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Horizon Insights

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The New Global Order in the Making

Saied's Project of Democratic Backsliding

'Reception crisis' for asylum seekers in Belgium and the Netherlands: What does it tell us?

Book Review: Teaching Critical Thinking in the Context of Political Rhetoric: A Guide for Classroom Practice

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Foreword

Dear Reader,

In this issue, Beyond the Horizon ISSG focuses on hotspots around the world with three policy papers. In this regard, we hope that you'll find interesting reading the repercussions of the War in Ukraine on the global order, the democratic backsliding of Tunisia, and the refugee crisis in Belgium and the Netherlands, respectively. As accustomed, we conclude with a book review.

The first paper is a policy brief of the Geopolitics Task Force, composed of in-house and external experts, on the recent developments in the war in Ukraine. The experts deeply analyze the invasion over the primary actors, i.e. Russia and Ukraine, but also through external actors, such as the US, EU and China.

The second paper is also a policy brief of the Geopolitics Task Force, describing how Tunisia transformed into a case study that manifests the resilience of authoritarian culture and democratic weakness from a symbol of democratic success in the Middle East in the wake of the Arab Spring. The author analyzes the process through the new constitution and its repercussions for domestic and foreign policy.

The third paper is a policy brief on the refugee crisis in Belgium and the Netherlands. This policy paper provides a quantitative analysis of the number of asylum seekers and the available housing/shelter/bed for them. This analysis reveals that though the number of arrivals is lower than the levels in 2015, there is a 'reception crisis' caused by a 'reluctant reception' of the mentioned governments. The paper ends up with policy recommendations for the decision shapers/makers.

In our book review corner, we have a recent book, "Teaching Critical Thinking in the Context of Political Rhetoric: A Guide for Classroom Practice", written by Joseph Sanacore. In this book, the author aims to show the ends, ways and means to the teachers who are responsible for guiding students in analyzing, synthesizing, applying, evaluating, and problem-solving.

Sincerely yours,
Beyond the Horizon ISSG

The New Global Order in the Making

Geopolitics Task Force Brief

by Onur Sultan¹, Mats Radeck², Jeremy Alan Garlick³, Olena Snigyr⁴, Charles Joseph Sullivan⁵

1. BACKGROUND

- On August 29, 2022, the Ukrainian military launched its first major counteroffensive in the Southern region around Kherson, claiming to have breached Russian defence lines and retaken territory. The counteroffensive marked the beginning of a third phase of the ongoing war. ⁶
- On September 6, 2022, the Ukrainian military launched a second major counteroffensive on Russian-occupied territory in the provinces of Kharkiv, Donetsk and Luhansk. By September 9, Ukrainian forces had reached a breakthrough and managed to recapture approximately 2.500 square kilometers, including the cities of Kharkiv, Balakliia and Izyum, in a rapid advance. ⁷
- On September 15, President Xi Jinping met with Russian President Vladimir Putin. The sides praised continued practical cooperation in various fields to include trade and energy, strategic comprehensive partnership geared towards building “a more equitable and reasonable international order”, and subscription to the ideals of non-interference in each other’s internal affairs. ⁸
- During the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summit on September 16, Indian PM Narendra Modi marked a shift in Indian foreign policy toward Russian invasion of Ukraine by telling Putin “Now is not the time for war.” ⁹
- On September 21, 2022, Russian President Putin announced a partial mobilization of 300.000 reservist forces to serve in the battle in Ukraine. ¹⁰ The mobilization is the first after the Second World War. In reaction to the order, protests erupted Russia-wide and border traffic out of Russia, especially to Georgia and Finland, increased.
- Lasting from September 23 to September 27, 2022, amid the counteroffensives, Russian occupiers ran referendums in the Ukrainian provinces of Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia, about the declaration of independence and consequently the Russian annexation of the provinces. Russia does not control any of the provinces completely. Yet, after having installed puppet governments, the referendums are seen to anticipate justifications for further Russian attacks, claiming to defend Russia’s alleged territorial integrity. Kyiv and Western governments reject the referendums as “a sham” and did not plan to recognize the results. ¹¹
- During his address on 22 September, Putin threatened the West with use of nuclear weapons. He finished as speech saying: “This is not a bluff.”
- The war in Ukraine triggered unprecedented change in strategic thinking on security, defense and foreign policy in Europe, and especially in Germany. On 16 September, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said to the army congress: “As the most populous country with the greatest economic power and as a country in the middle of the continent, our army must become the cornerstone of conventional defence in Europe, the best equipped force in Europe.” ¹² The Chancellor had famously called forth a “Zeitenwende” that signalled reorientation of the country’s policies toward use of Bundeswehr and allocation of more funds to significantly upgrade its capabilities. ¹³

Towards a New Global Order and Position of the US

by Onur Sultan

We are far away from the unipolar moment that Charles Krauthammer described in his famous article in 1990. ¹⁴ As opposed to what he asserted, the power is distributed now across the globe. Russia has challenged the West by invading Ukraine while it joins China in investing heavily in new technologies and their application in defense. On the western side, NATO that witnesses eroding of its technological superiority that it relied upon throughout the Cold War. Until Russian invasion, the US call to the Allies to increase spending in defense and specifically research and innovation had not received enough attention. As the US Senator Mark Warner describes, 21st century will be characterized by technology driven competition and the Western Alliance does not seem to act accordingly. ¹⁵

This European apathy also creates an internal challenge for US governments. The increasing tone of the US taxpayers about why the US must pay for European defense while Europeans themselves do not want to increase their defense spending is a recurrent theme. If President Trump's critique about the relevance of NATO is discounted, overall the US has stuck to the multilateralism so far, a lesson learned in the Vietnam War. Another failure of the consequent US governments has been inability to convince European Allies to lessen dependency on Russian hydrocarbons.

From a wider geopolitical perspective, the US singles out China as "most consequential strategic competitor and the pacing challenge". The 2022 National Defense Strategy outlines four defense strategies two of which openly address China.¹⁶ Those are:

1. *Defending the homeland, paced to the growing multi-domain threat posed by the PRC*
3. *Detering aggression, while being prepared to prevail in conflict when necessary, prioritizing the PRC challenge in the Indo-Pacific, then the Russia challenge in Europe*

13. The other two pertain to deterring attacks against the US and the Allies and building a resilient Joint Force. NATO also named China a challenge for the first time in its history. More precisely, the latest strategic concept that the Allies endorsed during Madrid Summit on 30th June reads:

The People's Republic of China's (PRC) stated ambitions and coercive policies challenge our interests, security and values. The PRC employs a broad range of political, economic and military tools to increase its global footprint and project power, while remaining opaque about its strategy, intentions and military build-up. The PRC's malicious hybrid and cyber operations and its confrontational rhetoric and disinformation target Allies and harm Alliance security. The PRC seeks to control key technological and industrial sectors, critical infrastructure, and strategic materials and supply chains. It uses its economic leverage to create strategic dependencies and enhance its influence. It strives to subvert the rules-based international order, including in the space, cyber and maritime domains. The deepening strategic partnership between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation and their mutually reinforcing attempts to undercut the rules-based international order run counter to our values and interests.

The war in Ukraine has served the US to tilt the balance of global power in the direction of the Western Alliance and create a rally around the flag effect to align the latter around its policies that awaited response for long. Through the war, the current Biden Administration has successfully gathered Europe around the table under its leadership to fine tune reaction to Russian actions. The EU has rapidly and in full congruity with the US, imposed sanctions to cripple the Russian economy to cut down its ability to support the war efforts. Although deemed as an area directly related to national security, the EU countries have sought ways / alternatives to lessen dependency on Russian gas, oil, coal and other raw materials, and European societies have become more prepared to probable non-delivery of Russian energy to European markets.

The war has laid bare dependencies, deficiencies and areas to improve to make Europe more autonomous and again a strong player in the geopolitical arena. The war, while seriously downgrading Russian capabilities, has awakened Europeans to give proper consideration to war and security-related issues that will further unlock public support for spending on the military. Besides this primary area of concern, other dependencies, trade agreements, and business models will undoubtedly be revised.

In the book he co-authored, "2034: A Novel of the Next World War," former SACEUR Admiral James Stavridis foresees a war between the US and China. The fiction book has a more instructive than entertaining tone. The expectations of a new world war among scholars and policymakers are abundant.

The war in Ukraine has played in the hands of the US in that it has downgraded Russian capabilities while creating the push for Europe to counter this challenge on its eastern flank, depending mainly on European capabilities. This, more importantly, will likely preclude a two-front confrontation for the US with both Russia and China at the same time. The already energized European defense sector is in constant move to dynamically plan for the bleak outlook for the next decade and beyond. This envisioned future will entail a push to revise relationship with both China and Russia that will certainly translate into less trade and lesser economic growth for both major powers.

Europe's Future: Does Europe Rise Again as a Hard Power?

by Mats Radeck

Europe has long struggled to agree on a common stance on its external action and defense policy. However, the Ukraine war now expedites this agenda. Sweden and Finland's applications for NATO membership exhibit a growing sense of exposure to military threats across Europe and give a new purpose to the Alliance. Meanwhile, key

players, such as the European Commission,¹⁷ as well as the German and French governments have disclosed their ambitions to further Europe's transformation into becoming a key geopolitical player, showing how a sensibility for external action has been introduced at the highest political levels.

The most notable example of this has arguably been the recent announcement of German chancellor Olaf Scholz aiming for Germany to take on substantial responsibility in this European transformation. His "Zeitenwende" agenda (literally meaning "turn of an era") has disclosed German ambitions to turn a country reluctant on foreign policy in the past into a country keen on taking on greater responsibility for a sovereign and resilient EU.¹⁸ Russia's neo-colonial appetite therefore caused a rupture in Germany's risk-averse foreign policy and led the chancellor to reinvent it. Particularly, the 100 billion Euro special budget for the Bundeswehr (the German armed forces) exemplifies the seriousness behind the new agenda.

Until now, Europe has been relying on US military force and deterrence capabilities to uphold its peace architecture. However, this presumption is now being challenged by the emergence of a more multipolar world which forces the US to put its foreign policy focus on the Pacific region to act as a counterweight to China.

The threat emanating from Russia and the changing world order have also set the priorities at the recent NATO summit in Madrid. Besides adopting a new strategic concept,¹⁹ NATO leaders have agreed to strengthen the alliance's collective deterrence and defense capabilities,²⁰ including enhancing the multinational battlegroups at the Eastern front, upgrading the force plan and expanding the number of forces at high readiness to at least 500.000, and increasing funding to strategically important partner countries. Lastly, the formal invitation of Sweden and Finland to NATO highlights the new role assigned to Europe in this endeavor.

German minister of defense Christine Lambrecht captured the new circumstances the world finds itself in thoroughly arguing that "the Indo-Pacific theater gains increasing importance for the US [...]. Hence, we are demanded to do more for Europe than before."²¹ Such statements are by no means new, yet until now they have not been undermined by credible actions which has been disclosing the question of whether these ambitions remain bold rhetoric. Especially Germany and France have been appearing to push for more European defense in the past. Backed by EU willingness and NATO readiness, these two countries now also signify Europe's potential to transform.

Germany's approach to hard power has historically been plagued with several issues. Olaf Scholz's government, however, can be seen to tackle some of these. After losing purpose at the end of the Cold War, the Bundeswehr has been the subject of a persisting discussion on its actual role in Germany and abroad.²² With the special budget now being anchored in the constitution, Scholz's government can claim success in having crossed partisan borders and rallied his government and the biggest opposition party behind his project. Yet, doubts remain whether this is enough to also overcome the deep-rooted military skepticism in society.

Second, the German military procurement sector suffers from great inefficiency problems with key departments being understaffed, something Scholz's government has announced to overhaul.²³ However, considering the great bearing of these problems, it is yet to be seen whether Scholz can deliver credibly.

Germany ranks in the top places in terms of weapons delivery, financial and humanitarian aid to Ukraine, and has even broken a taboo by providing militarily useable intelligence data. France has massively boosted its defense spending which showcases how the country does not dodge future responsibility.

Yet, Eastern partners, especially Poland and the Baltic countries, expect a more active stance of their Western European counterparts and NATO in the wake of Russian aggression and Chinese influence.²⁴ Poland's long-held wish for a permanent US military presence in its country showcases the glance towards a more active security policy and an acceptance thereof.

Geopolitical ambitions and respective actions can therefore indeed be identified, but complications still plague the continent. Besides severe fragmentation on major political issues, a lack of cooperation and unclarity about the EU's role as defense actor regularly puts obstacles in the way of the industrial sector and hinders the realization of promising defense projects.²⁵ Delays in the development of the Spanish-French-German "Future Combat Air System" exemplify this problem, leading Germany to rather invest in American F-35s. In this regard, aims uttered by Scholz or Macron are somewhat scant considering that a vanquishing of fragmentations and overall unity is required to, for example, set the European budget.

However, the Ukraine war offers a chance to close ranks between intentions. The EU has shown in the past that it grows in crisis with the comprehensive covid relief package being the latest example. In the face of the Russian aggression, Europe united in an unprecedented manner to respond to Kremlin with unheard-of sanctions, agreeing to free the continent from a dependency on Russian oil and gas and making Georgia, Moldova, and even war-torn Ukraine candidates for EU membership. Backed by the bloc's economic power, industrial base, NATO's resurgence, and political will at the highest level, Europe has the potential to again rise as hard power. However, so far, the plans fail at their implementation and political fragmentation across the continent.

The impact of the Ukraine crisis on China's relations with the West

By Jeremy Alan Garlick

Despite appearances, it cannot be assumed that China supports Russia's invasion of Ukraine. From Beijing's perspective, it has been a destabilizing factor in European affairs. While from one perspective this plays into China's hands, from another – maintaining economic growth in China amidst signs of a downturn – it does not. Europe and North America are two of China's most important export markets.²⁶ China still needs the West for the time being. As economies are impacted by the European energy crisis, inflation, and a possible coming downturn, it is not in China's interests to see an even more destabilized international order.

For the most part, Beijing has maintained silence on the issue of the war in Ukraine. This should be taken as a sign of tacit disapproval. Recently, the Chinese foreign minister, Wang Yi, has expressed in the UN the Chinese desire that the conflict should come to an end.²⁷ China has always maintained the diplomatic position that the sovereignty of states should be respected.²⁸ For this reason, they cannot be fully supportive of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. According to US officials, China is also not supplying Russia with arms.²⁹

At the same time, China cannot simply ditch its Russian partner for strategic reasons. China needs Russian energy.³⁰ Feeling pressured by the West, Beijing also cannot risk losing the confidence of the Russian leadership. Among the major world powers, Russia is the closest China comes to having an ally.³¹ Nevertheless, there is still not necessarily enough trust between the two to label them an axis or to assume that they are working in tandem.

The Chinese media – including the Party mouthpiece China Daily – attribute the cause of the Ukraine war to US and NATO pressure on Russia.³² The Chinese are sensitive to this issue because they worry about the build-up of US forces in the Asia-Pacific.³³ Like the Russians, they are also resistant to what they see as Western interference in their internal affairs. From this point of view, they seem to stand with Russia against the West.

However, beneath the surface suspicions about long-term intentions linger. Russia has long supplied large quantities of arms to China's rival, India.³⁴ The 'partners' – Russia and China – compete for influence in Central Asia, even if they maintain the outward appearance that this is not the case.³⁵

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has created a severe rupture with the West. Since China is tarnished with the image of being Russia's partner, its relations with the West have also been damaged by the conflict. Reconstructing ties is going to be a difficult task.

On the other hand, remembering the Sino-Soviet split during the Cold War gives a hint of what might be possible.³⁶ Russia is now beyond the pale as far as the West is concerned, at least as long as Vladimir Putin is in power. It may, however, be possible to reactivate a degree of understanding – if not full-fledged cooperation – with Beijing, at least at the macro-level of broad geopolitical policy.

The West should seek to engage with China – at least behind the scenes if not in public. With Russia and Putin now appearing weakened, Moscow is now unquestionably in a subordinate position to Beijing. Xi Jinping is a powerful voice at Putin's flank. It would be wise to try to cultivate contacts with China to try to resolve the Ukraine crisis and find ways to bring Russia back to a semblance of responsible behaviour. China cannot be an ally of the West. But from a pragmatic, long-term perspective it would be sensible not to completely alienate the Chinese leviathan and turn it into a totally pro-Russian enemy.

The Main Determinant of the Outcome of this War: Does Ukrainian Will Go Anywhere

by Olena Snigyr

The war is still going on and the main result is yet to come. But we can already talk about some visible things.

Rethinking False Narratives

On the eve of the full-scale invasion, Ukrainians heard about the capture of Kyiv “in three days” not only from the Russian side. Such forecasts were also given by Western diplomats, politicians and experts. Western countries were preparing for the loss of Ukraine and partisan resistance as the best possible outcome.

Such a false belief was based not only on objective comparisons of the capabilities of the two armies - Ukrainian and Russian, it was significantly constructed by Russian propaganda, which promoted a narrative about the lack of agency of Ukrainians.

“You do understand, George, that Ukraine is not even a state!” - the widely known phrase of Putin, which he said to George W. Bush in April 2008, is a Russian narrative that was planted by Russian propaganda in all possible information fields and, unfortunately, was taken into account by a large part of the Western audience. Many Western observers (and for that matter, some Ukrainians) who were even pro-Ukrainian still believed that the Ukrainian state had no real, deep foundations, that it would blow over in a strong wind, leaving the long-suffering but dogged Ukrainian nation to fend for itself alone.

The reasons for the West's strategic blindness regarding Ukraine and Russia are rooted not only in the concept of rational choice. This is also a consequence of the unfinished processes of decolonization in the Eurasian space and the dominant Russian-centric approach in the political and scientific analysis of everything related to the study of Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia - in general, all regions that Russia declares as the territory of its “special interests”.

Rethinking Russo-centrism in the study of not only Ukraine, but also the entire geographic Eurasian space, including the territory of the Russian Federation, is a great and exciting challenge for scientific and political discussion, and it will be a direct consequence of the Ukrainian will to fight in this war.

New architecture of European security

Russia's aggression and Ukrainian resistance are changing the current security picture and shaping future security relations in Europe and influencing the world order.

The motivation of the Ukrainians in the battle against the Russian army, which by all indicators outnumbered them, is determined by their desire to survive. This motivation not only broke Russia's plans at the beginning of a full-scale invasion, but became a sufficient argument for Ukraine's allies to provide military aid for the offensive actions of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. NATO's defense capabilities were de facto extended to Ukraine. Ukraine's accession to the Alliance is a much more realistic prospect today than before the start of Russia's open military aggression.

Russian military aggression has already nullified all the comprehensive security mechanisms of pan-European cooperation, undermined the authority of the UN, and threatens to finally gut the nuclear non-proliferation system and international justice of its meaning. However, it will be possible to construct new safe formats and reform old ones only after the end of the war. And the final possible result is directly influenced by Ukraine's ability to win this war.

Russia's Revised Objective, Strategy, Tactics, and Assumptions in Ukraine

by Charles Joseph Sullivan

Russia's original objectives in initiating a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in late February of 2022 have failed. Following Russia's botched attempt to overthrow the Ukrainian government led by President Volodymyr Zelensky and install a pro-Russian government in its stead, the Kremlin has revised Russia's objectives and formulated a new strategy. Moscow's new objective is to seize a portion of the Donbass region and hold it indefinitely. Granted, the optics of the Kremlin trying to forcibly acquire an inchoate portion of southern and eastern Ukraine

encompassing parts of Luhansk Oblast, Donetsk Oblast, Zaporizhzhia Oblast, and Kherson Oblast by force are very unpleasant, and Russia's incorporation of these territories serves as the primary source of consternation within the international system of states today. That said, Russian President Vladimir Putin and the siloviki in the Kremlin need to demonstrate to the Russian public that the Russian military has pacified at least a portion of Ukraine, which they claim belongs to Russia. To realize this revised objective, Russia is adhering to a strategy that is grounded in a set of calculated assumptions. Whether the Kremlin ultimately succeeds in realizing its revised objective depends upon Russia's ability to effectively employ a series of tactics in furtherance of its strategy, and the accuracy of its assumptions.

In attempting to realize its presumed aforementioned objective, the Kremlin appears to be adhering to a strategy which seeks to divide the West and incapacitate the Ukrainian government. In adhering to this strategy, Russia has organized referendums within, as well as annexed parts of Luhansk Oblast, Donetsk Oblast, Zaporizhzhia Oblast, and Kherson Oblast.³⁷ In addition, by restricting gas to Europe (or "self-sanctioning by imposing different costs" on various European Union states),³⁸ working in tandem with other governments to restrict global oil output, conducting countervalue operations across Ukraine, and threatening to deploy tactical nuclear weapons (if the situation arises in which the Kremlin deems it is necessary to use such weapons), Putin and the siloviki hope to blunt Ukraine's recent military momentum.³⁹

Russia's new strategy is grounded in a set of assumptions. First, Russia's leaders are assuming that the West (i.e., at least several European countries) will eventually break ranks with the United States over Ukraine and call for a ceasefire and/or the holding of peace talks, namely because of Europe's current dependency upon Russia for natural gas, concerns related to grain prices, and the possibility that the confrontation could turn nuclear. Second, the Kremlin assumes that Ukrainians' resolve will weaken as Russia conducts sweeping countervalue operations and/or decides to deploy a tactical nuclear weapon. Finally, Putin and the siloviki are assuming that domestic civil society groups will not coalesce into a unified and coherent movement that can challenge their hold on political power. In the event that the Kremlin is mistaken about any or several of these stated assumptions, then it is highly probable that the aforementioned strategy will end in failure, and Russia will not succeed in realizing its revised objective.

Endnotes

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5 Dr. Charles J. Sullivan is an Assistant Professor of Security Studies at the United Arab Emirates National Defense College in Abu Dhabi. The opinions expressed within this article are the author's and do not represent those of the UAE National Defense College.

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'Reception crisis' for asylum seekers in Belgium and the Netherlands: What does it tell us?

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Introduction

Belgium and the Netherlands governments are struggling to provide shelter to asylum seekers nowadays in addition to the displaced people from Ukraine. It turned out to be a 'reception crisis' leading to strikes, people sleeping on the streets and unhealthy conditions. The governments are trying to find short-term solutions. Given the global situation is leading to migration flows to Europe, longer term policy measures need to be taken at the EU and national levels to avoid such crises in the future.

Key Takeaways

- It is a 'reception crisis' both in Belgium and the Netherlands rather than an asylum crisis.
- It is undeniable that there is a housing crisis, especially in the Netherlands, making the situation more difficult.
- The structural problems are apparent at the European and national level policies.
- The politics of 'reluctant reception' at the national levels can be seen as a significant factor.
- Keeping a surplus reception capacity during times of lower arrivals is a necessity.
- An updated proactive temporary protection regime imposing a level of preparedness on the member states and preparing contingency plans would help handle such cases in a better way.
- More flexible asylum and integration policies and partnership with private initiatives could help ease the situation in a shorter period.

Background

Belgium has been facing saturation of its systems to receive asylum seekers for months now.¹

Hundreds of people have to sleep on the streets because the doors of the Fedasil registration centre Klein Kasteeltje/Le Petit-Château in Brussels cannot handle providing shelter to the asylum seekers and the refugees which is their right to get.

In face of this situation, on August 18, State Secretary for Asylum and Migration, Nicole de Moor, tweeted: "*What happened today at the Klein Kasteeltje cannot be repeated. The door must open, but we must be able to guarantee the safety of the staff and the other asylum seekers staying there.*"² Mayor of Brussels Philippe Close called on de Moor to tackle the problem and find a solution. Even though the Public Buildings Administration quickened plans to move the registration centre to Schaerbeek, the capacity of this centre is not competent in solving the problem.

1700 convictions have been opened against Fedasil, Belgium's Federal Asylum agency, since October last year for failing to ensure its legal responsibility to shelter people. Fedasil staff went on strike on 23 August because of current running risky working conditions.³

The current overwhelming problem results from certain facts such as the high rate of the occupancy of the asylum receiving centres and decreased capacity of those centres because the pandemic has brought the situation to a boiling point.

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The neighbouring Netherlands is also facing the same problem.⁴ Hundreds of applicants of asylum are on the streets in front of Ter Apel's asylum centre. Conditions are fragile and inhumane, especially for women and children. It was reported that a three-month-old baby died, and an investigation was invoked by the House of Representatives. Besides, due to difficulties in taking showers, many of them have to deal with skin diseases.⁵ That is why Doctors Without Borders (MSF) are involved to offer medical assistance to people in need.⁶ It must be noted that it is the first time that Doctors Without Borders provide medical help in the Netherlands. MSF director for the Netherlands Judith Sargentini said that *"Doctors without Borders has been around for fifty years, but it is the first time that we are offering emergency aid in the Netherlands. We are doing this because the Dutch government is so late, the conditions in which the people at Ter Apel find themselves are inhumane."* Sargentini also added that this is a short-term solution, and it is important to consider a long-term solution.

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte emphasised that he was ashamed, and announced measures aiming to evacuate people from Ter Apel to get the overcrowding under control.⁷ But some asylum seekers refused to leave because they are afraid to lose their turn of registering and facing an obligation to restart the process again.

On 31 August, a cruise ship rented by the national government arrived in Amsterdam to provide accommodation for at least 1000 refugees.⁸ In addition, Utrecht reserved the majority of the social housing for refugees for six weeks.⁹ It should not be forgotten that there is a serious housing crisis in the Netherlands.¹⁰ Director of the Mixed Migration Center, Bram Frows stated: *"There just aren't enough houses in the country which affects the availability of houses for asylum seekers. So this means they will continue living in asylum reception centres across the country for months. In turn, the asylum centres have no capacity to receive new arrivals and people have to sleep outside."*

The European Union Agency for Asylum offers to provide 160 containers according to Operational Plan 2022 signed between the Dutch government and The European Union Agency for Asylum.¹¹ The Dutch government is also planning to reduce family reunification to get the situation under control, which is criticised by the EU Commission spokesperson. *"The government's plan to handle this crisis by reducing family reunification arrivals in order to avoid congestion at Ter Apel should be avoided. So far, these people arrive on family reunification visas and also need to register at Ter Apel. There is no need for that since they have already been vetted. This isn't a solution to stop overcrowding"*.

Reception crisis in numbers

Belgium

According to Fedasil statistics, Belgium has 32,544 reception places for asylum seekers, of which 30,144 are occupied as indicated in figure 2.¹² These numbers do not include 55,598 temporary protection issued so far by Belgium for the displaced persons from Ukraine.¹³

Temporary protection is an exceptional measure to provide immediate and temporary protection in the event of a (imminent) mass influx of displaced persons from non-EU countries who are unable to return to their country of origin.¹⁴

The asylum figures in Belgium saw a peak between 2014-2015, the years at which the civil war in Syria was especially intense (see figure 1). The exact figures for the year 2022 have not been published yet, however the sum of the asylum seekers and issued temporary protections has already passed the last year (figure 1,2). This unexpected increase is a result of a combination of geopolitical developments featuring Russian invasion of Ukraine at the beginning of 2022, Taliban's takeover of rule in Afghanistan and the slowdown of the pandemic.

Number of persons who applied for international protection (asylum) in Belgium (Source CGRS)

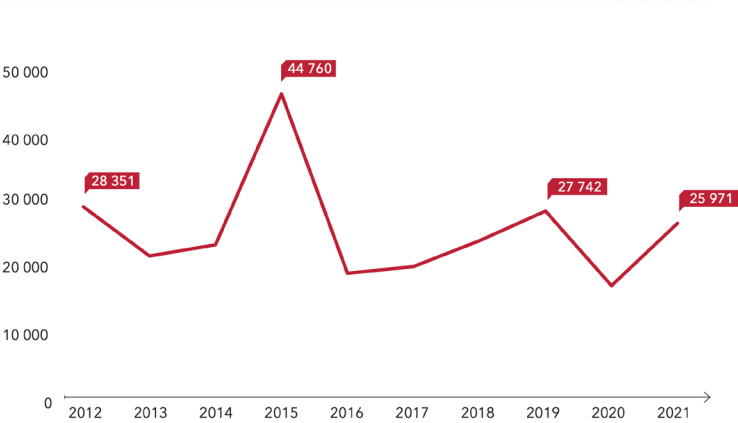


Figure 1: Annual evolution of the number of persons who applied for international protection (asylum) in Belgium (FEDASIL)¹⁵

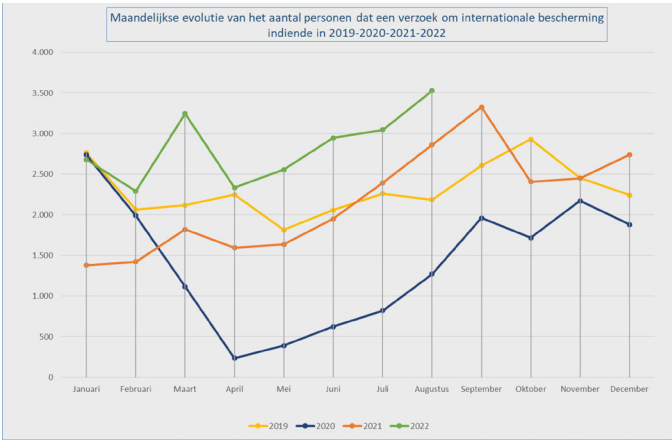


Figure 2: Monthly evolution of the number of persons who applied for international protection (asylum) in Belgium between 2019-2022 (CGVS)¹⁶



Figure 3: Statistics of reception places and occupancy rate by September 2022 in Fedasil (FED-ASIL)¹⁷

The evolution of the reception capacity indicates that the structural capacity has not been changed since 2015. However, the temporary capacity has been activated according to the needs. As of its peak point in 2015 (during the Syrian crisis) the total capacity decreased until 2018 and the capacity has been gradually increasing since then. The current occupancy rate is 96%.

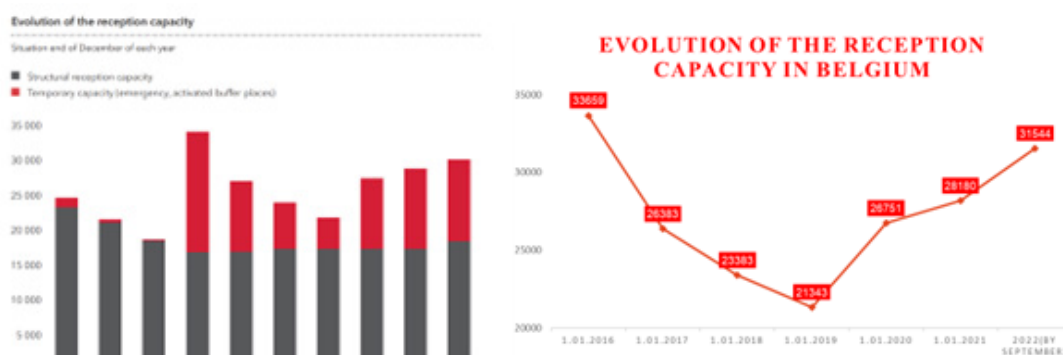


Figure 4: Evolution of the reception capacity in Belgium (FEDASIL)¹⁸

At the beginning of the Russian invasion, UNHCR estimated that approximately 200,000 Ukrainians would flee to Belgium.¹⁹ But The Federal Planning Bureau's baseline scenario is a total influx of 83,000 refugees from Ukraine throughout 2022.²⁰ To overcome this problem, the Belgium government assigned local authorities to accept Ukrainian refugees, giving them a subsidy of 2,000 - 3,500 (per refugee).²¹ Local authorities have created or assigned separate places for them to reside, such as temporary villages, and new reception centres.²² ²³ Additionally, they have coordinated the dispatch of the refugees with the support of NGOs to local families who are volunteering to host them in their houses.²⁴

The Netherlands

According to the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security, the total number of asylum applications in the Netherlands has reached 29,114 (not including Ukrainians) from January 2022 to August 2022.²⁵ In the last 12 months, the number of applications counts up to 46,734, the biggest share or 41 percent of which come from Syrians.

There is an increase in the total number of asylum applications (not including Ukrainians) by July compared to the last two years (see figure 6). The reasons behind are similar, the takeover of Taliban in Afghanistan and the pandemic's slowdown. According to the Dutch Central Organisation for the reception of asylum seekers (COA), the Netherlands will require more than 13,000 additional reception capacity by 2023.

In addition to the asylum seekers, the number of refugees from Ukraine registered at municipalities, from private and municipal shelters stands at 76,470.²⁶ Accordingly, 59,389 of 62,231 available beds are occupied. Ukrainians refugees are treated under the temporary protection statute as in Belgium. It is seen that there are more refugees from Ukraine than available beds (Figure 7), who are mostly hosted by volunteers or NGOs. At the beginning of the influx, thousands of Dutch families opened their houses to Ukrainians via some matching applications such as "takecarebnb" or "Share My Home".^{27 28 29} But with the beginning of the summer, Dutch families started to leave their houses and they did not want to leave Ukrainians in their houses alone. So, many Ukrainians had to leave their hosting families putting a burden on municipalities to find additional accommodations.³⁰

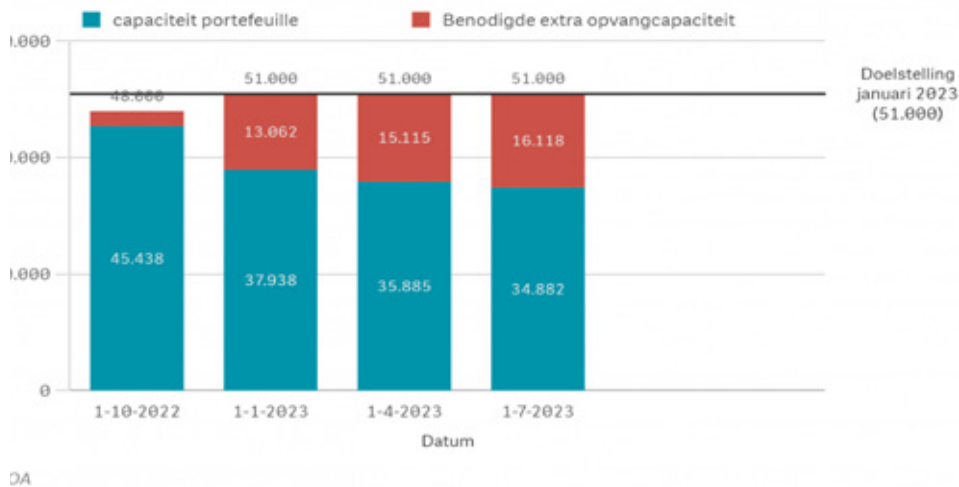


Figure 5: Capacity (real estate portfolio) versus capacity requirement* (COA)³¹

*The total locations do not include reception of Ukrainian refugees in municipal shelter Ukraine (GOO), reception of Afghan evacuees in defence locations, (crisis) emergency shelter managed by municipalities

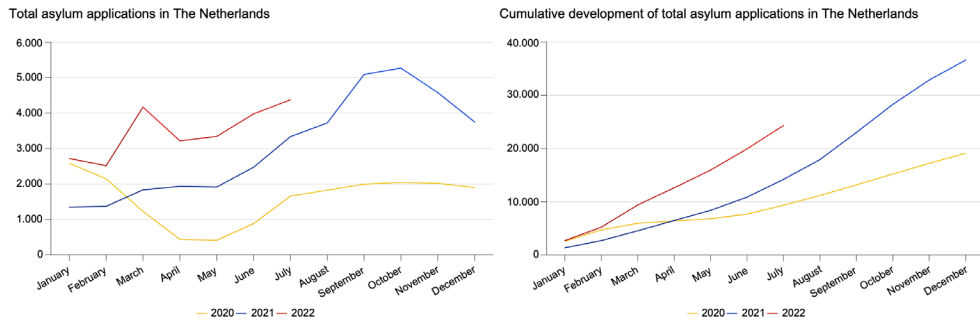


Figure 6: Total asylum applications in The Netherlands and Cumulative development of total asylum applications in The Netherlands (Dutch Immigration Service)³²

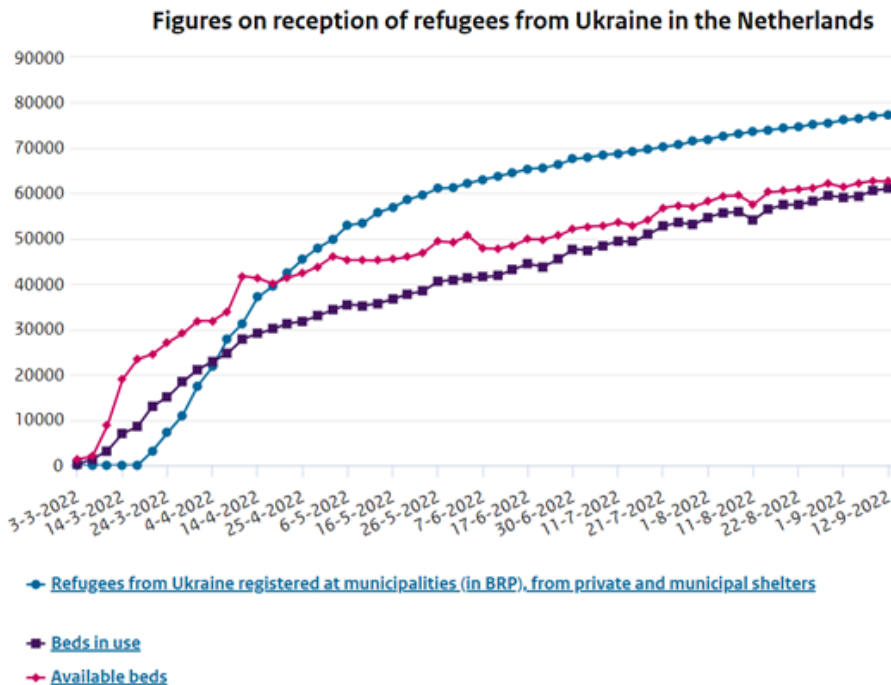


Figure 7: Figures on reception of refugees from Ukraine in the Netherlands (Dutch Government)³³

What does it tell us?

There is a real 'reception crisis' both in Belgium and in the Netherlands. And it must be kept in mind that it is not an asylum crisis. It is more likely to be called a reception crisis, because the number of arrivals is lower than the levels in 2015. But still, the occupancy rates of reception centres in both countries are almost at their maximum capacity and the required additional reception capacity will likely increase by 2023 (see figures 4 and 5). So both countries must urgently seek to create extra places to increase the capacity in order to meet the requirements.

The structural problems are apparent at the political and policy level. Michael Kegels resigned from his position as Fedasil director, citing that “There are still so many challenges in the reception policy. All Fedasil employees work hard to give people a place to stay. In recent years, this task has become increasingly difficult.”³⁴ On the other hand, Judith Sargentini, Dutch director of Doctors Without Borders, criticised the absence of political willingness of the Dutch government, noting that the Dutch government has not invested 200 million euros in the reception of refugees as was planned.³⁵

The politics of ‘reluctant reception’ at the national levels can be also seen as a significant factor.³⁶ In line with that, the lack of a sufficient solidarity action among the EU member states regarding reception of asylum seekers is worsening the situation and making the crisis more unforeseeable for some of them.

It is hard to boil down the reasons for the ongoing crisis to purely lack of enough resources. It is undeniable there is a housing crisis, especially in the Netherlands. To respond to this problem, the plan of the Government is to build 100.000 additional capacity every year. But there is shortage of workers and also a nitrogen emission crisis. The Netherlands has the second highest nitrogen surplus in Europe, which must be reduced by 2030.³⁷ The nitrogen crisis and the shortage of workers together restrain the Netherlands from building houses as planned.

Experts have been proposing to keep a surplus reception capacity during times of lower arrivals, because it is cheaper to keep them open than build new ones when relatively higher numbers of migrants come.³⁸ Besides, forcing small municipalities to host those arriving people is not a rational solution.

It must be noted that the “temporary protection” regime, which was introduced in 2001 after the Yugoslav War, has been used for the first time for displaced persons from Ukraine.³⁹ The directive was urgently invoked on 4 March 2022 with a big solidarity among the member states right after the start of the illegal Russian occupation. It helped the EU to react in a very short time to the crisis although not in a perfect manner due to its shortcomings. However, many member states were not prepared to implement the requirements of the directive. The great solidarity from the people and their volunteer support helped the governments to react. The member states need to have contingency plans for future cases of mass influx. The temporary protection should be handled in a way more proactive than reactive, imposing a minimum level of preparedness on the member states. A positive attitude within the society would not always be there. So, the European and national level policies should be updated accordingly, given such cases are not out of scope in the foreseeable future.

The attention to the energy crisis has eclipsed this humanitarian crisis. And it is hard to say that migration towards Europe will decrease. The conflicts in the European periphery are far from being resolved. A wave of migration as a result of the climate crisis is on the door, and Europe is among the top list of destinations. So, a mixture of anticipation, preparation of the right policies and capacity building would help the Member States avoid similar crises.

On the other hand, providing more flexibility in asylum and integration policies could help the newly arrived to find jobs in a shorter period, leading to easier integration into society. As the Belgian Secretary of State Sammy Mahdi proposed in his action plan, partnership with organisations that are entitled to help recruitment may help asylum-seekers to find jobs in shorter periods.⁴⁰ “Tent Partnership for Refugees” which is carrying its activities and network to Europe is a good practice that brings companies to pledge positions to refugees.⁴¹ This could accelerate the socio-economic integration of asylum-seekers while reducing economic and social pressure on governments. In addition, this could also help the newly arrived to find proper accommodation options and prevent over-concentration in urban areas.

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Follow-Up: Saied's Project of Democratic Backsliding

by Mats Radeck *

1. Background

- In 2011, the Jasmine revolution put an end to Tunisia's president Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali regime, an entrenched dictatorship (nytimes.com, 2011). The momentum further spread to other countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and initiated a protest movement today known as the "Arab Spring."
- Being regarded as the greatest democratic hope in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, Tunisia initiated various reforms to the political system to support a democratic transition immediately aftermath. To date, this transition has not yet been finished as key institutions are still flawed or have not been set up, including a constitutional court (Goldstein, 2021).
- During the last couple of years, however, a political deadlock and economic crisis (Radeck, 2022) have been in tandem shaking Tunisia. The situation has been immensely worsened by the impacts of the Covid crisis.
- On October 13, 2019, amid this crisis, Tunisians elected an independent political outsider, a professor of constitutional law Kais Saied as president (BBC News, 2019). Saied's anti-elitist stance at first sparked enthusiasm about him appearing as a reformer willing to overcome the problematic situation the country found itself in.
- On July 25, 2021, Saied declared to have dismissed the government and frozen the work of the parliament (Why Tunisia's Democratic Transition Still Matters, 2021). This unexpected move was the first of many that made Tunisia set sail for renewed authoritarian rule (Radeck, 2022).
- On September 29, Saied named Najla Bouden Romdhane as the prime minister (Amara & Mcdowall, 2021). While she is the first woman to have ever fulfilled this role in the Arab world, her powers were also subordinated to the president making her less influential than her predecessors.
- Since then, Saied has gradually assumed more power in the country. Such autocratic power grabs include attacks on the judiciary, such as the dismissal of judges (Deutsche Welle, 2022), or the replacement of the electoral commission (MEE Staff, 2022).
- On July 25, 2022, Saied put the changes in the country's state structure to the vote in a constitutional referendum marking the centrepiece of Saied's plan to establish a presidential system in Tunisia (Chulov, 2022). Opposition groups boycotted the voting (Volkman, 2022). Thus, while only about a third of Tunisians eligible to do so voted, the new constitution passed with a sweeping majority of 95%.
- In reaction to the referendum, opposition groups denounced the referendum as illegitimate (Volkman, 2022), and its result as not credible. Meanwhile, Western governments, such as the USA (Tunisia's July 25 Referendum, 2022) and the European Union (Tunisia: Declaration by the High Representative on Behalf of the European Union on the Constitutional Referendum, 2022), expressed their concerns about the state of democracy in Tunisia.

Analysis

1. Tunisia's New Constitution and Criticism

On July 25, Tunisians voted on a draft constitution brought forward by President Kais Saied. In general, the proposed constitution sets the basis to conform Tunisia's hybrid presidential-parliamentary system into a solely presidential one. Among other things, it, therefore, weakens the standing of the judiciary and the parliament, while it beefs up the powers of the president (Reuters, 2022).

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Many articles of this new constitution go headstrong against tenets of representative democracy. For example, Article 101 states that the President has the exclusive power to appoint government members. This differs from the former constitution according to which the parliament had antecedence in choosing government members. Article 112 underscores this point by making the government responsible to the president who fulfils the executive function according to article 87. Also, article 68 weakens the legislative process of the parliament by giving a higher priority to the president's right of initiative than to that of the parliament.

Furthermore, article 96 says that "exceptional measures" are to be taken by the president "if there is an imminent danger threatening the republic, the security of the country and its independence." A similar article has been at the centre of debates surrounding Saïed's power grab (Chettaoui, 2021). Article 80 of the former constitution was seen by many as the Achilles heel of the charter and arguably enabled Saïed to make his move in the first place (Al-Dahni, 2021). It is thus interesting that Saïed's new constitution mirrors the old wording forasmuch as it grants him power.

Moreover, the constitution makes the president the supreme commander of the armed forces with reporting by the security forces to be done to the president directly (Murphy, 2022). Also, it tasks the state with working towards the goal of Islam (Yerkes, 2022), an unusual goal setting considering that Saïed himself has spoken out against political Islam (Tunisia: Islam Will Not Be State Religion, Says Saïed, 2022). Yet, the new constitution attempts to entrench Islam deeply in government procedures.

Saïed himself is set to preserve his mandate. The new constitution even makes it possible for him to run for two more terms, enabling him to possibly stay in power until 2034 (Boussen & Lakhal, 2022). In theory, this grants Saïed enough time to further develop and consolidate his authoritarian project. While in power, the president can also not be held accountable by other state branches. Neither can he be impeached by parliament, nor does the weakened judiciary pose a severe risk to his influence.

The constitution has been subject to broad critique by many following the situation closely. Some critics assign a theocratic, as well as an autocratic risk to the proposed paper (Mekki, 2022). The constitution is seen to abolish institutional safeguards for fundamental human rights (Amnesty International, 2022) while it fosters almost unchecked powers of the president (Tunisia: Questions and Answers on the Draft Constitution, 2022). The constitution as the centrepiece of Saïed's accused dictatorship building (O'Grady, 2022), therefore, presents attempted legalisation and consolidation of his extensive power grab. Meanwhile, Saïed argues that the new constitution is necessary to overcome the political and economic paralysis that the country finds itself in.

The polling process presents another factor of potential criticism. With a turnout of 30 %, Saïed was able to motivate only one third of Tunisians to cast their vote. What might defame the popular legitimacy of his new constitution on the one hand, also shows how his voter base is consolidating considering that a sweeping majority of 94 % voted "yes" (Boussen & Lakhal, 2022). In deeply divided Tunisia, this number showcases the political power of Saïed.

Further, a criticism brought forward includes that the constitution's drafting process has been too untransparent. The head of the constitutional panel tasked with overseeing the drafting process even distanced himself from the final version (Amara, 2022). He declared that the version put to the vote was nothing like the version his panel had written, instead, it was unstable and dangerous. Further, he said that it could "pave the way for a dictatorial regime."

The campaigning process did also not proceed as accustomed in democracies. While there was no room created for discussing the content beforehand, Saïed shot down criticism with propagandistic calls to vote yes (Lettre De Kais Saïed: Dites Oui! À La Nouvelle Constitution, n.d.). As if there was no time to lose, Saïed also rushed the publication of the constitution in the official journal without awaiting the official results of the referendum (Boussen & Lakhal, 2022), raising doubts about the original intent of the referendum being a mere coverage for a political move he would have executed anyway.

However, the criticism has not resonated enough within the opposition to sufficiently mobilise the population and stop the referendum or Tunisia's slow democratic regress. This also nourishes doubts about the opposition's capacity to renew democracy in the future. Besides the opposition itself being fragmented, a great part of Tunisia's society is simply disenchanted with the political scene as a whole. Statements like the one by Ennahda (N., 2022), an Islamist party having assumed a forerunner role in oppositional work throughout the crisis, proclaiming a failure of the constitution were therefore hardly talked about.

In the timespan of only one year, Saïed's rule challenged the state of democracy in Tunisia and revealed the vulnerability of its fragile constitutions. Therefore, whatever the criticism put forward may be, the outcome of the referendum matters, nevertheless. Both for Tunisia domestically, as well as externally, the path that Kais Saïed has chosen, and which he has now reinforced, holds severe repercussions for the country.

2. Domestic Repercussions for Tunisia

The new constitution, as well as Saied's overarching power grab, does not appear to solve the problems that the country suffers from, although declared so by Saied. Rather, it further enforces an authoritarian system and scotches the democratic successes of the Arab Spring.

This condition can be exemplified by the fact that Saied seems not to show any interest in the country's economic recovery. The economic crisis has so far wracked havoc on Tunisia without showing any signs of improvement. Saied's promises that once made him capable of mobilising popular grievances and assuming the presidency in 2019 have not been a raving success, leading to the country still enduring ongoing deterioration.

Several economic indicators have hit record highs in an economy that has been slowing since the Arab Spring in 2011 and so far (Reuters, 2022; Amara & Mcdowall, 2022), there are no signs of Saied taking on this problem. Among these is inflation soaring at about 8%, rising youth unemployment (Unemployment, Youth Total, n.d.), and a worsening sense of corruption (Network 20/20, 2022), with the fight against the latter being a political emphasis of Saied's agenda.

Meanwhile, budget and trade deficits are mounting (World Bank Group, 2022). Such increases are impactful in an economy with such large public sector expenditures as it risks the functionality of the state. Thus, while the country's expenses stretch on wages of public service workers, the unstable public finances of the country make Tunisia susceptible to further economic insecurities. Most recently, the war in Ukraine has triggered a crisis in commodity prices and food insecurity which is also felt by ordinary Tunisians (Lynch, 2022).

The poor economic conditions of the country also raised concerns about its ability to pay back debts. Both Fitch Ratings (FitchRatings, 2022), as well as Morgan Stanley (Staff, 2022), have issued negative outlooks for Tunisia's economy with the latter even ranking the country among the world's most likely defaulters. However, Saied's plan to pull the economy out of this misery seems to rest exclusively on a potential, not yet sealed, deal on an unpopular IMF bailout loan (Gallien, 2022).

Thus, while Saied has invested great ambitions into changing the state structure, he has not delivered economic reforms. Instead, the severely needed economic agenda rests on conditions which the IMF will issue. In a dire economic state, such an unpromising agenda is set to fuel social unrest.

Many of Tunisia's citizens have therefore also rejected the new constitution through massive protest (Volkman, 2022), showing disapproval of Tunisia's authoritarian development. The country is therefore setting sail for domestic instability fuelled by increasing authoritarian development and economic hardship. Considering the nature of authoritarian responses to protest, Saied's future administration will most likely answer by the means of intolerance and coercion.

3. Repercussions for Tunisia in Foreign Politics

The developments in Tunisia will also have severe repercussions on its foreign relations. Especially the relationship between Tunisia and the United States at a critical brink. Saied's steering of the country towards authoritarianism could trigger a diplomatic crisis which would in turn negatively impact the country's domestic condition.

Considering Tunisia's pioneering role in the Arab Spring, as well as Tunisia's geographic position in Northern Africa, the country holds great importance to several Western democracies. In this context, Germany, the European Union, and the United States, for example, are the three biggest donors of foreign assistance to Tunisia (FA.gov, n.d.). The EU's support for Tunisia even resembles the biggest aid transfer per capita among all receiver countries worldwide (Bobin, 2019). Furthermore, Tunisia's economy is closely tied to Europe's, hinting at the strong trade partnership as well as the massive investment inflow (EU Trade Relations with Tunisia, n.d.). These strong economic ties are testimony to the Western interest in a successful democratic transition and political stability, alongside showing Western diplomatic weight in Tunisia.

Especially the foreign policy of US president Joe Biden highlights the West's ambition to stem authoritarian aspirations in the world (Feinberg, 2021). Saied's attempts thus pose a challenge to Biden whose credibility will be assessed by a strong stance towards Saied. Domestically, Biden already experiences pushbacks urging his government to act (Farooq, 2022).

Most significantly, US secretary of state Antony Blinken has voiced concerns about the future state of democracy in Tunisia (Reuters, 2022). Consequently, his counterpart and foreign minister of Tunisia, Othman Jerandi called upon the acting US envoy to refrain from interference in his country, marking a rise in tensions in the diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Other western players have expressed concerns about Tunisia and issued travel warnings to their citizens. In the European Union, both the parliament (Motion for a Resolution on the Situation in Tunisia, 2021) and the high representative for foreign affairs and security policy Josep Borrell (Al Arabiya English, 2021) have expressed their concern about Saied's power grab with the latter having highlighted the possibility to delay European macro-financial assistance in response to the developments which amounted to 800 million Euros since 2011 (Dejoui, 2022). Similarly, Germany, for example, reaffirmed its commitment to a democratic transition and issued travel warnings to its citizens regarding Saied's political moves

Saied's decisions to rebuild the state structure and dismantle democratic institutions have, therefore, triggered repercussions beyond Tunisia's border. Powerful western players with big leverage in the country disagree with the developments. Perspectively, Tunisia's new constitution could, therefore, not only strengthen the authoritarian power of the president but could also lead to diplomatic tension and crisis with important partners, in turn fuelling an economic decline that worsens living standards of Tunisians.

Conclusion: Is Tunisia Doomed to Fail?

The recent developments in Tunisia, including the constitutional referendum and the new constitution, have shown that Kais Saied is not willing to divert from his authoritarian path. Instead, the past months have exhibited systematic attempts to amassing powers formerly held by state institutions in the hands of the president.

Underscored by a low voter turnout and a population deeply disenchanted with the political parties, the democratic regress, therefore, provides a reason to worry. Although passed by a majority of the votes, Saied's referendum does not appear to be actively supported by a majority of Tunisians which raises questions of democratic legitimacy.

However, it is not the only issue to worry about. Tunisia's plunging economy is risking default which heavily impacts the lives of its citizens, many of which are on the brink of poverty. Meanwhile, Saied has not yet introduced an economic agenda to tackle the economic problems of the country. Instead, he has relied on money from Western donor states and a prospective IMF deal. By doing so, Saied repeats the mistakes of former administrations since the Arab Spring that prioritised changes to the political system over improvements in living standards.

Furthermore, the developments in recent months have also begun to trigger diplomatic tensions, mostly between Tunisia and the USA which denounces Tunisia's consolidating one-man show. Saied's power grab has brought international criticism to the arena signalling disapproval and potential sanctioning of his actions.

The mix of democratic setback, economic aggravation, and diplomatic alienation has created a suspense-packed situation in which a disunited, but dissatisfied opposition faces a president who appears more powerful than his public support let assume. These tensions are likely to escalate into unrest soon. For the sake of consolidation of his newly formed authoritarian regime, Saied is most likely going to answer these by force. Worryingly, the opposition has not been able to stop the onset of renewed authoritarianism in the country. A respective consolidation of it will only hamper the opposition's capabilities to act.

Tunisia's opposition, therefore, faces not only the growing authoritarian power of the country's president but also a loss of trust and confidence by the population due to the political class not having been able to take up responsibility in the past and deliver on popular grievances. Hence, stopping Saied's authoritarian state-building involves a broader overhaul of oppositional structures, including leadership personnel and revised party manifestos, to regain citizens' trust.

With its authoritarian path, Tunisia presents a symbol to the Middle East. While it once used to celebrate a democratic success story in the wake of the Arab Spring, Tunisia now runs the risk of becoming yet another case study to exhibit the authoritarian resilience and the weakness of democracy in the region. The symbolic power of failing democracy, therefore, extends beyond Tunisia's border, maybe even beyond the whole region signalling a surge of authoritarianism. Considering the general instability of authoritarian regimes, Saied risks Tunisia's failure in the long-term if not soon.

Meanwhile, Tunisia's Western partners find themselves confronted with the decision to navigate between a tough Biden doctrine and the use of foreign policy tools, potentially beyond diplomatic reprimand, and support for Tunisia's crippling economy. However, withdrawing European assistance is no real option as it would bowdlerise the main pillar of Tunisia's shaky groundwork of social cohesion and could catalyse the development of the described worst-case scenario.

In such complex circumstances, the West should stick to its principles and remind Saied of the value of democracy and democratic freedoms. Support for the democratic transition in Tunisia should be upheld, also for the sake of elevating the living conditions of ordinary Tunisians. Such support goes hand in hand with the prospective IMF deal for which Tunisia's partners could urge Saied to open room for public debate, prospectively reaching

the conditions potentially asked for by the IMF. Step by step, such a tactic of depicting improvements could help Tunisia to return to democracy.

In tandem with abovementioned approach, support to civil society and its freedom to express its thoughts and feelings, and to organize itself to take collective action gains extreme importance. Moreover, support to free media to allow public's reach to independent and impartial reporting and analysis is equally important.

The situation requires continuous observation. The implementation of the prospective IMF deal or the upcoming parliamentary elections on December 17, 2022, President Saïed's subsequent moves regarding freedom of speech and media, and judiciary are developments to look out for in this regard.

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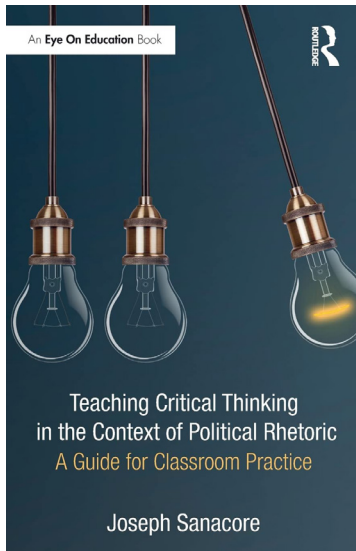
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Book Review: Teaching Critical Thinking in the Context of Political Rhetoric: A Guide for Classroom Practice (Joseph Sanacore¹)



Samet Coban²

"Read not to contradict and refute; nor to believe and take for granted; nor to find talk and discourse; but to weigh and consider. Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested: that is, some books are to be read only in parts, others to be read, but not curiously, and some few to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention."

The Essays, Francis Bacon (1597)

In the last two decades, we witnessed a revolution in communication technologies, the rise of artificial intelligence (and related technologies such as big data, cloud computing, etc.), and the emergence of social media as an alternative to mainstream media. Never before has reaching information been that easy in the history of humankind. For example, as of 1 February 2023, Wikipedia has 6,611,028 English articles (the overall number of articles in all languages is 57,444,507). The number of social media users (creating content and/or consuming information) was 4.59 billion in 2022. This phenomenon is defined as

"blitz of information" or "knowledge explosion" by Joseph Sanacore, and the need to help "students who are struggling to distinguish true, fake, and terribly biased information, especially regarding political issues" is the starting point of this valuable book.

The goal of the author is to show the ends, ways, and means to the teachers who are responsible for guiding students in analyzing, synthesizing, applying, evaluating, and problem-solving skills (also called higher interactive thinking skills - HITS, alternatively higher-order thinking skills - HOTS) so that students can become "independent thinkers" or "critical thinkers." Moreover, the author takes it as a major responsibility to support critical thinking as an essential service in favor of the common good.

The author well articulates the need to teach critical thinking by referring to relevant literature and using examples from daily life challenges.

In promoting the (teaching) of critical thinking, the author argues that reflexively teaching critical thinking is way more effective than teaching it generically. To this end, he offers some valuable strategies and related activities and tools for teachers to ensure the transfer of learning and take into account the increasingly multimodal nature of literacy rather than didactic approaches. Special attention is given to vocabulary development, independent reading, creativity, problem-solving, humor, and propaganda tools and their use in teaching critical thinking.

A recently launched EU-funded project IMMUNE 2 INFODEMIC aims to immunize EU citizens against disinformation and misinformation on selected themes by empowering and equipping them with several methods using eye-catching material and easy-to-use tools. The project consortium formulates and co-produces 3 instruments (vaccines): digital literacy, media literacy, and critical thinking, and applies these instruments to 3 selected hot themes (boosters): elections, COVID-19, and migration. Vulnerable citizens/residents having limited/no knowledge about mis/disinformation activities but using social media extensively, the youth generation (18-25 y), and also seniors (+65 y) will be targeted. Resources like this study provide a sound practical base for meeting project objectives.

Endnotes

1 Dr. Joseph Sanacore is a journalist, researcher, and professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning at the Post Campus of Long Island University, Brookville, NY.

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