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THE IMPACT OF THE TRUMP EFFECT ON CONSERVATISM

Donald J. Trump, contrary to the expectations of pollsters, the mainstream media, and the vast majority of the political, economic, social and cultural elite, first defeated the 16 other presidential candidates of the Republican Party in the 2016 primaries, and then Hillary R. Clinton, the icon of the Democratic Party – and of liberals – in the November presidential election. His success was attributed by many, both at home and abroad, to a one-off 'fluke', but in the 2020 presidential election, despite the fact that the majority expected a significant defeat for the president and his party, mainly due to the Covid-19 epidemic and the economic difficulties it caused, the 'blue wave' expected by his opponents did not occur. In fact, Donald J. Trump received roughly 10 million more votes than four years earlier, while Republicans in the federal House of Representatives increased their numbers, won more governorships than expected, and a Republican majority emerged in both houses of the state legislatures in roughly half of the states. Only in the federal Senate did the Republican Party fail to maintain its majority, mainly due to the loss of the Georgia senatorial election, primarily as a result of the President's inappropriate tactics. One of the lessons of American history is that, with a few exceptions (such as Grover Cleveland or Richard Nixon), failed presidential candidates were not able to stay at the forefront of politics, but, as the upcoming presidential election in 2024 demonstrates, Donald J. Trump has been able to do so. The former president's hold on the Republican voters is so strong that no serious challenger emerged during the primaries in 2024. It is true that there is a certain number of disgruntled 'Never Trumpers' among the Republicans, but their voice is usually stifled by the MAGA Republicans and those who think that defeating Joe Biden is the paramount goal even if they do not necessarily agree on Trump

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concerning both style and substance. It seems that the immediate future of the Republican Party will be defined by Donald Trump for better or worse.

On the one hand, Donald J. Trump did not emerge from obscurity in 2015–2016 (he had previously run for the Republican Party's presidential nomination), and his decades of media presence had given him a wide profile. On the other hand, practically all the elements of his political program were already known in American political history, even if not in the way Donald J. Trump represented them. His success can be seen as a classic case of being at the 'right place, right time' – in this sense, he is a successful politician, and can even be described as a politician who can be considered a transformational president in the history of the Republican Party. The question of whether he played (and still plays) a similarly crucial role for American conservatism is more controversial. Many have tried to describe his political ideology in many different ways, but it is so amorphous that it cannot be reduced to any political theory category. Perhaps most of all, Donald J. Trump's policy can be described as an ideology-free policy without pragmatic (dogmatic) principles, often self-contradictory, having a kind of 'transactionalism'. However, it also seems clear that Trump's emergence on the stage of big politics, and his undeniable popularity and success with tens of millions of voters, brings Republican Party supporters and conservative-leaning people (the two categories do not necessarily overlap) to a crossroads. The key question for both groups, and for U.S. politics in general, is whether 'Trumpism' will take over within the Republican Party, or whether the more traditional conservative values can regain influence within the party and win mass support for a softer, more middle-of-the-road tendency on the right of the political spectrum against an increasingly leftward shifting Democratic Party, which is also in a struggle between moderates (centrists) and radicals, the so-called progressives. In reality, the two extremes are largely conditional on each other; 'Trumpism' reinforces 'progressives' and vice versa. The 'middle' in U.S. political life seems to be emptying out with the weakening of the traditional, broad middle class, which is their mass base, and which agrees in a broad national consensus. Demographic changes, the overemphasis on group interests, so-called identity politics, extreme ideologies (critical race theory, intersectionalism, 'wokeism', etc.)

that emphasise differences rather than similarities have all shaped the current political life for the worse, which is divided to the extreme, and from which Donald J. Trump's eclectic populism is (was) trying to find a way out. However, the success of the experiment is more than questionable, and, it is also doubtful whether it would benefit the United States and the world as well. In any case, it is fairly safe to say that Trump has raised important but taboo issues in American political life, and expressed a traditional American desire and aspiration for change, albeit often in a way and tone that is unusual in public life. But substance and form should not be confused, which lesson was learned by the liberal side and moderate conservatives the hard way in 2016.

TRUMPISM – POPULISM, ANTI-ELITISM

The policies of Donald J. Trump contain highly eclectic elements. It is difficult to describe it briefly: perhaps demagogic 'populist conservatism' could be used, although both the adjective populist and the noun conservatism are more than problematic because of the different interpretations. Populism, in a very broad sense, is the representation of the 'people' against the 'elites', the *establishment.* The phenomenon, in this sense, is not new in the history of the United States. Grass roots disillusionment and the need to protect the 'little people' against the dominant financial, political and social elites have been reinforced from time to time. Without being exhaustive, one can mention President Andrew Jackson (1829–1837), who, among other things, expanded democracy and strengthened the rights of the states to reduce the dominance of East Coast elites. The People's Party or Populist Party, which emerged around the turn of the 19th century, grew out of a left-wing agrarian movement and, broadly speaking, opposed the financial and corporate elites; it was an era that saw the rise of huge industrial and financial concentration, the rise of the Rockefellers and the Morgans. Then, in the 1930s, in the wake of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, in opposition to large-scale federal programs and increasingly comprehensive central regulation, a number of left populist movements and programs emerged,

from Louisiana Governor Huey Long's *Share Our Wealth* to Father Charles Coughlin's *National Union for Social Justice.* Even the *America First* movement, which called for the neutrality of the United States in the event of war, and included such 'big names' as Charles Lindbergh, can be included in this line. The 'original' *America First* movement and Donald J. Trump's *America First* campaign slogan also touch on another Jacksonian tradition: Walter Russell Mead's typology attributes to the 7th President of the United States the principle of a strong military force but refraining from international military involvement,[1] which President Trump sought to meet by reducing America's military commitments. It should be added here that this approach was in contrast to the traditional American conservative view of U.S. military engagement abroad, especially the so-called neo-conservative position. Finally, and by no means exhaustively, the *Reform Party,* founded by Ross Perot in the 1990s, the better known members of which included Patrick Buchanan, was considered by some paleo-conservative, and Ralph Nader, a leader of the consumer movement, also deserves a mention in this context. What makes this essentially unsuccessful party interesting for the purposes of this essay is that Donald J. Trump was also briefly a member of this party. Perot, and many others before him, including Theodore Roosevelt at one time, were dissatisfied with the bipolar political system and wanted to give a third party alternative to the Democratic and Republican parties. Donald J. Trump's 2016 campaign was built partly on responses to the real problems of the lower middle and working classes without tertiary education, and partly on dissatisfaction with the two major parties. Millions of voters wanted a combative candidate who would take on the *establishment,* who was outspoken, who did not speak the language of the *Beltway* politicians in Washington, which included the so-called RINOs *(Republicans in Name Only)* within the Republican Party, too. By the end of the 2010s, these social groups had become the core voters of the Republican Party: while in the 1990s the majority of white voters without a higher education degree backed Bill Clinton, in 2016 39% more of them voted for Donald J. Trump rather than for Hillary R. Clinton.[2] Anti-Beltway sentiment is not a recent phenomenon:

[1] Mead 2017.

[2] Igielnik et al. 2021.

after the Second World War, a whole series of presidential candidates ran against Washington, the political, economic, social and cultural elite represented by the capital, and the Washington bureaucracy (the deep state): Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, even Barack Obama before Donald J. Trump. After his defeat in November 2020, the former president was considering the formation of a third party for a while, which – if American history teaches us anything – is practically doomed to failure, mainly because the two major parties are umbrella parties or people's parties, and cover the entire political spectrum from the far right to the far left, so a third party has no real room for manoeuvre. (Not to mention the gigantic task of organising and funding a national party.)

Anti-elitism itself has a similarly strong tradition in the United States. In the 20th century, anti-elitism gained momentum during the presidency of Woodrow Wilson. The idea was used by Warren G. Harding with his 'back to normalcy' campaign slogan in 1920, promising the dismantling of the 'big state' built up during the Great War: the abolition of hundreds of federal institutions and the removal of regulatory regimes affecting many areas of life. The New Deal had already irrevocably begun to build the welfare state, which was further expanded by the Democratic Party presidents following Franklin D. Roosevelt; most notably Lyndon B. Johnson's *Great Society* should be mentioned in this respect. The Republican Party practically accepted the new consensus; opponents, such as Robert A. Taft, failed with the concept of restoring the 'small state'. Within the Republican Party, the East Coasters around Nelson Rockefeller took the lead in the 1950s and 1960s, and this Republican elite was strategically very different from the Democratic elite. As a kind of culmination of convergence, George W. Bush gave birth to 'big government conservatism' with his 'compassionate conservatism', and his successor Republican Party presidential candidates John McCain and Mitt Romney also adopted this policy. Increasingly large social groups, especially the agricultural people of the Midwest, the white workers of the Great Lakes states, and the religiously and socially conservative residents of the South, felt that the party leadership no longer represented their views. Donald J. Trump felt this sentiment and won

the support of the vast majority of the 48% of what Hillary C. Clinton, condescendingly, called the 'basket of deplorables'.

The patronising attitude of some of the political elite was complemented by similar attitudes among the media and cultural elite. The immediate beginnings here date back to the 1960s. The leftist-inspired 'counterculture', as well as the conquest of universities and colleges by the theories of the left, Marxism, neo-Marxism, even Maoism (Herbert Marcuse, the French deconstructionists, etc.), the iconification of figures such as Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, Mao Zedong, not only challenged traditional values, but also made those who still believed in the 'American creed', the 'American dream', second-class citizens in the intellectual and spiritual field. In a kind of paradox, the Leninist 'useful idiots' (meaning the intelligentsia) in America began to regard as 'useful idiots' those who believed in the Bible, the political system established by the Founding Fathers, traditional values such as family, homeland, individual morality, and so on. It was this frustration with the university and metropolitan elites that Donald J. Trump was able to capitalise on in 2016 – it is another question how much Trump personally empathised with these people and shared their concerns and disillusionment. But by strongly voicing these sentiments, whether sincerely or not, he forced a choice within conservatives and the Republican Party: on the one hand, the populist conservative tendency was strengthened, and on the other hand, the 'Never Trump' voters, the modern-day Rockefeller Republicans, returned to a political line in which the Republican and Democratic elites were virtually indistinguishable on strategic issues, and as a glaring example of this, such former conservatives as for instance, George F. Will, John Kasich, William Kristol, Max Boot, and the list can be extended at will, voted for Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden.

A recurring criticism of Donald J. Trump is that he divides society, pitting social groups against each other. Presidential candidate Trump indeed made more than objectionable statements about Latin American, especially, Mexican immigrants. Later, as President, he imposed a travel ban from many Muslim countries. That is, he was criticised for mobilising public opinion against ethnic groups. Donald J. Trump is indeed 'guilty' of these accusations, but the fact cannot be ignored that the so-called identity

politics is a left-wing, liberal, above all black feminist, nationalist-inspired idea, defining social groups against each other, which Trump has turned on its head. The success of his policy among a significant group of whites can be traced back to the so-called positive discrimination practices in educational institutions and workplaces that began in the 1960s; and also to the often tragicomic manifestations of political correctness targeting the white population and to the efforts to rewrite history (i.e. read history backwards), as exemplified by, for instance, the *1619 Project* launched by the authors of *The New York Times* and *The New York Times Magazine*. The rewriting of American – and Western – history began at least as early as the 1980s, and its aim was to erode American national identity; it is no coincidence that Donald J. Trump's rhetoric of restoring the 'greatness' of the United States, brought to life by George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, the 'founding fathers' in general, and later such political leaders as Abraham Lincoln, Theodore and Franklin D. Roosevelt and many others – is for the left discriminatory, because it is almost exclusively about 'dead, white, male' people. For the proponents of critical race theory, the history of the U.S. (and, by extension, the West) is about racism, the suppression of minorities by the privileged white people for all intents and purposes, and their goal nowadays is to redress all the real and perceived 'crimes' in all walks of life from politics to culture committed by the dominant social classes in the past. The *Critical Race Theory* (CRT) questions the foundations of the liberal order, including equality, the rule of law, Enlightenment rationalism and the principles of constitutional neutrality. In the words of Kimberlé Crenshaw: "Critical Race Theory draws from a variety of intellectual traditions, including but not limited to poststructuralism, postmodernism, Marxism, feminism, and literary criticism. It also incorporates self-defining discourses such as black nationalism and radical pluralism." She also added: "The normative position within Critical Race Theory is that achieving racial justice necessitates large-scale social transformation."[3]

[3] Hayward 2021.

ECONOMY, CLIMATE CHANGE

The Republican Party's fiscal policy had been determined by the principles of the so-called fiscal conservatives until the 1980s. The main elements incorporated a balanced budget, avoidance of sovereign debt, low federal personal and corporate taxes and deregulation. Other relevant aspects included the 'small' federal state, the reduction of central bureaucracy, and decentralisation (in other words, the strengthening of the local levels of power, as opposed to federal and state levels), partly by leaving more money in the hands of the states and local authorities. The Democratic Party was on the opposite track with the New Deal, which – broadly speaking – strengthened central power and pursued a more redistributive policy through higher taxes. However, fiscal conservatives were marginalised from the 1980s onwards within the Republican Party. During his campaign in 1980, Ronald Reagan used their principles, but as president he betrayed them, so to speak.[4] It is true that he cut taxes and abolished many central regulations that hampered economic activity, but at the same time he kept welfare spending flat, while increasing defence spending. As a result he started a spiral that resulted in the U.S. sovereign debt stock rising to $27 trillion by 2020, or roughly $70,000 per capita (for comparison: in 1990, the debt per capita was around 12 thousand dollars).[5] This meant, among other things, the adoption of the liberal 'big', 'caring' state; under George W. Bush, one could already speak of 'big-state conservatism' in the spirit of the 43rd president's compassionate conservatism. While Donald J. Trump promised a return to traditional fiscal conservatism, this was only reflected in a simplification of the personal tax system and a modest reduction in personal income taxes, a reduction in corporate tax from 35% to 21%, and a relaxation of central regulatory regimes. The size of the federal bureaucracy did not shrink, while the national debt increased by more than four trillion dollars between 2019 and 2020 – mostly due to the economic impact of Covid-19. A return to classical conservative fiscal and economic policies does not seem to be possible, and it would be an achievement on the conservative side if

4 Stockman 1986.

5 Duffin 2021.

they could pass elements of Donald J. Trump's economic policies, such as lower taxes and contributions, job creation, less central regulation and the continuation of decentralisation, which have proven successful in many respects, in contrast to the policy of the leftward-shifting Democratic Party. These latter measures would also politically boost the Republican Party's chances against Democrats, who rely mainly on the East and West coasts and the big cities, while then Republican strongholds can mostly be found in the South, the Midwest and the Rocky Mountain states, where the large segments of the population, especially the working class and lower middle class voters – Hillary Clinton's 'deplorables' – feel being abandoned, even being looked down by the political, social and media elite.

Members of the so-called '68 generation', including Hillary R. Clinton, played into Donald J. Trump's hands during the 2016 presidential election by concentrating on 'culture warrior' issues instead of addressing those who in previous decades had either seen their economic circumstances worsen or, at best, their living standards stagnate, including in the so-called 'rust belt' states. In these former industrial centres in the Northeast and along the Great Lakes, jobs had been disappearing rapidly, mostly due to automation and outsourcing. The predominantly white workers employed in traditional industries (iron and steel, clothing, shoes, etc.) used to be stable Democratic voters; it is no coincidence that it was the Democrats, for example, who were very sceptical of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the 1990s. However, the Obama–Clinton wing of the party put its faith in globalisation, and one of the side-effects of this had been the loss of many jobs in the U.S., largely as a result of competition from East and Southeast Asia. It was with the help of these disillusioned voters that Donald J. Trump won in industrial states such as Ohio, Michigan and Pennsylvania. Here the Republican presidential candidate reversed previous party policies on the issue. The Republican Party used to be supported, as a trend, by Wall Street and big business, and was accordingly in favour of free trade – although in the 1920s Republican presidents introduced high protective tariffs (Fordney–McCumber [1922] and Smoot–Hawley [1930] laws). But Donald J. Trump had clearly promised and delivered a protectionist trade policy. As a key element of this policy, Trump had frozen the Transatlantic

Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), started a kind of trade cold war with China in particular; but also European allies fell 'victim' to this policy. He also renegotiated NAFTA (United States – Mexico – Canada Agreement – USMCA), and thereby created more favourable conditions for American workers and agricultural workers. Job protection then proved to be so politically advantageous that in 2020, his Democratic opponent Joe Biden also committed to protecting American jobs *(American Jobs Plan),*[6] and TTIP and TPP were also excluded from the priorities of the new Democratic administration.

Protectionist trade policies and efforts to repatriate (large) companies had also been pursued by the Trump Administration in the strategic sector of energy policy. The Republican Party has traditionally enjoyed good relations with large companies with interests in the energy sector. However, at the beginning of the 21st century, global warming, climate change and pollution have also become the focus of serious political debate. The political left in both the U.S. and Europe, mainly through so-called green policies (or outright green parties of various names), including effective mass media as well as social media, is putting a lot of pressure on government actors, from reducing carbon emissions to banning polluting substances. The majority of scientists agree that human activity and habits play a major role in climate change, which could have dramatic consequences (melting ice caps at the North and South Poles, resulting in rising ocean and sea levels that could threaten the lives of hundreds of millions of people living along the coasts, etc.). One of the 'apostles' of the fight against climate change, former Democratic Party Vice President Al Gore and his party, especially its so-called progressive (i.e. left) wing in the United States, are pushing the Democratic Party in an increasingly 'green' direction. In contrast, the majority of Republican Party supporters are sceptical that climate change is primarily the result of human activity, although, it should be noted, the preservation of the Earth's ecosystem and environmental protection should be a fundamentally conservative idea.

6 The White House 2021.

Apart from the scientific arguments, the issue has taken on a serious economic and political dimension. The emission guidelines and quotas agreed at the various climate summits do not, of course, apply to all countries. Advanced industrialised societies have accepted – and would accept – greater cuts than countries in the developing category. The latter include China, India and Brazil, among the biggest emitters. At the time of the Kyoto Protocol (1997), a fierce debate broke out in the United States about the advantages and disadvantages of adopting the Protocol. The Clinton Administration ultimately refused to submit the document for congressional ratification due to bipartisan opposition. One of the main objections raised by opponents was that the protocol would give undue advantages to certain countries, China in particular. This argument was then gradually weakened by the rise of the 'progressives' within the Democratic Party, but the majority of the Republican Party insists that Beijing would benefit from similar agreements, most recently the Paris Agreement, in the U.S.–China strategic rivalry. As a logical result of this Donald J. Trump withdrew the United States from the treaty to which the Obama Administration had acceded, while one of Joe Biden's first executive orders was to rejoin the Paris Agreement. In any case, the U.S. energy self-sufficiency, including increased production of natural gas, shale gas and oil, was a key driver behind Trump's action. As part of this, the Republican administration opened up areas previously closed to fossil fuel extraction for environmental reasons, and gave the go-ahead to the Keystone XL pipeline, which was intended to transport gas extracted in Canada to ports in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico and then liquefied natural gas to other countries, including Europe. Indeed, partly through this project, the United States could even have emerged as a seller on the international energy market, with a number of geopolitical implications (including in Central Europe). Another benefit, according to the Trump Administration, would have been to increase U.S. competitiveness – for example vis-à-vis China. However, under pressure from the green lobby within the Democratic Party, Joe Biden withdrew the permit for the pipeline construction from TC Energy Corporation on the first day of his presidency, 20 January 2021. Donald J. Trump sees the move as a weakening of the international position of the United States, and on this issue he is practically on the same platform as

the majority of (neo)conservatives who support a strong and internationally active America. Fossil energy production is also a political issue, as hundreds of thousands of workers are employed in production, transport, refining and distribution, many of them living in key electoral states.

JUSTICE, LAW AND ORDER

Perhaps the most lasting legacy of Donald J. Trump, and one that is also acceptable to conservatives, is the new judges appointed to the various levels of the federal courts (District Courts, Appellate Courts, Supreme Court). In the United States, in the dual court system – federal and state – the President can nominate new judges for federal courts, whose appointments are approved by the federal Senate. The appointment is valid for life or until the judge resigns or is legally removed *(impeachment)*. As the latter two is quite rare, appointed judges can remain in their posts for practically decades. Since, under the system of checks and balances, court decisions cannot be overruled by either the executive (the President) or the legislative (the Congress), they remain the law of the country until they are changed by a federal court at the appropriate level. When the President and the majority of the federal Senate are from the same party, that party can appoint judges who broadly agree with his/her philosophy – even if they are supposed to be independent and not involved in party politics. But in reality, two attitudes prevail among judges: the so-called originalist and the liberal or activist. The former category, which is partly arbitrary, includes those who believe that the role of the courts is to interpret the constitution and existing laws. The latter group, on the other hand, believe that if the other two branches of power do not (properly) address a social or even economic issue, then the courts have the right, even the duty, to 'legislate'. The most striking example of the latter is the role of the courts, especially the Supreme Court, in civil rights matters. Because of the cyclical nature of the U.S. presidency,[7] it has happened repeatedly in recent decades that a liberal-leaning, i.e.

[7] For more on this topic see SCHLESINGER 1986.

Democrat president has 'inherited' a conservative Supreme Court, and in turn, a conservative-leaning, i.e. Republican president has 'inherited' a liberal-majority judiciary. Of course, there have always been – and will always be – exceptions to the rule; for example, Dwight D. Eisenhower nominated Earl Warren, a staunch conservative with a solid record, to the Supreme Court, but he proved to be quite liberal in that office (1953–1969).

However, there were also presidents who did not have the chance to nominate a single judge to the Supreme Court during their term of office. In this respect, Donald J. Trump was 'in the right place at the right time', since he was able to nominate three new members to the nine-member body in four years, mainly because the small Republican majority in the Senate – despite the fact that several members sharply criticised the President on other issues (Lisa Murkowski, Susan Collins or Mitt Romney, among others) – 'united' on judicial nominations, even though all the nominees have been subjected to harsh and in most cases undignified attacks from the liberal side. All three nominees, Neil M. Gorsuch, Brett M. Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett, came under attack primarily for their 'pro-life' stance; the liberal majority Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade* (1973) allows, in simple terms, abortion in the first three months of pregnancy (and in various extreme cases, also later). The right to abortion is one of the value issues that represents a sharp dividing line between conservatives and liberals, and Republicans and Democrats: the former, the 'pro-life', oppose the unrestricted right to abortion, mainly on religious grounds, while the latter, the 'pro-choice', include it among the personal liberties as an achievement of the feminist movement. The American left (liberals, much of the mainstream media, etc.) brought up a decades-old alleged harassment case of Kavanaugh under the banner of the *#metoo* movement, while in the case of Barrett, the judge's religiosity and principled opposition to abortion provoked almost ecstatic opposition from liberals. Another unspoken but implied accusation against them was that all three were white, Anglo-Saxon and heterosexual, and two of them were even male, so they allegedly did not reflect the current profile of American society. By way of contrast, Barack Obama nominated Sonia Sotomayor, a Hispanic, and Elena Kagan, a Jew, to the Supreme Court. Together with Donald J. Trump's

appointees, the 'originalists' are in the majority in the Supreme Court by a ratio of 5:4 (the chairman, John J. Roberts, Jr., is basically conservative, but there have been cases of him voting with his liberal colleagues). The current composition of the Supreme Court, and the hundreds of judges appointed to lower federal courts by Donald J. Trump, may thus represent the president's most enduring legacy and, if necessary, a successful counter to the aggressive social transformation (a.k.a. social engineering) efforts of the liberal left, the so-called progressives. It is no coincidence that during the first large-scale attempt at social transformation in American history, the New Deal, the Democrat Franklin D. Roosevelt wanted to 'pack' the Supreme Court with his own people. This 'court packing' idea was heated up by Joe Biden during his campaign, in which he promised, among other things, a second New Deal. At the same time, the most vocal members of the radical left, including such Democratic Party congressional members as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ilhan Omar, Ayanna Pressley, Rashida Tlaib, Jamaal Bowman, Cori Bush (The Squad), called for (and are calling for) a Green New Deal; a rather questionable agenda to transform the U.S. energy market and industry.

The phrase 'law and order' became the 'trademark' of the Republican Party in the turbulent late 1960s. The peaceful and sometimes violent civil rights protests that characterised the decade, the demonstrations against the Vietnam War, the increasingly radical student movements with the occupation of universities, the rise of feminism, the destruction of traditional moral and social norms by the sexual revolution, the emergence of so-called identity politics, provoked a strong reaction from the 'silent majority'. The Democratic Party, in the opinion of tens of millions of people, was not strong enough to tackle the extremism and violence that flooded the streets. Indeed, it often treated those who committed lawlessness and violence with misconstrued tolerance. Learning from its failures in the 1960 and 1964 presidential elections, the Republican Party was renewed with a strong conservative intellectual base and offered a viable alternative to liberal policies. One element of this alternative was the restoration of the rule of 'law and order' and tougher action against those who broke the law. The Republican Party's policy in this area was, to a certain extent, adopted by

the Clinton Administration (1993–2001) with the *Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act* of 1994,[8] which later came under attack from the left of the Democratic Party. Progressives considered – and continue to consider – the law racist because of the disproportionately high numbers of certain racial minorities, primarily African Americans and secondarily Latinos, who are tried and convicted in the courts compared to their proportion of the population as a whole. On this issue, in part, the conservative 'colour blind' approach to society is in opposition to the 'positive discrimination' principle of the liberals. Above all, the opposition pits affirmative action, which gives preferential treatment to racial and gender minorities in college and university admissions and in most workplaces, against the American myth of full social equality regardless of race or gender orientation. Donald J. Trump clearly believes the latter, even though there is overwhelming evidence that this ideal situation never existed, and that the antagonisms between social groups have been exacerbated by the relative decline of the American economy to an extent unseen in the last century and a half, with the economic situation of the middle and lower middle classes – mainly white – deteriorating or at most stagnating, the polarisation of political life, the paralysis of the federal legislature, the fragmentation of society (many social scientists speak of a 50–50 society), and the reasons go on and on.

One of the most controversial areas of the 'law and order' approach is the issue of immigration regulation. The liberal approach is much more permissive than the conservative one on this issue, too. There is a fierce debate in the United States about the fate of illegal immigrants. The issue was last settled by Ronald Reagan with the *Immigration Reform and Control Act* of 1986,[9] which, among other things, legalised the status of illegal immigrants who arrived before 1 January 1982. In the decades since, however, illegal immigration has continued, mainly from Latin American countries, through the 3,145 kilometres of green border separating the United States from Mexico, but there are also significant numbers of people who have remained in the country illegally in other ways, such as after their visas have expired.

8 Congress 1994.

9 Congress 1986.

In the early 2000s, a bipartisan attempt was made to tackle the situation of illegal immigrants, but the ideas fell victim to partisan political infighting. It is estimated that there were more than ten million illegal immigrants living in the U.S. in the late 2010s. Their numbers have also been boosted by the Obama Administration's *Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)* program. DACA deferred deportation for people who came to the United States illegally as children. At the same time, since the late 1980s, the so-called *sanctuary city* movement, which effectively meant that local authorities refused to cooperate with the federal government in enforcing immigration laws, has been spreading, especially in Democratic-led states and cities. During his 2016 campaign, Donald J. Trump promised to further strengthen the U.S.–Mexico border, speed up deportations (in reality, the Obama Administration also deported large numbers of illegal immigrants), end the DACA program and force local governments to cooperate with the national government on immigration. On this issue, Trump was confronted not only by liberals, but also by moderate conservatives. Following Mitt Romney's defeat in the 2012 election, the party came to the – correct – conclusion based on demographic trends that Republicans needed to open up to racial and other minorities more than before in order to remain competitive with the Democratic Party in the future. President Trump pushed for the revocation of DACA, but the Supreme Court eventually stayed the revocation order (*Trump v. NAACP,* 2020). Donald J. Trump had more success in curbing *sanctuary city* practices: a total of 33 states passed laws to cooperate on illegal immigration with the relevant federal government agency, *Immigration and Customs Enforcement* (ICE), which was under constant attack from the liberal left during the Trump Administration. Donald J. Trump's immigration policy enjoyed the support of the majority of society and did not seem to have provoked any serious opposition even among the most affected ethnic group. In fact, Trump managed to increase the Latino vote for the Republican Party, both in absolute terms and in terms of the proportion of the voting age population, especially in such key states as, for instance, Florida, where immigrants from Latin America (Cuba, Venezuela, etc.) are more politically conservative than in the East and West Coast states. Of course, the immigration issue is only one factor influencing the political

orientation of Latinos, but Trump's handling of the issue has clearly not caused a setback for the Republican Party among this ethnic group.

TRANSACTIONAL FOREIGN AND DEFENCE POLICY

One of the main strengths of the Republican Party, and one of its main attractions in the eyes of the electorate after the Second World War, was its foreign and defence policy. The achievements of Dwight D. Eisenhower (1953–1961), Richard M. Nixon (1969–1974), Ronald Reagan (1981–1989) and George H. W. Bush (1989–1993) in these two areas are rarely disputed. True, the neoconservative-influenced George W. Bush's (2001–2009) record on democracy export and 'nation (or rather state) building' is more than questionable. Eisenhower, Nixon and the elder Bush had a wealth of international experience by the time they took office. They saw the world in terms of a comprehensive strategy, and in this they were aided by advisors of character and stature such as John F. and Allen Dulles, Henry A. Kissinger, George P. Shultz, as well as James A. Baker and Brent Scowcroft. These presidents and their senior foreign policy advisors had a coherent world view and saw the world as one. They thought and worked with clear priorities and had the support of the U.S. conservative foreign policy elite. (In the context of the conservative elite, we can speak of foreign policy, defence, financial, social, religious, etc. elites, who, of course, did not agree on all issues, but who sought a general consensus, a 'conservative minimum'.) These priorities included a strong America, a diversified military and political alliance system, the prioritisation of interests, and multilateralism whenever possible, but also unilateral action when it was deemed more expedient.

Donald J. Trump did not retain much of this conservative foreign and defence policy legacy; practically nothing except the principle of a 'strong America'. The defence budget had grown steadily during his presidency, and President Trump responded to the challenges of a rapidly changing security environment by ordering the creation of a fifth force, the U.S. Space Force, in addition to the existing four, which was officially established in December 2019. At the same time, the president reduced U.S. military commitments

abroad, especially in the Middle East, and demanded – rightly – greater burden-sharing from allies, above all NATO's European allies. Most of the latter allies significantly reduced defence spending after the break-up of the Soviet Union ('peace dividend'), but this made the U.S. financial contribution to the common burden even more disproportionate, and Europeans' defence capabilities increasingly lagged behind those of the U.S. These countries were virtually unable to act effectively in the event of conflicts in their own neighbourhood (Western Balkans, North Africa); in each case, the U.S. military had to support the European allies against militarily insignificant opponents such as Serbia or Libya. Donald J. Trump's pursuit of a more balanced allied military burden-sharing is one of the areas where the president's policies met the majority position of the (conservative) elite, and only the doctrinaire neoconservatives criticised the president for his actions in the field of defence policy.

However, Donald J. Trump's foreign policy was not so well received. Above all, he lacked the global vision of Eisenhower, Nixon, Reagan and Bush Senior, a clear articulation of strategy and the tactical steps leading to it. In fact, Trump is not in the same league intellectually or in terms of governmental experience as his predecessors (and this was also true of his frequently rotating foreign policy advisors), and partly because of this he dealt with different regions of the world and different issues almost exclusively on their own, in a so-called transactional way. He took contradictory, conflicting and unilateral steps towards both allies and adversaries. Thus, among other things, he denounced the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, but did not take any serious steps to counter Tehran's regional middle power ambitions, to offset the reduction of the U.S. (military) presence. His 'maximum pressure' policy did not produce the intended purpose of crippling the Persian state's economy; Tehran was discreetly assisted by countries which were bent on 'soft balancing' the U.S. He demanded greater involvement of European allies in international affairs, but at the same time supported Brexit, as a result of which the European Union lost its strongest military power, drastically reducing the community's foreign policy weight and capacity for action. He began a kind of trade cold war with China, while his main allies, such as Germany, increased their trade

and economic ties with the East Asian great power. And the list goes on. Donald J. Trump's clear emphasis on interests could even make him the heir to the Nixonian–Kissingerian balance of power policy, but he lacks the ability, the foresight, to see and deal with issues as a whole, in their interplay. Based on the Meadian typology,[10] he is perhaps closest to Andrew Jackson's conception; but the America of the 1830s is not, of course, the America of the early 21st century, and the world power situation of that time is not similar to the international relations of today.

His foreign policy approach proved to be a dead end, insofar as U.S. global dominance (hegemony) can only be maintained, if at all, through a policy based on close alliance cooperation and multilateralism. After the Second World War, the United States was able to establish and maintain its international leadership by being a kind of 'benevolent' or 'supplier' hegemon. It occasionally made tactical concessions for strategic purposes, sometimes even willing to make concessions that did not serve its interests in the short term and/or directly, even though it could have imposed its will 'by force' on virtually any of its allies. It did not try to apply the cost–benefit principle in every single relation. Donald J. Trump, on the other hand, perhaps with an approach brought from business, had sought to do just that. It is a truism that in today's globalised world, many challenges can only be solved through international cooperation, and one of the basic rules of cooperation is that no one party can fully impose its will; a degree of compromise is always necessary. Trump was obviously right not to want to cooperate with certain corrupt international organisations that had become the playground of liberals, but in the case of China, for example, closer cooperation and coordination with allies would have seemed more appropriate. Keeping the other side in suspense is a tried and tested method – Eisenhower or Nixon used it effectively – but Donald J. Trump's too often changing position, for instance on Russia, proved to be counterproductive. President Trump's policies had also been made less effective by his numerous improvisations and lack of consistency. For example, during his first trip to Europe, he committed himself to the 'Three Seas Initiative' in

[10] For more details see Mead 2001.

Warsaw: but in contrast, in the remaining years of his presidency, there was little mention of the importance of cooperation with Central and Eastern Europe for the United States, and political and economic support for it was also lacking. If many elements of Donald J. Trump's domestic policy are acceptable and followable to the Republican Party and conservatives, there are far fewer in his foreign policy, with the exception of his refusal to interfere in the domestic affairs of other countries, including his allies, and his rejection of the 'democracy export' based on somewhat arbitrary principles of liberals and neoconservatives.

THE FUTURE OF 'TRUMPISM'

Donald J. Trump, as even many of his opponents admit, asked relevant questions, ignored by those in the political mainstream, on issues of relative urgency such as immigration, trade or even war in distant countries.[11] During the 2016 Republican primaries, he drew a sharp line between himself and the increasingly indistinguishable Democratic and Republican elites, both of which had shifted to the left (the Democrats had even drifted into so-called progressive thinking that borders on socialism). In doing so, he forced conservatism in America, on the one hand, and the Republican Party, on the other, into an unpleasant but perhaps necessary and timely choice. The Republicans, with their 'soft conservatism' (currently advocated by the 'Lincoln Project' and the 'Never Trumpers', which have rather weak public support), have only managed to win a majority of the votes once in the last eight presidential elections (in 1984); in the other cases, it was the electoral system that made it possible for a Republican president to move into the White House. The party's defeats in 2008 and 2012 were particularly disappointing, when two iconic figures of the Republican elite, John McCain and Mitt Romney, were defeated. The analysis carried out after the 2012 defeat *(Republican National Committee's Growth and Opportunity Project*[12] *[GOP Autopsy Report]),* rightly, proposed to broaden the voter base, but the

[11] On this, among the first, see ANTON 2016.

[12] Republican National Committee 2012.

party – if we look for analogies – tried to go in the direction of the British Conservative Party's Harold Macmillan, i.e. to compete with the leading party of the left in expanding the welfare state and to propose traditional free market neoliberal economic policies. (In the words of Rod Dreher: they wanted to return to a 'zombie Reaganism'.)[13] All this at a time when millions of people had lost their jobs as a result of globalisation and free trade agreements that had not always benefited the United States, and a permissive, even naive, trade policy towards China. (One idea of pushing for Beijing's accession to the World Trade Organization [WTO] was that the Chinese would terminate such unfair practices as dumping, currency manipulation, the theft of intellectual properties, and the like.) Donald J. Trump, by contrast, proclaimed a patriotic economic policy and pledged to improve the situation of the marginalised, largely white middle and lower middle classes and workers. All this had, somewhat simplistically, created a sharp fault line within the Republican Party. The 'soft' conservative elite was confronted by the party's mainly white populist voters, who were looking for a solution to their dwindling financial resources, to the overt or more covert cultural attacks that had been made on them for decades, who felt that the party's ruling elite did not care about them, did not protect them from the harmful effects of globalism or 'positive discrimination' (or its updated version of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion [DEI]), nor from attacks on their traditional values (family, religion). Donald J. Trump had become an advocate for the disillusionment and frustration of the latter voters – indeed, millions could identify with his tone (much criticised both at home and abroad) and unsophisticated views, despite the fact that Trump's socio-economic background did not predispose him to be an advocate for a Pittsburgh steelworker, a Nebraska rancher, a Texas cattle rancher or the 'values voters' (white born – again Christians) – and in 2016, even a large part of the suburban, better-off and better-educated white population also sided with him. Moreover, in 2020, he was able to increase the number of Republican Party voters by roughly 10 million, and his relatively good record among blacks and Hispanics was particularly notable. Moreover, according

[13] Quoted by Szilvay 2021: 29–42.

to recent opinion polls, Donald Trump has been able to attract even more people of colour prior to the 2024 presidential election. Analogies are usually fallacious, and it is unlikely that Donald J. Trump have consciously adopted the political strategy of Franz Josef Strauss's CSU, or later Viktor Orbán's Fidesz: to ensure that there is no significant political force to the right of the party, meaning that the political forces to the right of centre should be brought together in a broad 'coalition'.

This division seems to persist within the conservative camp. According to various polls, roughly half of conservative-leaning Republican voters support the party because of Donald J. Trump, the other half because of traditional conservative values – without Trump.[14] It seems clear that without a reconciliation of the two camps, Republicans will continue to have trouble winning a majority of the votes in national elections; however, there are hardly any signs indicating such a reconciliation. It seems unlikely that the 'baseball hatters', 'Nascar dads' and religious fundamentalists will accept the leadership of the RINOs *(Republicans in Name Only),* 'accidental conservatives', who are usually favoured by *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post,* and their ideology, which, in some cases, is almost indistinguishable from that of liberals. One could even argue in this context that the Democratic Party's 'secret weapon' is Donald J. Trump – the liberal side can keep the Republican Party divided through the mainstream media and other means. On the other hand, at the state and local government levels, thanks in part to the U.S. electoral system and the manipulative gerrymandering of constituency boundaries, the Republican Party has done better and may continue to do so in the near future.

The way out, in theory, could be a Trumpism without Trump, a 'more polished/elevated Trumpism';[15] in other words, credible conservative politicians who are more or less politically acceptable to both camps, if not entirely, but more or less, who have higher intellectual level and better communication skills than the 45th President. Several Republican politicians are also testing the mood of the party's core voters in particular, and how

[14] Kesler 2021.

[15] Marietta–Barker 2021.

to salvage policies that proved popular during Trump's presidency. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, South Dakota Governor Kristi Noem, former UN Ambassador Nikki Haley, former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Arkansas Senator Tom Cotton are just some of the Republican politicians who could play a major national role in the future. However, so far no conservative think tanks emerged around the Republican Party except the Heritage Foundation, like the ones that provided effective support to contemporary politicians in the 1950s and 1970s. One of the main questions is whether a 'syncretic conservatism' or a more pronounced trend, that could even be called 'national conservatism', of which we find examples in Central Europe, would be the future of a Republican Party based on conservative ideology. If American conservatives can clarify this dilemma, thereby they could take a major step towards renewing the Republican Party once again in American history and offering a strong alternative to the leftward-shifting liberals.

THE TRUMP EFFECT AND HUNGARY

The presidency of Donald Trump and the policies he pursued undeniably improved U.S.–Hungarian relations. Strict border protection, the enforcement of legal immigration, the reduction of personal and corporate taxes, the favouring or 'empowerment' of domestic companies (patriotic economic policy), the pragmatic representation of the country's own interests without excessive ideological slant, the identity of views on many social issues (the central role of families, etc.), the rejection of the extremities of political correctness, the support of the principle of the nation as the primary frame of reference, the rejection of the deconstruction and 'backward reading' of history all brought the Republican administration and the centre-right Fidesz–KDNP government to a common platform. A key factor in improving bilateral relations had been Donald Trump's understanding that the United States had no role to play in actively and continuously criticising and lecturing other countries on democratic norms, or in ignoring the sovereignty of countries in general – each country is unique and each has its

own specificities, which contradict the 'one size fits all' principle of liberals and neoconservatives.

Hungary could potentially benefit in other areas as well from Trumpism becoming government policy. Among other things, the diversification of energy sources could be accelerated, reducing the overweight of Russian energy supplies. Under the Trump Administration, the U.S. emerged as a seller in the energy market; and in Central Europe, it emerged as an energy exporter in the region through LNG terminals in Poland and Croatia. Of course, in the case of Hungary, the impact has been negligible so far, but with the increase in U.S. gas production for export, this could change. However, the Democratic administration halted the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline, which would have brought Canadian gas to U.S. ports on the Gulf of Mexico coast and from there overseas. With the possible return of the Republicans to the White House, Trump's energy policy could once again become a factor with its strategic and geopolitical implications.

On Donald Trump's first trip to Europe, there was a strong focus on Central Europe. In his speech in Warsaw,[16] the President recalled the 'Intermarium', in other words a closer cooperation between the states existing between the Baltic, Black and Adriatic Seas, which was conceived by Józef Piłsudski and which partly overlaps with Viktor Orbán's concept of Central Europe, albeit with different strategic considerations. However, in this case, too, Donald Trump failed to translate his political vision into action, and tangible steps such as diplomatic support and greater U.S. involvement in infrastructure and other projects did not follow. One of the most important lessons from the first Trump Administration could be that legitimate questions, properly asked, need real answers – which would certainly require more discipline and consistency. A predictable U.S. foreign and security policy would be important for the allies; this is especially true for the Central European states, which essentially have to play politics and pursue national interests in a field of power defined by the EU, Russia, China and the United States.

[16] NBC News 2017.

Regarding Hungary, the Trump effect, somewhat paradoxically, also manifested in the United States. Even before 2016, the Orbán Government did not have a good 'press' in the vast majority of the U.S. mainstream media – partly because of the Hungarian Prime Minister's misunderstood and misinterpreted formulation of 'illiberal democracy', which was considered unusual in international political language. Viktor Orbán was one of the first world leaders to back Donald Trump, and the Hungarian Government subsequently refrained from criticising the Trump Administration, which became a kind of obligation in many Western countries. Inside the United States, the media campaign against the President effectively began at noon on 20 January 2017. The President's perceived or real ideological and political allies had also become targets of the U.S. liberal electronic and print press on the basis of the 'guilt by association' principle, and had at times attacked the U.S. President through them. There was a schism within the Republican Party: on the one side, among others, there were the supporters of patriotic economic policies (protective tariffs where appropriate), of the fight against illegal immigration, of the opponents of extreme liberal ideological manifestations, of a more unambiguous assertion of American interests, of a realistic approach to international relations, all under the banner of 'Trumpism'. On the other side, among others, were those who advocated traditional, middle-of-the-road Republican policies, such as free trade, 'big-state conservatism', multilateralism in international affairs, and the promotion and dissemination of liberal principles. The Fidesz–KDNP coalition is clearly ideologically closer to the former, and one could even risk the conclusion that many elements of 'Trumpism' were already present in Hungary before Donald Trump came to the White House.

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