
The End of Europe: Dictators, Demagogues, and the Coming Dark Age

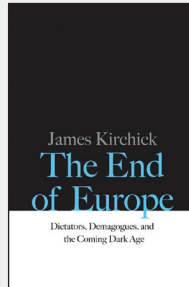
By James Kirchick

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In an era of returning great power competition, the rise of authoritarianism, and pervasive democratic backsliding, James Kirchick's *The End of Europe: Dictators, Demagogues, and the Coming Dark Age* is a timely work that comprehensively surveys the dilemmas of contemporary European politics. In his pessimistic assessment of the current crises emanating from political, social, economic, and geopolitical considerations, Kirchick laments that the European continent is losing its ideals and values, a process only exacerbated by the increasingly isolationist course of the United States and the omnipresence of Russia's subversive activities.

Kirchick's study is comprised of eight cases, ranging from Hungary and France to Ukraine and Greece, Germany, and Britain. In each chapter, the author discusses an emerging national phenomenon with ramifications that extend well beyond national boundaries. Due to the different sociopolitical, economic, and geopolitical discussions in each chapter, the book's content is difficult to sort out at times. Still, it can be classified into two themes: domestic challenges and external dangers. While the author counts democratic backsliding, disenchantment with liberalism, economic stagnation, and societal tensions as domestic challenges, throughout the book he underscores the increasingly isolationist and neutralist courses taken by major states such



as the United States, Britain, and Germany. External dangers consist of Russian aggression and the mass flow of refugees to Europe, which further jeopardizes the fragile social cohesion of European societies that have already failed to 'assimilate' Muslims.

The first domestic challenge to tackle is the incessant rise of populist political parties throughout Europe, which have already come to power in Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. Furthermore, populist political figures are increasingly gaining power and consolidating support elsewhere in Europe, such as Britain, France, Germany, and Sweden. All these actors share common policy preferences that carry the potential to significantly transform European domestic and foreign policy. Kirchick argues that these actors embrace anti-European and anti-American policies while appeasing and even sometimes admiring Russian behavior. Estranged from liberal democracy, these movements adopt populist and authoritarian discourse, lambasting European elites and institutions.

The second domestic challenge, Kirchick argues, is societal tension, particularly in France and Germany. Kirchick contends that at the root of the problems in these countries lies migration. In France, he states that terrorist attacks deliberately target the Jewish popu-

lation on the grounds that it is an extension of the state of Israel. In Germany, Kirchick discusses the rapid increase in sexual assaults after the mass refugee influx due to the civil war in Syria. Kirchick asserts that the Arab Muslim population is the primary actor that perpetrated these acts. He claims that male-dominant Arab culture and anti-Semitism are the fundamental causes that drive these people to terrorist attacks and sexual assaults. At the same time, he criticizes European governments for downplaying the issue, probably due to concerns about xenophobia and Islamophobic backlash. The bar of political correctness is so high that even a narrow space for debate does not exist regarding the problems related to the Muslim population, he asserts.

The third domestic challenge is economic stagnation. However, Kirchick only delineates the issue in the case of Greece. Kirchick blames Greeks for their mismanagement of the economy, despite the EU's generous financial packages. He argues that the Greek economic crisis is not truly economic but political, caused by Greek leaders' inefficient governance, which suffers from rentier and patronage practices. While Greek leaders rebuke EU institutions, creditors, and foreign investors, Kirchick argues that Greece's ability to create sources of revenue is not keeping pace with its extravagant public spending.

In terms of external challenges, Kirchick suggests that Russia is the first and foremost danger to European cohesion and security, and Europe's long-standing partnership with the United States. He argues that Russia's main objective is to drive a wedge between Europe and the United States by meddling in the internal affairs of European countries and creating instability in Eastern Europe. Informed by Chief of General Staff Valery Gerasimov's

doctrine, Russia widely conducts subterfuge, disinformation campaigns, or influence operations to undermine liberal parties and advance the causes of far-right movements by sponsoring them. Similarly, Russia uses ethnic minority Russians in its neighborhood as a pretext to intervene and invade countries that reject Russian influence and embrace integration with the West, which was the case in Georgia and Ukraine. Furthermore, Russia champions traditional values regarding sex relations, family, and religion while denigrating contemporary Europe's record on these issues to bolster European far-right movements.

Kirchick's study suffers from two major flaws. First is the lack of a systematic attempt to investigate the structural causes of the problems Europe faces today. While Kirchick consistently underlines that Europe and the United States are inseparable, he does not sufficiently appreciate the historical role the U.S. played in Europe's rapid post-war recovery under the U.S. security umbrella in the bipolar international system. One can argue that German unification and the dissolution of the Soviet Union changed the international system and transformed alliance politics and that U.S. security guarantees as well as the NATO alliance became obsolete. Yet it became clear in the early 1990s when conflicts emerged in the Balkans that Europe was not able to develop and implement a common response to significant international affairs without the United States. Recently, despite U.S. pressure to increase defense spending and military readiness, European states still mostly benefit from U.S. security guarantees and military presence. Hence, Kirchick overstates the importance of the continent of Europe but understates the structural problems between the U.S. and the European states while overlooking the multifaceted implica-

tions of the rise of China on the international stage which is significantly changing American priorities.

Second, causal relations in the text are ambiguous and difficult to understand. Although in the introductory chapter Kirchick argues that internal challenges are more important than external ones for the decline of Europe, in the following chapters he consistently emphasizes widespread Russian influence and how pro-Russian politicians are seizing ground and increasing their popularity. He provides examples of the problems with Muslim minorities to demonstrate the rising popularity of far-right parties among the populous but discusses different socio-political and geopolitical issues elsewhere to trace origins of the same problem. Hence, so many factors

are put into the analysis, ranging from German defense policy naivete and emboldened Russian foreign policy, to Greek economic mismanagement and Jewish alienation, that it is daunting to comprehend causal relations throughout the book.

The End of Europe provides the reader with a comprehensive summary of several crises Europe faces today from democratic backsliding to widespread Russian influence. Although Kirchick's book does not delve into the origins of the problems and overlooks structural factors, it is a valuable contribution to the literature, as the author points to the European states' mishandlings of various domestic and foreign policies, as well as the newest ways and means of Russia's dubious international behavior.

