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THE CHALLENGES OF TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT AFTER 2020 AND THE CRISIS OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY IN BULGARIA¹

ABSTRACT: The article explores the interplay between technological change, rise of populism, post-democracy, and the challenges faced by the liberal state. It argues that while meritocracy might offer equality of opportunity, it often exacerbates social inequalities because it legitimates elitism and empowers oligarchs. The crisis of liberal democracy comes from the erosion of trust in institutions and the concentration of enormous power among elites. Post-democracy, characterized by technocratic governance and reduced public engagement, undermines democratic ideals. This crisis in Bulgaria heightens the country’s vulnerability to corruption, Russian hybrid influence, and geopolitical risks at the EU’s external border. These developments are particularly problematic as Bulgaria has recently joined the Schengen area, creating an awkward situation for both the EU and the country itself. The text advocates to preserve democratic values by reviving the social commitment and ensuring a balance between economic growth and public interest. Authors like Zygmunt Bauman and Yuval Noah Harari call for rethinking democratic practices to protect human agency, address inequality and ensure broader societal participation.

Keywords: crisis of liberal democracy, post-democracy, meritocracy, crisis of representation, rise of populism

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INTRODUCTION

This article examines the multifaceted crisis of liberal democracy in Bulgaria, framing it within global challenges of technological disruption and the erosion of social solidarity. The aim of this paper is to analyze the crisis of Bulgarian liberal democracy by examining the confluence of global technological threats (like digital elitism)² and structural local deficiencies (such as institutionalized corruption and political instability), and to advocate for a renewed social state and ethical tech governance as a solution. Digital elitism is the process whereby technological progress, instead of being a democratizing force, becomes a mechanism for creating and sustaining a new powerful elite, thereby threatening the foundational principles of equal opportunity and democratic governance.

The research question is: What role do rapid technological advancements since 2020 play in Bulgaria's particular liberal democracy crisis, when they collide with long-standing domestic problems like corruption and broken neoliberal policies? Since 2020, data-driven technologies have advanced at a fast pace, aggravating already-existing disparities and consolidating power in ways that jeopardize global democratic foundations. These worldwide patterns collide with pressing local issues in Bulgaria, including widespread corruption, a captured state, weak institutions, and severe political instability. The uncritical embracement of policies that put market efficiency ahead of the general welfare breeds disenchantment and provides an environment that is conducive to populism and authoritarian regression. Restoring public confidence and democratic resilience will require a renewed dedication to the social state, strong ethical technology governance, and policies that balance individual freedoms with collective well-being.

Post-democracy describes a political system that retains the formal institutions of democracy – such as elections, constitutions, and a multi-party system – but where the actual substance of democratic power, accountability, and civic engagement has been hollowed out. The term 'post-democracy,' particularly advanced by the political philosopher Colin Crouch³, suggests that society is moving past the era of vibrant, participatory democracy into an era where politics is largely a managed spectacle, serving powerful interests rather than the public good. It is a democracy in form, but not in spirit. As we see in the case of Bulgaria,⁴ in a post-democratic state elections exist but are heavily influenced by money, media manipulation, and elite interests, limiting genuine political choice. Political power shifts away from the public and elected bodies towards

² Digital elitism refers to a socio-economic hierarchy in which power, opportunity, and influence are disproportionately allocated to a small group based on their exclusive access to, control over, and understanding of advanced digital technologies. It is the modern manifestation of inequality, where the divide is no longer just about wealth or social class, but also about one's position in the digital ecosystem.

³ Crouch C., *Post-Democracy*, Cambridge 2004, p. 15-17.

⁴ "Bulgaria Corruption Index," *Trading Economics*, at <https://tradingeconomics.com/bulgaria/corruption-index>, 17 January 2025; *Transparency International Bulgaria*, at <https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/bulgaria>, 17 January 2025.

unelected elites, such as corporate interests, technocratic experts, and oligarchic networks. Public debate atrophies, as citizens become disengaged, disillusioned, and marginalized from meaningful decision-making processes.

YUVAL NOAH HARARI AND BAUMAN'S FRAMEWORK

Yuval Noah Harari, writing for *The Atlantic*,⁵ put forward the risks that AI and other data technologies pose in the consolidation of power and undermining democracy. He explains how, with a few technological gadgets, contemporary technology amplifies authoritarianism to unprecedented levels of surveillance and control. Harari notifies that AI and data-driven systems could centralize power in the hands of a few, eroding democracy and individual freedoms. Harari's article highlights the ethical void in technology's rapid development, urging global cooperation to establish governance regulations. He emphasizes the importance of protecting human agency, warning against delegating decision-making to algorithms. Otherwise, the experience of human beings might confront a social order that is largely inhuman. Harari stresses the critical need for the creation of ethical frameworks governing the information technology, emphasizing the role of collective action to ward off tyranny and ensure such tools would serve humankind, not oppress it.

In Zygmunt Bauman's *Retrotopia*, five evils undermine democracy: inequality, insecurity, exploitation, exclusion, and environmental degradation. These forces weaken social cohesion and automatically create mistrust of distrust in democratic systems. Bauman argues that the material conditions for freedom require a stable social framework: economic equality, access to resources, and security that allows individuals to exercise their rights meaningfully. If the structural elements are not considered, then democracy turns out to be quite vulnerable to authoritarianism; citizens start losing faith in the possibilities of democracy to bring them justice and opportunity.⁶ The crisis of liberal democracy is anchored on the increase of economic inequality, alienation, and the loss of public faith in institutions. In Bulgaria Znepolski⁷ traces the root of these issues to unbridled neoliberal policies, where the market is privileged over social well-being.

⁵ Y. Harari, "Why Technology Favors Tyranny," *The Atlantic*, October 2018, at <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/10/yuval-noah-harari-technology-tyranny/568330/>, 17 January 2025.

⁶ Bauman Z., *Retrotopia*, Cambridge 2017, p. 15-17.

⁷ B. Znepolski, "To Avoid Losing Peace and Itself, Liberalism Must Revive the Welfare State," *Mediapool*, 7 December 2024, at https://www.mediapool.bg/za-da-ne-zagubi-mira-i-sebe-si-liberalizmat-tryabva-da-vazrodi-sotsialnata-darzhava-news365619.html?fbclid=IwY2xjawG-wp9leHRuA2FlbQIxMQABHdw-IaNzTDNiLUNaEdtNyCTc5z_KFy4ObOYiwuZOTJaVRVZIFmnlMBsQ_aem_mfWwdWVN-g5rbc5c-Ll7qPg%20%20-, 25 January 2025.

DIGITAL ELITISM AND EASTERN EUROPE'S POST-COMMUNIST LEGACY

Technological developments since 2020 have dramatically influenced liberal democracies around the world, placing difficult, more profound challenges to their theoretical pillars of equality, participation, and freedom. While innovations in artificial intelligence, big data, and digital platforms have created unprecedented opportunities, they also expose the vulnerabilities of democratic systems. Among the most worrisome of these is the rise of mass surveillance technologies. Very advanced tools used to monitor people have become common among governments and corporations, under the guise of public safety or efficiency. It compromises privacy and can easily be weaponized to suppress any dissent, most specifically in societies whose foundations and balances are weak. The COVID-19 pandemic has further normalized invasive data collection through biometric systems and contact-tracing apps. According to Yuval Noah Harari, the biggest benefactors of all these have been the authoritarian regimes using them in their mass-surveillance and manipulation.⁸

The concentration of technological knowledge and resources within large corporations and a few governments is leading to a new form of digital elitism. This trend poses a threat that may be called 'the meritocratic discrepancy'⁹ – i.e. widening the gap between those who have access to cutting-edge technologies and those who do not participate in the digital space. Currently, employment opportunities and industry standards are undergoing a radical transformation due to automation and AI, which intensified economic disparities. In addition, the emergence of technocratic rule – where experts but not elected representatives make policy decisions – is dangerous for civic involvement in policy-making processes. Amid these factors, economic instability contributes to the rises in populist movements, imposing an even greater burden within the liberal democracies. Their push for a return to traditional values indicates the concealed fears that progress in technologies will destroy the ground for social cohesion.

The crisis in Eastern Europe is based on the erosion of public interest and a failure to balance economic reforms with social protections. Post-communist transitions focused heavily on market liberalization, most often at the expense of collective well-being. Corruption is a significant issue in Eastern Europe, undermining trust in institutions and democracy. It creates unequal access to resources and opportunities, favoring elites while alienating ordinary citizens. It also erodes the rule of law, making public institutions ineffective in addressing societal needs. The result has been growing inequality, mistrust in government policies, and the weakening of democratic values. Overemphasis on privatization and individualism has distanced citizens – this being fertile

⁸ Y. Harari, "Why Technology Favors Tyranny...".

⁹ Digital Elitism often masks itself under the guise of meritocracy - the idea that those at the top deserve to be there because of their talent and skill. However, this ignores the immense structural advantages (e.g., education, capital, early access) that allow this group to succeed, further legitimizing and entrenching the inequality.

breeding ground for both populism and authoritarianism. There is an urgent need of re-centering policies around the public interest to restore balance.

The crisis of democratic participation is due to the excessive focus on the market efficiency over social cohesion resulting in increased inequality and weakened civic foundations. Neoliberalism's focus on deregulation and privatization led some governments to abandoning the welfare state, caused apathy among citizens and fostered distrust in institutions. This economic model has created disparities that erode solidarity, leaving individuals vulnerable and disconnected from the broader community. It's overall a very precarious economic model that induces gaps in society, which alienates citizens and separates the state from the rest of the world. These problems fuel authoritarian trends, challenging liberal democracy and collective welfare. This approach fosters inequality, alienates citizens, and diminishes public trust in democratic institutions. The lack of social protections and the privileging of elite or oligarch's interests over the common good further destabilizing liberal democracy. According to Znepolski,¹⁰ these factors destabilize the social conditions necessary for democracy, raising disillusionment and enabling authoritarian tendencies.

DIVERGING PERSPECTIVES

There is a significant difference between the interpretation of the crisis of democracy in Bulgaria and in the Western world. In the West, the crisis is often viewed, by authors with different political and ideological orientations, through the prism of immanent causes – certain political choices and the institutionalization of liberal values trigger social processes that ultimately threaten democracy. For example, the decision to deregulate markets, to shrink the welfare state, to place a strong emphasis on the individual and his/her freedoms and personal preferences leads to a weakening of social ties, to mass divisions and tensions, which ultimately undermine the social conditions of democracy. The crisis of liberal democracy may also stem from the erosion of its legal and normative framework – the rule of law, the separation of powers, fair and transparent elections, etc., but to no lesser extent it may also stem from the weakening of its social institutions.

The global crisis of liberal democracy, marked by the mistrust in institutions and the rise of populism, has manifested acutely in Bulgaria. Due to the initial conditions of the emergence of Bulgarian liberal democracy, the language used to talk about its crisis here is primarily a normative political-legal language. By this logic, the urgent improvements it needs are administrative – for example, a strong emphasis on judicial reform, which is assumed to solve all other institutional problems. Despite its EU membership and democratic reforms post-1989, Bulgaria faces significant challenges, including institutionalized corruption, declining public trust, and weakened civic engagement. These issues reflect broader systemic vulnerabilities and unique national factors.

¹⁰ B. Znepolski, "To Avoid Losing Peace..."

Corruption remains a cornerstone of Bulgaria's democratic crisis. The intertwining of political and economic elites undermines the rule of law and fosters public disillusionment. Economic disparities also play a significant role in weakening Bulgaria's democracy. Decades of unfulfilled promises have bred apathy among citizens, particularly the youth. High levels of emigration exacerbate this trend, as many Bulgarians seek opportunities abroad, leaving behind an aging electorate less likely to demand democratic reforms.

The rural-urban divide and pervasive poverty disenfranchise significant portions of the population. Many citizens feel alienated from political processes, perceiving them as serving only the interests of urban elites. *Transparency International* frequently ranks Bulgaria as one of the EU's most corrupt nations, which erodes citizens' confidence in their democratic institutions. Judicial inefficiency further exacerbates this issue. High-profile corruption cases rarely result in convictions, fostering a perception of impunity among elites. This undermines the accountability essential for liberal democracy. Populist rhetoric has gained traction, exploiting public frustration with the inefficacy of liberal democratic norms. Demagogic leaders in Bulgaria often target EU regulations and minority groups to galvanize support. These tactics deepen societal polarization and distract from necessary systemic reforms.

THE ANTI-DEMOCRATIC NATURE OF MERITOCRACY

In the most general political sense, the word 'corruption' means forcefully imposed private interests instead of the public interest – insidious replacement of democratic representation by creating various fictitious political projects, buying votes, manipulating public opinion (through spreading mendacious implications by private media in their many varieties), etc. In the last decade, civic attention shifted to new opponents, called 'oligarchy', 'mafia', 'backstage' and accused of comprehensive processes of corruption that paralyze social development and undermine citizens' trust in state and local government institutions. Moreover, for Craig Calhoun and Charles Taylor, meritocracy, a key element of neoliberal ideology, can be seen as a source of corruption, albeit in a slightly different sense. By dividing people according to quality and worth, by prioritizing personal merit over the role of social connections, and by treating these merits as the basis for rights (e.g., the right not to pay taxes), meritocracy is profoundly antidemocratic.¹¹ It essentially places the well-being of the privileged above the public good.

Another alarming issue is media freedom and election integrity decline – Bulgaria's media landscape further compounds its democratic challenges. Concentrated media ownership and editorial interference by oligarchs compromise press freedom. This limits the media's role as a watchdog, stifling critical reporting on corruption

¹¹ *Meritocracy is profoundly antidemocratic ideology. In place of democratic recognition of the equal worth of all citizens, meritocracy suggests that some are more worthy than others. It is self-serving for the elites, who think their positions and accumulated wealth simply reflect their merits. It is disempowering for others* (C. Calhoun, D.P. Gaonkar, Ch. Taylor, *Degenerations of Democracy*, Cambridge–London 2022, p. 157).

and mismanagement. The digital era has introduced vulnerabilities in election processes. Cyberattacks, foreign interference, and digital manipulation of voting campaigns threaten the fairness of elections. Securing democratic institutions from these threats has become a top priority, but the complexity of global cyber networks makes it a daunting task. Social media platforms, powered by algorithmic curation, have amplified the spread of disinformation. This has deepened societal divides, making democratic dialogue increasingly fraught. Echo chambers and fake news campaigns, often orchestrated by state or non-state actors, challenge the ability of citizens to make informed decisions, eroding trust in democratic institutions.

SOCIETAL FRACTURE & ‘THE TWO BULGARIAS’

The opposition of the two halves of the same nation as ‘separate states’ is also gaining popularity in Bulgaria. In one of his texts, “The Two Bulgarias” (2012),¹² the writer Kalin Terziyski contrasts the ‘First Bulgaria’ – ‘Bulgaria of the deceived people’ with the ‘Second Bulgaria’ – *Bulgaria of ‘Our People’ (...)* owners of holdings, party leaders, former ‘mutri’¹³ (thugs and scoundrels) and current MEPs. Corruption is important for understanding the replacement of public good with private ‘goods’, but it is only one reason participating in a more general institutional and value transformation. The main weakness of meritocracy is that it can undermine democracy by fostering elitism and inequality. The replacement of public good with private one may be disguised in the very ideology, in the values and policies of neoliberalism. The public good is both the basis and the goal of democracy, as it implies broad access to those public goods (quality healthcare and education, secure and well-paid jobs) that are key to creating and maintaining a strong common identity.

The text of Terziyski describes Bulgaria predominantly as a *country of deceived people*, where systemic corruption, weak institutions, and economic inequalities have eroded public trust. According to Smilova,¹⁴ while meritocracy promises opportunities based on talent and effort, in practice, it often concentrates power and resources among a privileged few. This leads to social alienation and resentment, as many feel excluded from decision-making processes. By legitimizing disparities, meritocracy may

¹² K. Terziyski, “The Two Bulgarias,” *Novinar*, 26 March 2012, at <https://www.vesti.bg/bulgaria/medii/kalin-terzijski-dvete-bylgarii-4677711>, 17 January 2025.

¹³ The term ‘mutri’ in Bulgaria refers to criminal groups and individuals that rose to prominence during the 1990s after the fall of communism. This era, marked by economic chaos, political instability, and weak state structures, allowed these groups to gain power. The *mutri* engaged in activities such as extortion, smuggling, money laundering, privatization fraud, and violent control over businesses. They became notorious for their ostentatious lifestyles, luxury cars, and armed bodyguards. This period left a significant imprint on Bulgarian culture, society, and the economy.

¹⁴ R. Smilova, *Meritocracy, Post-Democracy and the Crisis of Liberal Democracy*, at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361445376_Meritokracia_post-demokracia_i_krizata_na_liberalnata_demokracia_Meritocracy_Post-Democracy_and_the_Crisis_of_Liberal_Democracy_httpsseminar-bgeuspisanie-seminar-bgbroy22item624-meritokracia-postdemok, 17 January 2025.

undermine the principles of equality and solidarity essential for liberal democracy. Many citizens feel betrayed by promises of prosperity and fairness during the transition to democracy. This disillusionment has led to widespread apathy, emigration, and vulnerability to anti-elitist rhetoric.¹⁵

POLITICAL INSTABILITY AND THE CYCLE OF FAILED GOVERNMENTS

Between 2017 and 2021, Bulgaria's politics were marked by instability despite being governed by the center-right, pro-EU GERB party, which has been influential since 2009. In 2020 mass anti-corruption protests broke out and GERB faced difficulties forming coalitions, leading to repeated snap elections. In 2021, the anti-establishment 'We Continue the Change' party briefly led a fragile coalition, which collapsed in 2022. A rotational government agreement between GERB and its rivals in 2023 also failed, triggering the sixth elections from 2021 to the end of 2024, highlighting Bulgaria's on-going political gridlock.¹⁶

Following the elections at the end of October 2024, GERB-SDS had the potential to establish a nominally pro-Western government by aligning with the old *status quo* parties and pro-Russian factions such as BSP and ITN, and similar established groups. They could also secure additional backing from the remnants of Dogan's DPS (Movement for Freedom and Rights),¹⁷ effectively marginalizing PP-DB and stripping

¹⁵ R. Filipova, R. Stefanov, *Democracy in Bulgaria – Still Fragile After Three Decades of Transition*, at <https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/Voices-of-Central-and-Eastern-Europe-Country-report-Bulgaria-in-Bulgarian-language.pdf>, 17 January 2025.

¹⁶ Between 2017 and 2021, Bulgaria was governed by GERB (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria) in coalition with right-leaning partners. In 2020, a raid on the Presidency building triggered widespread protests against corruption and power abuses. Despite winning the April 2021 election under Boyko Borissov's leadership, GERB was unable to form a coalition as other parties refused to cooperate, leading to a snap election in July that year. This set a recurring pattern: parties won successive snap elections but struggled to establish durable, stable governments. In November 2021, the newly created anti-establishment party 'We Continue the Change' (PP) campaigned on an anti-corruption platform and emerged victorious, pledging to overhaul the system. They formed an anti-GERB coalition with the leftist Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP, a successor to the former Communist Party), the liberal Democratic Bulgaria (DB), and the right-leaning populist party 'There Is Such a People' (ITN). However, internal disagreements led to the coalition's collapse in June 2022, marking the first successful vote of no confidence in Bulgaria's modern history. After another inconclusive election in October 2022, GERB secured victory again in April 2023 and struck a rotational government agreement with its rivals, PP-DB. The agreement involved alternating the prime ministership every nine months, starting with a PP-DB candidate. However, this unconventional arrangement fell apart after the initial nine-month term, prompting yet another snap election in June 2024. When this sixth election also failed to produce a government, a seventh consecutive election was held on October 27, 2024.

¹⁷ Members of the movement are the majority of ethnic Turks, Pomaks and a smaller proportion of Muslim Roma population. The party has an authoritarian structure and is controlled by Honorary Chairmen Ahmed Dogan. A former State Security agent during totalitarianism, Dogan takes pride in the

them of political influence. Such a scenario enabled the obstruction of anti-corruption and judicial reforms, hindered changes within the predominantly pro-Russian security services, and paved the way for a more Russia-friendly policy. It also led to the consolidation of power by installing loyal personnel across state institutions, a tactic previously employed during Borissov's leadership. As a crucial EU and NATO member in the Black Sea region, Bulgaria is now facing a fresh political crisis, with the reformist PP-DB being effectively isolated by the entrenched *status quo*. This crisis is accompanied by the looming threat of democratic regression, destabilization, the stalling of reforms, and the cessation of efforts to counter Russian hybrid influence. Such developments signal a concerning shift toward closer ties with Moscow, raising serious questions about Bulgaria's reliability as a trusted international partner.

These problems do not indicate any major departure from the *status quo* set by recent snap elections, but they do highlight the persistence of concerning trends. Bulgaria has now entered its fourth year of political instability and crisis, with no immediate resolution in sight. In June, voter turnout hit a historic low of 34.4%, though it saw a slight uptick in October. This reflects a steady decline in Bulgarians' trust in political structures, creating space for populist and radical right-wing parties to expand their influence. Confidence in the national government and institutions, particularly the judiciary, is among the lowest globally, as reflected in Gallup's National Institutions Index.¹⁸ Trust in domestic elections is especially alarming, standing at just 10%, the lowest in the world. Among those who still vote, many are shifting their support to ultranationalist and far-right parties, whose combined vote share has now surpassed 20% for the first time. This trend further complicates coalition-building and undermines the legitimacy of the EU and NATO in Bulgaria, as these parties are strongly opposed to both.

PERSISTENT CRISIS, LOW TRUST AND THE RISE OF EXTREMISM

Despite Bulgaria's political instability, trust in the EU remains higher than in domestic governance, but approval ratings lag behind the average in the Union. Nowadays Bulgaria ranks among the countries with the lowest approval ratings of the EU, falling below the EU average in 2022 and joining Hungary, Slovakia, and Greece at the bottom. This crisis heightens the country's vulnerability to corruption, Russian hybrid influence, and geopolitical risks at the EU's external border. These developments are particularly problematic as Bulgaria has recently joined the Schengen area, creating an awkward situation for both the EU and the country itself. The ongoing political crisis leaves Bulgaria increasingly susceptible to Russian interference, especially amid global and regional geopolitical shifts and systemic changes. As a relatively young

so-called 'Bulgarian ethnic model', or in other words, the fact that Bulgaria did not have a Yugoslavia-type war.

¹⁸ G. Zapryanova, P. Tonkov, "No One Trusts Elections Less Than Bulgarians," *Gallup*, 22 October 2024, at <https://news.gallup.com/poll/652433/no-one-trusts-elections-less-bulgarians.aspx>.

democracy, Bulgaria urgently needs to resolve this crisis to prevent long-term negative consequences, such as deeper entrenchment of corruption and a state captured by the mafia. The EU, too, cannot afford to let this crisis persist and worsen, as it risks exposing its southeastern border to malign influences and vulnerabilities.

Unfortunately, Bulgarian political circles find themselves caught in a discriminatory opposition that they fail to resolve – the opposition between the supporters of the open society with its tolerance, pluralism, relativism, respect for otherness, on the one hand, and the supporters of the closed society with its conservatism, nationalism, patriarchalism, clannishness, etc., on the other. In their attempt to become the political leaders of their country, liberal parties expect their fellow citizens to quickly understand the superiority of their principles and to enthusiastically support them. When this does not happen, embittered and offended, they isolate themselves with all kinds of fences and engage in endless battles with their opponents, and ultimately gain little. Instead, without giving up on their basic principles, liberal parties should understand the attitudes of their fellow citizens and try to respond in their own way to the needs, fears, and prejudices hidden behind these attitudes. This way they would become truly democratic.

Liberal parties fail by neglecting the importance of the welfare state and social justice. Their focus on market liberalization and globalization has alienated large segments of society, particularly those left behind economically. By prioritizing individualism and economic efficiency, they overlook growing inequalities and fail to address the needs of vulnerable populations. This discrepancy fosters disillusionment, weakens public trust, and opens space for populist and authoritarian alternatives. Znepolski¹⁹ quotes Pierre Hassner's call for liberalism to address its social dimension – the urgent need to remain relevant and effective in hard times. It reflects on the fragility of democracy and the liberal order in the face of growing inequalities and authoritarian tendencies. The emphasis is on the transcendence of conflict between ideologies, restored justice, and a reimagined social state to counteract these challenges and preserve democratic values.

CONCLUSION

Liberal democracy in today's world faced significant but not unresolvable challenges evolving from the rapid technological development post 2020. The liberal state should build on these advancements by accentuating technological change to strengthen the democratic structures instead of undermining them. The future of democracy relies on its ability to cope with this incessantly changing world while safeguarding its core principles. Moreover, international collaboration and cooperation is direly needed to set boundaries on AI and data utility (ethical guidelines) in a manner that technological progress does not contradict democratic values. Also, democracy must start focusing on equitable access to technology and develop social safety nets to lessen the effects of

¹⁹ B. Znepolski, "To Avoid Losing Peace...".

automation. IT systems and EU governments must balance between efficient personal data controls and the reduction of disinformation, while simultaneously raising the level of citizen digital ability. Trust in democratic values can be preserved through making economic systems fairer, so the civic participation become more viable alongside the enhancing of political institutions.

Liberal values such as individual freedoms and equality of opportunity must be balanced with policies that reduce inequality and strengthen social cohesion. To address the current crisis of liberal democracy and the challenges facing rapid technological development, a new commitment to the social state is necessary – focusing on the reconciliation of individual freedom with the interdependence of the planet, and rebuilding solidarity. This requires changes towards linking economic globalization with citizen welfare in a more effective manner – more equitable distribution of resources while protecting democratic institutions. Climate change is a common challenge all nations face, and it demands action that reconciles different interests. The coordinated efforts of liberal democracies involve strong advocacy of sustainable development, promotion of creativity, and active participation on the international scene. While adhering to agreements like the Paris Accord, the measures must guarantee that climate policies align with social justice and economic stability.

Bulgaria's democratic crisis reflects both global trends and local specifics. Solving the abovementioned problems demands a comprehensive approach: strengthening judicial independence, addressing corruption, and implementing inclusive economic policies. Empowering civil society and ensuring media freedom are critical steps in restoring public trust. International organizations, including the EU, can play a supportive role as a guarantee of transparency and accountability. By solving these systemic issues, Bulgaria can move beyond its current problems and strengthen its democratic foundational principles for the future. In integrating liberal values with a robust social framework, the renewed liberal state should balance economic efficiency with social justice, private good and common welfare. It can counteract the crisis of liberal democracy through policies that prioritize public participation and foster institutions that serve all citizens. This model aims to restore trust in democratic governance by reuniting collective well-being with market-driven individualism.

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