Yesterday, the Panama Papers claimed its first political casualty. Sigmundur Gunnlaugsson, Iceland’s prime minister, stepped down after files showed that his wife owned an offshore firm with big claims on the country’s collapsed banks. More will follow. The sheer size of this leak makes you gasp for air: more than 214,000 offshore entities appear in the Panama Papers, connected to people in more than 200 countries and territories.

It’s safe to assume that a considerable amount of the money stuffed away in offshore accounts – according to French economist Gabriel Zucman roughly 7.6 trillion US dollars, an estimated 8 per cent of the world’s wealth – is there in the form of pure gold, writes Björn Elmbrant in a timely issue of **Ord&Bild** (Sweden) focussing on “Gold”.

Today, more than ever, notes Elmbrant, gold means stability. Recent currency and stock market crises have strengthened this connection further: since the turn of the millennium, the gold price has quadrupled. “To be on the safe side, those who own government bonds and stocks sell off some of their assets and invest in gold instead. [...] The political problem is that while ordinary taxpayers have to pay for the reoccurring collapses of banks others have the means to escape.”
It’s been a long time since the gold standard was abandoned. However, concludes Elmbrant, gold still plays an important role in current economic debates. “Similar suggestions to those presented in the 1920s, which turned out to be completely wrong, are again making the rounds – and democracy is put into question, just like it was back then. The question that [the Swedish] economist Stefan de Vylder poses to those in power is certainly called for: ‘Why can’t you at least make new mistakes? Why do you have to repeat the old ones?’”

Also: In a concise history of statelessness, originally published in New Humanist, Lyndsey Stonebridge explores how the modern history of refugees has shaped both the lives of the stateless and the lives, rights and securities of those who consider themselves happily at home.

More articles from Ord&Bild; tidskriftenordobild.se

As the latest polls show the UK’s EU referendum on 23 June is still too close to call, the debate over associated decisions and divisions is heating up in openDemocracy (UK). The media platform’s founder Andrew Barnett comments on the UK government’s original intention to hold a referendum:

“From the start their hope and presumption was that any referendum would be a foregone conclusion. However, against the backdrop of trans-Atlantic discontent with the global elite, and our European continent’s chronic financial insecurity and unprecedented influx of refugees, something quite extraordinary and surprising is taking place in the UK. The Westminster ruling order has splintered and the political system is going into a nosedive from which it may not emerge intact.”

Pluck and Anglo-American partnership: Political scientist Andrew Glencross considers the reasons for the wider public debate’s somewhat muted pan-European dimension. “Intervening in the UK referendum debate is fraught with difficulty for EU actors”, writes Glencross. This is not least because “they are largely deprived of their most common rhetorical device, which consists of appealing to a normative commitment to European unity for the sake of continental peace”.

“The need to build supranational political institutions to provide security fundamentally contradicts the twentieth-century island story of pluck and
Anglo-American partnership in the face of German militarism”, Glencross continues. “Successive UK governments have responded by explicitly approaching European integration as a purely pragmatic and utilitarian foreign policy”, with the latest case in point being the deal that UK prime minister David Cameron cut to scrap Britain’s treaty commitment to “ever closer union”.

**Citizen vs state:** In a video roundtable also posted on Eurozine’s sister site Time To Talk, Ulrike Guérot draws attention to the potentially productive ambivalence between a union of states and a union of citizens, should the UK referendum result in the UK state exiting Europe. Chaired by Niccoló Milanese of European Alternatives, the roundtable is completed by the philosopher and writer Federico Campagna, Marina Prentoulis of Syriza London and James Schneider of Momentum.

**Also:** oD editors Adam Ramsay, Maxim Edwards and Francesc Badia i Dalmases on the fall out from the Panama papers.

More articles from openDemocracy; opendemocracy.net

In interview in Kultura Liberalna (Poland), Dubravka Ugreic discusses the absence of European democratic thought in the current political crisis. The transition process that took place in post-communist Europe needs to be urgently reviewed, says the Croatian, or rather post-Yugoslav author (Ugreic’s prefered epithet).

To Lukasz Pawlowski’s question about disillusionment in the post-communist countries with the West after 1989, and the West’s reciprocal disenchantment, Ugreic responds: “Joining Europe provoked a national orgasm in Croatia. It meant that we are better than Serbs, that we are finally joining “our” Catholic European family. It meant “good bye” to Serbs and “good bye” to the Balkans.

It meant that we, Croats, belong to Europe, and other people of the former Yugoslavia belong to all that Balkan shit. However, my problem is not Croatia. My problem is that Europe might feel flattered by the Croatian motivation for joining the EU.”

Economic transformation has in fact sanctioned and cemented a return to the nationalist ideals of World War II, says Ugreic: “The truth was replaced.
People claimed that the rise of nationalism was something good because during the Yugoslav years they had been nationally suppressed. [...] The same pattern was repeated all over eastern Europe. But beneath that “national liberation” political narrative comprehensible to western politicians, primitive and unsophisticated plunder went on. Brutal and blunt plunder. Post-communist transition, with or without war, appeared to be a perfectly well organized great theft. [...] Only people in power could participate in the process.”

**International democracy:** Ulrike Guérot confirms that nineteenth-century nationalism will not work in today’s world, “where the nation-state isn’t an effective tool for conducting politics – or even for collecting taxes”. Guérot’s sentiment echoes her call for Europe as a republic, published previously in Eurozine, and further, more rigorous utopian thought: “We need international democracy.”

More articles from Kultura Liberalna; liberalculture.org

*Mittelweg 36* (Germany) devotes an issue to global migration history. Historian Peter Gatrell reveals some of the more Eurocentric impulses behind the founding of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and genesis of the 1951 Geneva Convention. Gatrell finds that even in the aftermath of World War II, there was a reluctance to consider the global scale of the refugee crisis during the 1950s.

He concludes his article, first published in *New Global Studies* in 2013 and appearing here for the first time in German: “Refugees and rights are not often spoken of in the same breath. In the postwar era, the rights of refugees came to the fore to a limited extent only. Much effort was instead directed towards emergency relief and to this or that “durable solution”, whether repatriation, resettlement or integration. Relief was offered as a sign of sympathy or a means of forestalling radicalization.”

“The 1951 Convention stipulated that individual refugees, provided they were “recognized”, had a right not to be forcibly returned to a state where they risked being harmed. But”, continues Gatrell, “there was no guarantee that this right or others would be enforced. Refugees exist in a kind of limbo – they are, as [scholar of migration] Emma Haddad puts it, outside the “state-citizen-territory trinity”. As she says, “whereas the human rights regime aspires to a solidarist world beyond the nation-state, the refugee regime
rethinks the state as the solution to the problem”.

**Moral economy of asylum**: Commenting on the current crisis, Didier Fassin says “the so-called European refugee crisis is revealing a situation rather than provoking it”. “Without minimizing the problem, it is crucial to understand how much it is constructed as such by politicians and the media”, insists Fassin. The overdramatization of the influx of refugees into the European Union has helped justify overly drastic measures. Now, persons “accused of crime are deemed innocent until proven guilty”, while asylum seekers, the alleged victims of persecution, “are suspected of lying until their trustworthiness is established”.

More articles from *Mittelweg 36; mittelweg36.de*

marginally present”. Following an extended period of indifference towards culture within policy circles, constant and progressive cuts in national art and culture funding has yielded a workforce “comprised of aging and demotivated employees who are deprived of the means to do their job”.

Moreover, Italian politicians’ sustained lack of interest “creates a vicious circle where every day, citizens grow more and more distant from art and culture, while the country”s political class can easily afford to continue neglecting culture, since it is of no use for electoral purposes”.

Volpe’s solution: to foster a cultural environment that would allow broader, more dynamic and participative access for citizens to cultural resources. The country’s cultural heritage would then cease to be considered so exclusive, limited to just a few people. “And the people of the South would finally be able to appreciate the value of their heritage“, concludes the Foggia-based scholar of archeology and medieval history, “and start to consider it a resource instead of an obstacle”.

**Leaving the South**: Roberto Impicciatore and Salvatore Strozza note the persistence of economic migration from southern to northern Italy, even as regional mobility across the rest of Italy has all but ceased. Though the rate of south-north migration has substantially decreased, the authors perceive its persistence as “discomforting evidence of the subordinate role of the southern regions and the continuing economic imbalance” between the two territories, an imbalance that will only increase with time if nothing is done
to alter prevailing trends.

**How the state restricts creativity:** Economic historian Joel Mokyr, a recipient of the 2015 Balzan Prize, remarks in interview: “a country may possess as much creativity and technological innovation as it is possible to have, but [...] a restrictive state will kill off all potential resources, and creativity on its own won’t be able to go far”.

More articles from *Il Mulino; rivistailmulino.it*

Jon Nixon examines the logic of austerity: “The audit culture rapidly morphed into a culture of suspicion, risk-aversion and mistrust. The professional classes that had constituted the cornerstone of the welfare state were now beleaguered by the increasingly powerful advocates of the small state. The ideal type was no longer the public-sector professional grounded in the ethics of public service, but the private-sector professional committed to institutional efficiency and the maximization of profit.”

In the university sector, “members of the professoriate became increasingly enmeshed in managerial responsibilities and/or advancing their own academic careers in an increasingly competitive and institutionally stratified market place. In the meantime, early and mid-career academics were – and are – struggling in a workplace that is increasingly characterized by fixed-term contracts, professional atomization and economic insecurity”. No wonder, comments Nixon, that the “great humanistic traditions of scholarship that I see as one of the enduring legacies of Europe”, are now at risk.

However, he concludes, we must avoid at all costs the “mental and ideological trap” of “taking at face value the Thatcherite mantra – repeatedly intoned by successive governments intent upon pushing through austerity policies – that “there is no alternative”: no alternative, that is, to cuts in public expenditure, to selling off public goods for private gain, and to the systematic destruction of the welfare state”.

**Also:** *West vs. East all over again* in Lithuanian translation, an article by Erik Tabery, editor-in-chief of Czech weekly *Respekt*.

More articles from *Kulturos barai; kulturosbarai.lt*
In Glänta (Sweden), Greek artist Stefanos Tsivopoulos presents an archive of alternative currencies. Most will have heard of bitcoin, a digital “cryptocurrency” introduced in 2009, existing beyond the control of state institutions and traditional banks, but Tsivopoulos’ collection of texts and images gives a fascinating insight into a wide range of additional non-monetary exchange systems from all times and geographical regions.

What about Melanesian pigtail currency, beer money from Angola or the social currency crédito, developed in Argentina to encourage its users to think of themselves as “prosumers” instead of consumers?

In stark contrast to the activities of Mossack Fonseca, the law firm at the centre of the Panama Papers, stands the Zero Currency, a project initiated by the anti-corruption organization 5th Pillar in India. On their web page, digital copies of bank notes with the nominal value “0” are made available for download. The idea is that whenever you are confronted with someone demanding a bribe you can instead hand over a “zero note” thereby making your protest visible and tangible.

**Mastering the speed of light:** In an intriguing essay-cum-journey through the allegedly virtual economic landscapes of our time – a kind of textual performance – Johan Forsman and Anders Paulin points to actual, material limitations that apply also to the most advanced high frequency trading:

> “Even if you manage to get access to the most high-tech fibre-optic cables money can buy, you will still be limited by the speed of light – it is simply impossible to make information travel faster than so. Whenever information is transferred from one financial centre to another there is a time gap of a few microseconds before the information arrives. When it comes to high frequency trading it is during these microseconds everything happens. If you can’t find your way into that time gap you will be a loser long before you even started.”

This means that geography still matters in the globalized economy, despite all bold proclamations of the opposite. Which is why “Goldman Sachs, Credit Suisse and a few other banks involved in algorithm-based transactions at surreal speeds pay surreal amounts of money to have their computers in the
same room as the New York Stock Exchange’s own servers – to get access to that microscopic time space where high frequency traders are doing their deals before the information reaches the conventional stock market.”

More articles from Glänta; glanta.org