



## **Yanis Varoufakis on Julian Assange, Militarization, European Politics and Social Movements**

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### **ZAIN RAZA (ZR):**

Welcome to the source, a program in which we interview whistleblowers former insiders and policy experts. My name is Zain Raza. Today I'm joined by the co-founder of the democracy in Europe movement, former finance minister of Greece. Yanis Varoufakis Yanis is also running for the upcoming European election and is the author of numerous books. The latest being "Talking to my daughter about the economy. A brief history of capitalism." Yanis thanks so much for joining us today.

### **YANIS VAROUFAKIS (YV):**

Thank you for having me again.

### **ZR:**

Let's start with Julian Assange. In the last interview we talked about what his case means for press freedoms. Can you talk about what people could actually do to protect Julian Assange and press freedoms?

### **YV:**

Well for a start people should disengage from the debate about Julian's personal failures or advantages. No one is perfect in this world. And this is not a question of personal ethics. It's a question of freedom of the press. The only reason why we know about Julian is because through WikiLeaks he created the infrastructure that allows whistleblowers like Chelsea Manning to let us know of crimes against humanity that are being perpetrated in our name. The only reason why he's now withering in Britain's Guantanamo Belmarsh Prison is precisely that. So we need to organize public support. For effectively our own right to know. And we need to do it everywhere.

**ZR:**

There's a lot of movements taking place around Europe, whether it's Fridays for future or the movement against the recent copyright law on the uploaded filter or the yellow vest movements in France. However there's little to no action - when we compare this to the 70s and 80s or when we compare these movements - on [against] militarization. Even though Western military budgets have been increasing billions if not trillions. For example the United States spends \$643 Billion whereas the European NATO countries spend \$246 Billion annually and we're not only talking about the financial cost. I'm also talking about the opportunity costs where this money could have otherwise been spent and of course the social costs of the people that are on the receiving end of all this military weapons. The the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists have cited the removal of arms treaties as well as nuclear modernization as a grave threat. What is your assessment on this and should movements also incorporate a stance against militarization.

**YV:**

Yes of course it should. And yes indeed. We are falling into a false sense of safety. After the collapse of the Cold War the clock is edging closer to midnight, the Doomsday Clock, simply because we have a new arms race. We have new players in that arms race. And we have militarization playing the role of a stabilisation mechanism for a highly unstable financial capitalism. You mentioned something which is quite correct. The fact that we don't have the peace movement and generally the massive demonstrations that we used to have in the 1960s and 1970s. The reason is really very simple and very sad. These are deflationary times. Your generation, I'm saying yours because you're younger than me, had the bad fortune of experiencing 1929 all over again in 2008. And just like after 1929 there was a period of deflation. Negative interest rates of rubbish Jobs replacing good quality jobs. These deflationary periods are not periods of activism. They are periods of depression both economic and psychological. You'll recall that in the 60s and 70s those were inflationary periods. Inflationary periods have their problems but at the same time they generate profits and generate activism on the streets.

**ZR:**

So I want to talk about two issues that have gone behind the scene due to the Mueller Report that's come out at the moment in the United States. One of them is Iran where we are seeing Trump's administration from John Bolton to Mike Pompeo tightening the noose on Iran by removing the treaty that was signed under Obama as well as increasing up sanctions and Venezuela where many critics are saying this is sort of a coup d'etat taking place over there and dozens of European countries have even recognized Juan Guaido. So could you provide DiEM's official position on this?

**YV:**

Let's start with Venezuela. Our official position is that president Maduro has failed the people of Venezuela. He suspended Chavez's own constitution and he's introduced unacceptable levels of violence against peaceful demonstrators as a result of a failing economy, an economy which is failing due to the inefficient management of Chávez socialist experiment by the Venezuelan army. But at the same time while we're condemning this we are condemning with equal ferocity any attempt by the United States to strangle Venezuela to make impossible a debt restructure which is absolutely essential for the people of Venezuela to breathe again. There is an ongoing coup d'etat, it's been happening now since Chavez's time, Maduro unfortunately made it easier for the United States establishment to affect that. To cut a long story short DiEM25 is very clear: The only saviors of Venezuela must be the Venezuelan people who must be allowed through free and fair elections and democratic politics to put their house in order.

**ZR:**

Let us switch to Europe. In certain countries like Greece and Spain we are seeing economic growth and a drop in unemployment levels for example in Spain the unemployment level has dropped from 26 to 14 percent from 2013 to 2018 and in Greece we're seeing a drop from 27 percent to 16 percent. There has also been a modest economic growth between 2.5 and 1.9 percent. Is austerity working in these countries?

**YV:**

Austerity was and remains a catastrophe. And there is no growth. In Greece it is to add insult to injury to celebrate the drop in unemployment. Because yes the unemployment rate has fallen, but it's fallen because young people have migrated from the country. You nuke a country you kill everyone. There's no unemployment left. That's not a reason to celebrate. As for growth there's no growth. If you look at value added income that is if you do not count the amount - the gigantic taxation that has been imposed on the people of Greece in terms of gross national disposable income - there's no growth. If you look at the total amount of money that workers are taking home, there's a decline. So the depression is continuing. In Spain you have more employment but employment of part time [of] precarious nature that has replaced good quality jobs. There's nothing to celebrate in Spain too especially if you take into consideration the massive increases in private debt. And recall that the reason why Spain fell into a black hole was private debt. Europe is in 2019 experiencing a new escalation of the same crisis that has been now ravaging Europe and the Eurozone in particular for 8-10 years. We have a new period of intensified recession here in Germany as we speak. Industrial production is down 5 percent. Italy is in recession. France is in a standstill. France is unsustainable within the eurozone as it is. The crisis is ongoing. All the

celebrations of the end of the crisis and austerity success are let's say not just premature but nonsensical.

**ZR:**

Let's switch to climate change and I want to talk specifically about responsibility and accountability. Should it be the consumers watching what they buy, what they eat and how they separate their plastic and all [of their] waste disposal. Or should it be the producers taking responsibility because they assemble all the products. Where do you think is the right balance there?

**YV:**

Neither. Consumers can keep recycling and ride bicycles instead of driving diesel cars. That's not a bad thing. But it is irrelevant. There will be no change no significant dent into the climate catastrophe when we are massaging our consciousness and conscience through these acts of individual volunteerism. Producers are not going to do anything unless they are forced to do something. So we're failing at the level of organized society, at the level of civilization. What we need to do is we need to spend at least 5 percent of GDP on a green transition. We need to have physical limits on the growth of bads as opposed to goods and we need to combine the macro and the micro but at the level of what we call at DiEM25 a Green New Deal, which we have spent two or three years working out what it should be.

**ZR:**

You talked about the Green New Deal. In a recent article for The Guardian you wrote and the title is "it's time for nations to unite around the International Green New Deal." Can you talk about the three points that you mentioned: production, innovation and reparations, and also talk about what role the progressive international should be playing in this?

**YV:**

Beginning with production. It is clear that we should shift the mode of production towards one that actually produces useful things and stops producing things that are destroying the planet which are really doing nothing for our happiness or soul. That will require massive investment of the excess liquidity which is now at a planetary level reaching the volume of around 20 to 30 trillion dollars of idle savings that have not been invested into things we need. We need to take this money and we need to invest it in green technologies, green energy in particular, green transport, and also green agriculture. When it comes to the question of reparations. None of this is going to work if we keep asking the countries around the world, that suffered for centuries European and American colonialism, to foot the bill, to put limits on their attempts to reverse years and centuries of poverty. There have to be

reparations. There has to be a redistribution of wealth, not just income, from the global north to the global south.

And finally innovation. We need a new Manhattan project. When America and the allies in the 1940s were facing a clear and present danger of Hitler getting the atomic weapon, they took the best scientists of the world and put them in Los Alamos, and [then] they said to them OK, whatever it costs, fix it. Get the nuclear bomb before the Nazis do. We are facing a similar kind of catastrophe. We need to invest in innovation at that kind of level not by putting the best scientists in one place but creating an international network of scientific research that will be the next step in creating usable energy.

**ZR:**

We've only two minutes left, so to my last question: In 2014 during the European election we saw all time lows in participation. Only 43 percent of people joined [participated]. How important is it to take part in this election?

**YV:**

Well. You know I come from a country where in my youth we had a fascist dictatorship and I saw people give their lives for the right to vote. You've got to vote because people fought and died for your right to vote. And if you don't vote then the establishment and the authoritarians are going to ruin this world for yourselves and for your children. This is why we are running here in Germany with "Demokratie in Europa" and across Europe with the European Spring.

**ZR:**

Yanis Varoufakis co-founder of Democracy in Europe movement thank you so much for joining us today.

**YV:**

Thank you.

**ZR:**

And thank you guys for tuning in. If you like this content be sure to click on Subscribe and to donate so we can continue to remain independent, free from corporate and state influence. My name is Zain Raza. See you guys next time.

**END**

