

2024 - THE UNRAVELLING OF ILLUSIONS?

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Abstract

The evolution and reform of public policies face new challenges amidst the economic, social, and political conditions of the electoral year 2024. Indeed, the electoral year of 2024 appears to have a significant global impact, given the elections in countries with significant geopolitical influence such as the USA, India, Indonesia, Mexico, and the European Union. The choice between Trump and Biden in the USA, in particular, captures the attention not only of Americans but also of the entire world. Certainly, electoral years are crucial moments for democracies worldwide, and the fact that over 75 states have scheduled elections in a single year is impressive. It is a sign of people's engagement and desire to exercise their right to vote and influence the political direction of their countries. However, it is important to underline that elections are not always a guarantee of a healthy democracy, as there can be various issues such as electoral fraud, voter intimidation, and other undemocratic practices that can distort the electoral process. The year 2024 is a unique electoral year in Romania - with European, local, legislative, and presidential elections.

Keywords: *electoral cycle, economic crisis, public policies, economic sustainability, conflict in Ukraine, hybrid warfare.*

1. Introduction

The year 2024 is a year full of challenges and also a turning point in many aspects, and some of these aspects may remind us of the period leading up to the Second World War. The war in Ukraine and the geopolitical tensions between Russia and other states, as well as the possible expansion of populist groups, often supported by Russia, raise serious concerns regarding regional and global stability and security. Uncertain economic

developments, as well as the potential for conflicts to escalate at the European or global level, heighten these concerns and amplify the sense of instability.

The analogy with the period preceding the Second World War can indeed be relevant in some respects, especially concerning geopolitical tensions and the risk of conflict escalation. It is crucial for leaders and the international community to be mindful of the lessons of history and to make efforts to avoid repeating past mistakes, promoting dialogue and cooperation in resolving disputes, and promoting peace and stability.

However, it is important to underline that each historical period has its own particularities and unique contexts, and addressing current challenges requires specific approaches and solutions tailored to the conditions and dynamics of our world today. Through collaboration, diplomacy, and commitment to democratic values and human rights, we can hope to overcome these challenges and build a safer and more prosperous future for all. Otherwise, the year 2024 will represent the unravelling of illusions for a period of prosperity and peace.

2. The period leading up to the Second World War (1938-1939) v. the Geopolitical Turning Point of 2024

The period of 1938-1939 is known as a particularly tense moment in European history, marked by events of geopolitical significance that culminated in the outbreak of the Second World War. This paper explores that specific period from multiple perspectives, focusing on the economic, political, and geostrategic aspects that contributed to the climate of instability and conflict in Europe at the end of the 1930s.

From an economic perspective, the 1938-1939 period was characterised by a deep global recession fuelled by the effects of the Great Depression of 1929. European states suffered from economic decline and rising unemployment, which exacerbated social and political unrest. Additionally, the protectionist policies adopted by some countries in an attempt to safeguard their domestic industries contributed to increased economic tensions and reduced international trade¹.

From a political perspective, the 1938-1939 period was marked by a series of events and decisions that heightened tensions and rivalries among European powers. The year

¹ B. Antoniu, M.-R. Dinu, *Istoria relațiilor internaționale în secolele XIX-XX*, Program postuniversitar de conversie profesională pentru cadrele didactice din mediul rural, 2005, p. 103-121, https://hiphi.ubbcluj.ro/Public/File/sup_curs/istorie25.pdf.

1938 saw the Anschluss of Austria and the Munich Agreement, which allowed Nazi Germany to annex territories and consolidate its position in Central Europe. Additionally, the Czechoslovak crisis occurred, during which Czechoslovakia was dismembered, with the agreement of Britain and France, under pressure from Germany. These events underscored the weakness and hesitations of Western powers in the face of Nazi aggression and fuelled feelings of insecurity and distrust in Europe.

From a geostrategic perspective, the 1938-1939 period was characterised by the consolidation of Nazi Germany's position in Europe and the expansion of its influence in the region. Through the annexation of Austria and the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, Germany gained control over strategic territories and strengthened its position in Central Europe. Additionally, the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in August 1939 changed the geopolitical dynamics in the region and paved the way for the outbreak of the Second World War.

The 1938-1939 period was exceptionally tense and provocative in European history, marking the beginning of a new era of conflict and suffering. Economic, political, and geostrategic factors significantly contributed to the atmosphere of instability and tension in Europe at the end of the 1930s, laying the groundwork for the outbreak of the Second World War. It is important to understand and reflect upon the lessons learned from this dark period of European history in order to avoid repeating past mistakes and to promote peace and stability in our contemporary world.

The period around 1938 is indeed considered crucial in the evolution of events leading to the outbreak of the Second World War, and the policy of appeasement practised by France and the British Empire towards Nazi Germany has been criticised for exacerbating Nazi aggression and jeopardising peace and stability in Europe.

The conciliatory attitude of the Allies, represented by the policy of „appeasement”, was clearly evident during the Sudeten Crisis of 1938. Despite international treaties guaranteeing the territorial integrity of Czechoslovakia, France and Britain adopted a conciliatory approach to Nazi Germany's territorial claims over the Sudetenland region, which had a German population within Czechoslovakia. The Munich Agreement, signed in September 1938, allowed for the annexation of the western part of Czechoslovakia by Germany without consultation with the Czechoslovak government. This conciliatory approach was interpreted as encouragement for Nazi aggression and territorial

expansion and undermined the credibility of international commitment and peace treaties.

Furthermore, the Allies' conciliatory policy towards Nazi Germany's territorial claims was also evident in the case of the Anschluss of Austria in 1938. The lack of a strong response from France and Britain to Germany's annexation of Austria strengthened the aggressive stance of the Nazi regime and heightened the threat to regional and international stability.

In conclusion, the hesitant policy practised by France and Britain in their dealings with Nazi Germany during the interwar period has been later criticised for failing to prevent Nazi aggression and territorial expansion and for contributing to the escalation of the conflict that led to the outbreak of the Second World War. This period serves as a reminder of the importance of solidarity and firmness in the face of threats to peace and international security, and of the danger of appeasement policies towards an aggressive and expansionist state led by a dictator².

The strategic error of France and Great Britain in 1938, in the context of the annexation of Austria and the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia by Nazi Germany, had significant consequences on the balance of power in Europe and drastically altered the world order established at the end of the First World War.

The annexation of Austria and the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia brought into Germany a significant population with considerable economic and military potential. Approximately 7 million inhabitants from Austria and 3.5 million from Czechoslovakia, the majority of whom were ethnic Germans, were incorporated into Germany. This territorial expansion brought about a substantial increase in Germany's labor force, recruitment base, and industrial capacity, giving it a significant strategic advantage over France and Great Britain.

In the spring of 1939, the demographic balance among the four major European powers was significantly altered by these territorial changes:

- Germany became the largest power in Europe, with 87.3 million inhabitants, the majority of whom were considered ethnic Germans;
- The United Kingdom, Italy, and France were outnumbered by Germany, with 47.5

² M. Udrea, *Drumul Europei spre Al Doilea Război Mondial (1937-1938)*: München, „Pacea timpurilor noastre”. Înghițirea Austriei și Cehoslovaciei. De ce o dictatură nu poate fi oprită niciodată cu compromisuri și negocieri, Istoria Lumii, Colecționarul de istorie, 15.01.2022.

million, 43.4 million, and 42 million inhabitants, respectively.

- This change in the demographic balance of power amplified Germany's dominant position in Europe and undermined confidence in the Allies' ability to confront Nazi aggression. The strategic error of France and Great Britain in 1938 was a fatal one, significantly contributing to laying the groundwork for the outbreak of the Second World War and altering the balance of power in Europe³.

In conclusion, this period was a crucial moment in world history, marked by escalating political tensions, laying the groundwork for the outbreak of the Second World War. The main economic, political, and social aspects during that period globally were:

- Global economic context: following the economic crisis of 1929, the world was still grappling with the profound effects of the Great Depression. Many people were still living in poverty, and unemployment remained high in many countries;

- Rise of totalitarian regimes: in Europe, the Nazi regime in Germany and the fascist regime in Italy had become dominant. Hitler had consolidated power in Germany and began to extend his influence in Central and Eastern Europe. Mussolini, in Italy, was also strengthening his control;

- Annexation of Austria and the Sudeten Crisis: in March 1938, Hitler annexed Austria, consolidating Germany's power. Subsequently, the Sudeten Crisis followed when Germany demanded the cession of the Sudetenland region from Czechoslovakia, which it obtained following the Munich Agreement in September 1938, signed by Britain, France, Italy, and Germany, without consulting Czechoslovakia;

- Expansionist policies of Japan: Japan intensified its aggression in Asia, occupying several territories in China and embarking on what would become the Pacific War;

- International reaction: the international community was concerned about the increasing aggression and instability. Attempts to maintain peace and stability, such as the appeasement policy adopted by France and Britain, were criticised by some for allowing Nazi aggression to advance;

- Military mobilisation: as tensions rose, many countries intensified their efforts for rearmament and military mobilisation in preparation for a potential conflict;

- Refugees and immigrants: the tense political situation in Europe led to an increase in the number of refugees and immigrants trying to escape persecution and war. Many

³ *Ibidem.*

Jews from Germany and other areas under Nazi influence sought asylum in other countries.

Overall, the period 1938-1939 was characterised by escalating geopolitical tensions and concerns about global peace, laying the groundwork for the outbreak of the Second World War on September 1, 1939.

The elections in 2024 are undoubtedly crucial for the direction each country will take and for the global political climate. In the United States, especially, the competition between Trump and Biden is intense and has repercussions worldwide⁴.

Trump represents a polarising figure, with an agenda that has sparked controversies domestically and internationally. His promise to establish a personal dictatorship and to withdraw US support for international organisations such as NATO, as well as the threat to close the American economy and reduce aid to other countries, fuel concerns regarding the respect for democracy and global stability⁵.

The year 2024 is indeed a crucial moment for global democracy, considering the large number of countries holding elections and their significance in a variety of political and social contexts⁶.

In the United States, India, Indonesia, Mexico, and the European Union, these elections will influence the political and social direction of these countries, significantly impacting their citizens and international relations.

On the other hand, countries like Russia, Pakistan, and Bangladesh face challenges regarding transparency and fairness in the electoral process, and the outcomes of these elections can have significant consequences for the political and social stability of the region and the world at large.

It is essential for elections to be conducted transparently and adhere to democratic standards to ensure the fair representation of the people's will and to promote stability and progress worldwide.

The European Parliament elections in June are indeed particularly important, and the results will have profound consequences for the direction the European Union will take in the coming years.

⁴ <https://newsweek.ro/international/super-2024-anul-care-poate-schimbar-lumea>.

⁵ <https://pressone.ro/2024-cel-mai-important-an-electoral-din-istorie-76-de-tari-merg-la-urne-ce-putem-sa-facem-pentru-a-ne-asigura-un-viitor-mai-bun-in-romania/>.

⁶ <https://www.mediafax.ro/politic/2024-va-fi-un-an-electoral-istoric-cu-alegeri-din-sua-si-uniunea-europeana-pana-in-rusia-ii-va-supravietui-democratia-22224683>.

An increase in eurosceptic and far-right parties could bring significant changes to the political dynamics of the European Parliament. However, it is important to note that the European Parliament is composed of a variety of parties and political orientations, and the legislative and decision-making process requires negotiations and compromises among different political groups.

The possibility of the far-right Identity and Democracy group becoming the third-largest faction in the European Parliament could have implications for how European policies are formulated and implemented, especially concerning aspects related to EU enlargement and relations with partner countries, including Ukraine⁷.

The rise of far-right populism in Europe is indeed a concerning trend, and the elections for the European Parliament within this context are of major importance regarding the political direction of the EU and its future.

Far-right populist parties have managed to gain ground in many European countries, relying on platforms that emphasise defending traditional values, combating immigration, and criticising European institutions. The successes of these parties in national elections in the Netherlands (Geert Wilders), Italy (Giorgia Meloni), Slovakia (Robert Fico), Finland (Petteri Orpo), and Hungary (Viktor Orbán) indicate a shift in the European political landscape and an increase in their influence in decision-making processes⁸.

In the context of the European elections, it is expected that these parties will focus their campaigns on the same themes that brought them success in national elections. Defending traditional values, promoting national sovereignty, and opposing immigration are likely to be central points in their political platforms.

However, it is important to emphasise that the European elections provide a framework in which a variety of parties and political orientations can make their voices heard. The democratic process and the need to reach compromises and consensus in the European Parliament could limit the ability of far-right parties to unilaterally impose their agenda.

⁷ <https://moldova.europalibera.org/a/anul-electoral-2024-anul-recordurilor/32762649.html>.

⁸ <https://www.euractiv.ro/extern/2024-anul-alegerilor-77-de-tari-si-aproape-trei-miliarde-de-oameni-chemati-la-vot-65071>.

Ultimately, this year's European elections will be an important test for the future of the European Union and its ability to manage political and social changes in the current context of rising far-right populism and the internal and external challenges it entails.

The future EU support for Ukraine and other candidate countries for accession will indeed be influenced by the outcome of the European elections and the political configuration of the new European Commission. The candidacy for a new term of the Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, and her pro-Ukraine stance could play an important role in the EU's continued support for these countries.

Despite opposition from some member states, such as Hungary, EU support for Ukraine may continue, but the modalities and conditions of this support could be affected by political changes within EU institutions.

Overall, the European elections in June will be a crucial step in the evolution of the European Union and in setting its future direction in a wide range of issues, from internal and economic policies to external relations and community expansion.

Comparing the challenges of 1938 with those of 2024, in the current context of the conflict in Ukraine and elections in many democratic states, we can observe several significant differences and similarities:

- **Conflict and Geopolitical Tensions:**

In 1938-1939, geopolitical tensions were marked by the aggressive expansion of totalitarian regimes, such as Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.

In 2024, the main focus of geopolitical tensions is the conflict in Ukraine, where Russia is involved in a war against Ukraine and supports separatists in eastern Ukraine. Additionally, geopolitical tensions are present in other parts of the world, such as the Middle East and the South China Sea region.

- **Economy and Poverty:**

During the 1938-1939 period, the global economy was still grappling with the effects of the Great Depression, and poverty and unemployment were still major issues in many countries.

In 2024, the global economy faces various challenges, including uncertainties related to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on global markets, as well as issues related to poverty and social inequality.

- **Authoritarian Regimes v. Democratic States:**

In the period leading up to World War II, authoritarian totalitarian regimes, such as those in Germany and Italy, dominated European politics.

In 2024, there is a diversity of political regimes in the world, ranging from consolidated democratic states to authoritarian regimes and dictatorships.

- Refugees and Migration:

In 1938-1939, geopolitical tensions and persecution led to an increase in the number of refugees, especially Jews, seeking asylum in other countries.

In 2024, migration is a global issue, and the refugee crisis persists in many regions of the world, with millions of people leaving their countries of origin due to conflicts, persecution, poverty, and climate change.

- Technology and Communication:

During the years 1938-1939, technology and communication were different from what we know today, but there were still some significant innovations and developments during that period.

Although television was still in its early stages of development during that period, the first television broadcasts began to appear in some countries, heralding a new era in communication and entertainment.

Overall, while there are notable differences between the challenges faced in 1938 and those in 2024, there are also some striking similarities, particularly in terms of geopolitical tensions, economic uncertainties, and migration issues. Additionally, advancements in technology and communication have transformed the way information is disseminated and societies interact, shaping the global landscape in both eras.

In conclusion, the technology and communication in the years 1938-1939 reflected a combination of traditional means and innovations in development. Although they did not reach the level of complexity and accessibility of today's technologies, these means of communication had a significant impact on shaping public opinion and transmitting information globally.

In 2024, technological advancements and global communication allow for greater awareness and mobilisation among civil society regarding current challenges such as climate change and human rights.

Overall, while there are some similarities between the challenges of 1938-1939 and those of 2024, such as geopolitical tensions and migration, the current context is quite

different, reflecting significant changes in politics, economy, and technology over the past century.

3. The electoral duel between Donald Trump and Joe Biden

The assessment of the harmfulness of Donald Trump's presidency between 2016 and 2020 is subjective and can vary depending on political perspectives and individual values. However, there are some aspects of his presidency that have often been criticised and have generated controversy. Here are some of them:

- **Polarisation and division:** Trump's presidency was marked by extreme polarisation in American society. His reluctance to criticise or condemn supporters who resorted to violence or hate speech fuelled tensions and political divisions in the country;
- **Attacks on democratic institutions:** Trump was criticised for his attacks on democratic institutions such as the free press, the judiciary, and the electoral process. His constant rhetoric against the media and his doubts about the fairness of the presidential elections undermined trust in these key institutions;
- **Harsh immigration policies:** Trump administration's immigration policy was one of the most controversial aspects of his presidency. Policies such as family separation at the southern border of the US and attempts to ban travel from certain predominantly Muslim countries generated widespread criticism, including from the international community;
- **Withdrawal from international agreements:** Trump adopted a unilateralist approach in international relations, withdrawing the United States from several agreements and international organisations, including the Paris Climate Agreement and the World Health Organization (WHO);
- **Handling of the COVID-19 pandemic:** Trump administration's response to the COVID-19 pandemic was strongly criticised for initially downplaying the seriousness of the pandemic, inefficient management of testing and distribution of medical equipment, and promotion of unconventional or ineffective treatments;
- **Ethical lapses and allegations of corruption:** Trump administration was overshadowed by numerous allegations of corruption, nepotism, and conflicts of interest, including related to his family's businesses and his personal conduct as president.

It is important to mention that, alongside the criticisms and controversies associated with his presidency, Trump also had numerous supporters who appreciated his non-conformist approach and his efforts in areas such as fiscal policy and nominations for the Supreme Court. The overall assessment of his presidency is subjective and may vary depending on the perspective of each individual.

4. The presidency of Joe Biden in the United States has its pros and cons

The presidency of Joe Biden in the United States has been subject to subjective analysis, varying depending on individual political perspectives. Here are some pros and cons of his presidency up to this point:

Pros:

- Handling of the COVID-19 pandemic: Biden administration has made the management of the COVID-19 pandemic a top priority, accelerating the vaccination campaign and providing financial support to states and communities to address the health crisis;
- Economic stimulus: adoption of a comprehensive economic stimulus package, known as the American Rescue Plan, to support economic recovery and assist families and businesses affected by the pandemic;
- Addressing climate change: Biden administration has taken measures to combat climate change, including rejoining the Paris Agreement and promoting climate policy at the national and international levels;
- Return to diplomacy: restoring diplomatic relations with traditional allies and commitment to international cooperation, particularly regarding the World Health Organization and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

Cons:

Criticism regarding the handling of the migrant crisis at the southern border: Biden administration has faced criticism for its management of the migrant crisis at the southern border of the United States, including conditions in detention centers and its family separation policy;

Domestic economic and political tensions: political divisions and social tensions remain high in the United States, and Biden administration faces challenges related to passing legislative reforms in a polarised political context;

Failure in immigration system reform: to date, Biden administration has not succeeded in achieving comprehensive immigration system reform, leading to criticism from organisations and groups advocating for immigrant rights;

Geopolitical challenges: the United States faces multiple geopolitical challenges, including tensions with China and Russia, as well as threats from authoritarian regimes worldwide.

The evaluation of Joe Biden's presidency is subjective and may depend on individual political perspectives. It is important to consider the full range of actions and decisions of his administration in assessing his presidency.

5. The global economic outlook for the year 2024

In terms of the global economic outlook for the year 2024, these may vary depending on several factors, including the current political and economic situation, global trends, and recent events. However, we can provide some general perspectives:

- Global economic growth: depending on economic recovery efforts, a resurgence of economic growth can be anticipated in many countries, although the pace and magnitude may vary by region and the government policies adopted;
- Long-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic: the COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a significant impact on the global economy, with varying effects depending on the economic sector and geographic region;
- Inflation and monetary policy: in the context of economic recovery, some countries may experience inflationary pressures. Central banks will continue to monitor inflation developments and adjust monetary policies accordingly;
- International trade and geopolitics: trade and geopolitical tensions can affect the global economic outlook for 2024. Developments in areas such as trade relations between the US and China, Brexit, and other trade conflicts may influence economic growth and global stability;
- Technological changes: technological advancements, such as artificial intelligence, blockchain technology, and digital technologies, will continue to influence the global

economy, creating new opportunities and challenges for businesses and society.

In conclusion, the global economic outlook for 2024 is influenced by a variety of factors, and their evolution may be difficult to predict accurately. It is important to monitor economic trends and react to emerging changes to ensure sustainable and inclusive economic growth.

6. The war in Ukraine that began in February 2022

The war in Ukraine, which began in February 2022, was an escalation of the prolonged conflict between Ukraine and Russia-backed separatists in the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. Here is a brief overview of the main events that led to this escalation:

- Russian aggression and annexation of Crimea: in 2014, Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine following a controversial referendum condemned by the international community as illegal. This action sparked a conflict between Ukraine and Russia-backed separatist forces in eastern Ukraine;

- Conflict in eastern Ukraine: since 2014, the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk have witnessed ongoing fighting between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian separatists. This conflict has resulted in loss of lives, destruction of infrastructure, and human suffering, severely affecting the stability and security of Ukraine and the region as a whole;

- Escalation in 2022: in February 2022, the escalation of the conflict reached a critical point, particularly in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine. Intense clashes occurred between Ukrainian forces and separatists, prompting Ukraine to declare martial law in some regions of the country;

- International support for Ukraine: the international community, including the United States, the European Union, and other countries, condemned Russian aggression and provided political and military support to Ukraine in its fight against separatism and Russian influence;

- Negotiations and ceasefire efforts: despite the escalation of the conflict, diplomatic efforts were made to achieve a peaceful resolution. Negotiations between Ukraine, Russia, and other intermediaries were conducted in an attempt to secure a ceasefire and a political solution to the conflict.

Overall, the conflict in eastern Ukraine, which escalated in February 2022, continues to be a major security concern in the region and a source of tensions between Ukraine and Russia, with significant implications for the geopolitical stability of Eastern Europe.

However, at the beginning of 2023, prospects for a strong counteroffensive from Ukraine seemed unlikely. Military experts and defense analysts predicted that intense fighting would continue into the following year, but that Ukrainian forces were not yet prepared to launch massive counteroffensives. Instead, they were expected to focus on consolidating territory they had already reclaimed, particularly in eastern Ukraine.

At the beginning of 2023, hopes were high that a much-anticipated Ukrainian counteroffensive would change the course of the war against Russia. However, in reality, the evolution of the conflict in 2024 could become even more challenging, and two critical factors could influence the potential defeat of Putin, according to Western military experts⁹.

The military alliances of Ukraine with the United States and Europe have the potential to destabilise the Russian army. However, everything depends on the political direction of the United States after the 2024 presidential elections and the delivery of two important weapons to Kiev from the West (aircraft and long-range missiles).

The amount of support and military equipment Ukraine receives may decide whether it will succeed in a counteroffensive or it will need to adjust its war strategy. Meanwhile, Russia has intensified military spending and weapon production, indicating its readiness for a prolonged conflict.

On the other hand, the direction of the Russia-Ukraine war in 2024 will largely be decided thousands of miles away, in the United States. The US is Ukraine's biggest military supporter, and if US assistance decreases in the lead-up to and after the presidential elections, this could have a significant impact on the balance of power in the conflict.

⁹ <https://ziare.com/razboi-ucraina/razboi-ucraina-experti-evolutie-razboi-ucraina-2024-doua-mutari-decisive-infrangere-putin-1843718>.

7. The economic, political, and ideological issues between East and West

The economic, political, and ideological issues between East and West have been a prominent feature of modern history, especially in the context of Europe but also in other regions. Here are some of these issues:

- **Historical divisions:** the divisions between East and West have been deeply rooted in Europe's history, with events such as the Cold War solidifying these political and ideological divisions. The West, represented by Western countries, particularly those within NATO and the EU, adopted a capitalist and democratic approach, while the East, especially the countries in the communist bloc, was characterised by totalitarian regimes and centralised economies;

- **Economic differences:** Eastern and Western Europe have exhibited significant economic differences, even after the fall of the Iron Curtain and the end of the Cold War. Western European states have typically experienced faster economic development, with higher living standards and more developed infrastructure, while Eastern countries have often faced challenges related to transitioning to market economies and adapting to the democratic system;

- **Political and ideological divergences:** political and ideological divisions between East and West remained relevant even after the fall of communism in Eastern Europe. Some Eastern European countries rapidly adopted democratic and economic reforms, seeking integration into Euro-Atlantic structures such as NATO and the EU, while others remained tied to their communist past or experienced difficulties in consolidating democracy and market economies;

- **Migration and brain drain:** economic and opportunity differences between East and West have led to significant migration from East to West, with a migration of labor force and talent from Eastern European countries to Western ones. This phenomenon has had an impact on the economies and societies of both regions, sometimes creating social and political tensions;

- **Resilience and cooperation:** despite these differences and challenges, East and West have made significant progress towards reconciliation and cooperation. The process of NATO and EU enlargement in Eastern Europe has been an important step in consolidating peace and stability in the region, and economic and political cooperation

between Eastern and Western states continues to develop.

Overall, the relationship between East and West remains complex and fraught with challenges, but there are also opportunities for collaboration and reconciliation in the common interest of all Europe and the international community.

8. Conclusions

Years like 2024 are indeed crucial for humanity, as they bring with them a series of social, political, economic, and geostrategic challenges. It is during these moments when decisions made can have significant long-term consequences on the direction the world takes. Here are some aspects of the importance of the year 2024:

- **Social Challenges:** rapid social changes and various social movements, such as the civil rights movement, gender equality, or the environmental movement, can redefine society and power relations;
- **Political Challenges:** major political elections and events, such as changes of governments or referendums, can influence the political direction of a country and can have repercussions on international relations;
- **Economic Challenges:** economic crises, technological changes, and transformations in business models can affect global economies and can influence how people work and live;
- **Geostrategic Challenges:** international relations, conflicts, geopolitical tensions, and changes in the balance of power can reconfigure the global geopolitical map and can affect international stability and security.

It is essential for leaders to be prepared to address these challenges and to promote sustainable and equitable solutions. Additionally, citizen engagement and international collaboration are vital to successfully confront these challenges and to create a better future for all.

Comparisons between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Nazi Fuhrer Adolf Hitler have become increasingly frequent in the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine beginning on February 24, 2022. As highlighted by Atlantic Council President Frederick

Kempe, there are significant differences between the 1930s era and the present, but there are also notable similarities¹⁰.

While it is important not to exaggerate or trivialise the significance of the Nazi tragedy, it is imperative to carefully analyse Putin's behavior and policies and assess whether they exhibit common characteristics with those of Hitler's regime. Putin himself has used the term „Nazism” to label the Ukrainian government, sparking intense debate about the legitimacy of the comparison.

Political science professor Alexander D. Motyl from Rutgers University in Newark has emphasised that while Putin's absurd standards regarding Nazism should not be accepted, his opening of this subject justifies a careful examination of his policies and actions compared to those of Hitler. Such analyses should focus on isolating the defining features of Hitler's regime and assessing the extent to which Putin's system is similar¹¹.

In light of these comparisons, the international community is called upon to evaluate Russia's policies and actions under Putin's leadership and to take appropriate measures based on the conclusions drawn. It is essential to avoid both exaggerating and underestimating the risks and significance of these comparisons, while also paying attention to the gravity of the situation and taking appropriate action accordingly.

While there is hope that Putin's regime could follow the fate of the collapse of Nazism, it is important to approach this perspective with caution and not underestimate the gravity of the current situation. Indeed, both the Nazi regime and Putin's aggressive policies have caused widespread suffering and instability.

The observation that both Hitler and Putin were driven by grandiose illusions and committed grave errors through their attacks is relevant. Hitler's attack on the USSR had devastating consequences and significantly contributed to the downfall of his regime. Similarly, Putin's aggression against Ukraine and involvement in regional conflicts have garnered international condemnation and sanctions, which could weaken his position.

However, it is essential not to underestimate the resources and strategies of Putin's regime, as well as the support it may have both domestically and internationally. Combating this regime will require a balanced and strategic approach from the international community.

¹⁰ <https://adevarul.ro/stiri-externe/rusia/vestul-va-fi-fortat-sa-renunte-la-iluziile-sale-si-2346587.html>.

¹¹ <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/4521958-is-putins-russia-a-nazi-state/>.

While there is hope that the West will remain united and confront Russian aggression, it is clear that the risks and consequences of a major conflict are significant. Therefore, it is crucial to continue diplomatic and deterrence efforts, as well as to prepare for any possible scenario, including escalation of tensions or open conflict. The West will be compelled to abandon its illusions of peace and prosperity and to fight for its peace against Russia¹². The priority should be to maintain global peace and security, which may require sacrifices and compromises from all parties involved.

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