

# **RISE OF EUROPEAN DEMOCRACIES AFTER COLLAPSE OF SOVIET UNION; MISGOVERNANCE IN CHINA**

Tenth Anniversary Conference in Prague  
Council of Members of the Platform of European Memory and Conscience  
Webinar notes by Hon. David Kilgour, J.D. ([www.david-kilgour.com](http://www.david-kilgour.com))  
12 Nov 2021

---

The implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991 brought freedom to almost 20 restored or new democracies in Central/East Europe after almost half a century of oppression. Then Russian leaders Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin supported national self-determination and democracy. The European Union added ten east-central European countries in 2004 and 2007 and almost 80 million European citizens to its union of democratic nations.

The transition from totalitarianism to democracy brought many changes to all these nations. Trade barriers were removed to allow freer movement of goods and services; many state-owned enterprises and resources were privatised (some into irresponsible hands). The economic performance of most of these nations has been good despite serious adjustment problems.



VACLAV HAVEL  
PHOTO BY OFER VAKNIN /AFP/Getty ImagesZuz



President Zuzana Caputova of Slovakia

The end of despotism in Czechoslovakia, with the late Vaclav Havel moving in months from prison to the presidency in Prague, afforded an opportunity

to carry out major political and economic reforms. The country, which later divided, has since seen flourishing exports and rising direct foreign investment.

What motivates some people to struggle for democracy? Havel asked of Czechs and Slovaks. “Where did (our) young people ... (find) their desire for truth, their love of free thought, their political ideas, their civic courage?” The answer lies in the human desire to choose the types of societies we want to build for ourselves — ones grounded on values of dignity for all and the rule of law. The citizens of the Czech Republic in a national election recently removed the last Communists from their parliament after 100 years of presence by giving the party less than four per cent of their votes.

### **Baltic States**

Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia have a combined population of only about 6.32 million, but are determined peoples. Once free, each wasted no time in aggressively pursuing economic reforms and integration with the rest of Europe. Between 2000 and 2007, the Baltic States had the highest real growth rate in Europe, ranging from 6 to 12 percent; from 2011 on, they have also done well.

### **Hungary and Poland**

While now problematic, both transitioned to democracy and a market economy after 1990, despite significant losses in markets for exports and in subsidies from the former Soviet Union. In 1995, both privatised state-owned enterprises, cut their current account deficits and reduced public spending. Many suffered great hardship during the transition, but both economies grew about 4 percent in real terms between 2000 and 2006 and did economically quite well after 2010.

In short--and I've mentioned only some of your region's nations-- transitions were difficult, but in virtually all East and Central European countries, life appears to be significantly better now than in 1989. Despite current serious problems, the EU continues for most around a shrunken planet to be a beacon for democracy, human dignity, economic prosperity and stability.

### **Russia**

An ailing Boris Yeltsin resigned his presidency in 2000 to former KGB lieutenant. Vladimir Putin, whose clear aim today is to destabilise democratic

governments wherever feasible. The use of Magnitsky and other targeted economic sanctions might, however in time bring him or his successor to a collaborative engagement with the rule of law world.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) concluded that the average household disposable income for a Russian family in 2013 was (US)\$15,286, ranking number 30 of the 36 OECD developed-economy nations. Today sadly, Russian incomes have fallen about 10% since 2013.

As COP26 meets in Glasgow, Russia has become mostly a petro-state. The economic/political focus of Mr. Putin and about 140 oligarchs has been on Russia's oil and gas industry, keeping Europe dependent on Russian imports. The Crimea invasion precipitated a flight of capital from Russia in the first quarter of 2014 as large as US\$70 billion. European peace remains essential if the Russian economy is to improve the lives of its citizens.

Yale history professor Timothy Snyder, author of *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*, notes: "Ukraine (under Yanukovych) was governed by probably the most financially corrupt regime ... which by the end of its rule was not only physically oppressing, but finally killing its citizens ... (for) exercising their rights to speech and assembly".

World chess champion and democrat, Garry Kasparov, wrote: "Vladimir Putin has twice during six years sent Russian troops across internationally recognised borders to snap off pieces of neighbouring countries, first in Georgia (South Ossetia and Abkhazia) and now in Ukraine (Crimea)...Trying to seek a deep strategy in Putin's actions is a waste of time. There are only personal interests, the interests of those close to him who keep him in power, and how best to consolidate that power. If the West punishes Russia with sanctions and a trade war, it would be cruel to 140 million Russians, so instead sanction the 140 oligarchs who would dump Mr. Putin ... if he cannot protect their assets abroad. Target their visas, their mansions and IPOs in London, their yachts and Swiss bank accounts. Use banks, not tanks."



Soldiers without insignia on march in Perevalne, Crimea. Vladimir Putin later conceded that they were Russian troops.

Democracies don't oppress, segregate or terrorize. They value diversity, inclusiveness and respect for everyone by upholding the rule of law premised on citizen equality. They maintain independent judiciaries separated from legislative and executive branches. Reliance on a vigorous judiciary helps make it possible for minorities and marginalized groups to be equal members of society.

International institutions, such as the UN Human Rights Council and UN Security Council, should accord much more weight to human dignity and good governance around the world. We must all safeguard and enhance our own democratic practices and help strengthen democracies abroad, remembering always that it begins with each of us as individual citizens.

The number of full democracies across the world in the 1970s doubled by the 1990s because of efforts by many determined democrats. Today, their successors in many nations need to recognize that this governance model — democracy — is now in disfavour in part because it is seen to benefit “one per centers” disproportionately. The age of “robber barons” a century ago has become for many observers today an era of Big Tech tycoons, who appear to care little for their employees, fellow citizens or democracy.

Among a host of policy initiatives by governments that could help reverse negative perceptions of democracy are robust pro-competition legislation and enforcement, raising corporation taxes and banning off-shore accounts in tax havens, introducing election spending and donation limits, raising minimum pay and enacting effective whistle-blower protection.

Democratic governance can flourish across Europe and the world once again. It needs the active attention and care of all of us.

## China

Without the checks of the rule of law, terrible tragedies, including violent racism, often occur. Consider government-run organ pillaging in China. The PRC appears to be unique among approximately 196 independent countries today in that its organ transplant commerce is state-run rather than criminal offences done by unscrupulous surgeons.

In mid-2006, David Matas and I as volunteers did an independent investigation into persistent claims of forced organ harvesting from Falun Gong practitioners across China. We released two reports and a 2009 book titled *Bloody Harvest*.

We concluded that since 2001 the Beijing party-state directed a network of forced vital organ-harvesting from prisoners of conscience--primarily Falun Gong killed for their vital organs. The organs were then sold to wealthy recipients in China and foreign 'organ tourists', who usually wait long intervals to obtain voluntarily-given organs at home. Specifically, we concluded from 18 kinds of evidence that beyond any doubt between the years 2001 and 2005, 41,500 organs were sourced from Falun Gong prisoners of conscience killed during the removals.

Ethan Gutmann, author of *The Slaughter* (2014), later placed the persecution of the Falun Gong, Tibetan, Uyghur, and house Christian communities in context. He explains how he arrived at his "best estimate" that organs of 65,000 Falun Gong and "two to four thousand" Uyghurs, Tibetans and house Christians were pillaged in the 2000- 2008 period.

Matas, Gutmann and I released an Update in 2016 in Washington, Ottawa and Brussels (accessible from [www.endorganpillaging.org](http://www.endorganpillaging.org)). It provided a careful examination of the transplant programs of hundreds of hospitals across China. We concluded cautiously that over two decades, the party-state directed a network of organ harvesting from prisoners of conscience—primarily Falun Gong since 2001. Our findings helped the US Congress and the European Parliament to pass nearly identical resolutions condemning the Chinese state for harvesting prisoners of conscience.

Organ pillaging from Uyghurs in fact preceded that from Falun Gong. Dr. Enver Tohti, a Uyghur, has detailed how in 1995, as a general surgeon in a Ürümqi hospital, Xinjiang, he was sent to an execution ground to remove the kidneys and liver from a prisoner. Xi Jinping himself has been quoted saying bizarrely that Uyghurs should be shown "absolutely no mercy".

Based on the independent 2019 China Tribunal findings in the U.K., we learn that the Chinese authorities are still doing this vile commerce. Ninety thousand transplants a year and the assurance of a back-up organ should the original organ fail is a combination that has no equal anywhere. This reality in China can only be explained as caused by the murder of readily available ‘prisoners’ – Falun Gong, Tibetans, Uyghur Muslims and Christians.



Chair Geoffrey Nice, Q.C.



China Tribunal presenting its findings

The Tribunal concluded that Falun Gong members were the primary victims of the harvest, but since 2017 a comprehensive DNA collection of every man, woman, and child from Xinjiang’s indigenous Uyghur community in China has created a large pool of potential donors from which evidence of harvesting might emerge. The incarceration since 2017 of up to 3 million Uyghurs in concentration camps has added to the concern that this has become a particularly vulnerable group.

The Tribunal concluded by calling on governments, activists, motivated politicians to decide for themselves whether crimes had been committed in the face of the findings, and “do whatever they might think is their duty in the face of any revealed wickedness of the kind shown in any finding that forced organ harvesting has happened or is continuing to happen in the PRC.”

## **COVID-19**

Many nationals of countries with independent media probably know that during about 40 days in late 2019 and early 2020 Beijing concealed and falsified information about the spread of COVID-19 within China. German intelligence and others reported that China’s Xi Jinping pressured the World Health Organization (WHO) to delay issuing a global warning about the virus. American government security concluded that Beijing suppressed the information so it could buy up PPE and other medical supplies globally.

When COVID-19 emerged in Wuhan, Taiwan, for example, moved quickly to screen flights from there on December 31, 2019; ban entry by Wuhan residents on January 23, 2020; institute intensive testing and contact tracing; and bar all visitors from China on February 6th. If the WHO and its 194 member-nations had adapted Taiwan's practices, many of the millions of infections and more than 5 million deaths (Nov 9) worldwide could have been avoided.

The biggest influx of COVID-19 carriers into Europe was about 260,000 Chinese citizens, with two-thirds flying back from China after their yearly vacation to their garment industry jobs in Italy. By January 11, 2021, there were 2.2 million confirmed cases in Italy and 79,203 deaths. European Union governments, Australia, and the U.S. demanded an independent investigation on how COVID-19 spread to humans. Xi offered \$2 billion to the WHO, but until mid-January, 2021 blocked WHO and investigators from various countries entering Wuhan. Some class actions for damages against the government of China appear already to be underway in the United States.

## **Conclusion**

Manufacturing remains the lifeblood of most prosperous economies. The democracies have watched myriad manufacturing jobs disappear because investors felt they could make greater profits in China. Canada alone has lost about 600,000 since China joined the WTO in 2001.

A report on state capitalism almost a decade ago in the *Economist* made a number of points about the Chinese economic model, including:

“A culture of corruption permeates China's economy today, with Transparency International ranking it 75<sup>th</sup> on its perceived corruption index for 2011. *The Economist* quotes a central Bank of China estimate that between the mid-1990s and 2008 some 16,000-18,000 Chinese officials and executives of state-owned companies ‘made off with a total of \$123 billion.’ “

Former premier Wen Jiabao said years ago, “The reform in China has come to a critical stage. Without the success of political structural reform, it is impossible for us to fully institute economic structural reform. The gains we have made... may be lost, new problems that have cropped up in China's society cannot be fundamentally resolved and such historical tragedy as the Cultural Revolution may happen again.”

Unfortunately, under Xi Jinping in recent years the rule of law and democratic reforms sought by Wen and other leaders ended. Xi has in effect re-interpreted democracy at home as totalitarianism, including opposition to multi-party elections and independence of judges.

Earlier this year, the Canadian House of Commons voted 266-0 to declare Beijing's ongoing persecution of its Turkic Muslim minorities to be genocide within the 1948 UN Genocide Convention. The motion also called on the Canadian government to push for relocation of the 2022 Winter Olympics out of Beijing if this crime against humanity does not cease.

President Xi Jinping (習近平) is attempting to change the narrative by asserting that his government has eliminated extreme poverty in China. However, Premier Li Keqiang (李克強) in May said that "there are over 600 million people whose monthly income is barely 1,000 yuan [US\$155], not enough to rent a room."

Permit me to end with a plea to all of you from so many European nations to help oppose actively any harassment of persons of origin in China wherever it occurs. Our concern is the genocidal and other inhuman conduct by the non-elected regime in Beijing, not the much-abused residents of what will hopefully become a leading democratic country soon.

Thank you.