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## Post-Liberal Conservatism and the Nation State

### INTRODUCTION

In late 2022, a remarkable scandal emerged. In the wake of the controversial Qatar World Cup, several EU officials were arrested and charged with corruption and money laundering, most notably European Parliament Vice-President Eva Kaili. Roberta Metsola, President of that same body, used very strong language to condemn what until then were still only allegations and charges – a common trope these days: apparently accusation entails guilt, and virtue signalling goes a long way. Metsola went as far as to say that “European democracy [...] open, free, democratic societies are under attack”.<sup>1</sup> European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen acted along the same lines – not when she referred to the accusations as “very serious”, but when she immediately insisted that a new ethics body be created, to battle these threats. Lest we forget, back in 2019 von der Leyen was not even on the shortlist of nominees when she was elected, a move back then unanimously rejected by the European Parliament under the header.<sup>2</sup>

The irony of the situation was not lost on several democratically elected European leaders who in the aftermath of the Covid pandemic and amidst the ongoing war in Ukraine had been on the EU’s radar for alleged corruption and anti-democratic tendencies. Most notably, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, whose conservative party Fidesz had won the Hungarian elections with an overwhelming majority earlier that year, tweeted a “Good morning to the European Parliament!” – the accompanying image showing

<sup>1</sup> GREGORY 2022.

<sup>2</sup> STONE 2019.

some hearty laughs: “And then they said: The EP is seriously concerned about corruption in Hungary.”<sup>3</sup> Speaking at the World Economic Forum, Polish President Andrzej Duda suggested that “representatives of EU and European institutions should finally stop throwing around the rule-of-law platitudes which, as one can see, do not have much to do with their own actions” and that “[i]nstead of lecturing others, they should start dealing with the rule of law in their own ranks”.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, although both Hungary and Poland have their own share of issues – there is, I believe, rightful concern about the independence of both countries’ judicial institutes – the EU’s own past – and present – is filled with corruption scandals.

Still, the charges of corruption and “illiberal” democracy flow all too easily from Brussels in other directions, in particular to Hungary and Poland. Perhaps it did not help that Orbán, in an address at the 2014 edition of the festival of the Hungarian Right, seemingly directly promoted that idea, “illiberal democracy”.<sup>5</sup> On the left end of the spectrum, hardly anyone tried to understand what the Hungarian prime minister actually meant when he spoke those words – a focus on community, rather than on unbridled individualism – or perhaps, they could not care less: clearly, Orbán had openly declared himself an enemy of liberalism, and thus of democracy, as if the two are the same. Remarkably – or rather, obviously – both Hungary and Poland have in recent times set forth a political course that is at loggerheads with that of the EU. Whereas many other European nations have more or less given up any pretensions to that description – nation – Poland and Hungary, but also the United Kingdom, instead strive for a strongly defined, and often shared idea of what constitutes their national identity. Indeed, if anything, these nations do no share in the general Western “malaise” that Roger Scruton termed *oikophobia*:

[This] peculiar frame of mind that has arisen throughout the Western world since the second world war, and which is particularly prevalent among the intellectual and political élites [...]

<sup>3</sup> ORBÁN 2022.

<sup>4</sup> First News 2023.

<sup>5</sup> SZILVAY 2022.

its symptoms are instantly recognised: namely, the disposition, in any conflict, to side with “them” against “us”, and the felt need to denigrate the customs, culture and institutions that are identifiably “ours”.<sup>6</sup>

This expresses itself on several fronts, but not necessarily the ones that come to mind first, such as immigration or minority rights. For example, while the UK has adopted strong immigration laws, both Poland and Hungary have accepted hundreds of thousands of immigrants over the past year, primarily Ukrainian refugees. Poland and Hungary have taken a highly critical approach towards LGBTQ rights, whereas regarding these the UK is as liberal as most other parts of Europe.

What Hungary, Poland and the UK share, is a sense of preservation of national identity against what is perceived and sometimes directly expressed as European hegemony. Indeed, back in 1988 when the British Conservative Party was still a conservative party and the EU still the European Economic Community, then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher expressed concern for a Europe that would erase all sense of national identity. Extolling Britain’s contributions to Europe, she began listing its virtues by stating that “[o]ver the centuries we have fought to prevent Europe from falling under the dominance of a single power”. Expressing how Europe should never be an end in itself, she stated several guiding principles how to continue the project of European cooperation by maintaining strong national identities: “Europe will be stronger precisely because it has France as France, Spain as Spain, Britain as Britain, each with its own customs, traditions and identity. It would be folly to try to fit them into some sort of identikit European personality.”<sup>7</sup>

It is exactly that “identikit European personality” several European nations feel forced down their throats today. Had that personality be more alike to their national identity, it might have been perceived differently and considered more palatable. Yet to many former Eastern Bloc countries and their citizens, Europe’s über-liberalism, combined with the forceful approach with which

<sup>6</sup> SCRUTON 2006: 36.

<sup>7</sup> THATCHER 1988.

the EU promotes, or rather, dictates, its identikit, all too eerily resembles the authoritarian life behind the Iron Curtain.<sup>8</sup> These are peoples who, in the words of Thatcher, “once enjoyed a full share of European culture, freedom and identity” but “have been cut off from their roots” and in the process of rediscovering these roots find in the EU a persistent weed trying to subdue that original culture once again. Obviously, not all former Eastern Bloc countries perceive EU identity that way. Many revel in what they consider their full share of European culture, freedom and identity, as per Thatcher’s words. But others consider that the culture, freedom and identity on offer by the EU today are very different from those described by Thatcher in 1988.

In this chapter, I argue that the revival of the nation state, exemplified in theory by political philosophers worldwide, and, more importantly, in practice by Hungary and Poland, is a direct response to what theorists like Francis Fukuyama perceive as the excesses of liberalism, others like Patrick Deneen as its inherent – and fatal – consequences.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the “New Right” conservatism of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan during the 1980s, attempting to fuse cultural conservatism with market liberalism, must be considered as deeply flawed. Little cultural conservatism is left in the American Republican Party and in the British Conservative Party today, who have given in to what Fred Dallmayr describes as “the derailment of liberalism and liberty into radical individualism and self-centredness”.<sup>10</sup>

Yet where authors like Fukuyama and Dallmayr consider post-liberalism as repairing liberalism’s defects, some are willing to dig deep into their national histories to revive a conservatism long since forgotten or abandoned by others. Proponents of strong nation states consider liberalism a threat, both culturally and politically, that must be battled by a re-emphasis on exactly the conservative ideals it so opposes. In its cultural guise, liberalism is considered to erode

<sup>8</sup> Similar sentiments are found in the USA regarding the left-wing bulwark over the past decades erected by the Democratic Party, most of academia and many nationwide corporations; see e.g. the many interviews recorded in DREHER 2020.

<sup>9</sup> FUKUYAMA 2022; DENEEN 2018; 2023.

<sup>10</sup> DALLMAYR 2019: 2.

traditional institutions such as marriage, the family, the Christian religion. In its political guise, liberalism's "globalist" ideals are perceived as authoritarian, imperialist, paradoxically leading to less freedom, despite its name – and thus the nation state re-emerges, providing ways for its peoples to live freely in a post-liberal conservative society.

### POST... LIBERALISM?

But what exactly is post-liberalism? As with most modern concepts, no single definition exists, and there is surprisingly little literature discussing the exact term. Even the term itself might be misleading, for example when compared to that most famous of posts, post-modernism. Post-modernism clearly distances itself from modernism by rejecting the latter's claims to absolute truths, and generally maintaining a certain philosophical scepticism towards the latter's grand narratives. Not so much with post-liberalism, whose interlocutors – because we cannot speak of "post-liberals" – cover a spectrum ranging from, for want of a better word, anti-liberal, to clearly pro-liberal.

John Gray, in the revised introduction to his *Post-Liberalism*, summarises his concept of post-liberalism as a "post-Enlightenment, pluralist view", arguing that the Enlightenment project ended in a failure, that it was self-undermining, and that we need something different entirely:

Pluralism is a response to the diversity of incommensurable values and perspectives that is a peculiarly prominent feature of early post-modernity. It relinquishes the universalist ambitions of the Enlightenment project and of liberal theory, and maintains that the terms of a peaceful coexistence must be worked out locally and in practice, vary considerably along with cultural and historical contexts, and will only sometimes encompass the construction of liberal institutions [...]. There can be no return to tradition as a solution for our ills.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> GRAY 1996 [1993]: ix.

In what way the pluralism Gray discusses is any different from Thatcher's "identikit" is unclear, but it is very clear that with the statement with which the quote ends – "there can be no return to tradition" – Gray directly referred to conservatism. The impossibility thereof he worked out in more detail in his *Enlightenments' Wake* of 1995. The latter volume's criticism of the Enlightenment, Gray argued, was:

[A]mong other things [...] a critique of conservatism. It suggests that the historical space in which a coherent form of conservative political practice could occur no longer exists in most Western countries: it has been destroyed by New Right policies whose effect has been to accelerate and deepen all the forces in late modernity which weaken its ties with its past.

It is a sentiment Gray would echo in yet another revised preface, this time of the 2007 edition of *Enlightenment's Wake*, where he stated that there is "no historical possibility [...] of a return to traditional conservatism".<sup>12</sup> The New Right policies Gray so much lamented obviously prioritised market liberalism, and though they might have paid lip service to social conservatism, in the wake of the often unbridled capitalism they promoted little of that survived in actuality. But although Gray's diagnosis of the underlying pathology might have been spot on, his historical pessimism regarding conservatism seems to be ill-founded. To exclude any "historical possibility" of a return to traditional conservatism at best underestimates the strength of that traditional conservatism; at worst, it is simply bad historiography.

Perhaps we ought to give it to John Gray that already in the 1990s he perceived how deeply the ideals of the Enlightenment had taken root in Western society, and how these ideals subsequently turned out as aberrations. Today, even Francis Fukuyama, one of liberalism's staunchest defenders, has realised that not all is well at the liberal front. From his vantage point, though, there is nothing wrong with liberalism itself, but rather with what (economic)

<sup>12</sup> GRAY 2007 [1995]: viii.

liberalism “evolved into”, that is, neoliberalism. “It is this [economic] inequality [between wealthy elites and ordinary people] that is at the core of the progressive case against liberalism and the capitalist system with which it is associated”, Fukuyama argues in his latest, *Liberalism and its Discontents*, effortlessly alternating between various ill-defined concepts of liberalism. Strangely, Fukuyama seems to consider “evolution” as something unnatural: clearly, neo-liberalism has nothing to do with what liberalism is *really*, but is rather the result of artificial tampering with its nature.

Others are less keen on believing that liberalism is inherently good. The Polish philosopher and MEP Ryszard Legutko is very clear on the matter:

[L]iberalism, as a specific political doctrine, has coalesced into liberalism as a super-theory that has enforced itself on modern society as the best regulator of human diversity. All attempts to deprive liberalism of its imperial bent [...] have failed. It does not matter, whether liberalism follows Rawls’s social democratic model, if it is more market-oriented, or even anarcho-libertarian. In each version, the problem remains the same.<sup>13</sup>

The problem that Legutko refers to, is that liberalism ultimately leads to suffocation: “The liberal order requires social engineering to be implemented and this, in turn, means not only restructuring society but marginalizing those who oppose the process.”<sup>14</sup> There is a clear tension between liberalism and egalitarianism, the two political projects that emerged in the Enlightenment and in the Romantic period. Yet the two central values these projects promote are mutually exclusive. As Andreas Kinneging put it, following Alexis de Tocqueville:

The large-scale and structural pursuit of equality unavoidable and *linea recta* leads to tyranny and repression [...]. Indeed, the strife for equality demands ever more centralisation of ever more power with government, ever more government regulations and ever more government supervision and enforcement, thus diminishing the sphere of freedom until

<sup>13</sup> LEGUTKO 2021: 170.

<sup>14</sup> LEGUTKO 2021: 171.

in the end she disappears completely [...]. Those who are too passionate about equality contribute to the establishment of slavery.<sup>15</sup>

Patrick Deneen, in his *Why Liberalism Failed*, argues that liberalism's aberrations are not the result of liberalism *gone wrong*, but instead the result of liberalism *as such*. "Liberalism has failed – not because it fell short, but because it was true to itself. It has failed because it has succeeded."<sup>16</sup> According to Deneen, the Enlightenment project – to use Gray's term – was destined to fail from its conception, carrying the seeds of its own destruction deep within. Instead of providing liberty, liberalism undermines freedom. Indeed, Deneen ends his insightful analysis with the following:

What we need today are practices fostered in local settings, focused on the creation of new and viable cultures, economics grounded in virtuosity within households, and the creation of civic polis life. Not a better theory, but better practices. Such a condition and differing philosophy that it encourage might finally be worthy of the name "liberal". After a five hundred-year philosophical experiment that has now run its course, the way is clear to building anew and better. The greatest proof of human freedom today lies in our ability to imagine, and build, liberty after liberalism.<sup>17</sup>

Deneen thus emphasises practice over theory: building liberty after liberalism. If we are to believe Gray, these new "buildings" by definition cannot be conservative, or at least not conservatism as it once was. But then again Gray is reasoning from theory, based on very unclear premises and with as little empirical evidence as Hobbes and Locke had with their ideas of man and the state.

<sup>15</sup> KINNEGING 2020: 559. Translation by the author.

<sup>16</sup> DENEEN 2018: 27.

<sup>17</sup> DENEEN 2018: 197–198.



### “MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL”

Having discussed post-liberalism in its many interpretations and guises, all of them theoretical, let us turn our gaze towards post-liberal conservatism in theory and practice. First, let me state the obvious: post-liberal conservatism is conservatism looking within, rather than without. One of the major reasons why liberalism was allowed to derail modern society to the extent it has today – whether the flaw is in liberalism itself or its excesses – is because conservatism critiqued it with its mouth yet embraced it with its heart. Many modern day so-called conservatives are deeply liberal at heart, and not just in the economic sphere. Core ideas of liberalism, most notably its focus on an unbridled individualism, are so alluring that entire parties have fallen for it hook, line and sinker. Indeed, there is a rot at the heart of many modern day conservative movements. Frequently, it is disguised by the use of obscurantist terms that belie their true meaning. Frank Meyer, the founding father of American fusionism – one such term – honestly believed that “the rigid positions of doctrinaire traditionalists and doctrinaire libertarians were both distortions of the same fundamental tradition and could be reconciled and assimilated in the central consensus of American conservatism”.<sup>18</sup> Even the term “libertarian” as used by Meyer was a neologism, and obscurantist; as its inventor, Leonard Read argued:

There was a word that I always liked; the classical economists used it: liberal. The word liberal really meant, in the classical sense, the liberalization of the individuals from the tyranny of the State. That word was expropriated by our opponents and it has now come to mean liberality with other people's money. The word was taken over. And so I, more than anybody else, was responsible for introducing and publicizing and perhaps making world-wide the word libertarian. I am sorry I ever did it. Why? Because the word libertarian has now been just as much expropriated as the word liberal.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> MEYER 1996: 156.

<sup>19</sup> READ 1975: 12.

Of course, the word “liberal” in the classical sense meant not “the liberalization of the individuals from the tyranny of the State”, as Read put it, but instead the liberalization of the individual’s heart from the tyranny of his passions. To become a free man, in the *artes liberales* tradition, meant to be able to restrain oneself, to be in control of those passions, to not be governed by those passions but instead to govern those passions. Freedom meant constraint, frequently by voluntarily accepting the “tyranny” of the State, or of a certain sets of rules for life, because, paradoxically, only through accepting these boundaries would the individual experience true freedom. Yet this is only paradoxical because of what 21<sup>st</sup> century individuals have come to understand by the term “freedom”: an aberration of its original meaning.

At the same time, this blindness to the liberal rot at its root has led many conservatives to underestimate, or willingly or unwillingly be blind to, liberalism’s true nature. For example, by the mid-1990s when the world was already showing ample signs of liberal decay and John Gray had moved on to post-liberalism, Irving Kristol was still oblivious to what was at stake. Indeed, Kristol truly believed that the identification of one third of Americans as “conservative” as opposed to 17% as “liberal” by 1995 – which he attributed to the influence of Leo Strauss’s writings – showed that “contemporary liberalism [...] its simplistic views of human nature, its utopian social philosophy, its secularist animus against religion [...] [had been brought] into disrepute”.<sup>20</sup> If anything, Kristol’s definition and interpretation of liberalism showed a very shallow understanding of its nature, and a total blindness of how deeply his own brand of Republicanism had been under its influence.

In order to set aside this theoretical discussion and look at the actual practice of recent conservative governments, it appears we must distinguish between conservatism and Conservatism; or rather, between parties and governments that call or consider themselves conservative, and governments that do in fact live up to its standard. Indeed, frequently conservatism and liberalism cannot be separated easily, to the extent that people associate one with the

<sup>20</sup> KRISTOL 1999 [1995]: 380.

other, and for good reasons. One desperately tries to list what it is the UK's Conservative Party has tried to conserve over the past decades, and whilst the Tavistock GIDS clinic has been ordered to close down – finally, long overdue, and, alas, delayed – the Party continues to endorse very liberal economic and socio-cultural policies.<sup>21</sup> In a recent opinion piece, Daniel Pitt argues that out of the “Scrutonian Triptych”, that is, “get married, start a family and set up a business”, the government has scored a single cheer for their bringing down of the employment rate. Unfortunately, when it comes to the other two-thirds, the government has brought down figures that should have gone up, and vice versa: over the past decades marriage rates have lowered, divorce rates have gone up, and fertility rates have gone down again. As Pitt suggests: “It is time for Sunak to realise his priorities by building on solid foundations. It is only by repairing the social fabric more broadly conceived that the Conservatives could earn three cheers.”<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps, when it comes to the Conservative Party being conservative, there is one other major exception: the nation. As badly executed as it was – and the full economic and political consequences are still not clear today – the same Conservative Party initiated the UK's leaving the European Union in 2016. As David Cameron put it in his EU speech of 2013, “there is a growing frustration that the EU is seen as something that is done to people rather than acting on their behalf”, whereas instead, according to Cameron, the EU should always be “a means to an end – prosperity, stability, the anchor of freedom and democracy both within Europe and beyond her shores – not an end in itself”.<sup>23</sup> Echoing Thatcher's Bruges Speech, Cameron strongly argued against the EU's “insistence on a one size fits all approach which implies that all countries want the same level of integration. The fact is that they don't and we shouldn't assert that they do.” Throughout, Cameron emphasised the need for strong, independent nations, working together under the umbrella of the EU on issues of “security and diversity of our

<sup>21</sup> MOSS 2023.

<sup>22</sup> PITT 2023.

<sup>23</sup> CAMERON 2013.

energy supplies [...] climate change and global poverty [...] terrorism and organised crime”, adding, “[t]his vision of flexibility and co-operation is not the same as those who want to build an ever closer political union – but it is just as valid”. Moreover, as Cameron reminded his audience, “power must be able to flow back to member states, not just away from them. This was promised by European leaders at Laeken a decade ago. It was put in the treaty. But the promise has never really been fulfilled. We need to implement this principle properly.” In more than one sense, Brexit was a response to that unfulfilled promise, with the Conservative Party reclaiming, or perhaps, conserving, Britain’s autonomy.

#### POST-LIBERAL CONSERVATISM IN PRACTICE: GOD, HOMELAND, FAMILY

Yet there are other European nations that have gone over and beyond reclaiming autonomy whilst remaining part of the European Union; at least, for now. Most recently, Italy saw a resurgence of conservatism with the newly installed Meloni Government, immediately labelled as fascist and a direct continuation of the Mussolini regime. Why? As the Italian journalist Roberto Saviano puts it: “The Brothers of Italy leader denies she is a fascist but clings to the Mussolini-era slogan ‘God, homeland, family’.”<sup>24</sup> Apparently, what were once perfectly normal political principles for politicians on all sides of the spectrum are now exclusively fascist, making anyone still fighting for these causes, but in particular Giorgia Meloni, “a danger to Italy and the rest of Europe”, as the title of Saviano’s piece has it. Most of the backlash around Meloni was based on a speech from the 2019 World Congress of Families that went viral in September 2022 when the Italian elections were incumbent. Here, Meloni engaged in a frontal attack on the values of modern liberalism:

<sup>24</sup> SAVIANO 2022.

Why is the family an enemy? Why is the family so frightening? There is a single answer to all these questions. Because it defines us. Because it is our identity. Because everything that defines us is now an enemy for those who would like us to no longer have an identity and to simply be perfect consumer slaves. And so they attack national identity, they attack religious identity, they attack gender identity, they attack family identity [...]. We will defend God, country and family.

Moreover, and once more reminiscent of Thatcher's Bruges speech, Meloni directly confronted global financial and economic politics, perhaps with an eye on the World Economic Forum, stating:

I can't define myself as Italian, Christian, woman, mother. No. I must be Citizen X, Gender X, Parent 1, Parent 2. I must be a number [...]. Because when I am only a number, when I no longer have an identity or roots, then I will be the perfect slave at the mercy of financial speculators. The perfect consumer [...]. [But] we do not want to be numbers. We will defend the value of the human being.<sup>25</sup>

How, and to what extent, Meloni will succeed in implementing policies that defend these conservative values remains to be seen, but it is telling that she provided a very similar rhetoric during her campaign, which suggests that these values are indeed shared by her electorate.

Needless to say, most of Meloni's critique went over the heads of the liberals she was referring to, with one *Washington Post* columnist asking, with seemingly authentic bewilderment, "who considers family to be an enemy or frightening, and in what way?"<sup>26</sup> But it is exactly Meloni's insistence on traditional institutions such as the family that makes her an enemy of the left. As Ben Shapiro, the influential *Daily Wire* co-founder put it: "To them, traditional roles are themselves fascist institutions; those who promote such roles suggest that human happiness can't be found in atomistic individualism, supplemented

<sup>25</sup> Illinois Family Institute 2022, quoted from 11:30 onward.

<sup>26</sup> BUMP 2022.

by collective social welfare schemes. And so true freedom requires that those like Meloni be fought.”<sup>27</sup>

Unsurprisingly, although no one disputed the electoral process that saw her become prime minister, Meloni’s critics considered her party Fratelli d’Italia’s rise as undesirable. Delivering a keynote address at Princeton a few days before the Italian elections, Ursula von der Leyen stated that “whatever democratic government is willing to work with us, we’re working together [...]. If things go in a difficult direction, I’ve spoken about Hungary and Poland, we have tools.”<sup>28</sup> Needless to say that this thinly veiled threat, as even mainstream media called it, did not go down well with the involved conservative parties. Von der Leyen’s statement reveals the issues some of the bloc’s member states have with the European Union’s definition – or interpretation – of democracy. Implicit in her remarks is the idea that Meloni’s government, though democratically chosen, either might not be a democratic government, or might need to be coerced via “tools” to cooperate with the EU. And what “tools” she is talking about, is very clear from her reference to Hungary and Poland: infringement procedures, embargoes, and sanctions involving the withholding of funds.

In the end, however, conservatism is not a theory: it is a practice. And if we are to understand what post-liberal conservatism looks like, both Poland and Hungary are prime examples. Both resist, to a certain extent, Europe’s liberal agenda, instead insisting that the EU take seriously the voice of their domestic electorate. Both have been drawing from their own histories, both have been searching for, and attempting to define, their national identity. Both Poland and Hungary are exemplars of a movement that only in recent years has been given a proper name, and indeed a proper theoretical foundation: national conservatism. Yet both would be the first ones to tell us that all they do is hark back to the past.

It is often argued that conservatism was created by Edmund Burke, in response to the atrocities of the French Civil War. Indeed, Burke was one of the first to give voice to the idea of conservatism, but as Yoram Hazony argues,

<sup>27</sup> SHAPIRO 2022.

<sup>28</sup> Reuters 2022.

conservatism is much, much older, dating back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century English Chief Justice and politician John Fortesque and his posthumously published *De Laudibus Legum Angliae* [In Praise of the Laws of England, c. 1543].<sup>29</sup> Fortesque wrote his treatise whilst in exile in France during the Wars of the Roses as an exposition of the English constitution, or rather, as Hazony argues, “a theorist’s explanation of the reasons for regarding the English constitution as the best model of political government known to man”.<sup>30</sup> Here, too, conservative thought is formulated in response to a particular series of events; as such, it is very clear that actual conservatism is much older. Both Fortesque and Burke saw the need to define, and put to paper, their ideas about the state, in response to adversity: the just order had come under attack and needed defending, thus necessitating defining. Yet that does not mean that those ideas did not exist before that; indeed, it argues for the exact opposite. Before Adam Smith launched his *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* in 1776, people had been inquiring into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations for centuries; yet no one had put their thoughts on the matter to paper systematically.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, it should not come as a surprise to see several European countries respond to liberalism by formulating ideas rooted in national history and tradition. In Poland, the national conservative Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) party of Jarosław and Lech Kaczyński first came to power briefly in 2005, and regained their position in 2015. Their party programme immediately makes clear their position towards Europe: “We want the whole of Europe to be a sphere of freedom, equality, solidarity and justice, and we believe that a model of social life based on the values of our tradition, when put into practice, can have a significant impact by setting a good example. However,

<sup>29</sup> HAZONY 2018: 25–26; 2022: 2–7.

<sup>30</sup> HAZONY 2022: 4.

<sup>31</sup> Just one example: as Warden (1696) and then Master (1699–1727) of the Royal Mint, Isaac Newton (1642–1727) developed quite sophisticated theories about the national and global economy, currency rates, precious commodities and the efficiency of production through specialisation, as can be learned from his ample notes on these matters, for which, see <https://newtonandthemint.history.ox.ac.uk>.

we reject any moves aimed at cultural unification.”<sup>32</sup> Yet aside from stating what the party is against, Law and Justice also makes clear what they are *for*:

A sovereign nation state of our own is a key value for us since other values which we consider fundamental cannot be attained without it. A sovereign, democratic, law-abiding state, and an efficient one at the same time, where Polish families can survive and develop. Such a state is feasible provided that we keep developing as a nation, a community of free Poles, a community of Polish families, an economic organism, a political entity and a cultural model.<sup>33</sup>

Note, that at the heart of the Polish nation stands the family, not the individual; this too is post-liberal conservatism in action. As Legutko argues, “[H]uman societies have never been simply collections of self-contained, isolated individuals, but have been perceived as consisting of beings with larger social, historical, ethnic, and religious identities”.<sup>34</sup> According to Hazony, the core social identity of any conservative is again, the family, and not just the so-called nuclear family consisting of parents and their children; no, Hazony advocates for the multi-generational traditional family.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, one of the reasons for discussing Hazony’s work under the practice section, is because his is a theory directly enacted in practice, as the extensive personal chapters at the end of his *Conservatism: A Rediscovery* demonstrate.

It is not just “family” that receives an extensive section in the index to Hazony’s latest; another recurring theme is religion. In Hazony’s personal case, this means the modern orthodox Jewish faith, but in his theorising about the nation state, and its practical implementation of public religion, it is the dominant historical religion of the nation:

Conservative democracy regards biblical religion as the only firm foundation for national independence, justice, and public morals in Western nations. In America and other traditionally

<sup>32</sup> PiS 2014.

<sup>33</sup> PiS 2014.

<sup>34</sup> LEGUTKO 2021: 151.

<sup>35</sup> HAZONY 2022: 207–216.



Christian countries, Christianity should be the basis for public life and strongly reflected in government and other institutions, whenever a majority of the public so desires.<sup>36</sup>

It is this same strong focus on religion we find in Balázs Orbán's *The Hungarian Way of Strategy*. Here, the author, political director and strategic advisor to Viktor Orbán, provides a unique insight into a decade of post-liberal national conservative policy in practice. Rooted in Hungarian history and culture, and full of practical examples, Orbán ends his treatise with a series of principles he labels "the Hungarian Guide", the first and foremost of which is "a conception of mankind based on Christian culture".<sup>37</sup>

It will not come as a surprise to find in the Hungarian Guide other principles found in Hazony, in Law and Justice's party programme, and in the programmes of conservative parties worldwide, such a focus on the family, on the uniqueness of each human individual (contra "Identikit"), on private property and on the importance of the nation state. Apart from certain points particular to Hungary – including a fierce nationalism – what Orbán's work uniquely adds is how these principles have been made operational. It is one thing to say that the family is the cornerstone of society, it is another thing altogether to develop a political strategy based on these values, and act on it. In the Hungarian situation, direct incentives – often financial – are put into place to reward marriage, the creation of large families, home-buying support, active participation in religious groups or other forms of communal activities, and so on. As per 2021, the figures look promising, with Orbán suggesting that, indeed, the proof is in the pudding:

As far as academia goes, after 2010 there was a general professional consensus that the model expounded by the Orbán cabinet, and the measures it proposed, were doomed to failure. Academics, of course, find it easy to pass judgment on that which they do not understand. Only later, as experience grows, does the overall picture become clearer.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> HAZONY 2022: 341.

<sup>37</sup> ORBÁN 2021: 172–173.

<sup>38</sup> ORBÁN 2021: 71.

When in 1990 the European Council assembled in Rome to discuss its plans for what would eventually become the current EU, Margaret Thatcher famously opposed these plans in a statement in the House of Commons that would become known as “No. No. No.”<sup>39</sup> In more than one sense, the UK’s Brexit, Italy’s election of Giorgia Meloni, Poland’s choice for Law and Order, and Viktor Orbán’s premiership are all similar “No. No. No.” responses to the EU’s liberal agenda. At the same time, they are a resounding “Yes. Yes. Yes!” to virtues deemed unsalvable by most “academics”, virtues that turn out to be very much alive in a post-liberal Europe.

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<sup>39</sup> THATCHER 1990.

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