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## FREEDOM UNDER THREAT IN CONTEMPORARY WORLD

**Abstract:** Until a few years ago, freedom was taken for granted in all Western countries. Overall, after the end of the Cold war, Francis Fukuyama said that history was over: freedom had won on communism, the West had won against any other alternative political and economic model. Unfortunately, he was wrong: freedom is under threat again. The first threat comes from Islamic radicalism and terrorism. The second threat arrives from Russia and China, trying to impose their power over small free countries (Ukraine and Taiwan, overall). But two more threats arrive directly from inside the West: political correctness is the biggest threat to freedom of expression, and Covid restrictions have been the largest limitation of civil rights in western countries since the end of World War 2. I will try to analyse shortly these four critical situations.

**Key words:** freedom, political correctness, war in Ukraine, Islam, Covid restrictions.

In his famous 1992 essay entitled “The End of History and the Last Man” (Fukuyama, 1992, 44), the political scientist Francis Fukuyama supported a theory that became very popular in those years, namely that history ended with the total and definitive victory of the liberal and capitalist model on Soviet communism after 50 years of Cold War. Indeed, the United States, at the head of the West, had won from all points of view: in 1992 the free world seemed to have triumphed, with all its value corollary made up of the rule of law, free market, individual rights, multilateralism. The well-being and lifestyle of the West completed this ideological arsenal which appeared invincible and capable of attracting and assimilating every other culture. No other political, social and economic model seemed to be able to offer itself as a credible alternative to the one proposed by the West. Sadly, the world soon realized that the end of history was just an illusion. Fukuyama himself,

only four years later, published a second essay (entitled “Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity”; Fukuyama, 1996, 91) in which he began to doubt that liberal democracy, pressed by the resurgence of regional social, political and cultural identities, could really constitute the definitive form of government of the world. Thirty years after the publication of “The End of History and the Last Man” it is clear that history is not over and that freedom, the cornerstone of the Western model, has not yet won its battle. On the contrary, as Fukuyama underlines in his latest essays, freedom has to face every day new and old threats, both external and internal to the West.

Starting from the latter, I believe that the first threat to freedom comes, paradoxically, from the deep heart of the West, that is, from the Anglo-Saxon world. Contemporary democracy has its roots in Great Britain and the United States, which over the centuries have strenuously defended it from monarchical absolutism, Fascism and Communism. For about fifteen years, however, society in Anglo-Saxon countries seems to have forgotten its liberal roots, increasingly favouring an excessive protection of minorities (Tsakalakis, 2022, 112). The so-called ‘political correctness’ has now turned into a continuous limitation of freedom of expression, and in some Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian countries has even taken the form of a real censorship of critical thinking, which becomes evident in the world of cinema and entertainment, as well as in the numerous restrictions imposed by the social networks of the Meta group. In a few years we have gone from an objective and latent discrimination against minorities to a mild form of dictatorship of minorities. Minorities cannot be criticized, mocked and sometimes even named. Furthermore, minorities are now exclusively allocated jobs and shares of boards of important companies. With the goal to protect minorities, history has even been rewritten, denying the fundamental historical role of some great Western figures and demolishing important monuments in their memory. ‘Diversity’ and ‘inclusion’ have become obligations that lead, in fact, to a sort of reverse discrimination against Caucasian heterosexual men, seen as privileged people who should be somehow marginalized in society (Benoist, 2021, 73). The most worrying fact is that this liberticidal tendency based on so-called political correctness is spreading also in France and in the Mediterranean countries, above all Italy and Spain.

The second internal threat to the free world is much newer and more insidious than political correctness. It emerged with disruptive force in the two years of pandemic emergency, during which numerous Western governments imposed extremely severe restrictions on the civil rights of their

citizens. Countries like Italy and France have even gone so far as to ban their citizens from leaving their homes for months, importing the Chinese model in total silence from the media and opposition political forces (Stanig, Daniele, 2021, 101). Cities have been militarized and Western states have displayed an unprecedented repressive apparatus. The most basic rights such as freedom of movement and assembly have been denied, without this causing a scandal. The anti-Covid measures have been imposed as a form of technical restriction, about which no political debate has developed, despite the fact that the political implications of these restrictions were very strong and evident: parliaments have been practically deprived of the technical committees responsible for drafting restrictions on which there was no public debate. With the excuse of protecting public health, governments have found after several decades a way to impose very heavy restrictions on the freedom of their citizens without arousing any scandal or reaction from the constitutional courts, judges, media, political forces of opposition: the system of checks and balances typical of liberal democracies has completely disappeared, creating a precedent of absolute gravity that we do not know what it could lead to in the future.

Moving on to the external threats to freedom, the most continuous and long-lasting one is certainly Islamic fundamentalism (Etienne, 2001, 217). Since the first Taliban victory in Afghanistan (1996) it became clear that Islam would have been the main force of resistance to the Western model. A force incapable of promoting an attractive and alternative model to the Western one, but nonetheless capable of waking up the consciences of numerous peoples who have shown themselves to be allergic to Western values and lifestyles. September 11, 2001 was certainly the most violent and glaring fact of the Islamist threat, but this threat appeared with worrying continuity over time and space: the most glaring attacks were certainly those in Kenya and Tanzania (1998), 11 September 2001, Madrid (2004), London (2005), Mumbai (2008), Paris (2015), Berlin (2016), to which we must add the hundreds of micro-attacks carried out by Islamic jihad in Israel and in the Palestinian territories. In recent years, the Islamist threat has become even more insidious, because it is no longer limited to single attacks. It has attempted to take control of large territories in various parts of the world (Boko Haram guerrillas in Nigeria, jihad of the Islamic Courts in Somalia and Kenya), even going as far as to build – albeit only for a few years – a real Islamic state between Syria and Iraq. Just a year and a half ago Islamic fundamentalism achieved a symbolic political-strategic success

of great importance, when the Taliban managed to overthrow the democratic government established by the West during the twenty years of occupation of Afghanistan. Finally, we cannot forget a sneaky but fundamental aspect of the Islamist threat: the increasingly massive presence of Muslim immigrants in Europe. It is clear that most of them have nothing to do with fundamentalism, but it is a fact that many of the Islamic attacks that have occurred in Europe have been carried out by European citizens originating from Islamic States (Houllebecq, 2015, 184): this poses a gigantic challenge to Europe, which will have to defend its borders on the one hand and try to integrate and assimilate the Muslims already present on the continent on the other (Elsayed, Grip, 2018, 56).

The second external threat that freedom must face today is clearly the expansionist aims of “rogue states” (as Ronald Reagan liked to call them), led by China and, above all, by Russia (Fukuyama, 2022, 52). Up to now China has limited itself to periodic threats against the independence of Taiwan, a democratic outpost in the Far East. Russia, on the other hand, has been a threat to freedom, peace and geopolitical stability since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The method used by the Russians has always been the same since 1992: instrumentally raising the issue of the ‘protection of Russian-speaking minorities’ present in all the former Soviet states. This happened in the Moldovan region of Transnistria in 1992, in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008, in the Ukrainian regions of Crimea and Donbass in 2014 and now we are seeing the repetition of the same pattern with the very violent invasion of Ukraine. The big question is: whose turn will it be next time? To the Baltic republics? To Poland? To Moldova? Today the real ‘fault’ of Ukraine is certainly not the alleged ‘oppression of Russian-speaking minorities’. The real ‘fault’ of Ukraine is that it has embarked on the difficult path towards democracy and the rule of law, looking towards the West and wriggling away from the nefarious embrace of Moscow. From the Russian point of view, such an affront had to be repressed and immediately punished, who are terrified that the seed of freedom could also germinate in other former satellite states, such as Belarus or the republics of Central Asia. But the Russians miscalculated. I believe that the recovery of freedom is starting from Ukraine: the free world, headed by the United States, the United Kingdom and Poland, from day one has been on the side of the Ukrainian people, who are courageously resisting. The free world, after taking freedom for granted for far too long, is finally realizing its value. As President Zelensky has said many times, freedom must

be armed better than tyranny. This is what the free world is doing, this is what the free world will continue to do until the final Victory of Freedom!

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