

A democratic Union?



Dr. Karin van Leeuwen

Experience Day BA European Studies, Maastricht



Overview

1. What is democracy?

- ❑ Liberal vs illiberal democratic political systems

2. Which democratic values does the EU stand for?

3. Case study of Eastern Europe:

- ❑ Democratic transition after 1989
- ❑ Democratic backsliding after EU membership

1. What is democracy?



Etymology:

‘Demos’ = people

‘Kratein’ = to rule

A popular definition

Democracy is government of the people, by the people and for the people.

(Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address)

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Democracy is government **of** the people, **by** the people and **for** the people.

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An academic definition (Robert Dahl)

A political system based on the following:

Criteria of Democracy

1. Effective participation
2. Voting equality
3. Enlightened understanding
4. Control of the agenda
5. Inclusiveness



Conditions for democracy

- 1) Elected officials
- 2) Free and fair elections
- 3) Inclusive suffrage
- 4) Right to run for office
- 5) Freedom of expression
- 6) Alternative information
- 7) Associational autonomy

Conditions for democracy

Public Participation

- 1) Elected officials
- 2) Right to run for office
- 3) Inclusive suffrage
- 4a) Free elections



illiberal democracy

Liberal and civic rights

- 4b) Fair elections
- 5) Freedom of expression
- 6) Alternative information
- 7) Associational autonomy



liberal democracy



2. The democratic values of the EU

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- **DRAWING INSPIRATION** from the cultural, religious and **humanist** inheritance of Europe, from which have developed the **universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law,**
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- **CONFIRMING** their attachment to **the principles of liberty, democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and of the rule of law,**
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(Preamble to the Treaty on the European Union, emphasis added)

Copenhagen summit (June 1993)



The Copenhagen criteria (1993)

A prospective member must achieve:

- stability of institutions guaranteeing **democracy**, the rule of law, **human rights** and respect for and protection of minorities;
- the existence of a functioning **market economy** as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union;
- the ability to take on **the obligations of membership** including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.

The challenge of enforcement

Pre-accession: liberal democracy as a *condition* for membership

Post-accession: enforcement mechanisms, but depend on agreement of the Council (including the 'backsliding' Member States!)

3. Case study of Eastern Europe



Restrictions of liberal/civic rights

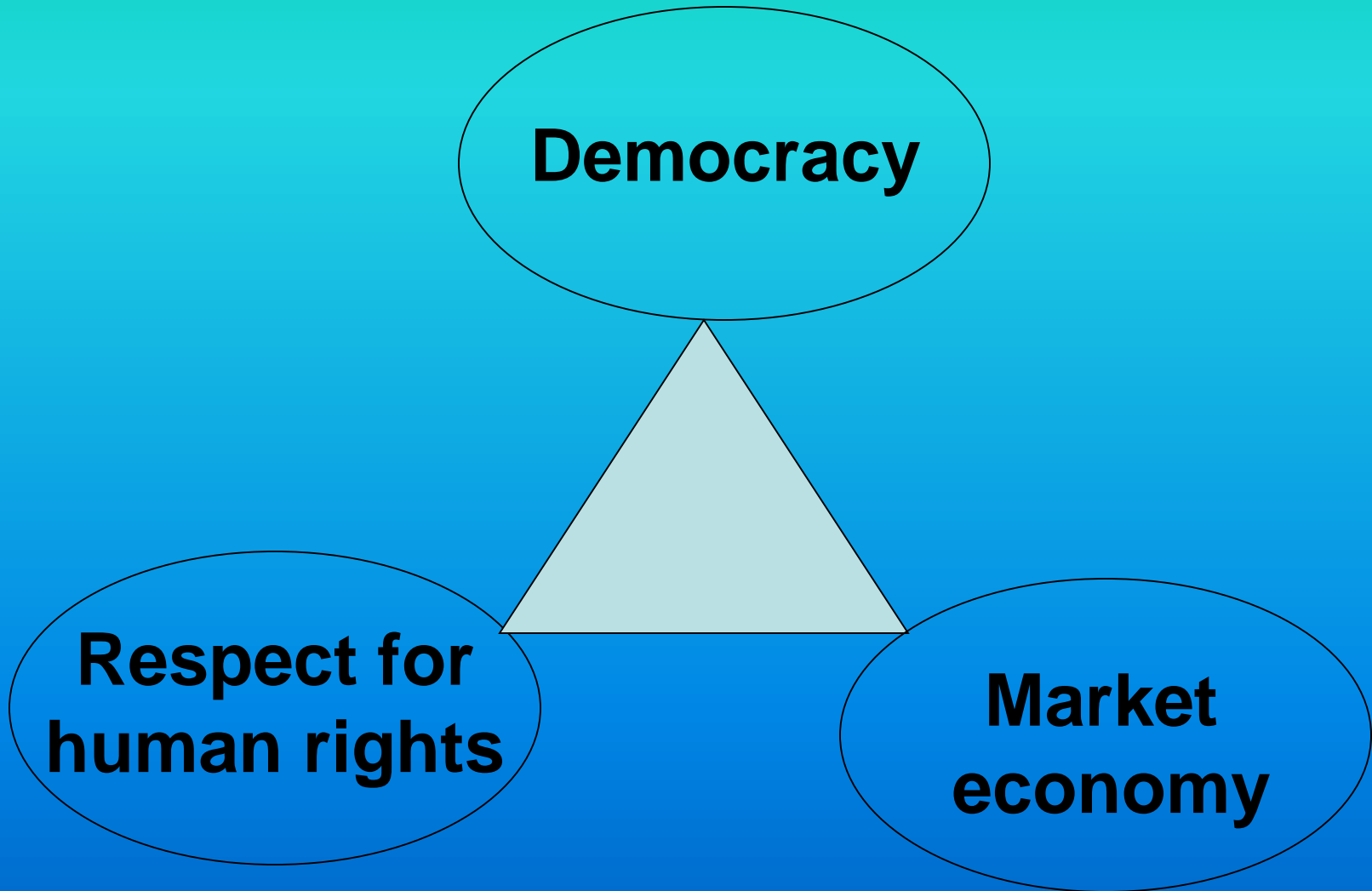


Legacy of communism?

Pre-1989 political characteristics:

- One-party communist regimes
- Subordinated to Moscow
- Backed up by a repressive apparatus
- Political pluralism was unthinkable
- Elections were just a formal exercise and controlled by the government

1990s transition: liberal victory?



2004 into EU -> 'backsliding'



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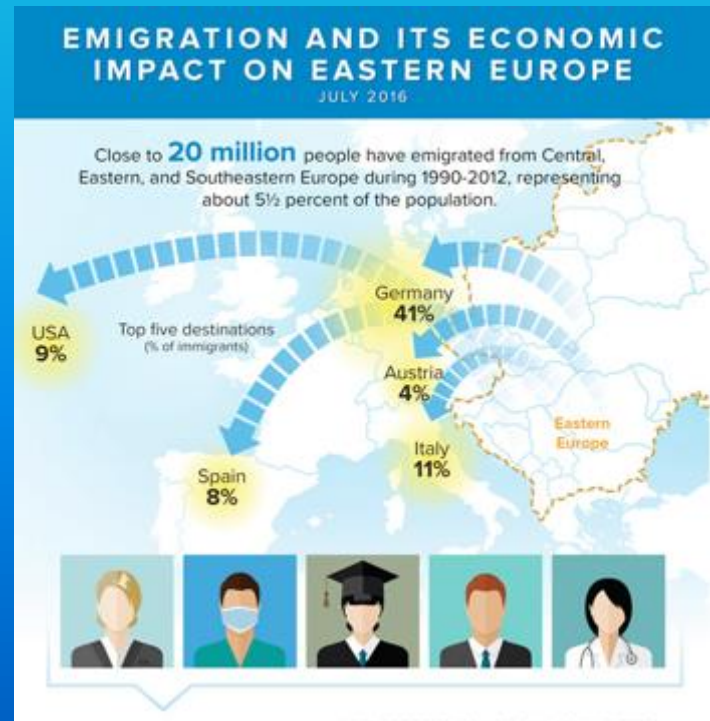
ARGUMENT For Eastern Europe, Brussels Is the New Mo...

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ARGUMENT

For Eastern Europe, Brussels Is the New Moscow

After upcoming elections in Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania, healing Europe's east-west divide will be more urgent than ever.



Wrapping up

- Liberal vs illiberal democracy
- EU embracing liberal democracy
- Within EU, some Eastern European states becoming illiberal democracies



Discussion

(How) Can liberal and illiberal democratic systems co-exist within the EU, and what does this mean for the European integration project?



**THANK YOU FOR YOUR
ATTENTION!**