberal democracy in Europe, it is important to examine other non-electoral factors that may be contributing to democratic strain on the continent.

The Committee heard that some leaders around the world are gaining power through elections and then pursuing action to centralize power and weaken liberal democratic norms and institutions. According to Professor Ziblatt, while democracies “used to die at the hands of men with guns,” today they die in more subtle ways, “at the hands of elected leaders.”²⁹ His research indicates that an “electoral road to autocracy” has

27 FAAE, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 2 May 2019.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.



emerged along which democratically elected leaders slowly erode and subvert the liberal democratic order using the very tools of democracy (e.g., elections, plebiscites, legislation, court rulings). Professor Ziblatt indicated that this path is especially dangerous because it happens behind a façade of democracy. He argued:

There are no tanks in the streets. The constitution remains intact. There are elections. Parliaments continue to function. As a result, many citizens often aren't fully aware of what's happening until it's too late. In 2011, which was 12 years into Hugo Chavez' presidency, a survey showed that a majority of Venezuelans still believed they were living under a democracy.³⁰

While harder to identify and react to, particularly when pursued incrementally, the Committee heard that elected leaders who are inclined to subvert liberal democracy use common techniques and often follow similar patterns. Professor Way said that the main threat to liberal democracy comes less from overt and violent actions, and more from “less visible, but systematic, attempts to create an uneven playing field by packing the courts and buying out opposition media in order to eliminate alternative sources of information.”³¹ According to Professor Way, while these measures rarely inspire headlines, they seriously harm the democratic process.

If liberal democracies are understood as a system of government committed to both protecting individual freedoms and supporting collective self-government, the Committee heard that leaders seeking to centralize power tend to attack the liberal element of the system first. Research by Professor Lindberg indicates that restrictions on freedom of expression, including freedom of the press, is one of the “early warning signals” of autocratization.³² Professor Lindberg’s research also found that attacks on freedom of association and the rule of law are other frequent and early targets along a leader’s path to centralizing power.

The denouncement of opposition parties and independent state institutions is another tactic used in the subversion of liberal democracy. Professor Mounk said that, once in power, leaders who practice “authoritarian populism” will seek to delegitimize the opposition, labelling them “as traitors, rather than Her Majesty's loyal opposition.” Furthermore, Professor Mounk said that these kinds of leaders will often refer to institutions that are responsible for overseeing executive power as “enemies of the people,” or, in the case of the judiciary, as “so-called judges.” He noted that these types

30 Ibid.

31 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 11 April 2019.

32 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 9 April 2019; and [Written brief](#) submitted to the Committee by Staffan Lindberg.

of leaders also tend to attack the independent press, suggesting it is “working against the people.”³³

Minority rights are also under threat when liberal democracies are attacked from within. Michael Ignatieff, President of the Central European University, told the Committee that the “genius of liberal democracy” is the equilibrium that is achieved between majority rule and respect for minority rights. However, Mr. Ignatieff suggested that this balance is under threat in Europe. He stated:

The key challenge, I think, to democracy in Europe is the hostility towards counter-majoritarian institutions everywhere: hostility towards the media, hostility towards the courts, hostility towards civil society that asks probing questions and hostility to any of the independent regulators, in favour of a vision that the people must rule, the people must decide.³⁴

This issue of “pure majoritarianism,” or leaders who argue for an unchecked reliance on “the people,” was also identified as a threat by William Galston. According to Mr. Galston, in practice, pure majoritarianism “gives way to exclusionary definitions of the people, based on religion, ethnicity, language, etc.”³⁵

Professor Ziblatt recently co-authored a book that devises a series of litmus tests that can be used to identify politicians who may pose a threat to liberal democracy, before they enter office.³⁶ Professor Ziblatt told the Committee that this sort of “early-warning system” is critical because today’s democracies “die at the ballot box.” Included among the criteria highlighted by Professor Ziblatt are whether or not a politician vilifies political opponents, tolerates or encourages violence, rejects the legitimacy of elections or the constitution, or seeks to curtail civil liberties. According to Professor Ziblatt, “if a politician or political party tests positive on a single one of those criteria before getting into office, we should be worried.”³⁷

Institutional Strain

During the Committee’s study, several witnesses argued that Hungary is an example of a European country that is experiencing democratic strain. Since returning as Hungarian

33 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 11 April 2019.

34 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 April 2019.

35 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 9 April 2019.

36 See: Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die*, Crown, New York, 2018.

37 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 2 May 2019.



Prime Minister in 2010 (he previously served as Prime Minister from 1998–2002), the Committee heard that Viktor Orbán, the leader of the Fidesz party, has undertaken certain measures that have been criticized by the European Union and other bodies for undermining liberal democratic values and institutions. In fact, beginning in 2014, Prime Minister Orbán began openly endorsing a concept he called “illiberal democracy,” which he offered as an alternative to liberal democracy.³⁸

Michael Ignatieff referred to Hungary not as a country where democracy has disappeared, but one where “democracy is in danger.” According to Mr. Ignatieff, Hungary has been diverging over the past several years in “a very serious structural way” from the norms of European liberal democracy. He told the Committee that the media environment in Hungary is dominated by pro-government outlets, that the capacity of the courts to oversee and guarantee electoral integrity is diminishing, and that the space for independent political debate “is shrinking all the time.”³⁹ Mr. Ignatieff also indicated that the Hungarian government has been trying to drive the Central European University out of Hungary for the past two years.⁴⁰

Fidesz and its coalition partners won Hungary’s 2010, 2014 and 2018 parliamentary elections. In each instance, they obtained two-thirds of the seats in Hungary’s National Assembly, the threshold for amending the country’s constitution. The Committee was told that Prime Minister Orbán’s government has used its majority to pursue an agenda that has resulted in a weakening of certain democratic norms and institutions. For example, Professor Way said the Hungarian government has “used a variety of variety of legal mechanisms—gerrymandering and the selective distribution of government

38 For more information on Prime Minister Orbán’s understanding of illiberal democracy, see: Prime Minister of Hungary, [Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s speech at the 29th Bálványos Summer Open University and Student Camp](#), 28 July 2018; and [Full Text of Viktor Orbán’s speech at Băile Tuşnad \(Tusnádfürdő\) of 26 July 2014](#), *The Budapest Beacon*, 26 July 2014.

39 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 April 2019.

40 In December 2018, the Central European University (CEU) announced that it would move its United States-accredited degree programs from its campus in Budapest, Hungary to a new campus in Vienna, Austria. That decision came in response to a law that imposed a series of administrative burdens on the university, which the CEU said would force it to incur “needless financial and human resource costs.” In announcing this decision, Mr. Ignatieff said that the institution had “been forced out” of Hungary after the country’s government refused to sign an agreement that would ensure the university’s operations in Budapest over the long-term. See: CEU, [CEU Forced Out of Budapest: To Launch U.S. Degree Programs in Vienna in September 2019](#), 3 December 2018. The CEU was founded in 1991 by investor and philanthropist George Soros.

advertising—to seriously undermine critical media, as well as the opposition's capacity to compete for power.”⁴¹

Relations between the Orbán government and the EU have become increasingly strained. In September 2018, the European Parliament achieved the two-thirds majority needed to launch a process under Article 7 of the *Treaty on European Union* against Hungary for “a serious breach” of the EU’s fundamental values.⁴² While the Committee heard that there has been rising concern at the European level about the situation in Hungary, several witnesses suggested that the EU has been slow to react and that its reaction to date has been insufficient.

Some witnesses also discussed the situation in Poland. Since November 2015, the Committee was told that policies and legislative changes have been initiated that have elicited concern in Poland and other parts of Europe. These have included actions which some Polish civil society organizations, opposition leaders and other observers say have weakened the independence of the Polish judiciary.⁴³ In March 2018, after more than two years of attempted dialogue between the European Commission and the Polish government, the European Parliament adopted a resolution that called on the European Council to launch proceedings regarding the rule of law in Poland in accordance with Article 7 of the EU Treaty.⁴⁴

Ideological Challenges to Liberal Democracy

Popular discontent in Europe has been driven by, and given rise to, the emergence of political parties and leaders seeking to challenge the status quo. As noted earlier, many of these individuals and groups are often given the “populist” label. However, the Committee heard that this term is unclear, and is either too broad or fails to capture the

41 FAAE, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 11 April 2019.

42 The Article 7 process begins when a proposal to find a “clear risk of serious breach” of EU values is brought forward by the European Commission, the European Parliament or by one-third of EU member states. A four-fifths majority of member states in the European Council must then determine that the state in question is in clear breach of EU values in order to adopt the proposal. The proposal must also be approved by a two-thirds majority of the European Parliament. If these provisions are satisfied, the process then moves to the European Council to issue a formal warning and to provide recommendations to the state in question. That state is then given a chance to respond to the recommendations. Once that response has been issued, member states must decide unanimously whether to launch sanctions and suspend voting rights. Such action has never been taken before. “[Rule of law in Hungary: Parliament calls on the EU to act](#),” News release, European Parliament, 12 September 2018.

43 For more information, see: United States Department of State, *2018 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Poland*, 13 March 2019; and Freedom House, “[Poland](#),” *Freedom in the World 2019*.

44 European Parliament, *Commission decision to activate Article 7(1) TEU as regards the situation in Poland*, 2018/2541 (RSP), 1 March 2018.



root of the political ideology being espoused by the political parties or leaders in question.

Witnesses offered different perspectives about how to understand the challenges posed to liberal democracy by anti-establishment parties, and more fundamentally, about how to define these groups. Professor Mounk commented that populists have “deep ideological differences, especially when it comes to economic policy, where some of them would be classified more as left wing and others more as right wing.” A similar perspective was offered by Professor Mudde, who explained that populists differ on many issues, including on their outlook toward the United States, Israel, the EU and NATO, as well as on social policy.⁴⁵

In Professor Mounk’s opinion, what connects populist leaders and parties is “a rhetorical style, a way of thinking about politics and understanding the nature of politics.” He suggested that populists share a common belief that the only way to deal with contemporary challenges is to reject the power structure and to elect someone who truly represents “the people.” Furthermore, he argued that a distinctive argument of populists is “that they and they alone can represent the people and that anybody who disagrees with them is, by nature of that fact, illegitimate.”⁴⁶

Jason Stanley, Jacob Urowsky Professor of Philosophy, Yale University, offered an alternative perspective, arguing that the term populism is “ill-defined.” Professor Stanley said that he could think of no way of defining populism in a way that does not include “some people who are perfectly liberal.” He also suggested that he was reluctant to place the blame for the threats facing liberal democracy on populism because it neglects the role that “elites” have played in creating some of today’s challenges.⁴⁷

The Committee was advised that it is important not to conflate opposition to certain policy decisions with opposition to liberal democratic values more generally. To this point, Benjamin Haddad stressed the need to differentiate between legitimate policy concerns and rhetoric and actions that are “antithetical to the values of the European Union and the attachment to the rule of law.” Mr. Haddad underlined that European leaders have an obligation to respond to people’s legitimate policy concerns, while at

45 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 11 April 2019.

46 Ibid.

47 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 April 2019.

the same time being “extremely firm” when it comes to fundamental breaches of democratic norms.⁴⁸

Michael Ignatieff spoke to this point in the context of Brexit. He told the Committee that much of what those in favour of Brexit have been saying is: “We want to restore British liberal democracy. We want to restore British parliamentary sovereignty.” Mr. Ignatieff stressed that these objectives are “eminently democratic, eminently liberal, and the debate, despite bringing the country to the edge of a complete seizing-up of its institutions, has been eminently civil and democratic.”⁴⁹

In this sense, witnesses expressed that non-establishment parties can contribute to the public debate by enabling new and critical thinking about long-standing policy issues and bringing to the surface issues that may not be receiving sufficient attention. However, the Committee heard that these movements turn dangerous when they are used to exploit people’s legitimate concerns as a means of centralizing power or furthering exclusionary policies. William Galston told the Committee that populism becomes negative when it “takes on a pure majoritarian form that seeks to override liberal protections for individuals and minority groups.” In Mr. Galston’s opinion, that form of populism “undermines a fundamental building block of liberal democracy as I understand it.”⁵⁰

The Expansion of Intolerance and Hate

Differentiating between the various manifestations of popular discontent in Europe is crucial to understanding how to respond to the challenge that these movements present to liberal democracy. Worryingly, the Committee heard that parts of Europe are witnessing the expansion—and, in some cases, the re-emergence—of groups and political parties espousing extreme and hateful ideologies. Instead of “populism,” Professor Stanley suggested that the real threat facing liberal democracies in Europe, and in the broader West, comes from the rise of what he termed “ultranationalism” or “far-right ethnonationalism.”⁵¹

Professor Stanley told the Committee that the term populism is often used to describe a method or tactics that “cynical politicians are using to distract people from the actual

48 FAAE, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 9 April 2019.

49 FAAE, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 April 2019.

50 FAAE, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 9 April 2019.

51 FAAE, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 April 2019.



problems that they face.” He suggested that ultranationalist or ethnonationalist groups share a common core philosophy:

They talk about a revitalization of some ultranationalist pride. They appeal to dominant group victimization, as in the loss of their culture in the face of minority groups and gender equality, the loss of male hegemony.⁵²

Professor Stanley referred to these groups as “harshly anti-feminist” and said that they “seek a one-party state.” He also indicated that they seek to portray “the other party and minority groups as sort of betrayers and traitors. They portray immigrants and minority groups as criminals, as threats to law and order, as lazy and a drain on the state.”⁵³

Professor Stanley said that a common theme of ethnonationalist groups is the “idea that we once were great and we’re going to return to it.” This narrative is deployed particularly in countries that can “call back to some kind of imperial past.”⁵⁴ Professor Snyder echoed this point. He noted that the “enemies of democracy” will often present “a kind of mythical version of the past” as a means of appealing to dominant groups.⁵⁵

The use of racist, anti-Semitic and Islamophobic appeals are other hallmarks of ethnonationalist groups. Rafał Pankowski indicated that the ethnonationalist community has tried to construct a sort of “enemy image” that it defines as those who do “not belong.” He told the Committee that the ethnonationalist community has defined these enemies as “ethnic minorities, religious minorities, ideological opponents and also sexual minorities.”⁵⁶

Disturbingly, the Committee was informed that there has been an increase in anti-Semitism and anti-Semitic discourse in media and politics across Europe. According to a written brief submitted by B’nai Brith Canada, there has been a resurgence of anti-Semitism in Europe. They attributed this resurgence, in part, to a growth in “right wing nationalism and extremism which stigmatizes ‘the other’, including glorification of historic figures who sympathized with or supported Nazi efforts to destroy Jewish life.”⁵⁷

52 ibid.

53 ibid.

54 ibid.

55 ibid.

56 FAAE, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 2 May 2019.

57 Written brief submitted to the Committee by B’nai Brith Canada, 25 April 2019.

Michael Williams, Professor, International Politics, University of Ottawa, testified that the rise of what he called the “radical right” must be understood as part of a larger political and ideological struggle. According to Professor Williams, popular discontent in Europe is not “simply an inchoate political spasm.” Instead, he suggested that these movements are the result of a series of intellectual, political and cultural strategies that have been developing for more than two decades.⁵⁸ According to Professor Williams, to counter this threat, leaders must take more seriously the underlying ideas and ideology. He and other witnesses also argued that the proponents of liberal democracy must work to reframe the political debate by coming up with a positive alternative to the anti-liberal democratic agenda.

RESPONDING TO THE CHALLENGES TO LIBERAL DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE

When thinking about how Canada should respond to the challenges facing liberal democracy in Europe, it is first important to acknowledge and to state the obvious: the challenges facing European democracies are first and foremost European challenges that will require European solutions. As Michael Ignatieff told the Committee, “We need to understand whose business is whose here. Preventing the authoritarian turn in central and eastern Europe is not fundamentally the business of Canada. It’s the business of the European Union...”⁵⁹ Having noted this, these countries are part of the NATO transatlantic security alliance whose Article 2, “the Canadian Article,” commits members to pursuing, inter alia, the “development of peaceful and friendly international relations.”⁶⁰

Additionally, Europe does not exist in a vacuum. Many of the challenges facing European countries, such as economic dislocation, irregular migration, digital distortion and political polarization, are part of broader global trends that are also affecting Canada. There is, therefore, a compelling reason for Canada to be involved in the discussions and the solutions aimed at addressing these challenges. Moreover, stability in Europe, and the future of NATO and the EU more specifically, are of critical interest for Canada. Given

58 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 2 May 2019.

59 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 April 2019.

60 Article 2 of the *North Atlantic Treaty* states: “The Parties will contribute toward the further development of peaceful and friendly international relations by strengthening their free institutions, by bringing about a better understanding of the principles upon which these institutions are founded, and by promoting conditions of stability and well-being. They will seek to eliminate conflict in their international economic policies and will encourage economic collaboration between any or all of them.” See: North Atlantic Treaty Organization, [The North Atlantic Treaty](#).



its close political, economic, military and cultural ties with Europe, disruption on that continent has implications for Canadian strategic interests and alliances.

Professor Mounk identified three possible consequences that the challenges facing liberal democracies in Europe could pose for Canada. The first concerns the implications for Canadian business and investment. Professor Mounk noted that Canadian companies in Europe expect to operate according to a predictable set of rules, free from political interference and other threats to the rule of law. However, he said that when “populists come into power and undermine the rule of law,” Canadian companies can no longer be assured that their investments will be secure. More specifically, he said that companies that either do not “toe a political line,” or that lack allies among the ruling elite, could be disadvantaged in the context of rising populism.⁶¹

The second possible consequence cited by Professor Mounk concerns the impact that democratic erosion could pose to trade agreements and alliances. He suggested that a form of politics has emerged “that is often not fact-based and that tends to incite irrational fears rather than scientific evidence.”⁶² According to Professor Mounk, this form of politics can result in the spread of misinformation, making it harder to persuade people “to agree to important trade agreements.”

Finally, Professor Mounk warned that creeping authoritarianism in Europe could pose a danger to the NATO alliance. He told the Committee that “[p]opulists often have sympathy for other dictatorial regimes” and therefore have a propensity to seek closer cooperation with the adversaries of liberal democracies. More generally, Professor Mounk said that the “threat of populism” would make it harder for Canada to know if it can rely on some of its European allies in a military or commercial sense.⁶³

At a more fundamental level, the Committee heard that a weakening of liberal democracy in Europe could pose a threat to Canada through the effect it would have on broader liberal democratic norms and the rules-based international order. The following section will discuss ways in which Canada can and should respond to this challenge.

Advancing the Principles of Liberal Democracy

The Committee was told that liberal democracies in Europe and beyond became complacent in the post-Cold War era. Professor Snyder said that Western liberal

61 FAAE, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 11 April 2019.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

democracies fell into a “kind of determinism,” believing that “history had come to an end” and that there would be no new alternatives to liberal democracy.⁶⁴ In Europe specifically, Zoe Dugal said that after the defeat of fascism and communism, many people took for granted that “liberal democracy was the only possible form of governance.”⁶⁵

Professor Mudde told the Committee that, today, there are “very few parties that defend what used to be the absolute consensus 20 years ago—things like economic integration, European integration and cultural integration.”

Professor Mudde said that there has been a failure of leadership by more mainstream political parties to explain, promote and, even, “sell” liberal democratic ideas. He suggested, “if you don't sell liberal democracy, if you don't tell people why it's good, it creates a space for those who have an agenda, even if it is a very problematic agenda.”⁶⁶

It was impressed on the Committee that the threats facing liberal democracies must be met directly. Former Ambassador Fried spoke about a joint effort launched by the Atlantic Council and the Waterloo-based Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) aimed at doing just that. According to former Ambassador Fried, the Atlantic Council and CIGI decided that “bemoaning the state of democratic deterioration in Europe, in the United States and around the world simply was a hand-wringing and ineffective exercise.”⁶⁷ Instead, he told the Committee that the Atlantic Council and CIGI decided to develop a document that clearly and firmly laid out a set of foundational principles for liberal democracies in the 21st Century.

The *Declaration of Principles for Freedom, Prosperity, and Peace* contains statements that focus on democracy, economic freedom, peace and security, human rights, and the natural environment which, in the words of former Ambassador Fried, “plant the flag of values and what we stand for.”⁶⁸ The declaration states that the international system must rise to meet challenges brought on by new technologies, while addressing the issues that are causing many to question free markets and the value of global

64 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 April 2019.

65 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 11 April 2019.

66 Ibid.

67 FAAE, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 9 April 2019.

68 See: [Declaration of Principles for Freedom, Prosperity, and Peace](#), Atlantic Council; FAAE, [Evidence](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 9 April 2019.



engagement. According to the declaration, autocrats and extremists are using these challenges to denigrate the rule of law and to undermine faith in democracy.

The declaration states clearly that “free peoples have met greater challenges in the past, and we can master those in our time.”⁶⁹ The same message echoed throughout the Committee’s study. Multiple witnesses called on Canada and other liberal democratic states to more fulsomely and consistently stand up for liberal democratic principles. Professor Mudde said that it is incumbent on liberal democracies to “come up with not just an anti-populist agenda...but a positive liberal democratic alternative.”⁷⁰ As he said, a liberal democratic response to contemporary challenges should be framed around the strengthening of liberal democracy.

Reaffirming Multilateralism and International Cooperation

The Committee’s study was unusual in that most of the recommendations made by witnesses were directed at the European countries who are facing democratic challenges, rather than to the Government of Canada in respect of Canadian policy. However, several witnesses also recommended that Canada can help to address the threats facing liberal democracies in Europe by reaffirming and increasing its support for liberal democratic norms and institutions at the international level.

The Committee was advised that multilateral institutions have an important role to play in a context of democratic strain. As this report has discussed, many of the challenges facing liberal democracies in Europe transcend national boundaries and therefore require regional and global solutions. In this regard, the Committee believes that Canada must work with its European partners and allies in multilateral organizations and alliances to strengthen the rules-based international order.

Recommendation 1

The Government of Canada should work with its European partners and allies, including in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, to reinforce a rules-based international order and to strengthen liberal democratic norms and institutions, and within United Nations fora to reinforce and strengthen a rules-based international order.

69 [*Declaration of Principles for Freedom, Prosperity, and Peace*](#), Atlantic Council.

70 FAAE, [*Evidence*](#), 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 11 April 2019.

Strengthening parliamentary institutions, and deepening inter-parliamentary cooperation, are other avenues for reinforcing liberal democracy globally. As Martin Chungong told the Committee, parliaments are fundamental institutions of democracy and play a crucial role in upholding public trust in systems of governance.⁷¹ However, as noted earlier, attacks on the legislative branch of government is a common tactic of leaders who seek to centralize power. Testimony underlined that parliaments in newer democracies—including those that experienced Soviet occupation and control—are especially vulnerable to attacks by the executive branch. The Committee believes that parliaments across the liberal democratic world must have the necessary resources and the capacity to fulfill their critical oversight and legislative roles.

Recommendation 2

As part of its international support for democratic development, the Government of Canada should support projects that would strengthen parliaments in European democracies that continue to face challenges as a result of post-Soviet and post-Communist legacies.

Canada should also build its educational partnerships with European countries by supporting more student and youth-oriented exchanges. These kinds of exchanges have mutual benefits. For example, from a Canadian perspective, witnesses underlined the importance of teaching Canadian youth about Canada's history in Europe, including the role that Canada played in Europe during the First and Second World Wars. The Committee also heard about the important contributions of long-term youth internship programs which embed interns into MP offices in Canada. More generally, the Committee believes that such exchanges can be important drivers for closer relations between Canada and the diverse group of European countries. By exposing students and youth to different systems of government and by creating personal networks between people from different cultures, academic and youth-oriented exchanges can also support stronger liberal democracies over the long-term.

Recommendation 3

The Government of Canada should engage with governments, civil society organizations and academic institutions in Europe to develop new, and to reinforce existing, academic partnerships and youth-oriented exchanges.

71 FAAE, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 April 2019.



Recommendation 4

The Parliament of Canada should look to create a youth parliamentary internship program in the House of Commons for nascent democracies which would, over multiple years, provide training in the fundamental principles and practices of liberal democracy.

Canada must also invest in its diplomatic resources in Europe. The Committee heard that many Canadian missions in Europe are under-resourced, and lack the capacity to invest in civil society, free media and other projects and programs with democratic objectives. This was a point that was also made during a previous Committee study on the situation in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.⁷² During that study, the Committee was informed that Canada's diplomatic representation in parts of Europe was spread too thin and that the resources at the disposal of Canada's missions were too limited.

The Committee's study on Eastern Europe and Central Asia also highlighted the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI) as one mechanism that Canada should use to support democratic values in these regions. CFLI projects, which are selected and approved by Canadian diplomatic missions, average \$25,000 each and are planned and implemented by local organizations.⁷³ While the funding is modest, these projects can have an important impact. The Committee believes that Canada's missions in Europe should have the resources required to allow them to more meaningfully invest in and support projects linked to liberal democratic values, particularly in newer European democracies.

Recommendation 5

The Government of Canada should review the diplomatic resources earmarked for EU- and NATO-member states, especially in the nascent democracies where additional support for civil society and democratic institutions may be required. As part of this review, the Government of Canada should look at whether dedicated, in-country embassies would better serve these requirements.

Recommendation 6

The Government of Canada should increase the financial envelope available for the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives so that Canadian diplomatic missions in Europe can fund projects specifically related to democracy and democratic governance.

72 See: FAAE, *Strengthening Canadian Engagement in Eastern Europe and Central Asia*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, November 2017.

73 Government of Canada, *The Canada Fund for Local Initiatives*.

The point about supporting newer democracies in Europe came up regarding the Balkans in particular. Michael Ignatieff urged the Committee to not forget that region when thinking about Europe. However, he expressed concern that organizations such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and the European Union “have essentially departed from the Balkans.” He told the Committee that Canada would be well advised to invest in civil society and peace-building in the Balkans, noting that frozen conflicts in the region “can blow up at any moment.”⁷⁴ In this regard, he suggested that Canada look for opportunities to work with its European allies on a bilateral and multilateral basis in support of peace-building in the region.

Recommendation 7

The Government of Canada should enhance its bilateral and multilateral engagement with its European partners and allies in support of democratic governance and peace-building in the Balkans.

The Committee believes that an important mechanism for supporting newer democracies in Europe is election monitoring. The period during which the Committee’s study took place overlapped with Ukraine’s presidential election. As part of *Mission Canada 2019*, Canada deployed more than 150 short- and long-term observers to monitor the first and second rounds of Ukraine’s presidential elections. These observers were responsible for monitoring all aspects of the presidential electoral process, including compliance with international standards for democratic elections and domestic laws.⁷⁵

Zoe Dugal told the Committee that Canada’s election observation mission in Ukraine showed that Canada was standing with the Ukrainian people in support of their democracy.⁷⁶ Michael Ignatieff offered similar testimony, saying that Canadian election monitoring in Ukraine “has been a crucial part of the stabilization of Ukrainian democracy.”⁷⁷ The Committee believes that Canada should continue to support Ukraine in the area of elections and democratic governance. It also believes that Canada has developed important expertise in the area of election observation that could be applied to other democracies.

74 FAAE, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 April 2019.

75 For more information, see: Mission Canada 2019, [*CANADEM Election Observation Mission Ukraine: Presidential Elections*](#).

76 FAAE, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 11 April 2019.

77 FAAE, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 April 2019.



Recommendation 8

The Government of Canada should, using our electoral missions and practices in Ukraine between 2004 and 2019 as an example, look for opportunities to engage in numerically substantive long-term and short-term election monitoring in European democracies that face challenges as a result of post-Soviet and post-Communist legacies, as well as in other regions of the world where democratic processes are at risk.

Countering Disinformation and Digital Distortion

Countering disinformation and digital distortion is another area where Canada must play a strong role. The Committee was told that no single institution or government is capable of preventing or eliminating the kind of information manipulation that is being perpetrated on a global scale. Instead, witnesses indicated that a variety of tools and investments will be required to counter the active spread of disinformation. For one, Professor Snyder said that liberal democratic states should “invest heavily in factuality, which is to say in journalism, and, in particular, local journalism.”⁷⁸ Other witnesses highlighted the importance of investing in media literacy; that is, in initiatives that support the ability to access, analyze and evaluate media from a critical perspective.

At a broader level, Anne Applebaum told the Committee that Canada and every other liberal democracy will need to wrestle with the challenge of how to establish the regulatory, social and legal frameworks that make new technologies work for democracy. According to Ms. Applebaum, this type of action could take many forms, including the regulation of Internet advertising in the same way as broadcast advertising, and through efforts to eliminate fake accounts on social media.⁷⁹ She also suggested that NATO should look more closely at issues related to disinformation and information security. While there is no silver bullet to the challenges posed by digital distortion, Ms. Applebaum stressed that liberal democracies must work together to address this emerging challenge.

In this regard, former Ambassador Fried highlighted the *Charlevoix Commitment on Defending Democracy from Foreign Threats*, agreed to by leaders at the 2018 G7 Summit.⁸⁰ The declaration calls for the establishment of a G7 Rapid Response Mechanism to strengthen coordination in identifying and responding to “diverse and

78 Ibid.

79 FAAE, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 2 May 2019.

80 See: *Charlevoix Commitment on Defending Democracy from Foreign Threats*, Government of Canada, 9 June 2018; Written response by Daniel Fried to questions by members of the Committee, April 2019.

evolving threats to our democracies.” It also calls for direct engagement with Internet service providers and social media platforms regarding the “malicious misuse of information technology by foreign actors.” In the declaration, G7 leaders further committed to supporting “public learning and civic awareness aimed at promoting critical thinking skills and media literacy on intentionally misleading information, and improving online security and safety.”⁸¹

In January 2019, the Government of Canada announced the establishment of a Rapid Response Mechanism Coordination Unit. The unit will be housed within Global Affairs Canada and will act as a focal point for Canada and its G7 allies to share information and analysis on foreign threats to their democracies.⁸² The Government of Canada’s 2019 federal budget proposed providing the department with \$2.1 million over three years, starting in 2019-2020, toward the operationalization of this coordination unit.⁸³ The Committee encourages the Government of Canada to continue to work with its trusted allies to address the challenges posed by disinformation and digital distortion.

Recommendation 9

The Government of Canada should continue to work, and expand its engagement on an ongoing basis, such as through the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism Coordination Unit and other means, with its allies to counter disinformation campaigns and digital distortion. As part of this effort, the Government of Canada should work with its G7 allies to fulfil the commitments of the *Charlevoix Commitment on Defending Democracy from Foreign Threats*.

Recommendation 10

The Government of Canada should strengthen and increase its work within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, focusing on the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence and the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats, to continually review and develop mechanisms to counter disinformation, digital distortion and cyber-attacks that are targeted against Allied countries.

81 [*Charlevoix Commitment on Defending Democracy from Foreign Threats*](#), Government of Canada, 9 June 2018.

82 Government of Canada, [*G7 Rapid Response Mechanism*](#).

83 Government of Canada, [*Investing in the Middle Class: Budget 2019*](#).



A FINAL NOTE ON LESSONS FOR CANADA AT HOME

Finally, as a Committee focused on foreign affairs and international development, issues related to domestic policy normally do not fall within the Committee’s mandate. However, the Committee believes that many of the factors that have contributed to rising popular discontent in Europe can provide lessons for Canada at home. Below are three recurrent themes of witness testimony, which the Committee believes are useful for the Government of Canada to consider as part of a comprehensive response to the challenges facing liberal democracies.

First, the Committee believes that it is important for the Government of Canada to work to address the legitimate concerns of those who feel marginalized by globalization or who feel that the global economic system is not working for them. The Committee heard throughout its hearings that maintaining a focus on inclusive economic growth is critical to preventing some of the popular discontent experienced in parts of the liberal democratic world. As Professor Snyder told the Committee, “[i]f you allow inequalities of wealth and income to become too great in a democratic society, people no longer believe—and they’re right—that they’re living in the same world.”⁸⁴ In this regard, the Committee believes that the Government of Canada should prioritize and maintain an ongoing focus on ensuring inclusive economic growth.

Second, over the course of the Committee’s study, several witnesses contrasted the negative rhetoric about immigration that has emerged in parts of the liberal democratic world with public sentiment toward immigration in Canada. This testimony is supported by a 2018 Pew Research Centre survey, which looked at public sentiment toward immigration in 18 countries, including Canada. According to the survey, 68% of Canadians agreed with the statement that “immigrants today make our country stronger because of their work and talents.” Canada was the country with the highest percentage of those who agreed with that statement.⁸⁵

In addition to enjoying broad-based domestic support, the Committee was told that Canada’s immigration and refugee policies also serve its national interests, including by solidifying its liberal democratic system of governance. The Committee believes that the Government of Canada should play an ongoing role in demonstrating the value of immigration, pluralism and diversity to the world.

84 FAAE, *Evidence*, 1st Session, 42nd Parliament, 30 April 2019.

85 Ana Gonzalez-Barrera and Philip Connor, “[Around the World, More Say Immigrants Are a Strength Than a Burden: Publics divided on immigrants’ willingness to adopt host country’s customs,](#)” Pew Research Center, 14 March 2019.

Lastly, working to strengthen liberal democratic norms and institutions abroad are only part of what should be a broader Canadian response to the threats facing liberal democracy. Canada must also maintain an enduring focus on strengthening its liberal democracy at home. As the Committee heard throughout its study, democratic strain and popular discontent in Europe are testing the strength of the liberal democratic model. Canada must continue to work to strengthen its democracy, its democratic institutions and to ensure that its system of governance is resilient to the challenges of today and those to come.

APPENDIX A LIST OF WITNESSES

The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the Committee at its meetings related to this report. Transcripts of all public meetings related to this report are available on the Committee’s [webpage for this study](#).

| Organizations and Individuals | Date | Meeting |
|---|------------|---------|
| <p>As an individual</p> <p>William Galston, Ezra K. Zilkha Chair and Senior Fellow Governance Studies, Brookings Institution</p> <p>Staffan Lindberg, Professor, Political Science Department and Director of the V-Dem Institute University of Gothenburg</p> | 2019/04/09 | 135 |
| <p>Atlantic Council</p> <p>Daniel Fried, Distinguished Fellow</p> <p>Benjamin Haddad, Director Future Europe Initiative</p> | 2019/04/09 | 135 |
| <p>As an individual</p> <p>Yascha Mounk, Associate Professor, School of Advanced International Studies, Agora Institute Johns Hopkins University</p> <p>Cas Mudde, Professor, Stanley Wade Shelton UGAF University of Georgia</p> <p>Lucan Way, Professor of Political Science University of Toronto</p> | 2019/04/11 | 136 |
| <p>CANADEM (Canada's Civilian Response Corps)</p> <p>Zoe Dugal, Deputy Director Field Operations</p> | 2019/04/11 | 136 |

| Organizations and Individuals | Date | Meeting |
|---|-------------|----------------|
| <p>As an individual</p> <p>Hon. Michael Ignatieff, President Central European University</p> <p>Timothy David Snyder, Richard C. Levin Professor of History Yale University</p> <p>Jason Stanley, Jacob Urowsky Professor of Philosophy Yale University</p> | 2019/04/30 | 137 |
| <p>Inter-Parliamentary Union</p> <p>Martin Chungong, Secretary General</p> | 2019/04/30 | 137 |
| <p>As an individual</p> <p>Anne Applebaum, Professor of Practice Institute of Global Affairs, London School of Economics</p> <p>Michael Williams, Professor International Politics, University of Ottawa</p> <p>Daniel Ziblatt, Eaton Professor of the Science of Government Center for European Studies, Harvard University</p> | 2019/05/02 | 138 |
| <p>"Never Again" Association</p> <p>Rafal Pankowski, Co-Founder</p> | 2019/05/02 | 138 |

APPENDIX B LIST OF BRIEFS

The following is an alphabetical list of organizations and individuals who submitted briefs to the Committee related to this report. For more information, please consult the Committee's [webpage for this study](#).

B'nai Brith Canada

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the Committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this Report.

A copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* ([Meetings Nos. 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 148 and 149](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Levitt
Chair

