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## The Attempted Destruction of Western Values

### Abstract

An attempt to shake the established world order of Western society, based on International Law, by the waging of war, has reached its peak. This is evidenced not only by Russia's war in Ukraine, but also by Russia's political attempts to destabilise Moldova's approach to Western values, along with the recent unrest in Georgia, where there is a risk of restricting individual freedom of expression, and the constant threats against the Baltic States. Conflicts of values have existed throughout world history, but the events we are witnessing now are not an accident, but a systematic reiteration of Russia's influence, with the aim of maintaining its influence and, perhaps, increasing its power in the region. The aim of this article is to show the clash of contemporary values in the current socio-political situation from the perspectives of theory and practice. Russian political leaders had long used alarming language in their rhetoric, up to and including the moment of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In Europe and throughout the Western world there was a belief in universal values with peaceful/stable global institutions, a belief which has proved to be misguided. On the other hand, military aggression against a free and independent country can be interpreted as a direct and clear attempt to destabilise the values of Western civilisation, without which no democratic society can exist. The timing of the military aggression was chosen after a decline in civic confidence from the perspective of the COVID-19 crisis; European countries were experiencing a reduction in political activity among their citizens, dissatisfaction with the political elite, and a certain decline in confidence in the EU institutions. The course of the pandemic reflected

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the lack of critical thinking in societies, as individuals were also at risk of manipulation in the information sphere. The Russian invasion of Ukraine caused some indignation in the Western world and a failure to react quickly to the rapid turn of events. After the first year of the war, the EU Member States managed not only to change their position but also to give unwavering and unequivocal support to the victim of the war, namely, Ukraine. So far, the EU slogan “United in Diversity” has become “United in Solidarity”, helping Ukraine to hold on and possibly win the war against the aggressor state, because no war, especially a war of values, ends on the front lines. As a result of current events, EU and transatlantic cooperation has undergone a major transformation involving extensive cooperation, a clear position on international law, and a desire to preserve and strengthen Western values.

**Keywords:** Values, Democracy, Liberty, Civil Society, Autonomy, Sovereignty

### **The Challenge for Democracy: Values as Ends and as Means**

Russia’s war in Ukraine marks its attempt to turn back the hands of time by reviving the Russian Empire to what it was in the 19th century. Back in the late 20th century, Russian right-wing ideologists Alexander Dugin and Alexander Prokhanov outlined Russia’s geopolitical future – a Eurasian empire with Russia at its centre, fighting against Atlanticism (the US) and, more broadly, democratic Western civilisation (Andersens, 2014). Until Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the liberal global order linked belief in universal values to the peaceful functioning of global institutions. A return to a peaceful life requires peace. This is not a one-off decision, but a long-term effort to protect universal norms and values and build cooperative institutions (Harari, 2009). Conflicts of values are a universal phenomenon, but Russia’s attack on Ukraine is a direct attempt to destroy the political values of the Western civilisation, without which no democratic society can exist. The aim of this article is to describe values as ends and as means, the practice of embodying values in the socio-political situation of the present, and the relationship of values as regards democracy and morality. Looking back historically, it is easy to see that every great civilisation emerged and flourished thanks to the practice of certain values, and subsequently perished because they stopped practising these fundamental values. Reflecting on the decline of the ancient Greek civilisation, Bertrand Russell considered the reason for the decline to be

that “a very high level of civilisation was combined with a very low level of morality” (Russell, 1938, p. 73). As a result, the social capital of that society was gradually squandered, leading to its weakening and collapse. Values, on the one hand, shape our behaviour and attitudes towards the world and people in general. On the other hand, they are the realisation of these attitudes, which may or may not be related to one’s needs. Values that have nothing in common with needs, are defined as so-called “eternal values” or “value ideals” that are timeless and therefore found in almost all cultures, i.e., the value of life, the ideal of freedom, and the ideal of humanism. But values do not function only in the form of ideals. They serve the purposes of human fulfilment and the development of society, and, for certain values to be realised, others must already be present in social practice. A certain level of social well-being and education allows both autonomous choice and tolerance to be exercised in the field of values. A society that experiences poverty may have serious difficulties in building and developing tolerance because the inequality gap is too deep. In the context of Western society, Isaiah Berlin quotes Richard Henry Tawney: “Freedom for the pike is death for the minnow” (Berlin, 2000). He goes on to ask: what does freedom mean for those who cannot use it? What is the value of freedom without the right conditions for exercising it? There are situations in which shoes are more important than spiritual values – individual freedom may not be the first necessity for everyone (Berlin, 2000). In other words, economic prosperity creates the basis (i.e., the right conditions) for the realisation of social and cultural values. In order for man to exist meaningfully in this world, he must find an answer to the question: what is it that makes life worth living? Everyone needs an answer to this question, from the individual to the nation.

When thinking about the various types of values, it is important to distinguish between *values as a means* to achieving an end and *values as an end in themselves*. Moral values are means to certain ends, primarily to achieve what is good.

If values are an end in themselves, because the individual wishes to embody them in the course of his or her life, to experience them being realised in relationships, then they can become the organising principles of life, from the individual to the nation and its culture. Values define the patterns of preferred behaviour and represent selective and preferred orientation of people in the matters of desires, needs, means, aversions, and attractions (Tiwari, Misra, 2020). The greatest difficulties for the individual arise in situations where it is up to him or her to determine what is and what is not valuable. In simple terms, value is what is considered valuable not only by the individual, but also by other people. Understanding values

and their interrelationship is a part of social education, since values do not develop by themselves, *they are taught*. Values are a means of socialisation, so education in the environment of values always poses certain problems for both parties in the forms of the educators and the educated. Values are internalised through social, personal, and cultural experiences, forming a psychological structure that organises people's social behaviour. They serve as criteria or standards by which people orient themselves in both the internal and external worlds, which is why the study of values and value systems is important for understanding the content and dynamics of the human psyche. Also in most cases, moral disagreements between two parties arise because of the compelling reasons pursued by two different sides of the spectrum with incommensurable values (Neog, 2019).

Values show us that there is no single truth, and that accepting only one and absolute truth is not only a path to dogmatism, but also an abyss of the mind – a narrow-mindedness, which, in its most radical forms, is dangerous to oneself and others. As Isaiah Berlin writes: “If I know the true answer and you do not know it and do not agree with me, it is because you are ignorant; if you knew the truth, you would certainly believe what I believe; if you want to oppose me, it is only because you are mistaken, because the truth has not been revealed to you as it has been revealed to me. This approach justifies the most repulsive reforms of oppression and enslavement in human history, and is indeed the most dangerous and, especially in our century, the most violent interpretation of the concept of positive liberty” (Berlin, 1996).

Thus, the pluralism of values is inevitably confronted with monism, which leads to a final choice between liberal values if pluralism is chosen, and conservative values if monism is chosen. The misconception is that the different value orientations are able to coexist in contemporary Europe without disagreement: “(...) focus on political pluralism has been dissonant with nationalism, while the demand for social solidarity has been in opposition to the value of individual freedom and merit. It is precisely the disagreements, conflicts, and compromises between different value orientations that have shaped Europe's characteristic worldview” (Berlin, 1996). “United in diversity” is more than an ideological slogan; this diversity is a *European value*. The European Union was founded on the values of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and human rights, including minority rights. These values are shared by the Member States in a society where pluralism, tolerance, justice, solidarity, non-discrimination, and gender equality are possible. Value conflicts affect not only the European Union, but also other countries, cultures, and individuals, yet this does not necessarily mean that people

are ready to abandon them. Culture is nothing but a world of embodied values.

If, for example, humanity (meaning freedom, love, respect, tolerance, etc.) is proclaimed as a value, then it must be defended when that value is threatened. Otherwise, statements about the importance of this value are just empty words. What does it mean to stand up for values? Firstly, it means thinking critically and being able to analyse, the aim of which is to keep a close eye on how certain values are (or are not) put into practice. Secondly, if it is clear that values are under threat, then this must not be accepted and, additionally, this issue should be addressed publicly. Thirdly, in order to change the value system or to strengthen the status of values in the society, they must be observed. It is important that values are observed by public figures who use their authority to encourage others. The quantitative aspect is also important in the practice of values; the more people follow a particular value, the wider the social environment in which that *value is established as the norm* (Silis, 2015). In situations where the observed values are already established as the norm, they start to serve *as a means to sustain other values*.

In many respects, Christianity in Europe continues to constitute an important cultural and political horizon in Europe, which coexists with other orientations on which modern Europe is based, e.g., secular humanism and tolerance, and local cultural practices. One of the values of a Christian Europe is the so-called “inner world” or “interiority of man”. At the same time, as Latvian political scientist Ivars Ijabs (2007a) stresses, interiority is also a political phenomenon; it is the basis for people’s ideas about the relationship between public and private, the need to respect the conscience of each individual and to guarantee his or her right to privacy. Like Christianity, Enlightenment in the European culture is something more than a value-creating phenomenon; it is an intellectual movement that continues to shape European ideas about the relationship between man and society to a significant degree. For most Europeans or European-minded individuals, it is inherent to believe that we can know the meaning of any phenomenon just by looking at its historical development.

Since Russia’s military invasion of Ukraine on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022, the historical situation of the present shows that an attempt to destroy Western values has begun and is continuing. It is being carried out by an aggressor state, namely, Russia (the work of Putin, the Kremlin, and his propagandists), which sees Western values as a threat to its own values, which it believes to be the only good and correct values.

Isaiah Berlin represents the position of value objectivity, which is justified as follows: “If a person aspires to one of these values which I do

not consider to be my own, I can understand why he aspires to it or how I would feel if I had adopted that value while living in his circumstances. This is the basis for the possibility of human understanding. I believe that these values are objective, i.e., that their nature and their fidelity to them form part of a person's being, and that this is an objective fact" (Berlin, 1996). Berlin concludes that this is why pluralism is not relativism; different values exist objectively, they are part of the essence of humanity, rather than arbitrary products of human subjective imagination. Respect for different value systems is therefore possible, because it opens the doors to tolerance and liberal consequences that cannot come from monism (only one set of values is right, all others are wrong) or relativism (my values are mine, yours are yours, and if we clash, too bad, but neither of us can claim to be right) (Berlin, 1996).

Berlin is positive about nationalism. For him, the feeling of belonging to a nation seems to be perfectly natural and in itself is not in the least reprehensible or even something to be critiqued. It is only pathological when it is driven to extremism. What can be considered pluralist or liberal values are undoubtedly Enlightenment-derived, but today have undergone a significant transformation in a positive sense. According to Isaiah Berlin, the following insights can be considered liberal values:

- diversity is good;
- a society in which people with different views are tolerant of each other is better than a monolithic society in which one view is imposed on everyone;
- more than one answer is possible to the same question, i.e., pluralism;
- motives, rather than consequences, should be the basis of values;
- what matters is truthfulness, rather than success.

And then there are the liberal values, namely, an individual's autonomy and freedom, human rights, and the rule of law. Two other concepts, citizenship and civil society, are important in this context. Why? The answer to this question lies in the very content of the concept of citizenship, i.e., that it is through citizenship that individuals are able to think not only about their own interests, but also about the common good of society as a whole.

In order to respect different values in the midst of all the diverse interests, the actual limits of tolerance must be clearly understood. However, the question of the limits of tolerance is not only unanswerable for Isaiah Berlin, it is fundamentally unanswerable. To define its limits is to universalise a principle, which in turn would dogmatise liberal values, which would be contrary to their meaning.

Unlike Isaiah Berlin, Joseph Raz speaks of value pluralism as moral pluralism – promoting the view that there are different forms and ways of life that reflect different virtues and are incompatible. It is precisely for this reason that *tolerance is an essential social value* based on respect for otherness, and without it, it is impossible to build a simultaneously strong and democratic society capable of solidarity towards common goals. To be tolerant means we also have to at least in part limit our Self – our seemingly self-evident right to deny and exclude everything that is not our own. But this does not mean endless acquiescence, which gradually turns into the unquestioning submission on which Michel Houellebecq writes. We can, however, try to set limits with the help of universal moral principles; morally correct behaviour should be tolerated, whereas immoral behaviour should not be tolerated. But this too can be addressed conceptually in the relationship between autonomy and freedom.

Joseph Raz uses the term “competitive pluralism” to refer to the value of virtues whose existence causes one to want to disagree with certain flaws in other people, even though they have other equally valuable virtues. Such judgements lead to the conclusion that the most common forms of pluralism compete with each other. This, in turn, creates a conflict between people who pursue valuable but incompatible forms of life. In order to prevent conflicts from becoming part and parcel of everyday life, Joseph Raz argues that the duty of tolerance and respect for autonomy gives rise to a range of other duties that are necessary for living an autonomous life and that are our duty towards other people. These include:

- the duty to foster cognitive capacity – the capacity to take in, remember, and use information;
- the duty to develop the qualities of character that are useful for autonomous living – stability, loyalty, affection, and the ability to maintain close relationships;
- the duty to create an appropriate range of choices, so that people have a range of things to choose from.

Joseph Raz, like Isaiah Berlin, uses the concept of “positive liberty”; people are basically to be seen as autonomous beings – as creators of value. Both of those thinkers agree that the framework of the word “liberty” is linked to the individual’s desire to be in charge of his or her own actions: “I want my actions to be determined by my own will and not by the will of others. I want to be a subject, rather than an object; I want to be guided by my own judgements and conscious goals, rather than circumstances that influence me from the outside” (Raz, 2001). Unfortunately, no one has managed to free themselves from the power of circumstance, so it must be acknowledged that complete self-determination is only possible at the

level of our desires. At the same time, this desire to be as independent as possible is ever-present in human beings. Isaiah Berlin discusses the two main forms that the desire to be in charge of one's own life has historically taken:

- the first is self-denial in order to gain independence;
- the second is self-affirmation, or the complete identification of oneself with a particular principle or ideal in order to achieve the same end.

Unlike Isaiah Berlin, Joseph Raz believes that positive liberty has an intrinsic value that derives from its contribution to personal autonomy. Anything that enhances a person's ability to live an autonomous life contributes to their positive liberty. The doctrine of liberty, in turn, is based on the importance of autonomy and pluralism of values. Following Raz's line of thought, it should be clear that liberty does not include the morally bad and repulsive: "Since autonomy is valuable only if it focusses on the good, it has no reason to provide and defend options that are worthless, especially if the choices are poor" (Raz, 2001). At the same time, we can also see the other side of the coin in that one is autonomous even when one chooses the bad; autonomy is partially blind to the quality of the available choices. A person is autonomous only if they believe that valuable choices are available to them. Of course, the "bad choices" of an autonomous person make the quality of their existence more questionable than the quality of a non-autonomous life, or, more accurately, less valuable. Raz's conclusion on the link between autonomy and freedom can be expressed in causal terms; people can only successfully enjoy an autonomous life if they live in an environment that supports appropriate social forms. One of the most important duties of free citizens is therefore to defend fundamental values (the right to life, liberty, and security of the person, as articulated in Article 3 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights) (United Nations, 2015), otherwise there is no basis for claiming that these are indeed fundamental values. In order to realise these values, the core values defined by each individual country are important. In his lecture on the fundamental values of the European Union and the role of the Court of Justice of the European Union in safeguarding them (Kalniņa, 2019), the President of Latvia, Egils Levits, pointed out that there are five fundamental values in a liberal democratic state that must always exist: democracy, the rule of law, fundamental rights, freedom, and equality. The sixth value, which may or may not exist, is solidarity. A democratic state puts these values into practice, and not only in the constitution. The European Union as a union of states is based on these same values. They are enshrined in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union. When the



European Union admits new countries, their constitutional culture is tested, which is one of the prerequisites for admission, emphasises Egils Levits (Kalniņa, 2019).

### **Responsibility for Democratic Values – The Moral Norm**

For the Member States of the European Union, democracy is not a declarative value, but a value embodied in practice, since the effectiveness of a sovereign democratic state depends on the degree to which liberty is exercised as a core value, as reflected in the annual Democracy Index. The Democracy Index reflects the global situation of the practice of democratic values in 165 countries around the world. It is based on five sections: the electoral process and pluralism, the functioning of government, political participation, political culture, and civil liberties (The Economist Intelligence, 2023).

Based on a survey conducted by The Economist Intelligence, in the case of Latvia, they have identified three characteristics lacking in political participation which continued to hinder the development of the consolidation of democracy in the country. The risk zones where society shows a lack of knowledge and understanding are: the functioning of government, political participation, political culture, and civil liberties. This has been a dominant feature since 2006, and therefore there is a need to strengthen its society's education on the fundamental principles of democracy. As the President of Latvia, Egils Levits, emphasised in his speech at the opening of the Democracy Academy, "War has returned to Europe, and Russia is putting up a fight against all the values that are the basis of the Latvian state and its Constitution. Ukraine's fight for its independence has unleashed unprecedented solidarity" (Levits, 2023). The European Union's slogan "united in diversity" has now been transformed into "united in solidarity" by helping Ukraine win the war against Russian aggression. Again, no war ends with victory on the frontlines, especially a war of values. As MEP Sandra Kalniete says: "This will be a long struggle for democratic values and our way of life. It will not end with Ukraine winning the war (...)." This is why, for example, a Democracy Academy has been established in Latvia as a real contribution to the security and education of its civil society.

In Ukraine, the test of the effectiveness of Western democracy had begun even before the war, specifically with the handling of Covid-19, which showed a lack of critical thinking in face of disinformation. The manipulation of public consciousness through social networks and the

media showed how fragile and vulnerable civil society is to informational manipulation, and Russia is also using this to wage an information hybrid war against the Ukrainian people and other democracies.

The President of Latvia stressed that it is necessary to fulfil our duty as citizens – to take care of democracy and its fundamental values. Everyone must take care of themselves, their family and the common good of society, acting responsibly towards others and future generations. Aware of its equality in the international community, Latvia defends its national interests and contributes to the sustainability and democratic development of Europe and the world (Levits, 2023).

At the opening ceremony of the Democracy Academy, former leader of the Latvian Popular Front, Dainis Īvāns, said that stability is one of the core values of democracy. It requires a cultural tradition that demonstrates the ability to resist and defend one's identity, which includes a cultural tradition of defending one's core values and the ability to resist any attempts to destroy them. In the context of civil society, the ability to debate, to argue, and to listen to diversity of opinion is necessary. The inheritance of collective memory, the development of a common sense of nationhood (patriotism) and the identification of common ideals are also important. Countries wherein civil society is weak, and which are characterised by democracy indexes as “flawed democracies”, one of the criteria for democracy was not implemented in those societies as it should have been. This indicates that democracy has not taken root as a value in its own right in people's consciousness and way of life, examples of which can be found in Latvia, Serbia, and Moldova. In Latvia, 2022 was marked by an increase in civic activities, demonstrating solidarity with the Ukrainian people in various activities and demonstrations. SKDS surveys show that 56% of Latvian households have donated something in support of Ukraine (Sabiedrības Integrācijas Fonda, 2023), and 65.4% of Latvians support Ukraine's position in this war (Fridrihsone, 2022). At the same time, Serbia, which is in the same category as Latvia on the democracy index, shows different trends. This is due to its historically close ties with Russia, which have not diminished even today. This is evidenced, for example, by the pro-Russian march which occurred on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2022, which saw protesters throwing smoke bombs at the presidential palace and directing accusatory and derogatory slogans against the president. They also demanded the immediate lifting of sanctions against Russia (RFE/RL's Balkan Service, 2022). A poll on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2022 showed that 95% of Serbs support Putin as a world leader, but only 11% support the EU. 68% of Serbs believe NATO started the war in Ukraine, and 82% oppose sanctions against Russia (Hoxhaj, 2022). Pro-Russian demonstrations

against the Moldovan government were also organised in Moldova on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2022. Protesters expressed support for Russia, condemned Ukraine for the current hostilities, and even went so far as to request the resignation of the country's president. It should be noted that the protesters openly admitted that they were organised to be taken to the event and received a fixed fee for their participation (Calugareanu, Schwartz, 2022). On 10<sup>th</sup> February 2023, the government of Moldova actually resigned amid economic turmoil and Russian tension after 18 turbulent months. The pro-European prime minister Natalia Gavrilita made the decision to quit because of Russia's continuing interference in the internal politics of the country in its attempts to destabilise a country that faces, *inter alia*, a multitude of economic issues, the consequences of a neighbouring country at war, refugee issues, as well as the increasing instability in the frozen Transnistria conflict zone. The breaking point for the Prime Minister's government came with the violation of the sovereignty of the country's airspace by Russian missiles fired from the Black Sea. According to the prime minister, Russia is systematically interfering in Moldova's domestic politics by manipulating the public on the issue of energy prices, the consequences of the refugee crisis, and the overall economic slowdown (Tanas, 2023). As political tensions rose, on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2023, Moldovan President Maia Sandu publicly announced that Russia was preparing a coup d'état in Moldova. Sandu called for heightened security measures after the pro-European government resigned the week before. The President of Moldova emphasised that the plan included sabotage and militarily trained people disguised as civilians to carry out violent actions, attacks on government buildings, and to take hostages. The president added that individuals from Russia, Montenegro, Belarus, and Serbia may have been involved in the coup attempt. The biggest challenge was directed against the legitimately elected government, in order to bring about a change of power in favour of a pro-Russian government and to stop the European integration processes (Preussen, 2023). Despite the unstable situation in the country and the security risks, Moldova, on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2023, succeeded in establishing a new pro-European government with Prime Minister Dorin Recean at its head, who stressed: "We want to live in a safe world where international treaties are respected, where problems between countries are resolved through dialogue, where there is respect for small states, [and] we want to be full members of the European Union" (Tanas, 2023). The situation in Moldova reflects the fact that Russia wants not only to continue destabilising Europe, but directly to re-establish its sphere of influence in the countries of the former USSR by propagandising values that are contrary to those practised in the West. Unfortunately,

the current success on Russia's part has been possible so far because in Moldova, as in Serbia, there is a significant section of society which, since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, has been strained by the economic challenges caused by the increased cost of energy resources. Consider also that Serbia and Russia have long historical ties. This, in turn, is a reason for the fragility of society, and for the increasing possibilities of manipulation by the aggressor state. Consequently, on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2023, a pro-Russian protest organised and financed by the SOR political party took place in the Moldovan capital, where picketers admitted to having been brought to the capital on paid buses. The aim of the event was to directly confront the value system practiced in Russia with the pro-Western one. Moldova, like Ukraine, has been under great pressure from Russia since the collapse of the USSR because of its energy dependence; pro-Western, legitimately elected political forces now want to end this dependence (Williamson, 2023). This in turn provokes Moscow's anger and/or a reaction and it is specifically Moldovan society and its political space which is clearly a site of clash of these values, and where further developments depend on Ukraine's capabilities on the battlefield.

In countries such as Germany and Italy where civil society is strong, the resilience of democratic values is being challenged in provocative ways, and it has proven to be less resistant to professionally-conducted activities fostered by disinformation. In Cologne, for example, around 2000 protesters gathered in September 2022 to urge the German government to break with the Western coalition support for Ukraine. The rally was just one of many (others were online as well as physical), where people demanded that Berlin reconsider its support for Ukraine. Several million Russian speakers live in Germany, both ethnic Germans who resettled from Russia in the 90s, as well as those Russians who had lived in communist East Germany. The stakes are high; if Germany, the European Union's largest economy, turns its back on Kyiv, it is believed that European unity may collapse in wartime (Nikolskaya et al., 2023). A Reuters analysis of German-language Telegram channels revealed at least 27 channels that consistently share and amplify pro-Kremlin messages to a combined audience of around 1.5 million subscribers. One such account is the "Putin Fanclub". It regularly publishes photos of Putin, and shares news of his public appearances along with providing German translations of his speeches to its 36,000 subscribers.

As a NATO member, Italy's official position has been, from the outset, politically supportive of Ukraine's efforts to resist Russian aggression. To that end, Italy has supplied Ukraine with necessary military weapons. However, in November 2022, tens of thousands of Italians marched

through Rome calling for peace in Ukraine and urging Italy to stop sending weapons to fight the Russian invasion. “The weapons were sent in the beginning on the basis that it would prevent escalation,” protester Roberto Zanotto told the AFP news agency. “Nine months have passed and it seems to me that there has been an escalation. Look at the facts: sending weapons does not help stop a war, weapons help to promote war” (Euronews, 2022).

In order to understand the contradictory assessments of the situation during the war, it is necessary to take into account the fact that the post-Soviet countries’ warnings about Russia’s aggressive nature were ignored for a long time. It is not easy to accept another point of view when, as the philosopher and sociologist Vents Silis points out, “Old Europe is not blameless either, for decades it comfortably vegetated on cheap energy resources and turned a blind eye to Russia’s crimes. Now Europe has snapped out of its moral slumber, but (...) it took a war and the sacrifice of the Ukrainian people” (Silis, 2022).

Russian leader Vladimir Putin is trying to bring a “Russian world” to Ukraine and Europe, but Poland and the Baltic States associate such a world only with poverty and slavery. In a discussion on “Latvia and Poland: Countering Today’s Challenges Together”, Polish president Andrzej Duda stressed that Poland and many other countries will do their utmost to prevent the war in Ukraine from coming to Europe. The Polish president also pointed to the different perceptions of the war in Ukraine among many European countries. For example, Poland has one perception, while Portugal has another. Poland and the Baltic States are working particularly hard to inform other countries about the historical experience of the Baltic States and Poland in their relations with Russia. Duda believes that each country can decide its own fate and that any justifications for Russia going to war do not stand up to criticism (LETA, 2023).

It is noteworthy that, on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2023, shortly before the anniversary of Russia’s war against Ukraine, President Joe Biden visited Kyiv to symbolically express his support for the Ukrainian people. The President made his position clear, stating: “It is now and in Ukraine that the fate of the world order, which is based on rules, on humanity.. is being decided” (Waterhouse, Cuddy, Armstrong, 2023). It is clear that this is a war of values, where the existing world order cannot be taken for granted. World peace and the international system of law and values are undergoing the greatest upheaval in the history of their existence and the freedom that the Western world has enjoyed since the end of World War II is now being challenged in a former Russian sphere of influence. Concluding his message to the Ukrainian people, President Biden

emphasised, “Freedom is priceless, and it is worth fighting for as long as it takes” (Waterhouse, Cuddy, Armstrong, 2023).

## **Conclusions**

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine shows that it is precisely values that cannot be moulded into one single absolute truth, because that is not only a path to dogmatism, intellectual narrow-mindedness and immorality, but is also destructive in its radicalism towards oneself and others.

Ukraine, unlike Russia, defends value pluralism and the fundamental values of democracy, at both the national and the human level. The absolutisation of a single truth rooted in the monism of world opinion and ideology is inevitably confronted with value pluralism. This explains the Russian public’s support for the Putin-initiated aggression in Ukraine. If humanity, for example, is considered a value (which also means the value of life, freedom, love, dignity, tolerance, etc.), then it must be defended when this value is threatened. Otherwise, statements about the importance of this value are merely empty words. The defence of values is closely linked to the awareness of the importance of democracy in society. The war in Ukraine has rallied the defenders of Western values against real opposition, so Russia’s attempt to destroy them is bound to fail.

If it is clear that values are under threat, then this should not simply be accepted; values must be discussed in public, because discussion solves problems. Debate is important for the existence of democratic societies because it clarifies the meaning of existing values. If we as a society stop fighting for existing values, they will soon be replaced by other values. This can be clearly seen in today’s Russia, where the democratic values that society had won with the collapse of the Soviet Union have been completely lost. In order to change the value system or to strengthen the status of values in society, values need to be practised. It must be understood that publicly defending values requires moral courage for the individual and for society. Therefore, defending values requires effort. In particular, it must not be forgotten that values and norms are the way in which we mark the limits of our humanity. If values are not defended, humanity itself will inevitably be lost.

Democracy is a moral system. It is also a system of government. It means that, morally, it expresses an attitude towards people. The basic moral premise of democracy is the idea that all people are equal. Democracy is for people, rather than people being there for democracy. Democracy is a value in itself and, at the same time, a means of embodying it, thus ensuring that individuals and societies can exist and develop freely.

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