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New Eastern Europe

2011–2021

UKRAINE'S UNFINISHED STORY

On the country's difficult journey to the West and the obstacles that still remain

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DEAR READER,

A lot of attention has been put on the situation in Belarus these past months, and rightly so. The brazen move by Alyaksandr Lukashenka to redirect the Ryan Air flight to Minsk in order to capture Roman Protasevich – a Belarusian journalist and activist working outside the country – was not only unprecedented, it was also terrifying. The events illustrate once again just how unstable and unpredictable the situation in our region is; and this is not only limited to Belarus.

That is why we decided to dedicate the main theme of this issue to another country which is constantly in flux and under threat – Ukraine. But unlike Belarus, Ukraine's trajectory is much more positive in terms of geopolitics as it remains on the pro-western path. Nevertheless, from the social, economic and political points of view, a lot of work still remains for this country. And this is why Ukraine's story is incomplete and requires further scrutiny. In this issue our authors take us through recent events and developments in the country, including President Zelenskyy's (mis)management of the COVID-19 crisis and vaccine roll-out; social attitudes to the Maidan seven years on; the changing role of women in the military; Russia's ongoing colonisation of the Crimean peninsula; the negative impact Nord Stream 2 will have on the country; a look at Odesa's challenges; and much more.

This special summer edition also tells the untold stories of prejudice in our region in a special section prepared by participants from our Solidarity Academy – an annual project we co-organise with the European Solidarity Centre. Lastly, the issue concludes with a special focus on the security situation in the Eastern Flank to bring to light ongoing topics that are faced by NATO members in our region. The publication is in conjunction with the June 2021 NATO Summit and aims to contribute to the dialogue surrounding the NATO 2030 initiative.

We would like wish all of our readers an interesting read and hopefully a somewhat normal summer holiday. For more on the region, please make sure to visit us online and don't forget to listen to our podcast: *Talk Eastern Europe*.

The Editors

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Nowhere to hurry?

VICTORIA GUERRA

The low rates of immunisation against COVID-19 in Ukraine can be explained by certain errors in the organisation of the process and the chaos on the ground. However, the main problem remains a lack of vaccine supplies.

As of mid-May, Ukraine has the lowest COVID-19 vaccination rates in Europe – a mere 2.2 per cent of the country's population has received the first dose of the vaccine. To compare at the time of the writing of this text, neighbouring Poland has reached 31 per cent while Hungary 49 per cent. At the current pace, Ukraine's Healthcare Centre estimates that it will take five years to vaccinate 60 per cent of the population with at least one dose.

What has caused Ukraine to fall behind others was mainly the late start of the vaccination campaign, triggered by delays in the vaccine procurement process. The first doses of vaccine arrived in Ukraine only on February 23rd. Since then, all promised vaccine supplies have been either postponed or delayed, and as of mid-April only 832,000 doses were actually supplied. The national coronavirus vaccination plan in Ukraine in April was four times behind the schedule. As of mid-May only 1 952 000 doses were supplied, which is still a very small number.

Poor start

Already during the summer of 2020, Ukraine's health minister, Maksym Stepanov, announced that he personally was leading negotiations with vaccine manufacturers. However, it was only on December 30th that the State Enterprise Medical Procurement of Ukraine finally signed Ukraine's first agreement for the

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supply of 1,913,316 CoronaVac doses, provided by the Chinese company Sinovac. The procurement procedure was accompanied by a corruption scandal: the vaccine was bought not directly from the manufacturer, but through an intermediary firm, previously known for winning government tenders during the pre-reform era of Viktor Yanukovych's presidency.

Arsen Zhumadilov, the general manager at the State Enterprise Medical Procurement of Ukraine, said that it was Stepanov who insisted on concluding the agreement through this intermediary. Moreover, he accused Stepanov of slowing down the negotiation process with another manufacturer. These corruption allegations were supported by investigations by some parliamentarians, NGOs and journalists.

Throughout January and nearly all of February, Ukrainians continued to wait for the arrival of vaccines, as CoronaVac was still in the third phase of clinical trials. The vaccination campaign only took off in April, although an emergency permit from the WHO was still pending. Neither did Ukraine adhere to the rapid vaccine rollout mechanism within the global vaccine-sharing COVAX framework – the ministry of health initially announced that the first batch of vaccines (117,000 doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine) would arrive by mid-February. The delivery was postponed to April.

On April 16th, under the auspices of the COVAX initiative, Ukraine received a supply of 117,000 Pfizer/BioNTech doses.

In January, the Crown Agents international agency joined the purchase which significantly accelerated Ukraine's vaccine procurement process. Already on February 5th, they agreed to the supply of 12 million doses of AstraZeneca and Novavax vaccines for Ukraine. The first batch of the India-produced AstraZeneca CoviShield vaccine – 500,000 doses – arrived in Ukraine on February 23rd. The vaccination process finally began the next day. By the end of March, Ukraine was to receive another 1.5 billion doses of the same vaccine. But on March 26th it became apparent that there would be no supplies – India had announced its intention to make domestic vaccination a priority due to the growing number of cases in the country. As a result, 500,000 doses of CoviShield was all that Ukraine had until mid-April. Vaccination with CoronaVac, purchased at the end of last year, began on April 13th. However, as of April 16th, the country only received a small batch – 215,000.

On April 16th, under the auspices of the COVAX initiative, Ukraine received a supply of 117,000 Pfizer/BioNTech doses, which enabled some 58,000 Ukrainians to receive the jab – the vaccine must be administered twice, so half of the doses were immediately reserved for re-administration. While February's batch of CoviShield was coming to an end – 433,000 doses out of 500,000 were used – Ukraine found itself in a situation where it would not have any vaccines left. Only on April

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30th 500,000 doses of CoronaVac arrived, while the next 500,000 doses Ukraine received on May 9th. Another delivery of COVAX took place on May 18th, which included 122,850 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. In total, all the deliveries are still too small for a country with a population of 44 million people.

Not according to plan

In April Ukraine's Cabinet of Ministers allocated 6.5 billion hryvnias (around 195 million euros) for the purchase of 10 million doses of Pfizer vaccine. Stepanov promised that it would begin to arrive in the coming weeks. But so far, Ukraine has received Pfizer only from COVAX.

According to Volodymyr Kurpita, an epidemiologist and senior lecturer at the School of Public Health at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, "Large manufacturers still do not want to deal with the Ukrainian state because of the scandals that came to light in the past. Therefore, it is only logical that in January the government sought the involvement of an international company, Crown Agents. Why has this not been done before, over the past year? Purely for political reasons, I believe, because the leadership in the health ministry had previously criticised the international procurement conducted for Ukraine, among others, by Crown Agents." He added that a division emerged "within the ministry [between] Stepanov who, was responsible for bilateral agreements, and his first deputy and chief sanitary doctor, Viktor Lyashko, was responsible for receiving the vaccine under the COVAX mechanism. There has been some sort of a competition as to who would be the first to deliver the vaccine." In some circles, Lyashko is considered the next minister of health and appears to be a political competitor of Stepanov.

Ukraine's Vaccination Roadmap identifies which priority groups are to be vaccinated first: doctors in COVID-19 hospitals and emergency care; other medical personnel; social workers and the elderly in specialised institutions; all persons over 60 years of age; the military and law enforcement; teachers; and finally, the rest of the population. In reality, however, this sequence often goes off track. At first, everything went according to plan. Throughout February and early March, specially trained mobile teams were vaccinating medical frontline staff. One team could perform a maximum of one hundred vaccinations per day. Yet in practice teams failed to make the target because some medical institutions did not have a hundred doctors from the priority group willing to receive the jab.

Many frontline staff refused the vaccine – either because they had already contracted the virus or because of vaccine hesitancy. Ukraine, in consequence, is in a situation where the country anxiously awaited vaccine supplies and mobile teams

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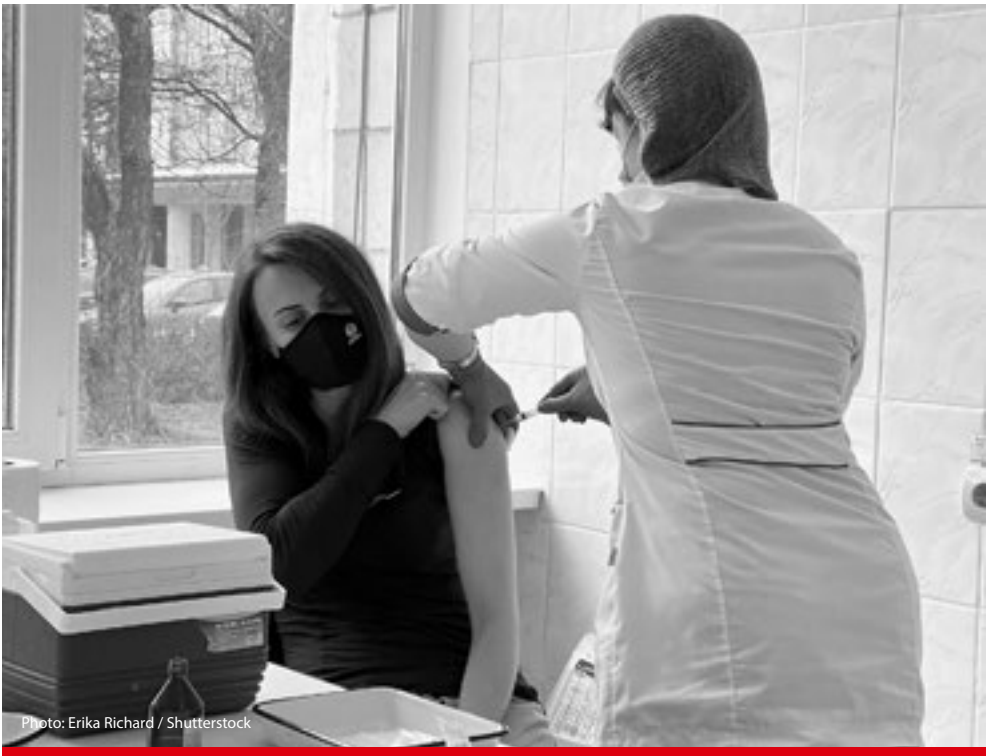
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A woman gets her CoviShield vaccination in Kolomiya, Ukraine. The first batch of the India-produced AstraZeneca/CoviShield vaccine of 500,000 doses arrived in Ukraine on February 23rd.

are still vaccinating the first priority group at a rather sluggish pace – from only 5,000 to 8,000 people a day.

Further, it was not uncommon that open vials (e.g., AstraZeneca packaged in 10-dose vials) were wasted instead of being used on someone outside the priority group. Queues of people wishing to be vaccinated with the unused vials formed very quickly, and the amendments to the ministry's decree allowed vaccination with vial residues for public figures, although without any clear definition or criteria for such entitlement, which consequently resulted in abuse and manipulation.

Slight improvement

On March 22nd, the situation improved as the country opened 565 vaccination centres. Since then, everyone – primarily those over 80 years old – can receive the jab by registering through their family doctor (Ukraine introduced a successful reform of primary care in 2017). For those willing to be vaccinated, this scheme

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proved to be effective, although it can hardly be considered transparent. Since only family doctors have access to the registration lists, it depends entirely on their decision who receives the vaccine and when. It is common for doctors to refuse those who do not belong to any priority group – even in the absence of regulation.

Unsurprisingly, chaos ensued. While some young people have already been vaccinated with the vial residues thanks to their family doctors, older people, including those from the priority groups, are still waiting. Consequently, on April 19th, changes in the Vaccination Roadmap allowed vaccine residues to be only administered among the priority groups, as well as those aged 80 or older.

At the same time, mobile teams across the country continue to administer the Pfizer vaccines among staff and patients of nursing homes and other specialised institutions, and CoronaVac to essential infrastructure workers and low-mobility groups. Simultaneously, some vaccines can be transferred to government institutions. On April 15th, for instance, 52,000 doses of CoronaVac were allocated to the central clinic of the ministry of internal affairs for vaccination of law enforcement officers. It is yet another departure from the Vaccination Roadmap – staff and patients of nursing homes and other specialised institutions have still not been vaccinated as a group, which contradicts an earlier statement by the ministry of health that all CoronaVac doses will be administered there first.

According to Pavlo Kovtonyuk, an expert at the Ukrainian Healthcare Centre and former deputy minister of health, "there are four main problems with vaccination rollout in Ukraine. First, the government in Ukraine was unprepared and the vaccination campaign had a late start. In addition, in the first month of the rollout, Ukraine has the same rates of COVID-19 vaccination as at the beginning of the year. Second, it is the weak capacity of Ukraine's government and public healthcare system. The vaccination rollout in Israel and the United States relies on the army, while Britain and Germany engaged volunteers. Ukraine needs to stop pretending that everything is under control and ensure a countrywide mobilisation to maximise the effectiveness of vaccination – currently, nothing is more important than that. Third, while many people are not ready to be vaccinated, a great share of others, on the other hand, want to receive the jab as soon as possible and cannot do so because of Ukraine's complicated prioritisation mechanism. At the same time, those in doubt are just waiting for others to get the vaccine. Finally, Ukraine's vaccine supply fell short. When most countries led active talks with vaccine manufacturers, the Ukrainian government was waiting for humanitarian aid while wrestling with its own procurement agency. As a result, deliveries are

According to a poll conducted in March, 51.5 per cent of Ukrainians do not want to be vaccinated at all.

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slow, and vaccines are registered even slower. A simplified mechanism for verifying vaccines, recognised by countries with strong quality control policies (i.e. the EU member states and the US), was never launched in Ukraine."

Vaccine mistrust

To make matters worse, 51.5 per cent of Ukrainians, according to a poll conducted by the Razumkov Center in March, do not want to be vaccinated at all. The main reason is a distrust of the CoviShield vaccine, which was the only available option until April 13th. Among those who would refuse vaccination, 45 per cent consider CoviShield to be insufficiently effective or safe, but are willing to be vaccinated with "another" vaccine. It is worth exploring where the distrust came from.

In Ukraine, the anti-vaccine movement became widespread during a 2008 case when a 16-year-old boy died shortly after an unscheduled MMR immunisation with a vaccine manufactured by the Serum Institute of India, the current producer of CoviShield. The link between the tragic incident and the vaccine has never been proven; and since 2017, millions of children and adults in Ukraine have received tetanus and diphtheria vaccines produced by the same manufacturer. Nonetheless, a proportion of the population is still reluctant to get vaccinated. What is more, a number of Ukraine's national TV channels have been leading a vaccine misinformation campaign, considering it an acceptable form of political struggle against the current government.

Even in parliament, the chairman of the European Solidarity party and ex-President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko said: "When I asked why anyone would refuse to be vaccinated – I apologise for the non-parliamentary statement made by a doctor in despair – it is because they bought shit." To increase confidence in vaccinations, Ukraine's president and health minister, along with other senior officials, have been publicly vaccinated with CoviShield. In addition, the government has launched a special website dedicated to the support of vaccination, which offers information on each vaccine and its safety. It remains to be seen how effective these measures will be when the vaccine becomes widely available.

There is also the issue of trust in the information that is published by the government. For example, the vaccination website states that the effectiveness of the Chinese-made CoronaVac vaccine is 85.3 per cent, while the third phase of clinical trials in different countries have shown varying results: 65.3 per cent in Indonesia, 85.3 per cent in Turkey and about 50 per cent in Brazil. Why did the ministry of health decide to claim 85.3 effectiveness? It has to do with the fact that the agreement for vaccine supplies, concluded in late December, states that the contract

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is subject to cancellation if, in the third phase of clinical trials, the vaccine shows effectiveness below 70 per cent. Therefore, if the ministry took, say, the average figure from the different studies, vaccine supplies would come to an end.

Low rates of immunisation against COVID-19 in Ukraine can be explained by certain errors in the organisation of the process and the chaos on the ground, but ultimately the main problem is a lack of vaccine supplies. With the current number of doses available, Ukraine simply has nowhere to go – it is impossible to administer a greater number of vaccines.

***

While this text was being prepared for publication, minister Maxim Stepanov was dismissed. The reason for his dismissal was the failure of the vaccination campaign. Consequently, on May 20th, his deputy Viktor Lyashko was appointed minister. He promised to reach the number of five million Ukrainians vaccinated during the summer. Such words, of course, have caused strong scepticism given the current pace of vaccination. NEE

Translated by Anastasiia Starchenko

Victoria Guerra is a Ukrainian journalist who covers health-related issues for Ukrainian press.

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Uncovering the paradoxes of values in Ukrainian Society

ANNA OSYPCHUK

This past February was seven years since the climax of the Maidan and the sniper shootings. From today's perspective those events are intrinsically connected to the attempted annexation of Crimea by Russia and its aggression in eastern Ukraine. When we now ask people about their feelings to those events, we cannot disregard everything we now know and all that has happened since.

Different values and attitudes and their prevalence in different societies are probably one of the most popular topics to study in social science in general and sociology in particular. Quite often we even tend to think about other societies in terms of cultural stereotypes. Data collected from a number of surveys and opinion polls over the last two years suggest some noticeable changes towards values and attitudes within Ukrainian society. Eighteen per cent of people in Ukraine think they are very happy and 60 per cent see themselves as rather happy, according to the latest edition of the World Value Survey; these numbers are 10 per cent higher than the previous edition in 2011. Similar trends are seen in other surveys with different methodologies.

One of the most important value-orientations is a reliance on one's own efforts versus paternalistic expectations. Though there are more people with individualistic attitudes today, almost half (49%) of respondents still think the state should take responsibility for their wellbeing. Only 22 per cent have a clearly individualistic

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orientation and 28 per cent fall "in-between". Another interesting fact is that parents regard the importance of independence (35%) and obedience (33%) in their children about the same, but value assertiveness more (46%). It is also important to understand that a majority thinks one's efforts should pay off and thus the amount of individual input should be clearly mirrored in the benefits one gets.

Social trust

Probably one of the most persistent stereotypes about Ukraine is that it is a society with low levels of social trust. But is this true? Social scientists often talk about trust in different ways. It is not only about whether people trust social institutions such as the government or public institutions, but about trusting neighbours and those who live in the same community or country. When we say Ukraine is a country with low social trust, we usually mean the former – institutional trust. Indeed, recent surveys clearly show that the most trusted institution is its army – with a difference between trust and distrust close to 50%, while 74% of Ukrainians proclaim their trust in it. The army is followed by religious institutions: 72 per cent trust them while the difference is around 45 per cent. That is probably not all that surprising when we take into account that, by different estimates, around 56 per cent of Ukrainians say "that God is important in their lives" and around 80 per cent proclaim they "believe in God". The only other institutions with a positive difference of social trust are the "educational system" and civil society organisations such as NGOs (positive balances around 20%). It is interesting to note that if army volunteers are listed as a group they are trusted slightly higher than the army itself. All other public or state institutions – including the parliament, political parties and the national government – hold low public trust.

These trends have been observed since at least 2014, when volunteers, civil society and the Armed Forces of Ukraine received a sudden boost of public trust. Regarding other institutions, low levels of trust in the media and political establishment has been a persistent trend since the early 1990s.

Low levels of trust in the media and political establishment has been a persistent trend since the early 1990s.

All this suggests there is an absence of social trust in Ukraine. But does it mean Ukrainians do not trust their fellow citizens? Surprisingly, if we look at "interpersonal" trust, Ukrainians fell into the European median: around one-third of respondents in the most recent World Values Survey said they believe "the majority of people could be trusted", which is higher than France, Poland, Italy, the Czech Republic,

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In Ukraine, an absolute majority are dissatisfied with "the way things are going now", but only about 30 per cent are ready to protest or think that protest is plausible in the foreseeable future.

Croatia and Hungary. Ukraine scored relatively high level in interpersonal trust which also partly explains why the most trusted institutions are those closely connected with interpersonal relations and everyday life – such as the church, local schools and clubs. And it helps to better understand the lens through which the armed forces are now seen as the "people's army" rather than the official machine and hierarchy of generals and officers.

Contradictions

How does all this translate into practice? The first thing that comes to mind is the civic and political engagement of Ukrainians themselves. There are some paradoxes here. On the one hand, an absolute majority are dissatisfied with "the way things are going now", but only about 30 per cent are ready to protest or think that protest is plausible in the foreseeable future. Among the reasons given as valid to protest are high unemployment, high taxes, inflation and access to medical care. At the same time, since independence over three decades ago the only protests that were successful were those that had political or civic claims, not the ones looking for extra resources.

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Another contradiction is the difference between knowledge or attitudes and practice. For example, over two-thirds of Ukrainians say it is important to sign petitions, vote in elections, write complaints to authorities if they do not perform their duties, be active in communities and local civic organisations or self-government structures, etc. Yet less than ten per cent routinely engage into such actions except for electoral voting, where around 35 per cent voted in the last local elections (which is also less than those who said it is important to vote, and they are going to do so). Are people lying or giving socially approved answers? Or is there a need for a subtler, more in-depth explanation that will account not only for social desirability but for factors of trust in the political system?

Another paradox is the prevalence of populist attitudes among Ukrainians. Not surprisingly, close to 70–80 per cent demonstrate some kind of populist attitudes, including juxtaposing of the "elite" and "ordinary people's" politicians, the idea that "all important state-level decisions should be approved by people via referenda or polls" and "parliament should not pass a law that is not supported by the people". Still, 63 per cent believed that people can mistakenly support a wrong decision in a referendum. When asked if parliament should pass laws imposing on someone's constitutional rights, 74 per cent said no and that parliament should uphold constitutional rights.

Why do we get such contradictory results? Maybe there are no contradictions and just different levels of reflection and association. When everyone thinks about their decision being the one that should be supported and passed as "the will of ordinary people"; yet any law which imposes on someone's rights could backfire and take one's own rights away. All this might be connected to the fact that though most Ukrainians (79%) value living in a democratic country, only one in three think Ukraine is governed in a democratic way. To compare, 54 per cent think that human rights are not respected and upheld properly in Ukraine, against 45 per cent who think there are no problems there. Still, 82 per cent are proud to be Ukrainian ("citizens of Ukraine"). Questions of social trust, political engagement and civil rights inevitably bring us back to the past civil protests in Ukraine, and more particularly to the Revolution of Dignity.

Attitudes to the Maidan

This past February marked seven years since the climax of the Maidan revolution and the sniper shootings. From today's perspective those events are intrinsically connected to the attempted annexation of Crimea by Russia and its aggression in eastern Ukraine which few had foreseen then. Now when we ask people about

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their attitudes towards those events, we cannot disregard everything we now know and all that has happened since. It seems such a commonplace to say this, but it is really important to remember if we are to discuss the results of any surveys or interviews on the Revolution of Dignity or the Maidan.

In a joint survey conducted by the Razumkov Centre and the Democratic Initiatives Fund presented on February 20th 2020, almost half of respondents (45.5%) said the Maidan was "the Revolution of Dignity", 23 per cent had the opposite opinion, that is of it being an "anti-state coup"; another 18 per cent stated that "it was a change of power by not fully legitimate means but under compulsion". Even more profoundly, 59 per cent would not want to return to life before 2014, with 27 per cent saying they would prefer life before 2014. In the third and final question on whether they would support the Maidan if it were today, 38 per cent agreed with it, 10 per cent would support the anti-Maidan and 39 per cent would support neither (around 13% refused or found it hard to answer in all three of these questions).

Of course, these are not easy data to analyse as there could be multiple interpretations. One of the most obvious is about the intrinsic interconnectedness of the Maidan and the war in the public and personal perceptions – which, to be sure, makes it harder not to see the war as a result of the Maidan and the Revolution of Dignity, at least in some way. Another interesting point is that an estimated 10–15 per cent of Ukrainians support the Russian occupation of Crimea or parts of Donbas. Of course, we cannot say these are the same people who would support the anti-Maidan, but it could be a valid hypothesis for further research.

Nevertheless, it is still important to talk about the Maidan and the Revolution of Dignity today and to ask about it in sociological research. These issues are still open and an unfinished story for many, including those who have yet to process their experiences of witnessing a relatively peaceful society fall into civil unrest, conflict and war. On a personal level, this was a turning point for many of us, and as such there is a need for deeper reflection. On the other hand, the Maidan is already "history book material" and a battleground of competing narratives is being fought. Can we really allow ourselves to lose it, and what are the meanings and implications of a loss or victory in such a war? NEE

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Invisible no more

GUILLAUME PTAK

Over the past seven years the number of servicewomen in the Ukrainian armed forces has more than doubled. Driven by the war in Donbas and a successful advocacy campaign by activists and academics, this increase has been welcomed by the military high command, while the legislative framework has been amended to facilitate the recruitment of women in the army. However, a number of cultural and institutional obstacles still remains in the path of true gender equality.

In November 2020 Anatoliy Petrenko, Ukraine's deputy minister of defence, declared to the Fourth Congress of Ukrainian Women that 58,000 female soldiers were currently serving in the armed forces. A number that, according to him, "exceeds in many cases the total size of the armed forces of some European countries". This increased participation of women has been discussed at length in Ukrainian media and is seen as a great achievement and a source of pride for the war-worn country, fighting a seven-years-long war against Russia-supported forces in the eastern region of Donbas.

"The realities of the armed conflict in the East forced Ukraine to reconsider the state policy regarding servicewomen, and to develop it in accordance with international legislative standards", explains a representative of the defence ministry. As of late 2020, about 25,000 female soldiers were serving in combat positions, of which 3,400 were officers. Another 31,000 women were holding civilian positions in the army, bringing the percentage of women in the Ukrainian army to 10.6 per cent, close to the NATO average of 10.9 per cent. Over the course of the conflict, an estimated 10,000 servicewomen have participated in combat missions in Donbas.

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Invisible battalion

Yet this state of affairs has not been achieved overnight, and those recent developments are owed in no small part to the work of activists, scholars and servicewomen themselves. The most publicised and wide-ranging of these efforts is the 2015 advocacy campaign dubbed the "Invisible Battalion". What started out initially as an academic sociological study conducted in the wake of the EuroMaidan protests soon turned into a successful drive to open more combat positions to women and generally to improve the life and career prospects of servicewomen within the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

The study was instrumental in bringing about, in June 2016, the Decree of the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine No. 292, which opened more than 100 combat military positions to women. Until then, they were only allowed to occupy jobs in the military that would not affect their reproductive health. As of today, only a few positions remain unavailable to women, mostly related to the handling of explosives, poisonous substances or to diving operations. Those changes have also reached the system of military education, long the exclusive preserve of men: in 2020, the share of women enrolled in military universities reached 13 per cent. "Women are now given the opportunity to receive a military education at any level, both in higher military educational institutions as well as in naval lyceums," confirms the department of social and humanitarian support of the defence ministry. And while work remains to be done, the tangible benefits of the advocacy campaign are being felt across the ranks of the Ukrainian military.

> As of late 2020, about 25,000 female soldiers were serving in combat positions in the Ukrainian armed forces.

In 2017 a documentary film, bearing the same name as the advocacy campaign, was produced and released. Narrated by three female directors, it examined the conditions of servicewomen fighting in Donbas through the stories of six of them; it was instrumental in bringing public attention to the difficulties they faced on the frontline.

A former sniper and Lieutenant, Olena Bilozerska, was one of the women featured in the documentary. A journalist by trade and member of the organisation *Pravy Sektor* (Right Sector), she had been training for years for the eventuality of an armed conflict against Russia. When war finally came, she left for Donbas and joined a volunteer unit with her husband and brothers-in-law.

"At the beginning of the war it was much easier for a woman who wanted to fight on the front line to do so in a volunteer unit than in the army," Bilozerska said. "There, if a woman really wanted to fight, she achieved it rather quickly. The

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commanders understood that if they did not let her fight, she would leave, and the unit would lose a motivated fighter."

Tamara Martsenyuk is an associate professor of sociology at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and the academic coordinator of the 2015 study. According to her, the Armed Forces of Ukraine exhibited at the time of the study both "vertical and horizontal gender segregation", while the empirical findings of the study (a survey of 42 women who were fighting or who had previously fought in Donbas) revealed major challenges. "Almost all respondents indicated that they encountered problems with their ability to make decisions in the army," she told me. This is "largely because women were not included in the decision-making in the armed forces".

This is an assessment which is shared by Oksana Iakubova, a now-retired Senior Lieutenant and former deputy commander of a mechanised battalion. She said that "in 2014 in the armed forces there were very few women in leadership positions in combat units on the front lines. I was the only woman in my battalion until 2016".

To prove oneself

A pervasive culture of sexism in the armed forces meant that servicewomen constantly had to prove themselves worthy in order to be accepted as soldiers, and even more so as officers. "My male subordinates at first did not take me seriously, and would call me a girl," Iakubova admitted. "It took a few battles for them to begin treating me as a commanding officer."

A senior soldier and machine gunner in the Military Law Enforcement Service, 39-year-old Yulia Sakhno also felt she had to impress her fellow soldiers in order to be taken seriously: "Men start to accept you as a soldier when they see that you do not whine, that you go shooting with everyone else, and that you can clean your gun without sparing your manicure. Only then do they show you more respect."

The lack of access to combat and commanding positions and daily occurrences of sexist behaviour were not the only obstacles impeding the recruitment and integration of women in the armed forces. The researcher Martsenyuk noted that women faced "other day-to-day life issues which are rarely discussed by the government, including the lack of specialised health care for women, a lack of proper shoes and uniform sizes and unsatisfactory housing conditions," concluding that the "infrastructure of the armed forces is only equipped for the needs of men and excludes from the army women's specific needs."

A situation experienced first-hand by Oksana Iakubova on the frontline confirms this. "In the trenches, you have to set aside your preferences and completely

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change your behaviour," she told me. "At the front, in the dugouts, women do not have the opportunity to wash like the guys. There are even problems with the toilet."

The issue of gender inequality in the armed forces, thrown into sharp relief by the war in Donbas, is nothing new, however. Arguably the most famous woman to ever serve in the Ukrainian army, Nadiya Savchenko, says that she also encountered considerable difficulties when trying to join the army: the only female soldier among Ukraine's peacekeeping forces in Iraq, she made international headlines in 2014 when she was captured by pro-Russian forces in eastern Ukraine and subsequently brought to Russia to be tried for the murder of two Russian state-television journalists.

Slow changes

A defiant Savchenko was finally released as part of a prisoner exchange in 2016, and went on to become a member of Ukraine's parliament. Looking back on her career, she doesn't shy away from calling out the sexist attitudes she encountered: "I did face difficulties when trying to join the army, and those obstacles were faced by every woman. When I discussed with female instructors who had joined the army during the time of the Soviet Union, they told me it was the same at the time."

According to her, transforming the mindset of male soldiers will prove harder than amending the legislative and institutional framework: "Changing the mentality is not as easy, and I think it might take many more generations. As a woman, you are always reminded that this is not a woman's business." However, she does believe that overcoming those difficulties has contributed to proving her worth as a soldier. "In some way, this constitutes your own professional selection. If you have a strong enough character to resist this, you are a good soldier. If you immediately give up, the army probably is not for you," she added.

Besides the laudable, if long-overdue, opening of combat positions to women, she also notes some cultural changes in recent years, including the kind of language employed within the armed forces. "Previously, we did not have feminitives, and your rank was referred to by its masculine name. But now, feminitives have been included in the official dictionary," she said. "For example, as a woman officer, you are not addressed as *Kapitan* anymore, but as *Kapitanka*." Those are small changes, but a testament to how far the army has come in addressing some of the issues pertaining to gender equality.

However, activists believe that much work remains to be done, including the taboo of gender-based and sexual violence. While some high-profile cases have contributed to raising awareness in recent years, Martsenyuk believes that a real

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reckoning still lays ahead. "Although such problems are not specific to the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and sexual harassment occurs in other armies around the world, the situation in Ukraine is characterised by a lack of effective institutional mechanisms to prevent and combat sexual harassment," she told me.

The story of Lieutenant Valeria Sikal is one important case in this regard. After experiencing sexual harassment for over a year by her commanding officer, she spoke out and became the first servicewoman to publicly denounce sexual abuse in the armed forces. She said that the local police refused to take her complaint seriously, while prosecutors initially rejected her written report. Unsurprising, according to Martsenyuk: "Women do not often report sexual harassment and discrimination, and almost never turn to the command or the police. In general, solving the problem of gender-based and sexual violence should be better addressed, and the Istanbul Convention should be ratified by Ukraine."

According to the ministry of defence, a draft law that has recently been sent to the Cabinet of Ministers proposes, among other things, to better "regulate the response of commanding officers in cases of discrimination and sexual harassment among service members", and adding to the list of military discipline obligations of servicemen the principle of "ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women, as well as preventing and combating discrimination and sexual harassment".

In December 2018, Lt. Sikal filed a sexual harassment complaint with both military prosecutors and the police. As of today, the case is still under investigation. Her commanding officer, meanwhile, is still serving. NEE

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The minister of everything

KATERYNA PRYSHCHEPA

Arsen Avakov, Ukraine's minister of internal affairs, is the longest serving minister in the country's history. Appointed as an interim in the spring of 2014 he survived government reshuffles under President Petro Poroshenko and retained his seat under President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Avakov was not an obvious candidate for political longevity, but a set of circumstances in Ukraine's recent political history made him a golden shareholder.

The nickname of minister of everything was bestowed upon Arsen Avakov by public commentators after the 2019 presidential and parliamentary elections in Ukraine and the formation of the first government under President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Avakov was referred to as the only grown up in the government especially compared to the young, inexperienced Prime Minister Oleksiy Honcharuk, who was 35 at the time of his appointment. Being one of the most experienced politicians in the cabinet of the newly-elected president, Avakov often commented on matters far removed from his official ministerial tasks.

Despite years in the cabinets of Zelenskyy's predecessor, Avakov found a place in the new administration. He made his move early on, practically declaring support for then candidate Zelenskyy in the presidential campaign. In practice, Avakov's support was manifested in incidents when police officers detained activists who were distributing leaflets against Zelenskyy, claiming they were printed against election procedures. A few days after Zelenskyy's inauguration, police detained a 16-year-old, named Daria Kotsiuruba, who was holding protest banners during a rally in Rivne. The teenager explained she was protesting against the appointments of Zelenskyy's showbiz partners to state offices. Signs of loyalty on the part

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of Avakov secured his position within the administration of the newly-elected president. Yet Avakov's charm was effective not only with Ukrainian politicians. When testifying in the US Congress during the impeachment hearings against former President Donald Trump, the former US ambassador to Ukraine, Mary Jovanovich, spoke of Avakov with sympathy, stating that he had warned her about the possible personal danger she faced in Ukraine.

From local elite to the national stage

Avakov was born outside of Ukraine. As the son of a Soviet army officer, he came to Ukraine as a baby. His father was stationed in Chuhuiv, a town in the Kharkiv oblast, in the east of the country. Avakov spent most of his life in Kharkiv and the Kharkiv oblast, graduating from the Kharkiv Polytechnic University. It is believed that Avakov's business ventures have roots in his student activities. He was a leader of the student construction brigade. The Soviet practice of these brigades organised students to work on construction sites throughout the USSR, and even in the countries of the Soviet bloc during the summer. In the later Soviet period the student brigades functioned as semi-commercial service providers, and the students were paid significant sums for their work. Many leaders of the brigades went on to establish official businesses after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The business of the Avakov family was a private company called Investor, and a bank called Basis bank. Investor started in 1990 as a trading company but soon expanded to retail, energy, gas extraction and media. Like many businessmen in post-Soviet Ukraine, Avakov turned to politics. He became a member of the Kharkiv city council in 2002 as a partner with the future mayor of Kharkiv, Gennadiy Kernes. Their common business was the local TV company Tonis which operated the "7 Channel" TV. In 2004 Avakov supported Viktor Yushchenko who was running for president of Ukraine against Viktor Yanukovych. After the Orange Revolution, Avakov was appointed by Yushchenko as the chairman of the Kharkiv regional state administration. Yushchenko's nephew, Yaroslav, was appointed as Avakov's deputy. At some point during the Orange government, a conflict with Kernes took place and the two became enemies.

Like many businessmen in post-Soviet Ukraine, Avakov turned to politics, becoming a member of the Kharkiv city council in 2002.

During the 2010 presidential elections Avakov supported Yulia Tymoshenko who was close to victory, but lost to Yanukovych. Avakov's political sympathies led to Viktor Yushchenko's decision to remove him from the head of the regional state

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Photo: Oleh Dubyna / Shutterstock

Despite years in the cabinets of Zelenskyy's predecessor, Arsen Avakov remained onboard as interior minister and found a place in the new administration.

administration in February 2010. Yushchenko hoped to get re-elected and interpreted Avakov's choices as disloyalty. In 2012 – two years after Yanukovych was elected president and the Party of Regions established its domination in national politics – Avakov fled the country to avoid a criminal case against him. The case was regarded as part of Yanukovych's crackdown on the opposition. In autumn 2012 he was elected member of parliament which provided him immunity from prosecution during his period in office. As a result, Avakov returned to Ukraine in December that year. After the ousting of Yanukovych during the 2013–2014 Revolution of Dignity, the case against Avakov was closed.

The protector of the East

It was not only his charm but his efficiency which secured Avakov's success. One of the very few representatives of the Kharkiv regional elite not tied to Yanu-

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kovych's Party of Regions, Avakov was appointed interior minister in 2014 (first as an interim) with an unofficial task of securing Kharkiv and the Kharkiv oblast for Ukraine. The region was one of eight oblasts of Ukraine which Russia wanted to put under its control as part of the "Novorossiya" project. The city of Kharkiv had its share of pro-Russian violence and in the spring of 2014 the building of the Kharkiv regional state administration was seized for a short period and separatists even proclaimed the creation of a "Kharkiv people's republic".

Avakov managed to secure support from some of the local elite, and having employed the special police units, was able to regain control of the city. In the process he had to negotiate with his former business partner and bitter rival – Kernes. During his active participation in political life, Kernes changed allegiances several times. Having backed the Orange Revolution in 2004, he later became an active supporter of the Party of Regions. In 2013–2014 Kernes did not support the Maidan protests, and in the beginning of 2014 made statements which could be interpreted as support for separatism. In April 2014, as a result of an assassination attempt, Kernes was gravely injured and required treatment in Israel. The perpetrator was never found. After his return to Ukraine, Kernes started supporting Ukraine's unity, however remaining in opposition to the current government. In December 2020 Kernes succumbed to COVID-19 which led to a complicated transition process in the Kharkiv local elite.

Another bold move was Avakov's decision to offer support to the volunteer battalions at the beginning of the war in Donbas in 2014. Since the state army was unable to produce swift action after the initial seizure by Russian paramilitary groups in the town of Slovyansk in the Donetsk oblast of Ukraine, many Ukrainians created volunteer battalions. In summer 2014 the ministry of interior, under Avakov, formed four volunteer battalions as units of the National Guard of Ukraine (In practice he offered the official status and thus took control over self-organised units). Those battalions took part in the most significant battles of the Donbas war, including the operation for the liberation of Mariupol, the battle of Ilovaysk and the battle of Debaltseve.

Patron of the police

Avakov's policy of covering up police misdeeds has become famous in recent years. After his appointment as minister, Avakov became one of the frontmen of police reform. He invited Georgian politician Khatia Dekanoidze, who was involved with police reform in Georgia, to lead reform in Ukraine. Dekanoidze served as the chief of the national police of Ukraine from November 2015 until November

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2016. Her resignation from the post resulted from a slow burning disagreement with Avakov, who imposed a heavy personal control on the reform process.

The reform envisaged a few key elements, including the creation of the new patrol force and the verification process for serving police personnel. The verification of police personnel included tests on basic knowledge of the constitution and laws as well as interviews with officers. The interviewing commission included a number of public activists and journalists who often pointed to discrepancies in levels of spending and officers' income. They openly stated that the verification process was rushed by the leadership of the ministry of interior so that activists did not have enough time to interview all officers. In some cases officers who failed exams on the basic legal knowledge were able to bypass the verification process. In the view of some activists, it was Avakov who, by letting many officers remain in their position despite insufficient qualifications, has gained the loyalty of the police force.

Avakov's policy of covering up police misdeeds has become famous in recent years.

In early 2020 Ukraine, like many European countries, introduced amendments into the state budget to accommodate unforeseen expenditures related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Planned spending – often in the sphere of culture – was cut to create a special COVID fund. The fund was created to purchase personal protection equipment and other medical supplies; it all amounted to 72 billion Ukrainian hryvnias (over two billion euro) in 2020. Due to Avakov's lobbying, 2.7 billion hryvnias (80 million euro) of this fund was allocated to the ministry of interior for supplement payment to its officers and staff.

Avakov has also survived cases of police criminal behaviour under his leadership, as well as false accusations. In July 2018 Kateryna Handziuk, an activist and local politician, was attacked with sulphuric acid in Kherson in southern Ukraine. Hanziuk died of injuries resulting from the attack in November of that year. The local police and prosecution tried to sabotage the investigation by accusing a local resident, Mykola Novikov, known for previous criminal convictions. It was Avakov who publicly announced Novikov's arrest. Journalists and local activists quickly collected evidence of Novikov's innocence. It was thanks to public pressure and a series of protests which forced a proper investigation into the attack. Eventually the former chairman of Kherson regional council, Vladyslav Manger, was accused of being behind the attack.

In May 2019 a group of drunk off duty police officers started shooting tin cans in a residential neighbourhood of Pereyaslav, a town in the Kyiv oblast. One of the bullets hit a five-year-old boy who was playing outside. The boy died and the local police initially tried to cover up the incident – presenting the death as a result of

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injuries not related to the shooting. A proper investigation only began after details about the case reached the media. The trial of the three policemen accused of homicide has not been finalised at the time of writing. Yet, not one high ranking officer resigned or was fired as a result of this.

In May 2020 Ukrainians were shocked by the news of the torture and rape of a resident of Kaharlyk (another town in the Kyiv oblast) by a police officer. A woman was summoned to the police station under the pretext of giving a statement as a witness in a case. She was tortured and raped by a police officer, someone who she allegedly refused as a suitor in the past. Soon after the incident, journalists revealed that other cases of torture took place at the same police station and were swept under the rug. Moreover, the police officers who tortured and raped the woman have officially passed the verification process rushed by the ministry. Once again the leadership of the ministry of interior did not take responsibility for the actions of their subordinates.

The murder of Pavel Sheremet

During a December 2019 press conference, Avakov together with then Prosecutor General of Ukraine Ruslan Riaboshapka (appointee of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy) and Zelenskyy, declared the solving of the murder of Belarusian journalist Pavel Sheremet who was killed in Kyiv by an explosive device in 2016. Sheremet, who was exiled from Belarus, had been living in Ukraine for a few years before his murder. He was not the only person to be killed by an explosion in Ukraine after 2014. Details of the murder gave way to suggestions that the killer could have been working for foreign intelligence. In December 2019 the police arrested three Ukrainian citizens and charged them with participation in the conspiracy to kill Sheremet. According to official statements, their motives were based on ultranationalistic political views and plans to destabilise the situation in the country. All three suspects were known for their support of the actions of the Ukraine's army in Donbas: Yulia Kuzmenko was a volunteer doctor, Andriy Antonenko was a former military serviceman and musician who went to the frontline and Yana Duhar, at the time of her arrest, was a serving military medic.

During a December 2019 press conference, Avakov declared the solving of the murder of Belarusian journalist Pavel Sheremet who was killed in 2016.

Sheremet's colleagues, who conducted their own investigation, declared distrust in the statements of the minister of interior. Independent experts declared

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the evidence in the case to be tampered with and inconclusive. Riaboshapka, who was removed from the post as prosecutor general in March 2020, later stated it was Avakov who invited him to the press conference. He also admitted that the evidence in the case was inconclusive. A formal trial has not yet begun as the investigation has been prolonged. Of the three accused, Duhar was released to house arrest, followed by Kuzmenko. Antonenko was released to house arrest at the end of April this year after more than 500 days in prison. According to many commentators in Ukraine, the release of those sentenced to house arrest is an indicator that the prosecution feels the case will be lost in trial. Like many politicians in Ukraine, Avakov has had dubious moments in his career. Yet his longevity as interior minister, despite the mishandling of a number of high profile cases and clear incidents of political engagement as minister, is the best illustration of the current state of Ukraine's politics.

Kateryna Pryshchepa is a Ukrainian journalist and a frequent contributor to *New Eastern Europe*.

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The silent Russian colonisation of Crimea

OLENA YERMAKOVA

With every step taken by the Russian authorities, the reintegration of Crimea into Ukraine becomes ever more difficult. How can Ukraine claim back rights to a territory that citizens of another country de facto own?

On March 20th 2020, decree number 201 of the President of the Russian Federation came into force. According to this ruling, the majority of the Crimean Peninsula, around 80 per cent of the territory – only excluding a few municipalities and a small part of the city of Sevastopol – is gaining the status as a border territory of the Russian Federation. This decree might well be the final nail in the coffin of Ukrainian Crimea.

In effect, the decree will lead to a situation that for those Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars who, after the annexation refused to give up their Ukrainian passports for Russian ones, have become foreigners in their own land, and are now at risk of being expelled from their homes. According to the Russian decree, foreign citizens and legal entities, as well as stateless persons, do not have the right to own property situated on border territories. "Foreigners" (i.e. Ukrainians) owning an estimated 10,000 land plots were obliged to sell or gift their properties within a year after the decree was signed. According to the Donbas and Crimea: Legal Un/Certainty project, if foreign owners fail to do so before the deadline date, a court decision will transfer the property to another person. According to experts from the Un/Certainty project, this move by the Russian authorities can be classified as a war crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, and it breaches multiple international conventions.

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Few options

Imagine you are a Crimean Tatar living with your family of five in a house somewhere around Bakhchysarai, your "historic homeland" for centuries. This house is the only roof over the head of your family; and out of fear of prosecution or maybe because of solid political convictions, you opted out of a Russian passport in 2014. Or if you are a Ukrainian living in Kyiv but you inherited your grandad's dacha around Alushta, where you spent every summer of your childhood. In either case, you are the object of the decree. You must get rid of your land or the government will do it for you. Legal experts have recommended filing a lawsuit before the European Court of Human Rights. Unfortunately for many ordinary citizens, this sounds like a joke. Doing so would require hiring lawyers who specialise in human rights and undertaking a legal process that is likely to last much longer than a year – after which the deadline would have passed. And there is no guarantee these proceedings will end with a ruling.

In light of this, what, if any, options do these "foreigners" have? Sadly, very few. If it is not your only home, you could sell the land plot with the house to a Russian citizen – take the money and forget about taking holidays in Crimea again. But if this is your only home and you do not want to leave it behind (besides having nowhere else to go), you could in theory rent your former property, living there while paying rent to the new owners. Those are the only options Ukrainian lawyers are recommending on the record.

Off the record, however, in order to keep your home and not pay anything extra, you can either re-register the property in the name of a relative with a Russian passport or get a Russian passport yourself. You could also opt for the "wait and see" option, doing nothing and hoping for better times to come. Unfortunately you are likely to find your summer house bulldozed off the face of the earth, or new owners moving in. Thus, the various options on the table almost succeed in creating the illusion of having a free choice. It is an illusion because no matter which option you take, the result is the same: the Russian Federation will own close to 100 per cent of Crimean land. The evil genius of the Russian government's plan is that, no matter what you do, they always win.

Further Russification

The legal term *jus soli* (right of soil), applied in some jurisdictions, means the right of anyone born in the territory of a state to its nationality. The Putin regime, however, is reversing this rule in Crimea: the right to territory stems from national-

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ity. A Russian from Moscow, for instance, now has all the rights to Crimean land, should she or he want to retire there. Yet a local Crimea non-Russian resident will have to either leave or accept Kremlin rule. Many commentators refer to what is happening in Crimea as a type of colonisation.

Even though Putin's decree targets only around 10,000 land plots, probably concerning around 10,000 families (not too many in the grand scheme of things), this is not the first but an essential step in the process of Crimea's Russification. According to Anton Korynevych, the Permanent Representative of the President of Ukraine in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea – an institution that, like many others, operates in exile – Russia has already resettled over 300,000 of its citizens to the annexed peninsula. He adds that the new settlers are often Russian officials, law enforcement officers and those loyal to the regime. Simultaneously, Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar journalists, public figures and others who do not recognise the annexation are being pushed out. Korynevych calls this process a new form of colonisation, one which is changing the demographic composition in order to increase the percentage of residents whose loyalties lie with Russia.

Russia has already resettled over 300,000 of its citizens to the annexed Crimean peninsula, many of whom are Kremlin loyalists.

Another backdrop to this, according to Korynevych, is Russia moving Ukrainians from Crimea to the Russian mainland and carrying out what he calls a forceful "passportisation" of Ukrainians in Crimea. In an official statement Nabila Massrali, the spokesperson for foreign affairs and security policy of the European Union, has called Putin's decree "another step towards the imposition of Russian citizenship on the peninsula". That is not to mention that the decree effectively prevents Ukrainians from mainland Ukraine from moving to Crimea.

Unless you live in Crimea, chances are this is the first time you have heard about the issue. It has barely caught the attention of Ukrainian media, let alone international media. Even my Crimean friends living in mainland Ukraine have not heard much about it. Why is this? First, the timing was right. The decree was out in late March 2020, when the world was under the first lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Everyone was focused on stories related to coronavirus and had immediate concerns to think about. There was little interest in anything else, much less a decree on Crimea.

International media seem to have forgotten about the issue, since after seven years it is old news. International politicians, allies of Ukraine, did of course issue a short statement of condemnation of Russia's actions, like the above-mentioned EU spokesperson. However, as Ukrainians who find themselves in crises often joke: "all the EU can do is to be deeply concerned". Concrete actions, in other words, are

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rarely to be counted on. Yet how can one blame them? Even Ukrainian politicians and the Ukrainian public seem to have accepted the status quo.

Another reason why the timing of the decree is important is because during the pandemic travel restrictions were put into place. Even if you wanted to deal with the situation, you would have to deal with the courts in Crimea and the de facto local authorities. If one resides elsewhere in Ukraine, this is not so easy. Both sides have restricted travel. What is more, postal services from Ukraine to Crimea are currently suspended. Even if you manage to smuggle documents through, the courts might not trust a document sent "from Crimea" while the applicant resides elsewhere. To get anything done, you would need to hire a local lawyer proficient in Russian law. Concluding any legal documents or agreements on Crimea while being situated in Ukraine is virtually impossible; no notary in Ukraine can accept a document with an address reading "Crimea, Russian Federation".

Mental (in)security

Apart from all the technical issues that those with property in Crimea face due to the legal grey zone that the annexation has created, there is another set of problems embodying the guilty consciousness of the unfortunate landlords. When speaking to people in such a situation, I gathered that the dilemma they face is as follows: to stay fully in the right and abide by Ukrainian law, and not implicitly recognise Russian rule over Crimea, you need to only follow Ukrainian law when dealing with matters concerning Crimea. Yet in practice, to get anything done in Crimea, you need to follow Russian law. Hence, Ukrainian landowners feel cornered. They are forced to choose a lesser evil. Is it a lesser evil to sell land you rightfully own, saving your personal wealth but contributing to the irreversibility of the colonisation? Or is it a lesser evil to pay rent to an occupying state to live in a house you built with your own hands, or to accept its citizenship?

Many Ukrainians, however, do not have time for those dilemmas as they are consumed with panic and confusion. In a situation of panic, many will sell cheap and fast. Nevertheless, old-school feudal warfare for land continues, but it is now disguised behind consumerist free market attributes. In the contemporary liberal world, Stalinist resettlements and population replacements are long forgotten. Technically, no one is forcing anyone to move. Why shouldn't a Ukrainian just sell and move to mainland Ukraine since private property in Crimea seems to be under constant threat.

And, of course, you can see the appeal to wealthy residents who live in the cold and rainy city of St Petersburg, jumping at the opportunity to purchase one of the

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10,000 available plots in Crimea under market value. When asked by *Krym.Realii* why such a decree was signed after all these years, Roman Martynovskiy, a lawyer of the Regional Centre for Human Rights, suggested that in the previous years, Russian authorities were busy confiscating land by other means. But maybe it took time for the Kremlin to create a mental security for Russian citizens, by investing in it and making Crimea an attractive relocation target. The Crimean bridge is open and Crimea now is linked to Russia. Most Russians no longer need to doubt – rephrasing the propaganda slogan – that Crimea is theirs.

A catastrophe

While the dogs may bark about non-recognition, the train keeps moving. With every step, the reintegration of Crimea into Ukraine becomes more difficult. How can Ukraine claim a right to territory that citizens of another country de facto own? How can Crimea ever want to reintegrate into Ukraine if many of its residents have already migrated and its new existing residents are Russian citizens?

Rafat Chubarov, chairman of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatar People, who, like many other Crimean Tatars, effectively lives in exile since the annexation, in his interview with *Krym.Realii* described Putin's decree as a catastrophe. He says the decree solves two problems for Russia. The first is pushing out the Crimean people believed to have ties to Ukraine. The second is the total redistribution of land. He suggests that giving Crimean land to new settlers from Russia is another element of the colonisation of Crimea. He sees these actions as a means of impeding the restoration of the sovereignty of Ukraine over Crimea.

Already in 2015 Dmitry Medvedev declared that Crimea has been fully integrated into Russia. However back then, many in Ukraine did not see it as crossing the Rubicon and hoped that, one day, Crimea would "come back home". But once Putin's decree is fully implemented, this could be the point of no return. NEE

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Ukraine's public diplomacy enters a new phase

NADIIA BUREIKO

A new milestone in Ukraine's public diplomacy began in late March when the foreign ministry approved, for the first time in history, a public diplomacy strategy. The document calls for efforts to form and promote a positive international image of Ukraine at a strategic level and defines the concept of public diplomacy, filling a conceptual void that had existed for many decades.

After Ukraine's declaration of independence in 1991, public diplomacy in the official Ukrainian public and academic discourse was practically absent. Existing initiatives in this field were mostly isolated, lacked complexity, strategic vision and adequate financial support. For some time, the duties of public diplomacy were assigned to so-called cultural and information centres, which operated at foreign diplomatic missions. These centres were responsible for disseminating information about Ukraine abroad, acquainting foreign audiences with Ukrainian history and culture, and informing them about Ukraine's tourism opportunities and attractions.

Despite the importance of such work, the activities of cultural information centres were usually limited to formal protocol or representative activities, lacking continuous and systematised coordination. Furthermore, these centres were often short of adequate financial resources and human capital. Therefore, their work failed to achieve the expected effect, as there was a lack of "fresh visions" which, again, required strategic support.

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Institutionalisation

After the Revolution of Dignity, which caused many state-building changes, the situation has significantly altered. Moreover, an urgent need for public diplomacy was identified with the beginning of the aggression against Ukraine by the Russian Federation, which included the illegal annexation of Crimea, the war in Donbas and widespread disinformation. Thus, public diplomacy – as a set of planned measures to convey specific messages about Ukraine to influence the formation of public opinion in other countries – has become more relevant than ever. It was in 2015 when the institutionalisation of public diplomacy began in Ukraine and the first signs of systematisation in the approach to its formation and implementation were outlined.

The successful development and implementation of public diplomacy requires a coordinated team effort. It is a question of strong involvement in the direction and understanding of public diplomacy algorithms of government representatives, state and non-state institutions, as well as the synergy between them. The main generator of public diplomacy in Ukraine is the ministry of foreign affairs. It is the foreign ministry which performs the tasks of "promoting the formation of Ukraine's international prestige and building its image in the world as a reliable and predictable partner". Consequently, the ministry "disseminates information about Ukraine abroad, its place and role in the world to strengthen the positive international image of the state, provides foreign diplomatic missions of Ukraine with relevant information". An important step in 2015 was the establishment of the department of public diplomacy (now the department of communications and public diplomacy) in the structure of the ministry. Since 2015, the ministry has been actively using Twitter diplomacy, promoting information and image campaigns (such as #CrimeaisUkraine, #JusticeForMH17, #LetMyPeopleGo, #StopNordStream2, #CorrectUA, #KyivnotKiev). In addition, it launched a digital portal about modern Ukraine designed for foreign audiences – www.ukraine.ua. According to Dmytro Kuleba, Ukraine's foreign minister, the site was created "so that the world would learn about the real Ukraine: creative, dynamic, and innovative. A country of diversity and enchanting nature. A country of freedom and dignity. A country where millennia of history and culture are complemented by an ambitious vision of the future."

A real turning point for Ukraine's public diplomacy was the proposal to establish a specialised state institution – the Ukrainian Institute – which in 2015 was presented for public discussion by the foreign ministry in order to improve an understanding and perception of Ukraine around the world. According to then foreign minister, Pavlo Klimkin, the Ukrainian Institute is "the identification of Ukraine –

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what Ukraine is for the average Dutchman, Greek or Brazilian, what it is associated with, and, of course, its attractiveness". The process of opening the institute was not an easy task and was impeded by numerous bureaucratic obstacles. But, finally, in June 2017, the decision for its establishment was approved, and the following year the position of its general director was filled. However, the first fully-fledged working year of the institute only took place in 2019, when the core team was formed and regulations were adopted that allowed it to function.

Internationalisation of Ukrainian culture

Today, the Ukrainian Institute, which represents Ukraine abroad through the potential of culture, is without exaggeration the most active actor in the field of public diplomacy in Ukraine. Since its establishment, the institute's team has launched a number of successfully functioning programmes to strengthen the international and domestic image of Ukraine through cultural diplomacy. In addition, co-operation has been established with Ukrainian diplomats abroad, foreign Ukrainians with experience in organisation of cultural events, foreign partners and partner institutions in Ukraine. The main goals set by the institute are: increasing Ukraine's visibility internationally by spreading knowledge about it; promoting the Ukrainian language and culture abroad; building international dialogue through supporting international exchanges; ensuring Ukraine's participation in co-operation projects in creative industries, culture, education, science, economy and other fields; the dissemination of the Ukrainian experience in the development of civil society, commitment to the values of freedom, democracy and national unity.

The Ukrainian Book Institute is involved in the promotion of Ukraine's image abroad through the propagation of Ukrainian literature.

Another state institution that plays an important role in the development of public diplomacy is the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation, established in 2017. The foundation puts forward new mechanisms of state financial support (through the creation of competitive grant programmes) for initiatives in the field of culture and creative industries and promotes the preservation of cultural heritage and development of Ukrainian culture. Among the goals of the foundation is the internationalisation of Ukrainian culture. Thanks to its support, for several consecutive years, numerous projects have been implemented that contain an international component.

The Ukrainian Book Institute, established in 2016, is involved in the promotion of Ukraine's image abroad through the propagation of Ukrainian literature. Among

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its functions are: the implementation of residency programmes for authors, translators, illustrators and literary critics, the translation of Ukrainian literature into foreign languages and the representation of Ukraine in international organisations within the publishing field.

The Ukrainian Institute, the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation, and the Ukrainian Book Institute are often referred to as "new model / new generation" institutions. After all, they were all founded after the Revolution of Dignity and have been conducting their activities with the help of young progressive teams that have a fresh vision and new ideas based on transparency, openness, efficiency and accountability. According to some experts, it is very important that these institutions are not only able to survive but to grow stronger, despite the rather difficult ecosystem in which they operate.

In the spring of 2020, these institutions were threatened with major funding cuts due to COVID-19. There was a direct threat to the new cultural policy of Ukraine, both within the state and cultural diplomacy (which works with foreign audiences). Funding was largely defended by direct efforts of the main actors, yet not without public attention to the issue, both in Ukraine and abroad. Nonetheless, the situation exposed clear sore spots – not only a problem of resources, but the frequent absence of an adequate level of inter-institutional co-operation and the appeal to culture on a residual basis. Another painful moment was the attack on the Ukrainian Cultural Foundation in the spring of this year. In support of the institution, many employees of the cultural and creative sectors, artists, academics, public activists, and ordinary citizens initiated a social media campaign in support of the foundation. It was called *#довіряюУКФ* (#ITrustUCF).

Outlining a strategic vision

A new milestone in Ukraine's public diplomacy began in late March this year when the foreign ministry, for the first time in its history, approved a public diplomacy strategy. It does not only single out public diplomacy as a functional area of Ukraine's foreign policy, but provides answers to questions that were often previously used to "falter". First, the document itself calls for efforts to form and promote a positive image of Ukraine internationally at a strategic level. The strategy defines the concept of public diplomacy, names its priorities, goals and objectives and its main tools.

Second, the document not only identifies seven areas (cultural, economic, expert, culinary, scientific, educational, sport and digital diplomacy) that are key to Ukraine's public diplomacy, but outlines which institutions will be responsible for

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each area. In addition, the strategy repeatedly emphasises the need for close inter-institutional / interagency co-ordination. The very process of developing the strategy in the fall of 2020 signalled the inter-institutional synergy not only of the public but also of civil society. After all, representatives of civil society and well-known experts on public diplomacy were invited to the strategic sessions coordinated by the department of communications and public diplomacy at the foreign ministry.

Third, the strategy recognises the importance of applied research and analytics to ensure the functioning of the public diplomacy field. This practice has already been successfully initiated by the Ukrainian Institute in co-operation with think tanks, striving to build its agenda on the basis of empirical research. This allows it to better determine the ground zero, from which the initiatives start, and then to measure the effectiveness of the work done. Even though this approach is an established practice in many advanced countries, it is still used quite selectively in Ukraine, so enshrining it in the strategy is an important step.

Fourth, the strategy addresses the subject matter of the public diplomacy field – this regards the national brand "UkraineNow" that was officially approved by the government in May 2018, as well as the main narratives that are to be promoted to position Ukraine internationally.

Fifth, the main geographical vectors are described in detail, taking into account Ukraine's foreign policy priorities in cultural diplomacy, attraction of investment, promotion of Ukrainian exports, educational opportunities, tourism potential, and in scientific-expert and digital diplomacies. In additionally, the strategy offers specific indicators for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of its implementation.

Unanswered questions

Funding has traditionally been a weak point. The strategy itself recognises the scarcity of available resources, yet emphasises the need for full expenditure to properly execute the tasks of public diplomacy. Will it be possible to maintain this funding level, let alone expand it? To maintain partnerships with their foreign counterparts, Ukrainian institutions need stable funding. Otherwise, what public image can we talk about if an exhibition or festival in some country is cancelled due to a sudden reduction in travel expenses? In the same context, the question of obsolete budget legislation remains open particularly, the difficulties of introducing three-year budget planning of the Ukrainian Institute. This significantly complicates the work abroad (for example, in planning and implementing long-term projects).

The strategy alone will not be able to solve the problem of excessive bureaucratisation and regulatory irregularities that still characterise the Ukrainian public

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sector. This problem, in particular, complicates the procedure of inviting foreign experts and partners to Ukraine with public expenses. The particularities of the public procurement procedure that complicate the work of the Ukrainian Institute abroad, the co-operation with foreign partners in providing them with services in joint projects, the ability of public diplomacy in Ukraine to react in unforeseeable circumstances may have an adverse effect on the image of Ukraine abroad.

Despite the fact that the strategy pays considerable attention to inter-institutional co-operation, the question remains how the "mandates" will be coordinated between all the institutions involved in public diplomacy, whether duplication of functions or possible transfer of responsibilities can be avoided. It will also be necessary to make considerable efforts to build an algorithm for co-operation with the Ukrainian diaspora, as well as with non-governmental organisations. It would be apt to develop a grant scheme for NGOs and think tanks to strengthen expert support and professional analysis in the field of public diplomacy. The Ukrainian Cultural Foundation, for instance, could serve as a model for this.

In addition, internationally, work in this direction will continue to face some unfavourable circumstances. In particular, the Russian Federation is not only conducting a direct armed aggression against Ukraine, but is also competing for the hearts and minds of the people in the region and further abroad, using the means of hybrid warfare and allocating huge resources towards it. Moreover, in some countries, Ukrainian public diplomats will have to practically start from scratch. After all, vivid images positively associated with Ukraine are not always present abroad, there are still numerous stereotypes in perceptions and the overall knowledge about Ukraine sometimes remains rather limited.

However, the positive trends in Ukrainian public diplomacy have already been outlined. Its gradual exit from *terra incognita*, thanks to the active work of new institutions and the adopted strategy, provides the grounds to talk about a new level of Ukrainian public diplomacy. It will be important to maintain existing developments and gain momentum so that Ukraine's public diplomacy is "overgrown" with success stories and effective practices. The challenges – both internal and external – still remain, and there is a need to work hard to neutralise them.

Translated by Margarita Novikova

Nadiia Bureiko is the head of the programme "Ukraine Abroad" at the Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism".

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Nord Stream 2

Strictly business or wider threat?

MYKOLA VOYTIV

Ukraine's gas transmission system is one of the most extensive networks of gas pipelines in the world. The role of the Ukrainian system, in the functioning of the pan-European gas transit infrastructure, is extremely important in the strategic economic and energy security contexts of life in Europe.

When we talk about Nord Stream and Nord Stream 2, we cannot consider these large-scale projects in economic terms alone. What is more, from the point of view of financial and technical indicators, they are not justified. The capacity of the Ukrainian gas transmission system (GTS) at the entrance is 281 billion cubic meters per year with an output of 146 billion m3 per year. Almost 50 per cent of natural gas from Russia to European countries until 2019 was transported via the Ukrainian GTS. Today, unfortunately, the situation is not the same. Starting in 2020 the Ukrainian GTS delivered about 30 per cent of natural gas to Europe, and this year it will decrease to about 20 per cent.

Russia has invested tens of billions of US dollars to build an inexpedient and unnecessary alternative to the Ukrainian GTS. Comparing the above indicators of output capacity of the Ukrainian system and the real volume of transit, one can conclude that Russia aims to neutralise the Ukrainian GTS as an integral part of European energy security. The reason is because the Kremlin broke its imperialist teeth on the rocky strength of Ukrainian sovereignty and national dignity.

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Gas transit agreements 2020–2024

Three agreements between Ukraine and Russia on gas transit were signed on December 31st 2019. They were based on the protocol of the December 19–20 2019 meetings in Berlin and Minsk. According to these agreements, Russia has agreed to extend the transit of gas through Ukraine for a period of five years with a possible extension for another 10 years. Ukraine has agreed to cede some of its demands to Gazprom through arbitration and antitrust investigations. The agreements have fixed the minimum volume of gas transit. In 2020 it was 178.1 million m3 per day (or 65 billion m3 per year); for 2021–2024 will decrease to 109.6 million m3 per day (or 40 billion m3 per year).

It should be noted that this contract allows Ukraine's gas transmission system to operate for the next five years (up to 2024 inclusive) and to earn a profit. The logical question is, thus, what is next? One of the options is that if the Russian side does not want to use the Ukrainian gas infrastructure, European companies/traders can independently book the capacity of the Ukrainian system and purchase Russian gas at the Ukraine-Russia border and, accordingly, transport it to Europe via Ukraine. In this case, one can assume that the Russians will try to apply dumping mechanisms and make their gas supply through the Nord Stream and Nord Stream 2 pipelines cheaper than the Ukrainians could offer to European counterparties.

Unfortunately, the position of EU member states is not unanimous regarding the intentions and threats of Nord Stream 2. When I recently asked Mykhailo Gonchar, president of the Ukrainian think tank Centre for Global Studies "Strategy 21", how he evaluates the EU's attitude to the pipeline, he said: "Germany and Austria openly support the implementation of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project. The position of France, the Netherlands and Belgium looks more passive."

Unfortunately, the position of EU member states is not unanimous regarding the intentions and threats of Nord Stream 2.

Poland and the Baltic states, including Lithuania, are among the countries that openly oppose the construction of the NS2 gas pipeline. Romania is also opposed to it on the basis of solidarity with Poland. It was at the request of Poland when Romania, during its presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2019, initiated amendments to the EU Gas Directive, which provide the dissemination of EU energy legislation on offshore pipelines. As a result, gas cannot be supplied through an offshore pipeline by the same company that owns the gas, produces it or sells it. Third-party companies must have access to offshore pipelines. Therefore, de jure, Nord Stream 2 must operate at 50 per cent of its capacity.

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Ukrainian losses

Unfortunately, there is an exception mechanism that Germany has lobbied for in regards to Russia. However, any decision by the Germans can always be influenced by the European Commission, up to its cancellation. If we assume, hypothetically, that the Nord Stream 2 pipeline will work, then the consequence for the Ukrainian system could mean zero transit, which would lead to the forced decommissioning of approximately two-thirds of gas compressor stations in Ukraine.

As Gonchar noted, article 274 of the Association Agreement between the European Union and Ukraine addresses gas transmission via Ukraine. It reads that: "The Parties shall endeavour to facilitate the use of gas transmission infrastructure and gas storage facilities and shall consult or coordinate, as appropriate, with each other on infrastructure developments. The parties shall co-operate on matters related to trade in natural gas, sustainability and security of supply. With a view to further integrate markets of energy goods, each Party shall take into account the energy networks and capacities of the other Party when developing policy documents regarding demand and supply scenarios, interconnections, energy strategies and infrastructure development plans)." This article comprehensively protects the Ukrainian GTS and guarantees the importance of its operation for the whole of Europe. The current position of each EU member state should be based primarily on this article of the Association Agreement.

Naftogaz, Ukraine's national oil and gas company, estimates that the operation of the Turkish Stream pipeline has reduced gas transit through Ukraine by 15 billion m3 in 2020. According to the official gas transmission system operator of Ukraine, the country is receiving 450 million US dollars less annually from the transportation of gas, which it previously transited to countries in southern Europe and is now transited through the Turkish Stream. Here is evidence that Russia's goal is not to do damage to the Ukrainian budget or to block about 2.5 billion US dollars of budget revenues, but to make Ukraine a weak energy supplier – to depreciate its energy, in particular its gas transportation potential. In early April, Ukraine's gas transmission system operator announced that Russia has been gradually reducing transit through Ukraine. The transit to Turkey, Greece and Bulgaria has now been completely transferred from Ukraine via the new Turkish gas pipelines. From April 1st, gas deliveries to Romania are fully provided from Bulgaria via the Turkish Stream 2. Currently, transit via the southern route through Ukraine is provided only for Moldovan consumers.

Naftogaz estimates that the operation of the Turkish Stream pipeline has reduced gas transit through Ukraine by 15 billion m3 in 2020.

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It is important to also mention the Trans-Balkan pipeline, which Ukraine, Moldova and Romania lost significant revenue from. Sergiy Makogon, head of the gas transmission system operator of Ukraine, stated that "the strategic asset with a transit capacity of 27 billion m3 per year, the Trans-Balkan pipeline gas corridor can and should be a warranty of energy security for Southeast Europe. If there are interruptions or maintenance works on Turkish Stream, gas flows can still be assured. Furthermore, for the first time, on August 26th 2020, Ukraine's transmission system carried out a transmission request from south to north. This request was placed by a local commodity trader shipping natural gas up the Trans-Balkan Pipeline from Greece through Bulgaria and Romania to Ukraine. The above-mentioned transaction helped to demonstrate the technical viability of this route, even if it is not yet commercially viable."

Gas transit after 2024

It is difficult to accurately forecast gas transit by the Ukrainian gas transmission system after 2024. It will largely depend on the needs of the EU market. On the one hand, sources of gas supply are becoming more diversified and producers of liquefied natural gas (LNG) are developing dynamically. The EU seeks LNG as a reliable commodity in both price and security. On the other hand, the EU is actively restructuring its industry to meet tighter green standards. Accordingly, with the reduction of coal production and coal-fired power generation, the consumption of natural gas will increase. In general, the EU is the largest importer of natural gas in the world – in 2020 consumption amounted to 394 billion m3.

The EU expects to diversify its source of natural gas supply, but, understanding the risks and identifying aspects of energy security, it also takes a formal position. According to the European Commission Directorate-General for Energy, "Nord Stream remained the most important supply route of Russian gas to the EU. Fifty-two billion m3 of gas was transited through Nord Stream while around 38 billion m3 of gas was transited through Ukraine with an EU destination in 2020".

It should be added that by the end of 2019, approximately 85–94 billion m3 of natural gas transited each year was through the Ukrainian GTS. It generated approximately three billion US dollar in revenue for the country. Naftogaz spends about 2.4 billion US dollars on natural gas imports. Hence, it has been an opportunity for generating significant profit. Last year profits fell by 30 per cent and this year is expected to fall by almost 60 per cent. Income from transit will no longer be sufficient to cover the costs of importing natural gas. The management structure of the newly created Joint Stock Company "Mahistralni Gazoprovody Ukrainy"

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and the Gas Transmission System Operator of Ukraine LLC is professional and ambitious. The Ukrainian public has expectations that the system will be functional and profitable after 2024.

Integration or support

The Ukraine transmission system operator is not a member of the European Network of Transmission System Operators for Gas (ENTSOG) since Ukraine is not a member of the European Union. The road to full EU integration is comprehensive, but a few good steps have been taken. For instance, the Ukrainian company has become an observer in ENTSOG. It sends the data of network operation to the transparency platform on a daily basis. ENTSOG provides Ukraine's dispatching centres with the tools for operational communication, monitoring and joint response in crisis and emergency situations. During the last two years, Ukraine and its transmission system operator has been working on the harmonisation of legislation and procedures as well as on transparency and security of supply.

There is one more point to Ukraine's integration into the European regional gas network. In February 2015, the European Commission launched the Central and South Eastern Europe Gas Connectivity Initiative (CESEC). Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia and the EU set up a High Level Working Group. The six energy community contracting parties – Ukraine, Moldova, Serbia, North Macedonia, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina – signed a memorandum of understanding and were joined to the CESEC. This initiative works to accelerate the integration of the central, eastern and south eastern European gas markets. The goals are to coordinate efforts to facilitate the swift completion of cross-border and trans-European projects that diversify gas supplies to the region and to develop regional gas markets and implement harmonised EU rules to ensure the optimal functioning of the energy infrastructure.

Hence, despite Russia's approach to negatively affect Ukraine's gas transit system, and hurt its revenue raising potential, there are still opportunities for Ukraine to develop. In the end, it is for the reader to decide whether the forecasted scenario of the Ukrainian gas transit system is optimistic or pessimistic.

Mykola Voytiv is the head of energy projects at the Kyiv-based NGO, New Generation Management.

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Odesa's growing mismanagement

MAXYM PRZYBYSZEWSKI

Odesa has faced many challenges in recent years. However, the ongoing pandemic and the reduction of land available for construction have brought the issue of ineffective management back. It is linked to the lack of an adequate response from the authorities as well as corruption.

On Saturday morning, several dozen people picketed the construction of an alleged yacht club and residential complex being built on the sea coast in Odesa. The protests were led by Vitaliy Ustimenko, an activist from Odesa who is the leader of a grassroots organisation called the AutoMaidan. "We will not allow dumb and insolent oxen capture the sea coast of Odesa," Ustimenko said as he was speaking into a microphone.

People gathered at the gates of the construction site. The company in charge of the construction is called Varda Plius. Its representatives have claimed the construction is not going forward, but refused to let people on the premises. Journalists, police officers or the city councillor, Olga Kvasnichkaya, cannot enter the site. Previously, the environmental inspection was denied. The plan is to build apartment buildings about 20 metres from the sea. Environmentalists worry about the impact this could have on the sea and coastal soil. According to Ukrainian law, a building this close to the sea is allowed only in exceptional cases. For this very reason, one of the five-star hotels on the beach of Odesa was initially built as a "rehabilitation and health resort with dolphin-assisted therapy", the other one allegedly was a reconstruction of a sea rescue station.

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The Varda Plius construction company received permission for the reconstruction of a yacht club which includes three buildings up to 25 metres tall. Activists believe this will be a normal residential complex. Trials are still ongoing, but the property developers are winning so far – restrictions on the construction were lifted at the end of March.

Corruption and lost opportunities

This was one of many recent lawsuits and street protests against the construction in Odesa's historic city centre. Although the architectural ensemble of Odesa's old town contributes to tourism, it is hard to remember the last time something was done to preserve or expand the city's cultural heritage. For instance, the owner of one of the most famous buildings in Odesa, Russov's House, was sued by city authorities several years ago. The four-storey mansion situated in the city centre was built at the end of the 19th century at the request of a merchant, philanthropist and art collector named Alexander Russov. The mansion was a perfect representation of neo-baroque, with its richly decorated stucco, sculptures, a tower with a spire and rows of spacious windows. In the early 21st century, every apartment in the Russov building was purchased by Ruslan Tarpan, an entrepreneur who publicly announced his initiative to dismantle and rebuild the mansion. The house was never restored during the Soviet era and around 2000 its restoration was declared a dire need. Between 2009 and 2017 around ten fires occurred in the building. As a result, the roof was partly destroyed.

> It is hard to remember the last time something was done to preserve or expand the Odesa's cultural heritage.

Tarpan did not have enough time to restore the house. In 2013 he went abroad to escape criminal charges issued against him. He is still a wanted man in Ukraine. He is accused of forging documents and embezzlement of huge sums of money. None of the accusations, however, has anything to do with Odesa's architecture.

The authorities in Odesa, since 2017, have tried to win the right to restore Russov's house in court. They even managed to demonstrate their right to spend money on the restoration. A company from Kyiv, called Ukrspetsproekt, won a tender to carry out the reconstruction. After the work was finished, police opened a criminal case based on budget embezzlement and criminal association. Details of the newly restored house quickly started to crack. In December 2020, the prosecutor's office brought charges against the director of the company. As it turned out, she hired the company of the business partner of the house owner as a subcontractor.

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A representation of the streets in Odesa; some of which are in dire in need of investment and modernisation.

Photo by Pavel Kachanau / Shutterstock

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Several dozen people have picketed the construction of an alleged yacht club and residential complex being built on the sea coast.

Photo: Maxym Przybyszewski

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People gathered at the gates of the site to halt the construction of apartment buildings 20 metres from the sea.

Photo: Maxym Przybyszewski

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Old buildings in the historical center of Odesa. Activists have declared a readiness to defend what is left of Odesa's historic heritage and fight for its preservation.

Photo: Multipedia / Shutterstock

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Odesa has faced many challenges in recent years. However the ongoing pandemic and the reduction of land available for construction have brought the issue of ineffective management back.

Photo: Pavel Kachanau / Shutterstock

In April this year one of the restored statues crumbled because those who were restoring it used a plastic bottle as the frame.

Throughout the last year, around ten old buildings have either partially or completely collapsed – some of them did not have historic value but most were architectural monuments. Some were privately owned and had been collapsing overtime. Such was the fate of Odesa's former ice cream factory, Polyarnaya Zvezda (Polar Star). Others were residential buildings which had the status of architectural monument. Therefore, theoretically they should have been maintained in appropriate conditions. One way or another, the city began losing buildings that could have been valuable for locals and tourists. Activists have declared a readiness to defend what is left of Odesa's historic heritage, fighting for it almost with guns in their hands. The number of these activists, however, remains very small.

Fighting to preserve heritage

One successful example of the activists' collective effort was the fight to preserve the Marazli Summerhouse – a complex of three historical buildings constructed at the end of the 19th century. The land on which those buildings are located had been part of a Soviet sanatorium and was handed over for new construction work in 2019. Before that, in 2017–2018, the city authorities and future complex owners were dealing with formal procedures of handing over land from one owner to another, including privatising households and historic buildings. The buildings have a direct view of the sea and are surrounded by one of the largest parks in Odesa – truly an upmarket neighbourhood for a residential complex.

The new owner's initial plan was to build several residential buildings and preserve at least one of the three historic buildings. In December of 2020 and January 2021, hundreds of local residents took part in the protest – a drop in the ocean for a city with a million inhabitants. Several weeks afterwards, the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine prohibited the construction on the territory until the investigation was over. Currently, the construction is halted; however, the old buildings are not being restored either.

Alexandr Babich is among those who are fighting to preserve the heritage of Odesa. It is not only limited to old buildings but to burial grounds. Babich was among those who recently achieved the ban of building new garages on the burial ground of the victims of communist repressions of 1937–1939 and 1941. One hundred years ago, this land was located at the outskirts of the city and, according to preliminary data, the remains of around 8,000 Ukrainians, Poles, Germans and Romanians are buried there.

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"You are fighting for something that has value for you. Some of the activists are fighting for green spaces which are becoming fewer and fewer. Others are fighting against construction on the sea coast. And there are some who are in this to preserve the local heritage. Another type of fight is for the pro-Ukrainian idea and a pro-Ukrainian context," Babich says. He owns a tourist company, called Tudoy-Sudoy, and has been fighting against Russian influence in Odesa since 2014. He defends the right of the people of Odesa to have a new Ukrainian history, a normal historiography without Soviet influence.

"This is about the history of vandalising monuments, the history of renaming streets of Marshal Zhukov or Nebesnaya Sotnya street (Heavenly Hundred street), about the language issue, the choice between [using the phrase] the Second World War and the Great Patriotic War, about whether the monument of Catherine the Great should be in Odesa or not. The question is very complex and only a careful incorporation of historic documents into the context can solve it", Babich says.

Babich is honest when he says that he and other activists are exhausted. The number of motivated activists is still small. Despite that, Babich keeps working and says that people on the other side, (i.e. those working for the city administration) are also tired. "Before, the city authorities communicated with the activists, but now they do not even bother to gather coordinating councils. Previously they at least tried to demonstrate a readiness to talk, but now they don't need that," he says.

All politics is local

Many residents of Odesa hoped things would change for the better after local elections took place in autumn 2020. Turnout was around one-third of the voters and even fewer cast their vote during the second round of the mayoral elections. As a result, new members made up nearly half of the new city council. However, Mayor Gennady Trukhanov managed to maintain control over the city administration. Officially, he has held the position since 2014, but in fact he has been running the city for some time longer – through his business and political associates.

Trukhanov controls the largest fraction in the Odesa city council and has easily succeeded to bypass his opponent, Nikolay Skorik. Skorik is a member of the pro-Russian Opposition Platform-for Life party. Both politicians are former members of Viktor Yanukovych's Party of Regions. The difference between them is that Trukhanov managed to partly win Odesa's patriotic-minded electorate. Prominent artist and former comedian Oleh Filimonov, who was running in the election as a candidate for the Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Servant of the People party ended up with less than 10 per cent of the popular vote.

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Zelenskyy's party has the largest number of new members in the city council, with 9 out 10 members never involved in local politics or affiliated with local politicians. They are still facing challenges competing with older fractions. Both the Opposition Platform-for Life and Trukhanov's party have twice as many deputies in the city council as Zelenskyy's party. However, according to the head of a local department of the Committee of Voters of Ukraine, Anatoly Boiko, the city mayor, still has to negotiate with the fractions in order to operate.

"These changes have potential, but they are not revolutionary. The residents treat the city authorities in the same manner as they used to, but there are some changes taking place, although their consequences are not clear. Trukhanov has no majority, so he must negotiate with the Servant of the People party" or European Solidarity [the party of the former president Petro Poroshenko]. It is too early to speak about any changes in the structure of local authorities, but these circumstances have weakened his influence", Boiko says.

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed serious flaws in Odesa's management and healthcare system.

Last year was a test for Odesa. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed serious flaws in the city management and healthcare system. In spring 2020 the first lockdown was introduced. Cafés and restaurants were shut down and public transport was operating in a limited capacity. However some people found ways to avoid the restrictions. For instance, Privoz, which is Odesa's largest supermarket, was operating almost as usual and police attempts to penalise the company were unsuccessful. Privoz is half-owned by Vladymyr Galanternik, a businessman whom the Ukrainian media call the "mastermind" and "grey cardinal" of Odesa. He is considered to be a major partner of the city's mayor, Gennady Trukhanov.

Along with Privoz, many fancy restaurants and guesthouses were operating despite the pandemic. Hotels were accepting clients after they found a loophole in the law that allowed them to operate. City transport companies were violating safety regulations, allowing more passengers to commute than permitted and not forcing people to wear masks. Medical staff in the city's hospitals faced equipment shortages necessary to deal with COVID-19. Hospitals across Ukraine had the same issues as government procurement was slow and did not keep up with the needs of medical staff. Several doctors in Odesa called on the president to increase supplies to health services and address the shortage of medical workers.

The operational headquarters monitoring the pandemic in Ukraine was created upon Zelenskyy's initiative. However, big business and the oligarchs took the responsibility to support the health services in the regions of their interest. Such headquarters appeared in Odesa as well, and the co-owner of the port company

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Transinvestservice, Andrey Stavnitser, was appointed its chairman. Together with other businesses and local charities in the region, they managed to gather around four million US dollars. This was spent on medical equipment and personal protection gear.

Reliance on volunteers

When the second wave of coronavirus hit Odesa, hospital capacities had to be increased as hospitals were not able to cope with the large number of infected patients. They had to purchase artificial lung ventilation machines, oxygen, and ask volunteers for help. The end of autumn, winter and beginning of spring were tough times for Odesa's medical workers who were faced with a lack of hospital beds and a shortage of medical workers. Some infected patients were denied hospitalisation as there were not enough beds.

The rollout of COVID-19 vaccines in Ukraine began at the end of February. As of mid-April, the Odesa region has received 38,000 vaccine doses and around 16,000 people have received their first shot. While the Ukrainian health minister, Maxim Stepanov, promised that Ukraine would receive four million vaccines by the end of March, there were fewer than one million delivered by mid-April. The vaccination process, at present, is going rather slowly in Odesa. It is one of the first regions in the country where Stepanov would allow public opinion leaders first to promote the vaccine among the general public. Due to this decision, journalists, politicians and other public figures received their jabs. They were then asked to share their experiences on social media, inviting people to follow their lead. Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities followed this example, but by mid-April the campaign was shut down due to "political reasons". Many were disappointed that social media celebrities received their jabs before to those in high risk groups. Thus, it is impossible to measure success of this campaign.

By the end of March, the number of infections increased so rapidly that hospitals had to turn people away. Lockdown restrictions were introduced but guidelines were again not properly followed. Public transport, stores and markets were still operating. Volunteers continue to provide hospitals with oxygen concentrators as authorities have failed to supply what is required.

"Between October 2020 and April 2021 as many as 2,000 people received oxygen. We donated 169 oxygen concentrators to major medical facilities of the Odesa region. We did it without cameras, without showing off, unlike others. 545 oxygen concentrators already help people in our region to breathe", the head of the Monster Incorporated charity Katerina Nozhevnikova wrote on Facebook on April

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19th. According to official information, 420 tonnes of oxygen were employed by hospitals in March 2021. Fortunately, the Odesa region has not experienced shortages of oxygen. Two large local businesses have received permission to produce oxygen tanks (the Odesa port factory and Krioprom-Gaz). Together they can produce 480 tonnes of oxygen per month. By mid-April, the number of COVID-19 cases in the Odesa region has started to decrease. Distance learning and restrictions of public life turned out to be effective. Odesa is eagerly waiting for Ukrainian tourists to travel to the Back Sea shore this summer as international travel will probably still be limited.

Odesa has faced many challenges in recent years. However the ongoing pandemic and the reduction of land available for construction have brought the issue of ineffective management back. It is linked to the lack of an adequate response from the authorities as well as corruption. Competition for available pieces of land is harsh, and it seems that no one cares about the interests of ordinary citizens when it comes to land redistribution. Locals can only hope that these challenges will make the city stronger and that someday they will have leaders who will be ready to unite Odesa residents. NEE

Translated by Anna Efimova

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How should the EU deal with Russia after Navalny's poisoning?

ALEXANDRA DIENES

Steps towards the managing the European Union's relations with Russia needs a long-term perspective and a corresponding political dynamic that requires audacity. The once commonly-held vision of co-operative security in Europe, enshrined in the OSCE's founding documents, may seem unachievable now, but it should not be lost out of sight.

When the Russian oppositionist Alexei Navalny released the video "Putin's palace" in January 2021, upon his return to Russia from Germany after being poisoned with a military-grade substance called Novichok in August 2020, the showdown began. No doubt, Navalny and his political organisation have always been a thorn in the Russian regime's side. Yet the stakes have risen since investigative journalists revealed the details of the poisoning as being carried out by Russian intelligence agents. Since then the "Berlin patient" seems to have been elevated to public enemy number one by the Russian ruling regime.

The subsequent trial and imprisonment of Navalny led to the largest street protests in Russia in a decade. They occurred across the entire country, drawing over a 100,000 people. In the meantime, the regime has been tightening the screws. It has barred Navalny from public life, banned his organisation and adjusted the laws so that virtually anyone can be put behind bars for as little as a social media post. Individuals and organisations are being prosecuted under the guise of fighting extremism, misinterpretation of history or undue foreign influence. The room

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for manoeuvre is very limited for oppositional forces, and pretty much anyone can be labelled a "foreign agent".

Nothing to lose

At the time of writing, the authorities have overwhelmed Navalny, his team and organisations with criminal lawsuits in an unprecedented wave of repression ahead of the autumn Duma election. Several opposition leaders have already emigrated as a result. Against this backdrop, the degree of confrontation in Russia-West relations and the heightened tensions in the neighbourhood constitute a new and worrying phenomenon. The recent Russian military build-up at the Ukrainian border – a "test of the Russian military's readiness", as Russian minister of defence Sergey Shoigu put it – alarmed Ukraine and its neighbours. President Alyskandr Lukashenka of Belarus, after being shaken by tenacious peaceful country-wide protests, has cracked down on demonstrations and, being supported by Russia, is unlikely to step down voluntarily.

In its relations with the EU, Russia continues to break diplomatic porcelain and seems to have adopted a policy of "nothing to lose". It humiliated Josep Borrell, the EU's High Representative of Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, on his visit to Moscow in February this year. It expelled European diplomats for attending pro-Navalny protests while the press conference between Borrell and Sergey Lavrov was happening. Subsequently, Lavrov claimed Russia did not have relations with the EU as an organisation, and even floated the option of breaking relations with the EU altogether. A biannual renewal of EU sanctions and a wave of mutual expulsions of diplomats became part of the routine.

The inauguration of the Joe Biden administration in the US heralded the revival of what is left of nuclear arms control, through the five-year renewal of the new START treaty. Yet President Biden has made no attempts to reset relations with Russia so far. Instead, he imposed additional sanctions in response to alleged Russian election interference and the hacking of government computers (i.e. the Solar Winds attack). All previous sanctions remain in place, firmly backed by a bipartisan consensus in the US Congress. Biden called his Russian counterpart a "killer". But, at the same time, he offered Putin a personal meeting. Overall, Biden's proclaimed fight between democracies and autocracies suggest a tough US line on Russia and narrows the space for defusing tensions. And Russia seems comfortable with the status of the US as primary adversary.

Despite tensions running high, a relaxed attitude seems to prevail among policymakers and experts. This is paradoxical. Both the EU and Russia appear to think

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that the status quo is not too bad, and that time is on their side. This "wait and see" approach suggests that it is better to "sit out" the current crisis in the hope that the other side gives in, or that events will ultimately change the situation. This thinking only fuels the current deadlock. Serious problems with Russia should not allow the EU to lie back since the situation may quickly deteriorate.

Those policy makers and experts calling for a "maximum pressure" approach face another paradox: the outcome may be minimal or even contrary to the desired goal. The seven-year history of anti-Russia sanctions indicate that while sanctions may be painful for Russia, they do not fundamentally change Russia's behaviour. Rather they feed into the Russian narrative of a "besieged fortress", built on the juxtaposition of "the West". Issues of (wounded) national pride play an important role here. This should not be taken as an argument against sanctions per se, but rather as a critical reflection on the expectation that Russia will change under pressure. Above all, this approach does not provide a way out of the current impasse, but rather entrenches the antagonism. The underlying moral high ground of this policy can be dangerous, especially if applied to a nuclear power that feels threatened.

A third paradox is that in Europe security issues do not seem to be on top of the agenda, which is dominated by climate change, the pandemic and migration. Yet tackling these global challenges requires a concerted effort of all countries, including those who are deeply distrustful of each other or are in conflict. Solving these "classical" security conflicts appears to be a necessary condition for successfully tackling global challenges to security.

Stepping out of the deadlock

There is no clear recipe for getting out of the deadlock with Russia – not least because it requires a great deal of co-operation from Russia, unity among EU member states and coordination with the US. Above all, it requires political will from all sides to tackle the obvious risks emanating from a standoff between nuclear powers. In the short term, it is the EU's responsibility and interest to manage relations with Russia and to prevent further deterioration of the situation – the worst case possible could lead to a war. Concrete steps may include direct talks, reactivation of confidence-building measures and military-to-military contacts. Let us not forget that dialogue is not a reward for good behaviour, but the most common tool in foreign relations. It has nothing to do with appeasement, as some critics have it, let alone forgiveness for the Kremlin's behaviour.

In the medium- and long-term, a political process with bold new ideas to re-establish stability on the European continent is badly needed. The EU is in a good

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position to start it. Such political process should include three components: 1) being tough – "resistance"; 2) extending the hand – "co-operation"; and 3) bringing our respective homes in order.

A carefully balanced and well-communicated combination of resistance and co-operation, on the one hand, requires the EU to deter Russian sabre-rattling and cyberattacks, to dismantle tax havens that attract money laundering, and to push back against outright lies. On the other hand, it requires engagement with Russia on issues of mutual interest – as has been pointed out by European policy-makers. Issues range from technical standards for industrial products to the development of vaccines, management of the Arctic, climate change and the Iran nuclear deal. Not for the sake of engagement, but based on the realisation that tackling these issues is in the EU's interest and it requires co-operation with not like-minded states. There may be more areas that Russia is interested in engaging. The EU should seek a frank dialogue on equal footing with Russia to explore what these could be and to forge concrete joint projects.

Together with the Council of Europe, the EU should continue being vocal about human rights abuses, as in the case of Navalny and other political prisoners. Doing so is important not only to stay true to the EU's own values, but because publicity can save lives. The EU should also continue expressing concern over breaches of the very same principles that Russia subscribed to as a member of the Council of Europe and the OSCE, such as the right to free speech and freedom of assembly. At the same time, in supporting civil society, the EU should be cautious not to do harm given the current wave of repression.

The EU should continue being vocal about human rights abuses, as in the case of Navalny and other political prisoners.

The EU should view its policy towards Russia in the broader context of Eastern policy, currently covered by the Eastern Partnership programme. Most urgently, the EU and its member states should do everything they can to contribute to a peaceful resolution of the seven-year-long conflict in Ukraine that has claimed more than 13,000 lives. First and foremost, fighting in Donbas needs to stop. This requires putting diplomatic pressure on Russia but also, to a certain extent, on Ukraine. This latter aspect may be politically unpopular in the EU, yet is necessary and should go along with continued assurance of solidarity with the Ukrainian people and support the efforts of the government to bring peace to the country. Even if Russian soldiers, foreign fighters and their weaponry disappeared from Donbas overnight, re-integration and reconciliation would be a daunting long-term task, requiring the collective effort of the entire Ukrainian society. Demining of the contact line – sadly one of the largest mined areas in the world – will be a part of this effort.

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Moreover, it would be advisable if the EU reassessed what it can credibly offer the Eastern Partnership countries in the absence of a membership perspective, and how to encourage domestic reforms. Ideally, the EU should play a mediating role and help these countries to find a well-balanced approach between their neighbours – the EU and Russia. The EU, in this context, should encourage counties not to see themselves as bargaining chips in a geopolitical contest. Detailed proposals have been laid out in the joint RAND-FES policy report titled "Consensus Proposal for a Revised Regional Order in Post-Soviet Europe and Eurasia".

Resilience at home

These steps should be premised upon facing Russia the way it is, not the way we would like it to be. This means taking Moscow's interests and threat perceptions into consideration. This does not mean not being tough on Russia. Neither does it mean accepting Russia's policies or forgiving its transgressions, let alone betraying EU values or giving up the ideal of a democratic Russia. This approach does not imply a strategic partnership, a quick breakthrough or change through rapprochement. It does, however, reject the passive, defeatist attitude of the "wait and see" approach and eschews the confrontation inherent in the policy of "maximum pressure".

Most importantly, steps towards managing relations need to be accompanied by a long-term perspective and a corresponding dynamic that requires audacity. The once commonly-held vision of co-operative security in Europe, enshrined in the OSCE founding documents, might be unachievable now, but it should not be out of sight. The FES-Globsec "Cooperative Security Initiative" that combines efforts of eminent experts from across the region and a public awareness campaign, offers proposals on reviving co-operative security. A serious, honest strategic conversation (perhaps informal and behind closed doors) about European security and Russia's future place in it needs to be a part of this process. Neutral states (for instance, Austria, Finland, Sweden), who were instrumental in the CSCE process, could give impulses, fathom the room for compromise and have a mediating role.

> The EU would be a stronger foreign policy actor with regards to Russia if it bolstered its own capabilities.

EU member states would be aided by the realisation that Russia, in fact, is not the biggest threat – the EU's internal weaknesses are. The EU would be a stronger foreign policy actor with regards to Russia if it bolstered its own capabilities – from education, in order to better demarcate propaganda from facts, to the economy,

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now battered by the pandemic, to common defence capabilities. Only if EU member states find durable fixes to domestic problems like populism, nationalism and growing inequality can they better prepare to deal with external challenges. Strong cohesive societies will both exert the power of attraction and act from a position of strength on the international arena.

If EU member states had a more unified approach, they would be sending clearer signals to Russia, and the EU as an institution would be taken as an actor to be reckoned with. Yet views on Russia differ starkly. Some states gravitate to the "maximum pressure" approach, others favour a "wait and see" one; a few governments try promoting dialogue, but often face criticism from their neighbours. In the absence of majority voting in the European Council, member states are having a hard time reconciling their different views and agreeing on a common policy that goes beyond the five "Mogherini principles". The divisions invite Russia to exploit them – most recently the procurement of Sputnik V vaccines by some European countries before any EU authorisation.

As for the Russian "home", it may not be close to collapse, as some hawks suggest. In fact, economists attest it a considerable *zapas prochnosti*, or resilience, that rests on sound macroeconomic policy coupled with regime ingenuity to mobilise and placate large parts of the populations while selectively targeting dissent. Yet the relative stability should not lead Russia to lose sight of the problem of economic stagnation, driven primarily by domestic factors, corruption and low oil prices. Economists around Sergey Guriev speak about *zastoy 2.0*, relating to the period of economic stagnation of the late Brezhnev years. Additionally, Russia's "middle-income trap", noted by World Bank reports, will be hard to escape from without political and technological modernisation.

The second difficult task, which will be key to the future trajectory of Russia, is to manage the balancing act between the demands of two groups, described by the economist Alexander Auzan. On one side is the 75 per cent of Russians who are predominantly conservative, depend on state-funded jobs and prioritise stability and a strong state. On the other side you have 25 per cent of Russians who are more liberal, agile and entrepreneurial – they prioritise political freedom and the rule of law. Some of them came into the spotlight during the recent protests – young internet-savvy people who grew up during the economic boom and are hard to intimidate. To stay in power, the ruling regime needs to cater to the 75 per cent; but to spur economic development, they need support from the other 25 per cent. This dilemma will shape the future of Putin's rule and the path that Russia takes.

Notably, this path is not bound to lead to a democratic Russia. EU policy-makers tend to connect their hopes with the "25 per cent". Yet even those of them who are dissatisfied with the situation in Russia, and Putin in particular, do not necessarily

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favour a western-style democracy, as many polls have demonstrated. In this context, Russian authoritarianism should not obscure to western observers the tacit social contract in Russia. Its most recent renewal came in 2020 with the nationwide voting on constitutional amendments, in the middle of the pandemic and when the Crimea rally-round-the-flag effect had worn off. This de facto plebiscite on the (almost) indefinite rule of Putin demonstrated that the Russian regime cares about its legitimacy while large parts of the public are content with the bargain.

Long-term goal

In our relations with Russia, we are facing a deadlocked and potentially dangerous situation. The West will probably remain tough on Russia, as will Russia towards the West. Both sides are militarised and not since the heights of the Cold War has the danger of nuclear exchange been so high, at least according to the Doomsday Clock. Even if a new figure appears at the helm of the Russian government, this alarming situation is unlikely to go away. To manage it we need responsible policy, front and centre. Therefore, all Russian wrongdoings notwithstanding, the EU should reconsider its self-righteous perception that the ball is in Russia's court. If the EU wants to actively shape policy and avoid further escalation and possible conflict, the ball is automatically in its court. This requires critical self-reflection and a readiness to admit mistakes and to adapt. And, above all, it requires boldness to start a political process with an adversary in order to stabilise European security.

It will be a difficult process, most certainly marred with setbacks. But rather than stopping at obstacles or trading blame, the EU should be humbled by crisis and feel urged to try harder next time. After all, diplomacy cannot afford standing still. It is its job to manage even bad relations. Even though a breakthrough with Russia is hardly imaginable in the near future, the EU should not lose sight of the long-term goal of co-operative security in Europe. It is not only a desirable vision but an utmost necessity given the great challenges of human security we are facing, such as migration, pandemics and climate change. NEE

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Streamlining soft power

MIŁOSZ J. ZIELIŃSKI

Over the last five to seven years, there has been a growing understanding in the West that engagement in the post-Soviet area needs to be differentiated. As much as we need to keep communication channels open in order to prevent the emergence of new divisive blocs, we must not forget about our values and what stands behind them. Therein lies the potential to build, to improve and to unite. A positive agenda is all the more important given what the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed.

We will all remember 2020 as the year when the COVID-19 pandemic arrived. The rapid spread of the virus brought significant changes to our lives: closed borders, businesses closing and limited social interactions. More importantly, it forced us to rethink the present and the future – an exercise that is increasingly needed as the scale of challenges continues to overwhelm us. At the dawn of 2021, the world's attention has been drawn to the first steps to sort things out – namely, the vaccination process. January filled us with hope as the European Medicines Agency and European Commission announced the approval of several vaccines. Yet shortly thereafter problems with deliveries emerged. After weeks of patience, some national governments turned their eyes to alternative supplies offered by Russia and China. Discussions about whether to accept Sputnik-V arose in Hungary, Slovakia and Italy.

It comes as no surprise that the issue was heavily exploited by the Russian media. They presented EU solidarity as temporary, ineffective and Russophobic in essence. Sputnik-V, on the other hand, was announced as an innovative interven-

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tion thus proving that Russian researchers are capable of developing cutting-edge technologies. Oddly enough, the same outlets were not keen on presenting data suggesting potential side effects of the Sputnik vaccine. It quickly turned out that Moscow treats the supply vaccines as yet another propaganda tool. Sputnik shipments to the EU coincided with shortages in the Russian regions of Kaliningrad and Vladivostok. Apparently, there is no bad time for the Kremlin to wage its favourite disinformation war even at the expense of its own citizens.

Fear of losing grip

The lockdown has taken a great toll on the global economy. In many countries, governments were able to mitigate its effects by having support programmes for businesses and citizens, amounting to billions of US dollars. Russia also provided selective support. Extensive state support was not possible for the Kremlin's closest ally, Belarus, though. Already before the pandemic, the regime in Minsk had been facing structural shortcomings of the planned economy where the entrepreneurial spirit and private initiatives were suppressed by the axiom of maintaining authoritarian power. No wonder that the forged presidential election in August 2020 triggered a major social reaction. The months-long protests led to the arrest of hundreds of people who later had to flee the country or face further consequences such as losing their jobs or being relegated from university. Some journalists were sentenced to prison – which set back the establishment of human rights in Belarus for at least a decade – and demonstrations in December 2020 were brutally repressed.

> Already before the pandemic, the regime in Minsk had been facing structural shortcomings of the planned economy.

Even though Alyaksandr Lukashenka's reaction came as no surprise (he was fighting for his political survival, after all), it is more instructive to look at what the protests evoked in the Kremlin. In the minds of the Russian political class, they were a clear example of a western plot to overthrow the current regime in Russia. The ruling elite became convinced that events in Belarus were a beacon of what could happen – if not now, then at least in a few years – in Moscow, St Petersburg, Ekaterinburg or Kaliningrad. The Kremlin's political technologists clearly indicated that if the current kleptocracy wants to stay in power, it cannot lose its grip.

The Russian opposition has long been disfigured by actions orchestrated or initiated by the Kremlin. There is a long record of fatal victims, from Anna Politkovskaya to Boris Nemtsov who were shot in 2006 and 2015, respectively. The

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lack of anti-Putin political representation in the Duma does not mean, however, that there is no growing discontent among ordinary Russians and that they are not ready to express it. Alexei Navalny is perhaps the most prominent example of this trend. He lays bare the ruthlessness of the regime and shows that it affects every aspect of everyday life.

Sadly, Putin has gained strength during the pandemic. The so-called constitutional referendum in June and July 2020 allowed Putin to stay in office until 2036. The expansion of the definition of foreign agent makes it almost impossible to involve any sort of direct co-operation with organisations from abroad without official consent from the very top. When the protests in Belarus broke out, the Kremlin realised that something similar could happen in Russia. It was of concern that they were not only limited to Minsk. The protests spawned across the country, reaching small provincial towns. Given the mindset of all authoritarian regimes, Moscow was more than willing to attempt to gag Navalny, once and for all. Hence the attempted poisoning. The Kremlin was ready to pay the price of relatively small-scale protests during the middle of a pandemic winter. If it had decided to wait, it would have to deal with a tornado of discontent. It is just a matter of time when the havoc wreaked by lockdowns and irresponsible economic policy becomes fully visible.

Given the mindset of all authoritarian regimes, Moscow was more than willing to attempt to gag Navalny, once and for all.

When the recession hit Russia in 2013, its economy still had not recuperated from the 2008–2009 crisis. The short-term remedy rested on appealing to the notion of Russia being a fortress besieged by foreign powers, hence the war in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea. It might have made Putin's popularity skyrocket, but it never solved any of the country's main problems: corruption, clientelism and a lack of transparency. The Kremlin's reaction to the protests against detaining Navalny was well summarised by the US State Secretary Antony Blinken who wrote: "The Russian government makes a big mistake if it believes that this is about us. It's about them. It's about the government. It's about the frustration that the Russian people have with corruption, with autocracy, and I think they need to look inward, not outward."

Calling all stations

Since the COVID-19 pandemic has slowed down the global economy, it has accelerated a yearning for change in post-Soviet societies. Today, Belarusian and

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Russian societies have witnessed a growing number of falsified death statistics and diminishing support for ordinary citizens. In fact, Moscow is reaping what it has sown. Its response to calls for democratisation of transparency in public space has been disinformation, violation of territorial integrity and open military actions. It resulted in a growing understanding of the threat Russia poses among the transatlantic community which sought new ways of engagement. In the case of the European Union, they were conceptualised in March 2016 by five guiding principles. The first three centred around the Minsk Agreement, relations with the Eastern Partnership and other post-Soviet countries and strategic resilience. The last two called for selective engagement with Russia and the need to engage in people-to-people contacts and support for Russian civil society.

> Since the COVID-19 pandemic has slowed down the global economy, it has accelerated a yearning for change in post-Soviet societies.

For the EU, this was a substantial change. Never before had Brussels openly acknowledged that democratisation in Russia requires direct engagement with its citizens. For the US, it was rather a way of coming back to the roots of its activities in Central Europe in the 1980s and 1990s. Back then, the anti-communist opposition received considerable support to dismantle the non-democratic regimes and cement the result brought about by the transition process.

Fast forward to 2021 and the context we have known for at least a decade has changed for the Kremlin and the West. On the one hand, resources at the disposal of the Moscow elite are dwindling. The Russian economy is increasingly unable to compete on global markets beyond the gas and oil industries. The enthusiasm surrounding Crimea has seemed to have vanished. Only to a limited extent can it be substituted with talks on the moral preponderance of the so-called Orthodox civilisation which sees little or no difference between the tsar and the Soviet period.

For the West, the pandemic makes it increasingly difficult to launch large-scale programmes that require physical co-operation across borders. For now, fora, roundtables and conferences are only possible in the digital space. Western societies are preoccupied with sorting out their own issues – the role out of vaccines and the easing of lockdown restrictions. Their attention to developments in Eastern Europe might be temporarily limited.

In times like these, there is a need for increased engagement in local and regional initiatives. Their main objective should be to show that civic activity and agency are crucial to improve one's direct neighbourhood. Local communities, scattered over a vast area, often lack tools and knowledge but are full of enthusiasm and willingness. They are the real seeds of change which, once planted, will bear the

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fruits of advancing democracy, human rights and welfare, just like what happened in Central Europe some 30 years ago.

Action for political change is crucial because we need responsible leaders willing to face the real challenges of today: rebuilding economies and societies, preventing a climate catastrophe and rethinking the use of digital technologies. This cannot be achieved without both national and local leaders' engagement. Such actions on the ground need to be complemented by small study visits. Direct experience with well-functioning mechanisms of local democracy can make a difference. They provide added value because they are authentic. Not only do they seek to achieve objectives foreseen in their respective agendas, they also show what lies beyond: a different world, with which one can freely interact.

I experienced the effects of this phenomenon myself. When I still was a high school student, I spent three weeks at Wake Forest University, North Carolina, where I learned about the American Constitution and travelled across the East Coast. It was a remarkable adventure for an 18-year-old. Even though back then, in 2006, Poland was already a member of NATO and the EU, I felt that such initiatives were a formative experience and left a long-lasting mark on my choices in adult life. Nowadays, at a time when freedom of travel has been restricted, study visits like these are likely to become even more appealing.

In grassroots we trust

Over the last five to seven years, there has been a growing understanding in the West that engagement in the post-Soviet area needs to be differentiated. As much as we need to keep communication channels open in order to prevent the emergence of new Cold War blocs, we must not forget about our values and what stands behind them. Therein lies the potential to build, to improve and to unite. A positive agenda is all the more important given what the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed. Even in a time of grave global risks the struggle for power continues. Disinformation and propaganda affect such sensitive areas as the vaccination process, which can save millions of lives. It points to a sad but important fact: Russia's greatest strength lies in its potential to do harm.

Sadly, Moscow thrives on pursuing a negative agenda. Nevertheless, in the long run its shenanigans constitute its greatest weakness. All interferences in Ukraine, Belarus and other places have been impairing the Kremlin's credibility. Investigative journalists have pointed out numerous times that because of its own structural shortcomings the incumbent regime is mostly capable of destruction, from troll farms to shooting down civilian aircraft.

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Such a policy seeks to undermine the stability offered by democratisation, as well as gradual strengthening of civil society and market economy institutions. In order to counter it, the West needs a readjustment in its engagement in the post-Soviet space. It should build on its approach towards Russia based on the instruments developed since 2014. We need more inclusive, action-based dialogue and tangible support for Russian and Belarusian civil societies. We need local leaders who are able to catalyse progress in their communities.

Streamlining policies and achieving added value is crucial in this regard. The decades-long US engagement in Central and Eastern Europe, the EU's recently readjusted approach and the expertise provided by Central European countries seems an ideal recipe for gradual, yet long-lasting democratisation and grass-rooted change. NEE

This article was prepared by the author in his personal capacity. The opinions expressed in this article are the author's own and do not reflect the view of any institution that the author is affiliated with.

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Hungary's friends in need

DOMINIK HÉJJ

When the first three cases of COVID-19 were registered in Hungary in March 2020, the government instituted a state of emergency and imposed restrictions that could still be in place this summer. At that time the Hungarian authorities almost immediately followed other countries in their fight against the virus; first by purchasing, independent of the EU, personal protection gear and later, non-EU approved vaccines.

Hungary has used the pandemic to convince the European Union and its own citizens that in difficult situations there is no point counting on EU institutions. Only partners from the East (mainly China and Russia) are reliable. These are real friends indeed. The sequence of priority (China being first) is not accidental either. It was from China that Hungary received an almost uninterrupted supply of personal protective gear. Deliveries, which arrived on board WizzAir planes (Hungary's low-cost airline), were welcomed by senior officials at Budapest's airport, including the minister of foreign affairs, Péter Szijjártó. His Facebook posts were evidence of how successful this co-operation was from the Hungarian perspective and proof that when it came to the pandemic the Fidesz government took matters into its own hands. For the very same reason Prime Minister Viktor Orbán also welcomed some of the deliveries in person.

Overall, there was only one narrative. It derived from the official Hungarian foreign policy doctrine implemented since 2013, known as *Keleti Nyitás* (which in English means "opening to the East"). It assumes that during a crisis, Hungary is ensured access to necessary equipment and supplies. Indicatively, nobody asked about the political price for this "insurance policy". Yet its importance is marked by such events as the recent 17+1 summit during which Orbán participated. Interest-

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ingly, while the president is formally the head of state, it is the prime minister who attends strategic meetings. Thus, during the summit it was Orbán who praised Xi Jinping and thanked China for its assistance to Hungary during the pandemic.

Corona diplomacy

This "assistance", also known as COVID diplomacy, is in fact a form of transaction and not voluntary service. Specifically, during the initial phase of the pandemic, when things were still pretty rough, Hungary purchased several hundred respirators from China. Thanks to that, within a few weeks it became the country with the highest number of respirators in the world per capita. This fact was presented to the public as an illustration of the government's success and evidence of its effectiveness. The EU, in turn, was depicted as unable to secure anything for its member states. In time, however, it turned out that the cost of these Chinese respirators was so high that the Hungarian state had no choice but to start selling some of them.

In parallel, the authorities decided again to reassure the public that everyone was guaranteed access to medical equipment and the state was well prepared to cope with the crisis. Yet the official rhetoric did not find its ground in reality, especially when the second and third waves hit the country. Hungary started recording high death numbers and ended up with one of the highest death tolls in the world. Despite this and with Chinese equipment at their disposal, the authorities decided to increase their influence in the region. Their first step was in the Balkans. Hungary transferred aid to Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and the Bosnian Republika Srpska.

> During the pandemic, Hungary offered aid to the Hungarian minority living in other states, bypassing these states' official authorities.

As part of Hungary's corona diplomacy, the prime minister and minister of foreign affairs paid a number of official visits to different Balkan states last year. During one of them, the Serbian president, Aleksandar Vučić, said that, in difficult times, Serbia can only count on Hungary, while the EU provides no help. Interestingly, the former Hungarian ambassador to the EU, Olivér Várhelyi, is the current EU Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement.

In addition, Hungary also offered assistance to countries with a Hungarian minority and which, before the 1920 Treaty of Trianon, belonged to the Kingdom of Hungary. Indicatively, when we read the official statement issued by the Hungarian ministry of foreign affairs and foreign trade in this regard, we see that no names

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of states are used. Instead the document mentions former geographic regions of the Kingdom of Hungary, which is a deliberate revisionist manoeuvre. Thus, the names of places where the Hungarian government sent assistance are presented as Transylvania, Upper Hungary (which is today's Slovakia), Vojvodina (which is today's Serbia), Slavonia (today's Croatia) and the Mura region (today's Slovenia). Offering assistance to these regions is interpreted as an obligation stipulated by the Hungarian Constitution, which provides a mandate to the Hungarian government to take responsibility for Hungarians outside its borders. This assistance was offered to representatives of the Hungarian minority living in other states, but it bypassed these states' official authorities. Interestingly, assistance was not sent to the Zakarpattia region, located in today's Ukraine.

First in line

The implementation of the vaccination rollout in Hungary began on December 26th 2020, when the first delivery of EU-contracted vaccines arrived. The government's ambition was that Hungary would be the first country in the EU to start the rollout. Activities in Hungary started at least 12 hours prior to the agreed date of commencement of the vaccination rollout.

Importantly, however, the Hungarian authorities started negotiations on vaccine deliveries even before manufacturers declared their availability. In an interview with public radio Kossuth last August, Orbán declared that Hungary had signed a contract for five million vaccine doses. At that time, there was no information regarding their source. On the same day the Russian Federation announced it had produced an effective COVID vaccine. One might wonder whether the contract Orbán announced back then was the purchase of the Russian vaccine, Sputnik V. From what we know now, however, we can say most likely not. It was probably the Chinese Sinopharm of which Hungary first ordered five million doses.

On November 5th 2020 Szijjártó announced information about Hungary's contract to procure the Sputnik V vaccine. This was the second vaccine the government purchased from outside the EU. Since then we can observe two vaccine lobbies operating within Hungary. While Orbán has become Sinopharm's main ambassador, Szijjártó has become a lobbyist for Sputnik V. In these roles, both politicians have been commenting on the vaccine contracts and welcoming the deliveries at Budapest airport. In the meantime, a Hungarian military A330-200 Cargo Airbus, operated by WizzAir, started to run flights from Hungary to China and Russia.

From the outset, one could spot that, in the official government rhetoric, there was some strong doubt about the EU vaccine supplies. A narrative was built to

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prepare Hungarians for receiving the vaccines from other sources than the EU. What was this argumentation based on? Szijjártó, for example, stated that vaccines have no nationality and it does not matter which of them to use, as the main goal is to hinder the spread of COVID-19. He was recorded as saying: "in our childhood, no one was interested whether the vaccine was from the East". This was followed with a rhetorical question: "Does anyone really think that China or Russia would

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intentionally vaccinate their citizens with a bad or defective product?" Finally, the slogans of the vaccination rollout programme – "vaccine is life" and "every life counts" – were created and endorsed by Orbán.

Politics over health

Yet the truth is that at the moment of concluding the vaccine contracts with China and Russia, the Hungarian authorities had no information on the effectiveness of these vaccines. While in the EU the vaccine approval process is carried out by the European Medicines Agency (EMA), in Hungary it is handled by the National Institute of Pharmacy and Nutrition (*Országos Gyógyszerészeti és Élelmezés-Egészségügyi Intézet*, *OGYÉI*). This organisation is responsible for the approval of the Russian Sputnik V and the Chinese Sinopharm for use in Hungary. Its final decisions were made in late January and early February of this year.

Government information regarding the authorisation of the "eastern" vaccines showed that the decision of their use was not made by OGYÉI but the prime minister and the minister of foreign affairs and foreign trade. Emergency regulations granted Szijjártó, and not Miklós Kásler (who is the minister of human resources responsible for health), the authority to decide on the use of vaccines. Seemingly tensions emerged between OGYÉI and Szijjártó when it became clear that regardless of OGYÉI's decision, Szijjártó would allow both "eastern" vaccines to be used in Hungary, which was justified on political grounds.

While sick with COVID-19 and in isolation, Szijjártó gave an interview to the Russian-sponsored propaganda channel RT. He spoke about Hungary's willingness to buy the Russian vaccine, emphasising its high effectiveness. Szijjártó also pointed out that part of the production could take place in Hungary (an idea that was never repeated again). However, in regards to Sputnik V, the truth is that there has been much ungrounded information spread around, which was contradictory. On December 31st 2020, the spokesman of the office of the prime minister, Gergely Gulyás, announced that Sputnik V would not be imported to Hungary. The reason given was a lack of production capacity of the Russian manufacturer. However just 20 days later, a short film was shared on Facebook where the minister informed OGYÉI staff that he was in Russia inspecting the facility where the vaccine was being produced.

The film suggested that the decision on whether Sputnik V would be approved would be made within 48 hours. And indeed, on January 22nd, Szijjártó, who flew to Moscow to negotiate the terms of a new gas contract, began his visit by announcing the approval of Sputnik V for use in Hungary. He then thanked the

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Russian minister of health for such fruitful co-operation. In the following weeks, Hungarian authorities demanded a disclosure of the terms of the agreement between the EU and vaccine manufacturers. At the same time, the Fidesz government disclosed the contracts it had entered into. In their language it was stipulated that all the consequences of using Sputnik V were to be borne by the Hungarian state. The Chinese Sinopharm, in turn, was purchased by an intermediary, a Hungarian offshore company.

On January 15th 2021, new information emerged that the Hungarian government had signed an agreement for one million Chinese Sinopharm vaccines. Three days later, just after 8:30am, a press release was issued by the Hungarian Press Agency in which the head of OGYÉI, Ferenc Lukács, stated that the Sinopharm vaccine is produced under safe conditions and in an advanced facility. He added that the effectiveness of the vaccine requires further research. In fact Lukács made this statement during his stay in Beijing, where he visited the vaccine-producing factory. At that time, it was finally agreed that the order of Sinopharm was five million doses, while for Sputnik V it was two million. However, since both vaccines require two doses, they would vaccinate 3.5 million Hungarians (out of a total population of 9.7 million). In the third week of March, the OGYÉI approved two more vaccines not accepted by the EMA: the Chinese CanSino and India's Covishield. It was announced that, for logistical reasons, these vaccines would not be administered in Hungary. Yet a similar declaration was made on the last day of the year by Gulyás regarding the Sputnik V orders.

Manipulations

Sputnik V has been administered to Hungarians since February 11th 2021 while Hungary began rolling out Sinopharm jabs on February 24th. Moreover, Hungary's use of the eastern vaccines goes beyond its own public health care. Szijjártó is known to have personally assisted the then Slovak Prime Minister, Igor Matovič, in obtaining vaccines from Russia. Nevertheless, information on the effectiveness of Sputnik V and Sinopharm were lacking for some time. Data were first published in late April which included an analysis of the effectiveness of vaccines used in Hungary. The main message of the report was that more people fell ill and twice as many died after receiving the Pfizer-BioNTech jabs than those who received Sputnik V or Sinopharm.

After having analysed these data, Katalin Karikó, a Hungarian professor affiliated with the University of Pennsylvania's School of Medicine and one of the founders of the mRNA technology, wrote that the government's evidence was biased and even

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manipulated. The report did not show any differences between the timing of the administration of individual vaccines. For example, the first vaccine administered in Hungary was the Pfizer one, followed by AstraZeneca. Also, the data presented by the government on vaccine-related deaths included both the total of those who died after the second dose and those who died from other pre-existing conditions. For Sinopharm and Sputnik V this information was not provided at all. The timing of the rollout of "eastern" vaccines explains why they were not administered in nursing homes – one of the first places to receive vaccines.

As a result, pro-government media could report that the Chinese and Russian vaccines were more effective than what they referred to as the "American Pfizer". Clearly this kind of narrative resembled communist propaganda. In fact, the entire campaign of importing personal protective gear and vaccines from Russia and China was not accompanied by any critical voices. This is the situation in the Hungarian media space, which is dominated by pro-government outlets. There is no room for uncomfortable questions.

To make matters worse, a law on counteracting the pandemic was passed in May 2020, which includes penalisation for spreading disinformation about the pandemic. As a result, any article or media story which questions the government's COVID-19 policy can be labelled disinformation. And the reach of independent sources is much smaller than pro-government media, which now includes around 500 press outlets nationwide. Independent journalists have been banned from entering COVID-19 hospitals and medical personnel are banned from speaking to the media.

Hungary's pandemic policy has demonstrated, once again, its strong slant towards the East – both to China and Russia. As a result, Hungary quickly gained access to much needed personal protection gear and vaccines while the rest of the EU struggled behind. At the same time, it is difficult to fully assess and predict the political consequences of this approach. It is probable that Hungary will pay a price for it in the near future. There is no doubt that one of Fidesz's goals is to prepare for next year's parliamentary elections in which the dominant narrative will be that the government has effectively handled the pandemic. NEE

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

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Crisis like a dream

WOJCIECH WOJTASIEWICZ

Georgia has been trapped in a political, economic and social black hole. It is affected by crisis after crisis. There is no prospect for improvement. Thus, at a certain point apathy may turn into social eruption.

For many months now Georgian politicians have been busy. After last October's parliamentary elections, the ruling Georgian Dream and the opposition got stuck in a months-long jam from which they could not escape. The opposition accused the authorities of rigging elections and they boycotted the parliament, while the ruling coalition downplayed the accusations and claimed the opposition was unable to accept defeat. Instead of focusing on real social problems (e.g. the pandemic generated economic crisis, rising debt, unemployment, weakening currency and the problematic vaccination process), politicians were instead fighting a long-term battle which ultimately weakened Georgia's international reputation and undermined its status as a democratic country. Given all that, it is not surprising that 30 per cent of the public has no preference in regards to political choices.

Opposition's boycott

In terms of transparency and maintaining democratic standards, the 2020 parliamentary elections did not differ much from the elections that took place during Mikheil Saakashvili's time as president. Consequently, the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) observers assessed the elections as free, but pointed to numerous flaws. Among them were the abuse of administrative resources by the ruling party; a lack of media balance; strong political polarisation; and pressure put on state employees. The opposition, splintered and quite

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unpopular among voters (many still hold a negative memory of Saakashvili), could not take advantage of the new electoral law which, after many years, was negotiated with the Georgian Dream. The current system is still a mixed system, yet the proportional component has been enforced and the threshold reduced from five to one per cent.

Despite public disillusionment with the Georgian Dream, it received the most votes (90 out of 150 seats), while all eight opposition parties did not have enough seats to even consider the possibility of a coalition government (together they only received 60 seats). The truth, however, is that the Georgian Dream's victory had more to do with the opposition's weaknesses than their own specific qualities. Running as a united front, the opposition decided not to participate in the second round of elections in single-member constituencies, and announced a parliamentary boycott. It called for a repeat of the vote, electoral law reform, a change of the chairman of the Central Election Commission, and the release of Giorgi Rurua, whom it considers a political prisoner. The opposition also organised several fairly large street protests. In the end, the ruling party entered into negotiations with the opposition. However, after five rounds of talks, no breakthrough materialised.

Running as a united front, the opposition decided not to participate in the second round of elections and announced a parliamentary boycott.

In the meantime, some significant changes were taking place. First and foremost, Bidzina Ivanishvili, the leader of the Georgian Dream, announced his resignation from politics. Yet, many still believe that he will still continue to pull strings and rule the country from behind, as he did from 2013 to 2018. Ivanishvili's position was taken by the former speaker of the Georgian parliament, Irakli Kobakhidze, known for being firm with his adversaries. There was also a reshuffle in the ranks of the main opposition party, the United National Movement. Its current formal leader (Saakashvili, in fact, runs the party from Ukraine), Grigol Vashadze, resigned. He stated that it had to do with differences he had with other party leaders in regards to the boycotting of parliament and negotiating with the authorities. Vashadze was replaced by Nika Melia, an emotional and somewhat radical politician.

The leadership of the second opposition party, Movement for Freedom-European Georgia, also changed. Its former leaders, David Bakradze, (former chairman of the parliament) and Gigi Ugulava (former mayor of Tbilisi) resigned from the party. Earlier, a similar decision was made by the charismatic Elene Khoshtaria, who founded a social movement called Droa! (The time has come!). The party is now headed by the former secretary of the National Security Council of Georgia, Giga Bokeria, who is known for his uneasy political temperament. The small-

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er opposition parties were also not saved from splits and reshuffles. For instance, four politicians broke away from the pro-Russian and nationalist Alliance of Patriots of Georgia. They founded a new group called the European Socialists. A division also took place in the ranks of the New Political Center – Girchi (Shyshka). Its leader, Zurab Dzaparidze, founded a new party called Girchi – More Freedom. Two politicians of a small party, called Citizens, broke the parliamentary boycott and formally entered the legislature to work on a new electoral law in agreement with the Georgian Dream.

Tightening up

In mid-February, endless rounds of meaningless talks between the ruling party and the opposition were interrupted by Melia's arrest. He was accused of persuading demonstrators to storm the parliament building during protests in June 2019. By October 2020, Melia was released on bail with an electronic monitoring device. He ripped it off as a sign of protest to the alleged electoral fraud. He also refused to pay his second bail. Melia's arrest was a spectacular media event. The state's special forces stormed his party headquarters where he was barricaded together with other opposition leaders. Tear gas was used and the party premises were damaged.

A few days prior to these brutal scenes, Georgia's Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia resigned. Gakharia had earlier been the minister of the interior. However, when he stood against the detention of the opposition leader, he turned from being a hawk to a dove. Consequently, he clashed with other leaders of the Georgian Dream who did not agree that Melia's detention would make matters worse. Gakharia was replaced by the Minister of Defence, Irakli Garibashvili. Interestingly, Garibashvili had already been head of the government from 2013 to 2015 which is around the time Ivanishvili formally left politics for the first time. Garibashvili's promotion was a prelude to a tougher stance taken towards the opposition. Not only did he call those in the opposition as criminals and radicals, but also announced that parties that boycotted parliament would be deprived of state financing.

Brussels to the rescue

Once matters deteriorated further, the West decided to step in. First the ambassadors of the EU and the United States participated in talks between the parties. Later, the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, came to Tbilisi to

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push for an agreement. He noted all points of contention and even got a promise from the Georgian Dream and the opposition that they would return to the negotiating table. Yet after his departure, the parties returned to business as usual and mutual accusations. Thus, in the end, Christian Danielsson, an EU diplomat and Michel's special envoy, was assigned the task of resolving the conflict.

Despite spending more than a week in Tbilisi, Danielsson did not get any closer to an agreement. He returned a second time and presented a draft six-point agreement which was rejected by both the ruling party and the opposition – who blamed each other for the talks failing. Danielsson's document contained provisions ensuring the opposition's entry into parliament and some posts for its representatives. It also provided amnesty for Rurua and Melia, as well as reform of the electoral law and justice system. However, the document was unsatisfactory for both the opposition, which did not want to approve the results of the vote, and the Georgian Dream, which did not want to release political prisoners.

A draft agreement was rejected by both the ruling party and the opposition – who blamed each other for the talks failing.

Danielsson suggested that the talks be resumed, but did not seem to have much hope he could do anything further. Thus, the opposition prepared for further protests. Unexpectedly, after less than three weeks, the document put forward by Danielsson was signed by the Georgian Dream. However, the opposition did not withdraw its decision. In mid-April, Michel proposed a new version of the agreement. It included amnesty for Melia and Rurua and early parliamentary elections in 2022, should the Georgian Dream get less than 43 per cent of the vote in the upcoming local elections later this year.

Finally, in the second half of April, the document was signed by all opposition parties except the largest ones – the United National Movement and the European Georgia. Initially, Saakashvili was very critical of the agreement. Then he changed his mind, stressing that it was imperfect, but the opposition should focus primarily on winning the autumn local elections, which will be a kind of plebiscite on the rule of the Georgian Dream. Opposition representatives began working in parliament. Charles Michel returned to Tbilisi to encourage the former ruling party to join the agreement. It is possible that in the end this will happen after the release of Nika Melia. However, he opposes the amnesty law which would also apply to law enforcement officers who allegedly violated the law during the pacification of a demonstration outside the parliament building in June 2019. There is an ongoing tug of war between the Dreamers and the opposition in this matter. Ultimately, the bail for Melia's release was paid by the European Union. On the other hand, President Salome Zourabichvili pardoned Giorgi Rurua.

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Irritation

It seems that scuffles in Georgian politics are endless. This has led to the public becoming exhausted by politics and more disengaged. Most people are sick of hearing about disputes and fighting. Their primary concern is survival at this difficult time. The second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and the public lockdown, which took place in the autumn and winter of 2020, has had a really negative effect on the domestic economy. The greatest hit came from the collapse of tourism which, together with other services, generates almost one-third of the country's GDP. The number of visitors dropped from over nine million to one million. As a result, many owners of hotels, restaurants and travel agencies lost most of their income, and many are still paying off loans. The government's support was insufficient due to the modest size of the state budget.

> Most Georgians are sick of hearing about political disputes and fighting. Their primary concern is survival at this difficult time.

The number receiving state financial aid has increased by over 80,000. Now, more than half of Georgia's 3.7 million citizens are financially supported by the state, and for 150,000 families this is the only source of income. This in turn explains why public debt has continued to rise, which was a serious problem even before the pandemic. Also indicatively, in recent months there have been several large-scale bank robberies in Tbilisi and Zugdidi. One of the raiders said he did so out of despair and an inability to pay off his debt. He complained about high interest rates, expensive medicine and gambling being a social problem. His deed was a gesture of despair. The additional problem is the continuing weak exchange rate of the Georgian currency, the lari. This in turn explains a serious decrease in people's purchasing power.

All these problems are reflected in opinion polls. Recent data show that as many as 59 of Georgians per cent think unemployment is the country's biggest problem. Forty-five per cent sees high and rising prices as their biggest concern, almost one-third (28 per cent) point to poverty, and 27 per cent to the lari's depreciation. Opinions about Georgia's future are almost evenly split: 38 per cent believe that things are going in the wrong direction and 32 per cent think things are good. The remaining 22 per cent believe they are neither good nor bad.

These numbers could of course become further exacerbated by the expected third COVID-19 wave. The partial lifting of restrictions in February and March of this year translated into higher COVID-19 cases and deaths. Another lockdown could bring about complete economic collapse and lead to further social unrest. However, for the moment it is difficult to put much hope into mass vaccine roll

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out as a quick remedy. The truth is that the first shipment of Astra Zeneca jabs arrived in Georgia only in March. According to Our World in Data, on the 28th April just over one per cent of the Georgian population has received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Quite worrying is the public's attitude towards vaccination. Research suggests that over half of the public (53 per cent) do not want to take the jab, only 35 per cent are willing to get vaccinated, and 12 per cent do not have an opinion. In order to convince Georgians to get vaccinated Zourabichvili was filmed getting her shot. However, only a few days after her public vaccination, the media announced that a young nurse died in Akhaltsikhe after she had experienced an anaphylactic shock.

Nobody to vote for

The social mood is often reflected in polls. One recent poll indicated that as many as 60 per cent of the public were against the opposition's parliamentary boycott. Opinions were more divided on the need to hold early elections. Forty-five per cent were in favour and 45 per cent were against. Social trust in public figures is extremely low. The public has no trust in party leaders. Eighty-nine per cent has a positive view of Patriarch Ilia II, the head of the Georgian Orthodox Church. Former Prime Minister, Giorgi Gakharia, is trusted by 65 per cent, followed by Tbilisi mayor Kakha Kaladze with 54 per cent. The leaders of the Georgian Dream and the political opposition have more critics than supporters.

As many as 60 per cent of Georgians were against the opposition's parliamentary boycott.

A third of voters do not know which political party they would vote for. The Georgian Dream is on 35 per cent while the United National Movement has 18 per cent support. Support for other parties remains at zero to three per cent. Georgians have long been waiting for a third, alternative player to emerge. For some time, it seemed that the party Lelo for Georgia, founded by two bankers in late 2019, could be it. However, this party has not gained much support. Evidently, Georgian politics lack young faces. Voters are tired of the same political figures who have continuously failed to solve Georgia's most fundamental problems.

Possibly, the void will be filled by the former Prime Minister Giorgia Gakharia, who has announced he is founding a new party. This initiative has already been joined by six deputies of the Georgian Dream. Yet, it is rightly feared that Gakharia's project could become something of a pseudo opposition – something controlled by Ivanishvili. Giorgi Margvelashvili, Georgia's former president, called it Geor-

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gian Dream 2.0. Even if these fears prove invalid, the question remains what new could be offered by a man who was the country's prime minister for only a year and a half and who, apart from the effective management of the pandemic during the first wave, does not have any other success.

Grim prospects

The Georgian authorities have recently faced another problem which has resulted in a growing wave of protests against the construction of one of the largest hydroelectric plants in the country. The plant is to be built near Kutaisi, Georgia's second largest city. The investor is a Turkish company called Enka. Locals and environmental activists oppose the construction and three mass demonstrations have already been organised. And the protesters have outnumbered those who usually come to opposition rallies.

For the time being, authorities have decided to suspend the main construction, only allowing some preparatory tasks. Yet the government emphasises that the investment, as a response to growing demand for electricity, will contribute to Georgia's energy security. The plant's opponents point to an unfavourable contract (i.e. high energy prices, an obligation to sell to the state for only 15 years, compared to the 99 years of leasing the area where the hydroelectric plant will be built) highlighting the need to displace several hundreds of families. Other costs of the project would include the flooding of several villages and its negative impact on local wine production and tourism. Additionally, the facility is to be erected in a seismic and landslide area.

Instead of dialogue, the government has used force, summoning protesters to police precincts, blocking road access to the Rioni Valley, and liquidating the protest camp. Natela Turnava, the minister of economy and sustainable development who has been the face of the project, abruptly left a meeting with local community leaders after just five minutes. The project is also contributing to tensions in Georgian-Turkish relations. The Turkish ambassador to Georgia has claimed that anti-Turkish sentiments were driving the protesters.

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Both politically and economically, Georgia is in an extremely difficult situation. The level of aggression and detachment from reality among the political elite is shocking. For several months now the country has become a one-party system

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which has little to do with western democratic standards. In light of this, the idea of Georgian authorities officially applying for membership in the European Union in 2024 is a grim joke. Economic collapse is a brutal fact. The vaccine rollout will probably be difficult – there is a shortage of vaccine supplies compounded by a society reluctant to get vaccinated. Unlike EU member states, Georgia cannot count on a post-pandemic recovery fund. For now, it is difficult to predict when tourism will return to pre-pandemic levels, and it is equally hard to say when the domestic economy will recover.

As the overall situation in the country has been deteriorating for years now, the public has expressed greater apathy and discouragement. Given all that, a change in social attitudes can never be ruled out. Should the level of impoverishment worsen, Georgians may take to the streets and threaten the dysfunctional political class, putting the country's fate into the hands of a new, younger generation.

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A fortress of human rights

ADAM CHMIELEWSKI

Europe will either be united or not. It cannot be ruled out that an unforeseen event may lead to the disintegration of the EU. But it can also not be ruled out that an unforeseen event will cement it. Paradoxically, the COVID-19 pandemic, which is currently devastating the global economy, may prove to be such an event.

Prior to the creation of the European Union, Europe did not exist. It did not exist in the political sense, that is. It is true that François Guizot, the 19th century historian and statesman, believed that there is something like a European civilisation because a certain kind of unity permeates European countries despite countless differences dividing them. This unity, however, was manifested only to a select number of Europeans and only through comparisons with the brutally colonised European "Others" across Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Americas. Certainly, the thus conceived civilisational unity did not translate itself into political unity. The geographical concept of Europe made political sense only as an unstable system of volatile states linked more frequently, and tightly, by their mutual hostilities than their alliances.

Both world wars were the extreme consummations of these hatreds which, in their attempt to annihilate each other, severely injured European countries and the rest of the world. If "Europe" previously meant only a geographical concept, after the Second World War it referred to a continent covered in ruins. Europe as a political entity only came into existence upon these ruins.

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The work of European poetry

The suppression of hostilities between European countries was a necessary precondition of creation of Europe as a political entity. However, no one believed that the self-crippled countries would be able to succeed in building a Europe on their own. In order not so much to quench the hostilities as to suppress them, NATO was established. The purpose of the pact was revealingly defined by Hastings Ismay, NATO's first secretary (1952–1957), who previously earned his credit as Winston Churchill's chief military assistant. According to Ismay, the goal of the military alliance was "to keep the Russians out, the Americans in and the Germans down". The pact reflected the then Cold War global power balance and sanctioned the hegemonic position of the United States in the western part of the European continent.

Europe's coming into existence was successful because there was an acute political-ontological gap that needed filling.

By its very nature, NATO's strictly military nature could not provide a comprehensive answer to the expectations of the scarred European nations as they struggled to lift their war-torn states from the rubble. The aim of the pact was essentially negative, not positive. By defending the countries of Western Europe against the communist threat and the German domination, it effectively transformed them into American colonies. The Marshall Plan, whose economic importance is much overestimated, perpetuated this political dependence and did not provide a mechanism for the emergence of Europe as an entity capable of staying on its own feet.

Since Europe did not exist, it had to invent itself. Europe's coming into existence – a considerable feat for a non-existent entity – was successful because there was an acute political-ontological gap that desperately needed filling. The gap was spotted and successfully filled by great poets of European politics. The emergence of the European Union has brought about a complete reversal of Ismay's adage: America ceased to play the hegemonic role in Europe, Russia returned to it, Germany have dominated it, while NATO has lost its significance.

Philosopher Theodor Adorno said that writing poetry after the Holocaust is barbaric. Yet the emergence of post-war European politics is a work of poetry. Jean Monnet – the author behind the Schuman Plan, which was the beginning of the European Coal and Steel Community established in 1951 in Paris – demonstrated that an imagination, driven by compassion, may be able to save Europe from another slaughter. He believed that "Europe never existed. In fact, it has yet to be created," adding that "there will never be peace in Europe if states are reconstituted on the basis of national sovereignty … The countries of Europe are too small to

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guarantee their peoples the necessary prosperity and social progress. European countries must form a federation…".

Being a work of poetic mind, the European Union is a figment of imagination. Therefore, it cannot be captured by traditional political theory and does not fall under the terms of the Westphalian way of thinking. The European Union works like a state. It has a parliament, an executive and a judiciary, whose judgments are binding on the member states. It has its own budget composed of contributions from its members, and a partially common foreign policy. The EU protects the rights of its citizens, it has a president (with a telephone number that Henry Kissinger asked for) and armed forces. The Union has its own currency, although not all member states use it as their own. EU citizens have a uniform passport, and the borders of the Union are protected by a common border agency. Its laws have higher status than those established by individual member states. They regulate the production of material goods, food and energy, trade, transport and education.

Yet, the EU does not act like a state. It cannot collect taxes from citizens. The countries of the EU, taken together, maintain the largest number of soldiers in the world – over two million. But the EU itself has only 18 rapid deployment groups in the form of reinforced battalions belonging to the EU Battlegroup, each in the strength of about 1,500 troops coming from among the member states, and the decision to deploy them may be vetoed by each state. Total defence spending of the 27 EU countries is around 30 per cent of the US military spending; in 2018, it amounted to 191 billion US dollars while in the United States it was 643 billion dollars. The most important thing, however, is that the EU is not a territorial entity: although the EU operates mainly within the territories of its member states, it is itself an extra-territorial managing authority. As an imaginary, ideal and, in this sense, poetic entity, the EU is an unidentified political object.

> Being a work of poetic mind, the European Union is a figment of imagination.

Despite its poetic roots, the EU is primarily an economic entity. It is arguable that after its unquestionable successes in building and constantly transforming itself, its primal poetic spirit has started to lose breath. It was replaced, on the one hand, by the spirit of bureaucracy and technocracy at EU summits; and, on the other hand, by a commotion of xenophobia and ethnic cleansing. In response to this deficit, the then president of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, in 2013 initiated the creation of a "new story for Europe" that would continue the narrative written on its first pages: "We have to continue our narrative, to continue writing the book of the present and the future of the EU project." However, the idea designed to re-awaken the poetic spirit with technocratic methods could hardly bring about the expected rewards: the authentic

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poetic spirit blows where it wills and it cannot be dictated by directives. All the more so that the role of the new European poets was played by Jürgen Habermas, Angela Merkel, Donald Tusk, Michał Kleiber and similar artists.

The agency of Europe

On the day Donald Trump was sworn in as US President in January 2016, Marine LePen stated that "the European Union is already dead, it just does not know it yet". In the period preceding the great enlargement of the EU onto ten new countries, a high official in the US Department of State was asked about the attitude of the American administration to the integration of the EU. His response was: "Disintegration!"

These statements are just two symbolic examples of a series of threats to the sustainability of the EU, internal and external ones. Trump disappointed the hopes placed in him by the French National Front (now the National Union), though not for the lack of trying. The customs war he initiated against the EU, primarily aimed against the economies of Germany and France, did not have the effect expected by LePen. It should be emphasised, however, that LePen's quoted statement reveals not only her political goals, but, to an even greater extent, the weakness of the anti-integration European right, including the Polish and Hungarian varieties. Her statement confirms the intuition that anti-EU movements in Europe are deeply aware of. So far at least they are too weak to overthrow the EU on their own, and for that very reason are looking for outside support.

In 2020, Donald Trump lost his bid for a second presidential term. Four years of his presidency did more damage to America than to the EU. His electoral defeat to the more moderate Joe Biden suggests that one of the threats to European integration has abated. This, however, does not mean that the future of the EU is secure. The most serious of these threats lie not in the open hostility of the US Republican Party to the European project, the anti-European activities of Vladimir Putin, or the power of far right-wing movements in Europe. Indeed, the fact that European integration generates various forms of resistance, especially in states that already are members, and yet is an aspiration for other states outside the EU, may lead one to think that the problems marring European integration lie not so much in the heart of the project, but in its implementation. However, this conclusion would be premature. The EU often enjoys much greater support from its citizens than the national governments that represent them, and, with the exception of the UK, anti-EU groups do not have much chance to win a sufficiently strong mandate that would enable them to take their countries out of the EU.

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At the same time, the bonds of European integration are not tight enough. This was especially prominent during the financial crisis in Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain and the Syrian refugee crisis. Their weakness was also made apparent by the efficacy of mendacious propaganda, disseminated by British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, which influenced the UK citizens to vote in favour of leaving the European Union. The election of Joe Biden as US president is likely to weaken America's disintegrative actions against the EU and to undermine the destructive optimism of the anti-European right. But the abatement of animosity will not amalgamate the increasingly divergent interests of the US and EU, nor will it remove the weaknesses of the European project. Therefore, the questions of whether the European Union will survive or whether it will be able to reinvent itself remain.

Chance and necessity

After 2015, many commentators, mostly Euro-enthusiasts, predicted the imminent collapse of the EU. Among them, Ivan Krastev's book *After Europe* draws attention by its painful honesty. I have suggested above that there was no historical necessity that led to the founding of the EU: it is the product of a poetic spirit which has managed to intertwine – skilfully and creatively – the existing needs and interests into a novel political entity. Similarly, Krastev argues that the collapse of the EU may not be due to historical necessity, but rather due to chance, mishap or accidental circumstances. Krastev has in mind such cases as the assassination of Prince Ferdinand due to which the nations united in the structure of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, established over a half century earlier, scattered overnight tearing any former ties between them. Another example is the collapse of the Soviet Union which seemed unshakable barely a few months before its demise.

> Krastev argues that the collapse of the EU may not be due to historical necessity, but rather due to chance or accidental circumstances.

The deficits of the EU were particularly pronounced during the financial crisis that occurred more than a decade ago. It turned out that the euro itself was poorly designed. Also, the control over expenditure of the EU money was deeply flawed. These two crises, however, are technical in nature and could be resolved by technocratic methods, albeit at the cost of considerable social discontent and political disturbances. The most serious EU crisis, the moral one, was revealed as a result of armed conflict in Libya and the flow of refugees coming from the Middle East and Africa to Europe. It is this event that may lead to the collapse of the EU. The

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weight of this issue makes it worthwhile taking a look at how the dissolution of Libya came about.

The fall of Libya was the result of the political narcissism of Nicolas Sarkozy and Bernard-Henri Lévy, as well as the machinations of American secret services. Lévy, a French celebrity philosopher famous for human rights activism, met General Khalifa Haftar in March 2011 in Benghazi on one of his trips to Libya. In 1986–87, after an ineptly led campaign against Chad, Haftar, then colonel, fell into conflict with Muammar Qaddafi. He later started collaboration with the CIA and became leader of the rebellion against Qaddafi's rule. The official purpose of Lévy's visit was to make sure the Haftar-led and CIA-backed rebels were getting the help they needed. It remains a mystery why such a mission was entrusted to a leftist philosopher. This notwithstanding, Lévy convinced Sarkozy that Haftar was capable of overthrowing the aging Qaddafi and successfully seizing power. Justifying his interest in Libya, Lévy replied: "Why? I don't know!"; "Of course, it was human rights, for a massacre to be prevented, and blah blah blah – but I also wanted them to see a Jew defending the liberators against a dictatorship, to show fraternity. I wanted the Muslims to see that a Frenchman – a westerner and a Jew – could be on their side."

In toppling Qaddafi, accused of numerous corrupt activities, Sarkozy saw an opportunity to save his political future.

So much for noble intentions. Enter narcissism. Sarkozy, the inept president, clung to the idea of overthrowing Qaddafi like a drowning man to his last straw. His candidacy in the 2012 presidential elections ran very low in the polls. In toppling Qaddafi, accused of numerous corrupt activities, Sarkozy saw an opportunity to save his political future. For this reason, he insisted the then US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, on a joint military strike against Libya, which took place despite Barack Obama's resistance, with the US generals "leading from the back".

Helpless

Qaddafi kept Libya in a state of despotic unity which guaranteed peace in much of Northern Africa. That peace gave the EU a much-underappreciated dividend, the value of which can only be estimated after it has been irretrievably lost. The result of noble intentions and a chain of disastrous decisions was the complete disintegration of Libya's statehood into brutally antagonised camps, political factions and regions – a massacre of hundreds of thousands of people; destruction of the foundations of social life, and a stream of refugees who, risking the dangerous

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crossing of the Mediterranean Sea, seek salvation in Europe. In the face of the humanitarian catastrophe, the EU has demonstrated a deplorable helplessness and indecisiveness. Some of its politicians now silently regret that Qaddafi cannot be resurrected.

Limiting ourselves to French soil, one may say that despite strenuous efforts on the part of the anti-integration-minded Marine LePen, it is not she who presents the greatest danger to the EU, but rather Sarkozy, her narcissist compatriot; while his no less narcissistic friend, Lévy, will go down in history as the greatest useful idiot in the history of United Europe. Thus far, no directive protects the EU or its member states from the narcissism of its politicians.

In the face of humanitarian catastrophe, the EU has demonstrated a deplorable helplessness and indecisiveness.

Although Angela Merkel stated in 2010 that "multicultural society does not work", in 2015 she welcomed migrants stranded in Hungary with open arms, which was interpreted as opening up Germany to the inflow of refugees. The result was not only an increase in refugees entering the EU, but the resistance of German citizens. The resistance gradually transformed into ever-more powerful anti-immigration movements, the strongest of which is the Alternative for Germany (AfD). In 2017 it gained significant electoral support. Merkel's attitude additionally fuelled the crude anti-EU rhetoric of Jarosław Kaczyński and Victor Orbán.

An equally important ideological and political consequence of the EU's ineptitude in dealing with the refugee problem is the conviction that authoritarian rule can at times be more efficient in dealing with such problems than the liberal policy of human rights, which, in the case of Libya, brought only anarchy and death. Such a belief significantly weakened the position of those who, seeing Bashar al-Assad as a criminal dictator, started the devastating war in Syria. The war in Syria almost completely destroyed the country and turned it into the second main source of refugees, next to Libya. As a result of such policies, hatred of the western world, and despotic tendencies in neighbouring Turkey, received an additional boost.

The loss of the Libyan dividend of peace makes it clear that the same dividend is now drawn by the EU from the authoritarian Turkey which now works as a reservoir for around four million refugees detained on their way to Europe. In exchange, the EU is paying Turkey six billion euros for their safekeeping, and it has loosened visa requirements for Turkish citizens. The issue of Turkey's bid for membership in the EU, initiated in 1987, fell from the EU agenda mainly because of Turkey's failure to respect human rights. It turns out that the EU which, as former EU minister for foreign affairs Javier Solana wrote, was to promote freedom, democra-

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cy, respect for human rights and the rule of law in order to surround itself with "a ring of well governed countries to the East of the European Union (from the Balkans to the Caucasus) and on the borders of the Mediterranean, with whom we can enjoy close and cooperative relations", has now become a fortress of human rights enjoyed by us, its citizens, at the expense of nations living outside its borders, while the relative peace inside this fortress is guarded by neighbouring despots whom the European Union criticises for their despotism. So far, the EU has not issued any directive against its own hypocrisy.

Will Poland overthrow the EU?

Although it is making strenuous efforts towards this goal, Poland will not succeed in overthrowing the EU. It might leave it, though, causing more harm to itself than the EU. Poland is the largest beneficiary of EU funds. Over the first 16 years of its membership, Poland received 188 billion euros and paid 61 billion euros – its net profit thus far has amounted to 127 billion euros in direct transfers. These transfers are responsible for about one per cent growth of Poland's GDP and for the creation of about 600,000 jobs. Polish products gained access to the second largest commercial market in the world. Moreover, about three million Polish citizens live and work outside their country and, since its accession in 2004, they earn around 100 billion euros annually in various member states.

EU funds have made it possible to solve the seemingly unsolvable problems of Polish agriculture, which received 61 billion euros over the past 16 years.

EU funds have made it possible to solve the seemingly unsolvable problems of Polish agriculture, which over the past 16 years received 61 billion euros. Thanks to EU funds, decent roads, railways and airports have been built. Despite all this, Polish authorities, especially since 2015, are extremely critical of the EU and try to demonstrate it in various ways. The most recent example was the Polish authorities' initial threat to veto the EU budget and the Next Generation EU package of 750 billion euros (i.e. the solidarity fund which aims to combat the economic consequences of the coronavirus pandemic; the package was eventually approved by Poland's parliament).

Despite the moral, and not only pragmatic, obligations arising from EU membership, Poland obscenely parades its sovereignty towards the EU and at the same time displays an uneasy servitude towards the US. In 2003, shortly before Poland's accession to the EU, it joined the misguided and illegal invasion of Iraq. The invasion had catastrophic consequences for the Middle East and the rest of the world:

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it led to the emergence of ISIS, the destruction of several countries perpetrated under the pretence of "nation-building", provoked a wave of terrorist acts, and turned Poland into a laughing stock. By joining the "coalition of the willing" with Spain and Great Britain, Poland took part in an initiative which was tantamount to an outflanking manoeuvre which signalled to the EU that its eastern, northern and southwestern ramparts are not holding strong. The British one has just collapsed. The actions of the present Polish government may suggest that it joined the effort to remove the eastern flank of the EU – namely, itself. The government engages in these actions although it is not democratically mandated to do so: 89 per cent of Poles positively assess their EU membership, while only seven per cent are against it. Leaving the EU is clearly against Poland's interests. When asked whose interest the Polish government intend to promote by distancing itself from the EU, none of its members dare give an honest answer.

A number of facts indicate the systematic anti-European attitude of the Polish authorities. As a zealous NATO member, Poland is arming itself to the teeth and it purchases military equipment (especially combat aircraft and helicopters) predominantly from the US, not from European producers. Poland intends to build a nuclear power plant, but does not co-operate with the European agency, EUROATOM, and has signed an agreement on costly nuclear co-operation with the US. Among the 85 aircraft flown by LOT Polish Airlines, there is not a single Airbus passenger plane produced by the European consortium Airbus.

When Polish historian Adam Michnik asked his Russian friends about Russia's public policy, he was told that there was no such thing as policy in Russia, only the operations of security services. This might be true, but Russia was neither a precursor of this, nor does it excel in it. In this respect, the US is an unrivalled champion (its most recent exploits being in Syria, Venezuela and Bolivia). Donald Trump did not wage new wars but he supported various interest groups, not infrequently resorting to the secret services which helped him secure the support in the 2020 election campaign, dumping the costs of this trade-offs onto other countries. It is no secret that the targets of the disintegrating activities of various American security services, both in the past and present, are the countries of the EU. The US and Russia actively supported the UK leaving the EU. A more recent example comes from Poland. As *Open Democracy* recently revealed, the notorious campaigns to establish LGBT-free zones in Polish cities have been financed by a network of American foundations supported by funds whose origin cannot be ascertained. As a result of these activities, some Polish local governments lost

Eighty-nine per cent of Poles positively assess their EU membership, while only seven per cent are against it.

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not only the support of European and Norwegian funds, but also their good name. These foundations were established by Jay Sekulov, President Trump's trusted lawyer who hired him, among others, in an attempt to overturn the legitimacy of the elections in 2020. Sekulov also established a foundation which, just a few days before the anti-abortion ruling was announced by the Polish Constitutional Tribunal, sent an "amicus curiae" letter to the Tribunal with detailed instructions as to what the ruling should contain. In this way Trump was repaying the American religious fundamentalists for their electoral support. A similar example of such repayment was the moving of the US Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Who will save Europe?

Speaking about Germany's role in Europe, Angela Merkel said that "we're damned if we don't lead and damned if we do". Commentators point out that the German "reluctant European hegemon", too big for Europe and too small for the world, suffers from a "leadership avoidance complex". In light of Germany's role in two world wars, this is perfectly understandable. Post-war Germany tried to indicate, in various ways, that it was far from hegemonic.

The history of the European currency is a good illustration of Germany's position in the EU. Timothy Garton Ash wrote that the common currency was not a German design to dominate Europe, but a European project to prevent Germany from dominating Europe. Contrary to the negative opinion of the Bundesbank, and against the public attachment to the Deutsche Mark, the then German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, decided to support this initiative after discussions with the American administration. Although adopting the euro was against German economic interests, Kohl insisted on it because "Germany needs friends". Kohl argued, convincingly, that the monetary union also requires a fiscal union and, therefore, a political union, but François Mitterrand and Gulio Andreotti categorically refused as their goal was to have a means to steer the German currency, not to give Germany an instrument to control the budgets of France and Italy.

The adoption of the euro did not hurt the German economy. In fact, it made it unquestionably the strongest domestic economy in the EU. Almost half of the Europe's exports to China come from Germany, and it is the main importer of goods manufactured in the Visegrad Group countries, thus the largest employer in this region. Germans also shirk from the role of hegemon because they are aware that when other countries demand leadership from it, they are really demanding money from them. Be that as it may, the survival of the EU depends on a strong, co-operative and, above all, patient Germany.

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In the end, Europe will be united or it will not be at all. It cannot be ruled out that an unforeseen event may lead to the disintegration of the EU. But it cannot be ruled out also that an unforeseen event will cement it. Paradoxically, the COVID-19 pandemic, which is currently devastating the global economy, may prove such an event. Undoubtedly, the authoritarianism in China seems the most effective at fighting the disease, while the divided United States proved the worst at dealing with it. However, to conclude that authoritarianism is the most effective method of government would be a mistake: its Brazilian and Polish versions are rather discouraging.

Against this background, the EU idea of spending 750 billion euro in support of the European economy stands out positively as an expression of unprecedented solidarity of member states as well as a manifestation of the empathy and imagination of EU leaders. Irrespective of the efficacy of the European Green Deal, and the EU ad hoc efforts to overcome the pandemic, one thing cannot be denied: the EU, this figment of our imagination, is a space which constantly reinvents itself. Perhaps one day it will also come up with a solution on how to extend a helping hand to the displaced people who are travelling to its borders. NEE

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Turkey's original sin

A conversation with Candan Badem, a Turkish historian and participant of the Scholars at Risk (SAR) programme. Interviewer: Krzysztof Popek

KRZYSZTOF POPEK: You are the first participant of the Scholars at Risk (SAR) programme in Poland and your host is the Villa Decius Institute for Culture and the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. SAR protects scholars suffering from threats to their lives, liberty and well-being by arranging temporary research and teaching positions. Why were you forced to leave Turkey?

CANDAN BADEM: Since September 2016, I have not been allowed to teach or even participate in symposia at Turkish universities due to a state of emergency decree of the Recep Erdoğan regime. After the attempted coup d'état in July 2016, linked to Fethullah Gülen, an Islamist preacher who was Erdoğan's former ally, Erdoğan announced a state of emergency and purged the opposition (along with Gülen's supporters) from their jobs in state institutions, including universities. We still do not have key information on this attempted coup since the Erdoğan regime does not want to disclose the details and prevents a parliamentary investigation. I was among the first who suffered repression, I was expelled from the position of head of the History Department in the Munzur University in Tunceli (a small city in eastern Turkey). I faced absurd charges, including belonging to Fethullah Gülen's religious sect even though I have always identified as an atheist and I strongly criticize Islam. The rector of my university claimed that they had evidence against me, but he and others never showed proof of these claims. The commission appointed by the government has not decided on my case since 2017 despite the fact that I was acquitted by the court of the charges of being a member of the Gülen terror organisation. I am still not allowed to work in public or private universities in Turkey because private universities are also under pressure and do nothing to defend academic freedom. In most cases, the owners of these universities are dependent on the regime. In 2016 the authorities also cancelled my passport and banned me from going abroad. Thus, I could not take jobs and scholarships offered to me in Europe. Only in August 2020, the regime

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gave me my passport back and I travelled here to Kraków in November. Kraków is a beautiful historical city and that is why I am here.

The accusations against you belonging to the Gülen movement were false, so why did the Turkish government take all these actions against you?

Of course, the regime knew that I am not a Gülenist. It was just an excuse. They simply do not want any free voices in academia. You must be either a loyalist, Islamist, Islamofascist or a conformist at most. I was one of the more than 2,000 academics who signed the Academics for Peace Declaration in January 2016 in which we protested the violence on Kurdish civilians, calling on the government to stop these actions, and announced that we would not be silent on these crimes. I was also one of the four academics who filed a lawsuit against Erdoğan's insults to the Academics for Peace. At the time the Erdoğan regime started widespread repressions against the Kurds. Since 2016 the leader of the Peoples' Democratic Party, Selahattin Demirtaş, and many journalists, academics, lawyers, and students remain imprisoned as "terrorists".

How big is the problem of censorship in the humanities in Turkey? How does it affect academic life?

Everyone in Turkey practices self-censorship because any criticism may lead to imprisonment or dismissal. The Erdoğan regime has turned Turkey into a semi-sharia state where the rule of law is not applied and the constitution is de facto suspended. The problem with the humanities started when the Islamists came to power, they wanted to control all universities and professors. In the past, the Gülenists strongly influenced higher education – for example, they were stealing the questions of the state exams to enter universities and military schools so their followers could pass exams and infiltrate these institutions. Now the government calls them terrorists, but other political Islamist, jihadist sects are replacing the Gülenists in all institutions. Many former Gülenists are also still in parliament, hold places within the ruling party and almost everywhere. The universities lost the last part of their autonomy.

One of the most obvious signs of this is how rectors are appointed. Rectors are directly appointed by Erdoğan. In the past, faculty arranged elections for choosing new rectors. Now appointed rectors usually do not have the necessary qualifications. For example, there is still a protest at the Boğaziçi University in Istanbul, my alma mater; the authorities appointed Melih Bulu who has been accused of plagiarism. Protesting students were arrested at night in their homes and the interior minister accused them of being members of terrorist organisations. Academics of the university, despite a few exceptions, are against Bulu. They protest his appointment every day at campus, but he still holds office. Only a few professors support him, and they

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Photo courtesy of Candan Badem

have been appointed as vice rectors. The rectors copy the methods of Erdoğan and act like dictators; faculties and departments cannot make any decisions in their affairs. The quality of academic work is negatively affected. No Turkish university is now on the top international ranking university lists. The number of academics and universities is increasing but the quality of education has declined. As a result, academics are afraid of speaking on social and political matters. Even if they wanted to speak, mainstream media is controlled by the government, and these media outlets exist in a post-truth parallel reality. They prefer to listen to uninformed imams than professors. Like Erdoğan, they believe that interest rates are the cause of inflation. One of the most important people is the head imam of the Hagia Sophia (it has become a mosque again in 2020) who makes comments on everything, including economic matters. Yet economics professors and specialists remain silent and do not comment on the situation in Turkey – they are too afraid.

The situation at universities affects the public sphere. For example, Professor Erişah Arıcan was the thesis adviser of Berat Albayrak, the son-in-law of Erdoğan and former minister of finance. There are serious allegations that this professor wrote Albayrak's thesis (some emails leaked with information about it). He repaid Arıcan by making her chair or vice chair of key institutions, such as the Istanbul Stock Exchange, the Turkey Wealth Fund and Marmara University. Meanwhile, the EU Commission and EU Council continue to co-operate with the regime in Turkey, paying only lip service to human rights violations by stating they are "deeply concerned". Commercial interests are obviously more important for them. The European Court of Human Rights is also reluctant to pass verdicts regarding the victims of the regime in Turkey, stating that domestic legal remedies have not yet been exhausted when in fact the regime simply keeps us waiting endlessly.

You were the first historian from a Turkish university who did research in the National Archives of Armenia in Yerevan in 2009. Why was this so extraordinary?

Technically, it was not extraordinary – the Armenian archives do not require any special permission. It is likely that other historians did not know the existence of

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these archives, did not know Russian or Armenian, or thought they were not open to Turkish researchers. Nationalist historians in Turkey have claimed that the Armenian archives were not accessible to Turkish researchers, but they never tried applying to those archives. For them, it was convenient because they could claim that the Ottoman archives are open and everybody can research there, while the Armenian archives are allegedly closed. As far as I know, the only Armenian archives that are closed are the ones of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation in the United States and they do not belong to the Armenian state. Turkish nationalists accuse Armenians of hiding something. I think I did a good job showing that the Armenian archives were there and open to all. If you go to Yerevan, you can work there normally. In 2009, I went to Armenia for my research on the Kars area in the Caucasus and I did not work directly on the Armenian genocide. However, if you are a historian in Turkey, you will have to eventually confront this problem one day or another. It is unavoidable.

Why is it like that?

For Armenians, the Armenian genocide is a national tragedy, for Turkey it is the original sin of the modern nation. In the late Ottoman Empire, about ten per cent of inhabitants of Anatolia were Armenians, now they are practically gone, only a very small community has remained in Istanbul. During the First World War, the Ottoman government decided to relocate Armenians to the desert of Syria using security and the war as an excuse. However, the Ottoman government banished all Armenians regardless of their proximity to the war zone or their actual ties to any anti-government activity. In this mass relocation of around one and a half million Ottoman Armenians, hundreds of thousands were killed, captured, raped, or left to starve. Some children and young women were forcibly converted to Islam. This is a big issue that cannot be left to historians alone. Our nation needs to face it. I believe recognising the truth will liberate us.

The Turkish authorities have silenced or denied the Armenian Genocide for more than one century. Is dialogue between Turkish and Armenian historians possible?

Yes, it is possible. There are many Turkish historians open to dialogue but usually they live outside of Turkey. Some historians in Turkey also do not accept the state ideology, but they are now afraid to speak up. The Islamist regime in Turkey initially seemed to be open to dialogue. Ten years ago, they were presenting themselves as supporters of the so-called "moderate Islam", as democratic conservatives and economically liberals. But it was just a simulation and tactic to mislead. They now openly declare their Islamist agenda and the idea of a sharia state. In 2005, there was an important symposium organised by three universities in Istanbul, to be held at Boğaziçi University, a state university. For the

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first time, the Armenian question was the subject of a scholarly discussion, free from state propaganda. However, the symposium was suppressed by the government before it even began and the event was only held months later under different conditions in a private university.

Why do Turkish authorities deny the Armenian genocide? You called it the original sin of the Turkish Republic, but it was so long ago. There were several generations after these events…

It is because they have dug a defence trench for themselves so deep that they cannot get out. The Armenian genocide did not become an international issue after the First World War. Unlike the Holocaust, there was no international tribunal that would bring justice to the Armenian people and punish its perpetrators. During the occupation of Istanbul by the French and English in 1919, the Ottoman Military Tribunal sentenced many perpetrators, but its decisions were not implemented because of the resistance of the bureaucracy, the ensuing national struggle, and the war against Greece and Armenia. When the Turkish Republic was founded in 1923, the issue was already forgotten. Fortunately, the founder of the Turkish Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, was not involved in the genocide. Until the 1970s there was not much pressure on Turkey. Afterwards, Armenian terrorists started to assassinate Turkish diplomats and the Armenian genocide became an international issue. At that time new publications appeared, and western researchers began to be interested in the subject. The Turkish foreign ministry began to formulate the official viewpoint, denying the genocide. The authorities decided to modernise the Ottoman archives and open them to researchers – however, these archives were purged and many documents about the fate of Armenians during the First World War have been lost or unclassified. However, there is still a huge body of documentation that indirectly demonstrates that the state directed massacres against Armenians. My position is that it was genocide and not just a relocation of the population necessitated by war. Yet the Turkish government thinks that if it accepts that historical fact, the Armenians will demand territory and reparations.

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Lennart Meri

Statesman and prophet

GRZEGORZ KOZŁOWSKI

Estonia is today a secure and prosperous European country also thanks to the legacy of Lennart Meri who passed away 15 years ago. As president, Meri successfully punched above Estonia's weight and put his beloved state on the fast track of reform after regaining independence. His testament is being fulfilled today as his country is a successful member of NATO, the EU and the United Nations.

This year marks the 15th anniversary of Lennart Meri's death, the first President of the again independent Estonia – a great statesman, visionary and patriot, who successfully led Estonia through the first decade of regained independence at the end of the 20th century. To this day he is remembered as a leading European politician who contributed not only to the independence and territorial sovereignty of Estonia, but also to the security of the other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland. According to a 2018 survey, Meri was listed as "best-loved Head of State" by almost two-thirds of Estonians among all demographic groups.

Meri was born on March 29th 1929 in Tallinn in the family of Estonian diplomat and Shakespeare translator, Georg Meri. With his family, Lennart Meri left Estonia at an early age and studied in nine different schools and in four different languages. The Second World War brought with it a traumatic period, the end of independence of Estonia and for Meri and his family, imprisonment in a Siberian camp. They came back to the Soviet Republic, where young Meri had graduated *cum laude* from the Faculty of History and Languages of Tartu University in 1953 and

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completed history studies at Tartu University in 1953. He soon faced a life-transforming experience while he was travelling to the deserts and mountains of Central Asia, about which he later wrote several books, including *Hot Waterfalls* (orig. *Tulemägede maale*), which was also published in Poland in 1971 and can be found (in Polish) on the shelves of the VIP lounge at the Lennart Meri airport in Tallinn.

From culture to politics

Meri's literary works, films and translations meaningfully contributed to the preservation of Estonian national identity and by the time he was permitted by the Soviet authorities to travel beyond the iron curtain in the 1980s, Meri was already known as a champion of Estonian culture and freedom. He soon shifted his focus from literary to political activities and was the first Estonian to disseminate information abroad about the protest against the Soviet plan to mine phosphate in Estonia which would have caused enormous environmental damage. The protests grew and were subsumed "into the winds of freedom that began to stir through Eastern Europe in the late 80s and which found their Baltic expression in the singing revolutions in Tallinn".

Meri's literary works, films and translations meaningfully contributed to the preservation of the Estonian national identity.

In April 1990 Lennart Meri began his political career by taking a position as minister of foreign affairs of Estonia at a time when the state had not yet been restored. While the term "Estonian Socialistic Soviet Republic" was only abandoned in May 1990 and the term "Republic of Estonia" was reinstituted as the official name of the state, a month earlier Estonian authorities prepared a memorandum to approach the governments of all European countries, the United States and Canada with an appeal that the issue of the restoration of independence of the Republic of Estonia be added to the agenda of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1990 as a subject of international law. This was a document prepared formally by the Estonian authorities before regaining independence in 1991 which directed the foreign ministry to re-establish its activities as coordinator of the state's foreign policy.

During two short years as foreign minister, Meri preserved and defended the non-recognition policy as to achieve full restoration of Estonia through state restitution. As Juri Luik wrote "Lennart mastered the difficult art for a politician: converging ideals and real life in a way that none suffers. At that, the greatest sensitivity was needed in the USA, the bastion for the non-recognition policy. The joining of the two branches of independence culminated with Ernst Jaakson, born in 1905, as

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Estonia's first ambassador in the USA and at UN." Jaakson embodied the continuity of the Estonian state being an active diplomat before 1940 (as a member of Estonian Consulate General), between 1940 and 1991 (as a consul in charge of the legation) and after 1991.

Enormous challenges

Meri's success was visible not only in the political sphere. He is remembered to this day as the politician who laid the foundation of the ministry of foreign affairs in the direct sense of the expression – he built up a network of Estonian information offices in several European capitals which became the first network of Estonian embassies and consulates. In addition, which is even more important, he built the foreign service in Estonia composed of young, patriotic, extraordinary talented and workaholic young professionals who had everything but diplomatic experience. This brave decision was soon to be proved effective. Then Juri Luik, Kalev Stoicescu and others, just in their 20s, were instrumental in succeeding the most difficult tasks of the Estonian foreign and security policy, including paving the way towards the pro-transatlantic policy and stabilising the relationship with the Soviet Union.

Meri was elected president of Estonia and sworn into the office on October 6th 1992.

After a brief period as ambassador to Finland (April-October 1992), Meri was elected president of Estonia and sworn into the office on October 6th 1992. He was re-elected on September 20th 1996 for a second two year term. While the position of Meri as president was limited in the Estonian constitutional system he effectively faced enormous challenges in foreign and domestic politics.

Meri vigorously continued what he had started as foreign minister. Estonia was actively engaging in international relations anchoring its sovereignty in international organisations and treaties focusing on a pro-western course. Meri was a decisive personality in paving Estonia towards the transatlantic way. At the beginning of the 1990s he was one of the very few who predicted Estonia's membership in the transatlantic family. It was difficult to imagine since there was a strong inclination among some politicians to choose a safer, neutral, Finnish-like policy. But Meri knew what kind of future to seek for Estonia.

Already on November 25th 1992, he began to convince NATO members and partners that the North Atlantic Alliance is indispensable in the post-Cold War era. Meri emphasised: "If you don't know what to do now with NATO, read Sakharov. If it is being suggested to you, that with the disintegration of the Warsaw pact,

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Photo: Jaan Künnap (CC) commons.wikimedia.org

Choosing the transatlantic path, Lennart Meri knew that the future of Estonia must be associated with close allies from its region.

NATO must inevitably disintegrate, read him. Academician Sakharov and the Baltic states are also ready to answer those questions, which you are as yet unable to formulate". Many years had to come to materialise this dream. It was possible only after Meri's second term, when in November 2002 at the NATO Summit in Prague, Estonia, along with Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, was invited to begin accession talks to join NATO.

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Unique sense of humour

One of the biggest tasks of the newly reinstituted Republic of Estonia was the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Estonian soil. The Estonian Socialist Soviet Republic was one of the most militarised areas in the Soviet Union with two per cent of its territory being administered by military authorities. The number of Soviet troops stationed in Estonia ranged from 100,000–135,000. The process of negotiations between the two sides already started in October 1991, but took several years to define all the parameters since Russia was trying to introduce many complicated terms, including a ten-year withdrawal period. President Meri's active engagement on the international arena was one of the decisive elements in getting Estonia strong diplomatic support from western states as well as international organisations. The negotiations ended on July 26th 1994 when President Meri and Russian President Boris Yeltsin signed the agreement on the withdrawal of Russian troops from Estonia and on the conditions of their temporary presence on its territory. The deadline for the withdrawal of Russian troops was set as August 31st 1994.

> Lennart Meri knew that the future of Estonia must be associated with close allies from its region.

Choosing the transatlantic path, Lennart Meri knew that the future of Estonia must be associated with close allies from its region. He emphasised the value and meaning of the Polish-Estonian relationship based on a similar threat perception as well as historical and geopolitical determinants. Already in 1998 Meri appealed that "besides successfully developed political ties … we must seriously think how to overcome the really un-European obstacles in our relations. And I am not talking about the infrastructure of road and rail transport … the non-existent common energy circle round the Baltic Sea". After 23 years, these arguments are still valid.

While Meri was effective in leading Estonia through the challenging years of the newly restored state, he is mostly remembered as a man of meaty humour. As British journalist Edward Lucas mentioned, a witty remark with a deeper meaning was a characteristic "Lennartism". These witty remarks, punch lines or famous sayings with a deeper meaning also contributed to the heritage of Estonia's foreign and security policy. Meri was ready to offer them on different occasions and areas, including history ("the notion that the time of Stalin's and Hitler's is over is dangerous"), and contemporary challenges ("the situation is sh*t. That's our fertilizer for the future"). He did not keep it only for the purpose of his public life. When Meri found out about the death of Stalin on March 5th 1953, he proposed to his wife on that day saying "let us remember this happy day forever".

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Legacy

Today, Estonia is a secure and prosperous European country in part due to the legacy of President Lennart Meri, who successfully put his beloved state on the fast track of reform, knowing that independence should not be taken for granted. Meri knew of the importance of international law and organisations, especially vital for such a small state like Estonia. His testament is being fulfilled these days as Estonia is now a successful member of NATO, the EU and the United Nations.

First, Tallinn effectively presents its interests on the international arena, understanding the importance of membership in the key international organisations, including the UN, NATO and the EU. Already in October 1995, Meri emphasised in a speech before the UN General Assembly that "small states are, by definition, more easily wounded, which means that in a security vacuum, small states are more sensitive to barometric changes than large ones. Besides common ideals, we also have common concerns". To strengthen the voice of small states, Meri proposed the need to create a rotating seat for such countries in the UN Security Council and declared the preparation of the "Tallinn Declaration of Small States". While Estonia's efforts in this area were unsuccessful, Meri's legacy effectively influenced Estonia's decision to run for a seat on the UN Security Council in 2020–2021. The current president, Kersti Kalulaid, stressed in 2018 that "small countries do not have time for small goals".

> The success of Estonia can be associated with its ability to bring a reality check to discussions on European security.

Second, Meri used to say that "international law is the nuclear weapon of small states". The reconstruction of the free Estonian state in 1991 without bloodshed was possible thanks to the legal instruments which allowed some western countries not to recognise the Soviet annexation of the Baltic states. Estonia very well understands that it can effectively protect its sovereignty mostly within the international regime, where the rights and obligations of all states are equally protected. It is no coincidence that Estonia raises issues of international law as one of the priorities of its membership of the UN Security Council.

Third, the success of Estonia can also be associated with its ability to bring a reality check to discussions on European foreign and security policy. Meri used to say that "compared to Russia, Estonia is like an Inuit kayak. A super tanker takes 16 nautical miles to turn around, but Inuit can do a 180 degree turn on a dime". While Estonia, being a stable and efficient member of NATO and the EU, is able to run a relatively flexible policy, it also knew that the strategic objectives of such a neighbour like Russia cannot easily be changed, which we should not forget about especially during times of political thaw.

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As Estonian politician and ambassador Juri Luik wrote in 2016, ten years after the passing of Meri: "Of Estonia's statehood, many aspects though far from all lean on ideas of Mr Meri. Again and again, in the heat of the political battles, people have attempted to step into his shoes but, alas, they do not fit. Perhaps we'd better stop trying and get reconciled to President Meri having been unique and us not ever having another just like him". Five years later, we can only repeat what Luik wrote. NEE

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Polish ambassador to the Republic of Estonia.

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The mutilated world

JACEK HAJDUK

In Paris Adam Zagajewski, one of Poland's most distinguished contemporary poets, penned many of his most important works, including the poem *To go to Lvov*. This poem is often regarded as his most distinguished piece of work – a story of death and destruction, but also about life.

On September 11th 2001, the day of the terrorist attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon building in Washington, DC, the editors of the *New Yorker* gathered in the evening to decide how their magazine should adequately react to the tragic events of that day. The editor-in-chief, David Remnick, suggested the best way to commemorate the victims in the next issue – the now famous for its pitch black cover – would be through the publication of a poem. He was convinced that only poetry had the power of expression in the aftermath of such a tragedy. The editors thus started their search for the right poem to express the gravity and sorrow of the event, and at first they could not find anything that was adequate.

Coincidentally, however, a few months prior to the September events, editor Alice Quinn, who was in charge of the magazine's poetry section, had received the newest collection of poems by the Polish poet, Adam Zagajewski. It was sent to her by Zagajewski's American publisher. In this collection, Quinn found a poem titled *Try to praise the mutilated world*. Although written a few years earlier, the poem has become a symbol of the WTC attack, or – more precisely – how to react towards such a tragedy. It soon became a popular literary piece in the United States and throughout the world. It is still recognised as a prime example of "healing" poetry.

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From Lviv to Kraków

Zagajewski, born in Lviv, when asked about his early life said: "I was born on June 21st 1945, on the longest day of the year. In fact this is the most beautiful day of the year. A moment of triumph, short but nonetheless, of light over darkness." He then added that, at the time of his birth, many Lviv residents had no choice but to pack up their belongings and – with tears in their eyes – leave their beloved city for good. It was the end of the Second World War and, the changes to the political map of Europe, which forced many to depart and never return again. This contradiction of triumph and ecstasy, on the one hand, and despair and shadow, on the other, defined the poet's life and work.

Zagajewski was born in the house of his grandfather. The family had, for generations, lived in Lviv's Lychakiv district. His father, an engineer, worked at the Lviv Polytechnic Institute, while his mother, a lawyer by profession, did not work for long. The decision to leave their beloved Lviv behind took a huge toll on the whole family, a fate many other families shared.

The Zagajewski family moved to Gliwice (an industrial town in Silesia, Poland) where Adam's father got a job at the Silesian Polytechnic University. Their week-long journey in a cargo train wagon, which took them to their destination, was quite refined: each wagon carried two families and their belongings. During the journey, however, Adam (a few months old at the time) got very sick and nearly died.

Zagajewski lived in Gliwice until he finished secondary school. By then he would rarely leave the city. Overall, the family led a rather modest life, although were respected by the local community. It was in Gliwice where politics first entered Adam's life. More specifically, it was the coming to power of the communist leader Władysław Gomułka, which took place after the October protests of 1956 during the political thaw that followed Joseph Stalin's death in 1953. All these events had quite an impact on society, regardless of their area of residence or age. Zagajewski, although affected by them (just like others), never turned into a "political animal". His memories of this politically stormy period were more of a still calm and carefree life, away from big politics.

"I had a good family," Zagajewski said after many years explaining that he did not need to leave his parents. And yet he knew he had to move. He felt that in order to achieve something, he had to leave. Pursuing his dream, he moved to Kraków – a city that indeed is magical and legendary. He was deeply attracted to scholars, men of letters and, most importantly, the poets. Kraków was the city he eventually settled in. This historic capital of Poland has long been a city of literature and a place where theatrical life is vibrant and inspiring. Kraków, for Zagajewski, was a city where, as he had imagined in his teenage years, "the greatest masters live".

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To find them he explored the old streets, peeking into people's windows in the hope that he would spot some genius living there: a writer or a composer. Although he was interested in literature and art history, he pursued psychology at the university. But that did not matter. What mattered was that he lived in the city of his dreams, where he could feel the breath of great artists such as the poet Wisława Szymborska or the playwright Tadeusz Kantor. As a university student Zagajewski started writing poetry, but never published them. He was shy and for a while stayed anonymous.

In Kraków, Zagajewski was not alone. He had family there but they did not see each other often. He was already becoming quite critical of the Catholic clergy while his uncle was friends with Karol Wojtyła, the future Pope John Paul II, who at that time lived and worked in Kraków. Instead, the young poet spent most of his time enjoying Kraków's cultural life – making visits to museums, attending the philharmonic and jazz concerts – while his university studies were less of interest.

Nobody cared if I stayed

In March 1968 Poland was shaken by a wave of political manifestations. They were caused by an aggressive anti-semitic policy of the communist authorities which aimed to eliminate Polish Jews from public life. Zagajewski, who by then already had a few of his literary works published, took part in the manifestations. Years afterwards Zagajewski admitted that while he experienced some pain from the tear gas, he was not one of the most active participants. As a result, he did not experience any oppression at the hands of the secret police. The repressions passed, but the sense of bitterness stayed. Poland was haunted by antisemitism which, for Zagajewski, was a huge shame. With great sorrow in his heart he witnessed the forced migration of Jewish Poles.

Poland was haunted by antisemitism which, for Zagajewski, was a huge shame.

A new chapter in Zagajewski's life started in early 1975 when he became one of the signatories of the open letter of 59, also known as the Memorandum of 59. Led by the oppositionist Jacek Kuroń, this public appeal, written by a group of prominent intellectuals, to the communist authorities was an expression of their plight to ensure respect for human rights in Poland. In the spirit of the Helsinki Accords, the signatories were calling for freedom of conscience and religious practice, labour freedom, freedom of speech and academic freedom. "When there is no freedom," they wrote, "there is no peace or security."

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In that period Zagajewski discovered Warsaw's vibrant intellectual life. Specifically, he was in awe of Barbara Toruńczyk and Adam Michnik, two legendary opposition activists. He was fascinated by their courage and beautiful minds. Getting to know them helped Zagajewski fall in love with Warsaw, a city which later became the centre for political change in Poland. As the capital, Warsaw was clearly the place where more things were happening and everything had a faster pace there. Due to his close ties with the opposition, Zagajewski's name was soon on the list of authors banned by the communist authorities. This meant he could only publish his works underground. There his main publisher became *Zeszyty Literackie* – a literary journal edited by Toruńczyk. Established in Paris, this magazine (published in Warsaw) was, in a way, an offspring of the Paris-based *Kultura*. The latter was the famous émigré journal edited by Jerzy Giedroyc. Zagajewski wrote for *Zeszyty Literackie* until 2018, when the journal ceased its operations in Warsaw.

In December 1981 the communist authorities, faced with increased social unrest and pressure from the Kremlin, introduced martial law in Poland. As a result of this decision as well as the repressions that followed, many activists and writers left Poland. Zagajewski stayed though. After many years he bluntly said: "In fact nobody cared if I left or stayed". He expressed his pain in poetry and dreamt of migration. In communist Poland getting a passport was not an easy task. It took Zagajewski almost a year before he received his travel documents and he set off for Paris to reunite with his fiancée, Maja Wodecka.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, Paris was home to many Polish émigrés. For Zagajewski it was a city of "bizarre happiness". He was taken in by his love for Wodecka and the city's vibrant life. After a short break, Zagajewski started to write again. In Paris he penned many of his most important works, including the poem *To go to Lvov*. This poem is often regarded as his most distinguished piece of work – a story of death and destruction, but also about life.

While Zagajewski felt he found his new home in France, his poetry did not find many recipients there.

Paradoxically, while Zagajewski felt he found his new home in France, his poetry did not find many recipients there. Two collections of poems he released in Paris did not appeal to the French audience who were used to a very different style of poetry – one that had high aesthetic aims and was created in a different context. Despite that, Zagajewski never stopped admiring Paris. He loved the city and continued to explore it. He earned a living by translating texts from French to Polish. A change – a miracle in a way – happened when the prestigious American publisher, Ferrar, Straus and Giroux, offered to publish his poems in English. The publication received wide acclaim, and a new chapter started in his life.

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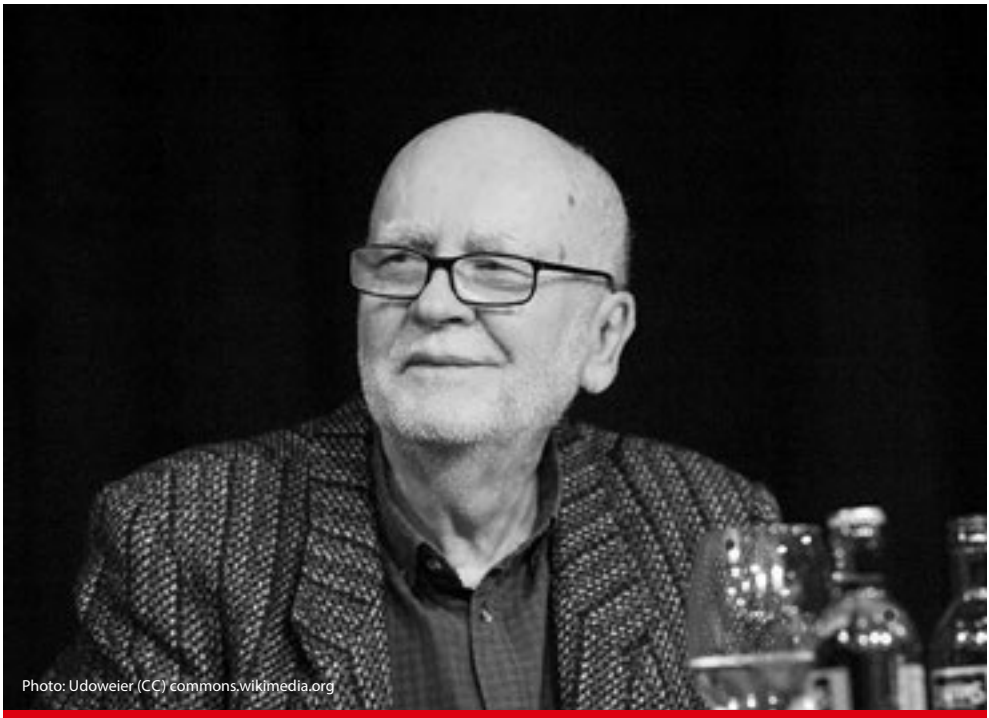

Adam Zagajewski was considered one of the Polish candidates for the Nobel Prize in Literature. Unfortunately it will never be awarded to him. He passed away on March 21st 2021.

Life on two continents

Zagajewski's first success with Ferrar, Straus and Giroux was soon followed by another financially attractive proposal. As a respected and widely recognised poet, he was offered to teach creative writing at the University of Houston. With a limited command of English, Zagajewski did not feel comfortable taking this assignment. Yet as he got more integrated into the local academic community, his English got much better and he became attached to Houston, a city he found both beautiful and ugly. He spent 18 years in Texas. In 2002, together with his wife, he relocated to Kraków. From then on, he divided his time between both homes.

Houston was not the only American city in Zagajewski's life. For a few years, starting in 2007, he gave lectures at the University of Chicago, where he taught literature. At that moment his life was organised on two continents and it brought him professional successes. The culminating point came with the publication of his poem *Try to praise the mutilated world* in the historical edition of *The New Yorker*.

Even though Adam and Maja returned to Kraków in 2002, their process of returning lasted longer. Their presence in this magical city, the one Zagajewski dreamt

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about so much in his youth, became quite visible again. Zagajewski integrated himself anew with the city and became one of its icons. He was one of its most beautiful minds. In that esteemed group there were also artists such as Czesław Miłosz, Wisława Szybmorska, Julian Kornhauser and Ryszard Krynicki – his literary fellows. Many places in the city, be it the Old Town or the Jewish district, are now marked by his presence, and as such they are remembered by Cracovians. Just like when Zagajewski was a student at Jagiellonian University and making modest steps towards a literary life – searching the streets to encounter the great Wisława Szymborska or Tadeusz Kantor – young writers and artists until very recently were coming to Kraków in their quest to meet this great poet of our time.

RIP

Adam Zagajewski was considered one of the Polish candidates for the Nobel Prize in Literature. Unfortunately it will never be awarded to him. He passed away on March 21st 2021, a day which is both recognised as the first day of spring and International Poetry Day.

Try to praise the mutilated world
Adam Zagajewski
[…]
Remember the moments when we were together
in a white room and the curtain fluttered.
Return in thought to the concert where music flared.
You gathered acorns in the park in autumn
and leaves eddied over the earth's scars.
Praise the mutilated world
and the gray feather a thrush lost,
and the gentle light that strays and vanishes
and returns.

Translated, from the Polish, by Clare Cavanagh.
Published first in the print edition of the
New Yorker, September 24th 2001.

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

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The Holocaust in Romania turns 80, with antisemitism back in political vogue

DAVID M. SHOUP

Eighty years after the dawn of the Romanian Holocaust, a new force on the far right has emerged that closely mirrors the fascist organisation that wrought havoc on Bucharest's Jewish community in 1941. This political party, the AUR, denies any connection to the past, but with national education on Romania's role in the Holocaust historically limited, connecting the dots is not always a simple feat.

On 21 January this year, Jewish Romanian actress Maia Morgenstern performed a monologue online in which she attempted to portray the fear and anxiety felt by the Jewish community in Romania 80 years ago. The occasion marked a dark chapter in the country's history: the anniversary of Romania's first pogrom during the Second World War, constituting three days of sudden and brutal violence, as it ushered in its participation in the extermination of Europe's Jews. In her performances, broadcast over one week, Morgenstern and the State Jewish Theatre shed light on the morbid events that took place during that bleak period in Romania, a country that has historically struggled to come to terms with its role in the Holocaust and the murder of around 400,000 Romanian Jews. The commemorations,

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however, came just weeks after Romania's parliamentary elections, which saw the ultra-nationalist Alliance for the Unity of Romanians (AUR) party take nearly ten per cent of the overall vote, winning 47 seats in parliament. It was a meteoric rise that stunned many observers, and alarmed several more.

"What worries me is the polarisation of speech and the lack of shame that we are starting to see in public declarations," says Radu Magdin, a Bucharest-based political analyst, who added that the pandemic crisis "is golden for parties who are in opposition and who do not necessarily have a very complex offer."

Troubling signs

AUR's leaders, George Simion and Claudiu Tarziu, have expressed admiration for the belligerents behind the Romanian Holocaust. Calls by the AUR in recent months to protest against pandemic restrictions have already led to some concerning incidents. A recent march in the western city of Timisoara, home of the 1989 revolution, saw protesters gather outside the home of the city's ethnic German Mayor, Dominic Fritz, where they chanted slogans calling for him to leave the country. After the incident, Fritz responded that demonstrators are "being pushed from behind by some extremists who publicly declare that they want freedom for all, but at the same time, promote a violent, xenophobic and anti-European discourse," and later said similar protests across the country had "been hijacked towards nationalism, xenophobia, and antisemitism".

Calls by the AUR in recent months to protest against pandemic restrictions have already led to some concerning incidents.

Romanian President Klaus Iohannis also expressed concerns over antisemitism. There have been more troubling signs that AUR, while not overtly espousing racist or xenophobic messages, does provide an ethnic nationalist platform to its followers. Only a few months after Morgenstern's commemorative Holocaust performances, and the AUR's electoral success, the Jewish actress received antisemitic death threats via email – signed on behalf of the AUR. Simion publicly denounced the letter. The culprit was later tracked down by the authorities and was reportedly suffering with mental health issues. He was released within 24 hours and has not been charged.

Maximillian Marco Katz, founding director of the Centre for Monitoring and Combatting Antisemitism in Romania, followed the incident closely. "I wrote a letter to the General Prosecutor of Romania asking to know what is happening with these threats," Katz said. "I did not yet get any answer." Addressing parlia-

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ment on March 31st after the Morgenstern incident, Jewish Deputy Silviu Vexler, who represents the single-seat Federation of Jewish Communities of Romania in parliament, said: "Sometimes I have the feeling that I came back to the 1930s." He also noted that the Iron Guard's headquarters, adorned with antisemitic and Nazi symbolism, stands a mere five minutes from parliament. Nevertheless, he remains resolute. "We won't give in. We will not be intimidated, we will not be threatened by anyone and we will not live our lives as citizens of Romania in fear," Vexler said.

The terror Bucharest's Jews faced in 1941 is well preserved in collective memory, yet dark reminders remain on public display.

The terror Bucharest's Jews faced in 1941 is well preserved in Jewish collective memory, but dark – and even illegal – reminders remain on public display. Less than 500 metres away from a former Jewish neighbourhood targeted in the pogrom is the Mircea Vulcanescu school – named after a war criminal convicted for his role in the Holocaust. Local media have identified two dozen such locations across the country named after war criminals with connections to the Iron Guard and former Marshal Ion Antonescu, who ruled the country alongside the legionnaires before eliminating the group during its attempted seizure of power and simultaneous Bucharest pogrom in 1941.

One of the pogrom's victims was Katz's uncle, Isidor Katz. "They threw him in a truck together with 90 other Jews. They took them to Jilava, to Fort 13. They kept them there one night, all naked. They continued to torture them. The next day they took them out to the forest and shot them in the head – this is the way my uncle died," Katz said.

Katz's organisation has criticised official Holocaust commemorations by the Romanian government that attempt to honour both perpetrators and victims. "They are recognised as friends of the Jewish community and on the other hand they commemorate those that killed the Jews," Katz said. "So I think the truth is that, in their minds, they cannot make the difference and do not understand what that Holocaust was about."

Resisting the truth

These concerns were exemplified in a debate in March when an AUR deputy and a deputy state secretary criticised recent legal provisions to exclude prisoners of the communist regime and their families from receiving government benefits if they were convicted of crimes against humanity. Such former prisoners of the post-war communist regime include Vulcanescu, after whom the Bucharest

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high school is named, despite an explicit 2002 law banning the naming of schools, streets, or other monuments after war criminals.

"Romanians did not vote to praise legionnaires and the high officials of the Antonescu regime who participated in the extermination of the Jewish community in Romania," said Deputy Alexandru Muraru of the National Liberal Party. "No, Romanians did not vote to turn the country back decades." Leader of the opposition Social Democratic Party, Marcel Ciolacu, added that the debate and recent incidents demonstrate that "the scourge of antisemitism has never been completely defeated."

Less than two years after the AUR's inception, the party now holds roughly one in ten seats in parliament.

After suggesting that many early communist-era officials were of Jewish origin, Octav Bjoza, the deputy state secretary, was fired by Prime Minister Florin Citu. Bjoza continues to claim his statement was misinterpreted. However, he further suggested, on March 16th, that he and the organisation he represents, the Association of Former Political Prisoners, may take issue with "the size" of the Holocaust.

For Katz, this is nothing new. "Romania, today, has institutions that, in my opinion, are not focused on really combatting antisemitism and Holocaust denial but controlling whatever is said about it," he said. "There is a resistance to the idea that in Romania there was a Holocaust – I'm talking about a majority of people resisting the idea." Deputies from three out of Romania's four largest parties have denounced the latest spate of antisemitic incidents, with many placing blame squarely on the AUR. Deputy Prime Minister Dan Barna expressed his concerns over antisemitism being treated for too long as a secondary issue that does not impact Romanian society, stating "that's how monsters are born," before turning his ire to the AUR, whose Deputy, Sorin Lavric, praised far-right politician Mircea Vulcănescu as a martyr during communist rule.

Less than two years after the AUR's inception, the party now holds roughly one in ten seats in parliament. The party message asserts that Romania is a Christian nation under threat from globalist forces that have anti-family and anti-church sentiments. Its co-founder, Tarziu, said after the election that the AUR is the only Romanian party to support then-President Donald Trump. As the rhetoric of Trump and his supporters descended into violence and five deaths on January 6th in Washington, DC, Timisoara Mayor Fritz warns that "verbal violence to physical violence is a short distance". The analyst Magdin suggests that such a descent could also prove detrimental to the AUR's political trajectory. "Other manifestations, like physical violence, is what gets me worried – there will be a price that the AUR will pay in the future if they are not careful," he said.

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During scores of AUR-supported anti-restriction protests, many demonstrators have brandished Orthodox icons and national flags as part of their push to return to regular church services – the type of simplistic policy agendas that Magdin identifies as a characteristic of recent populist movements worldwide. He predicts that the AUR could reach close to 20 per cent in the polls by the end of the year.

By 1937, the Iron Guard, led by the charismatic Corneliu Codreanu, held onto roughly 20 per cent of seats in parliament and used its relative popularity as a mandate for using death squads against their critics. It was not long before Jews became their targets. Underscoring the connection between the movement and Orthodoxy, Codreanu and several of his co-legionnaires, assassinated by King Carol II's secret police in 1938, were later sainted by senior leaders of the Romanian Orthodox Church. As the fantasy of a global Zionist conspiracy guided the ideology of the Iron Guard legionnaires, another new globalist ploy dominates the AUR party platform and the minds of its voters. Today, the threat they perceive is the lack of access to local churches and a ruse surrounding mask mandates and the origins of COVID-19.

Thing of the past?

But not everyone shares concerns about AUR. Cezar Victor Nastase, a 33-year-old architect, believes that the far-right party represents the least corrupt option for conservative Christian voters, and that any overlaps with the legionnaires are not reflective of the party's aims. "I think there might be voters that have those tendencies or sympathies," Nastase said. "But I think that legionnaires and the Iron Guard are a thing of the past. The reality is now different and the AUR is more of a conservative national party and does not share the Iron Guard's beliefs." Nevertheless, Nastase says that one of the issues concerning him, as a voter, is the perceived threats to Christianity in Romania. On April 25th, Muraru, who was recently appointed Romania's Special Envoy for Fighting Antisemitism, Xenophobia and Promoting the Memory of the Holocaust, publicly demanded Nastase's arrest for hate speech after the AUR supporter reportedly published a Facebook post listing 35 prominent intellectuals and politicians and calling for their execution.

Christianity identified as being under threat from multicultural and globalist forces is an idea featured prominently in Codreanu's manifesto, a *Mein Kampf* for Romanian fascism that warns of Jewish tradition and Bolshevism squeezing out Romania's Christian values. Codreanu chillingly noted in the manifesto that one of Romania's three primary pillars for the future must be "resolving the Jewish problem". Romania's Jewish population today is fewer than 2,000 – most are now

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elderly – compared to roughly 790,000 in 1936, the year Codreanu's manifesto was published.

"Romania is not an antisemitic country, but there is a lot of antisemitism here and there is a lot of it underground, and this is coming out especially when we speak about the Holocaust," Katz said. Disagreement between the ministry of education and several Jewish advocacy groups, including Katz's antisemitism watchdog, over the removal of a proposed textbook's references to Antonescu and Romania in the Holocaust resulted in a high school course on the Holocaust being made optional, rather than obligatory. According to the US State Department's 2021 report on Romania, less than two per cent of high school students took the course in the 2019–2020 school year.

Last year Katz, who is an advocate for Holocaust education, returned to the site of his uncle's murder. Like the recent Morgenstern death threats, it served as a reminder of the horrors experienced by his community, which he says can take an increasingly dark turn in turbulent times. "Many Jews, including me, believe that whatever happened could happen again," he said.

David M. Shoup is a freelance journalist based in Bucharest.

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Tackling prejudice

Stories from the Solidarity Academy

The Solidarity Academy is an international project initiated by the European Solidarity Centre in Gdańsk, aimed at inspiring and supporting the development of young intellectual elite across Europe. The project is funded by the International Visegrad Fund with the participation of institutions from Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Balkans and Ukraine. With the 2020 edition cancelled because of COVID-19, this year's Solidarity Academy allowed for the return of both the previous participants and the theme in a hybrid format online, away from Gdańsk. The following articles written by the participants all discuss specific contexts related to tackling prejudice.

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Katarzyna Rodacka	**Job market for people with disabilities in Poland**
Maja Móczár	**The care crisis. An interview with Kinga Milánkovics**

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How Ukrainian female drug users are fighting against stigma and abuse

VLADYSLAV KUDRYK

The coronavirus pandemic has complicated the lives not only of large communities, but also of those who are mostly ignored. This is particularly true in the case of female drug addicts. Violence against this group, as well as various new problems regarding access to medicine, have only increased in recent times. Despite this, it is clear that the usual problems of stigmatisation, discrimination and rights violations have not disappeared in Ukraine.

During the pandemic, the number of reports made by women drug users related to incidents of violence increased by 30 per cent. Overall, lawyers from the Ukrainian Network of Women who Use Drugs (UNWUD) have recorded about a thousand cases. In general, this corresponds with an increase in reports of violence against women. However, these more general reports are often made for slightly different reasons. Halyna Korniyenko, a programme manager with the UNWUD, explains the situation often faced by female drug users: "Very often men hire their wives out for sex work, so they can get money for drugs. During the quarantine, sex work stopped. There is no money. And who is to blame!?"

Due to transport restrictions during the lockdown, drug addicts who receive treatment have to choose between spending time on the road to hospitals, where they can get help (some patients have to travel dozens of kilometres), or care for

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their children. They often choose the second option and end up sacrificing their own health. The pandemic has exacerbated problems that have existed in the past, including stigmatisation, discrimination and rights violations.

Discriminatory legislation

Tetiana Lebed had been using street drugs in the past. Now she is the director of the UNWUD, leading the group's efforts to defend rights of female drug users. "There are a lot of problems regarding access to medicine and the realisation of reproductive rights," she says. "There are still no protocols on pregnancy management. Even in Kyiv, I was abused in a specialist maternity hospital for drug addicts. They said 'Oh, what drug damage the child has!', although everything was fine with the child in all respects, and I was on drug replacement therapy, on minimal doses. Imagine what happens to girls who do not know their rights."

Women who take part in substitution maintenance therapy (SMT) will normally receive safe medications. On the other hand, they become even more vulnerable to law enforcement and social services. Human rights activists have recorded cases of mothers being deprived of their children due to discriminatory legislation. Lebed believes that the government should amend an especially controversial article of the country's Family Code. The article states that parents may be deprived of parental rights if they are "chronic alcoholics or drug addicts". Despite this, medical legislation does not have such terms, referring only to "persons with mental and behavioral disorders due to opioid use". "That is to say, there is no diagnosis, but there is an article", explains the director of UNWUD.

"After one line of the article, they can take the child away from the mother, because she is addicted. It doesn't even matter what the living conditions are. Some women can't stand it and just die. These are not exaggerations or fantasies. We conducted a survey, and 41 per cent of women said they had problems with the police, their rights were violated. And they would rather not call the police, even when being killed, because it would get even worse. We had such a case in Zaporizhia. The woman was beaten by a partner, and after the police were called, one child was taken away. She was pregnant at the time, and when she gave birth, the second child was taken away as well", Lebed says.

According to her, the attitude of the police towards drug users has not changed since the 1990s, when she was a user herself. Instead of telling them how to get help or get substitution therapy, law enforcement officers either take bribes or try to throw the woman in jail. Among the UNWUD members, most of the women have served prison terms for possessing syringes and substances used for the prepara-

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tion of drugs. According to the organisation's data, three out of four women drug users have faced rights violations, stigma or discrimination from health workers, social services or the police. At the same time, 36 per cent of respondents were refused medical care because they use or had used drugs.

Halyna Korniyenko argues that "We have a punitive and demonstrative drug policy. And if you are a woman, you will also be told that 'You are a woman, a guardian [of a family]!' Everyone seems to think that addiction is a choice but no one would want such a fate if they knew what would happen." She adds, "We constantly conduct training for doctors and police. Things are slowly changing. However, I do not know how many more years it will take for the society to start changing, for there to be more tolerance and real human rights."

A ticket to a better life

Information support for people with drug addiction is provided by employees of the National Hotline for Drug Addiction and SMT. The UNWUD project has "Street Lawyers" specifically set up to fight discrimination against women drug users. These women activists have no professional legal education, but have been trained to help addicts. For instance, they help women deal with stigma, as well as write to medical professionals to ask for help. "They work like a bridge: they can go to the doctor, to a court, or help write a statement", Lebed says. Usually activists manage to defend women's rights. However, defending parental rights is more difficult. It is easier for human rights defenders to connect with women drug users if they themselves have lived with an addiction. The director and the head of the board of UNWUD both have first-hand experience. "Women understand that you went through the same things as they did, that all of your problems were similar", explains Lebed.

During the pandemic, changes were made to the country's main document that regulates the treatment of patients with drug addiction. The minimum period in which the patient can start to self-administer the replacement drug has been halved to three months. A patient can also now get a single prescription of drugs for a period of up to ten days. Psychiatrists and other trained doctors can now also help patients with the SMT. With the help of SMT, people addicted to opioids can receive safe medications instead of illegal street drugs. This helps to minimise harmful effects and improve the lives of patients. Since there is no injection, the method helps prevent the spread of HIV and Hepatitis B and C. In SMT rooms, patients are regularly tested for these viruses. Overall, it has also helped reduce drug-related crime.

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"When there is a substitute drug, they can think of something else other than drugs. A lot of our patients are working, taking drugs and living a successful life", says Ihor Harkusha, a social worker in the SMT department of Kyiv's Sociotherapy clinic. He further notes that "The SMT programme is one of the most effective ways to help society. Neither detoxification nor rehabilitation centres give such a result."

"SMT makes life easier for both patients and us", adds Gela Kalandia, head of the department. He says that the decriminalisation of drug use is needed: "If a person is ill, he or she should not be imprisoned for it, but treated". Among more than 15,000 patients receiving SMT in public clinics, there are less than 2,500 women.

Moving in the right direction

Public institutions provide SMT free of charge. There are also private ones, but sometimes they do not control the patient.

"As far as I know from acquaintances, in some clinics anyone can buy the drug. The public ones first treat the patient to find the right dosage. Also, unlike private clinics, the information about the public ones is freely available", Lebed says.

"In private centres you can effectively buy as many prescriptions in one day as you want. You could go to ten clinics and receive ten prescriptions. In our clinic we control everything. On any given day we can ask the patient to show us that they have been using the drugs", explains Ihor.

Illegal centres sometimes operate under the guise of private rehabilitation clinics. At the end of March, one such institution was exposed in the Kyiv region. People with alcohol and drug addiction were effectively tortured there. Those who worked at the facility constantly demanded money for "treatment". Last year, more of these centres were found in the Ivano-Frankivsk region. They did not have any medical documentation.

"In Ukraine, the legislation on SMT is not bad when compared to European countries. Fortunately, we are moving in the right direction. And our substitution therapy itself is now not very stigmatised", says Kalandia, the head of the SMT department. "There is a big difference between the stigma faced by my patients ten years ago compared to now. It's much better now. However, discrimination and stigma are still the main problems. It is still often difficult to help a patient who clearly needs it. Not because you can't help, but because of societal attitudes."

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Make yourself at home

JOANNA URBAŃSKA

The German city of Görlitz on the border with Poland is learning the challenges of integrating migrant communities. Thanks to the help of local activists, a lot of progress has been achieved in the last several years. Yet, the effects of the pandemic and rising social tensions has threatened to undo some of the important achievements.

Görlitz is a small city in Sachsen, East Germany joined with the Polish city of Zgorzelec by two bridges and a shared past. It is known for its renovated old town and rows of tenement houses with colourful facades that stare at those walking down the street. As I wander around the city, its silence and prettiness make the atmosphere somewhat odd, even spooky, as if something were hanging in the air.

"It's a small city," says Raffael, a local activist whom I meet in a park by the Neisse River. "You have probably noticed that everyone knows everyone here." Indeed, I have. On the one hand, it makes living here easier, because you do not have to make a lot of friends to feel welcome. On the other hand, some newcomers still have it worse than others. "People in this city are not used to foreigners much," Raffael continues. "Well, maybe except the Poles. But in general, they are quite conservative and often unwelcoming. So when more and more migrants started arriving into the city, sometime in 2015, there was no warm welcome here."

Café Hotspot

There are various reasons behind people's negative attitudes. The shadow of unreconciled past events, a sense of inferiority when compared to the West and the influence of AfD (Alternative for Germany) – a far-right, nationalist party which

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opposes the EU and immigration. Such conditions create a lot of tension in society and do not encourage dialogue.

As Julia, an activist living in Görlitz for the last 16 years, recalls, "Many migrants who came to the city used to hang out at Marienplatz, which is quite a central spot, because they wanted to use free internet available there for 30 minutes a day. Unfortunately, there were many problems, sometimes people acting hostile towards them."

In 2016 some members of the local community made an attempt to create a safe space which would invite people to get to know each other and give a welcome to the incoming migrants. What initially was a four-week project turned out to be a long-term commitment for the activists. They rented out a property located close to Marienplatz and created "Café Hotspot" – a place which provided its guests not only with internet, but also complimentary tea, intercultural events, advice on life in Germany and, most importantly, a space for casual interaction and dialogue.

"The most important aspect of Café Hotspot was that there was no obligation, no responsibility to come. Everyone could enjoy it," says Julia. The easy-going atmosphere of the place drew in many of those formerly sitting at Marienplatz, but also other local residents who came, led by curiosity or simply stumbling upon the place while walking through the old town.

In 2016 some members of the community attempted to create a safe space and give a welcome to incoming migrants.

"Café Hotspot was probably the most important place for intercultural dialogue in the city," Raffael recalls. "But we have also organised other events, engaging more with the city space, such as celebrating the end of Ramadan." It is a very important event in the Muslim world, as people come together to end a month of fasting. There is food, music and often dancing. The first public celebration in Görlitz was organised in a park behind the municipal theatre, and it turned out to be a success. Many people came, including those who did not understand the occasion but wanted to learn about it. But of course, there were also those who complained.

"The following year we decided to move the celebration to a different place, so that people would not complain about the noise and so that they would not try to stop it from happening. The event was then organised at Wilhelmsplatz, and it was quite big as well. Unfortunately, the fact that something disturbs the peace can be a powerful argument here," adds Raffael, with a bit of disappointment in his voice. "There is much prejudice that is never directly admitted. People living near Wilhelmsplatz started complaining not only about the noise, but also about migrant kids destroying the grass with their bikes and footballs. Of course, all local kids were playing there, but only the foreign ones were blamed," he adds.

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This is the reason why Café Hotspot was such an important place, as everyone could feel at home there, Julia emphasises. "No one had to be scared they would be called a thief just because of their skin colour."

Pandemic impact

In this sense the café not only created a prejudice-free space, but also channelled some of the hate and violence that used to be concentrated on migrants and refugees. As a place where they were known to hang out, Café Hotspot became a subject of some attacks as well, but broken windows do not hurt as much as broken bones. Unfortunately, personal attacks still occurred, and the activists involved in running the place received some nasty, threatening messages.

In 2019 Café Hotspot needed to change its location, as the building in which it was operating was supposed to undergo renovations. The name was left unchanged, but the new place is a lot smaller and the initiatives created to support refugees moved to another location. "Now the casual aspect is missing. There are no more spontaneous meetings and people are even starting to forget the language because they have nowhere to practice it," says Julia while commenting on the present situation.

Raffael, who is engaged in advisory and legal help for refugees, has similar thoughts. "Of course, we continue our work, and people still come when they need help, but now the meetings are much more focused on problem solving. There's no fun, there's no mixing." He recalls the events initiated and organised by the migrants themselves, such as regular falafel-eating meetings, which do not happen anymore. "It's hard, even impossible, to organise something during the pandemic. Even before, we had reached mostly men, as in more traditional settings it is they who represent the family in the public sphere," he says. Following this observation, there were also initiatives directed towards migrant women, which were quite well received. During regular meetings and casual talks, the women could present ideas for events and discuss their needs. "One of the most exciting things they organised were women's dance parties, usually in the afternoons. They could unwind, take the headscarves off and have fun," says Raffael.

Unfortunately, the pandemic has brought most of such activities to a halt. There are still some welcome meetings organised for newcomers by the municipality, but Raffael concludes that "the problem with formal meetings is that it is more difficult to address individual cases, and so they end up being quite general". That being said, the city has still not developed a successful programme of institutional help for refugees and migrants coming to Görlitz.

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Photo: Jerzy Strzelecki (CC) commons.wikimedia.org

Görlitz is a small city in East Germany joined with the Polish city of Zgorzelec by two bridges and a shared past.

"There is some institutional help, but the general viewpoint is that the refugees should already be assimilated. But such narration completely forgets about long-term problems, traumas, memories of violence and the new problems coming: kids getting into schools, etc." Julia adds when asked who would have done the work if it was not for a group of volunteer activists.

Raffael believes that "the lack of development of institutional help is the city's strategy to make the people feel unwelcome. Just last week I was working on a case where a family was denied an allotment garden on the grounds that they were foreign. It is something I really can't understand."

Need for more dialogue

It seems that in addition to the internal struggles that the migrants and refugees need to cope with, there is a pile of institutional and everyday obstacles which make living in Görlitz even more challenging. According to Raffael, finding a job here can be a real problem: "It's difficult for those who are educated and ambitious, and if they do get a job, it's usually somewhere else, so they can leave the city. But it's harder for those who did not have a chance to get educated in their home country. Imagine learning a foreign language and looking for a job when you can't read or write!"

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Both Julia and Raffael are not extremely optimistic about the future of initiatives that promote dialogue, openness and understanding between the people in Görlitz. Although there are already plans to move many of the aforementioned activities into a local cultural centre – Rabryka. But it might be harder to get the people involved. "There is a lot of tension in society now," Raffael says, "and because of the pandemic many people are living in their own social media boxes, surrounded by their own social bubbles. This doesn't encourage discussion."

And even though there might not be enough discussion, there is definitely action. I have learned that the complaints about noise created by migrants playing football at Wilhelmsplatz have been heard by the municipality, and the space was filled with white, metal deckchairs in order to encourage more sedentary leisurely activities. But as I reach the place on a sunny April afternoon, I see the deckchairs on both sides of the square being used as goalposts by a group of youngsters. It seems that, after all, obstacles do not have to stop people from enjoying their lives. Sometimes it's just a matter of taking action.

Joanna Urbańska is a graduate of cultural anthropology and Hebrew philology at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań. She is a keen language learner, nature enthusiast, amateur musician and an aspiring storyteller; currently living in Germany, but left her heart in the Balkans.

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Billboards, bureaucracy, Budapest

Foreign students in the Hungarian capital

MÁRTON MUNDING

Prejudice against foreigners runs deep in Hungarian society and this will require complex, large scale changes in order to solve. This includes bureaucratic reform, civil campaigns and better language and cultural education.

Xenophobic voices are nothing new in Hungarian media. However, since the failure of the European immigration system and the resulting crisis that began in 2014, these voices have been amplified to a radical degree. Billboards and posters depicting masses of immigrants gathering around Hungary's controversial border fence were erected all over the country. Regular government broadcasts, complete with dramatic music, called for action against asylum seekers and those western political figures seen as responsible for the European Union's refugee quota system. Hungarian media has now been saturated with anti-immigrant messages for many years. As new crises appeared, the xenophobic voices seemingly settled down but did not disappear completely from the country. Although the makeshift refugee camps are long gone from the underpass near Keleti Station, this large and vocal campaign has left its mark on society. This is especially true among those Hungarians who rarely encounter the Other on a daily basis.

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Safe but not welcome

Much like many other social and political problems in Hungary, the issue of xenophobia in Budapest is different from the rest of the nation. According to statistics from 2020, 45 per cent of foreign nationals in Hungary reside in the capital. Even when accounting for the fact that Budapest's residents make up about one-fifth of the country's entire population, this is an impressive figure. This large, cosmopolitan city also boasts more than half of the country's higher education institutes and attracts students from all over the world.

Between 2018 and 2020 I took part in a master's programme at one of Hungary's largest universities. The programme was in English, with the overwhelming majority of students being foreign. Most of them were visiting Hungary for the first time in order to study for their master's degree. During these years I had a chance to meet and work with many wonderful people from different cultural backgrounds. Even though the accepting academic environment sheltered us somewhat from reality, I could not help but wonder how these foreign students are treated by my fellow countrymen outside the university. To learn more about their experiences in Budapest, as well as the current state of xenophobia in Hungarian society, I decided to reach out to some of my former classmates. Although each of them comes from a different national, cultural and ethnic background, the shared themes that run through their stories paint an unflattering image of present-day Hungary.

"I feel safe here, but I do not feel so welcome. People are not friendly, but they mean no harm," says Dogu, a 26-year-old Turkish student. This sentiment seems to be shared among the group. Nelly, a Kenyan student, told me that "People will look at you differently, or move away from you on public transport, while supermarket attendants will follow you around in the shop." She added, "It made me cautious, because when someone is so observant in what you are doing, you cannot help but become aware of your actions".

According to statistics from 2020, 45 per cent of foreign nationals in Hungary reside in the capital.

While each of them reported being stared at in public places by locals, the general attitude of the public was described as a "cautious distancing", rather than anything malicious or hostile. This was best explained by Jane, a worldly traveller from Korea who has lived in Hungary multiple times since 2014. She told me, "I thought that this behaviour is similar to the concepts of negative reinforcement and punishment. When I zap you with a buzzer, that's punishment, but when I take away rewards from you, that's negative reinforcement. I feel like there's not much punishment here, but a lot of negative reinforcement, taking away accomplishment and opportunities from foreigners."

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The extent of this negative reinforcement by the wider society seems to vary according to the person's ability to blend in. This is strongly connected to the individual's ethnicity, gender and language. Francisca is from Brazil and has characteristically Caucasian features. She has noticed a clear difference in how people treat her and other, visibly foreign students. According to her, "If I don't speak English or Portuguese on the tram or in the supermarket, I'm just someone else. It has protected me in a way." However, as she continues to share her story, it becomes clear to me that whilst punishment is not as common, it is still definitely an issue. On one occasion she was having a conversation in Portuguese with a friend on the metro, when she was pushed by an older person exiting the carriage. This attack was accompanied by furious words, which resulted in visible discomfort on the faces of the surrounding native speakers. When Francisca asked one of them what the perpetrator had said, she did not receive a translation. However, the xenophobic motivation was clear.

The general attitude of the public was described as a "cautious distancing", rather than anything malicious or hostile.

A similar situation happened to Nelly on the tram, as well as Jin P, a Thai girl who was given an unwanted lecture in a shop: "I was exiting a small corner store near our campus, and slightly touched the duffel bag of a guy who was paying. I quickly said sorry, and went on, because I was in a hurry. But he came after me, yelling: Here in Hungary, you are supposed to apologise, we are a great, civilised nation! I was so shocked, I couldn't speak. I thought it was a joke".

"A great, civilised nation" – these are the sort of buzzwords that I associate with the talking heads of the media. While foreign students experience such clashes with strangers perhaps once or twice during their three year stay, the number and intensity of these incidents only grows when faced with institutions or those who work for such entities.

Barriers of bureaucracy

Bureaucracy in Hungary is often viewed as a sort of Kafkaesque horror show. The lack of communication between institutions leads to you being sent from one government office to another by generally overworked and underpaid clerks on the verge of total burnout. These experiences dissuade even native Hungarians from seeking solutions to their problems. As a result, it is really no wonder that adding a language barrier to the equation only creates utter chaos and neglect.

The exclusion from the system sometimes reaches extreme levels, beyond the awkward fumbling with Google Translate. Francisca recalls: "I went to the bank

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one time and selected the English option on the automated menu for the numbered tickets. The security guy saw this, and came up to me, repeating 'No English, no English'. Then he grabbed me, and escorted me to the door. It was very embarrassing." Although she showed the guard Hungarian papers from her employer that she needed for the banking procedure, she was denied service. She subsequently had to go to another bank. Of course, financial institutions have never been pinnacles of human virtue. However, similar stories from other parts of the public sphere suggest that there are deep rooted discriminatory tendencies. When Dogu lost his wallet, his girlfriend Lisa tried to report it at the district police station. However, when the help desk attendee noticed that she only spoke English, she turned away from her and acted like she could not hear Lisa's desperate attempts to explain the matter. Lisa then phoned a Hungarian friend to help with translation but the clerk refused to take the phone from her.

Neglect and denial of service are not the only ways that Hungarians make foreigners feel unwanted.

Neglect and denial of service are not the only ways that Hungarians make foreigners feel unwanted. Unfortunately, they sometimes say it directly to their face. Jane successfully applied to work as a tutor at a prestigious Budapest private school. Despite this, her Korean nationality meant that the employment process involved some extra administrative work. When discussing the situation with the employer at the immigration office, the school's office manager made an offhand remark to Jane: "I wish they could've chosen a European candidate instead, but my boss really insisted on you." She ended up reporting this incident to the head of operations. In many cases there is no one to report such issues to at all.

Foreigners have a generally harder time exercising their rights because of language difficulties. This puts them in a vulnerable position right from the start. As Dogu puts it, "They take advantage of you, everyone and everywhere. They know that you cannot complain, you don't know where to go, and it's going to be extra problematic in the end. I think bureaucratic things go really slow here, even for Hungarians. For us, it's even worse. You call a place, they tell you to press nine for the English operator. You press nine, wait for literal hours, get tired and give up".

Landlords preying on foreign tenants is a prime example of such exploitation. The list of ways in which this exploitation occurs goes on and on. For example, landlords may claim that certain household items have been broken or stolen and demand that the tenant pay the cost of the repair. At the same time, they may also charge unreasonably high electricity and water bills to tenants during months when the apartment was unoccupied for weeks. In some cases, landlords have even stolen from tenants. Many students have no choice but to put up with such

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injustices if they want to avoid going through the painful process of finding new housing. Finding a place to stay is especially hard for African students, who often face various forms of discrimination. In these circumstances, apartment owners have often avoided personal meetings or simply not replied to the inquiries of potential tenants. In one case, Dogu's friends contacted a man about his apartment and the owner asked for their nationalities. A member of the group happened to be Egyptian. Upon receiving their answer, the owner replied with a short text: "I don't rent to Arabs."

This is supposed to be you

When it comes to media campaigns, the impressions of foreign students are mixed. Since these campaigns are in Hungarian, it can be hard to notice for non-native speakers. When Jane's parents visited from Korea, they stopped to take a picture in a park. Only after she showed the photo to Hungarian friends did she learn that the picture was taken in front of an anti-immigrant billboard.

"There are certain times when I'm glad I don't speak Hungarian," Jane told me. There are cases when the message is more on the nose. Dogu explains that as a Turkish national, he is not unfamiliar with propaganda: "I saw these billboards the first time I came here, a picture of some immigrants in front of fences with a stop sign over it. Like a group of zombies. I really felt uncomfortable, it was very unwelcoming. Choosing the people as an enemy instead of the system, the laws or the politics that led to this is dangerous." He mentions the similar concerns of his friends and others about the campaign: "A friend of mine once showed me this billboard, saying 'This is supposed to be you' and that he feels sorry about it. There are also many Hungarians I talked with that feel ashamed of their government's politics."

To hold such feelings, a degree of empathy is required and implied here on the part of Hungarians. This seems to reflect the impressions of other interviewees, namely that despite all the loud campaigns and slogans, the young generation seems to be more approachable and even helpful at times. Of course, this can be explained by the improved language skills of young Hungarians compared to the older generations. The ability to communicate with each other can serve as a basis for building bridges that can withstand the storms of hateful speech. This is exemplified by a phenomenon reported by interviewees, or as Dogu put it, a "bug in the code".

The ability to communicate can serve as a basis for building bridges that can withstand the storms of hate speech.

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"If I only speak English, people are more careful. But if I start with a Hungarian greeting like *szia*, even if I continue in English after that, their whole attitude changes. People become more accepting, as if they were thinking, oh, you accept my language and are using it with me? Then you are welcome," Dogu says.

Prejudice against foreigners runs deep in Hungarian society and this will require complex, large scale changes in order to solve. This includes bureaucratic reform, civil campaigns and better language and cultural education. Overall, the fact that a gesture as small as one word can change people's attitudes to such a degree shows that whilst the road towards accepting the Other may be a long one, it is well worth the journey. This is true even in the country of billboards.

The names of the students featured in this story were changed to protect their identities.

Márton Munding is a short story writer, MC and cognitive scientist living in Budapest, Hungary. His scientific research focuses on the semantic processing of metaphors.

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Job market for people with disabilities in Poland

KATARZYNA RODACKA

Statistics clearly show that unemployment among people with disabilities in Poland is decreasing. Behind these figures, however, there are many stories of individuals who believe that a growth in employment does not necessarily go hand in hand with creating an open atmosphere in companies. Is the Polish labour market friendly to people with disabilities?

Martyna has a university degree and has been in the labour market since 2009. Currently, she works in an international company. Before this, almost all of her work was connected with PFRON, a state body that assists disabled people, and was associated with the fact that Martyna is a person with a disability. She was born without a left hand and her first eight years of working life were marked by unemployment or minimum wage jobs. Previously, she studied applied linguistics and was one of the best students in her class. She has also been improving her skills in this field outside university. She admits that many companies are open to employing people with disabilities and that these groups often boast about their employment statistics. Despite this, most people with disabilities are employed in positions below their level of qualification. Martyna explains that "nobody employs people with disabilities for managerial positions, even if they are capable of doing the job". She always dreamed of being a translator. So, after graduation, she looked for a job in this field.

"I must admit that the translation market itself is difficult and hard to break into. But when I went to the interview, the recruiter quickly looked away from

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my hand, it was obvious that he was flustered. They asked me several times, as if they had caught me lying, if I could do the things that I mentioned on my CV, for example typing. One recruiter directly told me that she writes on the keyboard with both hands. I do not know, maybe I just had bad job interviews. But I think that an able-bodied girl who has the same abilities as me and who, like me, would know exactly what she wants in life, would not take jobs that have nothing to do with her skills and plans, just because of desperation," Martyna says.

Not everything is visible in the stats

Tomasz, who has cerebral palsy, uses an electric wheelchair. He has problems with motor coordination and is a speechless person. From the beginning, he was looking for a remote job. He studied by distance learning, so he hoped that he would also be able to find work through his network. However, this was in 2006 when remote work was still very rare, so it was too difficult for him to find this kind of job. After graduating, he looked for a job again. It took him about a year and a half to find one. Right from his first message to potential employers, he had to inform the company that he could not communicate by phone.

The unemployment rate among disabled people is 7.2 per cent. Compared to the previous years, this is a good result.

"In my CV, next to the telephone number, I always add that contact is possible only via SMS, because I don't speak," Tomasz says. "I have always tried to explain in my cover letter what my strenghts and skills are, despite my health situation. But let's be honest – who reads your CV cover to cover? If the recruiter sees that the candidate does not speak, I think the employer will immediately think that there will be some problems with such an employee." Currently, he works as an IT specialist in digital accessibility, and recently part time at the foundation "Eudajmonia".

People with disabilities, like everyone else, are determined to find a job. But as Martyna says, the first job often ultimately defines the professional life of people with disabilities. Even if it is a poorly paid job, with no opportunity to earn better wages or a higher position, they do not want to give it up for fear that no one else will hire them. She adds that "disability easily turns into a class factor. Especially because for many employers, people with disabilities are a cheap workforce."

According to government data for 2019, the unemployment rate among disabled people is 7.2 per cent. Compared to the previous years, this is a good result, as unemployment among people with disabilities in 2015 was at 13 per cent. It is also worth looking at the employment rate. In 2019, it was 26.8 per cent, repre-

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senting an increase of 0.6 per cent compared to the previous year. Both trends are definitely going in the right direction. However, if we compare these statistics with the employment situation among non-disabled people, there is still a lot to do. The employment rate for non-disabled people for 2019 was 78.4 per cent, whilst the unemployment rate was 3.4 per cent. Although these numbers seem to show that Polish employers are more and more willing to employ people with disabilities, many of them are simply "not ready" for it. At least, that is what these groups say in conversations with specialists.

There is quite a lot of state financial support for companies open to employing disabled people.

Dr Tomasz Dąbrowski, one of the founders of the Diversity Hub think tank, which supports companies in the field of diversity management, often hears this argument about companies being ready. This is quite a surprising situation, as an employer who wants to hire a person with a disability certificate can get financial support from the state. Depending on the employee's degree of disability (severe, moderate or light), the state agency PFRON may provide monthly co-financing for the employee's wages to the amount of 1,800, 1,125 or 450 Polish zlotys. In addition, the employer is entitled to another subsidy of 600 zlotys if the employee is blind, has epilepsy or has been diagnosed with a mental illness. The employer will also receive reimbursement for costs related to training, adapting the employee's workplace, and the employment of an assistant if it is necessary.

Hence, there are quite a lot of advertisements on the internet from companies looking for such employees. The impression, therefore, is that it is easy for people with disabilities to find a job. However, this is often unskilled work for a low salary. In addition, it often turns out that the employer is looking for a person with a specific disability, such as blindness, as they will receive more funding from PFRON for employing such a person. Taking into account all of these issues, are Polish employers really willing to employ people with disabilities?

Responsibilities of HR

Ewa has been working in a human resources department for 25 years. During the first years of her career, when a person with disabilities applied to her company, she thought that employment would be very complicated from the point of view of law and logistics. Therefore, the best solution was not to hire such people at all.

"I knew there were some special laws on this, but I did not want to worry about it anymore. I avoided such situations," she admits. As a result, she did not know

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what to do if her company wanted to hire a person with a disability. Her colleagues also had no experience in this. "We all decided that it was better not to hire such an employee, because we do not know what will come out of it", Ewa says.

The issues of employing people with disabilities are regulated by Polish law. A company that employs at least 25 full-time employees is obliged to fill six per cent of its positions with people who have a disability certificate. If it does not achieve such rates, it must make additional contributions to the PFRON. "In addition, if a company exceeds this figure, it can receive a subsidy for each employee with a disability certificate. However, a problem arises when enterprises employ people with disabilities only for financial benefits, and at the same time do not create a friendly work environment for them," says Anna Zaroda-Dąbrowska, president of the Diversity Hub.

In reality, it is not only about employing an employee, but also about creating a friendly work atmosphere. This was noticed by Ewa, who eventually changed her job. Her new environment was much more open. Her new associates also knew the laws regarding the employment of people with disabilities very well and were willing to hire such workers. The employment of people with disabilities is not only a matter of conscious recruiting in the HR department. Even if an employee with a disability is hired by an employer who would like to create an open workplace, they often end up working in a subordinate position. Then, it often turns out that there is a lack of well-trained managerial staff who can manage a team that includes a person with disabilities.

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"Managers need to know how to explain to the rest of the team why this person works seven hours a day for the same wage, why s/he has more vacation time," Ewa explains. "He or she must know how to arrange the schedule correctly, especially in the case of shift work, because a person with disabilities cannot work at night. It is the leader of a team who must ensure that there are no conflicts in the group for this reason." It often happens that the team will not accept an employee with a disability. In these situations, employees who do not feel accepted risk getting fired.

"It's always a very unpleasant situation for us. As the HR department, we want to build a diverse and friendly work environment, and such people leave due to other employees' lack of training. However, if the employer takes care of this issue, the company will gain a lot from it, not only financially. Thanks to its openness to accepting people with disabilities, the company is more empathetic and sensitive overall. This approach is good for every employee," she adds.

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Communicating with the employer

It is not always so easy to create a friendly work environment, as Martyna saw at her interview when the recruiters reacted at the sight of her disability. These people behaved in this way because we as a society are not used to seeing people with disabilities. This gives a broader picture as to why it is harder for people with disabilities to find a job, even in a friendly environment. Managers are usually in contact with their employees everyday. Unfortunately, sometimes they just do not know how to behave.

"Often during our training sessions, companies ask for a textbook because people really don't know how to behave towards a person with a disability. Sometimes we feel like we need to be overly protective of such people, even though we don't want to do this. However, the managers cannot be blamed for such concerns. They often do not know how to behave, because we, as people in general, are not familiar with dealing with people with disabilities. Most of us would have similar concerns," explains Zaroda-Dąbrowska.

According to Martyna, those who see a disability immediately think about the trauma carried by that person. Also in the media, people with disabilities are most often presented only in the context of suffering and the struggle for equality. At the moment, there is a distinct lack of people with disabilities in the media who could comment on such topics from a specialist standpoint. She adds that "the able-bodied majority is isolated from people with disabilities. This causes a growing number of harmful stereotypes suggesting that people with disabilities are demanding, weak and clumsy. Added to all of this is the common belief and fear among employers that hiring someone with a disability will result in gigantic fines if the company does not adapt the workplace right away."

Tomasz has also talked about various stereotypes that are still impacting the employment rate among people with disabilities: "people with disabilities are still associated with social care, a lack of resourcefulness in life," he says. "They are perceived as people who must always be helped. For the majority of society, we are still only the recipients, unable to offer anything in return. Can such a person be a good worker in the eyes of an employer?" Despite this, he adds that the problem also lies with people with disabilities themselves and in their immediate environment. This teaches them from the very beginning that they should be given special treatment in all aspects of life, such as school, university and work. He adds, "What is the conclusion? Do we just pat such a person on the back and say that they are a good friend or employee? This will always be taken with a grain of salt."

Taking these reasons into account, not all jobseekers inform future employers about their disability. Reflecting on her experience, Ewa explains that only people

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with moderate or severe disabilities openly informed her company. This is especially true when the disability is visible or when it is impossible not to ask about potential accessibility issues regarding an interview. People who have mild disabilities often do not mention it. According to the law, these people are not entitled to additional benefits, such as a seven hour working day or additional ten days of so-called "rehabilitation leave". They will often not admit their disability for fear that no one will hire them. Benefits are, however, available to people with moderate disabilities.

In the media, people with disabilities are most often presented in the context of suffering and the struggle for equality.

"It happens, however, that candidates for managerial positions hide even a moderate disability. They will lose access to these benefits by doing this, but they are afraid that this will result in them not getting the job. It is well known that such positions are task-oriented, and that the working time is sometimes different," Ewa explains. Moreover, when such a person finds work and notices that the environment is unfriendly, they will often not disclose information about their disability. Despite this, Ewa's 25 years of experience shows that people are increasingly talking about their disability at work. This is because employers are now more appreciative of diversity in Poland. Ewa also has noticed that more and more people with disabilities are informing potential employers about their benefits. These candidates may also encourage the manager or employer to read about such matters.

An improved work environment

However, Tomasz is still trying to understand employers who do not employ people with disabilities and do not know the laws related to this issue. He believes that "there is a lack of social awareness and government actions or campaigns that could increase people's knowledge. It is well known that entrepreneurs already have a lot of work and they do not need to complicate their lives with learning about various laws. Due to this, these laws should be presented in an attractive and accessible way."

Many employers remain afraid of potentially complicated laws. However, the law now encourages these groups to engage with disabled people by offering financial benefits. Overall, companies are increasingly open to the benefits of a friendly work environment. The founders of Diversity Hub have highlighted the advantages of attracting candidates who are not represented in the labour market today, stating that "if people with disabilities do well in a company, they will attract their

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friends to work. These employees, which are hired on recommendation, are often more loyal and committed. In addition, diversity results in different points of view and multiple perspectives. The company is only a step away from becoming more innovative, breaking out of its usual patterns, and solving problems in a new way."

A company that is diverse in terms of employees can adapt more easily to issues as a whole organisation. It can react faster to a changing market. It is also worth placing importance on employee development. Those who work in an open environment have pointed out that they have changed their attitude and have become more tolerant and open. They often add that this is what acceptance is all about, because an open work environment increases the quality of all of our lives.

Katarzyna Rodacka is a specialist in Iranian studies and a journalist. She focuses on such issues as human rights, post-conflicts areas and social initiatives.

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The care crisis

An interview with Kinga Milánkovics, the co-founder of the Hekate Conscious Ageing Foundation. Interviewer: Maja Móczár

MAJA MÓCZÁR: What are the signs that a care system is in a state of crisis?

KINGA MILÁNKOVICS Well that is a complicated question and there are many ways to answer it. There are many areas that we can focus on. There is a societal, as well as a more individual, context in which we can examine this. In a wider perspective, I would say that since the human population has doubled in the last few decades, society nowadays has higher expectations when it comes to taking care of children, the elderly, the disabled and everyone else who needs care. Furthermore, as medicine advances people are living longer. Therefore, the demand for care has grown drastically. Historically it was assumed that women would simply do this type of work. Despite this, the question of who should be doing care work, which demands resources, time and patience, still isn't something that is really thought about at a societal level. Now the time has arrived where the demand for care is much larger than it was historically, when women could have been pressured into doing it. Consequently, this has created a big deficit in the number of people doing this kind of work.

From your career perspective, do you actually feel that there currently is a care crisis? For example, is healthcare and care work still being underpaid? Or are global tendencies, in which women move countries to find care work, changing this for the better?

This is an interesting question because I work in England in elderly care. From my point of view, on a personal level, globalisation is a positive development as this means better wages for us and a better negotiating position, because there simply aren't enough care workers. But of course, we cannot forget the societal level issues that have appeared as a result of the fact that there simply are not enough carers. Often one carer has to take care of 15 patients in a care home, because they do not have a good negotiating position or cannot get out of their contract. Many times people have asked me what has changed with the pandemic and the care crisis. From a feminist point of view, I think

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the core issues today aren't that different from those in the past. But now it affects socially more powerful people, so it is becoming a more talked about issue. More and more middle-class people are struggling to provide care for their family members, so it is now an issue in mainstream social dialogue. Care has always been delivered by mostly poor, lower class women who are subject to exploitation. Now at least women can get paid jobs and become more financially independent.

Since women have been participating in the labour market they have had this "double shift" of work from the beginning. The problem seems to be that we cannot get out of this dynamic.

It can be interpreted as a "double shift". But then the opinion that runs against feminism arises. This argues that when women only did the housework and did not take part in the labour market, they did not have to work this double shift. But the same reasoning can be reversed, why is it that men do not have to take care of these kinds of tasks? Doing paid work and also care work is not a problem on its own, because it is possible to build a society in which everyone does paid and unpaid work. The problem is how is it possible for some people not to have these kinds of tasks? How is it possible for them to get away with not participating in these tasks? When there aren't enough carers, nurses and social resources to satisfy the need for care, then this question becomes very important. How is it possible that some people don't have to do their part?

Yes, that's a really important point. I would like to ask you about global developments. As far as I know, carers from Eastern Europe often go and work in Western European countries. Women from semi-peripheral countries go to find work in the countries at the centre of the global economy. As someone who is doing exactly that, would you say that this is a widespread phenomenon?

Absolutely, yes. But this is often presented as a negative phenomenon. Of course, on a societal level this may be seen as an unpleasant development by many people. Though this is not true for the ones who actually go. Among Hungarian carers, it is worse for those who cannot go, and many times they even say so. When we talk about what it takes to go and work in a foreign country, many women often say that they cannot go because they have a child or elderly parents to look after at home. So yes, care migration is very real and it is happening on a macro level. This phenomenon can be viewed as a negative development depending on someone's point of view. The mainstream narrative reflects almost only the perspective of those for whom care migration is a problem. And not those for whom it really is the solution.

But isn't it a problem for all, in the sense that it would lead to a care deficit in the places where carers are emigrating from? Shouldn't the goal be to create better work

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conditions for nurses in countries like Hungary?

Yes, it should. When discussing this point it is very important to shift the focus to Hungarian care work conditions. We shouldn't view care migration as a problem. Instead, we should scrutinise the impossible conditions faced by carers that work in countries like Hungary. That is the real problem for nurses and care workers, not care migration. Care migration is a problem for English nurses. As migrant nurses fulfil the need for care, they won't have the chance to improve their own situation. Under these conditions, the system is not forced to improve itself. Despite this, I believe that there is little desire to improve the system even if there aren't any Eastern European carers in the country. This is a very visible problem right now in England. At the moment, 120,000-plus people are needed for social care roles. However, fewer carers are coming from the EU and the government is clearly not making any moves to improve social care conditions. We should examine if care migration can actually help fill these gaps in employment. Carers who take part in care migration can only really be seen as a symptom of wider issues and processes in the global economy. Currently, governments aren't trying to solve the care crisis, regardless of whether care migration exists or not.

And are there actual differences between Hungary and England, or is it the same systemic problem everywhere?

It is the same issue in the sense that there is generally a big need for nurses and carers. The need for care remains unmet in both countries and the two governments are not capable of solving this problem. Though I do see a difference in their approaches. The British government, at least in their communications, make it seem as though they care about the issue. Of course, compared to Hungary it is clear that the UK has different work conditions and that carers have different ways of putting pressure on their government. Overall, to me the level of arrogance shown by the Hungarian government regarding such issues appears unmatched. However, I do not know if the situation is any better in other Eastern European countries. I can only claim to have impressions of the Netherlands, United Kingdom, Malta, Hungary, Austria and Germany. So it is an interesting question: where do we place the blame for the care crisis? We can say that it is the governments that are responsible for solving it. In a sense, however, they similarly cannot solve it because it is a global problem.

I think we can say that the global pandemic made the care crisis more visible than it was before. Despite this, it seems like even with it being more visible, there aren't any governmental plans to try to solve this problem. Would you say that we probably need systemic changes to improve the situation?

Absolutely, we need systemic changes, deep social changes. With regards to this, we can discuss various critiques of

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capitalism, as well as many related narratives. Simply put, I would say that we need to change society in a way that it wouldn't be women who do care work mostly on their own and mostly unpaid. We can say that in many different ways and with different narratives but that would be the main goal.

And how would you define the critique of capitalism in relation to the care crisis?

The accumulation of capital and profit-oriented thinking and logic ignore reproductive work. As a result, this work becomes invisible and outsourced to women. They are subsequently left out of profit-making structures.

Besides systemic changes, what do we need, for example in Hungary, to improve the situation for nurses?

There are many ways we can talk about what changes we need, for example in Hungary, but not just there. I think that the country's whole tax system has to be modified. That could be one solution. We should completely rethink where we direct taxes. We should rethink all types of care work and remove them from the tax regime altogether. Care and small scale food production should not be taxed in any way whatsoever. On the contrary, they should be subsidised through national funding. We should not punish farmers and carers, because care work is essential for society. We should also reform the VAT system, and not tax products that are necessary for a basic standard of living. The logic of the whole tax system needs to be changed, as it shouldn't punish care workers and care organisations with any additional costs and expenses. It is also very important to place an emphasis on preventive health care and healthy ageing to lower the need for care in old age. Women's movements should also discuss the problem more and encourage women not to take on additional care work. Women who are pushed out of the labour market often do underpaid care work because they have to look after a child. As a result, they become completely overburdened and burn themselves out over a short period of time. It seems that some people will have to take on extensive care work, or we will somehow have to decrease the need for care overall in our society. Somehow, we have to find a solution to this never-ending cycle of more and more people needing care, as well as the constantly growing need for carers.

Kinga Milánkovics works in elderly care. She is also an economist and co-founder of the Hekate Conscious Ageing Foundation.

Maja Móczár studies philosophy at ELTE in Budapest and has been involved in feminist activism for two years at NEM! – Women for Each Other Movement.

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ADVERTISEMENT

Amber summer in Gdańsk

Summer by the sea evokes pictures of the beach, rest, and strolls in the sand, and when walking there you can come across a nugget of amber called the Baltic gold. If you happen to be interested in seeing its largest collection, it will be worth your while to set off for Gdańsk where a new Museum of Amber will open in the summer.

There is a good chance that the new museum will become one of the top tourist attractions in Gdańsk. There, you will see exhibits unmet anywhere else in the world, arranged on two floors, plus multimedia installations, and artistic arrangements of the topical sections.

The interior of the historic Grand Mill will be shrouded in semi-darkness, an effect created meticulously for the new exhibition; the walls and floors will be black to create an aura of mystery. The thus achieved contrast of blackness and illumination and the bright colour of amber is intended to highlight its beauty and draw the visitors into the world of the presented exhibits.

On the first floor of the permanent exhibition, you will have an opportunity to travel in time millions of years back – to the era when fossil resins and the Baltic amber began to form. You will be invited to step into the amber forest and see how amber formed; you will have an opportunity to put your feet next to the glacier which once bound the land of Europe, and see and touch a particle of succinic acid in 3D.

Unmet anywhere else

Inclusions, or imprints of prehistoric flora and fauna, will certainly prove the most interesting exhibits. Here, the worldwide famous lizard sunken in amber opens the list. For the first time ever, a gecko inclusion, a four-centimetre large specimen of a bird catcher, or a wasp will be put on display. At the museum, you will see the largest in the world, 68-kilogram block of amber from Sumatra. You will also find the unique, 330 years old amber chess figures originally carved in Gdańsk, wandering to Amsterdam and finally Scotland in their history. Thanks to their purchase for the new museum, they have returned to the place of their creation testifying to the mastery of the early craftsmen.

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Museum for everyone

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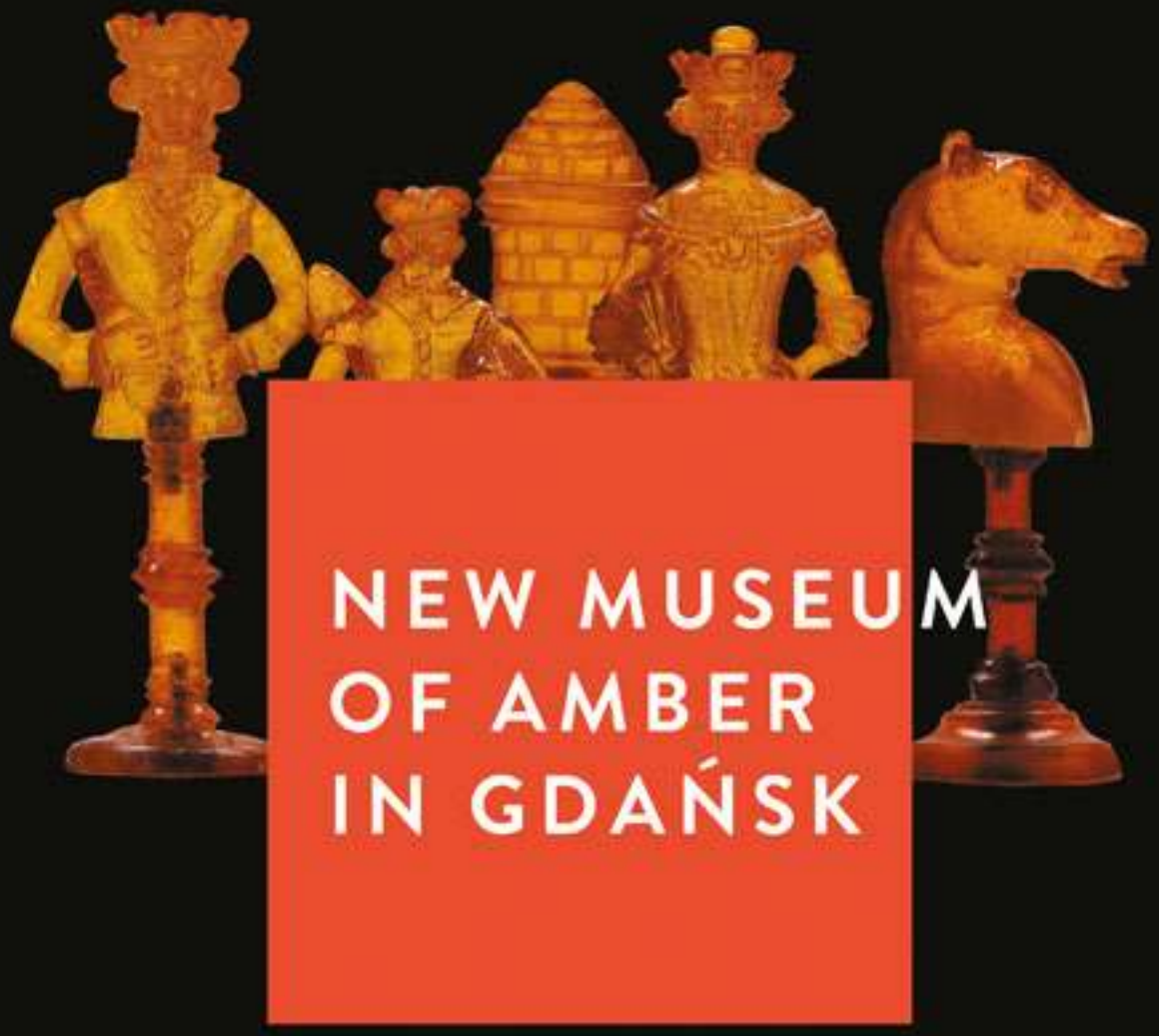

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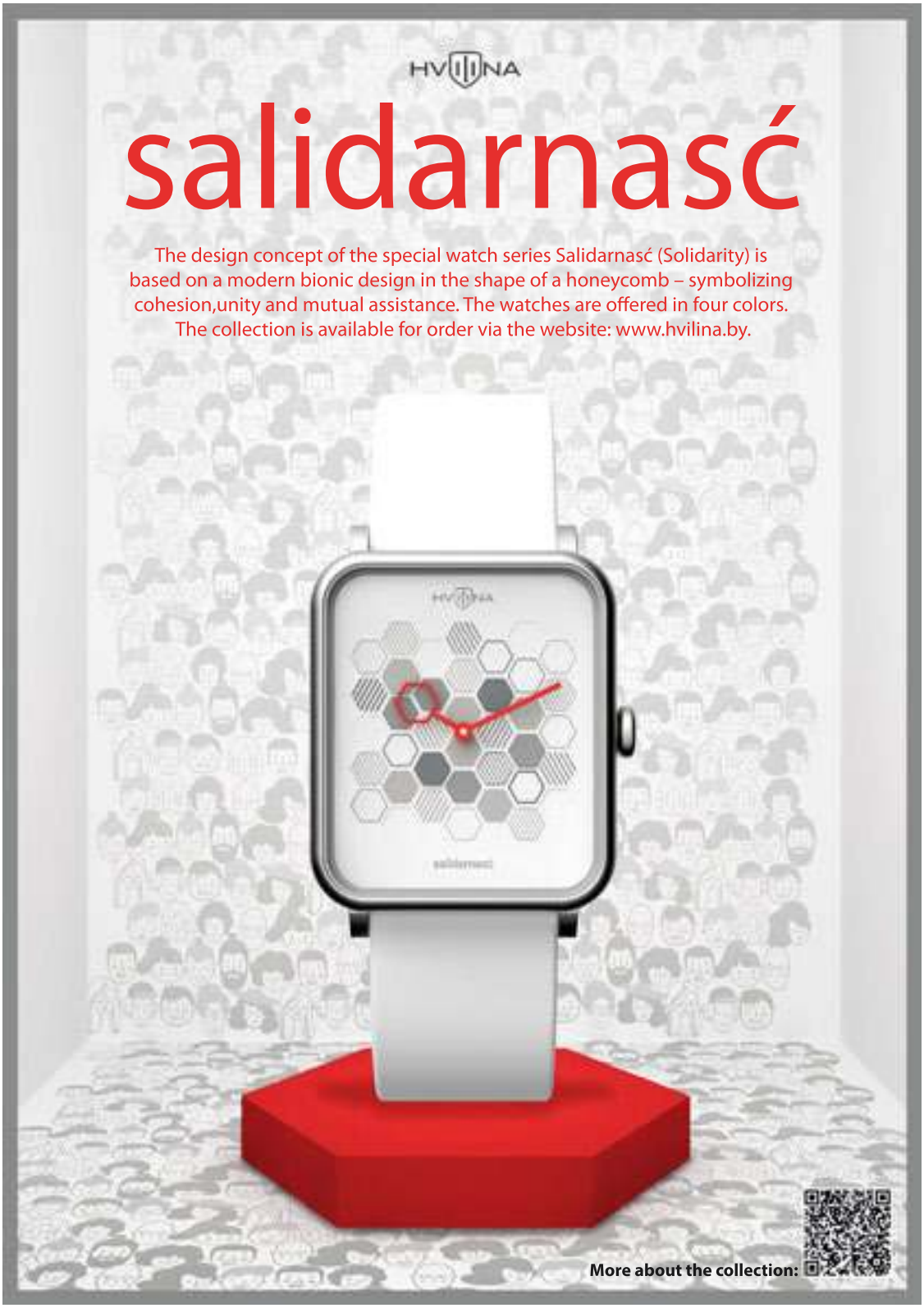

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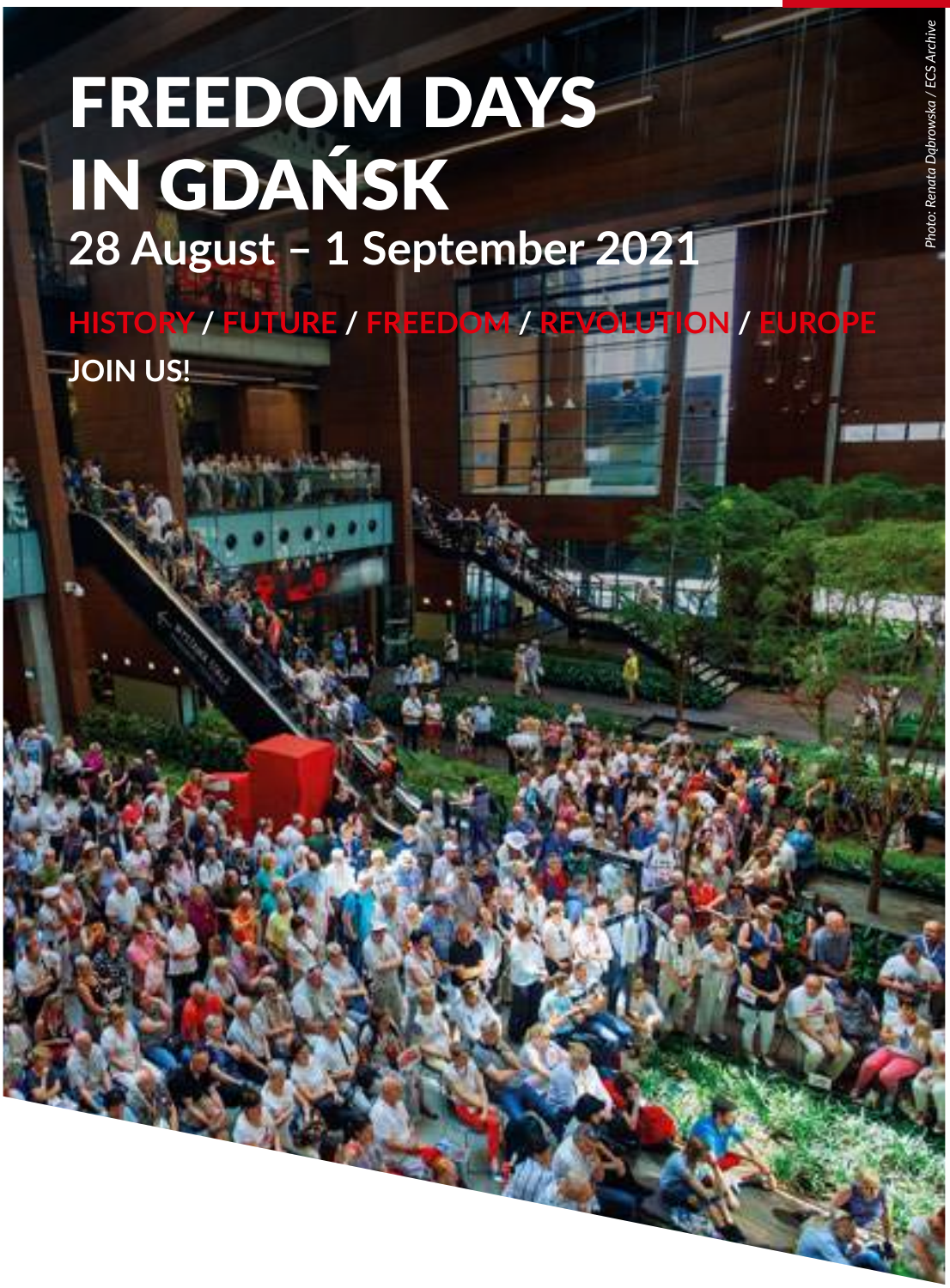

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EASTERN CAFÉ

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How powerful is Russia?

JAKUB BORNIO

Russia Resurrected. Its Power and Purpose in a New Global Order. By: Kathryn E. Stoner. Publisher: Oxford University Press, Oxford, United Kingdom, 2021.

Since the annexation of Crimea, Russia has become a fraught issue on the political and analytical agenda. The mainstream debate, however, has lacked a close contemplation of Russia's policy. It often failed to recognise that Moscow's assertiveness, as well as its dissatisfaction from the shape of the international order, were presented long before 2014. Undoubtedly, it was Vladimir Putin's rise to power in 2000 that constituted a qualitative change in Russia's politics, compared to the 1990s, both in external and internal dimensions. As a result, almost a decade after the collapse of the Soviet Union – the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century," as once expressed by Putin – Russia began a gradual recovery. Yet, Moscow's role in international relations, as well as its behaviours and ambitions were often misinterpreted. What is more, the question about Russia's character, whether it is defensive or offensive, still causes confusion. The catchy – and fairly correct – slogan that Russia "is neither as weak as we think nor as strong as its leadership would like it to be viewed" does not provide us with any clarification either. The fundamental questions on how powerful Russia is, and how much it has changed under Putin, is addressed in a new book by Kathryn E. Stoner, a professor of International Studies at Stanford University, titled *Russia resurrected. Its power and purpose in a new global order*.

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Quantifying power

The book consists of eight chapters each offering an analysis of a different branch of Russia's might and capabilities. It discusses the geographical scope of Russia's influence, includes a socio-economic analysis, examines Russia's hard-, soft-, and sharp-power toolkit as well as identifies the domestic determinants of Moscow's behaviour.

Yet, a proper evaluation of Russia's power is difficult and problematic. Indeed, various branches of the country's abilities have a diversified potential. In other words, the Kremlin's means do not have the same impact on every region; and every country is vulnerable to Russia's influence to varying degrees. Moreover, some of Russia's capabilities are hardly measurable, due to their specificity. At the same time, it must not be forgotten that the concept of power is always relative. The capabilities of other actors need to be taken into account as well. Comparative studies are essential in this matter. It is worth to note that the various theoretical approaches to international relations provide us with different answers to the question of how powerful Russia is.

Kathryn Stoner, being aware of these difficulties, provides us with a comprehensive, multi-dimensional, and "multi-theoretical" study on Russia's power, its influence, strengths, weaknesses and geographical domains. She has the unique ability to use different theoretical approaches in a very effective way. At the same time, Stoner does not usurp the right to propose a new theoretical perspective. Neither does she altogether criticise various schools of thought within international relations. Instead she drew on their experience to solve problems in the most comprehensive and multi-dimensional way possible. By doing so, she has also unveiled their shortcomings. The author's ambition was to complement the current literature on the matter, and the goal was fairly accomplished.

Kathryn Stoner provides a comprehensive, multi-dimensional, and "multi-theoretical" study on Russia's power.

Stoner is right arguing that the traditional perception of power is not sufficient to understand Russia's abilities and influence. Indeed, under Putin, Russia uses both traditional and non-traditional means of external influence. Her analysis is conducted through the prism of domestic and international factors, which complement each other; yet, they also interpenetrate. She argues that Russia is not a great power, in a traditional understanding of the term, but rather an effective disruptor/challenger to the contemporary international system.

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Geographical dimension of Russia's power

The author identified the post-Soviet space as an area of Russia's special interest and influence. Fair enough, bearing in mind Moscow's narrative, activities, and centuries-long penetration of the area. Indeed, the latter enables Moscow to use various methods (the main ones analysed in the book) in shaping the politics of all of the former Soviet republics. Case studies of Russia's bilateral relations with the Baltics, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus provides readers with a wider context. Unlike other authors, Stoner's assessment of Moscow's policy toward these states remains ambiguous.

In her analysis, Stoner approaches issues from different angles. It remains unconvincing, however, that the author had resigned from a focused case study of Russia's impact on the rest of the ex-Soviet republics, and grouped the "Stans" together, as well as two other south Caucasus states into two merged subchapters. Even though Russia's methods of influence in its self-defined "near abroad" are coherent, each of the ex-Soviet republics differs significantly. In this case, it refers mainly to Azerbaijan and Armenia. At the same time, with the Baltics being integrated into western structures, they are a completely different ballgame.

The analysis of Russia's influence on the fourteen ex-Soviet republics is a successful attempt of comparative study. All of this is considered within the wider geopolitical context of rivalry with the European Union, the United States and China, which makes the analysis even more multidimensional. Despite Russia's bilateral relations, Stoner elaborates on multilateral platforms of co-operation, trying to answer how Russia uses international organisations in the region for the purpose of its foreign policy.

It is quite obvious that Russia's ambitions reach beyond its "near abroad", a fact also noticed by Stoner. In this case, Moscow's means are more limited, yet still influential. Trying to answer the question "where else does Russia matter", the author starts with Europe, traditionally at the centrepiece of the Kremlin's policy. Stoner correctly observed the evolutionary character of Russia's policy toward Europe. Once again she provides the reader with a deepened analysis of an array of methods that Russia uses to impact policy of the so-called "new and old" Europeans. Such a clear distinction is well-founded bearing in mind the different historical roles which Russia played in Western Europe on the one hand, and in Central and Eastern Europe on the other. This obviously results in different abilities and methods that Moscow's use to increase its influence over these countries.

Undoubtedly it was NATO's eastward expansion that concerned Russia the most. Stoner argues that Putin's role in shaping Moscow's harsh policy towards NATO was determinative. In fact, it was not Putin who had been unique in this matter, but Boris Yeltsin who "had come

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to gradually accept NATO expansion" despite the fact that the state apparatus and Yeltsin's back-office opposed Poland and Hungary accession to NATO. The US engagement in Europe remains a major preoccupation of Russia's foreign policymakers.

Thus, pushing the US out of Europe is one of Moscow's top priorities. Indeed, Putin envisions a Europe from Lisbon to Vladivostok, but there is not much space left for Washington in such a concept. Hence, it is not that evident whether Moscow's policy would have been different if someone else had replaced Putin. Even though the subchapter is an excellent analysis of the various dimensions of Moscow's modus operandi towards Europe, I would argue that the so-called Gerasimov Doctrine (which focuses on information warfare) is a part of it. As the military historian Charles K. Bartles remarked in 2016, Gerasimov was rather misinterpreted by western scholars.

Russia is also present globally, trying to influence its partners in several regions of the world. They all grab Russia's attention for various reasons. Some of them are constituents of Russia's long-term strategy and some became an object of Russia's interest because they got into geopolitical vacuums. Stoner offers good insights into Moscow's influence in Africa and the Middle East, for example, where Russia's is trying to be a bigger player, as well as on bilateral relations with China and India. It is a pity that not much was said about these countries perspective on Russia – a factor that could change the outlook dramatically. Although, as the author acknowledges these are "worthy of a book in and by themselves".

Economic weakness and military might?

Another issue Stoner has dealt with includes the economic and financial condition of the country. In addition to the relatively well-known energy sector, Stoner analysed financial assets, macroeconomic indicators, Russia's capacity to overcome crises, level of innovations and its research and development capabilities. She pays great attention to the structure of the domestic economy. Indeed, its unbalanced oil-based character and the domination of a few hegemons over the entire economy are serious obstacles. She also included the oligarchy and Russia's unique "patronal politics" as an inseparable component of its economy.

Generally, Stoner is correct to say that the oligarchy weakens the country's condition. What she does not mention, however, is that members of this "inner circle" may also contribute to Russia's foreign policy. They do this in a way that benefits the Kremlin. Being aware of the relativeness of power, Stoner compares Russia's economy with the economies of other major players like the BRICS countries, the EU, and the US. Surprising to some, she shows that the widespread

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opinion of Russia as a political/military colossus with economic feet of clay is an oversimplification. Her critical attitude, once again, needs to be appreciated here. Stoner is right that Russia's projection of foreign power is not based on its economy. Money, however, provides other means with necessary impetus. That is why this part of this book is so valuable.

Russian demographic indicators, as Stoner reminds us, significantly improved since "the dark years of the 1990s," but there is still much to be done.

A widespread historical narrative about Russia's strength emphasises the great role of its landmass and manpower. The latter should not be limited to the military scope. In fact, these are people who are one of the main factors of production. The collapse of the Soviet Union was a great trauma for Russia because of the unprecedented decrease in its population. As a result, the Kremlin "lost control" of around half its population. Nevertheless, as Stoner correctly points out, it is not just about the number but the quality of the social fabric. Russian demographic and health indicators, as Stoner reminds us, significantly improved since "the dark years of the 1990s," but there is still much to be done. From the Russian perspective, it is not just about the body but also about the soul.

The military strength – the key features of Russian might – obviously could not be ignored in the book. Unquestionably, hard power remains the core asset of Russia's foreign policy and no one will deny its unprecedented technological and organisational revolution. Russian policymakers, as Stoner argues, learnt from failures in past wars like in Chechnya and the shortcomings of their military campaign in Georgia. It resulted in a deep modernisation and reinforcement of the Russian army. Moreover, some technological and tactical abilities were examined in "real-life manoeuvres" on the battlefields of Ukraine and Syria. That provided Russia's armed forces with the necessary experience and skills. Russian Private Military Companies are addressed in the book as well. Stoner escapes the trap of power-metrics, which merely focuses on a quantitative comparative study. In addition to this, she includes qualitative research and, importantly, pays attention to the "geographic dividend" Russia clearly poses.

The issue is not that simple regarding Russian soft and sharp powers – especially as the former is not often associated with Russia's modus operandi. But as presented in the book, Russia's toolkit is quite wide. Its effectiveness, however, is extremely challenging to adequately evaluate. At the same time, Russia's sharp activities, like cyber-attacks or propaganda spread via state-sponsored media outlets, are more tangible. Ston-

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er accurately points out that the latter aims mainly at fuelling social stratification, in line with a *divide et impera* approach. Last but not least, it needs to be emphasised that Russia uses all of these methods simultaneously; a strategy that, since 2014, is commonly referred to as "hybrid".

Has Russia resurrected?

Stoner demonstrates that Russia has undergone a deep structural evolution over the past two decades. Importantly, it is not a revolution since revolutions are perceived by Russian authorities as worst-case scenarios. These changes are most visible especially in Moscow's geographical domain, some branches of the country's economy and its armed forces. Yet, Putin still faces several challenges when it comes to the structure of the economy and demographic issues.

Contrary to the widespread narrative, Stoner argues "Russia is not playing a weak card well, rather it has some strong cards to play". The book is a detailed analysis of the evolution of Russia's power under Putin. In fact, Stoner pays great attention to Putin himself. Even though I still think it is debatable whether Russia would have altered under different leadership, Putin's personal abilities cannot be denied. In this sense, the author is right to claim that his contribution was invaluable.

While analysing Russia's purpose, Stoner pays great attention to domestic factors. She argues that the "patronal system" is one of the most important determinants of Russia's projection of power abroad. It is due to the fact that the so-called "inner circle's" main interest is to preserve the domestic status quo. And once it can no longer meet the expectations of the public via economic means, it is pressed to satisfy the public's desires by the vision of a great Russia. And it finds a sympathetic ear. Thus, contemporary Russia does not lack an ideology, as Stoner argues. Even though Moscow uses imperialism, nationalism and geopolitics in a very instrumental way, it does not mean they are not behind Russia's external activities. The public's support for imperialism is the main reason I do not believe any easy democratisation of Russia would happen, as Stoner envisions, if someone else replaced Putin.

Let me raise a few provocative questions. Maybe it is time to admit that countries like Russia or China cannot be democratised? That maybe their civilisational differences are too great. That maybe their contribution to western-led international organisations should not be interpreted as a willingness to co-operate? Stoner is correct to say there were plenty of attempts of Russian-West co-operation. The question, however, is whether Russia understood them in that way. The problem is not about what really

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happened in the context of the so-called coloured revolutions, NATO being offensive or defensive, but rather about Russia's interpretation of these and other events. It seems that "civilised rivalry" does not fit the Russian mentality. The international struggle is still a zero-sum game for the Kremlin. This, absolutely, requires further research.

The greatest wisdom of the book is that the Stoner treats her explanations and conclusions as a complement to current studies. Even though she pays most attention to the domestic factors, she also acknowledges the importance of the international structure (as understood by neorealism) and significance of great power rivalry. It is also a multipolarity of the global order which enables Moscow to act assertively. Stoner, being a conscious researcher, is aware of some of the shortcomings of her study. As she claims her conceptualisation of power underscores the fact that contemporary conflicts are no longer determined by a country's military size, population or wealth.

In addition, her book is one of the finest responses to John Mearsheimer's famous article "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault". In fact, both Stoner and Mearsheimer are right. It is time to finally accept that reality is more complex than any theory can explain. This book is one of the greatest elaborations of Russia's capacities that I have read over the last few years. Stoner, with this book, has significantly contributed to the current debate on Russia. I recommend this book to anyone who wants to read a well-structured, critical and up-to-date analysis on present day Russia. I hope my questions and comments, which are not a critique of the book, will shed further light on the various themes discussed by Stoner. NEE

Jakub Bornio is an assistant professor at the Department of European Studies at the University of Wrocław.

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Fear as essential

ANNA EFIMOVA

Dear Comrades! A film directed by Andrei Konchalovsky, Russia, 2020.

Dear Comrades! is a recent movie, by the prominent Russian director Andrei Konchalovsky, which became a big international hit last year. It was shortlisted for the Oscars and received the Special Jury Prize at the Venice Film Festival, while Konchalovsky was awarded the Silver Hugo for Best Director award at the Chicago International Film Festival. The film tells the story of a violently dispersed demonstration that took place in 1962 in the city of Novocherkassk. Classified by the Soviet authorities until *perestroika*, this event remains mostly unknown to the Russian public *Dear Comrades!* depicts the Soviet army shooting into a crowd and leaving 25 people dead and more than 85 wounded. It received a mixed reception in Russia, being accused of tarnishing Soviet history.

1962

On May 31st 1962 the price of food increased in the Soviet Union, although the communist party claimed rumours about it were only "hostile propaganda". Having learnt about the price increases when they did take place, citizens became perplexed. How could they trust official statements if the hostile propaganda turned out to be true? The next day, workers of the Novocherkassk electric locomotive factory got news about changes to their workload and wages. As a result, some workers lost one-third of their monthly income. Workers ap-

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proached their superiors saying they could not afford to have meat as part of their daily food ration. One of them responded with advice to replace meat with liver pies.

In response, the workers organised a strike as they had seen them in Soviet propaganda movies – they dismantled the train tracks. They cut off the railway line to the south, a witness recalled in a conversation with *Meduza*, an independent Russian outlet that published a lengthy article on the events in 2017. The workers also came up with the slogan "Khrushchev for meat" which they painted on the trains that could not operate due to the dismantled track. Khrushchev himself did not seem too concerned about the strikes in Novocherkassk – he seemed more preoccupied with his speech about domestic enemies of the Soviet Union that he prepared for Cuban and Soviet students that day. Members of the Communist Party Central Committee and the Politburo arrived in the city to deal with the crisis.

The Soviets made a huge effort to conceal information about the event – there was no coverage in state media and residents were not allowed to leave the city.

The strike lasted for three days. On the second day, tanks entered the city. People carrying red flags and portraits of Vladimir Lenin approached the square where the local communist party headquarters were located. As witnesses recall, some children and passers-by were injured by the shootings during the demonstration. Soviet authorities, in the aftermath, launched a secret investigation of the event. Most of the 110 people arrested were sentenced to ten years in prison and seven were executed. The communists made a huge effort to conceal information about the event – there was no coverage in state media and residents were not allowed to leave the city. Bloodstains on the square pavement were immediately covered with a new layer of asphalt. *Perestroika* changed the situation, allowing people to speak out about the tragedies of the past, although an official investigation of the case was conducted only after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

The story of this revolt is told through the perspective of a staunch communist party worker, Lyudmila Syomina. The first scene starts with Lyudmila, or Lyuda, and another married man who, as we get to know, is the first secretary of the local communist party. The couple is sharing a bed, naked. Lyuda complains about the food price increase and says that things had not been this way under Stalin. She expresses this point throughout the movie, even when her daughter disappears during the peaceful demonstration and she has to secretly

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look for her daughter's body in someone else's grave.

Konchalovsky does not primarily focus on the protest or the participants' motivations. At first glance, it seems that the events are a reaction to the repressive, totalitarian state system (and its fervent followers). We see people throwing empty bottles at the windows of the local communist party headquarters and marching on the street. The communist authorities and KGB workers appear on the screen in various situations, showing how tense communication was between different high-ranking officials who had to make a decision on how to deal with the situation. The director skilfully incorporates opposing narratives into this story. In one scene the Soviet authorities are blamed for shooting innocent civilians participating in the peaceful demonstration; while in another it is speculated that the protest was fuelled by prisoners released as a result of Nikita Khrushchev's 1953 amnesty. According to the latter, if there was something to blame the Soviet authorities for, it was for not shooting the wrongdoers but for burying their bodies in someone else's grave and not letting their relatives pay their last respects to loved ones.

Yet in Russia the film was criticised by conservative groups for tarnishing Soviet history. However, for some viewers, the dark pages of Russia's history displayed here may be too tame. This does not come as a surprise as *Dear Comrades!* is mainly written for international audiences, as Russian critics have pointed out. It is simultaneously targeted towards international viewers who are not that familiar with Soviet realities and Russians who are generally fond of historical dramas. Reaching out to these two diverse audiences is possible as most Russians are not acquainted with the story of the Novocherkassk tragedy.

Paradoxes

The circumstances surrounding the production of this movie seem a bit peculiar. To begin with, the state-sponsored production, which presents the violent suppression of protest by the state machine, came on screen around the same time as a wave of protests. The director's approach to history is quite unique. The film's main character is an ordinary communist party worker whose job is to reach out and prevent any sort of resentment among factory workers. A quote by Egor Belikov, a Russian film critic, best describes this paradox: "Konchalovsky is a product of the Soviet order – its dear comrade and yet its dropout: as the son of one of the authors of the words of the Soviet and Russian anthems, a recipient of several state art awards, Konchalovsky left the Soviet Union, its censorship and constant limitation of artistic freedom to Hollywood in 1980. He returned

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a decade later to continue his career in now-independent Russia."

In spite of his past grudge against the Soviet authorities, Konchalovsky's contemporary views may appear paradoxical. Recently he called Vladimir Putin a "liberal" who should stay in charge of the state as long as possible as "it would be better for Russia". However, back in 2012, Konchalovsky expressed his support for civil society by signing a petition on behalf of Pussy Riot, a feminist music group that organised a provocative performance in a prominent Orthodox cathedral in Moscow.

In April 2021 Konchalovsky asked the organisers of White Elephant – a respectable annual film award – to withdraw *Dear Comrades!* from the competition as the investigation of Alexei Navalny and his Anti-Corruption Foundation were nominated for the same award, albeit in a different category. He stated, without explicitly mentioning Navalny and his work, that one of the nominees is a "journalistic project that can be regarded as a political act but is outside of the evaluation of cinematic art criteria".

Nevertheless, *Dear Comrades!* won the film of the year award while Navalny's investigation into Putin's secret palace beside the Black Sea, viewed more than 130 million times on YouTube, won the event of the year category. As the White Elephant organisers explained, Konchalovsky could not withdraw the film as it was not him who nominated it for the award, but the film critics themselves.

"There is a big misconception harboured in Russia and the post-Soviet space in general, that cinema is standing outside of politics. The fact that in the Soviet Union cinema was frequently used as a source of political propaganda is one of the reasons for this delusion. Cinema has always been related to politics and it was born within a political domain," a prominent Russian film critic, Anton Dolin, said in response to the dispute. Indeed, the state-affiliated Union of Cinematographers of the Russian Federation, a founder of the award, has already responded to Navalny's award by promising to cease all relations with the White Elephant organisers.

Essential element of power

The debate around something that depicts the Soviet violent suppression of protest can provide us with insight into the identity cleavages taking place in present day Russia. In one of his recent interviews, Konchalovsky, responding to a critic who accused him of tarnishing Soviet history, said the following: "Fear was essential [in the Soviet Union] as there is no fear today when the failure of the state is happening." In a way, Navalny's supporters could agree with the renowned director. Members of his headquarters, responding to the

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violent dispersal of the January protests in support of the Russian activist, argued that fear was "the one and the only weapon" of the incumbent Russian president.

Interestingly, both sides understand "fear" as an essential element of power but frame it differently; this can also be seen in regards to the Russian public at large. Clearly, the fear of authorities, the fear of law and order, the fear of looking "bad" in someone else's eyes are unavoidable for many Russians. In their view, these feelings bring order, guarantee security, and constrain people. Found in all spheres of life, these fears are deeply rooted in the Soviet past. Many of my contemporaries also grew up listening to their grandmothers wailing that someone "totally lost their fear" on various occasions.

In the perception of this group, it is fear that triggers officials' aggression towards innocent people who are discontent with the Kremlin's autocratic rule, legal violations, corruption, and suppression. However, we live in a state where hegemonic discourse (not only one towards Soviet grandeur, but any other phenomenon) dominates, and the opposing narratives are labelled "radical" or "fascist". This is frustrating, but at the same time, as history shows, if hegemonic discourses were to exist internally, there would not be many movies like *Dear Comrades!* made.

Anna Efimova is a Russian journalist. She is currently finishing her master degree in Central and East European, Russian and Eurasian studies from the University of Glasgow, University of Tartu and Jagiellonian University in Kraków.

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A book prematurely born

EWA THOMPSON

Our Man in Warszawa: How the West Misread Poland.
By: Jo Harper. Publisher: Central European University Press, Budapest-New York, 2021.

Witty, irritating, and refreshingly irreverent, Jo Harper's recent book stands out among the admittedly modest collection of books about contemporary Polish politics. Its copious quotations are well documented: a rare phenomenon in journalistic writings about Poland, the writings that usually turn around a few terms that unequivocally condemn before documenting, analysing, or asking for a second opinion. Harper tries to analyse and occasionally drops such names as Gérard Bouchard and Pierre Bourdieu, to show that his attempts to explain PiS and its enemies are not based solely on the work of stringers.

The book covers the post-communist period of Polish history, with emphasis on the last few years of political infighting and the remarkable economic growth under PiS. It surveys contemporary Polish politics as presented by the left-leaning political scientists and historians in Poland and Britain, including the 2019 and 2020 elections. The last part consists of quotations and assessments of Polish politics by British journalists. The author notes that the desire to write his book originated in irritation at the banalities within which the British press has tried to encapsulate Polish affairs. Perhaps the author has bitten more than he can chew: a short book can handle either a comparison between Poland and Britain or an analysis of Polish politics, but not both. While reading it, I often felt that the book was prematurely born.

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One-sided

Harper's credo includes an awareness that we live in an epoch of "post-truth". He does however believe that facts still exist. Good. Many British and Polish writers Harper refers to do not let facts get in their way. This fundamental ability allows him to deconstruct the largely superficial commentary on Poland in the *Guardian*, *Financial Times*, *The Economist*, *The Times*, or *The New Statesman*. He is less good at identifying the faults of the major media in Poland. He obviously failed to establish contact with PiS intellectuals, academics and journalists, and his sources are invariably the largely foreign-owned media in Poland. Thus his story is, in spite of his efforts to make it objective, one-sided. There is no room in this review to take issue with all the problems which one-sidedness brings; I will only mention a few as examples.

Harper describes the split in the Solidarity movement and the Round Table agreements that followed it. Dubbed "the thick line" (*gruba kreska*) by the first post-communist Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki, these agreements privileged the former communists who had the organisational resources and experience that members of Solidarity lacked. The agreements naïvely (or cleverly?) assumed that the communists and their foreign sponsors would withdraw and cease meddling in Poland's politics. Or perhaps it was worded in such a way as to ensure precisely the outcome all too visible today? Harper does not explore ambivalence of the Round Table accords or differences between them and the "change of guard" in Britain, where the discovery of the "Cambridge Five" and Anthony Blunt's confession became the infamy of the century. A country from which the Soviet military forces reluctantly withdrew as late as 1991, remained honeycombed with individuals and institutions set up to make it fail. Mazowiecki's *gruba kreska* was thus naïve at best, and treacherous at worst. Neither the British press nor its critic Jo Harper perceive the implications of this situation. Furthermore, Polish tolerance of a variety of points of view has nothing to do with Karl Popper's open society and a great deal to do with the tradition of Polish republicanism, not to speak of the Catholic social teaching. One perceives in this book an excessive reliance on periodicals such as *East European Politics and Societies* and *Polityka* in forming the author's view of Poland.

Another example can be seen in the author's take on the phenomenon of Solidarity. Harper treats it as if it were a joint worker-intellectual enterprise where workers provided the muscle and intellectuals created the programme. This is also a standard interpretation in the English-speaking countries and in circles associated with the Polish left. This interpretation was invalidated by, among others, Lawrence Goodwyn's *Breaking the Barrier: The Rise of Solidarity in Poland* (Oxford 1991). Goodwyn

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conclusively demonstrated that Warsaw intellectuals had little to do with the conception and development of Solidarity. Scholars and students in Poland associated with the publishing house *Teologia Polityczna* are now trying to return to the roots of Solidarity and reconstruct its true image and inspiration. But neither Goodwyn nor *Teologia Polityczna* weigh in in Harper's narrative. Instead, Harper's authorities are the American political scientist David Ost, the notoriously ideologised Brian Porter-Szücs, and other left-leaning sources. Harper's subsequent narrative is therefore grounded in an erroneous interpretations proposed by his sources. The uniqueness of the Solidarity is shuffled aside, and second-hand information provided by post-communist Warsaw intellectuals and American academics becomes the foundational narrative.

Misinterpretations

In Harper's defence it should be said that the narrative he unwittingly perpetuates has been widely approved by academic interpreters in Poland and abroad, from scholarly works to Wikipedia. The attribution to intellectuals of both tactics and strategy of Solidarity and bypassing the crucial role of Catholic social teaching and of Christianity generally (remember those confessionals magically springing up in the Gdańsk shipyard?) are standard practice. Harper aims at impartiality, but he falls victim to those whose position of ideological power allows them to create narratives that adhere to their theories rather than to the facts.

For similar reasons Harper misinterprets the issue of the "five hundred zloty monthly for each child". He calls it "redistribution" and a "handout," ignoring the fact that 80 per cent of Polish society live in what by American standards is deep poverty caused not only by low wages and zero inheritance for generations, but also by the absence of infrastructure that Western Europeans and Americans take for granted. It is enough to compare the quality and number of square meters of habitable space in Western Europe and in the formerly Soviet-occupied nations to see that unless one's goal is Poland's demographic and cultural shrinkage, some kind of dramatic help was overdue at the time PiS announced the five-hundred-zloty "handout."

Terms like "populist" and "authoritarian" are used throughout without offering empirical evidence. As a recent tweet (by Marcus Kranz) has suggested, the last authoritarian ruler of Poland was General Jaruzelski. Not a single representative of the conservative ruling party (PiS) is given coverage in this book without being filtered through the ideology of PiS's opponents. Harper quotes Sławomir Sierakowski but not Zdzisław Krasnodębski; Ireneusz Krzemiński but not Andrzej Zybertowicz.

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Tygodnik Powszechny is mentioned several times, but not *Arcana* or *Sieci*. One feels that the author has never met the conservative intellectuals of Poland and has never read the periodicals in which they publish. Ryszard Legutko's *Demon in Democracy: Totalitarian Temptations in Free Societies* (Encounter 2016) plays no role in interpreting the attitudes of Polish and American academics to Polish realities. Andrzej Nowak's numerous articles in scholarly journals and in the media are totally ignored. The same can be said about professors Andrzej Waśko, Krzysztof Koehler, Aleksander Nalaskowski; politicians Konrad Szymański and Jacek Saryusz-Wolski; political thinkers Bronisław Wildstein and the brothers Karnowski; journalists Cezary Gmyz, Jakub Maciejewski, Stanislaw Janecki, Aleksandra Rybińska, Marcin Wikło, Aleksander Majewski, Marzena Paczuska, Marek Pyza and others. Finally, Harper seems unaware that Poland modernised and developed economically under PiS while it stagnated under the previous Civic Platform (PO). In February 2021 Poland had the lowest unemployment in Europe. The IMF raised the expectation of Polish growth in 2021 to 3.5 per cent from 3.2 percent. On March 27th 2021, *Der Tagesspiegel* wrote about the "Polish economic miracle". Surely such facts should be taken into account when assessing the current government.

I do not blame Harper for these omissions and mistakes. The postcommunist reality is such that a foreign national arriving in Poland as a student, scholar, or journalist, will most likely be embraced by the strongly leftist and proactive intellectual milieu, rather than by the somewhat reticent conservative one. This is particularly true of universities and the media. But, to use François Thom's words, these intellectual centres increasingly "defend ideology against the unwelcome attacks of reality".

Not a single representative of the conservative ruling party is given coverage in the book without being filtered through the ideology of PiS's opponents.

In spite of the shortcomings outlined above, I welcome this book as one of the few foreign-authored books on Poland that does not patronise or adopt a *Besserwissenschaft* attitude. Its critique of the British press writing about Poland is right on target. NEE

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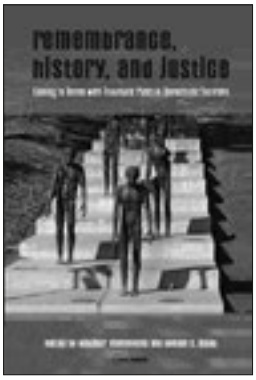
Remembrance, history, and justice

Coming to terms with traumatic pasts in democratic societies

JUHO NIKKO

Remembrance, History, and Justice: Coming to terms with traumatic pasts in democratic societies.
Editors: Vladimir Tismaneanu and Bogdan C. Iacob.
Publisher: Central European University Press, Budapest, 2016.

How do societies in transition address the crimes of the past, and what is the role of memory in building a new democratic society? These are the kind of questions answered by *Remembrance, History, and Justice: Coming to terms with traumatic pasts in democratic societies*. The volume presents a panorama of controversies regarding transitional justice and collective memory in Central and Eastern Europe, Germany and several non-European countries. The book provides a number of insightful, in-depth analyses of the region by some of the most influential authors in the field, but at same time, its broad scope results in a certain lack of focus.



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The necessity of memory

One of the basic theses of *Remembrance, History and Justice* is that a healthy democracy cannot be built without addressing the evils of the past. The authors clearly reject the idea that in order to heal, a traumatised society should forget and move on. Nevertheless, it becomes clear that an honest reckoning with the past is often impossible in the early days of a transition.

West Germany is often presented as an example of a successful reworking of the past. In his article, Jan-Werner Müller analyses the controversies regarding this view. According to critics, the German memory of the Holocaust should be one of pain and guilt, but perversely it has transformed into a feeling of pride over one's own remorse. While acknowledging the need to combat this normalisation of memory, Müller argues correctly that such issues can only arise thanks to the overall success of Germany's working through its Nazi past. Compare this to today's Russia, where Vladimir Putin is in the process of rehabilitating Joseph Stalin and assigns blame to Poland for starting the Second World War.

The painful labour of working through a difficult past does not happen automatically, however. The authors point to several factors that can hinder this process. According to Daniel Chirot, the reason why Germany faced its Nazi past relatively quickly was not some inherent self-reflexiveness of German society but the fact that it was forced to do so by the Allied occupiers. Japan, on the other hand, was not pressured in the same way, which resulted in a society that is rather oblivious to its regime's crimes during Second World War. Polish historian Andrzej Paczkwoski notes that in Poland, the first semi-democratically elected government was unwilling to prosecute the communist authorities as the "ministries of force" were still controlled by communists and had the power to deploy the army and security troops if they felt threatened. Eusebio Mujal-León and Eric Langenbacher point out that even where guarantees for the stability of the new regime are in place, victims of oppression can take years to develop the trust to speak out about their suffering.

The painful labour of working through a difficult past does not happen automatically. The authors point to several factors that can hinder this process.

At the same time, it is important to remember that the primacy of remembrance is a rather new phenomenon. Until the Second World War, forgetting had been the primary remedy for overcoming the terrors of war, dating back to

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the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 which called for "perpetual Oblivion, Amnesty, or Pardon of all that has been committed since the beginning of these Troubles". It was perhaps the unprecedented magnitude of destruction brought by the war and the Holocaust that in the long run made forgetting impossible.

Truth, justice or democracy?

The authors present ample evidence that justice, democracy and truth do not always complement each other as naturally as one might think. A good example is the case of former Serbian president Slobodan Milošević discussed by Vladimir Petrović. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) made the decision to investigate as many of Milošević's crimes as possible instead of sketching the general pattern of his crimes, which made the trial drag on for years. The court thus prioritised truth-telling and giving victims a voice over swiftly delivering justice. In the end, Milošević died before he could be convicted, denying the victims closure and leaving the trials with a mixed legacy.

In many countries, former elites found creative ways to escape justice. In Poland, the remarkable sluggishness of trials meant that by the time verdicts were given, many of the defendants were either dead or excluded due to poor health. In Bulgaria, Nikolai Vukov writes, killings that took place in labour camps could not be prosecuted because of a 20-year statute of limitations. Jeffrey Herf discusses the case of West Germany, where democracy by its very nature had the side effect of slowing down truth-telling: thanks to democratic elections, political forces that were against a comprehensive denazification were able enter parliament. What these examples show is that liberal democracy does not automatically lead to justice and closure to victims, even though it provides the crucial conditions for it.

The Romanian case

A considerable part of the book (five articles, 180 pages) is dedicated to discussing the Romanian transition and particularly the work of the Presidential Commission for the Analysis of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania (PCACDR), the chairman of which was Vladimir Tismaneanu, the editor of the book. The commission provided a long-awaited chance for Romanians to reach an official consensus about the nature of the communist regime, a topic which had

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largely been avoided during consecutive governments led by communists-turned-social democrats. On December 18th 2016, Traian Băsescu, the president of Romania who had set up the commission, officially declared the communist regime as criminal.

One might expect that the report would have been met with applause and relief, but instead, it got engulfed in criticism. The report declared that Romania's communist regime had been "(national) Stalinist" from its inception to its bloody end, which went against the popular narrative according to which Ceaușescu's rule had signalled a patriotic break from the "Muscovite" yoke introduced at the end of the Second World War. Parts of society that were compromised by the report criticised it furiously, including the Romanian Orthodox church which by the end of communism was deeply entangled with the party.

The emerging "New Left" portrayed the report as an attempt by Băsescu to impose a new cultural hegemony of "anti-communism" which unfairly discredited the utopian goals of communism and was no better than the state-endorsed anti-capitalism of the previous regime. Finally, many criticised the report for having robbed regular Romanians of their lived history, which was not necessarily congruent with the report's description of a thoroughly criminal regime. In other words, the Romanian elites failed to see the report as an opportunity to begin the arduous work of reckoning with the past, and instead discredited it as a compromised document.

Thematic breadth or lack of focus?

With 516 pages, *Remembrance, History and Justice* contains a number of truly insightful articles about the many troubles faced by societies battling with difficult histories. The main virtues of the book are in the quality of its individual articles, many of which are written by prominent scholars in the field. However, the wide scope of the book goes together with its main problem: a lack of focus.

When reading the book, one can think of several directions the authors could have pursued, but the result is rather a bit of everything. On the one hand, the book places a major focus on Romania, which could have warranted a publication of its own. On the other hand, the book is also not a systematic study of the entire post-communist region, with countries such as Czechoslovakia or Hungary going largely unmentioned. Another interesting approach could have been to go further with comparing Europe and the rest of the world, which is done in some of the articles, but not to the full potential.

The editors of the volume somewhat address this issue in the introduction by saying that the book "is innovative from

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the point of view of its thematic, methodological, and geographical breadth", which is true. Yet, I feel that a more focused and condensed approach would have produced better results. Nevertheless, *Remembrance, History and Justice* provides a fascinating read to anyone interested in the entangled web of memories, politics and history that transitional societies continue to grapple with.

Juho Nikko was an intern with *New Eastern Europe* in 2020. He spent two months with us in our editorial office and we had the opportunity and pleasure to get to know him and his interests. Unfortunately, Juho passed away this past April as a result of COVID-19. He was just 29 years old. We were shocked by the news and would like to send our condolences and sympathy to his family. No better words can describe Juho than those penned by Niall Gray, a contributor with *New Eastern Europe*: "Juho's love for Poland and the wider region was second to none. I was lucky enough to have known him well before we both started as interns at *New Eastern Europe*. However, his time at the magazine truly allowed him to shine and make use of all of his talents, not least his incredible language skills. His internship showed just how capable he was in accomplishing great things." May he Rest in Peace.

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All Quiet on the Eastern Flank?

French marines hold a position during mechanized infantry manoeuvres in Ādaži, Latvia.

Read on pages 184-206

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Kalev Stoicescu	**Minimising the threat from the east**
Wojciech Michnik	**Is NATO's 360-degree approach enough to keep focus on the Eastern flank?**
Ivana Karásková	**The other great power threat. China as a new challenge for NATO's Eastern flank**
Maksym Khylko	**Regional security from Ukraine's perspective. A focus on NATO**

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Stability but for how long

JURGIS VEDRICKAS

The Eastern flank of the NATO alliance might well be safer than ever before in a physical sense. However, warfare through information means, social and economic matters internally and geopolitical shifts externally could eventually lead to more troubling changes down the line.

The entire NATO Eastern flank is currently faced with a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, the international context is more unstable than it has been for decades, with the Kremlin continuing to assertively pursue its dreams of a *Russkiy Mir* (Russian World) and superpower status, while China exercises its increasing powers in order to pursue its own goals. On the other hand, at least in the short term, NATO states in the region are perhaps as safe as they have ever been – securing NATO membership provides a safeguard against direct hostilities of the sort we witnessed against Ukraine and Georgia, which means that, for the time being, efforts against NATO's Eastern flank are essentially limited to information operations and posturing.

Bar the gradual increase of tensions with the East over the past 20 years, these are circumstances that have remained essentially unchanged, which could allow us to say business goes on as usual in the region: be prepared, as best as you can, to defend against hard military incursion, while concurrently combatting more pertinent information assaults. Even while there are numerous discussions over the potential risks of the Baltics being cut off by a quick assault on or over the Suwałki Gap (an 80 kilometre strip of land in Poland which could become a bridge for ground troop transport between Belarus and Kaliningrad – editor's note), the real dangers lie in efforts that emanate from the East to mislead, destabilise and antagonise societies in the region. However, the past year has brought about sev-

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eral changes which, while not immediate, could significantly change the security and political landscape of the region.

From COVID-19 to information warfare

The coronavirus has been discussed to exhaustion over the past year and yet, so long as it continues to shape our everyday reality, we cannot avoid examining its impact. In a more direct sense, the virus's emergence has led to the loss of lives and livelihood around the world, concurrently locking down societies and economies. There have even been murmurs of a backsliding in democracy due to the measures implemented to combat the virus. The initial confusion and chaos, where we witnessed some disappointing displays of lacking solidarity between countries in the western bloc, did little to help.

While recovery is gradually underway, the fact that in the second quarter of 2020, we witnessed the largest decrease in GDP for the euro zone on record and that unemployment, particularly among younger generations, has greatly increased, speaks volumes. What does this mean for NATO's Eastern flank? Firstly, it puts a strain on any plans to increase spending on defence, an issue for the NATO alliance as a whole, given how numerous states have only recently been moving towards the NATO guideline of two per cent. This trend might not have been reversed as of yet, but as countries grapple with the fallout of the coronavirus crisis and as governments have to justify continued increases to defence expenditures, one can wonder if the most recent scandals involving Russian operations in NATO member states will be enough to convince Western European NATO states (some of which have been underperforming in terms of defence spending already). Any backsliding on compliance with NATO commitments is, at a time of increasing tensions with the East, a concerning element and states along the NATO periphery are likely to be the first to sample the consequences of failure in this respect.

> Any backsliding on compliance with NATO commitments at a time of increasing tensions with the East is concerning.

Nevertheless, so long as NATO membership and commitments do not come into question, even a lack of funds might be a moot point – NATO still maintains the capacity to mobilise resources if push comes to shove (not to mention the simple fact of a nuclear umbrella). The question here lies with societies. The impact of COVID-19 came together to form a potent cocktail. With societies under strain from the impact of the coronavirus, concurrently the circumstances are exploited to spread disinformation and manipulate perceptions. A perfect example is how,

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recently, the Lithuanian military reported a 32 per cent increase in "disinformation incidents".

There are already significant numbers refusing western vaccines or vaccines in general (likely, in no small part, due to disinformation spread through the Russian info-sphere), and while this may not directly impact security conditions today, it is another example of efforts to erode public trust in the state and its institutions. Such erosion could lead to unpredictable outcomes with potential security repercussions. Indeed, while NATO's Eastern flank can, for the short to intermediate term, rest easy in terms of its physical security thanks to NATO's Article 5 and at least adequate public support for the organisation both in the region and in the West, the real threat stems from the battle being waged over hearts and minds. This is particularly important in countries like Estonia and Latvia, which have large Russian ethnic minority populations, but also maintains relevance in states that do not such as Lithuania. While Russia is pouring vast sums into its media effort (Russia's budget for state media support exceeds a billion dollars a year), attempts to offer adequate alternatives to the Kremlin's mouthpieces remain insufficient or even non-existent in NATO member states. Admittedly though, at least at the domestic level in Russia, the Kremlin's propaganda machine might be losing some of its grip.

Efforts to dominate the information sphere manifest in more sophisticated ways as well. Recently, members of Baltic parliaments were faced with a technologically sophisticated provocation where individuals pretended to be Leonid Volkov, a prominent figure in the Russian opposition and supporter of Alexei Navalny. The attempt included the use of deepfake technologies, which made the perpetrators visually indistinguishable from Volkov, and it was the rather suspect content of inquiries and requests made that tipped off some parliamentarians that things were not as they had seemed.

2020. The year of Belarus

2020 was not only the year of COVID-19, but also, as a Lithuanian official put it during a recent webinar, the year of Belarus. The protests and civil resistance sparked by yet another fraudulent election on August 9th may have diminished due to the cold winter and severe repressions of the regime, but the intensity of the protests across the entire country was a very significant moment. Alyaksandr Lukashenka may still be in power, but he now finds himself racing against the clock. While the peaceful protests have no military element to them whatsoever, the situation is even potentially more significant in a security sense than the recent deployment

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of Russian troops to the Ukrainian border. The situation in Belarus is still developing and it is unclear what direction it will take. Yet, one thing is clear – whatever the outcome, it will have a massive impact on the region's security. Depending on what direction events go in, there are a number of likely scenarios.

First, is a situation where Belarus is integrated into the Russian Federation, which could result in the potential deployment of more Russian mainland (compared to those isolated in Kaliningrad) troops closer to NATO's borders and, perhaps even more significantly, extending the Russian-Ukrainian border and placing Kyiv in more danger due to its newfound proximity to the Russian border. It would, unsurprisingly, be a source of further tension or even escalation. This scenario, just like all others, is not particularly straightforward, however. Russia has lost significant amounts of support among the Belarusian public through its backing of Lukashenka and its involvement in events in Belarus. It is unclear how such integration would actually work out and if it would even be attempted.

Second, we cannot entirely rule out the Belarusian public forging its own path with Lukashenka gone. This can branch out as well – support for Russia may have declined in Belarus, but it is still viewed rather positively there and so, the fact of Lukashenka being dethroned might not guarantee the emergence of a friendly,

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pro-western neighbour. If a pro-western path is taken, this would touch upon the Kremlin's baseline and the response would probably be even more severe than in Ukraine's case and would further deteriorate the regional security complex, perhaps even more than the first scenario.

If the Belarusian public leans more towards Russia (without being outright integrated) or keeps a more neutral stance, however, it will become difficult to make any prediction. Would the Belarusian people return to something of a slumber again? Would a pro-Russian leadership manage to keep the people content and how would it navigate its relationship with Russia? Similarly, how would a more neutrally-inclined leadership fare when positioned between the Kremlin and the West? These are just a few questions to ask for scenarios like this, and each one could have very different implications for Belarus, the region and its security circumstances. There are a multitude of other possible scenarios, but they would clearly have a massive influence on the region's security.

All in all, there is little to say about the direct military component of regional security in the Eastern flank of NATO. As long as the course towards adequate defence spending is sustained and member states do not become overly complacent, the alliance will be able to take on all comers. That said, while the belligerence of Russia and China may open the eyes of some, the pandemic crisis and influx of money from the East may close the eyes of others – the problem is not military capacities per se, but the ability to maintain awareness while changes, both positive and negative, are ongoing in our neighbourhood and beyond. The recent European Parliament resolution on Russia, the case of Alexei Navalny, the military build-up on Ukraine's border and Russian attacks in the Czech Republic seems to indicate that we might actually be sufficiently awake for the time being.

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Minimising the threat from the East

KALEV STOICESCU

Russia would wish the security situation return to a pre-2014 *status quo ante*, but only in the sense of Allied troops leaving NATO's eastern flank. That is impossible, as long as Russia continues to heavily militarise its western and southern rims from the Arctic to the Caspian Sea, and refuses to recognise its role in the conflict with Ukraine.

Relations between Russia and the West (meaning NATO, the European Union and their member states) have become increasingly complicated and strained. Crises spread and exacerbate, and problems accumulate, instead of being resolved. The Kremlin is keen to demonstrate its capability and willingness to escalate tensions. Russian military and hybrid threats are real and are directed against the entire West. It would be a capital mistake to think that only eastern flank nations – from Scandinavia through the Baltics to the Balkans – are subject to the impact of Russia's aggressive anti-western policy.

Collective deterrence and defence in combination with dialogue were the West's main political and military instruments in dealing with and containing the Soviet Union during the Cold War. The West is constrained to use the same inventory since 2014, albeit in totally new conditions. NATO's enlargements in 1999 and 2004 were largely political. The Allies did not deploy any troops, equipment or command structures to the new member states – Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania and Bulgaria – until 2014, not even after Russia's blatant aggression against Georgia in August 2008. The only Allied presence on their territories was the Baltic Air Policing mission

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that started on March 29th 2004 and consisted of rotating mini-squadrons with just four fighter aircraft based in Lithuania.

Contradicting messages

The security environment in Europe changed drastically in 2014. The illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia – i.e. changing of inter-state borders without consent or negotiations with Ukraine – was achieved by the use of force, although no shots were fired. In addition, the instigation of and continuous political and military support by Moscow to "separatism" in east Ukraine (the Donbas region) has brought Ukraine to the heart of Russia's confrontation with the West. Since 2008 the Kremlin had already embarked on a massive military programme and made the armed forces, internal security and special services its uncontested top priority. Therefore, there is almost no ground in trusting the Kremlin's rhetoric that it presents no threat to its neighbours or Europe.

Moscow's words and deeds are in clear contradiction. NATO had to return to its core task of collective defence that was largely put aside in favour of partnerships (including with Russia) and out of area operations, particularly in the Balkans and Afghanistan. The Allies seek to minimise the Russian military threat by using the best possible tools – deterrence and defence. These policies and measures are by definition non-escalatory. The deployment of about 10,000 Allied personnel and a few squadrons of aircraft in NATO's entire eastern flank – stretching 2,500 kilometres from Estonia to Romania – is clearly something that demonstrates solidarity, and could hardly be considered a force of invasion. Moscow nevertheless claims this is a "serious threat" to Russia, in spite of its own posture – in its western and southern military districts – being considerably larger.

On the other hand, Moscow argued that Russia's deployment of more than 100,000 troops for "exercises" on Ukraine's border and in Crimea, in April 2021, did not threaten anyone. The Kremlin's spokesman stated that Russia is free to move its forces within its own territory as it wishes, and that it is nobody else's business. In addition, Russia announced that it would virtually close more than a quarter of the Black Sea, including the Sea of Azov that Russia shares with Ukraine (from May to October) to all "foreign vessels". One could wonder how Russia would react if NATO announced that it was preparing to deploy several divisions to the Baltic states and Poland, and that it would close for the months of the maritime traffic to non-NATO/EU countries through the Danish straits. That is, of course, a pure hypothetical scenario because the Alliance would never behave in such a provocative manner. However, Russia does it routinely.

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Russia would wish for the security situation to return to a pre-2014 *status quo ante*, but only in the sense of Allied troops leaving NATO's eastern flank. That is impossible as long as Russia continues to heavily militarise its western and southern rims from the Arctic to the Caspian Sea, and refuses to recognise its role in the conflict with Ukraine – it is a war waged by Russia against its neighbour and not Ukraine's "civil war", as the Kremlin likes to pretend. A "reset" in relations with Russia is not possible or even desirable in principle, because the pre-2014 situation is not worth restoring. Turning a blank page is also inconceivable considering the long list of problems and conflicts of interest accumulated since the end of the Cold War that cannot be simply ignored. Antagonism between Russia and the West is far wider and deeper than the context of Ukraine – it includes incompatible values and procedures in the realm of state governing, democracy and human rights, Russia's efforts to attack and undermine western countries and organisations, conflicts of approach to NATO's eastern (and Russia's western) neighbourhood, and most importantly, the threat of potential Russian aggression against its NATO/EU neighbours.

Escalation games

The main question, of course, is how to minimise Russia's threat without risking the chances of a conflict with potentially catastrophic consequences. The short answer is that NATO Allies can do very little to avoid escalation by Russia, as long as the Kremlin is willing to demonstrate it holds the keys of escalation and believes it can benefit from escalation and de-escalation. Indeed, Russia plays this game routinely by conducting large-scale combat control ("snap") exercises in sensitive border areas, provoking Allied (particularly American) aircraft and naval vessels in the Baltic Sea and Black Sea regions, the Atlantic Ocean (even as far as Alaska), and by having simulated nuclear attacks against European countries.

A more elaborate answer would suggest that the best the Allies can do is not play along with Russia's games. The Allies should remain focused on deterrence and defence, demonstrate political will and solidarity, military might and a readiness to act. The Kremlin understands strong language and powerful measures, but despises weakness, ambivalence and diplomatic niceties. Russia would continue to play its game of escalation as long as there would be questions asked in the West about whether it would or would not be better to appease the Kremlin. This is another fundamental mistake usually made by the so-called *Russlandverstehers*. They confuse purposefully understanding Russia with excusing and appeasing it.

Russia's escalation is not the main risk of conflict, especially if it is addressed adequately by the West with defensive measures and a refusal to engage in Moscow's

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provocations. The main risk is demonstrating political and military vulnerability that the Kremlin could readily exploit at the appropriate moment. Deterrence is the key to the security against Russia. If deterrence fails, the Allies would undoubtedly defend themselves collectively, but there probably would be a devastating conflict without winners. Deterrence has become much more complicated than during the Cold War because Russia employs (and doubles up on) its so-called hybrid warfare that includes disinformation and propaganda campaigns (particularly on social media), cyber-attacks, the political weaponisation of energy supplies, and the highest ever activity of its special services (GRU, SVR and FSB) against the West.

Proportional countermeasures

Sanctions remain the West's most solid response to Russia's aggressions and malign activities. These punitive steps have to be properly calibrated and targeted as proportional countermeasures. Proportionality and adequacy are key to inducing Russia to come back to the negotiating table. Russia is very much dependent economically and technologically on the West, particularly Europe, and not vice versa. In addition, Moscow's venturing into Beijing's arms could become very risky for Russia in the foreseeable future. Russia is not China's equal partner, and the disparities of economic and political strength would certainly increase in the future.

The US President Joe Biden proposed to hold a meeting with Russia's President Vladimir Putin during Biden's tour in Europe in June, but the Kremlin has not yet responded. It would be a great opportunity to start relieving tensions between Washington and Moscow and it would certainly have a positive impact on relations between NATO and Russia. Instead, the Kremlin has started preparations on a "list of unfriendly countries" that has the US on its top. It could be regarded as a symbolic step for Russia's domestic consumption, as it prepares for the State Duma elections in September, and it is also clearly a propaganda operation aimed at stigmatising certain countries – that for main years were already labelled as "Russophobic" by the Kremlin – and to create further political fractures in the West.

Moscow's escalatory mood is obviously and directly linked to its assessment that the West is in decline and has therefore no need to change its policy, seek solutions or make compromises. The West's duty is to demonstrate strength, unity and determination and show that that Moscow's assessment is actually wishful thinking. NEE

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Is NATO's 360-degree approach enough to keep focus on the Eastern flank?

WOJCIECH MICHNIK

Nowhere should NATO's 360-degree approach to security be more vigilant than on the Alliance's Eastern flank. It stems both from Russia's aggressive behaviour towards NATO and from the size and geographical proximity of the Russian troops deployed near the member states' borders. This does not mean that NATO should not look elsewhere for possible threats. It just means that at present the threat in the Eastern flank is the most formidable one.

The concept of a 360-degree Alliance is one NATO officials often use when referring to the ability of the Alliance to deal with threats coming from various directions. In June 2015, halfway between the NATO Newport and Warsaw Summits, amidst tensions with Russia on the Eastern flank, a growing terrorist threat from ISIS and the migration crisis on the Southern Flank, NATO's defence ministers reminded us that "to address all these challenges to the East and to the South, NATO continues to provide a 360-degree approach to deter threats and, if necessary, defend Allies against any adversary". Given the recent deployment of the Russian Federation's military troops near the Ukrainian border, its naval display of power in the Black Sea and its aggressive posturing against NATO member states, it would seem that the security of the Eastern flank should be on the top of NATO's agenda in 2021. Yet, the question remains whether NATO, in this time of the COVID-19 pandemic,

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will be able to formulate a clear, coherent policy towards Russia while upholding the core objectives of deterrence and defence? It is time to adopt the 360-degree approach and refocus NATO's efforts towards the Eastern flank.

Imperfect compromise?

Since its creation, NATO has been no stranger to the divergent security priorities among its member states. Yet it has been only in the last decade that the Alliance has witnessed a growing challenge to accommodate different priorities between southern and eastern allies. While member states located on the European Southern flank pointed towards the challenges of terrorism, mass migration and instability in the Middle East and North Africa; allies in the East kept voicing their concerns over Russia's assertive behaviour towards NATO member states and its allies in Eastern Europe.

After Russia's aggression on Ukraine in 2014 and the 2015 migration crisis, these intra-alliance debates not only intensified but turned into a tug-of-war contest on which threats were more imminent to NATO's stability. As solidarity and cohesion among NATO's 29 member states became more unsteady, the Alliance decided not only to reassure equal commitment to the Southern and Eastern flank, but adopted a 360-degree approach to deterrence and defence. This move signalled the growing need to address threats in a more comprehensive way, pointing to a geographical all-around readiness to defend itself, whether in the Eastern and Southern flanks or the high North. More importantly, it underlined a wide-ranging defensive posture that goes beyond individual member states' current interests.

> The pandemic has again raised the question of NATO's usefulness in addressing non-military threats.

From this perspective, the NATO 360-degree approach to security could be seen in two dimensions: first, as a catchy expression to the underline strategic complexities of the current challenges to transatlantic security; and second as a public diplomacy tool to communicate cohesion and an equal readiness to address threats to their security. Yet, creating a perfect balance has proven to be an impossible task, as the scope and type of threats varies across regions. Some even argue that not all threats are created equal, as the Alliance is prepared to address non-military challenges.

In a somewhat harsh, yet mostly justified, critique, Georgetown University professor Paul D. Miller described NATO as watering itself down by taking "on ever more missions, including cyber defence, counter-piracy and peacekeeping,

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and weakened by uneven burden-sharing in out-of-area operations in Afghanistan and Libya". His call for the Alliance to refocus on its main task, which is European defence, seems like a sensible proposition in a time of austerity caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

NATO in the COVID-19 world

Yet the pandemic has again raised the question of NATO's usefulness in addressing non-military threats while simultaneously questioning the one-sided approach that narrowed the Alliance to the role of a military "hammer". The pandemic has been dangerous for the transatlantic community not because it has challenged the Alliance's ability to project security in the transatlantic realm (which it has not), but because NATO has not been created to address such non-military and non-traditional threats. Some of the consequences of the pandemic on transatlantic security include: a severe economic crisis (of an unknown magnitude) that will surely affect transatlantic security as NATO member states will struggle to maintain their military budgets they originally agreed upon; and a growing need to balance military readiness with a way to address non-military threats, including public health security. It is expected that nationalistic and populist sentiments will increase as societies severely hit by the pandemic will focus more on domestic issues. Consequently, debates about threat perception and coherence of the Alliance will only be intensified as a result of COVID-19. As the individual security is getting more attention, the traditional approach to military security might be challenged further by politicians and voters in NATO member states.

Notably, the health and economic crisis that has affected the entire globe, has forced many state and non-state actors to rethink their international stance. A good example of this is the Euro-Atlantic partnership. As one pillar of NATO firmly stands in Europe, it would be essential for the well-being of the Alliance to tighten its co-operation with the European Union, specifically in the area of non-military threats. As NATO Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geoană pointed out in October 2020, "NATO-EU co-operation makes the world safer, and that NATO and the EU need to continue to complement each other". In the post-COVID-19 world it seems that these two institutions could finally find a way to a more comprehensive partnership. After all, with limited resources the question of how to do more with less needs to be addressed. And even though "doing more with less" sounds like a misnomer in this context, it clearly points towards the long-awaited partnership of NATO and the EU. If these two cannot work closely together in the face of the COVID-19 fallout, it is unlikely they ever will.

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This partnership could definitely fall under the umbrella of the 360-degree approach, as the uncertainties that NATO and the transatlantic community have faced before the outbreak of COVID-19 have only deepened in the midst of the pandemic. Examples of this have been already visible with the backlash against western liberal democracy; the continued popularity of populist ideas on both sides of the Atlantic; Russia's aggressive foreign policy; the assertive rise of China; and the instability of European neighbourhoods in the east and south. Subsequently, the challenges to transatlantic security have become more daunting whether they come from state or non-state actors or whether they stem from internal fatigue within the Alliance. The key question is whether a transatlantic community will be able to address these threats while simultaneously dealing with the domestic and international consequences of the pandemic. This is not only a question about how strong transatlantic ties remain but whether they are strong enough to guarantee NATO's security initiatives in the future.

90 degrees of escalation

The recent military mobilisation along the border of Ukraine has proven again that the Russian Federation will continue to use different tactics to keep the security situation in Ukraine, and hence in Europe, unstable. Additionally, the Kremlin has adopted its strategy of military provocations and disruptions against NATO member states, so it is kept below the threshold for an Article 5 response (which stipulates an attack on one country is an attack on all NATO countries – editor's note). This calls for the Alliance's careful and calibrated reaction on the Eastern flank, a reaction that would not only maintain deterrence but improve defence plans in case Russia miscalculates the risks of potential aggression.

Russian assertiveness will not go away if it is not properly addressed. How to deal with Russia and its constant threat to Ukrainian security seems to constitute a crucial question for NATO. The consistent and persistent response on the Eastern flank has been a good start of the Alliance. NATO's response, spearheaded by the presence and deterrence of Russia, did not stop Moscow from continuous harassment of NATO's member states and its partners in Eastern Europe.

Therefore, it is likely that the seven-year-old standoff between NATO and Russia will continue. This will require patience and a firm posture against Russian attempts to divide and play member states against each other. NATO will need to remain unified against Russia's attempts to break it by tempting member states with closer co-operation (i.e. selling weapon systems to Turkey; finalising the Nord Stream 2 deal with Germany; offering vaccines to Hungary and Slovakia). Finally,

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as it seems that Russia has been increasingly developing non-military means to challenge NATO and the West, the Alliance would need to develop its own capabilities to fight disinformation, disruption and cyberattacks as the lines between peace and war have become ever more blurred.

In the light of the above, one further point is worth underlining: Nowhere should NATO's 360-degree approach to security be more important than on the Alliance's Eastern flank. It stems both from Russia's aggressive behaviour towards NATO and from the size and geographical proximity of its troops deployed near the member states' borders. This does not mean that NATO should not look elsewhere for potential threats. It just means that at present the threat in the Eastern flank is the most alarming one. From NATO's standpoint, the Russian attack on Ukraine in 2014 provided additional energy and cohesiveness to the Alliance. The Kremlin's aggressive behaviour reinforces NATO on the path it has taken for more than seven years now.

Therefore, NATO should use this momentum to recalibrate and refocus on its most daunting challenges at hand. Currently, they lie on the Eastern flank as Russia's aggressive policy simply puts European security in danger. It would be challenging to find any other state or non-state actor that matches the Kremlin's ability to keep Europe off-balance. It should not be overlooked that the Eastern flank is not all about Russia and its impact on the NATO member states but also about the stability and security of Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia and other countries bordering the Alliance eastward on the continent. Hence, in a longer perspective, the European security is indivisible, and to expect that either NATO or the European Union could remain well off while its eastern neighbourhood continues to be unstable, is a fantasy. Subsequently, the problems NATO faces elsewhere should not be neglected, just aptly prioritised as reflected within the 360-degree framework.

The NATO strategic reflection process started before the COVID-19 pandemic in December 2019, with leaders meeting in London and continued through 2020. When the Secretary General launched the "NATO 2030" initiative in June 2020 the above-mentioned efforts are likely to be crowned by the implementation of the NATO's New Strategic Concept. In the meantime, the coming NATO Brussels Summit in June this year should be a good indicator of how the Alliance is going to frame existing and future threats into its multidimensional strategy.

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The other great power threat

China as a new challenge for NATO's Eastern flank

IVANA KARÁSKOVÁ

Finding a joint, NATO-wide stance on China is complicated by the fact that its perception as a threat varies not just among the Central and Eastern European NATO members but also across the Alliance. Just a handful of NATO members have been looking beyond Europe's immediate neighbourhood, or formulated a strategy for the Indo-Pacific region where the implications of China's rise reign supreme.

The region of Central and Eastern Europe has been historically contested by local great powers. The 20th century experience with expansionists Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union shaped these countries' security threat perceptions and influenced their foreign policies for decades. After the fall of the communist regimes and the end of the Cold War, various combinations of these historical resentments constituted the baseline that motivated these countries to seek NATO membership. With the resurgence of Russia as a security threat over the last decade, such reasoning has evidently been vindicated.

The People's Republic of China, on the other hand, represents a newcomer to the region. To the CEE countries – which lack direct experience with China as a great power and thus miss the knowledge that would help them decipher China's strategy – the PRC's recent entry into the region was originally regarded as yet another addition to a group of standard, non-problematic Asian economic partners,

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on par with Japan or South Korea. China represented a promising new investor and a possible export alternative to primarily West-bound economic orientation of the region. Central and Eastern European states were thus overwhelmingly enthusiastic when, in 2012, China established a format for mutual co-operation (originally 16+1, today the 17+1 initiative).

Trojan horse

The Chinese co-operation platform opened a direct communication channel with Beijing, something that the CEE countries were keen to use to their advantage. They continued to engage in this co-operation disregarding some criticism from the "old" member states of the European Union, which called the format a Chinese "Trojan horse" in Europe, and despite security concerns voiced by the United States.

In the years to come, however, China proved to be a problematic partner indeed. Despite numerous attempts to attract Chinese investment, sometimes even accompanied by a complete U-turn in the country's foreign policy towards shelving the criticism of human rights abuses or watering down a joint EU statement on South China Sea in exchange for better relations with Beijing, the Chinese investment only partially materialised and generally did not fulfil the CEE countries expectations.

> The region feels insulated from direct manifestations of China's growing military power and assertiveness.

On the diplomatic front, Beijing turned adamant when its "core interests" – such as the question of Taiwan's de facto independence, Tibet, Xinjiang, the South China Sea disputes, the potential exclusion of Huawei from the 5G networks build-up or the issue of human rights abuses – came to the forefront. China lured the Central and Eastern European countries with carrots, offering investment deals, yet when CEE states dared to touch upon these "sensitive issues", China threatened to use sticks. Dealings with China have also had effects on domestic politics as Beijing nurtured not only government but opposition parties. Local researchers uncovered non-transparent deals involving political and economic elites, while intelligence agencies warned against increasing China-related cybersecurity incidents or attempts to "silence the world".

Despite the recent experience with Beijing, Central and Eastern Europe has not perceived China as a direct threat on the scale or intensity as Russia. The region's countries tend not to focus on the fact that China has long had the largest standing armed forces in the world and its defence spending has been steadily growing.

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Beijing also intends to become a world leader in artificial intelligence by 2030 and the world's leading technological superpower by 2049. Its declared ambitions are in line with a growing naval assertiveness in the disputed area of South China Sea and the Western Pacific in general.

Nevertheless, the region of Central and Eastern Europe feels insulated from direct manifestations of China's growing military power and assertiveness, which have been much more visible to Beijing's Asian neighbours. CEE countries also – in a rather realistic assessment – do not even consider themselves to be a primary target for China's political and economic ambitions in Europe, which have concentrated largely (but not exclusively) on the Western part of the continent.

Towards a transatlantic consensus?

Finding a joint, NATO-wide stance on China is complicated by the fact that its perception as a threat varies not just among the Central and Eastern European NATO members but across the Alliance. Just a handful of (Western) European members of NATO have been looking beyond Europe's immediate neighbourhood or formulated a strategy for the Indo-Pacific region where the implications of China's rise reign supreme. The new EU Strategy for co-operation in the Indo-Pacific, launched in April 2021, thus constitutes an important step and signal to Beijing.

Europe's internal differences naturally hold implications for the possibility of forging a transatlantic strategic consensus towards Beijing. The European understanding of the threat posed by China still differs significantly from the US. For most Western European countries, China represents not just an economic competitor but also an important trade partner. While this also holds true for Washington, the intense strategic focus on China's growing military power in the Indo-Pacific theatre is not something America's European partners instinctively share. On the other hand, European NATO members have recently become concerned with China's investment in their strategic sectors, vulnerability of supply chains with defence implications, Chinese propaganda connected to the origin of coronavirus, the export of surveillance technologies and China's potential involvement in 5G networks build up. For some Eastern and Southeastern European nations, the sensitiveness of China's rising global presence has also been demonstrated through naval military exercises which China conducted in the Mediterranean and Atlantic in the vicinity of the Baltic states. These countries have also noticed, with increasing concern, Beijing's deepening co-operation with Moscow. Hence, while missing a robust platform of historically shared interests vis-a-vis China, forging strategic unity within NATO out of growing security concerns may still be within reach.

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What should, then, be the role of Central and Eastern Europe in this new strategic endeavour? As a necessary minimum, CEE countries should implement or upgrade their investment screening mechanisms and support the expansion of the East StratCom Task Force to vigorously counter Chinese propaganda. Within NATO, expanding the focus on China as a security and strategic challenge would undoubtedly require some creative restructuring. For starters, though, the Alliance would certainly benefit from reiterating its status of not just a military alliance but also as a political organisation (an emphasis first coined during the post-Stalin détente period in the 1950s). Targeted strengthening of the transatlantic consensus on core values and principles would, after all, have a significant benefit for the Alliance's dealing with Moscow. NATO has already started moving in this direction. The declaration of the summit in December 2019 mentioned the challenge posed by China for the first time. Subsequently, the reflection group appointed by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg also mentioned China in their NATO 2030 analysis.

While these steps represent some progress for NATO's shared perception of China, crucial obstacles against shaping a more robust consensus towards Beijing persist. First and foremost, not all European NATO members share the sentiment that China is a security threat. The EU position of seeking "strategic autonomy" vis-à-vis China (i.e. a position not necessarily in line with US preferences) which refuses to reconsider the challenges posed by economic interdependence with China, is not very helpful in moving towards this goal. The 17+1 platform thus represents just one of a more complex set of problems undermining NATO cohesion. Moreover, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are increasingly nervous that the United States will trade strategic prioritization of the Indo-Pacific region – since a recent intense focus on Russia's revisionism will remain their primary security concern.

Reaching a working consensus between Western Europe's fear of entrapment in the US's increasingly conflictual relationship with Beijing, and Central and Eastern European countries' fear of abandonment, will be anything but easy. As always, NATO's unity will be forged slowly, intricately and painfully – but it is still a better solution than foregoing a consensual stance towards the increasingly assertive East Asian power. NEE

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Regional security from Ukraine's perspective

A focus on NATO

MAKSYM KHYLKO

In co-operation with NATO, Ukraine needs to set realistic goals and terms that would not cause unnecessary frustration and misunderstanding. Surely, it would be the right step for NATO leaders to send a strong signal to Ukraine that the prospect of membership is still valid. But even if we do not get a membership action plan this year, the best response would be not frustration, but the redoubling of our efforts to meet the membership criteria.

Entering the eighth year of the ongoing Russian military aggression, Ukraine knows for sure who threatens regional security. Despite Moscow's claim that tensions and conflicts have been provoked by NATO's expansion to the East, the truth is that no country in the region has been attacked by a NATO member and not a single piece of territory has been occupied by any NATO ally. Instead, in the early 1990s, long before NATO's eastward expansion, Russia backed separatists in Moldova's region of Transnistria, as well as in Georgia's Tskhinvali Region (the so-called South Ossetia) and Abkhazia, and eventually occupied those territories under the guise of deploying the "peacekeepers".

Russian officials and politicians have repeatedly declared territorial claims to neighbouring countries. In June 2020, Vladimir Putin told the state Russia-1 TV

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channel that the former Soviet republics "received a huge number of Russian lands" and should have returned them when leaving the USSR. Already in 1992–1993, the Russian parliament passed decisions questioning the Ukrainian status of the Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. Moscow has always supported and fuelled separatist movements in Crimea and other regions of Ukraine, and neither Russia's commitments under the 1994 Budapest Memorandum or Ukraine's proclamation of non-aligned status in 2010 deterred the Kremlin from armed aggression against Ukraine in 2014 and the occupation of Crimea and certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

Restraining Russian aggression for more than seven years, Ukraine does not lack a reason to consider itself the frontline in a battle for security and democracy in Europe. Kyiv continues to warn the West that if Ukraine fails, subsequent victims will be NATO's Eastern flank member states. This was evidenced by the Russian troops' working out of invading the Baltic states during the Zapad-2017 military exercises.

Ukrainians' perception of security options

In spring 2012, when the majority of Ukrainians did not experience the threat of war, the Democratic Initiatives Foundation found that 42 per cent of Ukrainians believed that a non-aligned status was Ukraine's best security guarantee, while 26 per cent preferred a military alliance with Russia; and only 13 per cent supported joining NATO. These views changed dramatically after Russian military aggression. By the fall of 2014, the popularity of non-aligned status, which failed to protect Ukraine, fell to 22 per cent, and the idea of a military alliance with Russia fell to 15 per cent. Support for joining NATO raised sharply to 44 per cent in 2014 and 49 per cent in 2015. NATO has remained the most popular security option among Ukrainians, reaching 53 per cent support by the end of 2019.

NATO membership is the most popular security option among Ukrainians, with 53 per cent support at the end of 2019.

It is also important to note that 85.6 per cent of Ukrainians who support NATO membership believe it would provide the country with security guarantees, 33.1 per cent think that joining the Alliance would help strengthen and modernise the Ukrainian armed forced, 25.1 per cent believe it would contribute to Ukraine's credibility in the international arena, and 20.6 per cent consider that it would help Ukraine to develop as a democratic state (respondents could choose up to three options at once).

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Photo courtesy of NATO

Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal (left) in a joint press conference with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg during Shmyhal's visit to NATO in February 2021. In March 2018, NATO officially acknowledged Ukraine's aspiration to gain full-fledged membership, and in June 2020 it recognised Ukraine as an Enhanced Opportunities Partner.

Results of the expert survey titled: "Threats to security of Ukraine and other countries of the Eastern Partnership region and possible responses" – conducted by the East European Security Research Initiative Foundation think tank in December 2017, and still relevant in terms of results – indicate that the majority of Ukrainian foreign and security policy experts (83.8 per cent) agree with the general public that NATO membership is the country's best security option. Given the chance to choose up to three options, 54.1 per cent of experts identified EU membership as a security option and 37.8 per cent declared the option of US Major non-NATO Ally (MNNA) status. It is also worth noting that 27 per cent of Ukrainian experts favourably considered the option of establishing a new regional security format for Central and Eastern European countries, and 18.9 per cent selected the option of establishing a Black Sea regional security format (both formats without participation of Russia).

Speaking about the measures NATO could take to strengthen security in the region, the surveyed experts mostly favoured the options of assistance in reforming the security and defence sector (75.7 per cent); the expansion of military-technical co-operation (51.4 per cent); engaging with other countries of the region in order to strengthen NATO's eastern flank (43.2 per cent); granting NATO aspirant status (40.5 per cent); and the Enhanced Opportunities Partnership to those countries that strive for such options (29.7 per cent).

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NATO's assistance to Ukraine

It is worth mentioning that Ukraine has already achieved many of these courses of action. In March 2018, NATO officially acknowledged Ukraine's aspiration to gain full-fledged membership, and in June 2020 it recognised Ukraine as an Enhanced Opportunities Partner. As for the regional security formats, the regular joint trainings of the Lithuanian–Polish–Ukrainian Brigade with its headquarters in Lublin opened in 2016. Ukraine strengthened military-industrial co-operation with its Black Sea neighbour Turkey; it included the signing of agreements on purchasing of the unmanned combat aerial vehicle, Bayraktar TB2. In April this year, Ukraine and Georgia for the first time joined the Poland–Romania–Turkey triangle format – the five foreign ministers discussed the security situation in the Black Sea region and the Euro-Atlantic prospects of Ukraine and Georgia.

Since the beginning of Russian aggression against Ukraine, NATO has set up a number of trust funds and programmes to help Ukraine reform its security and defence sector and build its own capabilities. At the 2014 Wales Summit, NATO member states decided to launch five new trust funds to assist Ukraine in critical areas: Command, Control, Communications and Computers (C4); Logistics and Standardisation; Cyber Defence; Military Career Transition; and Medical Rehabilitation. At the 2016 Warsaw Summit, the Comprehensive Assistance Package was endorsed, including 40 tailored support measures to strengthen Ukraine's security and defence capabilities as well as its resilience to hybrid warfare. At the 2019 Washington meeting, NATO foreign ministers agreed on measures to strengthen support for Ukraine and Georgia in the Black Sea, including naval co-operation, situational awareness, port visits, exercises and sharing of information. By 2020, Ukraine benefited from seven NATO trust funds and 13 NATO programmes, and other activities funded by 34 NATO members and partner countries.

Ukraine's thorny path to NATO membership goal

In 2002, almost 20 years ago, the then Ukrainian president, Leonid Kuchma, by his decree, enacted the National Security and Defence Council's decision setting NATO membership as the country's goal. This decree was supported by the Ukrainian parliament resolution of November 21st 2002. Just three years later, after the Orange Revolution, an intensified dialogue on NATO membership aspirations began, and at the 2008 Bucharest Summit, the Allies agreed that Ukraine and Georgia would become NATO members in the future, but they did not grant Kyiv and Tbilisi with a Membership Action Plan (MAP).

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In 2010, the newly elected pro-Russian president, Viktor Yanukovych, abandoned the NATO membership goal by pushing through a law that envisaged a non-alignment status for Ukraine. This status was renounced by the Ukrainian parliament in December 2014 after Russia had occupied Crimea and certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. But it was only in June 2017 when parliament again set NATO membership as a goal, with amendments to the law on the principles of domestic and foreign policy. In February 2019 EU and NATO membership goals were set in the Constitution of Ukraine.

Of course, all this back-and-forth negatively affected the dynamics of Ukraine-NATO relations. A lot of time has been wasted, so when the president declares that Ukraine cannot remain in the EU's and NATO's waiting rooms forever, one should acknowledge that Kyiv's own inconsistency was among the main reasons for this situation.

In co-operation with NATO, it is necessary to set realistic goals and terms that would not cause unnecessary frustration and the misunderstanding of western partners. Surely it would be the right step for NATO leaders to send a strong signal to Ukraine that the membership prospects are still valid. But even if Ukraine does not get the MAP this year, the best response would not be frustration, but a redoubling of efforts to meet the membership criteria – not only in terms of military interoperability, but in building democratic institutions, the rule of law, liberal economy and social justice. At the same time, we should continue strengthening co-operation with NATO member states and partners – in terms of multilateral and bilateral formats, in particular on improving security in the region.

We should also intensify our efforts to inform Ukrainian citizens about the benefits of NATO membership, especially those in the eastern and southern regions that are still influenced by Russian propaganda. And we need an effective information campaign for NATO member states that are still reluctant to let Ukraine join. No one can say for sure when the window of opportunity will be open, but it will definitely happen and we must be fully prepared for it. For the foreseeable future there will be no other reliable security guarantee – both for Ukraine and the region as a whole. NEE

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