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**21st century, geopolitical
reconfiguration: what about the
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Abstract:

In a planet immersed in a powerful global reconfiguration, geopolitics, understood in its most classical sense, recovers all its splendour. After a few decades, since the end of the Cold War, of apparent maintenance of the international system, the sensation is that everything is being questioned and everything is being blown up.

Geopolitics provides a series of answers to these facts, although it is perhaps necessary not to forget that, beyond - or at the root of - disputes over power and interests, there are people and societies, human groups who, through a social contract, are bound to their governments and who are progressively losing hope all over the planet.

Although at different speeds and with different effects, this hopelessness, this lack of hope for a better tomorrow - at the entrance to hell described by Dante was the sentence "Abandon all hope" - has a devastating effect on a planetary scale, which means that it should perhaps be considered as an element to be integrated to a greater degree in geopolitical analyses.

A reflection on this subject articulates the present document.

Keywords:

Hope, geopolitics, social contract, self-deception, polarisation, credibility, international system.

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Resumen:

En un planeta sumido en una poderosa reconfiguración global, la geopolítica, entendida en su sentido más clásico, recobra todo su esplendor. Tras unas décadas, desde el final de la Guerra Fría, de aparente mantenimiento del sistema internacional, la sensación es que todo es cuestionado y todo salta por los aires.

La geopolítica proporciona una serie de respuestas a estos hechos, si bien quizás sea necesario no olvidar que, más allá —o en su origen— de las disputas por poder e intereses, se encuentran personas y sociedades, grupos humanos que, a través de un contrato social, se vinculan a sus gobiernos y que progresivamente van perdiendo, en todo el planeta, la esperanza.

Si bien a diferentes velocidades y con diferentes efectos, esa desesperanza, esa falta de expectativas en un mañana mejor —en la entrada del infierno descrito por Dante figuraba la sentencia «Abandonad toda esperanza»—, tiene un efecto demoledor a escala planetaria, lo cual lleva a que, quizás, debería considerarse como un elemento a integrar en mayor grado en los análisis geopolíticos.

Una reflexión al respecto articula el presente documento.

Palabras clave:

Esperanza, geopolítica, contrato social, autoengaño, polarización, credibilidad, sistema internacional.

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Introduction: Hope at last!

Only three decades ago, after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War, the world was seemingly heading towards an era of peace and prosperity, with the nightmare of the planet divided between irreconcilable sides and the latent possibility of the whole of humanity perishing in a nuclear holocaust over.

Thus, many nations, friends and enemies until just a few months ago, came together in the document called the Charter of Paris for a New Europe¹, which is a veritable hymn to hope. From stating that the era of confrontation and division had come to an end, and that from now on relations would be based on cooperation and respect, to expressing that we were entering a new era of democracy, peace and unity (in Europe), to literally stating that we were at a "time of profound changes and historic hopes" and that "ours is a time to fulfil the hopes and illusions of our peoples". All this gave a good indication of the prevailing sentiment and perception in Europe and in much of the world. It seemed that, at last, hope with a capital letter would be a fact and a reality for the whole of humanity.

There was even talk of the "end of history"², where it was pointed out that wars would be a thing of the past, disputes would be economic and that the struggle of ideologies had ended, with liberal democracy triumphing. And in the face of this new stage facing humanity, the planet, which was also immersed in great economic growth - with disparities, but with a positive balance on a global scale - due to globalisation, made the feeling of finding oneself in this new era of peace and prosperity seemingly a good one.

Geopolitics, in its most classical sense, is a concept more than a term, more than a simple word, in which several disciplines, such as geography, economics, international relations, history -not forgetting demography-..., make up a science or a field of study - there are certain discrepancies on this issue- which has a direct relationship with the trajectory of large human groups and with the international situation and future. Therefore, and although the term has sometimes been used in a pejorative way, in

¹ ORGANISATION FOR SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE. Charter of Paris for a New Europe. Paris, 19-21 November 1990. Available at: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/9/d/39521.pdf>. NOTE: All internet links in this document active as of 31 December 2023.

² FUKUYAMA, Francis. *The End of History and the Last Man*. 1992.

short, it deals with power, with the real and/or potential capacities of each human group and their distribution on the planet.

It seemed, at last, that humanity, overcoming those constants of the past, was heading towards a new era of global hope, where geopolitics, in short, the struggle and competition for power, gave way to a kind of cooperation to achieve a better world, that Kantian ideal of perpetual peace³ that would fulfil the expectations and hopes of most of the planet's human beings. In the face of geopolitics, understood in the most pejorative sense as a struggle for global power, the possibility of hope on a global scale arose.

But... would that be possible?

The end of global hope?

Nothing is forever... and, in a world where everything is happening - happening - faster and faster, it seems that what should be eternal, or at least have a long life, is becoming much more frugal and volatile.

Perhaps the signals were not properly interpreted, such as the disintegration of the once rich and world-renowned Yugoslav nation⁴ at the beginning of the 1990s - in a new edition of the balkanisation that has generated so many bad memories and so many embers of conflict in Europe since the 19TH century - or the plummeting fall into the abyss of the hitherto powerful and proud Russia -as the essential core of the Soviet Union- whose population went from very high expectations to a brutal level of poverty and disenchantment, whose population went, at full speed, from very high expectations to a level of poverty and brutal disenchantment⁵ - and which brought with it longings and yearnings for a past where, at least, some certainties made it possible to organise life and survive, where hope could be maintained -.

³ In the work *Perpetual Peace*, written by Immanuel Kant in 1795 after the Peace of Basel between Prussia and France, a series of guidelines are set out for the establishment of a system of world governance that would contribute to the achievement of true peace as the ultimate goal of mankind.

⁴ SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ, Pedro. "Yugoslavia y yugonostalgia: Europa y euronostalgia?", *Panorama geopolítico de los conflictos 2019*. Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, Ministry of Defence, Madrid, 2019, pp. 107-142.

⁵ FREELAND, Chrystia. *Sale of the Century: Russia's wild ride from communism to capitalism*. Crow Bussiness, New York, 2000.

Perhaps it was the economic crisis of 2008⁶, a crisis that seemingly came out of nowhere, a crisis that almost nobody understands well, but which, nevertheless, and precisely because of this global world, soon generated an economic hecatomb unprecedented since the Great Depression of the 1930s. And it also brought with it two powerful feelings: the loss of confidence, for the first time in generations, that children could live at a similar level to their parents - the appearance, for the first time in generations, of hopelessness about the future - and also the loss of confidence in governments, accused - rightly or wrongly - of not having taken adequate measures to prevent such an incomprehensible thing from happening and affecting citizens to such a great extent.

And a clear sign of the effects of this crisis - and of its most devastating effect, hopelessness - was the appearance of the so-called "Arab Springs", which, beyond perceptions related to demands for democracy and freedom, were essentially a social demand for bread and work, a hymn to hope for a real possibility of life, and for a better quality of life. And, in the same way, the waves of protests of the so-called "yellow waistcoats", the "indignados movements" or the emergence of the so-called "new parties" constituted patent acts of this social despair⁷ that sought, sometimes in a kind of "flight forward", a light at the end of the tunnel, while confidence in the leaders and the "system" was breaking down by leaps and bounds.

Perhaps it was that this so-called "democratic capitalism", a model that after the collapse of the Soviet Union seemed to have emerged triumphant in the struggle between socio-economic models, was in crisis, as the two components of this system, capitalism and democracy, seem to be in a phase of divergence, of apparent impossibility of coexistence, which contributes to the emergence and growth, and very rapidly, of populist currents at the extremes of this model. As a result, authoritarianism and anti-capitalism, at least in the narratives and proclamations, are gaining ground, and it is pointed out that democracy would be better without capitalism and capitalism

⁶ For an overview, see: ALLISON, John A., *The financial crisis and the free market cure*. McGraw Hill, New York, 2012.

⁷ SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ, Pedro. "Will the Mediterranean burn...south?" (IEEE Analysis Paper, 04/2020). 19 February 2020. Available at:

https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2022/DIEEEA01_2022_PEDSAN_Revolucion.pdf

would be better without democracy, so that voices arise⁸ indicating that a certain degree of rebalancing of this relationship is necessary... while despair grows.

Or perhaps it was globalisation, that apparent source of almost unlimited wealth and prosperity due to the growing commercial and economic links and interdependence between societies all over the planet -which apparently prevented the possibility of disputes due to the serious economic damage it could entail-, which is being questioned and analysed from different spheres and points of view: not only from the economic⁹, but also from the security¹⁰ and even from the identity¹¹. And not precisely as a source of hope.

Or perhaps it is the constant commitment to new technologies¹² as a factor of hope - the so-called "engineer's hope" - which seems not to be fully realised, or perhaps it is that it is based on much more complex premises than it might seem.

Thus, terms¹³ such as VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) or BANI ("fragile, anxious, non-linear and incomprehensible")... populate the literature and the perceptions of populations who have been suffering for years from the transition from an environment with a certain degree of certainty to one full of uncertainty¹⁴ ..., which generates, generally and globally, despair.

But not everywhere on the planet is this degree of hopelessness identical. In some places it reaches an almost absolute level.

⁸ WOLF, Martin. *La crisis del capitalismo democrático: por qué el matrimonio entre democracia y capitalismo está se diluyendo y qué debemos hacer para solucionarlo*. Ediciones Deusto, Barcelona, 2023.

⁹ In this sense: VV. AA. *Geo-economic fragmentation and the future of multilateralism*. International Monetary Fund, vol. 2023, n.º 1. 15 January 2023. Available at: <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/006/2023/001/article-A001-en.xml>

¹⁰ SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ, Pedro. "What if there is a blockade?" (IEEE Analysis Paper, 36/2021). 6 October 2021. Available at:

https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2021/DIEEEA36_2021_PEDSAN_Flujo.pdf

¹¹ AKIL BUMBESIA, Amadu and FARAFIN SANDOUNO, Farafin. "Afropolarism", *Geopolitika.ru*. 25 October 2023. Available at: <https://www.geopolitika.ru/en/article/afropolarism>

¹² SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ, Pedro. "Industrial Revolution 4.0: A new century of upheaval in the Mediterranean?" (IEEE Analysis Paper, 01/2022). 12 January 2022. Available at:

https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2022/DIEEEA01_2022_PEDSAN_Revolucion.pdf

¹³ An explanation of both, from a certain point of view, can be read in: DIEFFENBACHER, Stephan F. "BANI World: What is it and why we need it?", *Digital Leadership*. 3 September 2023. Available at: <https://digitalleadership.com/blog/bani-world/>

¹⁴ SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ, Pedro. "COVID Era: A New Security Paradigm?" (IEEE Analysis Paper, 36/2020). 18 November 2020. Available at:

https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2020/DIEEEA36_2020PEDSAN_eraCovid.pdf

Spaces of hopelessness... Let's look for hope!

In parts of Central and South America, the life situation is absolutely complex for tens of thousands of people: the lack of expectations, of hope for a better future in their own land, makes them leave for another land far away, making an extremely hard journey¹⁵ and which does not necessarily have to have a happy ending, as they may not reach "El Dorado"¹⁶ or even, if they do, be deported..., not to mention the real possibility of dying in the attempt.

The human flood into the United States is of such magnitude that, for some US congressmen, it is of paramount importance. So much so that they are threatening¹⁷ not to continue - not to extend the funds that are running out - with the aid provided to Ukraine in the ongoing conflict with Russia if there is no substantial increase in security at the southern border of the United States in order to limit the number of migrants arriving there to a high degree.

The situation of hopelessness is such among those seeking the possibility of a better life, or simply to survive, that even on Christmas Eve thousands of people marched¹⁸, many of them families with children, in an attempt to reverse the planned tightening of measures to alleviate migration from Latin America to the United States... A march for hope.

To point to another area of the planet - and without wishing to be exhaustive - in much of Africa and especially in the Sahel - the wide strip of land that constitutes the southern "shore" of the Sahara - a mixture of economic, social and political factors have generated destabilised societies where climate change and uncontrolled population growth - doubling every twenty years - mean that the only possibility for a substantial part of the population is to survive is to go to the Sahara, social and political factors

¹⁵ In this sense: MORÁN BREÑA, Carmen. "El regreso de la Bestia. El sueño mutilado de los migrantes", *El País*. 10 December 2023. Available at: <https://elpais.com/mexico/2023-12-10/el-regreso-de-la-bestia-el-sueno-mutilado-de-los-migrantes.html>

¹⁶ The myth of "El Dorado" refers to a land full of gold and riches. More information in: DELGADO, Daniel. "El origen de El Dorado", *Muy Interesante*. 13 August 2020. Available at: <https://www.muyinteresante.es/historia/35738.html>

¹⁷ DEMIRJIAN, Karoun and JAKES, Lara. "White House warns Ukraine aid is running out, pressing Congress for more", *The New York Times*. 4 December 2023. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/04/us/politics/us-congress-ukraine.html>

¹⁸ CLEMENTE, Edgar H. "Thousands join migrant caravan in Mexico ahead of Secretary of State Blinken's visit to the capital". AP, 24 December 2023. Available at: <https://www.yahoo.com/news/thousands-join-migrant-caravan-mexico-191633145.html>

have generated destabilised societies where climate change and uncontrolled population growth - doubling every twenty years - mean that the only chance of survival for a substantial part of the population is to join an organised crime/terrorist group or to emigrate, knowing that in either case the chances of death are very high. The existing situation in the region of a "perfect storm"¹⁹ leads to the future being viewed with very few expectations, to hope being linked to what has already been pointed out... or even to support coups d'état²⁰ as the only desperate option they see that can help them solve their serious problems, to bring them some hope.

Given the growing despair in large parts of the planet, it seems reasonable to look wherever it exists..., but the current global situation, full of conflicts and conflict, in an era of geopolitical reconfiguration²¹ where it is clear that the world "order" is changing and where it is not clear where it is heading, generates a powerful vacuum, a vacuum of hope, of expectations... and even of credibility. So much so that there is talk of a "crisis of credibility"²² in global politics, in the "system" and in the rulers... and at all levels.

But there are areas of the world, rich and free, that have no such problems, where hope is almost a vital axiom, is it not?

Spaces of hope... Are they still hopeful?

The serious fentanyl crisis²³, the addiction to a drug that is causing a veritable hecatomb in the United States - 100,000 deaths a year, more than in the rest of the planet combined - is a problem of previously unparalleled dimensions. And it is

¹⁹ SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ, Pedro. "Sahel: Perfect Storm of Growing Amplitude and Intensity", *Panorama geopolítico de los conflictos 2021*. Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies, Ministry of Defence, Madrid, 2021, pp. 229-252. Available at:

https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/panoramas/PGC2021/Cap_8_Sahel.pdf

²⁰ ERO, Comfort and MUTIGA, Murithi. "The crisis of African democracy", *Foreign Affairs*. 12 December 2023. Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/africa/crisis-african-democracy>

²¹ SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ, Pedro. "La nueva pugna de las potencias: Guerra mundial 3.0 o guerra fría 2.0?" (IEEE Analysis Paper, 28/2023). 19 April 2023. Available at:

https://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2023/DIEEEA28_2023_PEDSAN_Potencias.pdf

²² COHEN, Hared. "The global credibility gap", *Foreign Policy*. 6 December 2023. Available at:

https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/12/06/global-geopolitics-credibility-us-china-competition-alliances-deterrence-military-economic-power/?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Editors%20Picks%2012092023&utm_term=editors_picks

²³ FERRAGAMO, Mariel and ROY, Diana. "These eight charts show why fentanyl is a huge foreign policy problem". Council on Foreign Relations, 21 December 2023. Available at <https://www.cfr.org/article/these-eight-charts-show-why-fentanyl-huge-foreign-policy-problem>

happening - paradoxically or not - in the richest nation on the planet, albeit one with great inequalities at its heart. Wealth, *per se*, does not seem to be a guarantee of hope. So?

The answer is simple to give and very complex in the analysis of its causes: when a person, especially a young one, loses the motivation to go on living, it is easier to develop self-destructive behaviours such as drug addiction or suicide attempts, which have been called "deaths of hopelessness"²⁴.

And the United States, once the "paradigm" of democracy, is divided and radicalised as never before in its history, except for the moments before its civil war, and one of the reasons given for this division, this deep radicalisation that turns into extremism, is the lack of certainties, of references, because uncertainty²⁵ generates a powerful feeling of helplessness, which leads to a search for certainties, for roots, to know one's place in the world... And, in the absence of "traditional references", extreme ideologies provide others - in addition to the feeling of belonging to a group, which is always important for human beings and even more so in times of helplessness -, spreading at an unparalleled speed through social networks and digital communication systems. Faced with a lack of expectations, of hope, "grasping at straws (even if they are) burning" tends to be the most common option.

But it is not necessary to resort to such harsh and dramatic examples to be able to appreciate that something complex is happening even in the richest and safest areas of the planet. The "screens" and the abusive use of them have a powerful impact on the mental health of populations, especially the youngest sectors of the population, by, among other things, generating false expectations²⁶ that are not fulfilled. Even the Fundación de Ayuda contra la Drogadicción (FAD) has an open campaign²⁷ in relation

²⁴ VERDU, F. "Muertes por desesperanza", *International Journal of Forensic Science*, n.º 46. January-March 2023. Available at: https://www.uv.es/gicf/1Ed1_Verdu_GICF_47.pdf

²⁵ BENSON, Thor. "Why the US is primed for radicalization", *Wired*. 12 December 2022. Available at: <https://www.wired.com/story/radicalization-extremism-us-uncertainty-social-media/>

²⁶ Data from the conference "Bienestar y Salud Mental en una Sociedad Digitalizada", collected in: LA RAZÓN. "El abuso de las pantallas quiebra la salud mental". 25 October 2023. Available at: https://www.larazon.es/sociedad/abuso-pantallas-quiebra-salud-mental_2023102565394c0632dc75000143a969.html

²⁷ FOUNDATION FOR HELP AGAINST DRUG ADDICTION. "Your children's digital universe is a whole world". Available at: <https://fad.es/sensibilizacion/campanas/descubre-su-mundo-digital/>

to the digital world and its use - or abuse - by young people. Thus²⁸, 59.3 % of young people report having some kind of mental health problem in 2023, while in 2017, just five years earlier, the percentage was 28.4 %. And the fact that 46.2% of young people say they feel tired or lack energy, 42.7% are afraid of the future and 40.7% are uninterested in doing things is very worrying. And the refuge in a virtual world is just a sign of the hopelessness of the real world.

Youth, that vital, personal and social stage on which essentially rests the hope, the possibility - and viability - of a better tomorrow, is not only permeated by circumstances and facts that can really have not only a harmful component for health, but even make good the myth (or allegory) of Plato's cave²⁹ - in essence, a group of people who, in a cave in which they have lived all their lives, can only look at a wall, on which appear the shadows of people carrying objects projected by a fire; for these people, unaware of reality, these shadows projected by others constitute their reality in an unequivocal and unquestionable way, to such an extent that when one escapes from the cave, observes the true reality and returns to tell the rest... you run the risk of being killed. But that's just a myth, that can't happen in a world where all information is - or is believed to be - at your fingertips, can it?

Considering that young people primarily use online media as their main source of information³⁰, the situation is worrying, because opinions and perceptions are formed on the basis of the information received, and on that basis, hopes are also forged and supported. But if this information, these fragments of reality, are manipulated, changed or just shadows, as in Plato's cave, our opinions, perceptions and hopes will be completely different... They may, in the end, not even be "ours", but those that others have sought to implant, for, as is pointed out quite clearly and unambiguously: "The dissemination of disinformation also affects policy-making processes, as it influences

²⁸ MUTUA GROUP. *Barómetro Juvenil 2023* (carried out by the Mutua Madrileña Foundation and Fad Juventud-Prensa Mutua). 9 October 2023. Available at: <https://www.grupomutua.es/sala-de-prensa/actualidad/barometro-juvenil-fundacion-mutua-y-fad-sobre-salud/>

²⁹ PLATO. *The Republic*, Book VII.

³⁰ EUROPEAN COMMISSION. "Combating online disinformation: a European approach", COM(2018) 236 final. Brussels, 26 April 2018, p. 1. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/ES/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52018DC0236&from=PL>

public opinion. Domestic and foreign actors can use disinformation to manipulate policies, social debates and behaviour"³¹ .

For example, as points out³² in the sequel to Aldous Huxley's dystopia, *Brave New World*, cosmetics manufacturers do not sell emulsions, they sell hope. And for the hope of being more attractive, and by means of "misleading symbols", one is willing to pay ten or twenty times the real value of the product. Therefore, for hope, one is willing to pay a high price, especially if the environment is one of hopelessness... What if in the end what is "bought" is only false hope? Do we deceive ourselves and accept magical solutions in the face of the force of the facts?

Self-deception as a stepping stone to despair?

Great Britain, one of the European and world powers, decided, under the argument of "recovering sovereignty", to separate from the European Union in 2016, in a process - not exempt of multiple difficulties - that ended in 2020. The "Balkanisation" of the European Union that this act of secession -withdrawal- from it entailed was argued with promises of recovering glories and riches, capacities and possibilities like those of other moments in British imperial history... The current reality is that the problems are enormous, the glories of the past have not returned - nor have the promises of a better future- and that only 7% of the citizens have hope that the situation will improve in the medium term, while a majority wish to return to being part of the European Union³³ . Hope has not grown, quite the contrary.

And even in a wealthy and powerful nation - in an "El Dorado" for millions of people - an investigation into the management of the London government during the COVID pandemic shows increasingly weak state structures lacking in capacity, which served merely to muddle through, but without the capacity to deal with a complex situation such as that generated during the COVID-19 pandemic. And this weakness was maintained because part of the political class had a particular vision of themselves as a nation, their

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³² HUXLEY, Aldous. *Brave New World Revisited*, Editorial Sudamericana, Buenos Aires, 1998 (original work written in 1958), chapter VI, p. 56.

³³ TONY BLAIR INSTITUTE FOR GLOBAL CHANGE. "Moving forward: the path to a better post-Brexit relationship between the UK and the EU. 22 June 2023. Available at:

<https://www.institute.global/insights/geopoliticsand-security/moving-forward-path-to-better-post-brexit-relationship-between-uk-eu>

place in the world and their capabilities, perhaps maintaining the dream that "Britannia still ruled the seas"... a vision that was not the reality, as the reality is closer to that of a dysfunctional state, not to mention the disconnect between the government and the realities on the ground³⁴. It was, perhaps at its least bad, simply self-delusion.

And, further to this question, it is claimed that terms such as *dysfunctional*, *lack of discipline*, *chaos*... and an environment of "superhero culture" prevented an adequate management of the pandemic and its lethal effects from London, despite the warnings of certain members of the Government³⁵, just as it continues to be reiterated, from certain sectors, that policies centred on improvisation do not work, and even less so for the challenges that must be faced today. At a difficult time, at a time of crisis, if the government did not give - or does not give - an adequate response, where is the social contract? Where is the citizens' trust in their leaders? So much so, in fact, that in Britain, serious concern is spreading³⁶ about the declining morale of civil servants. Hopelessness is growing... And was anything else really expected?

Democracy, as noted in an interesting report³⁷, is in decline around the world; public confidence in the value of democracy and in that of the social contract by which citizens agree to be governed in exchange for receiving certain goods and services is declining, as not only is the capacity to deliver those goods and services to citizens increasingly at risk, but the gap between social expectations and institutional performance is growing. As a result, citizens are aware that the social contracts of many nations are no longer fit for purpose, as basic issues of social contracts in democracy, such as respect for individual civil and political rights, a reasonable exercise of power by the rulers over the ruled, or the real possibility of access to a series of rights that make a dignified life possible, are increasingly perceived as distant. And so, as the report is subtitled, it is a

³⁴ KAMPFNER, John. "Britain has a much bigger problem than Brexit", *Foreign Policy*. 9 November 2023. Available at: https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/11/09/britain-covid-inquiry-brexite-boris-johnson-state-dysfunction-pandemic/?utm_source=Sailthru&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Editors%20Picks%2011092023&utm_term=editors_picks#cookie_message_anchor

³⁵ MACASKILL, Andrew. "Boris Johnson's response to COVID was "mad and dangerous"". Reuters, 31 October 2023. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/boris-johnsons-response-covid-was-mad-dangerous-top-official-2023-10-30/>

³⁶ WORLIDGE, Jack and CLYNE, Rhys. "Ministers should be worried about declining civil service morale". Institute for Government, 31 March 2023. Available at: <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/comment/declining-civil-service-morale>

³⁷ IDEA. *The State of Democracy in the World 2022*. Stockholm, 2023. Available at: https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/sites/default/files/2023-02/estado-de-la-democracia-en-el-mundo-2022_0.pdf

matter of "forging new social contracts in times of discontent", in times of despair; making good the adage "politics is the art of making possible what is necessary" seems to be more peremptory than ever. In this way, apparently, hope could be restored, far from remaining in a situation of, perhaps, self-delusion.

There are also other options, more drastic and complex, related to a "flight forward": faced with the fracture of this "El Dorado", faced with the apparent questioning of everything -vocabularies such as *postmodernism*, *relativism*, *transmodernism*, *presentism*, *liquid societies*, *transversalism* (or *transversality*), *deconstructivism*? are increasingly populating our everyday vocabulary and reality - in the face of this - real or apparent - disorder and chaos, it is always much easier to generate separate bubbles within the system, to balkanise society in order to gradually, by clinging to certain values - whatever they may be - and acting in different spheres - social, judicial, economic, etc. - generate spaces on the margins of common governance itself, creating spaces and places that can become *no-go* zones where not even the laws common to all really govern and where neither the police nor the state security services, finally, have any real capacity to act, because, once the legitimate monopoly of violence is lost, the state - that state, that society - does not really exist, because the society generated is different and differentiated, even from the other inhabitants of the same country. One need only think of the Parisian *banlieue* (periphery)³⁸ or the Molenbeek district³⁹ - in a Brussels that is the seat of the European Union - areas that, to a large extent, are almost completely differentiated spaces, different societies within another society in the same state... and which, at times, they see as the enemy to be beaten.

And this is largely due to the fact that in the face of false hopes, in the face of those castles in the air that quickly lead to despair, many people, many social groups become easy target audiences for radicalism and extremism, providing values and slogans to cling to in times of uncertainty, of despair... even though they may be absolutely perverse. Indeed, the growth of the jihadist phenomenon in Europe is exponential,

³⁸ As a simple example: VILLAÉCIJA, Raquel. "Noche de fuertes disturbios en la periferia de París tras la muerte de un joven por tiros de un policía", *El Mundo*. 28 June 2023. Available at:

<https://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2023/06/28/649bde7d21efa0716a8b4575.html>

³⁹ CHALMERS, Robert. "Is Molenbeek really a no-go zone?", *GQ Magazine*. 21 June 2017. Available at:

<https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/article/molenbeek-belgium-no-go-zone>

despite all police efforts to ensure security, and the challenge it poses to democracy in Europe⁴⁰ has only just begun to be glimpsed.

Perhaps, that the "word of the year 2023"⁴¹ is *polarisation* should be a cause for deep reflection.

From despair to hope... Is the answer geopolitics?

When it comes to the really important questions of life - and hope is undoubtedly one of them - both for individuals and for societies, the answer is almost never outside, almost never in others.

For both individuals and societies, the answer is almost never outside, almost never in others. It is always within oneself, as a person or as a society.

By way of an example known to all, the disaster of 1898 for Spain was not really the loss of the last overseas provinces; it was not the military defeat by the rising United States, which was beginning its imperial expansion by occupying the Caribbean, the "North American Mediterranean". The real disaster came from the moral blow, from the reality check that came from facing the facts starkly after decades or centuries of losing capabilities and place in the international order. As the politician and academic Francisco Silvela (1845-1905) masterfully pointed out in a brilliant article, Spain was without a pulse: "It is that materialism has invaded us, it is said: it is that selfishness is killing us; that the ideas of duty, of glory, of national honour have passed; that warlike passions have been dampened, that no one thinks only of their own personal benefit"⁴².

Suddenly, reality set in, and Spain was not "an empire"... It was a worn-out, fractured and weak nation, at a time, moreover, when in the rest of Europe - the centre of the world at that time - the other "old nations" (France, Great Britain...) were increasing their strength, power and influence, and the "new nations" (Germany, Italy, emerged or "reborn" in 1870...) were struggling hard to take "their place in the

⁴⁰ MICHERON, Hugo. *La colère et l'oubli: les démocraties face au jihadisme européen*. Gallimard, Paris, April 2023.

⁴¹ FUNDÉU. "Word of the year. 2023. Available at: <https://www.fundeu.es/palabra-del-anno/>

⁴² SILVELA, Francisco. "España sin pulso", *El Tiempo* (Madrid, 16 August 1989), in *El Desastre de 1898 visto por las figuras políticas de la Restauración*. Agencia Estatal Boletín Oficial del Estado, Madrid, 2023, pp. 134-135. Available at: https://www.boe.es/biblioteca_juridica/abrir_pdf.php?id=PUB-DH-2023-280

sun"....) were increasing their strength, power and influence, and the "new nations" (Germany, Italy, which emerged or were "reborn" in 1870) were struggling hard to take their "place in the sun"... The others were growing, and Spain was broken. And from this real conviction, from this reflection far from self-deception and false hopes, hope arose, a catharsis was generated⁴³ which led to a new path - regenerationism -⁴⁴ , in which hope for a better future was opening up; The realisation of reality, the exercise of self-reflection without self-deception and the realisation of the need to work hard to get ahead, without false illusions, laid the foundations for building an illusion, for having hope with capital letters, and for feeling that the future, that the illusion of a better tomorrow, was in the hands of each and every one of us. As Silvela himself pointed out: "We must abandon lies and espouse the truth; we must abandon vanities and submit to reality, reconstituting all the organisms of national life on the modest but firm foundations that our means allow us, not on the hollow forms of a conventionalism which, since it deceives no one, discourages and mocks everyone"⁴⁵ .

The well-known dystopia *Brave New World*, written by Aldous Huxley in 1932, describes a world in which, under the control of a "world state", people are born genetically programmed to occupy a certain position in a society without war or hunger and absolutely free sexually - something that in the years in which the novel was written was a great difference with respect to "normal life"... Apparently, this brave new world was an absolute paradise. But despite this, it was necessary to control the population by means of hypnosis and the unbridled consumption of a drug - soma - which was even included in food and drink, because the absence of family, religion, culture, love - eradicated from this social model - generated dysfunctions despite the implementation of this "happiness", but "artificial and soulless"... There is even a "reserve", where, despite all the attempts to generate this happiness, the misfits of the system end up.... who live a "normal" life there from the perspective of the 1920s. The novel, one of the great works of universal thought, highlights - among other issues - the importance of

⁴³ A word derived from Greek that can be defined as 'purification, liberation or inner transformation brought about by a profound life experience', as stated in the third meaning of the Diccionario de la Lengua Española de la Real Academia Española. Available at: <https://dle.rae.es/catarsis?m=form>

⁴⁴ In this sense: SALABERT FABANI, Vicent Lluís and SUAREZ CORTINA, Manuel (coords.). *Regenerationism in Spain: politics, education, science and society*. University of Valencia, 2007.

⁴⁵ SILVELA, Francisco. *Op. cit.*, p. 135.

feelings and values in human beings, even if their most basic needs - as Maslow would say - are covered⁴⁶ .

Therefore, the forgetting of essences and values, the siren songs full of false hopes and "happy worlds" everywhere do not stand up to the contrast with the reality of human beings and the environment, at a time when despair is on the rise on a global scale... And, therefore, perhaps it would be necessary to contemplate the current geopolitical reconfiguration not only from the perspective of the struggle for power, but also from the perspective of the despair of some and the false hopes of others, for perhaps this is the driving force that could be leading to an inevitable clash of human groups.

Perhaps, therefore, to overcome a period of global despair it is necessary to employ a kind of "geopolitics of hope", perhaps now more necessary than ever.

Conclusion: Towards hope via...

It seems clear that there is a need for a reconfiguration of hope at the global level that makes it possible - although conflict, differences and disputes will always be present - for expectations of a better tomorrow not to become seemingly impossible unless the rival is eliminated, physically or socially.

The great threats and challenges facing our planet, humanity as a whole, require the concerted efforts of individuals, societies and states to emerge victorious, as humanity, at this crossroads of history.

Disputes, fragmentation, balkanisation... could only favour disruptive interests, which, following the old axiom of "Divide and rule", watch as, like a fire that feeds back, despair grows and with it division and the need to find some way forward, some light at the end of so much darkness that provides a meaning to life and what is done in and of it. And that is the perfect target audience for the "false prophets", those who, promising paradise, only succeed in making their followers live, or simply survive, in a veritable

⁴⁶ The pyramid of needs described by Abraham Maslow (1908-1970) establishes a hierarchical scale of human needs, with those occupying the most basic level (1 of 5) being purely physiological (eating, sleeping, sexual relations, etc.), up to the top of the pyramid, which at level 5 places what he calls self-fulfilment needs (potential development, moral, creative, etc.). A brief explanation can be found at: <https://blog.institutoserca.com/que-es-la-piramide-de-maslow-y-necesidades/>

hell in the false hope that by suffering and sacrificing more they will reach the desired destination..., the hope of a better life and future.

If those who have nothing lose hope of being able to have something and those who have (almost) everything lose hope of being able to keep something..., then?

And self-deception only works for a while, until hard times put facts against illusions, complex realities against illusions, real problems against invented problems.

Then the struggle will be relentless, and societies as a whole will suffer greatly.

Is a catharsis necessary...? Perhaps yes, although this usually takes place after a great tragedy.

In that case, perhaps the appropriate question would be: Does a great (global) tragedy need to occur for catharsis to occur?

Let us hope not.

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