

TO BHMA

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How Xi Jinping Steamrolls Dissent With Tactics From Stalin and Mao

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By Chun Han Wong

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

Chinese leader Xi Jinping is employing the sort of autocratic tactics once wielded by Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong to stamp out opposition and stack the leadership with acolytes as he prepares to extend his reign.

In a throwback to the most powerful Communist leaders of the 20th century, Xi has purged dozens of senior officials—even his own protégés—overseen the growth of a cult of personality and demanded absolute loyalty.

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The European Union Is Splintering, Some Say That's the Only Way to Revive It

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

By Laurence Norman and Kim Mackrael

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

BRUSSELS—The European Union was built on consensus. Nations that once bludgeoned each other found common purpose, yielding years of economic growth.

Now, as that expansion has stalled, the bloc is exploring a radical idea to get its mojo back: abandoning the unity that has defined it for decades.

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Edouard Sacaillan in his atelier next to one of his paintings.

PNOS KOUGIAS/TO BHMA INTL

TO BHMA International edition

Edouard Sacaillan: 'My homeland is painting'

By Panos Kougiass

Edouard Sacaillan's painting is difficult to confine to a single thematic or aesthetic category. At times,

he turns his gaze towards bustling human gatherings, traffic jams, beaches, festivals and scenes from everyday life; at other times, he allows colour to precede form, as if searching for that primordial state in which the image has not yet de-

ecided what it is going to become.

In his works, human presence does not function as a simple narrative. It becomes a field of observation of collective experience, co-existence, but also of the fragile balance between in-

dividuality and the whole.

On the occasion of the exhibition "From Chaos to the World", presented this summer at the Tinian Cultural Foundation in dialogue with the painting of Anna Maria Tsakali, Sacaillan returns to a concern

that has occupied him for decades: how form is born. For him, chaos is not synonymous with disorder. It is life itself, the primordial state from which images, light, movement and, ultimately, painting emerge.

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Věra Jourová is a Czech politician and lawyer who served as Vice-President of the European Commission for Values and Transparency from 2019 to 2024.

TO BHMA International edition

The Fight to Keep AI from Choosing Our Leaders

By Odin Linardatou

Inside the historic Quai d'Orsay in Paris—in the very room where Robert Schuman and Jean Monnet signed the Schuman Declaration, laying the foundations for today's European Union—we met former European Commission Vice-President for Values and Transparency Věra Jourová on the sidelines of the

Summit on Media and Democracy in Europe organized by Project Syndicate and the Meliore Foundation.

Against this powerful historical backdrop, Jourová speaks candidly about what she considers the defining threats of our era: the unprecedented concentration of political, technological and economic power; the weaponization of artificial intelligence; the manipulation of elections through digital plat-


forms; and the urgent need to safeguard Europe's democratic institutions.

Reflecting on her years as the European Commission's Vice-President for Values and Transparency, Jourová identifies her greatest frustration not as political resistance, but as the challenge of convincing citizens why democracy, the rule of law, and fundamental rights must never be taken for granted.

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The European Union Is Splintering—and Some Say That's the Only Way to Revive It

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

GERTY HANDEEN/WIJNGERTIAP PHOTO

The unity that defined the bloc became an impediment to growth

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Some of the continent's sharpest minds, including former European Central Bank President Mario Draghi, have proposed profound changes to restore economic dynamism and gain influence on the world stage. The problem is the EU's 27 countries are finding it hard to agree on how to proceed.

National governments with conflicting interests have balked at ceding control in critical fields that experts say most urgently need reshaping, including defense and foreign policy, financial supervision and labor laws.

But cliques within the bloc are emerging to push for change. France and Germany are leading a group of six working to merge financial markets. Berlin wants decisions on foreign policy to be made without requiring a unanimous vote. Sweden, Poland and Baltic countries, which are closest to Russia's border, are tightening their security and defense-industry partnerships. Farther west, Germany and former EU member Britain have strengthened their security alliance, co-leading European efforts to develop deep-strike capabilities.

At its core, Draghi's strategy is about creating conditions for globally competitive companies to emerge. Where there is government resistance, the private sector is starting to take matters in its own hands, he says. "You see an extraordinary dynamism by the private sector that is actually making partnerships, joint ventures, mergers and so on," Draghi said in an interview. "Basically, because the private sector has now very clearly understood that without scale, they have no future."

Seeds of the idea for blocs within the bloc were sown decades ago. In 1985, a group of

five neighboring European countries dropped passport requirements to form the Schengen Area. Then in 1999, the euro gave 11 countries a common currency. Both concepts caught on: Schengen, with 29 countries, is now larger than the bloc, and 21 countries have adopted the euro.

The innovations reflected a more self-confident era for the EU on its march toward a federal, nation-state-like existence. Today's shift is about self-preservation.

The bloc has struggled for years to agree on uniform rules for businesses and financial markets. That has contributed to internal barriers to trade that are equivalent to a tariff of as much as 44% on manufactured goods, according to the International Monetary Fund.

Today, it is also contending with threats to its existence from an expansionist Russia and trying to fight a tsunami of low-cost imports from China. The Trump administration took advantage of Europe's reliance on the U.S. for security to push the bloc to accept a trade deal last year shaped by the White House's demands.

Draghi, who is also a former Italian premier, advocates significant public and private investment and policy overhauls to supersize companies so they can compete internationally. He first championed the idea in a report for the EU's executive arm, the European Commission, two years ago.

Subsequently, he lobbied for small groups of EU states to deepen their integration and pool resources to accelerate growth in technology, defense and finance, an approach he dubbed pragmatic federalism.

Skeptics say subsets risk creating a two-tier EU; leaving the single market more fragmented and weakening the

bonds that bind it into a bloc. Others question whether the EU's most-powerful nations, under pressure from nationalist forces at home, will want to sacrifice any more sovereignty.

"You can have the best ideas but if you don't have the right political ground to build this, you will not be able to construct it," said Sbastien Maillard, a special adviser to France's Jacques Delors Institute, a think tank. "It will face tough opposition from some leaders."

But Draghi says the approach is beginning to yield fruit.

"The first best for Europe is to move together in 27 members. If that is impossible, then you have a situation where groups of countries naturally emerge as the ones who want to do the same thing," he said.

Since Draghi's 2024 report, the EU's six largest econo-

mies have thrown their weight behind uniting the bloc's financial markets under common rules and a single, more powerful supervisory body. Defense companies, sometimes prodded by governments, are sealing new deals to boost Europe's defense industry and military capabilities to tackle the Russian threat.

European countries forged a coalition to help Ukraine. On industrial policy, a group of 10 EU members is working on a pilot project to stockpile critical raw materials such as rare-earth elements and gallium, a crucial component in semiconductors.

The EU has always had ways of groups of countries working together, either within the EU rules or beyond them. Schengen started as an inter-governmental project that was eventually brought under EU rules. These loopholes are a

critical way to manage competing interests and priorities in the bloc, says Jim Cloos, a former top official in the EU who attended its leaders summits from 2006-2021. The workarounds don't fragment the bloc because eventually all member states can join.

In his speeches over the past 12 months, Draghi has suggested that countries share rules for advanced technologies and industrial competitors jointly invest in critical sectors such as semiconductors and power-grid infrastructure to lower energy prices. Nations with sophisticated defense industries should team up for research and procurement, he posits. For now, they are still trying to act in concert. EU leaders agreed in March on a timeline of economic changes that runs through 2027, including streamlining regulation and building arti-

cial intelligence gigafactories.

Hidden behind that timeline is an implicit warning, European officials say. If countries can't find a way to work as one at the EU level, breakaway coalitions will forge ahead.

The biggest test of that time frame is the effort to unite the EU's fragmented capital markets to make it easier for European companies to raise money to match the scale of major global players.

The work has dragged on for years, hampered in part by smaller countries wary of losing the power over their financial sectors that helps them attract investment and trading companies to their own territory. Recently six countries representing most of the bloc's economy and population formed a splinter group to drive the idea forward, and their leaders are trying to persuade others to join.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, the EU's top official, has told the bloc to speed up. In February she gave members until the end of the year to agree on the plan. If not, she would support a group of countries setting it up on their own.

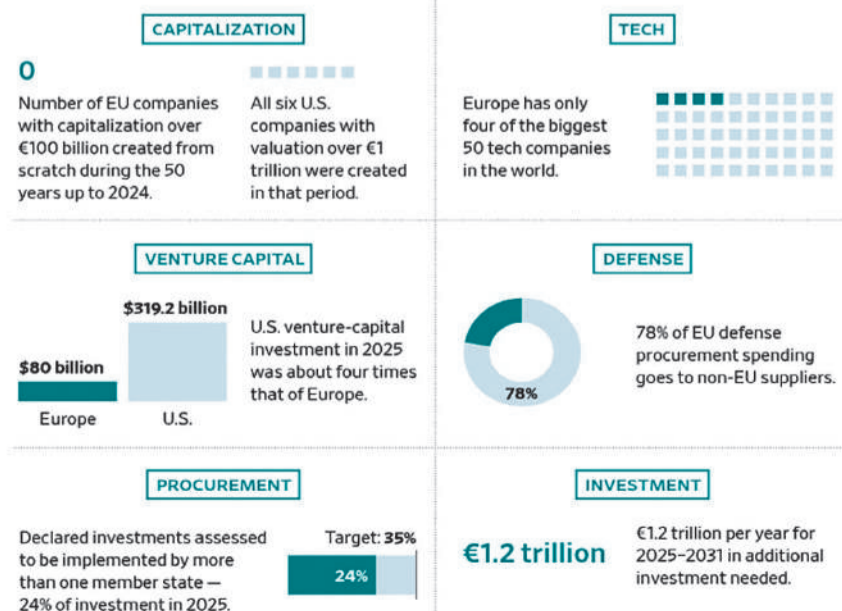
"You urgently need better access to low-cost capital," she told a group of industrial executives in Antwerp. "I am determined to make it happen this time."

With top EU officials embracing the idea, Draghi is hopeful that just as with the euro, which took decades of experimenting and reversals to pull off, the EU can find a new way to work together to meet its challenges.

"It's a matter of preparation and leadership," he said. "It's a slow train that used to be stuck in a station...and this is gaining speed."

Draghi's Prescription

In his 2024 report, former European Central Bank President Mario Draghi said these are the issues Europe must fix:



Sources: Draghi report 2024 (capitalization, tech, defense); PitchBook (venture capital); European Defense Agency (procurement); ECB report July 2025 (investment)

How Xi Jinping Steamrolls Dissent With Tactics From Stalin and Mao

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

China's leader draws from autocrats' playbook to expand power, oust potential rivals and lay groundwork to rule indefinitely



EMILY O'NEILL/WIREIMAGE.COM

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His goal: dictate China's destiny for years to come in order to expand the country's power and match the U.S. in military might and economic clout. Now in his 14th year as party leader, the 73-year-old Xi has eliminated conventions put in place after Mao to prevent a return to one-man rule.

But such strongman tactics come with risks. In squelching debate and stoking a climate of fear, Xi has made policymaking more arbitrary and mistakes harder to correct. Without clear succession planning, Xi also risks the fate that befell Stalin and Mao, whose deaths in office unleashed struggles for power that ended up unraveling their political visions.

Culling the top

Stalin and Mao eliminated rivals and quashed dissent as they consolidated absolute power. Both leaders oversaw sweeping purges that condemned millions of officials, intellectuals and ordinary citizens to jail, forced labor and death. In launching the disastrous Cultural Revolution, Mao mobilized zealous youths to attack alleged counterrevolutionaries, unleashing mob violence and social turmoil.

While Xi shunned such fanaticism, he has purged senior officials at a speed and scale unseen since the Mao era. Unending allegations of corruption and political dissent aim to compel officials to demonstrate loyalty to Xi and ensure that no one can undermine him.

Xi has stepped up the culling since starting his third term as party leader in 2022. He took down three sitting members of the elite Polit-

buro in six months, the biggest purge at this level since 1976. China's ministers for defense, foreign affairs and agriculture have been removed, along with other military commanders, regional leaders, financial regulators and state-enterprise executives. Borrowing a Mao-era practice, Xi requires Politburo members to critique themselves and each other in annual sessions he chairs, reviewing their performances using criteria that include loyalty to his leadership.

For Communist leaders, "The more successful you are, the more enemies are afraid of you and mobilize to destroy you, and therefore the more you need to purge," said Joseph Torigian, a historian at American University in Washington, who has studied power struggles in the Soviet Union and Mao-era China. "There is no equilibrium—the enemies continue to manifest."

No term limits or clear successor

Xi has pushed aside guardrails installed decades ago to prevent a return to Mao-style

autocracy, in which one man ruled China for life. During his first decade in power, Xi discarded age-based retirement norms for senior officials and repealed a two-term limit on China's presidency, clearing his path to remain party chief and head of state indefinitely.

Xi, whose stint as Communist Party leader is already the longest since Mao, appears poised to claim a fourth five-year term as party chief in 2027 and as state president the following year.

Delegating to seniors

Xi concentrated key policymaking powers into his own hands during his first two terms as party leader, asserting personal control over everything from economic planning to national security.

In his third term, Xi has delegated some responsibilities to a small group of loyalists who are in their late 60s and early 70s—considered too old to be viable successors. He hasn't promoted into the party's seven-man leadership body anyone young and experienced enough

to be a suitable heir, according to party insiders.

This approach is risky. Succession struggles after Stalin and Mao fueled political turmoil. Stalin's death in 1953 sparked a succession fight and ultimately a process of "de-Stalinization" that dismantled his personality cult and program of mass terror. After Mao died in 1976, his chosen successor purged a group of rivals known as the "Gang of Four" before being pushed aside by Deng Xiaoping, who became paramount leader and reversed many of Mao's policies.

Listening less

Xi has further centralized decision-making over major policies such as China's five-year plans, which chart goals for the economy and allocate state resources for achieving them.

China's government previously consulted foreign institutions and experts such as the World Bank and the American economist Joseph Stiglitz when preparing its five-year plans. But Xi shuns such counsel.

He also keeps tight control over the process. For the latest plan, he gave a trusted proxy, Premier Li Qiang, a more hands-on role. His advisers have accepted fewer sug-

gestions from lower-level officials and outside experts while drafting the plan, according to an analysis by the Asia Society Policy Institute.

One consequence: Xi has so far shrugged off signs that China needs to boost consumption to fight persistent deflation that is dogging the economy.

Making and enforcing rules

Xi has set up an extensive system of rules and enforcement that closely dictates the behavior of party members and government workers.

His administration has enacted or revised party regulations on duty and conduct at a pace far surpassing each of his post-Mao predecessors.

To enforce these rules, Xi empowered the party's top internal watchdog, the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, to scrutinize the party's 100 million members and police their loyalty.

Beijing has embedded CCDI officials into major party and state institutions and has deployed inspection teams across the country.

Communist Party authorities disciplined nearly a million people last year, the highest annual tally on record.

Xi has also retained an element of Stalin and Mao's approaches to social control: encouraging people to monitor and report on each other. Even so, Xi has avoided the mass terror and mob violence these two leaders once unleashed.

"The scope, intensity and violence of Stalin's purges dur-

ing the Great Terror far exceeded Xi's own effort to rectify the Chinese Communist Party," said Jonathan Czin of the Brookings Institution. "We don't see the people on the receiving end of Xi's wrath being liquidated."

Cult of personality

Like Stalin and Mao before him, Xi portrays himself as the greatest Communist theorist of his generation. He claims credit for major policies and links them to his own political philosophy, known as "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era," which has been enshrined in the Communist Party charter and China's Constitution—alongside "Mao Zedong Thought."

New rules require all prospective party members to study "Xi Jinping Thought" during the admission process. Once in the party, members must take part in regular study sessions on Xi's policies.

Party propaganda portrays Xi as the central and indispensable figure in China's renaissance. PropagandaScope, a platform that monitors Chinese state media, tracked a recent resurgence in state-media references to Xi as the "people's leader," echoing Mao's title of "Great Leader."

Tapping in to Mao's legacy, analysts said, helps Xi justify his autocratic style and legitimize his efforts to extend his rule.

"Whether it's Stalin or Mao or Xi, they all act with clearheaded rationality" in enforcing their policies and entrenching their power, said Guoguang Wu, a senior fellow at the Asia Society Policy Institute. "They are certainly ruthless—there are no emotional factors in their calculations."



SPUTNIK/ALEXANDER WAZAKOV/POOL VIA REUTERS

Chinese President Xi Jinping welcomes Russian President Vladimir Putin during a ceremony at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Tianjin, China August 31, 2025.

Edouard Sacaillan: 'My homeland is painting'

On the occasion of his joint exhibition with Anna Maria Tsakali at the Tinian Cultural Foundation, painter Edouard Sacaillan speaks about painting as a way of being, about creation that emerges from the unpredictable, about his relationship with human beings and the crowd, as well as about the need to remain open to that which precedes every intention: chaos

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Throughout our conversation, the concept of movement constantly returns. Form, as Sacaillan perceives it, is not a static destination but a temporary balance within a continuous flow. Perhaps this is why he refuses to offer definitive definitions or easy answers. He prefers to approach each work as a new encounter with the unknown, where experience, memory, observation and instinct co-exist without any of them claiming exclusivity.

Edouard Sacaillan speaks about painting as a way of remaining in constant dialogue with the world — even when this world remains open, uncertain and undefined.

The title of the exhibition, "From Chaos to the World", seems to describe a journey. What does this transition mean to you?

Chaos is something very specific for me. I do not use the word metaphorically. When I put the first colours onto the canvas, what appears is chaos. An event that does not depend on me, on my knowledge or on my will. It is something that exists before me and within which I also find myself. From that point onwards begins the attempt for it to acquire form.

When we say "world" in painting, we mainly mean form, the shape. Not an imposed order, but the moment when something acquires substance without losing its origin in chaos. That is the difficult part. To give meaning, but only as much as is necessary, so that the form continues to carry within it this initial organic quality.

In the past, human beings believed they could control everything. They designed, organised, executed. Gradually, however, we realised that we are not omnipotent. Light changes, the body changes, reality is constantly transformed. This flow is life, and this is what I want to exist within painting as well.

Therefore, for you, chaos is not synonymous with disorder.

Not at all. It is a mistake that is made very often. The opposite of chaos is neither order nor disorder. Order and disorder are human constructions. Chaos is not a construction. It is life itself. It can be light, a wave, an earthquake, a movement of nature. It can be something that fright-

'The opposite of chaos is neither order nor disorder. Order and disorder are human constructions. Chaos is not a construction. It is life itself.'

ens you or something that fascinates you. But it is always something primordial. I cannot give you chaos. I can create disorder. Chaos already exists before us. This is what I try to encounter every time I begin a work.

How is this idea translated into your painting process?

Many times, I have no spe-

cific idea when I enter the studio. I feel empty. Then I simply throw colours onto the canvas and observe them. Just as I would stand in front of the sea or before a landscape. Afterwards, my own responsibility begins. That chaos has to become painting. It has to become my own work. Not because I want to impose myself upon it, but because I must take responsibility for it. Sacaillan, the artist, must take a position towards what has appeared. Form is not something I impose. It is something that emerges through a continuous dialogue with what already exists.

In the exhibition, you are in dialogue with Anna Maria Tsakali. How was this shared proposal born?

Anna Maria and I share common concerns and common questions. We share an anxiety about what it means to make painting today and how an exhibition can go beyond the narrow framework of simply presenting works.

We did not begin by saying that we absolutely had to create a joint exhibition. The initiative came from the Tinian Cultural Foundation, which had been following our work and knew that we had presented joint exhibitions abroad as well.

The people at the Foundation suggested that we develop this dialogue in Tinos, and we felt that there was a genuine reason for it to happen. Although we paint differently, there is a common core. We both begin from an open, organic state, before form. From that point onwards, each of us follows their own path.

What does it mean to you that this exhibition is presented in Tinos, a place with such a strong artistic as well as spiritual tradition?

Tinos is a very special island. It does not carry only an important artistic history. It also carries a pro-



Edouard Sacaillan spoke to *TO BHMA International Edition* on his philosophy behind painting.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PANOS KOUBIAS/TO BHMA INTL EDITION

found theological history. It is a place where human beings come face to face with faith, with the notion of the miracle, with human weakness. This moves me deeply. I see people climbing on their knees towards the church seeking a source of strength. I do not approach this ironically. I understand it. In a different way, the artist does something similar.

They do not choose an easy path. They insist on searching for a small miracle within painting, within light, within form.

People are constantly present in your work. Beaches, festivals, traffic jams, gatherings. Do you paint more what you see or what you remember?

Everything together. And unfortunately, I cannot do everything at the same time. I always feel a little fragmented. When I am in the mountains, I want to be completely there. When I am by the sea, I want to be inside the sea. When I paint people, I want to be among them. The ideal would be to be able to coexist with people, with animals, with plants, with light, with memories — all at once. It is not easy.

Life forces you to choose, each time, only one fragment of it. I do not have the patience to work on the same subject for five years. I could perhaps devote myself exclusively to traffic jams or to the sea, but I would feel that I was functioning like a machine. I cannot work that way.

If you could stand discreetly beside a viewer looking at your works, what would you like to hear them say?

I cannot step out of my own position and enter the position of the viewer. Perhaps this is also my greatest difficulty. I do not expect them to say that they understood the work. Nor do I expect them to explain it. I would only like them to feel that these people who exist inside the paintings are not decorative elements.

I do not know whether this is recognised. Perhaps it is not. But I cannot complain because it is not recognised. I continue to do it because I do not know how to paint differently.

Are you concerned with the relationship between your work and institutions, collectors and, more broadly, the art world?

I am concerned with it, but not in the way many people think. Of course, an artist needs institutions, galleries and people who will

support their work. They do not exist outside society. On the other hand, I cannot paint based on whether something will be accepted or not. Painting does not happen that way. Today, I see that popularity operates according to different terms. Painting, however, requires time. It requires learning how to see. It is like reading. If someone has not learned how to read a text, it is difficult for them to read a painting as well. People constantly see images, but that does not mean they read them. Photography, the screen and the rapid slogan have changed the way we stand before images.

Nevertheless, you continue to paint with the same persistence, without adapting to the trends of the time.

I do not know how to do anything else. If I changed my painting in order to become more liked, I would betray the reason why I started painting in the first place. I prefer to make mistakes within my own path rather



A work in progress.

'Today, I see that popularity operates according to different terms. Painting, however, requires time. It requires learning how to see.'



The painter's tools.

than succeed by following a path that does not belong to me. Painting is not a strategy. It is a way of existing.

You often refer to the painters who shaped you. What did you retain most from your years in Paris?

I remember pulling Moralis by the sleeve and telling him that I wanted to understand whether he was as great as Velázquez. It was naïve, but that was how I thought. In Paris, I met people such as Leonardo Cremonini, and later

I had contact with Alekos Fassianos. But I never felt that painting could be transmitted through lessons. In the studio, you are on your own. It is a solitary work. Even when there are people around you, at the moment when you are painting, no one can truly enter what is happening.

You have said that you feel closer to Francis Bacon than to other painters. Why?

Because I am moved by the brutality he has towards

the image. He does not try to beautify it or make it pleasant. There is an intensity that speaks to me deeply. It does not mean that I want to paint like him. It means that I recognise this difficulty of standing before reality without idealising it. At some point, I abandoned the certainty of drawing and turned towards a more open way of creating. I owe this to a great extent to Cremonini.

I went there determined to do what I believed was the right kind of painting: models, still lifes, academic discipline. At some point, however, I felt that all of this was leading me nowhere. I literally took rubbish, threw it onto the floor of the studio and began observing it. That was when something changed inside me. I realised that painting is not found only in great subjects. It is also found in the humblest things. In the traces that life leaves behind. From there began another journey that continues until today.

And this is perhaps where the notion of accumulation comes from, which we encounter both in your own works and in the work of Anna Maria Tsakali?

Exactly. Within those "rubbish" objects, I began to see gatherings of things, relationships, lives. Anna Maria follows this through flowers, nature and organic forms. I follow it through people. In reality, we are both speaking about the same thing: how many small existences create a world. I am interested in anonymous people. Not the protagonists. Those who usually pass unnoticed. I believe that is where the true human story lies.

If a young painter came to your studio today and asked you for advice, what would you tell them?

I would not give them any advice. I do not believe in the role of the teacher who distributes certainties. It would be arrogant on my part. I myself continue to live within my own doubts. So how could I tell someone else what the right path is? What the people I respected most taught me is precisely the opposite: not to trust certainties. Cremonini did not give me formulas. He forced me to doubt more.

Let this be the only thing worth keeping for a young person. Not to fear doubt. To continue searching for their own path, even when they are not at all certain where it leads.

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If you're under the age of 30, booking a getaway to a top European destination gets cheaper with EU funded youth programs.

Smart Ways Young People Can Save on Travel in Europe

From discounted rail passes to funded travel schemes, here's how young people can explore Europe without breaking the bank



By Maria Paravantes

Schools are out and university entrance exam results are in. For some students and their families, it's a time to celebrate; for others, it's a chance to take a break before the next chapter begins. Either way, summer offers young Europeans the perfect opportunity to travel independently and, as teachers in Greece often say, "expand their horizons".

The good news is that exploring Europe doesn't have to come with a hefty price tag. Thanks to a range of EU-backed initiatives, discount schemes and alternative travel programs, young people can see the continent for far less than they might expect.

From free rail passes and student exchanges to farm stays, volunteering opportunities and work-for-accommodation arrangements, thousands of young Europeans travel each year for a fraction of the usual cost. *TO BHMA International Edition* has rounded up some of the best options for young travelers who are ready to start discovering the world.

1 Rail Travel Schemes DISCOVEREU

If you're 18 and live in an EU member state or another country participating in Erasmus+, you could travel across Europe for free through DiscoverEU.

Successful applicants receive a rail pass valid for up to 30 days, along with a discount card offering savings on accommodation, attractions, food and other activities. Around 40,000 passes are awarded in each application round.

Applications open twice a year, in spring and autumn. The next round runs from October 1 to 15, 2026, for applicants born between January 1 and December 31, 2008. Successful candidates will be able to travel between March 2027 and May 2028.

The program applies only to 18-year-olds.

INTERRAIL YOUTH PASS

Missed the DiscoverEU age window? The Interrail Youth Pass is available to travelers aged under 28 and offers discounts of up to 25%, making it one of the most flexible ways to explore Europe by train.

There are several pass options to choose from:

- Interrail Global Pass, which offers unlimited train travel to more than 30,000 destinations across 33 countries, ideal for multi-country trips or travelers keeping their plans flexible.
- Interrail One Country Pass, which covers unlimited rail travel in a single country.
- Interrail Plus Pass, which combines the benefits of an Interrail Pass with seat reservation costs on most trains.

Keep in mind that Interrail passes do not include:

- Seat reservations on many high-speed and overnight trains.
- Local public transport fares including buses, trams and metro systems.
- Accommodation, although partner discounts are available.

- Domestic rail travel, except for one outbound and one inbound travel day in your country of residence.

INTERRAIL PASS FOR ERASMUS+

Interrail also offers a dedicated pass for Erasmus+ participants traveling to and from their placement abroad. Available in four- or six-day versions, the pass can be used over a six-month period and allows holders to explore Europe while traveling to their host destination. Depending on the Erasmus+ grant, part or all of the cost may be covered through the program's Green Travel option.

2 Education and Exchange Programs EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CORPS

One of the least-known but most affordable ways to travel and live abroad is through the European Solidarity Corps (ECS) Volunteering Activities. This program offers young people aged 18-30 the chance to volunteer in another European country for two to 12 months.

Projects range from environmental protection and education to youth work, culture,

social inclusion, health, sport and humanitarian aid. The ECS covers travel, accommodation, meals, insurance and a small living allowance, making it an ideal and affordable opportunity for young people who want to travel, develop new skills, and experience life in another country while giving back to the community.

In Greece, Ecogenia places young people in paid, full-time teams working on environmental restoration, wildfire resilience, climate adaptation, and community projects. Participants are recruited by Ecogenia itself and work on its programs.

ERASMUS+

Best known for its student education, training, youth, and sport exchange programs, Erasmus+ also supports internships, training, volunteering, youth exchanges and study opportunities abroad.

The scheme is open to students, apprentices, recent graduates, educators, and young people, and helps participants gain international experience while developing new skills and improving their career prospects. Depending on the activity, Erasmus+ provides financial support to help

cover travel and living costs, making it easier for participants to spend time in another European country as part of their education or professional development. It also subsidizes Interrail passes, and offers extra funding for lower-carbon travel, including rail journeys.

AIESEC

AIESEC, the world's largest, youth-led non-profit organization, offers students and recent graduates aged 18 to 30 international volunteering placements, leadership programs and professional internships in more than 120 countries.

Volunteer placements last several weeks, while paid internships provide career experience in fields including education, IT, marketing and business.

3 Volunteering and Work Opportunities

For young people looking for other affordable ways to travel, several international programs combine volunteering with accommodation.

Service Civil International (SCI) organizes short-term volunteer camps focused on environmental, cultural, and community projects, with accommodation usu-

ally provided at low cost.

WWOOF connects volunteers with organic farms across Europe, where a few hours of work each day is exchanged for accommodation and meals.

Similar platforms such as Workaway and HelpX match travelers with hosts offering opportunities on farms, in hostels, guesthouses and family homes in exchange for a few hours of help each day.

Those wanting to earn money while travelling can also consider seasonal work. Ski resorts in France, Austria, Switzerland and Italy recruit winter staff, often including accommodation, while summer camps across Europe hire activity leaders and childcare staff with meals and lodging provided.

Many hostels and hospitality businesses also offer short-term positions in reception, housekeeping or events, with some providing free accommodation in exchange for part-time work.

4 Student and Youth Discount Cards EUROPEAN YOUTH CARD

The European Youth Card offers discounts on hostels, museums, transport, learning, services and food in 34 countries plus special summer discounts.

The card is available for anyone up to 31 years old and you apply through your country's dedicated website. The card costs around 17 euros and is available digitally through the myEYC app.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT IDENTITY CARD

Recognized in more than 130 countries, the International Student Identity Card (ISIC) is the only internationally accepted proof of student status. It offers holders access to more than 150,000 benefits and discounts in over 130 countries and is available to full-time secondary school, university and postgraduate students. There is no upper age limit, although applicants must be at least 12 years old.



Tips for Young Travelers

- Night travel can replace accommodation. So why not sleep on the train or bus.
- Ask about student or youth discounts everywhere—museums, public transport, ferries, attractions and even some airlines offer youth fares.
- Consider funding part of your trip as you go. This means getting a seasonal job in tourism or babysitting.
- Set a realistic budget before you leave, including transport, laundry, mobile data, attraction tickets and unexpected expenses.
- If you're under 18, check minimum-age requirements before booking accommodation.
- Keep with you at all times, your passport or national ID, European Health Insurance Card (if eligible), copies of important documents and emergency contact details.
- For your safety, it's best to travel with friends. Agree in advance on spending limits, shared expenses, safety expectations and what to do if someone wants to leave the group.
- Rather than rushing through multiple destinations, spend longer in fewer places. You'll save money, meet more people and enjoy a richer travel experience.

By Michaela Maria Derizioti

On June 15, Giannis Semertzidis said goodbye to his students for the summer. A few days later, he put on an apron and started working at a restaurant. In September, if he is lucky enough to be among those hired in the first recruitment round, he will return to the classroom. Not the same classroom as last year, of course. Until then, however, Greece's unemployment benefits are not enough to cover rent, bills, and everyday expenses. As a result, he chooses to work in the hospitality sector, where he can earn more money. Giannis is 29 years old, a special education teacher in a primary school, and, as he tells *TO VIMA*, "there has not been a single day when I have not thought about leaving the education sector forever."

He loves his job and adores working with children. Yet, during the four years he has spent as a substitute teacher, he has encountered obstacles that have made him reconsider his decision to pursue a career in education.

His situation is far from unique. For thousands of substitute teachers in Greece, the end of the school year does not mean rest, but marks the beginning of a second period of employment.

The financial pressure, however, is not limited to the summer months. As four substitute teachers told *TO VIMA*, for many, a second—or even third—job has become part of their daily lives, even during the school year.

A second job becomes a necessity

"I have never had just one job. After school, there are always private lessons or a performance at a concert," says Georgia Chasioti from Thessaloniki. She has been a substitute teacher for eight years and now only applies for schools near her because, as she explains, "for those who are placed far from their homes, the situation is quite disheartening, with announcements often being made just two days before they have to report for duty."

On the islands, the pressure is even greater. She explains that there are many cases where substitute teachers are forced to leave their accommodation before their contracts have even ended.

"Many of my friends temporarily live in tents on the beach or even inside their cars," she says.

In this environment of uncertainty, the need for a second source of income is not a choice, but almost a necessity. For Georgia, that second income comes from music.

"Music is both an escape and a necessary source of income. I play at festivals or even

on the street, although I always worry that I might be fined. The truth is that without this money, I would not be able to get by," she says.

Her involvement with music continues during the summer. In previous years, she worked at beach bars and summer camps because the pay was higher than unemployment benefits. One year, when she decided to rely only on unemployment support and income from music per-

formances, her first benefit payment arrived at the beginning of August, leaving her to cover expenses for weeks with whatever she could earn from playing music.

What happens if I want to have a child?

The difficulties, however, do not end with the need for a second job. What actually happens to female substitute teachers who decide to have children?

Job insecurity combines with gaps in the system, creating an even more demanding daily reality. This is confirmed by the story of Christina M., who became a mother three months ago. During the school year, she had to arrange a monthly trip from the island where she taught to the nearest city in order to undergo the necessary medical checkups. Because of ferry schedules, each trip required at least two days of leave.

Christina, a substitute teacher and professional athlete, spent this school year on a Greek island where there was no permanent gynecologist available to monitor her pregnancy.

"The primary education authority suggested that I take sick leave so I could travel and complete my medical examinations," she explains.

Every ultrasound meant travel, ferry tickets, and additional expenses, while she was trying to manage a pregnancy away from her family. As if that were not enough, she also faced another consequence of her employment status. She explains that "because of the special leave provided before and after childbirth, I was not insured with social security contributions for around four months, which meant I did not meet the necessary requirements to receive unemployment benefits this summer."

And that is where questions about the new school year begin.

Christina, who, around two months before schools reopen, has still not found a solution for balancing family and work, says: "If there is no place in a daycare center for my child, there is a possibility that I will remain unemployed, because I will not be able to apply for certain positions this year, such as those on remote islands."

'You collect degrees only to end up as a waiter'

Although the cases of substitute teachers may differ, they all share one common issue: the absence of a stable system that takes their personal circumstances into account.

For Marianthi V., a special education substitute teacher for the past four years, summer is not a break, it is simply a change of workplace.

"The concept of rest has almost disappeared from our daily lives. There is truly no period when you can relax. A teacher needs emotional reserves to cope with the school year, but there is never enough time to rebuild them," she says, describing a constant cycle between teaching during the school year and working in hospitality during the summer.

"Schools may close, but expenses keep running," she says.

"You collect degrees, master's degrees, doctorates, foreign languages, and in the end you become a waiter just to survive."

The uncertainty continues

For substitute teachers in Greece, the end of the school year is not the end of a journey, but the beginning of a new period of uncertainty.

It is an uncertainty that returns every year, between classrooms that empty in June and temporary jobs that fill the summer months. September brings new suitcases, relocations, and new placements. Along with it comes a return to the classroom—not always the same one, and not always in the same city.

And somewhere between recruitment lists, unemployment benefits, and second jobs, the education of an entire country ends up relying on people who enter classrooms carrying not only their teaching responsibilities, but also the daily anxiety of making ends meet.

Greek Teachers Forced Into Second Jobs to Make Ends Meet



Thousands of substitute teachers in Greece face yearly uncertainty, turning to summer and even year-round second jobs as unstable contracts and low incomes threaten their livelihoods



Continued from Page One

You said in an interview that Donald Trump frightens you still more than the challenges posed by the war in Ukraine, Russia, and even China. It left quite an impression on me.

Of course, I am very much afraid of Putin and his imperialistic plans, which have been obvious since the annexation of Crimea.

But when it comes to Donald Trump, I think there is now an unprecedented and absolutely monstrous concentration of political power, ideological power, technological power, and economic power.

We can do whatever we can at the European level and at the national level to protect democracy and make ourselves more resilient against populists. But when this enormous power comes from the global level—from Trump's alliance with the technological giants—we are in a very disadvantageous position.

How do you think the rise of generative AI, and of deepfakes, is reshaping politics?

We don't have much time to do everything necessary to ensure that AI does not dictate who becomes president or prime minister.

AI has enormous potential when it's used to spread disinformation, manipulate public opinion, and influence elections.

First of all, the AI Act imposes obligations on online platforms to guarantee transparency. When voters see something that has been

The Fight to Keep AI from Choosing Our Leaders

produced by AI—especially deepfakes—they should be informed that it is AI-generated.

It's also essential to stay on the alert before elections; in Romania, for example, thousands of dormant accounts suddenly became active, which probably means that something is wrong, something designed to manipulate and mislead voters. This is called inauthentic behavior—it's not normal for 5,000 sleeping accounts to wake up overnight and suddenly begin influencing public opinion—and the Digital Services Act

also imposed an obligation on digital platforms to stop such operations.

Otherwise, we will never again be able to speak about elections in EU member states as fair competition among real people, with real identities, presenting their genuine political visions.

Where do you draw the line between regulating harmful online content and protecting free speech?

The line is absolutely clear. If we extend the protection of

free speech to bots and artificial intelligence, it will mark the end not only of democracy, but of society itself.

In the European Union, freedom of speech is, of course, a primary—almost absolute—principle. But it is the freedom of speech of real people, with real identities that's protected together with free speech comes with a responsibility for what is said.

Even today, when I explain this, there are still a lot of surprised people who think I want to deprive AI of freedom of speech. Such a notion

is nonsense and something we have to prevent.

What was your biggest frustration when dealing with member states that repeatedly violated EU values?

My frustration was simple. At being unable to convey to the general public why we need the rule of law, why we need fundamental rights, and why we need a democratic system.

People—and young people, especially—find it hard to grasp the threat, because they have lived their entire lives in

democratic societies. So my inability to issue a powerful enough alert to societies in different member states was very frustrating indeed.

Do you think things are becoming even more difficult now when it comes to alerting societies?

Yes, because people are increasingly manipulated online.

I will never blame digital companies for all our problems—that was never my intention. But they amplify harmful content, and they amplify the effects of disinformation. Which is wrong.

Do you believe that freezing EU funds is ultimately the most effective tool for enforcing compliance with the rule of law?

Indeed it is, and this became obvious in Hungary, when the nation was unable to absorb or use EU funds.

I think people in Hungary also understood that we cannot send EU money into a system that is so badly corrupted.

So, yes, I believe that withholding funds has proven to be an effective tool.

Given the rise of populist movements, how optimistic are you about the long-term cohesion of the European Union?

I am optimistic because the European Union is a very complicated project.

The Union has 27 countries, 24 official languages, and a very complicated and difficult history.

Yet, in times of crisis, the European Union tends to become stronger. I believe this will continue to be the case.



Věra Jourová speaking at the Summit on Media and Democracy in Europe, organized by Project Syndicate and the Meliore Foundation at French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

European Corporate World's 'Med Blind Spot'

Europe still treats the Mediterranean through a post-colonial lens – a neighborhood to be managed rather than a market to be integrated

Ask any board director to locate the Mediterranean on their strategic map and you will find it stranded between categories — too Southern for Europe, too Northern for Africa, too Western for the Gulf. This categorical failure is costing companies real money and compounding geopolitical risk in ways boards are not yet registering.

The Mediterranean basin is home to half a billion people, a market the size of the EU's internal market, producing roughly 10% of global GDP. Yet intra-regional trade accounts for barely a quarter of that economic weight — making it one of the least economically integrated regions on the planet. That gap between potential and connectivity is not to be ignored. It is a strategic opportunity and, for those who continue

to ignore it, a vulnerability.

China has not ignored it. Through port concessions, fibre-optic cables, energy agreements, and logistics corridors, Beijing has systematically positioned the Mediterranean as the pivot of its Africa and Europe play. In Algeria alone, approximately 1,000 Chinese companies operate across construction, telecoms, energy, and infrastructure. In Morocco, \$5.6 billion in Chinese-backed battery gigafactory investment in 2025 is positioning the country as a manufacturing bridge to European and US markets. The Med is not China's frontier. It is China's gateway.

Gulf sovereign wealth funds are the other actor boards cannot afford to miss. From Libya to Israel, from Egypt to Cyprus and Greece, Gulf capital is the most active investment force across the Mediterranean — frequently



By Cleopatra Kitti

the access mechanism that unlocks upstream positions, the co-investor that provides political legitimacy, and the financial partner that bridges the gap between what European institutional finance will fund and what projects actually require. Understanding where Gulf capital is flowing, and on what terms, is not a secondary consideration — it is a prerequisite for any credible EMEA growth strategy.

Europe still treats the Mediterranean through a post-colonial lens — a neighborhood to be managed rather than a market to be

integrated. The EU has built investment frameworks focused on energy security, but without connecting energy to trade, digital infrastructure, financial inclusion, or supply chain resilience. When the partial closure of the Strait of Hormuz in early 2026 took one-quarter of global LNG export capacity offline, the result was a bilateral scramble — Spain's Foreign Minister to Algiers, Italy accelerating its Eni-Libya partnerships — rather than the activation of a coherent framework. A UN-led Cyprus reunification process moving toward a conference this summer could unlock EEZ demarcation across the Eastern Mediterranean and reshape offshore energy licensing for a generation. Greece illustrates what serious positioning looks like: its €30 billion energy investment program, with PPC and IPTO raising approximately

€5 billion in 2026 alone, is transforming the country into the primary hub for Southeast European power and gas supply. The architecture of the Mediterranean is being decided, on both flanks, largely without boards in the room.

This is where boards have a role beyond governance of their own exposure. The tools that would make the Mediterranean commercially viable at scale — political risk hedging mechanisms, capital co-investment frameworks, governance and transparency standards for producing and interconnector states — do not yet exist in the form the region requires. European and US private sectors, acting through their boards, are among the few constituencies with the commercial credibility and strategic interest to urge governments to build them. European boards should be asking why EU in-

vestment frameworks are not connecting energy security to the broader geo-economic picture. US boards should be asking whether their Middle East and Africa strategies account for the Mediterranean as the connective geography between them — because their competitors, state-backed and otherwise, already have an answer.

The architecture of the Mediterranean is still open. That is not a risk to be noted and filed. It is an invitation — to the boards willing to ask the questions others have not yet thought to raise.

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