

Europe's Demographic Collapse

Evarist Bartolo is Malta's former Minister for European & Foreign Affairs. Bartolo discusses the profound consequences of Europe's demographic decline, which are already cited as a reason for the US to predict Europe's civilizational demise. Follow Prof. Glenn Diesen: Substack: <https://glenndiesen.substack.com/> X/Twitter: https://x.com/Glenn_Diesen Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/glenndiesen> Support the research by Prof. Glenn Diesen: PayPal: <https://www.paypal.com/paypalme/glenndiesen> Buy me a Coffee: buymeacoffee.com/gdieseng Go Fund Me: <https://gofund.me/09ea012f> Books by Prof. Glenn Diesen: <https://www.amazon.com/stores/author/B09FPQ4MD>

#Glenn

Welcome back. We're joined today by Evarist Bartolo, former foreign minister of Malta, to discuss what's happening with European demographics. Thank you very much for taking the time.

#Evarist Bartolo

Thank you for this. I really enjoy following what you're doing, which I think is very, very important—bringing in so many different voices that are usually kept out of the mainstream, which is terrible.

#Glenn

Yeah, that was actually my main purpose in doing a podcast—to bring in interesting expert voices who aren't included if they're not reaching the "right" conclusions. Today I want to touch on a sensitive topic based on an article you recently wrote. We just saw the release of the U.S. National Security Strategy, and it's quite a shock because it has many components. It wants to put an end to NATO expansion, it wants to revive, more or less, the Monroe Doctrine—there are a lot of elements to it. But the European aspect is also interesting, because Europe isn't seen as relevant anymore.

In the U.S. National Security Strategy, it predicts the end of European civilization—that the relative global share of GDP continues to plummet, which is actually a very real thing, down from 25% to 14%. We see a rise of authoritarianism through attacks on political opposition, free speech, demographic decline, mass migration, and the inability of culture to reproduce itself. So today we were going to tackle one of these problems, and that is demographic decline. Europeans are simply not having many babies anymore, and that matters. You wrote a very interesting article on this topic, and I was wondering if you could flesh out your ideas.

#Evarist Bartolo

Well, the title of my article was "Demographic Suicide." It's actually a very strong term, which I took from the Schuman Foundation seven years ago. I'm lucky, I think, Glenn, that in my ministerial role I went from education to employment to foreign affairs. That kind of responsibility made me look beyond a silo mentality, where we tend to see different areas of life as isolated and separate from each other. Just to tell you, as employment minister for seven years attending the Social Affairs Council in Brussels, we never discussed demography—even though we were discussing the labor force, even when we were discussing skills shortages.

The only time we discussed demography—because it was related to migration—was when I was Foreign Affairs Minister. And even then, we discussed migration only as a security issue, not as something connected to the labor force or employment. Now, this is very serious, because the European Union, for the last 50 years—it's not something that just happened yesterday—has been declining demographically. If we look ahead, next year the European Union is expected to reach its peak, but from then onward it will start to decline, and it could decline dramatically if its population is not replenished with people from outside. Why is this so?

Because every EU woman, on average, in the 27 European Union countries, is having fewer than two babies—and in most cases only one—which means that by 2050 the population will decline by about 9%. It doesn't sound like much, but if you understand what that 9% means, it's far more significant when it comes to the working-age population. You know, it will decrease by 25 million. The workforce, in terms of working age, will shrink by 25 million. By the year 2100, it will decrease by 55 million. And again, we're not just looking at numbers; one has to look at the composition of those numbers. So while the working-age population is decreasing by at least a million a year, the population over 85 is set to double.

So you can imagine what this means. You need more people to work. You need more people to pay taxes to afford a social protection system—one that provides care, health care, not just care for the elderly. And this is happening at a time when you have leaders saying, "Let's dismantle the welfare system because we need to move to a warfare state now, not a welfare state anymore." I remember being part of a European Union that once boasted of its European model—political, human rights, democracy, diversity, inclusion, social solidarity in terms of sharing wealth, and environmental protection.

But now that whole European model has been thrown out the window, and the new European model is war, war, war. You know, one doesn't need a document from the U.S. administration to see that the European Union is making itself even more irrelevant. I mean, in terms of the reality of geopolitics, there are a lot of structural factors showing that the EU's central role has been lost for some time, and it was bound to become even more irrelevant. But instead of trying to make sense of such a difficult existential situation, it seems as if the current EU leadership is bent on pushing the Union further and further toward suicide.

#Glenn

Yeah, well, one of my main academic interests leans toward bringing the social aspect into politics, because we recognize that politics and economics can't be viewed separately. That's the whole principle of political economy. Sociology is also very important. Back in the day, it was common for all of this to come together, but we do it less now. Something like declining birth numbers—not only is it, over time, a kind of suicide if we're not reproducing—but it also has economic, political, geopolitical, security, and social consequences.

I mean, if you look at countries like South Korea, for example, you see that low birth numbers also tend to correlate with high suicide numbers. Because, you know, human beings are social animals—we organize in groups, we seek membership in groups. And the family is the most important one, where you have benign hierarchies, where people take responsibility for others inside the group instead of just extracting rights for the individual. So it's quite critical. Yet this doesn't really enter the larger community or political talk much, but that's because we always had rising populations. Now that it's going to plummet, that's why I found your article fascinating—because it's something that should be front and center, since this will define many of our problems going forward.

#Evarist Bartolo

I remember there was, I think, a feeble attempt—not in this commission, but in the previous one—to actually create a commissioner to look at demography. But it was a kind of passing fashion and quite superficial. Because what we must remember, Glenn, is that some people who might be following us would say, "Oh, but why think about 2050? It's 25 years away. And why think about the year 2100?" The demographic decline of the European Union is already here, so we're not talking about the future. It's enough to say that if we look at the employment figures today, the European Union has nearly 4 million job vacancies—3.9 million—that it cannot fill because there weren't enough babies born 20 or 25 years ago.

So it has to bring them from somewhere. Where is it going to bring them from? From migration. We will discuss migration because it is such a toxic topic. The discussion about it has become so irrational and so polarizing that one doesn't even dare to mention it as a possible alternative to the demographic decline, with all the complications that entails, obviously. But the demographic decline is being felt already now—not only in terms of numbers, but also in terms of skill shortages. You know, the European Employment Agency tracks every month the skill shortages in occupations across the European Union. At least 63% of small and medium enterprises say they're not finding the talent they need to operate.

This is not about growing, but about being able to operate. The European Union itself has reported shortages in around 42 different occupations, mainly in the STEM areas—science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. It needs about 2 million graduates in those fields. And that's for the present, not the future. So when you hear about the European Union being strong, rebuilding its

military, developing a military-industrial complex—well, it doesn't even have the young people for the army. In the last survey, only 32% said they were ready to join. And it also lacks the skilled people needed for its own military-industrial complex. That's the short-sightedness.

And as you were saying, when you have countries with this kind of decline, people show that they've also lost trust in the future. One of the reasons young people don't want to join the army is that they're definitely not inspired by today's leaders, who, instead of giving them prosperity, have given them a very difficult and dangerous social life. They're not proud to belong to an entity that isn't looking after them. This is really deep. We're not talking— I repeat, we're not talking simply about not having the people to work in the jobs being created, but about a feeling of hopelessness and of being lost. And that's why it's not just demographic decline, but also a civilizational decline.

#Glenn

I think some politicians, like Viktor Orbán, might be remembered differently from how they're vilified now, because a lot of the ideas about restoring traditional values could actually be a response to the excesses of liberalism, which often tear away at traditional institutions like the family. You do find research supporting the notion that if you put some crosses in classrooms, for example, or encourage children to attend Christmas mass—or whatever it might be—something that instills a sense of religious identity in the population, you see an effect. When people identify themselves as Christians, for instance, they often marry sooner, have fewer divorces, and have more children. And as those children grow up, they're more likely to have a father present, you see less antisocial behavior, and they're more likely to finish high school.

Their kids don't go to jail. They use fewer drugs and less alcohol, there's less violence, and they form their own stable families with higher birth rates again. So you have this different—well, call it social engineering if you will—but ways of encouraging it. Not all of these things work, of course, but it's interesting that some politicians are actually talking about this. I remember I was at the Hungarian Central Bank to give a talk, and the central bank chief came out and gave a speech asking, "What kind of economy do we have? We can't only measure GDP. We have to look at what incentivizes the restoration of the big family," for example. These are great ideas, and at some point all European countries will have to have this discussion, it seems.

#Evarist Bartolo

I think, Glenn, the tragedy is that if we go for the traditional divide of right and left—which I know today doesn't make a lot of sense—you really have to flesh out what those labels mean. But I think the tragedy has been that the kind of issues you're talking about, and that people like Orbán talk about... I remember in my first conversation with Lavrov, I was surprised because he was talking to me about the importance of traditional values, the importance of the family. It's important that we don't throw these out.

I was quite surprised that, in a discussion between two foreign ministers, this would come up. But I understand—it makes a lot of sense to bring it up, because I think we have to. Whatever area we're involved in—economics, geopolitics, politics, social affairs—it matters. We have to deal with it as if people matter. After all, we're doing this not for its own sake, not for our ambition or our career, but mainly for the common good of the people. What I find tragic is to treat these issues as if they only matter to people like Orbán and Lavrov.

And then from the other side, when you're always crusading about civil rights and saying the family is important, and talking as if secularism means there should be no ethics, as if liberalism means you shouldn't have any values at all—yeah, then it doesn't make sense. It doesn't make sense anymore. Especially then, because when we ask ourselves, okay, there's demographic decline, it's been going on for 50 years, even if present governments were to take up policies—like providing tax breaks or giving cash handouts for couples to have more children—

First of all, it's not going to happen automatically or from one day to the next. And we know we have to deal with the difficult issue of migration—you know, bringing in people, as has happened over the centuries, to make up for this demographic decline. But again, the discussion has become so irrational that it's as if one side takes the side of the migrants and doesn't care about the feelings of the residents, while the other side takes the side of the residents as if you could just do away with migration altogether. I don't think it's realistic to expect any country not to have a measure of sensible migration.

And migration obviously makes sense as an issue, because it's a very disruptive force. The people who come are uprooted and displaced, but in turn, the people who receive them also become uprooted and displaced. We haven't been sensitive enough, I feel, as policymakers, to take both sides into consideration, instead of siding with one or the other. This has now brought the European Union to a very difficult situation—very, very difficult—because of demographic decline. At the same time, even today, the center-right and center-left parties talk about migration in ways that used to be associated with, and sometimes are still associated with, the extreme right: not just anti-immigration rhetoric, but also anti-immigration policies.

At the same time, if they say, "Let's enlarge the European Union," because if we bring in four or five different countries, the population will increase by about 48 million. But those same countries also have demographic decline. So they're not an alternative. At the same time, are they ready to bring in the migrants they need to keep the economy running? At the present moment, given where the debate is going, that's not going to happen. So how is the European Union going to get itself out of this really, really existentially difficult situation?

#Glenn

I think the migration issue is very important because we already see that it can be very divisive. And, as we said, demographic change is a very sensitive issue. For conservatives, they want to

preserve and reproduce existing structures and authorities, so they'll always be very cautious about excessive migration because it causes too much disruption to the national consciousness, if you will. Liberals, on the other hand, will often look at the individual on their own, so they're much more open to having more migration. But it doesn't have to be polarizing if it's in moderation.

If you have a population that's reproducing itself and you're introducing some migrants, then the culture can reproduce itself within acceptable changes, which happen naturally over time. But what you see with a plummeting population that has to be made up for by mass immigration—even if that mass migration isn't available—is that it effectively becomes a replacement. And we even have this now on the political right: they're talking about deliberate replacement, like a strategy to destroy our civilization. The liberals will then say, no, this is a conspiracy theory.

But, you know, this is just polarizing rhetoric. The point is, the demographic changes are happening too fast. And then, of course, the politicians have to respond—like, what does this mean? I see our own politicians suggesting that, well, if your family's been here for hundreds of years, or if you came last year and now you're a citizen, we're all the same citizens. It doesn't mean anything. I mean, if this is all we are—walking, talking people carrying a passport, just happening to reside in the same place—this is not how human civilization works.

You know, you have sociologists like Robert Putnam, who considers himself a liberal, but also recognizes that the less homogeneous societies become, the less generous they often are, the less democratic they are. Because for the average person on the street, you don't necessarily even want economic redistribution when those around you aren't considered part of your group, part of the in-group. So it can be extremely disruptive. But as you said, we're not really allowed to touch this, because as soon as you suggest that maybe huge demographic changes can be disruptive to society, people get uncomfortable. It sounds like you're straying into bigotry or something along those lines.

#Evarist Bartolo

But it's so short-sighted. I can mention some examples I've read about. For instance, there's a small community of about 4,000 people living outside Frankfurt, and then, within a few weeks, a Syrian community of over 40,000 moved in next to them. I mean, how can you expect that to be manageable, and for people not to feel completely overwhelmed? Those who say, "Let them come," as if somehow integration will just solve itself and everything will fall into place—it doesn't happen. It hasn't happened even in countries like the UK and France, which over the years have also, I think, neglected to really think about how to manage migration, how to handle the social and cultural aspects of it, not just simply the arrival of people.

Migrants are people; they're not just workers. So how do you go about it? If you don't take the necessary educational, social, and cultural initiatives to build these communities, it won't work. It's already difficult to build communities that share a similar culture, let alone bring together diversity and different cultures. I remember, even when I was education minister, I had fathers come to me

saying, "I don't want my daughter to do sex education because that's not according to our culture." I'm talking about people who came from villages in Syria to Malta as refugees.

I don't want her to do sex education. And I don't want to meet the head of the school because she's a woman. And I used to say, "No, no, now listen. It's taken us years to build a culture of equality, that men and women are equal, and that we should have sex education because it's important—even for girls—to protect themselves. Now that you're here, you must abide by our culture, because it's in your own interest to do that." I used to have the same discussion because we obviously brought in laws, even when I was education minister, to protect, for example, gay teachers. And the Catholic archbishop in Malta is bound by that law.

And I would always say openly, I expect the imam to be bound by that law as well. He cannot tell me, "No, no, listen, this is against our religion, our culture, to have a gay teacher at our school." To build frameworks—legal frameworks, cultural frameworks—when you have so much diversity, you really have to put in a lot of work and not keep saying that integration means letting everyone do whatever they like. I think laissez-faire multiculturalism is very dangerous. It doesn't work; it creates problems. I remember Glenn having a discussion with the Education Minister of France after the Charlie Hebdo episode in Paris.

It was, for the first time in five years, I think, that in Brussels, at the Education Ministry Council, we discussed values. It was the first time because it was considered that only the traditionalists—the Hungarians, the Irish, the Maltese—still wanted to discuss values. They were seen as so old-fashioned. Why do they still want to discuss values? We're here, in education, to discuss employability, to discuss skills—how we're going to digitalize our education, how we're going to make sure that our people have the skills to work in today's economy, as if society does not exist.

As if, you know, how can you have a good labor force if you don't have, somehow or other, a cohesive social setup? So I remember telling her, "Listen, I know this might sound harsh, but what happened at Charlie Hebdo—you brought that on yourselves. Because if, in the name of secularism, you can't have religion or the teaching of ethics in schools because you want your schools to be secular, then where are these kids learning their religion? Where are they learning their values? You can't simply say, in the name of liberalism, 'Let everything happen as it should, let everyone do whatever they like, and things will work out fine.' They will not work out fine."

#Glenn

Well, that's not even secularism. Secularism is dividing religion and state. Dostoevsky, I thought, had some interesting perspectives there, because he wanted secularism to the extent that you don't want to mix church and state, since the state would then corrupt the church. You want to keep politics out of the church. But he was also very concerned that the church would be given just a little corner in society, to be ignored and left to manage its decline. That's also very dangerous. I think people forget that democracy itself, or even from the French Revolution, came with two traditions.

The French Revolution introduced nationalism—that is, if you transfer sovereignty from the monarch to the people, then the people have to be defined by a common culture, language, history, traditions, and religion. That's what the nation represents. At the same time, you have liberalism, which is about the rights of the individual. Over time, the liberal nation-state has started to disappear because liberalism has divorced itself from the nation-state. We're now talking about how we can't have a unifying culture; everything has to be multicultural. There can't be religion in society anymore. You have all these very strange developments, and people don't question whether society can actually sustain this. I mean, it's an important question to ask, though.

Is liberalism something that can exist only when it's balanced by nationalism, or should the goal of liberalism be to leave nationalism behind—and all the defining characteristics of one people? You know, I think a lot of these, if not philosophical, then social questions have to be addressed. Otherwise, you're going to end up with strange solutions. I saw at a university in Guangzhou, in China, that they're inventing humanoid robots with artificial wombs—essentially robots giving birth to human beings—which sounds like an awful future and a terrible solution to something that should already be deeply rooted in human nature.

#Evarist Bartolo

Yes, because while we're talking about the demographic suicide of the European Union, let's not forget that by the year 2100, China will have half its current population—just over 660 million, I think. So this issue of demographic decline is global. In some areas, especially in Europe, it's felt much more strongly. And I think it's also more noticeable because we tend to forget that very close to Europe there's another continent—Africa. By the year 2100, the European Union's population will be about one-tenth that of Africa's: around 420 million in the EU and 4.2 billion in Africa.

So how is the European Union preparing for this, when it has such a continent just a few miles—just a few kilometers—away from its shores? Again, try to put Africa and the Mediterranean on the agenda of the European Union. "Oh, don't waste our time, because we must concentrate on Russia. We must concentrate on the eastern neighborhood. We must pivot to Asia to take on China." And there you are, in this reality—very close to you—what is happening within you and what is happening next to you. And it's ignored. These are not the decisions of wise, strategic leaders. But unfortunately, those wise, strategic leaders are nowhere to be seen. The more I feel that the challenges have become complex, and the more we need deep wisdom to solve them, the less our leadership is up to the task.

So the best way to deal with it is war, war, war. There's an enemy at the gate, the barbarians at the gate. Let's militarize, let's prepare. Forget all the problems we have. Yes, our economies are not performing; we don't have enough people for our economies, even where we've created jobs. Let's not talk about these things. Let's concentrate only on one issue: the barbarians at the gate. Let's see how we can keep them out. But in fact, I don't think people in the European Union are convinced by

that. They're not sure whether the barbarians are at the gate or whether they're the ones running their countries.

#Glenn

Well, more and more, yeah, the barbarian seems to be our own political leadership at times. But it's interesting—again, what does this mean in political terms? As you said, in the 19th century the European population was two to three times larger than Africa's. Now this will be flipped, with Africa two to three times larger than Europe. To tell people that this doesn't mean anything, that it's not going to affect economics or politics, just doesn't make any sense. And I think dismissing all this debate as, "Oh, well, that's just racism if you worry about Africa being so much larger now than Europe," is wrong. I mean, it will have an impact, and I think it's worth addressing this. Let me also—yeah, sorry.

#Evarist Bartolo

Yes, Glenn, I was going to tell you that what is really amazing, again, as you said, is that in the meantime Africa is developing. Africa is developing, and you have the presence of Turkey, the presence of Russia, the presence of China, the presence of other countries. So Africa is not waiting for the European Union to move ahead and develop. I think the European Union has been so short-sighted to let itself out of that game, even though it used to be a huge donor to Africa and still gives a lot of money to Africa. But Africa, I think, will develop not only without the European Union—because it's developing without the European Union, there's a big chance it will develop against the EU. And I think this is so short-sighted.

#Glenn

Yeah, that's what we see now—not just the booming population, but also that many of the fastest-growing economies are in Africa. And we see, of course, China as the leading economy entering there, already a dominant economic partner in Africa. Just over the past two or three years, we've seen so many governments kick out the French, more or less, and embrace Russia instead. So again, I don't want to build a threat image around China and Russia. If anything, I think we should spend much more time harmonizing interests and actually talking. I don't really have any issue with that. It's just that there has to be some recognition that all of this affects geopolitics. You have to address what that means—take advantage of the opportunities while mitigating the risks. But I'm not seeing any of that. I want to ask you specifically about economic risks: what do you make of a shrinking workforce—not just the workforce, but a shrinking population?

#Evarist Bartolo

Well, first of all, in terms of public expenditure, you're going to have to spend more on health care and more on care for the elderly. So we need to build a stronger social protection system. What

does that mean? You need a prosperous economy. Where is the money going to come from to support that kind of social spending? You need a strong economy. But how are you going to have a strong economy if, even now, as those statistics show, we're losing about one million workers a year—and after 2050, that will accelerate even more, it will double?

You'll lose practically two million a year if you don't replace those workers. I mean, we've seen Japan trying to robotize. Yes, there are functions you can automate, but there's a limit to what you can robotize—especially when we're talking about caring for the elderly and in hospitals. And it's enough to say that quite a lot of health systems in Europe, including in your country, Glenn, and in my country, wouldn't be able to operate without doctors coming from overseas. So yes, there are serious implications for economies if they don't have the required numbers—and along with the numbers, the required skills.

So if you're going to have fewer children going to school, if you're going to have fewer young people going into schools and universities, where are your STEM workers going to come from? People who think that those who deal with demography are conservatives or belong to the right wing are being short-sighted. I think, just as conservatives shouldn't shy away from having sensible, rational discussions about migration, liberals should also keep in mind the implications and consequences of demographic decline. They ignore it, you know, at the risk of their countries.

#Glenn

Well, that's the thing. That's the problem with political polarization—liberals and conservatives need each other to balance each other out. If conservatives build walls to preserve the group while liberals build bridges, you need both to keep things in balance. In excess, both sides fail, essentially, because the liberal side can exhaust itself and become unable to reproduce. And when a society can't reproduce, a switch goes off in people's heads, and there's often a very nasty backlash. Meanwhile, conservatives, if they close off too much, can descend into xenophobia, stagnation, and hostility to change.

So you do need both, and you need them to balance each other, which is why it's so dangerous when you see these polarizations. Polarization happens, though, when problems aren't addressed properly. Economically, I mean, I can just imagine the reduced productivity, as you said—the social welfare pressures, higher health care costs, labor shortages, declining consumption, declining innovation, entrepreneurship. I mean, any one of these would have quite a dramatic impact. But really, the declining population is an independent variable that kind of drives this whole development process. How about political risks? What do you see there?

#Evarist Bartolo

Well, obviously the political risk is that, in economic terms, the part of the population that declines fastest is the working-age population. But when it comes to politics, everyone over 16 or 18 has the

right to vote, and the elderly have become a major constituency. So, while taking care of the elderly, you're also dealing with the largest group of voters in the country. We're moving toward a situation where the vested interests of short-term politics will focus on looking after the needs of pensioners and the elderly, just to be able to stay in power.

You need young people in employment. You need middle-aged people in employment to sustain that social protection. That's why it's such a vicious circle—you can't disconnect politics from economics. And I think with an electorate that's older, the risk is, yes, it might be a wiser voter, but at the same time, you need to look beyond our own needs. I'm one of the elders, so it's in my interest to have a good system that looks after me. But I know I have a grandchild, and I must think of that grandchild. What kind of world is she going to live in? What kind of economy will sustain her quality of life? And what kind of society will she belong to? We need a bit of foresight to think about that.

And this is something I think is also worrying about the European Union. Glenn, I feel that, like in a lot of parliamentary systems, short-termism is built into the electoral cycle. You don't think about what's going to happen in 25 years' time; you think, how am I going to be affected if I do this in two years' time, when there's a general election? So, there's short-termism in the parliamentary electoral cycle itself, but even more than that, in the European Union there's embedded short-termism in the structural funds. It says it wants to spend them to compete with China and with Asia, but at the same time, you have to spend that money within two years.

How can you have a long-term investment strategy to take on the science and technology power that Asia—primarily China—has built? If we look at how many graduates are coming out of China and how many are coming out in Europe, there's no comparison. So it's no surprise that when we look at technology—because obviously STEM is also affected by demographic decline—if you don't have the numbers, you're not even going to have the people in these areas. When you see what's happening in terms of technology, I always mention the Australian Social Policy Institute, which tracks the 64 crucial technologies for the 21st century. China is leading in 47 of them, and the European Union in two. So obviously, all this has implications—not just politically or geopolitically, but economically and technologically. It's so important.

#Glenn

Yeah, well, it's again not just about population, but about what people are studying. The STEM sciences are vastly more popular in places like China and Russia, compared to what we see in Europe these days. But it is interesting that while Europe tends to be among the worst in terms of demographic decline, the main regions of growth are in India and Africa, which are still expanding. It's interesting to see the economic and political changes that this will bring. You mentioned we have to look 25 years into the future. Well, this more or less takes us back to Trump's new U.S. national security strategy, because it says that Europe, on its current trajectory, will be unrecognizable within the next 20 years or less. And to prevent Europe from, as it puts it, killing itself with its own policies, the strategy even calls for cultivating resistance to Europe's current trajectory.

Because it notes that a lot of the leaders who are pushing destructive policies are, or should be seen as, illegitimate—more or less—they're authoritarian, they suppress political opposition, they censor. And so, again, regime change might be coming our way. I don't think we have to wait 20 years to see the consequences of this. The fact that the United States, under this administration, sees no future in Europe is also a big part of why it's now making a huge shift. It can't prioritize Europe anymore, which is why the same security strategy suggests the U.S. has to abandon the idea of ongoing NATO expansion and also the focus on Europe. So the consequences are already here, I think. It would be nice to see—at least, you know, maybe I don't have all the solutions, or you—but it would be nice to see this issue discussed, at least.

#Evarist Bartolo

Yes, exactly. Exactly. My fear, Glenn, is that there might be a tendency—if I read the situation well—that the present EU leadership will see this as a blip, a Trump thing. When Trump goes away, they'll think we'll just go back to living happily ever after, which I think is very superficial. All the issues we discussed are very complex. You can't simply have a magical solution to them, which means you really need to reflect on them and discuss them seriously.

But if you're not even going to reflect and discuss these issues, how are you going to build a strategy for the European Union in such a changed, multipolar world—one where it has to learn humility, to live with others, and to stop dreaming that it's the center of the world, able to dictate not only what others should do in their relationship with you, but also in their relationships with each other? Recently, I was following what the Qatari energy minister said about the tax the European Union wants to impose on Qatar because of the green tax. You know, since gas is also considered part of the carbon footprint, they have to pay that tax.

The Qatari energy minister said, "This is very strange, even for us, because we're selling them gas. But now they want to impose the tax not only on our trade with Europe, but also on our trade with the rest of the world. I mean, how can you have the arrogance to impose on other countries what they do not do with you, but with third countries, with others? So unless the European Union really takes a good look at itself and, with humility, begins to understand what its real standing in the world today is and how to build a future for itself, it's going to get itself into a deeper and deeper hole."

#Glenn

Yeah, well, I think you're right. This excessive focus on personalities is a problem. Trump didn't appear out of nowhere—he's a symptom of larger changes, unique in his own ways. But still, a symptom of the socio-economic and political shifts that are coming. More than anything, I think he's a transitional figure. There's not going to be any going back to the past once he steps down. I think we in Europe ignore that there's a whole new political class growing in the United States—people

who see global hegemony as a burden, something that destroys the republic. They're deeply concerned about the rise of this liberal authoritarianism, where constant references to "values" are used to censor, smear, and undermine democracy, as well as the traditional values of society. And there's also a growing portion of Americans who, for good reason, think that Europe is finished—economically, socially, politically—especially when they look at our hapless leadership. Not you, of course, but still, there's something to that.

#Evarist Bartolo

Sometimes I wonder, Glenn, because of our historical experience as a small country—we've always been a colony. So I think we sense colonialism wherever we see it, and sometimes even where it isn't. But I wonder what has happened since World War II. The European Union, or rather European leaders, gradually, generation after generation, didn't even realize they were becoming colonists of the United States. They became part of that culture of dependency they're afraid to break away from—the godfather who has kept them and under whom they've prospered for the last 80 years. And now they're panicking because that godfather, you know, doesn't want to keep that kind of relationship anymore.

And instead of growing up, they're panicking and behaving the way they are now—wanting to continue the war in Ukraine instead of really trying to find a solution. Over the last three or four years, they've harmed themselves to the point of cutting off a good energy source, and now they have to import much more expensive energy. All this is happening while their economy is becoming far less competitive. At the same time, they're facing demographic decline, which they're not addressing seriously.

#Glenn

I agree. When J.D. Vance argued that America doesn't need vassals, it needs partners, I thought that was interesting—when the master has to tell its slaves, more or less, that they need to grow a spine and start looking after their own interests. That should have been a wake-up call. But as the United States shifts away from Europe in this multipolar world, the first instinct of the Europeans was, "Well, we can't let the Americans go. Let's just subordinate ourselves and not do whatever we want. Let's line up in front of Trump's desk like good schoolboys and sign any trade agreement he puts in front of us."

The problem here is that if you subordinate yourself, you ignore basic national interests. You become even more irrelevant, and that's what Americans are seeing. They're losing all interest as Europe continues this decline. So I argue we should do exactly the opposite—that is, get more Chinese technology, get Russian energy, connect with other centers of power. We prosper, we gain political autonomy, and perhaps if European leaders also grow a spine, then Washington might actually respect them a little bit.

#Evarist Bartolo

Yes, I think if you don't have any self-respect, how can you expect others to respect you? How can you expect them to respect you? In the case of the European Union, I see that the only viable future is to recognize this multipolar world and not allow yourself to be dominated by any great power, but to build relations with all powers and with as many different countries as possible. I like the way Jaishankar tries to explain Indian foreign policy—it's not a matter of being non-aligned, it's a matter of being multi-aligned, and of having relations with as many different countries as possible. I think the old maxim about not putting all your eggs in one basket should be a good guiding policy for the European Union to get itself out of the mess it's in. Not only has it put its eggs in one basket, but it's jumping on them and smashing them to bits.

#Glenn

Not putting all your eggs in one basket is essentially the core of geoeconomics as well. Diversify by all means—that's good for you. Well, on the wise comments you just made in reference to Jaishankar, this seems like a good place to leave it. So thank you very much for taking the time, and I hope we can talk about this again later. Thank you. Goodbye.