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## 'The refugee crisis was Europe's September 11th. But it has given the EU a chance to reinvent itself'

Europe changes basic nature and self-perception in those years where universal values are on return, the majority feel threatened by minorities, and Europe's inner tensions emerge. A breakdown can be the consequence of an EU that overlooks the Eastern European perspective, not least in the refugee issue, warns the leading EU commentator Ivan Krastev behind the book 'After Europe'



The gap between east and west in Europe is still high - and it is particularly expressed when talking about and finding solutions to the refugee crisis, European thinker Ivan Krastev believes.

□ Sigrid Nygaard

□ 4 December 2017

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"The situation in the EU is critical - nobody can talk about it. But precisely why we need to talk more about Europe and recognize that there are many different perspectives, also from eastern Europe. "

Bulgarian Ivan Krastev has just begun, but still keeps a rare and short break in his speech stream. As a leading Eastern European Europeist and leader of the *Center for Liberal Strategies* in Sofia, he has taken the time to explain the European drama, which he described in the book *After Europe* , which has just been published in Danish.

"I do not want to write Europe's demise in my book. But I point out that we take Europe for granted and only have integration strategies, but no resolution strategies. Unfortunately, we humans have a need to see historical developments as something linear, "says Ivan Krastev in his exquisite English with clear Bulgarian accent.

"That's probably the reason why suddenly, a breach of voting after Brexit and the choice of Trump ruled that, as a result, the EU's retention is no longer a goal in US foreign policy. Since then, the atmosphere in Europe has largely changed with each national vote - for example, here in Austria, "says Krastev, who is currently living in Vienna, where he regularly teaches at the *Institute for Human Sciences* .

## Europe's September 11th

While the economic perspective and the euro crisis still fade into the Western European debate, Eastern Europe is only one crucial EU issue, says 52-year-old Krastev: refugee crisis.

"I see the refugee crisis as the most crucial political crisis in the history of the EU. The refugee crisis is for Europe, what September 11, 2001 was for the United States. It has been a *game changer* that has greatly changed our self-perception and our view of universal values and has transformed open borders from a promise of freedom to a threat - even though Europe has received significantly fewer refugees than for example . Turkey alone. '



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The refugee crisis has changed throughout Europe, but Krastev takes its starting point in the east. With his insistence that Western Europe should see the Eastern European perspective, he will not defend neither opposition to redistribution of refugees nor the authoritarian and illiberal tendencies, but just describe them. For Europeans, in his eyes, he seems blind to the depths of the differences between the two worlds.

"The Eastern Europeans make up a significant part of the Union and now have other experience horizons and biographies related to the Eastern Bloc and its dissolution," says Krastev.



The coast of the Greek island of Lesbos, to which thousands of refugees arrived in 2015.

□ Ulrik Hasemann



The refugee camp Jungle in northern France was crowded in 2016, while many were waiting for an opportunity to move on to Britain.  
 □ Ulrik Hasemann

One aspect is ethnic homogeneity.

"If we take a country like Poland, one third of the Polish population up to World War II did not consist of ethnic Poles, but for example, Germans, Ukrainians, Jews, etc., while Poland has been very ethnically homogeneous since the post-war period. Multiculturalism is associated with the Middle War, which ended so fatal - multiculturalism is seen as a security risk. Historically, the eastern countries are not a nationalist ghost, like Western Europe, but in relation to internationalism, we are reversed negatively by the Eastern Communist language of the international community," says Ivan Krastev.

He also emphasizes that the East countries do not have the same postcolonial accounts to make up with as the West, neither practical nor moral.

"Finally, Eastern Europe has been characterized by mass immigration to the west for the last 25 years - a time that has given the individual huge opportunities, but not left us with any collective identity-giving success."

In this brain drain and disappointment over the long way to Western European living standards, a demographic paradox has emerged, Krastev believes. In Bulgaria, population wars have caused anxiety for Bulgarian culture and Bulgarian language to be under pressure. So, even if the country needs immigration, aging and demographic decline have led to foreclosure and protection. At the same time, the population no longer sees the EU and the Union's institutions as something to protect against the national institutions.

"After the refugee crisis, many have thought that the national governments may be corrupt, but they do not fail our identity. Here too, there has been a strong shift."

### Major revolt

For the whole of Europe in the east as in the west, Ivan Krastev experiences the populist wave what he denotes as "the rebellion of the majority". The national majority feel threatened with their identity and begin to question universal rights and conventions - and minority rights. At the same time, they almost question the conspiracy theorists question the political and intellectual elites who defend these minorities.

"It's no longer radical to talk about the people in person, as something to be taken care of," says Ivan Krastev.

"Many liberal voices, especially from the left, compare the present to the 1930s and see it as fascist flows. I look at parallels to the breakdowns of Western democracies from 1968 onwards, with strong political protests that had their emancipatory roots in individual rights and minorities' rights - ethnic, sexual, religious, etc.," says Ivan Krastev.

"Now a reversed sign returns in almost all of Europe, where the majority rebel and does not feel serious. They claim that there are more than the sum of minorities with them and their interests, and they create new naturalism concepts about nationalism."

For Ivan Krastev, these anti-liberal flows are not only a threat to minorities. In Poland and Hungary, one can observe how critical votes from the opposition can be removed as a potential conspiracy against the nation.

### European province

Parallel with the rebellion of the majority, there is a historic breakthrough in the European perception of universal rights, Krastev believes.

"In the refugee crisis, Europeans began to question which standards apply to who and discourse about human rights dissolve slowly. Here, one must say that, for example, the 1951 Refugee Convention was created in a world that looked different. It was a collapse without global communication, where the big current went from the Eastern Bloc to Western Europe. In the ideological struggle it was a moral obligation that abstracted from the state's possibilities," he says.



Up to 60,000 Poles participated in the nationalist demonstration on Poland's national day on November 11th. Here there were slogans that recalled the 30's.  
 Dutch Height

Today, the issue of refugees is far-fetched and made a debate about speech, state capacity and integrity, where the West European middle class wants to protect its present life and society, Krastev believes.

"Europe gradually recognizes that we are a province in a big world, that in a generation we only represent five or seven per cent. of the world's population. We also discover that universal rights may be linked to power that they are something that applies to rich and free communities. "

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In this sense, the refugee crisis has made Europeans defensive, and in that context the title *after Europe can* also be read. A decade ago, Europeans still believed that they could change Russia and Turkey, for example, by virtue of universal rights. Today, the message even from pro-European speakers like Emmanuel Macron sounds that we should at least maintain these standards internally and with all the power to ensure that the others do not change, Krastev believes.

"Globalization no longer contains any hoped hope, but virtually only anxiety fantasies about control loss. Not only from the right but also from the post-Marxist left wing whose internationalist self-perception is broken up in fear of whether we can protect our work. "

#### Pedagogy-free populism

With all this underpinning of globalization anxiety, Ivan Krastev is no longer surprised at "anti-globalist revolutions" such as Trump and Brexit - and the belief in globalization and free trade as win-win is on retreat in Europe. Therefore, according to Krastev, we will also see more protectionism from the EU side.

"The populists say it's a zero-zero game. We have to close the limits. But protectionism and anti-globalization also have winners and losers, and I'm afraid that many losers of globalization will also become losers of anti-globalization. Protectionism and border closure will cause even greater pressure to increase digitization and automation - for purely demographic and wage-related reasons when less labor comes from outside. "

Almost regardless of the pace, the upsurge in production through digitalization will be quite dramatic, Krastev believes. Compared with the development of financial capitalism, it will require completely new answers to the distribution of both goods and power in society, but the Bulgarians are obviously not impressed with the fierce answers given today.



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»From both the right and left the reactions are nostalgic. They will stop time and look backwards. There is a big difference between today's European populism and past populist flows. None of these parties have an educational project, they will not improve or promote anything in man," says Krastev.

"The communist, socialist, fascist or even Christian-democratic currents would change and shape man. The populists today treat humans exactly as the market treats them. The customer is always right. The voter is always right. We just want to serve you."

At the same time, populist policy deals with "the victory of intensity over consistency". Or, in other words, cheat on whether our policy is connected, it just feels wild.

"The best way to take these parties is to make them part of the boring political life. It is at risk that some of their policies can break through and that some of the populists land in the office," says Krastev.



French Macron is a breakthrough in Europe because he is speaking the union, says Ivan Krastev.  
 Christian Liewig

But the opposite is more dangerous, says the Bulgarians.

"If we isolate the populists, they grow up in protest and return one day as a majority rule with the brutal majority logic we see in Poland. Therefore, I am actually no longer worried about what is happening in Austria with the ÖVP in the government than what happens in Germany where the populist wing parts are put right outside the door."

### After Europe

With British Brexit reluctance, German paralysis, Italian crisis and an authoritarian Polish line, it is among the major EU countries currently, only France, which has a relatively clear European direction. Here Macron delivers the most spectacular populist wave, says Ivan Krastev.

"As the first, Macron appeals to anti-elite feelings and at the same time to pro-European feelings. It has indeed been a turning point, albeit only in Western Europe. I'm skeptical about how far his reform project carries, but it has created a new breath."

After the formation of the government, Germany will probably also move, according to the Bulgarian. Despite the title *After Europe*, he does not like to give way to detailed glass spells forecasts, but it is no secret that, especially after the refugee crisis, he is a pessimist on behalf of a pressured Europe. He does not see a collapse, however, as when the communist regimes collapsed a generation ago.

On the contrary, the core countries - especially Germany and France - can further foster and integrate their strong economies to be fatal to the Union in its present form. For both economical, demographic and more symbolic reasons, it may force a large number of countries in the periphery to try to create stronger protectionism and thus link themselves to the open economies and borders, says Ivan Krastev.

"The issue of integration always comes into being. When Macron talks about the European Union, he actually believes the western eurozone," he says.

"If all efforts to create more solidarity concern only the euro zone, the periphery, especially in the east, will react strongly because it can challenge them even more economically, demographically, safely. It should be remembered that what resembles European integration in Paris or Berlin may well resemble disintegration from Sofia or Warsaw."

### atom button

In the midst of pessimism, Krastev is the first to emphasize that Brexit has become a scary example of most other populist flows in Europe, which has lost the appetite of pushing the "EU political nuclear power", as Krastev calls exit polls.

In addition to the split in the refugee crisis, the paradoxical output of the financial and euro crisis is that most Europeans have lost faith in the nation-state's protection of them in a globalized world. Thus, according to Krastev, most European nations have made it clear that there is no alternative to a kind of European Union.

"The union breaks into several parts, it is possible. But there is no one who imagines that we can go back to national economies. Imagine that a small country with an open and successful economy like the Danish should go back in time and create national economic protectionism. It may be possible for the United States or China to try, but in Europe it can only happen at supranational level."

On the bottom line, the only positive thing about the major European crises is that Europeans are forced to deal more with each other - including Eastern Europe. It was precisely Krastev's main motivation to write *after Europe*.

"It is the EU's chance to reinvent itself more in balance with the many populations of the Union," says Ivan Krastev.

"For Europe, I'm closer to a hopeful pessimist than a worried optimist. But Europe has always been an idea for a reality. And the story is not linear, it's open."

Ivan Krastev: After Europe, 124 pages, Information publisher



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