Bimonthly **May-August No 3-4 (XXXVII)/2019**
20 PLN (w tym 5% vat) | 10 EUR | 12 USD | 7 GBP
www.neweasterneurope.eu

New Eastern Europe

EASTERN PARTNERSHIP TURNS 10

ISSN 2083-7372
03
9 772083 737128

29th Jewish Culture Festival Krakow

21.06–30.06.2019

JEWISHFESTIVAL.PL

Kraków

TAUBE PHILANTHROPIES

KORET FOUNDATION

FRIENDS OF THE CRACOW JEWISH CULTURE FESTIVAL

New Eastern Europe

NEW EASTERN EUROPE IS A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT BETWEEN FOUR POLISH PARTNERS

The City of Gdańsk

www.gdansk.pl

GDAŃSK
city of freedom

A city with over a thousand years of history, Gdańsk has been a melting pot of cultures and ethnic groups. The air of tolerance and wealth built on trade has enabled culture, science, and the arts to flourish in the city for centuries. Today, Gdańsk remains a key meeting place and major tourist attraction in Poland. While the city boasts historic sites of enchanting beauty, it also has a major historic and social importance. In addition to its 1000-year history, the city is the place where the Second World War broke out as well as the birthplace of Solidarność, the Solidarity movement, which led to the fall of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe.

Lower Silesia

www.dolnyslask.pl

LOWER SILESIA DOLNY ŚLĄSK

Located in south-western Poland, Lower Silesia is a region that has historical ties to German, Polish and Czech culture. Throughout the centuries, the region has been at the centre of significant historical events such as the Protestant Reformation, the Silesian Wars, Industrialisation and both World Wars. After the Second World War the region became part of the territory of Poland. The capital and largest city of Lower Silesia is Wrocław, located on the Oder River. Today Wrocław is one of Poland's largest and most dynamic cities with a rapidly growing international profile and is regarded as one of the most important commercial, educational and tourist sites in the country.

The European Solidarity Centre

www.ecs.gda.pl

ECS european solidarity centre

The European Solidarity Centre is a multifunctional institution combining scientific, cultural and educational activities with a modern museum and archive, which documents freedom movements in the modern history of Poland and Europe. The Centre was established in Gdańsk on November 8th 2007. Its new building was opened in 2014 on the anniversary of the August Accords signed in Gdańsk between the workers' union "Solidarność" and communist authorities in 1980. The Centre is meant to be an agora, a space for people and ideas that build and develop a civic society, a meeting place for people who hold the world's future dear. The mission of the Centre is to commemorate, maintain and popularise the heritage and message of the Solidarity movement and the anti-communist democratic opposition in Poland and throughout the world. Through its activities the Centre wants to inspire new cultural, civic, trade union, local government, national and European initiatives with a universal dimension.

The Jan Nowak-Jeziorański College of Eastern Europe

www.kew.org.pl

The Jan Nowak-Jeziorański College of Eastern Europe in Wrocław

The College of Eastern Europe is a non-profit, non-governmental foundation founded on February 9th 2001 by Jan Nowak-Jeziorański, a former head of the Polish section of Radio Free Europe and a democratic activist. The foundation deals with cooperation between the nations of Central and Eastern Europe. The aims if its charters are to carry out educational, cultural and publishing activities, and to develop programmes which enhance the transformation in the countries of Eastern Europe. The organisation has its headquarters in Wrocław, Poland, a city in western Poland, perfectly situated in the centre of Europe and with a deep understanding of both Western and Eastern Europe.

www.neweasterneurope.eu

DEAR READER,

Preparing a special issue on such a technical issue as the Eastern Partnership is always a challenge from the editorial point of view. The European Union's policy towards the East is one that is never easily explained nor well understood among Europeans and their Eastern neighbours alike. As James Nixey points out in his essay, less than one per cent of Europeans has ever even heard of it. Certainly readers of this magazine have a good sense of what the Eastern Partnership is and how much has it changed (or not) in this region since it was launched in 2009. And that is why the milestone of the Eastern Partnership turning ten should be an opportunity to not only celebrate but also reflect on what has been achieved and how this policy can be shaped for the future. As you will read in the following pages, our authors have very different views of the Eastern Partnership. Arguably, however, they all agree that there is still plenty of work to do if the Eastern Partnership is to truly transform Eastern Europe.

Another transformative event that we are recognising in this issue is the 30-year anniversary of the fall of communism in Central Europe, specifically in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and East Germany. Our authors look at whether the promises of the transformation have been fulfilled for the societies that dreamed of a new future, what the memory of the year 1989 means today and, in some ways, why it generates social divisions. We recognise that these two anniversaries – together with the anniversaries of NATO and EU membership, 15 and 20 respectively – are a part of the wider context of a changing Europe in a changing world.

In the end, these anniversaries encourage us to look back and answer the question as to what have we learnt over these last 10, 20 or 30 years and how these lessons can help us shape this region by not repeating the same mistakes in order to deliver a better future for the next generation.

The Editors

Contents

10 Years of Eastern Partnership

Eastern Partnership, Past, Present and Future – Expert Survey

Opinion and Analysis

New Eastern Europe
www.neweasterneurope.eu

EDITOR AND PUBLISHER
The Jan Nowak-Jeziorański College
of Eastern Europe in Wrocław
office@kew.org.pl, www.kew.org.pl

The Jan Nowak-Jeziorański College of Eastern Europe in Wrocław

Zamek Wojnowice
ul. Zamkowa 2, 55-330 Wojnowice, Poland

CO-EDITOR
European Solidarity Centre
ecs@ecs.gda.pl, www.ecs.gda.pl

ECS european solidarity centre

EDITORIAL BOARD
Yaroslav Hrytsak, Paweł Kowal, Ivan Krastev, Georges Mink, Zdzisław Najder, Cornelius Ochmann, Mykola Riabchuk, Eugeniusz Smolar, Lilia Shevtsova, Roman Szporluk, Jan Zielonka

EDITORIAL TEAM
Adam Reichardt, Editor-in-Chief
Iwona Reichardt, Deputy Editor, Lead Translator
Daniel Gleichgewicht, Assistant Editor
Maxim Rust, Contributing Editor
Editorial Interns: Kristin Aldag, Mario Giagnorio, Kamil Jarończyk, Katherine Langdon, Jordan Luber

COPYEDITING
Martin O'Reilly

ILLUSTRATIONS AND COVER
Andrzej Zaręba

COVER LAYOUT
Do Lasu s.c

SUBSCRIPTION:
www.neweasterneurope.eu/subscribe

LAYOUT AND FORMATTING
Małgorzata Chyc | AT Wydawnictwo

EDITORIAL OFFICES
New Eastern Europe
ul. Szlak 26/12A, 31-153 Kraków
editors@neweasterneurope.eu

European Solidarity Centre
Plac Solidarności 1, 80-863 Gdańsk
tel.: +48 58 767 79 71, ecs@ecs.gda.pl

New Eastern Europe is co-financed by the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage.

Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland

NARODOWY PROGRAM ROZWOJU CZYTELNICTWA

The series on 10 years of Eastern Partnership is co-financed through co-operation with the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Any opinions expressed in the issue do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the ministry.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Poland

10 YEARS EaP Eastern Partnership

New Eastern Europe is also co-financed by the Marshal's Office of Lower Silesia, Poland.

LOWER SILESIA DOLNY ŚLĄSK

Legal Services Provided by KOKSZTYS S.A.

KOKSZTYS

Circulation: 5000
Printing: Media Drukarnia / Studio reklamy (Będzin)
International Distribution: www.pineapple-media.com
Printed in Poland
Published since 2011

Persisting towards a Europe without dividing lines

CARL BILDT AND RADOSŁAW SIKORSKI

Has the Eastern Partnership been a success story for the European Union? The question, a decade after its official launch, is certainly worth asking.

Let us start where we were more than a decade ago and which led the two of us in our then capacities as foreign ministers of our respective countries to make the first proposal for an Eastern Partnership in May 2008. At that time, the European Union had developed various neighbourhood policies in different directions. There was the overall European Neighbourhood Policy since 2004 – which led France to drive plans for an ambitious Union of the Mediterranean – and there was an ambitious approach for co-operation with Russia taking place. Yet in the middle of all of this, there seemed to be little time or energy for answering the requests for closer co-operation coming from the countries immediately between the EU and Russia (Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova), which also included the three countries in the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia).

In short, this was a part of Europe that Brussels had, to some extent, been neglecting, not always by design, but rather by default since all the other neighbourhood schemes had been launched, requiring attention and resources. That is why we suggested launching the Eastern Partnership – to fill a void in the overall neighbourhood policies of the EU and also recognising how important developments in the region were going to be for Europe in the years to come.

Winds of change

The reaction to this idea was met with initial scepticism. Some had argued that we had already too many neighbourhood policies – so why add another one? Others feared this would sound like a promise of membership perspective to those countries which are far from ready. A few were afraid it was going to divert resources away from the support for the Mediterranean neighbourhood countries. And there were valid questions as to the extent which of the six post-Soviet countries could be united as some sort of entity under the guise of an Eastern Partnership.

However, when the war broke out between Georgia and Russia, and Russia sought to dismember Georgia by recognising South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states in August 2008, the wind changed. Under the then French Presidency, the plan for an Eastern Partnership was quickly approved, paving the way for its launch with the summit in Prague under the Czech Presidency in May 2009.

A little over five years ago, both of us writing in the pages of this magazine – in the run up to the important Vilnius Summit of the Eastern Partnership in November 2013 – stressed that the Eastern Partnership should be seen as part of a policy for "a continent without dividing lines". That was certainly how we saw it then. But in the summer of 2013 the Kremlin had altered its policy. It had previously ignored the Eastern Partnership, viewing it as fairly irrelevant – although in our dialogues they had been uncomfortable with the phrase "common neighbourhood", indicating that it was primarily theirs. But once the benefits were becoming visible and attractive, the Kremlin altered its policy – launching its own Eurasian Union, also based on a customs union. This shift indicated that Putin was prepared to do whatever it took to bring the member states of the Eastern Partnership back into Russia's fold.

For Moscow, the issue was never about trade. It was about Putin's geopolitical ambition.

The Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement that was negotiated with Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and Armenia was in no way incompatible with the existing free trade agreements coming out of the agreements with the old Commonwealth of Independent States. Mexico has free trade agreements with both the United States and EU, so why should there be any reason Ukraine (or the others) could not? And with the opening of trade relations we had no intention to build new barriers in Europe. In fact, there was still a vision of free trade between Lisbon and Vladivostok.

For Moscow, however, the issue was not about trade. It was about Putin's geopolitical ambition, and the alternative he launched needed a strong western component – Kazakhstan was not enough and neither was Belarus. From the EU's point

Map of the EU countries and Eastern Partnership countries presented during the Spring European Council meeting in March 2009, which approved the launch of the Eastern Partnership.

of view, it was up to the individual states to decide for themselves. When the president of Armenia, after an unexpected night session in the Kremlin, declared his country was not going to sign the DCFTA with the EU but instead line up with the Russian-directed union, this was just noted and accepted in Brussels. The right of every nation to freely choose its own course was a core part of our idea.

Remarkable success

But it was primarily against Ukraine that the Kremlin directed its guns. The story of the rapidly escalating Russian efforts – fierce trade sanctions, hybrid war-

fare and political destabilisation to direct military aggression – was nothing but dramatic. It began with heavy trade penalties in the late summer 2013 and came to a climax with regular tank battles on the plains of Eastern Ukraine a year later. Nothing of the sort had been seen in Europe for decades.

Clearly, the refusal of the Kremlin to accept the choice another nation had taken was the reason for its retaliatory actions. And it was truly a national choice. During one of our joint visits to Kyiv, we were reminded of the fact that it was a choice supported by all the presidents and prime ministers of Ukraine since the country acquired its independence. Five years after the Russian aggression, the most remarkable fact is that the Eastern Partnership is still existing and that not only have three DCFTA agreements been ratified and started to work, but that the "core group" of the EaP has also showed enough reform maturity to get visa freedom. The efforts to derail and destroy it have clearly failed.

Five years after the Russian aggression, the Eastern Partnership still exists. The efforts to derail and destroy it have clearly failed.

This year there will be numerous events to highlight everything that has been achieved. Economic and trade links have been substantially strengthened, with the EU now being the number one trade partner for all EaP member states, with the exception of Belarus. And people-to-people links have been strengthened. No less than 30,000 students from the Eastern Partnership countries have been able to benefit from the Erasmus+ programme. This builds links for the future. But everyone knows that the road ahead is long.

Ukraine avoided political, financial and military collapse in 2014, and it has made very important progress since then, but its economy has yet to recover. It has benefited from receiving the largest EU support package ever given to a country outside of the union, but the main driver of the future has to be the reforms it decided to undergo. The presidential and parliamentary elections this year will be crucial for the continuation of Ukraine's reform path.

In the meantime, the Eurasian Economic Union does not seem to be doing so well. In Astana and Minsk it is seen as geared too heavily towards the interests of Moscow. And tensions in a number of areas have been building regarding the relations between Russia and Belarus. A recent study found signs of Russia starting to lose interest in the Eurasian Union project altogether. In both Yerevan and Minsk there is a renewed interest in co-operation with the EU and the Eastern Partnership. But as we move forward with the Eastern Partnership and the 20 deliverables for the co-operation that was agreed in 2017, we should not forget our original vision of a Europe without dividing lines.

Vindication

The brutal dividing line in eastern Donbas has cost 13,000 people their lives, and millions have been forced to flee their homes. What was once an industrial heartland of the Soviet Union has been reduced to a criminalised Russian-run rusting ruin. And in spite of massive infusion of money, Crimea, with its fascinating and multifaceted history, is a shadow of what it could have been. These issues need to be resolved. It is about the principles underlying the security of every European nation. It must be much more prominent on the agenda of Brussels – not only Berlin and Paris – in the years to come. Once that is done we should revive our vision, and seek to extend all the ambitions we have for the Eastern Partnership; and also to a Russia that, sooner or later, must return to a path of European modernisation if it wishes to be not relegated to a junior partner of China.

Today, the Eastern Partnership is an integral and important part of the policies and programmes of the EU. Despite some challenges beyond what no one envisaged when it was first launched, it is making significant progress in helping the member states meet their European and reform aspirations. The Eastern Partnership has proven to be an idea which time has vindicated. And we firmly believe its best time is yet to come.

Carl Bildt (Sweden) and Radosław Sikorski (Poland) are former ministers of foreign affairs who, together, are credited for shaping and launching the Eastern Partnership policy of the European Union in 2009.

Resetting the Eastern Partnership

MARIUSZ MASZKIEWICZ

Ten years after the launch of the Eastern Partnership we need to ask which parts require a major upgrade and which new tools should be used for this policy to become more effective. First and foremost, we need a deep and honest analysis of the programme's goals and methods.

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) is a policy of the European Union aimed at the six post-Soviet states of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. It was launched in 2009 upon the initiative of both Poland and Sweden, and supported by other EU members. Yet, the EaP has undeservedly – in my view – become a legend. Today, after a decade of its establishment, it is worth going back to the very start of this project and examine the assumptions that went with the initial stages of the EaP's development. This might help us understand why the EaP has generated so few tangible outcomes and why the aspirations of at least two states (i.e. Georgia and Ukraine) cannot lead to full membership within the European community.

At this point let me also make it clear that this essay is very personal. I participated in the majority of events and discussions that preceded the creation of the Eastern Partnership and its initial phases, when I held a key position within the Polish ministry of foreign affairs.

Value-added?

To those who believe the bureaucratic results of the Eastern Partnership – namely, the Association Agreement, the free trade deals, the visa-free regimes and youth

exchanges – are a success, I ask the question: "What would be different if we only had the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)?" In other words, what value has the EaP generated apart from the rebranding of an older policy and enriching the technocratic speech? Indeed, when you search for outcomes you encounter numerous analyses, expert reports, and thousands of books. There have been many conferences organised on the topic, with lots of coffee, food, snacks and networking. Millions of euros have been spent on delegations, trips and reports. The EU itself has published hundreds of well-written communiques and a few inane declarations. At the same time, when you look at the region the policy is aimed towards you see that Ukraine is torn by war, Moldova struggles with a deep crisis of corruption, and Georgian territories are occupied by Russia. Belarus, Armenia and Azerbaijan, on the other hand, seem to correlate their interest in the EaP with their economic interests.

Given the above, I come back to the question: What added value has the EaP brought to the ENP which (with its own budget and tangible projects) constituted an important element of common foreign policy of member states? There is no doubt that some EU member states supported the EaP out of fear of the EU's further enlargement. In short, they wanted to block further expansion. As a result, the EU's doors remain closed to Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova. Ironically, these EU countries, that are against an EU perspective to the new members, are now a host to other unexpected guests from outside the EU, who evidently are a burden on their generous social budgets. The arrival of these newcomers was probably not the kind of integration that EU institutions and citizens had envisioned. When we compare the programme document of Eastern Partnership (Prague Declaration – Council document No 8435 of May 7th 2009) with the Regulation (EC No 1638 of the European Parliament and of the Council of October 24th 2006) laying down general provisions establishing a European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, we cannot help but see the conciseness of the former.

Back in 2004 in Poland there was a general enthusiasm towards the idea that, together, the enlargement would allow Europe to return to its roots, as the states that had been "kicked out" of the western political community in 1945 would, once again, become a part of it. At that time, many Poles were convinced that similar overtures should be given to the post-Soviet states. A group gathered around Marek Karp and in the state think tank established by him, the Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW), had hoped that since that time, EU eastern policy would include Central Europe's input and expertise. Accordingly they were the ones championing the idea of a stronger ENP in the East. To balance French and German interests in the Mediterranean, Poland advocated for greater support for Ukraine and Georgia, as well as more activities countering Russian propaganda. As a new member of the

community in the region, we thought our voice should be heard. That is why we proposed to enforce the ENP with new tools. One of them was an independent television channel in Belarus, which later became known as Belsat.

Little support

I was actively involved in setting up of Belsat TV which – as we envisioned it – should have also been expanded to Russian-speakers in Belarus. Bear in mind that all of this was undertaken at a time when Putin's propaganda was just coming to the surface of the sinking democracy in Russia. Yet the European Commission and its staff were not overly enthusiastic about our ideas and we had little diplomatic support. Instead, EU resources found their way into the pockets of Russian oligarchs who, through their lobbyists in Brussels, convinced the European Commission to finance supposedly independent Belarusian programmes (in Russian!) on the private station RTVi. I often wonder if there had ever been an audit of this wasteful public spending.

In 2007, after the collapse of the first Law and Justice government, a new government was formed in Poland by the Civic Platform and started to review the country's policy towards the East. While some in the new camp wanted to maintain the previous line, others were pushing for a Polish reset with Russia. Radosław Sikorski, who was then Poland's minister of foreign affairs, saw the ENP Plus (at that time the name Eastern Partnership had not yet been coined) as a political opportunity. He took the idea from his predecessor, Anna Fotyga, and convinced the Swedish foreign minister, Carl Bildt, to join him in the project. There were also talks with other states that shared a similar perspective on Eastern issues.

> If we are to make the EU project truly effective, we have to increase support for the third sector.

In the summer of 2008 when I went to Kyiv as a representative of the Polish ministry of foreign affairs with the task of selling the new Polish-Swedish initiative to our Ukrainian colleagues, the question I received from the then deputy foreign minister of Ukraine was: "Why are you doing this? Is it another Russian trick? Is it an attempt to create a new 'freezer' for the states that are aspiring to integrate with the EU?" Unfortunately, the fears that decision-makers in Kyiv had at that time are still valid – especially when we take into account what happened at the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest, which rejected Ukraine's membership action plan, or after the Russian aggression in Georgia. Naturally, NATO and the EU are two separate entities. Yet for Eastern European societies, there is little difference in what line they wait, as

they know that both organisations can lead them to a safer, yet frozen, world. Back then they saw the doors slammed shut.

As an employee of the Polish ministry of foreign affairs, a deputy director of a department and advisor to the minister on Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova, I had hoped that the EaP project could become a mechanism to support the transformation processes in the post-Soviet states. I also had the experience of co-operation with the third sector which, in Poland, actually was shaping eastern policy. I also had experience with Belarus during the 1990s, when Alyaksandr Lukashenka and his regime established new standards that justified the breaching of law and democracy by replacing it with interest-driven policies. It was hard not to know that those in Belarus who were pro-democracy were expecting that Europe could somehow support their aspirations. Lukashenka, however, chose the "Chinese model" of development, treating civil society as an unnecessary element in effective management of the terrorised, disoriented Belarusian society. The Polish sector took on this responsibility for two decades, however due to a lack of state funds it had to withdraw. This all shows that if we are to make the EU project truly effective, we have to increase support for the third sector, whose structures are under serious threat in the region.

Putin and Lukashenka, afraid of the civil society, kicked out all important organisations, while some EU states tried to replace them with their own state structures, which are pretending to be independent. This has increased pressure and led to the elimination from the region of the so-called foreign agents who had the chance of being a leverage in the rebuilding of the civil society, self-governance and republican attitudes in the countries that were shedding off their Soviet past.

List of mistakes

Let me go back again to the mid-2000s. One of Poland's most ambitious tasks when it was joining the EU was to make its eastern neighbourhood safer, better-off and more stable. There was no room for ideology-driven policies, considering that development and prosperity in Eastern Europe was not a threat to Poland. Conversely, at the source of expanding Europe into the East was a rational assumption about the need to enlarge the continent's security zone, which is actually the same challenge we – the whole Europe – face today.

The opponents of the Polish engagement in the East, to strengthen their criticism, have long been using the argument of "Polish messianic gene" using the historical costume of Prometheism. Such interpretation and phrases like "Giedroyc myth", "Prometheism", "Polish messianism" have become tools of mockery.

After one year of consultations, the Eastern Partnership was established in 2009. It was declared in a nicely-polished text of an unimportant document. However, the declaration did not go beyond a few pages and nobody, neither Brussels nor the Polish government, was ready to really start a truly ambitious project that would require significant resources and demand extra efforts. Moreover, there was not enough institutional support for the third sector nor were there any ambitious long-term projects that would get deep into the social tissue of these countries. The example of Moldova is a painful illustration that the dialogue between Brussels bureaucrats and the decision-makers in an EaP state can bring little good.

Today, there are only the remains of the EaP – a project that, in my view, was passive, and overassertive. Its establishment was actually more aimed at covering the pro-Russian orientation of Donald Tusk's government, while for Sikorski it was a trampoline to jump higher into European and global politics. There is a long list of serious mistakes – and ignorance – that characterised the Tusk government regarding the implementation of the Eastern Partnership. Between 2009 and 2015 the Polish government, consciously or not, abstained from intrepid projects on security issues. Tusk sabotaged, ignored, or, at the very best, neglected President Lech Kaczyński's initiatives in the region. Having said that it is worth pointing out that Tusk's approach to Russia was not so much a result of his love for Putin but his conformism and calculation – similar to what we saw with other western politicians. In Germany there is an unwritten dogma that Russia is – and will remain – strong. Therefore Berlin should keep good relations with Moscow, even when they are at a cost of weaker neighbours. Such a calculated approach (interest above values) also characterised the then Tusk government. His first visit as prime minister was to Moscow (not Kyiv), and his government initiated the Small Border Movement (which allowed citizens of the Kaliningrad Oblast to travel to northern Poland and vice versa, which was in violation of EU regulations as well as in contradiction with the European principle of solidarity). These policies led to the cooling down of Poland's relations with Ukraine and Lithuania. The most telling example of that was Poland's lack of interest in the reactivation and reconstruction of the Ignalina nuclear power plant and its consent to competitive energy projects (the Belarusian nuclear power plant in Astravyets or the Ostrołęka power station). Another example were the preparations for the implementation of structural infrastructure project in co-operation with the Kaliningrad oblast, with EU funds, which demonstratively omitted the Lithuanian side. Thus, it was with bitter satisfaction to see Tusk, as president of the EU, posing in Kyiv in February this year as a great supporter of Ukraine's interest.

From a broader European perspective we can only lament that both Warsaw and Brussels have abandoned ambitious media projects aimed at Russian speakers. Such

was the case with Belsat TV, which was neglected by EU institutions and survived as a Polish outlet only. Today, there might be many voices arguing in favour of the need to fight Russian propaganda; however when the first elements of this ambitious project were being built in Poland and Lithuania (between 2006 and 2007) the resources of the European Commission were sent to its competitors. I daresay that EU passivity at that time helps explain the current success of RT and Sputnik.

Values and models

In such situations it is the safest to – as it has been proved during the time of every crisis – go back to the sources. In the case of the European integration and security policy the foundation seems to lie in our value system. Eastern Europeans, who still struggle with an unsuccessful transformation and the poisoned fruits of poorly implemented reforms, desire clear signals from the EU. A lack of which has led some countries to seek new options or value systems. Russia with its idea of "sovereign democracy" and fascination with the model of Chinese prosperity is on the top of the list of alternatives. Only the societies of Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova seem to be still adhering to their European dream often against the will of their elites. Yet, generally speaking, the EaP has become a catalyser for two contradictory concepts. The first one directs the region towards Russia – with its quasi-Chinese model or Eurasian economic and political transformation; while the second aims at empowering post-Soviet societies (today this is mainly Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and Georgia) that could become an alternative to the corrupt political elite and a force that will undertake the difficult process of transformation.

Thus, the main tools of the Eastern Partnership should empower the Eastern European societies based on the republican model. Such an approach should also not be treated as an ideological *sine qua non*. Otherwise we will be facing a similar problem to the one that we are experiencing today with the open society model, which has gone through quite a complicated road since the late 1980s. Now, because of its strong left or liberal orientation, it has turned into a burden for the non-governmental sector. As a result, the European right – especially its conservative branch – is deprived of the right to promote social freedom which goes against the republican model. Strangely enough, the same republican model is a part of the political mainstream in the United States. And while looking at today's world, many academics proclaim the crisis of liberalism, yet they do not answer the question as to whether the source of the current situation could be found in a too soft departure from communism. Stalin and his spectre are clearly still haunting the EaP states and unless we get rid of this "ideological vampire" we cannot

speak about the implementation of European values. However, if we assume that democracy is not a goal but a tool to implement a value-system, problems will continue to come to us from different sides.

Nevertheless, those who were against empowering Eastern European societies or thought that there was no contradiction in the two concepts of the EaP were proved wrong in 2014 when the Russian Federation brought war to Ukraine. This event only confirmed the words of the late Jerzy Giedroyc who famously said: "There is no free Ukraine without free Poland, and no free Poland without free Ukraine." To put it even more explicitly, security and independence of Poland are at risk when its eastern neighbours – Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus but also Georgia and many other post-Soviet states – are oppressed or at war with Russia.

Serious upgrade

We should now ask which parts of the Eastern Partnership require a major upgrade, and which tools should be used for this policy to become more effective? First and foremost, we need a deep and honest analysis of the programme's goals and methods. This should be the task of the new European Parliament and EU institutions. Given that the process of building bridges in international relations is not merely a result of relations between institutions and high level bureaucrats, but also a reflection of the network of connections, policy-makers should seek to allow for that to develop. Such a change will also break down barriers and thereby eliminate nationalistic or chauvinistic attitudes.

So far two main mechanisms have proved useful in this regard: 1) programmes that offer scholarships, study/work abroad opportunities and cultural projects; and 2) youth programmes that are made up of development aid projects, humanitarian projects, cultural and social projects, internships and professional study tours, media activity, etc. Therefore these two mechanisms should be further strengthened with generous financial resources. Also, there is a need for the simplification in the system of government grants which should be better tailored toward the needs of NGOs (there is a constant problem of a lack of financing for small organisations as well as the financing administrative costs of NGOs).

To put it simply, young people who are passionate about Eastern Europe require the financial support much more than ineffective bureaucrats. There is no consent for the big fish to eat the small ones, or for the pseudo-NGOs, with their large offices and multi-year financing, to function as machines for re-granting. They take advantage of smaller organisations and use the work of enthusiastic people to strengthen their own institutions.

When all is said and done, while the EaP remains a useful project, it calls for a serious upgrade. This means that the parts which are good and have proved effective should be kept, while the formal, inflexible and outdated mechanisms should be eliminated. The EaP ought to obtain a separate and much more modest bureaucratic apparatus (within DG or the European External Action Service) whose goal would not be to find organisations to conduct re-granting, but build coalitions around macro projects. Such coalitions of public institutions and private players could then get financing for non-ideological projects.

A good example here is the very modest, yet very effective activity of the Polish diplomat, Jerzy Pomianowski, who was placed by Sikorski as executive director of the European Endowment for Democracy. Unfortunately, from the very beginning he was left alone, and neither the Polish government nor the ministry of foreign affairs offered him adequate support or help. From the very beginning the Polish government was behaving in a very restrained manner, while the diplomatic service did not feel like helping the project which was in Brussels, far away from their desks. Even the whole construction of the EED is for many people hard to accept as the project has had to constantly fight for approval and allies for micro activities, instead of having a large support for macro-projects from many strong players in the EU.

The second such example is Belsat, which despite large negative activities of government institutions, and even at times its co-founder, has passed the test of time and is a good start for a wider media project. It would be desirable to expand this project so that it could become a place of employment for many honest journalists from post-Soviet states. Many of them suffer from very low standards of living or persecution.

The final and third example are large educational projects. In this area there is a lack of determination not only on the part of the Polish government to support those that will lead to the strengthening of the European and Euro-Atlantic model of education. With increasing digitalisation of the world, this does not need to be a costly endeavour, but one that requires a strong support of state and EU institutions.

The views and opinions expressed here are the author's and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the institution he represents.

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

Mariusz Maszkiewicz is a Polish diplomat and currentlyPoland'sambassador to Georgia.

The Eastern Partnership

Much accomplished, more to be done

GABRIELE BONAFEDE

After ten years of Eastern Partnership, the balance of success seems largely positive and heartening. The benefits of the initiative have been tangible and sizable. Yet there is still a long way to go to achieve stronger governance, especially concerning the strengthening of the rule of law, implementing key judicial reforms and reinforcing public administration.

"Launched in 2009 as a joint policy initiative, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) aims to deepen and strengthen relations between the European Union (EU), its Member States and its six Eastern neighbours: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine." This is the official definition of the Eastern Partnership (EaP), a political and technical platform for dialogue that has been shaping the relationship between the EU and its Eastern bordering countries, including the Southern Caucasus. In fact, it is even more than that. This year the EaP is celebrating its tenth anniversary with much of an accomplished and articulated system of dialogue. Organised in thematic sub-platforms, the dialogue has been developed with the contribution of all 27 EU countries, together with all six Eastern Partnership countries. It has increased mutual knowledge and understanding. And, maybe above all, it has permitted to increase shared familiarity concerning wide public issues as well as specific and technical matters. The Eastern Partnership dialogue has demonstrated to be a process combining different experiences along a common and converging roadmap, leading to a better future for all citizens of involved parties.

Platforms for change

The Eastern Partnership website officially declares that "The overall framework guiding relations between the EU and its six Eastern Partners is provided by the relevant bilateral agreements, such as the Association Agreements, as well as the Association Agendas and the Partnership Priorities…" Indeed, the most visible and important achievements of the process are the Association Agreements – signed by Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – and the Association Agendas. These have shaped a tailored co-operation between the EU and each EaP country, contributing to streamlining specific technical issues within particular political, economic and cultural contexts.

Within the general framework, all partners agreed to deliver tangible benefits to the daily lives of citizens by focusing on achieving the "20 Deliverables for 2020" in the four priority areas. These have been organised up until 2017 in four platforms for dialogue: Platform I – Democracy, good governance and stability; Platform II – Economic integration and convergence with EU sectoral policies; Platform III – Energy security; and Platform IV – Contacts between people. Since 2017 the platforms have been renamed and reshuffled with more focus on energy and infrastructure and, indeed, connectivity at large.

Since 2017 the four priority areas have been defined as Stronger Economy (economic development and market opportunities), Stronger Governance (strengthening institutions and good governance), Stronger Connectivity (connectivity, energy efficiency, environment and climate change), and Stronger Society (mobility and people-to-people contacts). Today, as we approach the 2020 deadline, progress has been impressive in some cases and limited in others.

First of all, co-operation between the EU and the partner countries features three cross-cutting issues: engagement with civil society, women's empowerment and gender balance, and strategic communication. While progress has been achieved in the area of strengthening strategic communication, creating an enabling environment for civil society and independent media needs urgent attention. What has been achieved among the deliverables is, first of all, EaP citizens' positive perception of the EU. This is increasing with the trust in the EU today higher than ever. According to surveys, 61 per cent of citizens of the six EaP member states consider the EU as the most trustworthy foreign institution. It is an impressive achievement as, in the same period, EU citizens' own trust in their continental institution has been not performing so well.

Yet for the EaP member states much has to be done in key areas and cross-cutting goals, such as creating an enabling environment for civil society, supporting pluralism and independent media, and ensuring gender equality. Enormous

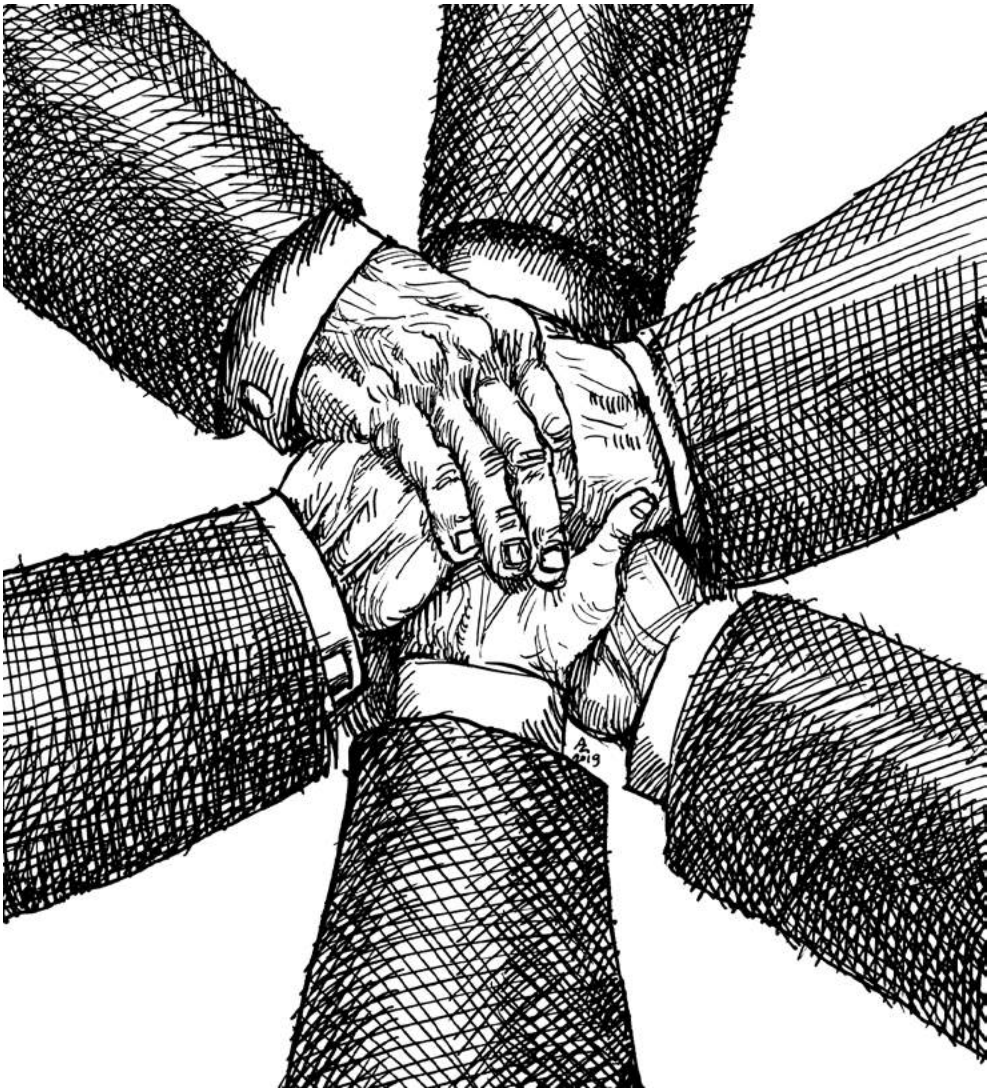
efforts have been put into building stronger economies for the six EaP member states. "Building economic resilience is at the heart of the EU's cooperation with EaP countries. The focus is on working together to develop stronger, diversified and vibrant economies. Significant progress has been made to help small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) grow; to attract investments; to create jobs in new sectors; and to increase trade opportunities by supporting access to new markets." Thus, for what concerns the broad goal of strengthening economies, more than half of the EU's loans to small and medium-sized enterprises are now in local currency. Trade between all six partner countries and the EU since 2016 has been also growing: by 15 per cent with Armenia, 17 per cent with Azerbaijan, 19 per cent with Belarus, 6 per cent with Georgia, 20 per cent with Moldova, and 24 per cent with Ukraine.

In addition, consensus has been achieved on a perspective for a mobile phone roaming agreement in the region by 2020. In this field, the EaP has been promoting a number of high quality studies identifying benefits and roadmaps to harmonise telecommunications and digital markets. Following the settings and results of the EU-EaP dialogue, two goals still need to be obtained: ensuring that commitments to harmonise digital markets are effectively implemented; and strengthening intra-regional trade to be one of the top priorities of EaP process.

Areas of improvement

Another chapter of EU-EaP co-operation has been devoted to obtaining stronger governance. The Eastern Partnership has been working to scale up efforts designed to strengthen institutions and good governance. This has been one of the priorities for the EU in the EaP countries where challenges and need for improvement still remain. "In particular," EU-EaP official documents highlight, "more efforts need to be made in the rule of law, implementing key judicial reforms, and in the fight against corruption. These are the preconditions for citizens' trust in the state, long-term stability and an investment-safe climate". In this field, e-asset declarations systems for politicians and public figures have been set up in four of the six EaP countries: Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. "Improvements in civil service laws paved the way towards a more depoliticised civil service in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine", the EU reckons.

Yet there is still a long way to go to achieve stronger governance in these countries, especially concerning the strengthening of the rule of law, implementing key judicial reforms and reinforcing public administration. Strengthening co-operation concerning security is one of the concerns that emerged thanks to the dialogue. Efforts need to be increased on tackling organised crime, support for conflict



resolution, and protection against new threats. Improving cybersecurity is also a filed with much to be done.

Encouraging results have been achieved to get a stronger connectivity between the EU and the EaP countries, as well as within EaP countries, at least regionally. Here, connectivity is meant for all fields of communication. This includes transport, energy, communications and digital connectivity. On the achieved deliverables set for the 2020 deadline, a few key-advancements have been attained. First of all, the Investment Action Plan for the trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) has been finalised, foreseeing the development of "approximately 5,500 kilometres of

roads and railways across the region by 2020 and an additional 4,600 kilometres by 2030", as reported in available EU-EaP documentation.

In the field of energy, the inauguration of the Azerbaijan–Georgia section of the Southern Gas Corridor strengthens common energy security: "High-level energy efficiency initiative between the EU and International Financial Institutions has led to improved legislation and investments to reach more people, municipalities and SMEs to help cut energy bills, and improve standards", declares the EU-EaP website. "The EU's work with partner countries to improve transport links and infrastructure, boost energy resilience and efficiency, as well as the use of renewable energy to reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions has resulted in significant progress." The will is for continued investments in these areas. This "will lead to greater sustainable economic development and concrete benefits to the lives of citizens by reducing energy dependence and consumption", affirm the EU-EaP publicly available reports.

A big area for improvement is in the field of biodiversity protection and sustainable forestry.

On the other hand, further reductions of CO_2 emissions and national monitoring of emissions in each EaP country needs to accelerate. A big area for improvement is in the field of biodiversity protection and sustainable forestry. Whereas the Strategic Environment Assessment and Environmental Impact Assessment laws and regulations have been developed in the countries which have signed the Association Agreement (AA) with the EU, the other three countries still rely on national systems, not always complying with minimal EU standards.

Tangible benefits

Last but not least, the quest for a stronger society has been one of the key elements of the EaP efforts and co-operation. Here, punctual progress is reported, such as the launching of the first Eastern Partnership European School in Tbilisi, Georgia. It is also interesting that, since 2014, more than 30,000 young people have taken part in exchanges, mobility and volunteering through Erasmus+. The EU-EaP claims that "The EU4Youth programme is actively supporting the employability and entrepreneurship of around 23,000 young people in partner countries and 200 Young European Ambassadors are fostering co-operation with youth organisations across the EU and the partner countries", and that "all partner countries have full access to Horizon 2020".

In short, the EU and the six Eastern partners have invested in young people's skills, entrepreneurship and employability, including education policies supported

by preliminary ad-hoc studies in many cases. Yet a lot is to be done for a stronger society, while continuing to monitor the progress of mobility partnerships. In particular, efforts should be made to improve the quality and relevance of national education systems, modernising teaching methods, reinforcing employability of graduates, and developing chances for reducing skill mismatching in the labour market, especially for young people.

After ten years of the EaP, the balance seems largely positive and heartening. Benefits of the EaP initiative have been tangible and sizable. For the medium term, say the next ten years, a stronger effort should be placed on energy and other connection infrastructures. Future emphasis looks to be placed on connectivity, energy efficiency, environment and climate change. Here a few initiatives have been set out, such as extending the TEN-T core networks for transport; increasing energy supply and security; enhancing energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy; reducing greenhouse gas emissions and supporting the environment and adaptation to climate change.

The most important bid of the EaP could well be the intensification of connectivity, at least with Ukraine (by far the largest EaP country), Moldova and Georgia. That is, starting with the three countries which have signed an Association Agreement, including an epochal free trade agreement – the DCFTA. Given the regulation infrastructure provided by the DFCTA, physical and virtual connectivity is the next big challenge ahead. This is vital to size existing opportunities in full.

Gabriele Bonafede is a freelance economist and editor. He has a PhD in Regional Planning (Italy, 1993) and specialised in Urban and Regional Studies in Developing countries (MIT, Cambridge, USA, 1996). Hee has 30 years of professional experience in technical assistance to public administrations. Since 1999 he focused on consulting services for Central and Eastern Europe, including the Baltics, the Balkans and the Caucasus, and (since 2015) specifically for the Eastern Partnership process.

Multiplying civil society's voice in the Eastern Partnership, a challenging task

DOVILĖ ŠUKYTĖ

The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum was established to facilitate civil society's engagement in Eastern Partnership policy and promote dialogue among civil society organisations and the authorities. One might think that one decade is enough time to develop co-operation where officials learn to value civil society's expertise and willingness to help. Unfortunately, that has not been the case.

When asked to look into the past ten years of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP SCF) I did not envision how difficult it would be. I found myself divided between my professional passion for the Eastern Partnership (EaP) region and the frustration that accumulated over the years of working on it. I have enormous admiration for civil society in the region whose actors, despite personal risk, tirelessly defend human rights, seek to instil democracy and the rule of law and create a safe and engaging environment. But I also cannot ignore the limitations. As a former co-chair and member of the forum's steering committee, I faced situations when country-related realities, cultural differences and even personal egos hindered our work. Some members deceive themselves about competences they do not possess, and prevented themselves from meeting the expectations of the

EU (the forum's main supporter) and giving EaP country governments a reason to ignore civil society when it becomes uncomfortable.

The Civil Society Forum is a unique tool for facilitating civil society engagement within the EU's EaP policy implementation process, notably the achievement of the 20 Deliverables for 2020, as set by the European Commission and the European External Action Service. It unites over 800 civil society organisations with their own areas of expertise and capacities. Their abilities are on different levels and it is among the forum's tasks to foster exchange of experience and co-operation among the members. In order to assess the results of the forum's decade of work, it is important to understand the environment in which the EaP civil society functions, to look at the impact of the EaP policy on civil society and the transformations it had to undergo in order to have a say in national reform processes.

Promoting dialogue

The Eastern Partnership policy was launched to bring six Eastern partners closer to the EU. However, EaP related discussions tend to sideline the societal elements and instead focus on the geopolitical leanings of the EaP member states and their political stamina to implement reforms. A majority of EaP experts and critics have never worked on the actual implementation of the reforms and have no connection with civil society. Furthermore, much of their analysis is dominated by hard security concerns, while ignoring the social changes. To illustrate this point, the post-Velvet Revolution of Armenia is still being analysed primarily through the prism of its security dependence on Russia, even though the Armenians themselves do not overemphasise this fact – an overwhelming majority (88 per cent) support the intensification of Armenia-EU relations. Such ignorance of the role that society plays is surprising, especially when the EaP region is coloured with civil society-run revolutions. As soon as the street revolution is over and the baton is given to the new government, the role of civil society is downgraded to reform monitoring. Another option for civic activists is to enter politics, which might strengthen the ranks of decision makers, but it bleeds society of its talents.

The EaP CSF was established to facilitate civil society's engagement in EaP policy and to promote dialogue among civil society organisations and public authorities. One might think that one decade is enough time to develop co-operation where officials learn to value civil society's expertise and willingness to help. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Civic actors, who are working on the ground and possess a practice-based know-how, are treated with the same respect as experts whose advice is based more on academic theories. A young social entrepreneur from the

mountainous areas of Armenia might not offer extensive market analyses, but she can provide successful models on creating workplaces for vulnerable groups and strengthening local communities.*

The extent of civil society's inclusion in the reform processes varies in all six EaP member states. The Georgian parliament, for example, has given civil society organisations premises within its buildings, while in Belarus the engagement between government and civil society is limited to cases when the EU insists on the presence of civil society at meetings.

The forum unites civil society organisations from six EaP member states and the EU. Forum participants are divided into members and delegates. Members belong to one of the six EaP member state platforms (organisations from EU member states have no such opportunity). The forum sets minimal standards for the national platforms, for example, insisting that they follow its code of ethical conduct. Most other matters, including the selection of members, are under the jurisdiction of each national platform. It would be a mistake to assume that the size of platforms is correlated with the size of the Eastern Partner state or their openness to civic activism. Currently the largest platform is that of Armenia, with 260 members. The Georgian platform unites 185 member organisations, while Ukraine has 130. The Moldovan and Belarusian platforms have around 80 members each, while the smallest – Azerbaijan – has 63 members.

The platform facilitates coordination of local activities, provides learning opportunities and easier access to decision makers. Platform membership is a precondition for any EaP member state organisation wishing to become a delegate to the Annual Assembly of the forum. Out of the 800 members, only 120 (20 per country) attend the Annual Assembly in a given year; an additional 30 seats are allocated to civil society organisations from EU member states.

Bring the bottom to the top

The Annual Assembly is more of a networking event where prominent civil society actors gather to share results of their joint work and discuss co-operation initiatives. It is also an opportunity to deepen dialogue with EaP decision-makers and EU representatives. Since the assembly is financially and politically embraced

* Among the most inspiring initiatives is Goris Handmade in Shinuhayr village, Armenia. From local sheep wool, which often is considered waste, economically disadvantaged women produce a variety of natural wool products – including toys for kids and personal accessories – thereby securing a sustainable income.

by the EU, civil society groups uses the event to pressure their national governments to take more action when implementing pro-EU reforms, and in simply respecting basic human rights. Conversely, the participation of high-ranking EU officials (including the Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy) is an opportunity for civil society groups to pinpoint troubling issues (including the wrongdoings of EaP member state governments) and to ask the EU for help in solving them. The forum has no legal authority, thus it needs to be creative and use any opportunity to voice concerns regarding the failing of human rights, superficial government commitment to reforms, election irregularities, the abuse of public resources and other issues.

The forum has no legal authority, thus it needs to be creative and use any opportunity to voice concerns.

Delegate engagement is not limited to the two days of the assembly. During the term they work in five working groups. Four of them mirror the priority areas (thematic platforms) of the Eastern Partnership: strengthening institutions and good governance; economic development and market opportunities; connectivity, energy efficiency, environment and climate change; and mobility and people-to-people contacts. The fifth one focuses on social dialogue. While it lacks an equivalent within the EaP structure, its topics – social policy, employment, labour rights, etc. – are still considerably relevant. When applying for the Annual Assembly, potential delegates need to highlight their competences and select a working group. The largest working group is the first one, as it covers human rights issues.

The aim is to organise the forum's work in a structure that is similar to the EaP's thematic platforms in order to ensure appropriate civil society involvement and contribution to the EaP agenda. When working on the ground in their communities, delegates are free to set their own goals. However, at working group meetings they need to ensure their work is of value to EaP policy. Furthermore, when attending EaP platform meetings – where they find themselves among policy makers – they need to provide valuable input. As one frustrated Moldovan public servant stressed to me, criticising is easy, but working towards solutions is what is actually needed.

Thus the forum, via its secretariat in Brussels, works to select the most qualified members to attend these and other meetings, and to present recommendations carefully developed in co-operation with colleagues from all six EaP member states. However, this is not an easy task. First of all, the preparation for such recommendations requires skills that many organisations do not possess. They are more used to working on the ground with people than writing policy briefs. The forum has prominent EaP think tanks among its members, but not all of them specialise in, for example, agrarian, educational or environmental issues. In

addition to expertise-related weaknesses, the forum has limited resources. Most of the resources are allocated to the Annual Assembly, working group meetings, re-granting and the maintenance of the secretariat. Accordingly, all contributions are made on a pro-bono basis. Recently two forum representatives took part in the EaP Ministerial Meeting on Environment and Climate Change – covering all six EaP member states, not only their own. Preparation included consultations with their counterparts in the other EaP member states, taking several days. The final result – a thorough presentation of problems and ways to manage them – reconfirmed the value and importance of having civil society actors in the room. One of the representatives assured that she would do it again even if it meant working without pay and putting aside actual work commitments.

New leaders and initiatives

In order to boost its members' co-operation and expertise, the forum has a re-granting scheme. Every year each working group formulates priorities which must be in line with EaP policy and the 20 Deliverables for 2020. For 2019, some 270,000 euros have been allocated; these funds will be divided among 13 awarded projects (they will receive approximately 20,000 euros each). To ensure broad co-operation, the project team has to contain three partners from the different EaP member states. As recently as a few years ago, there was a tendency to assign EU-based civil society organisations as lead partners with administrative responsibilities. Due to persecutions and limitations on receiving funding, organisations in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus would not embark on leadership roles.

Forum members have launched many successful initiatives. Among the first was an index of EaP media freedom.

Current data shows that EaP civil society organisations have taken over project management competences from their EU counterparts and are running all 13 re-granting projects: five are led by Georgian organisations, three by Ukrainian, two each by organisations from Armenia and Moldova, and one by an Azerbaijani organisation. Belarusian and Azerbaijani organisations still face difficulties in obtaining funds from abroad and this makes the forum, as well as the EU, look for local approaches on how to support civil society without putting its members at risk.

Due to re-granting and additional fundraising, forum members have launched many successful initiatives. Among the first was the Media Landscape of EaP member states, an index of EaP media freedom. Each year the forum also produces the

Eastern Partnership Index which measures and compares EaP member states' progress on democratic reform, sustainable development, and European integration. The flagship event of the working group on mobility and people-to-people contacts is the annual EaP Youth Forum which serves as a platform for youth co-operation. In 2017, members launched the EaP Think Tank Forum aimed to integrate EaP think tanks into the European network. One of the EaP Think Tank Forum's products included a set of recommendations for the 2017 EaP Brussels Summit. In 2016 the forum launched monitoring missions on the civil society, media and human rights situations. Their aim is to evaluate the working environment for civil society and independent media after abuses of power arise, as well as providing recommendations to the government of the assessed state, to the EU and other intergovernmental and nongovernmental organisations. The first monitoring mission took place in Armenia after the seizure of a police station in Yerevan and the wave of public protests it ignited. The second mission the following year in Belarus happened after the arrest of demonstrators protesting against the so-called social parasite law.

The flagship event of the mobility and people-to-people contacts work group is the annual EaP Youth Forum which serves as a platform for youth co-operation.

Responsibility and relations

When asked about the main advantages of being a part of the forum, EaP civil society members usually cite the following: through the direct influence of the EU, their participation in the decision-making processes significantly increased (especially for Armenian and Belarusian respondents), leading to improved outreach to national decision-makers; the network of EaP and EU civil society organisations led to an exchange of expertise, the transfer of best practices, and co-operation on joint initiatives; the focuses of civil society organisations broadened; the forum's secretariat in Brussels became the platform for events presenting civil society organisation's agenda and work results to a Brussels audience; also, via the forum's activities, its members became more familiar with the work of EU institutions. One respondent insightfully noted that civil society organisations took upon the shared regional responsibility in order to bring their governmental institutions closer to the EU and its structures.

The harshest criticism was expressed by a long-time member who noticed that during the past number of years the forum and its members have lost their iden-

tity as they try to meet the expectations of EU institutions and, in some cases, national governments (irrespective of how fair they are). Relations with the European Commission and the European External Action Service are adopting the logic of a donor-grantee relationship, which has never been the purpose of the forum. Civil society organisations receive funding via projects and continue to apply for what is available. The majority of the EU's funding opportunities are to provide support in a concrete area of EaP policy; thus organisations have less chance to contribute their project ideas and instead change their expertise in accordance to the EU calls for proposals. These risks diverting EaP civil society organisations away from what they do best – protecting human rights and democracy – and to turn them into another service contractors of the EU.

The EaP civil society organisations are doing what it takes to survive, to partake in the policy-making processes and support reforms that would bring their countries closer to the EU. The forum has served as a support network for them to share challenges, to learn from each other and to co-operate. In the words of a very determined EaP colleague of mine: the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum is one of the best demonstrations of partnership.

Dovilė Šukytė is a policy analyst with the Eastern Europe Studies Centre in Vilnius. She served as a Steering Committee Member of the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum between 2015 and 2017.

The Eastern Partnership at 10

What is there to celebrate?

JAMES NIXEY

In essence, the Eastern Partnership has diverted from its original path. Instead of transformation, it speaks of stabilisation and differentiation. One can argue that some of the states have made progress in the last ten years; but not because of the Eastern Partnership.

There should be no doubt about the good intentions and the vaulting, inspiring ambition of the European Union's Eastern Partnership programme (EaP). At its heart, the Swedes and the Poles found a simple premise in their extension of the European Neighbourhood Policy: to encourage, through incentives, a trajectory towards European values for the states involved (this was in the days when European values were not quite as tarnished as they are now).

It was, perhaps, with a little ironic destiny that the first letter of each Eastern Partnership country in Russian – Беларусь (Belarus), Украина (Ukraine), Молдова (Moldova), Азербайджан (Azerbaijan), Грузия (Georgia), Армения (Armenia) – could be acronymised to spell out the word for paper – БУМАГА (bumaga) – an unfortunate inference that "on paper" was all the Eastern Partnership would ever amount to. Humour is based on cruelty, but also on underlying truths. That contrived and minor coincidence would not be funny if the EaP was a runaway success… if through the EaP's provisions, any of these countries had truly entered the European fold. But they have not. Not yet at least.

Jumping through hoops

The EaP was only seen as anti-Russian by those who wished to see it that way – by Russia itself of course and by the vocal minority who see it as "interference in Russia's backyard" or, at best, needlessly provocative. Either way, such views deprive the six countries of their foreign policy independence. It should never be forgotten that Russia was originally invited to join the Eastern Partnership as well. The EU is nothing if not inclusive (just look at its Parliamentary Assembly). But being "one among seven" and submitting to "humiliating" western norms and standards does not befit a Great Power.

Setbacks and mistakes are understandable. But the overall negative direction seen in Belarus and Azerbaijan suggests that the EU was mistaken to offer EaP membership in the first place.

None of this is to say that any of the EaP countries were particularly fond of the hoops they had to jump through either – for three main reasons: first, it would entail initial economic hardship ("if it isn't hurting, it isn't working…"). This is true for the population at large, but also for the corrupt elites who would, theoretically, have to conform to western business practices and no longer skim off the top. Second, that there was no goal at the end – no membership perspective – in other words, a high risk for no reward. The weaselly suggestion that the reforms would be "good for them anyway", was too hard a sell, to say nothing of disingenuous. The third reason the EaP's provisions were unloved was simply because many countries – not all – simply had no intention of moving closer to Europe in any real sense. Setbacks and mistakes are understandable. But the overall negative direction seen in Belarus and Azerbaijan – not entirely by coincidence the two countries of the EaP with the longest serving presidents – suggests that the EU was mistaken to offer EaP membership in the first place and subsequently it has been overly tolerant of their misdemeanours by allowing them to remain in a club of supposedly reforming nations.

The EU's conditionality has been – and still is – too one-sided: carrots but no sticks. "More for more" is a fine policy, but woefully insufficient on its own. Consistent transgression of EU stipulations, norms and principles has not resulted in any form of punishment other than rhetorical admonishment. The simple conclusion must be that the Eastern Partnership (and thus the EU) has failed. It has failed to impose measures on transgressors, making the EU look weak. It has failed to attain any kind of wider recognition for what it is – in the EaP states less than five per cent of the population has even heard of it; while in the EU this number is even lower, less than one per cent.

Finally, of course, it has failed because it has not worked. You can argue that some EaP states have made progress in the last ten years. But you cannot argue it was because of the Eastern Partnership. In the cases of Armenia, Ukraine and Georgia, it was pressure from below, either through street protests or civil society, which has stimulated transformation.

Who's to blame?

This is not to take away from the achievements of the "leading" EaP countries. Ukraine has just had a genuinely democratic election and looks to have overturned an incumbent. Georgia has already done so. Both have made marked progress in reform (and both have a long way yet to go – but at least they have started). Armenia, despite having been forced into Russian-contrived groupings and at times effectively having sold out, has recently managed to claw back some of its lost independence through a popularly-elected and independent-minded, if pragmatic, leader. Moldova had a strong start, though it has since lost its way. Belarus and Azerbaijan remain laggards by their own volition.

You cannot prove a negative. So who is to say that had the EU put more enthusiasm and financial resources into the EaP, more could have been achieved. However, a lessening of sanctions on Belarus in 2017 and a special agreement being negotiated with Azerbaijan in 2018 has not resulted in an improvement in their democratic accountability. And the very fact that the EU has given over 200 times more financial assistance to Greece than it has even to Ukraine suggests that the EU is more interested in looking after its own than helping neighbours. This may not be unreasonable, depending on your proclivities and priorities, but it is indicative.

For the sake of fairness, when assessing the achievements and failures of the EaP it is reasonable to invoke a mirror image of the common argument against the existence of a benevolent God (why should "He" take credit for the good, but not the blame for the bad?). In other words, if the EaP cannot be credited with the achievements of Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia and at one time, Moldova, then why should it take the blame for the failure of Azerbaijan and Belarus? And Moldova. The answer is that it should not. The conclusion, then, is not that the EaP has failed the countries; rather that it has failed to make an impact.

In essence, the EaP has diverted from its original path. Instead of transformation, it speaks of stabilisation and differentiation – fancy words, redolent with concern and tolerance. True, there has been some positive work done through the Association and Free Trade Agreements, as well as integrated border management and training, and even in communications and PR skills. But most other initiatives

such as infrastructure investment are still in the planning stage. In sum it adds up to inertia and a lack of ambition – and the EU's withdrawal of its responsibility as a foreign policy actor, not least through lack of popular buy-in. Obviously those member states which have "failed" – Belarus and Azerbaijan primarily – are largely responsible. But the EU has never been fully behind the EaP – with the possible exceptions of its founders – Poland and Sweden – and the Baltic states.

All this "failure" then and Russia has barely lifted a finger to directly damage the EaP – at least not beyond obtuse criticism and a disinformation campaign, the latter of which could easily have been countered with proper planning. The more interesting question is, what would Russia have done had the EU "put its back into it" a bit more? The theory that Russia is threatened by the success of the former Soviet states has been emphatically proven only in the Baltic states – and that was some time ago, before Russia's more visceral revanchism of late. But it is still a pretty good theory. One has to ask why the EU is not prepared to test it more. And the answer to that is surely money (there is not enough of it for a Marshall plan for the former Soviet states), political will (lacking in the traditionally leading countries of Europe – the UK, Germany and France) and disinclination (Italy, Hungary, Slovakia among others, don't believe in it anyway).

Ultimate prize

If the EU is honest, there is little reason for it to celebrate on this 10th anniversary of its magnificently envisioned Eastern Partnership project (though there will doubtless be much laudation). However, there is an opportunity here. The EU should use the occasion to double down. And to focus. Expel for a consistent record of bad behaviour and no attempt to reform (a further warning is reasonable), and reward success, not just with cash (though more of that is needed which Brexit, if it happens, will hardly help with), but with the ultimate prize – a membership perspective. After all, what are the arguments against it? That the EaP states are nowhere near ready? Fine, then no admittance. That the EU cannot cope with so many other distractions? (Brexit again, migration, populism, keeping existing members in line). Surely a successful candidate would help with these problems not hinder them.

And again there is Russia. It, too, needs to be tested. If a third party is really going to prevent an independent country from joining a club which it itself is not a part of, then this needs exposure for what it is – the claim to a sphere of influence and a denial of states' independence. This is widely believed to be true – Georgia 2008 and Ukraine 2014 stand as evidence. Yet, and I write this as a known Russia

"sceptic" ("hawk" in others' language) – more evidence of Russia's true intentions and what it is prepared to do would be helpful for policy-makers. Besides, the more the Kremlin interferes in these countries, the more they will be inclined to conform to EaP standards to counter it. But in choosing between values and interests, the EU often chooses unwisely. As such, fear of the Russian response has entered into the EU calculus.

None of this should be confused as the "geopoliticisation of the EaP", much less wrenching countries away from Russia's grasp. For a start, Russia should not be grasping. But more importantly, it is a question of free will. Besides, if the EU really wanted to take over the EaP countries it would simply offer them membership, not the purgatory they are in now. The EaP is geopolitical only to the extent that Russia perceives it as such.

If the EU really wanted to take over the EaP countries it would simply offer them membership, not the purgatory they are in now.

The creation of the EU's Eastern Partnership was a bold move. Yet its 10-year lifespan has been a timid one. If the EU continues this project in the same lacklustre way it has run it over the past few years then it will be throwing good money after bad. Worse than that, it risks these countries forever being seen as "post-Soviet" (or worse, Russian playthings) – condemned to a "betwixt and between" existence, with commensurate antipathy towards the West at the political and popular levels.

But fortune favours the bold. With buy-in at the highest levels and a concentration of more resources on fewer countries, the Eastern Partnership will have a lot more to show for on its 20th birthday than it has for its tenth.

James Nixey is the head of the Russia and Eurasia Programme at Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London.

Eastern Partnership, Past, Present and Future – Expert Survey

Eastern Partnership

Partial progress

ANDERS ÅSLUND

In May 2009, the European Union launched its Eastern Partnership. It was a product of Swedish-Polish partnership, spearheaded by the two foreign ministers Carl Bildt and Radosław Sikorski. After one decade, the verdict is mixed. The EU offered a framework for co-operation, free trade agreements, visa-free travel and reform programmes, but the financial support has been quite limited, giving the reform programmes too little clout and no clear perspective of EU membership has been offered.

When the Eastern Partnership was launched, it was a big positive step. As a highly bureaucratic organisation, the EU can do little without a legal framework. In 2003 the EU presented the idea of European Neighbourhood, but it involved too many countries and the EU commitment was limited, leaving everybody disappointed.

The Eastern Partnership was much more ambitious. It aimed at the conclusion of Association Agreements, which included Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTA) and visa-free travel agreements. The partnership countries were also supposed to receive some financial support and technical assistance. The Association Agreements were designed to be reform programmes, formed with much of the EU *acquis communautaire*. Initially, the EU targeted six countries, the six European former Soviet republics – Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia,

and Azerbaijan. However, the EU stands for democracy and freedom, and neither Belarus nor Azerbaijan complied with its democratic conditions, so they have fallen out from the actual co-operation. The choice of countries has made perfect sense and the EU has been a force for judicial and democratic reform in these countries.

Russia excluded itself in 2003 when it refused to be a part of the EU neighbourhood project, demanding a standing of its own. Until Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014, the EU had two summits a year with Russia, which made little sense. Since 2014, on the contrary, it has been subject to various sanctions caused by its aggression against Ukraine. Until June 2013, the Kremlin seemed indifferent to the EU and its Eastern Partnership, while it had strongly opposed NATO enlargement. In the summer of 2013, Russia's policy changed swiftly and radically. It became a major foe of the conclusion of Association Agreements with the EU, driving its Customs Union and Eurasian Economic Union as an alternative. On September 3rd 2013 President Vladimir Putin convinced Armenia's President Serzh Sargsyan to abandon the already negotiated Association Agreement and instead join the Eurasian Economic Union. That left three countries opting for Association Agreements with the EU.

Next, Moscow put great pressure on Ukraine's President Viktor Yanukovych to stay out and imposed some trade sanctions on Ukraine. Yanukovych went to the EU Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius in November 2013 with the intention to sign an Association Agreement, but he was not allowed to do so because he refused to fulfil two key EU conditions: free the jailed opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko and adopt a law on prosecution. The Ukrainian population revolted. While the formal reason was that Yanukovych failed to conclude the Association Agreement, the real cause was that this agreement was seen as a dividing line between authoritarian kleptocracy and freedom. The

Russia excluded itself in 2003 when it refused to be a part of the EU neighbourhood project, demanding a standing of its own.

Ukrainians cherished the EU as their greatest hope to gain freedom and combat corruption. The outcome was the EuroMaidan or the Revolution of Dignity as it became called and the ouster of Yanukovych.

Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova have all signed their Association Agreements in Brussels in June 2014. While the ratification process lasted two years, the agreements were in force from September 2014. The DCFTAs have led to the EU share in these countries' exports having increased substantially to 43 per cent

for Ukraine in 2018 and 60 per cent for Moldova. Increased trade with the EU has also led to improved quality of production. Western Ukraine and Moldova seem to be catching on to the European supply chain.

Moldova succeeded in getting visa-free travel with the EU as early as 2014, while Ukraine and Georgia had to wait until 2017. The visa freedom is very popular, but it is a double-edged sword because it has greatly stimulated emigration to the EU countries, primarily for temporary work, but also for permanent work and studies. The consequence has been a substantial shortage of skilled labour primarily in Moldova and Ukraine, which hampers their economic development.

The EU machinery works slowly but systematically and all three countries have carried out numerous economic and legal reforms, gradually improving legislation and administration. The financing of these reforms, however, has been quite limited, and a frequent complaint is the absence of any clear membership perspective. This makes it more difficult for domestic reforms to have vital reforms accepted.

The critical concern is reforms of the judiciary and law enforcement. The only country that has been truly successful was Georgia under President Mikheil Saakashvili, but his reforms were far more radical than the EU desired. Rather than learning from the success of Georgia, the EU appears to be learning from the failures in Ukraine and Moldova, where both the West and local reformers now call for more radical reforms. The substantial top-level corruption in Ukraine and Moldova that the EU seems unable to combat can easily grow into a potent anti-western sentiment. Nor has the EU managed to do anything for the national security of these countries, which is beyond the EU mandate, but it is a *sine qua non* for the sovereignty of these countries.

The overall verdict is that the Eastern Partnership has been helpful for Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova, but a much more forceful EU engagement is desirable.

Anders Åslund is a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council and the author of the forthcoming book *Russia's Crony Capitalism: The Path from Market Economy to Kleptocracy*.

Eastern Europe intrigue

JOANNA HOSA

The Eastern Partnership started as a rather innocuous Swedish-Polish initiative. Launched in 2009, it was seen mostly as just another scheme for Brussels to channel funds and coordinate the European Union's activities in Europe's East. Ten years on, everything has changed about Europe's east and the EU itself. Now everything is political. If previously the EU could claim that the EaP was just a technical process, it is difficult to sell this argument now.

And so the EaP is looking for direction, its role, purpose and what it can offer. Each EaP summit is an occasion to take stock and reflect. Are we doing too much? Too little? Is it enough to keep partners on board, to keep countries motivated? What is the end goal of all this? EU membership? Yes? No? For whom, yes? For whom, no? How would Russia react? The EaP is overthinking. No wonder that we have Eastern Partnership fatigue. Overthinking is exhausting.

Yet, when it comes to Eastern Europe, we should be intrigued, not fatigued. This is a region which is very diverse, fascinating and with great energy. EaP countries are often put in one basket as "post-Soviet" states. This label is of little use and only conjures up bleak images. Other than being post-Soviet, Moldova and Azerbaijan have very little in common. They are drastically different countries that we know little about. More conspicuously, Ukraine or Armenia recently went through stunning revolutions, and yet they too remain largely unknown to Western Europeans.

The EU urgently needs a better communication strategy for Europe's East in order to garner more enthusiasm for the region among EU member states. For better or worse, Brussels is not the place where enthusiasm grows on trees. It is a place for painstaking compromises and procedures. Accordingly, the EaP is a very detailed, technical process. This is how the EU works and it should keep this systematic approach, setting clear goals, benchmarks and milestones and working on them one by one. This is how the EU has achieved great results in the past, not least helping transformations in post-communist countries.

However, the EU should also go beyond this framework and unpack the EaP structure by building it up with a stronger bilateral component and focus-

ing more on EaP countries as individual partners. The key to this is getting more EU capitals on board and interested in the the initiative, and getting them to drive the processes. The Swedish-Polish tandem is no more, and Sweden needs other EU member states to engage in the process. Foreign policy is made in European capitals, they are more agile than Brussels, so this is where we need to see more enthusiasm about Europe's East. Unfortunately, busy with a multitude of crises over the last decade, EU capitals have not fully grasped the meaning and potential of the revolution in Ukraine or the more recent one in Armenia.

Ukraine and Armenia are examples of changes that were made possible by the power of ideas and values that the EU stands for.

The 2014 Revolution of Dignity started as the EuroMaidan, where the Ukrainian students manifested their commitment to European values and European future. There was great pro-European energy, which had long been missing within the EU itself. Emotions have since subsided, but Ukraine is still a source of great enthusiasm for European values and for the EU as a project. As Europe struggles to keep its own citizens interested and convinced of the value of the EU, engaging with Ukraine and understanding Ukraine better could help EU countries regain confidence in the remarkable project that is the EU.

The 2018 revolution in Armenia was of an entirely different kind and arguably did not even have a foreign policy angle. What happened, however, is very impressive. Within a month protesters managed to oust their despised leader. The protests were a definition of peaceful revolution and achieved a bloodless change of power that very few had imagined possible. The country is eager to change its path, modernise, and become a meritocratic democracy with strong institutions that respect the rule of law.

Ukraine and Armenia are examples of changes that were made possible by the power of ideas and values that the EU stands for – whether expressed explicitly or not. These are fascinating and impressive changes that could and should inspire the EU countries as well. In other words, the EU and its member states have a lot to learn from its Eastern partners. And a lot to gain. Beyond helping reinvigorate the European project, Eastern Europe can also help Europe adapt its policy on Russia, find new solutions to this and other challenges.

In getting more interested in Eastern Partnership countries and seeing them more as partners, the EU and its member states should not be afraid to acknowledge their own weaknesses. There is no point in pretending that the EU is the

same strong actor as it was ten years ago. Moreover, it is better to be honest about EU's capacities and ambitions – over-promising will not work in the long term. However, despite the crises that have troubled the EU and its member states, we can still be confident and proud of what we have achieved over the decades.

We often hear that the EU must help itself first and fix its problems before helping others, which is a fair argument. However, the point is that Eastern European countries can be part of our solution. They should not be framed as a ballast that can only tire us out or a problem to manage. Rather, they can be inspiring partners. Engaging more with Eastern neighbours, who look at the EU and its member states for inspiration, can help us understand better what we do, why we do it, and reinvigorate the European project itself.

Joanna Hosa is the programme manager of the Wider Europe programme at the European Council on Foreign Relations.

Eastern Partnership at 10

Rhetoric, resources and Russia

BALÁZS JARÁBIK

The Eastern Partnership was designed to tie the eastern neighbours to the European Union, keep Russia out and EU membership off the table. These objectives have largely been achieved – but the region has become neither more stable nor secure.

It has some quite remarkable results during tumultuous times, just think about the bloody EuroMaidan Revolution in Ukraine in 2014, the peaceful revolution in Armenia in 2018, peaceful political transitions in Georgia and soon in Ukraine. Elections remained democratic in Moldova and Ukraine despite vested interests. The dialogue with Belarus brought attitude change from the government towards dissent and the country braces for political transition (i.e. change of constitution) in a few years. This holds a reasonable chance to bring Belarus among the region's democracies.

The ratification of the Association Agreements with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine was a serious affirmation of the EU's soft power. The policy attracted elites and mobilised societies despite the fact that it comes neither with the membership option nor with the kind of financial assistance that was given to the EU's Central European member states. Visa-free regimes was a wild dream at the start of the EaP and it took nine years for Ukraine, five years for Georgia and four years for Moldova to reach this goal.

The hope that the Association Agreements means integration via association compared to association instead of integration, the Eastern partners aligned their foreign policy with the EU, while not gaining access to actual EU policy-making. Not aiming to give the membership perspectives to eastern countries, Brussels often neglected its due diligence. Rather it has opted to do something similar to what George Soros wrote about as "market fundamentalists", namely ignoring the costs and consequences but putting enough money towards public relations.

It could do so also because of Russia. Moscow has been estranged by what it sees as western encirclement of Russia – used twice to protect its interest with weapons, crossing borders, defying

western hegemony and strengthening anti-Russia feelings among its immediate neighbours. The annexation of Crimea and the Donbas war – as Russia's reaction to the EuroMaidan Revolution – meant that the EU lost Russia over Ukraine.

In the Eastern Partnership countries there is a growing realisation that the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), the most important and binding part of the Association Agreements, cannot trigger the necessary economic growth alone. The EU's current economic offer is not going to help them in the short-term. Although exports to the EU have risen in all three associated countries, only in Moldova the volume of EU-bound exports – at 63 per cent – can somewhat compensate the loss of the Russian trade (Moscow imposed an embargo of Moldova's key export products: wines and spirits, in September 2013).

Ukraine's electoral campaign and the success of the actor-comedian Volodymyr Zelenskiy should serve as another wake-up call for the West to realise the need of changing the economic policy towards the region. Macroeconomic stabilisation has been necessary yet painful and most importantly has not brought investments. The trade deficit with the EU doubled in 2018; in goods it reached a whopping 10 billion US dollars.

Ukraine is now ranked as Europe's poorest country, ahead of Moldova. An estimated four million Ukrainians working abroad are currently providing more external sources for the economy in the form of remittances than the IMF. While Russia poured $22 billion into Crimea since its annexation, western assistance in the form of grants and direct budget support to Ukraine since the EuroMaidan is up three billion dollars. At the same time Kyiv has to pay back $36 billion to foreign creditors (mostly Yanukovych-era loans) in 2019–2021.

At the ten-year anniversary self-reflection is overdue. Brussels should take more responsibility for the socio-economic foundation of the region it aims to stabilise. After all, these countries

Ukraine's electoral campaign and the success of the actor-comedian Volodymyr Zelenskiy should serve as another wake-up call for the West.

opened their markets without receiving any compensation to alleviate the consequences like what Central Europe received. Yet the EU has caught a special kind of a "Dutch disease": after the 2016 Dutch referendum the EU and the Netherlands agreed that the association treaty with Ukraine does not guarantee any commitment to a potential EU membership, major financial assistance, the right to work in the EU, or military support.

Brussels' achievements remain fragile. Reforms need more resources, not more rhetoric. Of course, the EU can't

foot the bill, but it should finally realise that the neoliberal consensus does not fit the poverty-stricken region. Ukraine or Moldova's actual problems are tied up with the breakdown of a system based on (extreme) redistribution to the rich, a low level of investment and high capital flight, and private monopolies (led by oligarchs) keeping the state as weak as possible.

Instead of sticking to dogmas, reflection, due diligence and flexibility should be the guiding principles. Some immediate concessions for associated partners can be provided without significant costs, for example reviewing exporting quotas within the DCFTA. More flexibility within the financial support could foster economic modernisation. Informal interests continue to play important roles in these countries and have the potential to thwart reforms. In the absence of strong, de-politicised institutions, the EU should work to support political consolidation – the alternative is further polarisation and political fragility – while at the same time insisting on adherence to democratic standards and strengthened institutional checks and balances.

Balázs Jarábik is a nonresident scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, where his research focuses on Eastern and Central Europe with particular focus on Ukraine.

The Eastern Partnership project in Ukraine and Belarus

DAVID R. MARPLES

For the past decade, both Ukraine and Belarus have been members of the European Union's Eastern Partnership Project (EaP). Has it been a useful tool for the EU in drawing these countries closer? Have its initial and long-term aims been fulfilled? Is it a project that is worth continuing?

The two countries have taken very different routes. When Ukraine's formal entry took place in 2009, it was on the eve of an important presidential election, which resulted in the victory of a pro-Russian Donbas-based leader, Viktor Yanukovych. Despite his personal predilection for closer ties with Russia, Yanukovych at least paid lip service to supporting an Association Agreement with the EU, which was to have been signed in Vilnius in November 2013.

The path that Ukraine then followed was tortuous, volatile and destructive. Yanukovych withdrew from the agreement at a late stage and following a visit with Vladimir Putin in Moscow. The EuroMaidan protests that ensued had as their initial goal a return to the European path and decisively move away from the Russian orbit and the multivectored foreign policy followed by its leaders to that point. But the consequences have been catastrophic: over 100 killed on the Maidan and a prolonged war in the east that has resulted in 13,000 more deaths.

In some respects, Ukraine has made reasonable progress. It has a democratic structure. Its presidents change frequently and a variety of parties have held sway in parliament. Under the presidency of Petro Poroshenko, however, it has faced extremely adverse conditions: the loss of Crimea in 2014, and a conflict in Donbas where rebel regimes hold sway in parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions including both major cities. It remains deeply corrupt and the president himself is widely distrusted, as he is largely associated with these problems.

Ukraine has embarked further on a "de-Russification" campaign that includes a complete severing of links with the Soviet period, destruction of Soviet symbols, name changes, and veneration of anti-Soviet heroes, all supported overtly by the government in

power since 2014. Above all, the inclusion of Ukraine within the EaP alienated and incensed the Russian leadership. Russia's more ambitious plans to occupy much of eastern and southern Ukraine or to establish puppet regimes was short-lived. Today, all the same, it is committed to ensuring that Ukraine does not join EU structures, and especially that it does not join NATO. Most of the events of 2015–18 cannot be attributed to EaP initiatives, but Ukraine's problems have arisen in part because of an underestimation of Russia's willingness to respond with force. Other EaP states, other than Georgia, have in various ways made some accommodation with Russia. Armenia and Belarus appear the most stable and yet are also the most pro-Russian of the six.

Russia is committed to ensuring that Ukraine does not join EU structures, and especially that it does not join NATO.

Belarus is an interesting study, in that for several years it engaged in debates that were sometimes contentious with the EU, particularly over its human rights record, the arrest and detention of political prisoners, its lack of a free press and its manipulation of parliamentary and presidential elections. Over the past two years, the human rights record has deteriorated, with the difference that violent mass arrests have been succeeded by heavy fines. At the same time, the Lukashenka regime – in power since 1994 – has moved close to the EU in a number of ways, thanks to several initiatives. Though one should not overestimate their importance, they do merit attention.

First, the initiation of a visa-free regime with 80 countries in 2017 has effectively opened Belarus to the West. The five-day visa-free regime was expanded recently to 30 days. Second, Lukashenka, partly through his Foreign Minister Uladzimir Makei, has opened a dialogue with the West that has allowed Belarus to move closer to Europe without breaking its ties with Russia. Surprisingly, Belarus is the success story of the EaP, though the terms on which it has been achieved have all been in Lukashenka's favour: it has conceded little, but hopes are high. Third, Belarus has attempted to play the role of mediator in the Ukraine-Russia conflict.

Since the winter of 2018–19, Russia has paid belated and serious attention to this development, condemning the opening of the western borders and demanding closer coordination within the Russia-Belarus Union using economic pressure to assert its will. Belarus for the present has lost its oil and gas subsidies and its economy faces a freefall through Russia's new energy taxation laws. In one respect this move opens a

way for the EaP to develop deeper relations, but it now faces much more resistance from Moscow.

Further, the EaP's apparent neglect of demands placed on Belarus in return for economic support and integration has placed pro-western opposition groups in turmoil, solidifying the Lukashenka dictatorship and enabling it to act with impunity with regard to its internal foes. Moreover, the chances of long-term EaP success are minimal, since the population of Belarus is overwhelmingly supportive of Russia's moves in Ukraine, as well as close relations between the two countries.

Whereas Ukraine has tried – I would argue with partial success – to cut all ties with Russia, Belarus cannot survive without Russian support. Most Belarusians favour an independent state but prefer closer links to Russia than to the EU. Russia has strengthened this support through an extensive social media propaganda, installing a plenipotentiary ambassador last August (Mikhail Babich) who is prepared to exceed his mandate on Putin's behalf. Babich has made trips to Belarusian factories almost in the role of a Russian governor.

Thus in 2019 the EaP faces some stark choices. The EU of the present is also very different from that of 2009, with populist parties dominant in some countries and the lengthy saga of Brexit, weakening unity and rendering it less a model for states to the east. None of these factors should negate the worthiness of the EaP initiative but it will need to anticipate Russian responses to further moves, at least as long as the current leadership remains in Moscow.

David R. Marples is a distinguished university professor of Russian and East European History at the University of Alberta. He is the author of sixteen single-authored books, including *Ukraine in Conflict* (2017), *Our Glorious Past: Lukashenka's Belarus and the Great Patriotic War* (2014) and *Heroes and Villains: Creating National History in Contemporary Ukraine* (2008).

Lessons learnt from the Eastern Partnership

GWENDOLYN SASSE

Ten years after the launch of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) two basic dilemmas inherent in the policy design remain unchanged: first, the six countries within the EaP framework (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine) differ significantly in their domestic political trajectories and, by extension, in their ideas about their relationship with the European Union. Secondly, the EU's scope for affecting policy changes in the six countries is limited given that a concrete EU membership perspective is not on offer. Though modelled on the EU accession process in its overarching principles, the monitoring process and the disbursement of assistance, the EaP, can at best offer "conditionality-lite" to entice policy change if it corresponds with the political will of the elites in the EaP countries.

The EaP states now fall into three main categories. Three states (Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) have signed Association Agreements, Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs) and agreements on visa liberalisation, allow visa-free travel to the EU. Then there is the Armenia model – encapsulated by the Comprehensive and Advanced Partnership Agreement of 2017, a novel type of weaker integration with the EU that reflects the reality of Armenia's close relations with Russia, including participation in the Eurasian Economic Union. The focus here is on a less detailed agenda for fostering institutional capacity, economic development, energy efficiency and societal participation. Arguably, Belarus could one day follow this model. For the moment, the sanctions regime against President Alyaksandr Lukashenka and other elite members remains in place, so that current engagement with Belarus is limited to the multilateral dimension, in particular the dialogue with civil society organisations. Thus, Belarus effectively belongs to the third category of EaP states alongside Azerbaijan, a country that is only interested in economic co-operation with the EU. Negotiations on a new EU-Azerbaijan agreement have been ongoing since 2017. Thus, despite its shared overarch-

ing umbrella, the policy design has become more differentiated in line with the domestic political priorities of the countries concerned.

It has also become apparent that association with the EU, even though it might proceed very slowly, is not a linear process. There can also be backsliding within the group of EaP countries that have the most institutionalised relations with the EU. Moldova is a case in point where the domestic political consensus behind the implementation of the Association Agreements and DCFTA has become uncertain. By contrast, Armenia might revisit its current model as part of its recent domestic reform momentum. In such circumstances, the EaP has to remain flexible and ready to respond to the domestic developments in the countries to either reinforce conditionality, pause the implementation of the Association Agreement or DCFTA, or redefine existing frameworks of engagement.

The Eastern Partnership and the implementation of its agreements should not be treated as a technical matter. These processes are part of a wider political context that needs to be acknowledged in order to become better at positioning the EaP within it. The expectations, hopes and fears related to EaP are part and parcel of this reality. One extreme experience in this regard was the EuroMaidan in Ukraine in 2013–14. The trigger – though not the cause – of mass mobilisation was the decision by then President Viktor Yanukovych's refusal to sign the Association Agreement with the EU. The EuroMaidan took on a dynamic of its own and, in turn, provided a trigger for Russian intervention in Ukraine through the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and military support of separatists in Donbas. The latter turned into a war that has cost nearly 13,000 lives, led to 1.8 million internally displaced people and made another one million people flee to Russia.

The tenth anniversary of the Eastern Partnership has not inspired much appetite in the EU and individual member states to seriously consider the needs of the EaP countries and adjust the policy. The general consensus is that it has worked quite well. Indeed, the EaP has delivered many of its procedural objectives, at least with regard to the AAs and DCFTAs. But even here the population at large has not felt the benefits of the EaP enough. Some changes might simply not be associated with the EU in people's minds as the causal chain is too long, but other intended effects have not (yet) trickled down. For example, small and medium-sized enterprises have yet to profit from the new trade rules.

The Eastern Partnership and the implementation of its agreements should not be treated as a technical matter.

For at least three of the participating states – Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova – the perspective of EU membership remains an important one. The EU is wary of issuing explicit promises, and preoccupied with its own internal issues at the moment. But at least a clear high-level reiteration of the basic principle that every European country has the right under EU law to apply for membership and that the implementation of the EaP prepares for this step is desirable. Yet, avoiding the membership issue prevents the necessary discussions about the future objectives of the Eastern Partnership.

Gwendolyn Sasse is the director of the Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOiS) in Berlin and a professor of comparative politics at the University of Oxford.

We have an obligation and moral duty towards our partners in the East

Interview with Jacek Sutryk, Mayor of the city of Wrocław. Interviewer: Iwona Reichardt

IWONA REICHARDT: This year we are celebrating ten years of the Eastern Partnership, an important initiative aimed at integrating six Eastern European states with the European community. The implementation of this policy takes place on different levels, including that of local government. Wrocław, the city that you preside over, has a long history of co-operation with Eastern Europe and initiated numerous programmes in states such as Ukraine. How do you evaluate the Eastern Partnership from the perspective of local government?

JACEK SUTRYK: The Eastern Partnership has significantly contributed to bringing closer together and integrating the Eastern European and South Caucuses states with the European Union. Local governments play a very important role in this process. At this level a real interaction between nations takes place. Based on European values, standards and norms, we are developing co-operation in areas such as human rights, market economy, sustainable development and others. At the local level, the Eastern Partnership has also led to the development and strengthening of contacts between different institutions and NGOs. It contributes to academic and cultural exchanges. This co-operation can in the future facilitate deeper integration of the partner states with the EU. And this is something we all want. You mentioned Ukraine, which is Poland's direct neighbour. We want to help Ukrainians succeed in their reform process. Therefore, we organise regular study tours to bring Ukrainians to Wrocław. As a result, our colleagues from Lviv, which is Wrocław's sister city and with which we share historical ties, come to our town to learn about different aspects of city management. This includes environmental protection, health care and public transportation. I have been told

that they greatly appreciate this form of co-operation.

In 2016 when Wrocław was the European Capital of Culture, we focused on the intense cultural exchange and established new contacts with Kyiv, both at the central and local governmental levels. In addition, our city also supports the publisher of your magazine, the Jan Nowak-Jeziorański College of Eastern Europe, which is an institution that nourishes people-to-people relations between Poland and Eastern European states. Overall, I think that the engagement of local governments in this form of co-operation helps the revival of the European Neighbourhood Policy in its eastern dimension. Within the Eastern Partnership framework, such co-operation is much easier as it is based on very concrete activities.

In parallel with the celebrations of the ten years of the Eastern Partnership, we are commemorating 30 years since the collapse of communism in our region. How does the experience of these 30 years, also at the local level, help us in co-operation with partners in Eastern Europe?

Countries like Poland, which 30 years ago freed themselves from communism, are perceived as examples for the Eastern Partnership states. And, indeed, we have already undertaken a certain transformation path and, as a result, today our country is much more developed than it was at the beginning of the 1990s. This helps us in our co-operation with our partners in Eastern Europe. On many occasions I heard them say they would want to follow a path similar to ours, even though the differences between us are quite significant. I have also heard many people say that, in the last three years, Ukraine has done much more than it has in the last 30 years.

When I travel to Eastern Europe I often have the impression that these countries look like Poland did 10 or 15 years ago. They have already achieved so much in terms of infrastructural development and the development of the general landscape of their cities, but a lot still remains to be done. When we see these changes we want to say to them: "Do not cease in your efforts." However, what I worry about now is that Poland has ceased to be Ukraine's ambassador in Europe. We have to think about the common future of both our countries.

Three years ago on the pages of this magazine, we published an interview with the recently murdered mayor of Gdańsk, Paweł Adamowicz. During the conversation he said: "I remember in the 1990s when I was trained by the Germans, French, Danish and Dutch. Now, I see it as my duty to pass on this knowledge further East." These words surely reflect the way of thinking and the value system of the generation that is represented by the late mayor. You are a representative of a younger generation of local leaders. What is your philosophy in regards to co-operation with Eastern Europe?

The legacy of Paweł Adamowicz, who was tragically murdered in January of this year, is particularly important for


Photo courtesy of Jacek Sutryk / City of Wrocław

us local leaders. We, indeed, have an obligation and moral duty towards our partners in the East. Thus, an important motto in our co-operation with Ukraine can be found in the words of Jerzy Giedroyc, the prominent émigré publisher during the communist period. He often stressed that "there is no free Ukraine without a free Poland". In my view, our most important task is to support these states in their efforts to build democracy and reach greater economic development. Without the Eastern Partnership we are at risk of Europe being divided into privileged states and those who are left behind. In our activities at the local level, we want to contribute to Poland's active involvement in shaping the EU's eastern policy. Poland's geographic location, which has a border with Ukraine and is also an EU border, automatically puts us in a position of being an intermediary between the EU and Eastern Europe. I would like Wrocław to contribute even more to the national activities which aim at bringing our Eastern partners closer to the EU.

Wrocław indeed is a city with deeply established ties with Eastern Europe. After the Second World War it became a home to many families that came here from the Eastern territories of the Second Polish Republic. They brought with them the experience of life in the multi-cultural eastern parts of the pre-war Poland. Today, the city is inhabited by thousands of immigrants from the war-torn Ukraine. How does their presence here enrich the life of the city and change its tissue?

According to different estimates, somewhere between 80,000 and 100,000 Ukrainians now live in Wrocław. This means that more than half of all foreigners in the city are from Ukraine. We are happy to see that a great majority of them quickly integrate and find work, which also strengthens our local economy. Speaking in economic terms, without them some companies would simply face serious financial problems. We are also happy to see many Ukrainian students at our universities – a majority of them also stay here after they graduate. Without a doubt in a relatively

short period of time, we have become, to a large extent, a "Ukrainian" city in the European Union.

To be honest, it would be difficult to imagine Wrocław without Ukrainians. In recent years we have hosted many festivals and other events promoting Ukrainian culture and have run numerous integration programmes. And I am always impressed how well the Ukrainian residents of our city speak Polish. We hear about the many friendships and love stories, and without any doubt it is thanks to the newcomers from Eastern Europe that Wrocław is now becoming a better and more cosmopolitan city.

Looking into the future, how do you see co-operation with other local governments within Eastern European states? What can still be achieved and where are the limitations?

I am convinced that our co-operation with local governments of the EaP states will continue to flourish. There is a number of projects, especially those focusing on cultural and social issues, that we are planning to implement together with Lviv and Kyiv, as well as other EaP cities in countries such as Georgia. With all certainty, despite enforcing co-operation in cultural and social areas, we will not forget about business. It is thanks to the Ukrainian diaspora in Wrocław that we are establishing many new contacts with Ukrainians living here and in Ukraine.

And what about the limitations?

Here I see one very painful thing: Ukraine's road to the European Union is long, uncertain and dangerous. Given that, our work is even more important.

Jacek Sutryk is the mayor of the city of Wrocław.

Iwona Reichardt is a deputy editor in chief of *New Eastern Europe*.

Towards a new European Ostpolitik

IRIS KEMPE

Instead of encouraging co-operation through the opening of potential windows for partnership, which was the guideline of the previous Ostpolitik, a new European Ostpolitik should take the concerns, direct neighbourhood and historic experiences of the more recently added EU member states seriously by developing and implementing a new strategy of partnership. The goal should not be about developing new dividing lines but establishing new platforms of communication.

Germany's international relations are already prioritising the development of a new European Ostpolitik well in advance of July 2020, when the country is slated to assume the presidency of the Council of the European Union for six months. European Ostpolitik will likely be translated into more concrete policies during the 18-month-long rotating trio presidency of the Council of the EU that includes successive terms led by Germany, Portugal, and Slovenia, respectively. The latest deep and comprehensive changes in Eastern Europe require matching political adjustments because the strategic background behind Ostpolitik has shifted as a result of domestic policy towards European relations and of the varied policies enacted by other EU member states.

A new Ostpolitik as part of Germany's development since 1969

Starting in 1969, Willy Brandt and Egon Bahr tried to overcome the division between an Eastern Europe dominated by the Kremlin and a Western Europe that was oriented towards the Atlantic. On the German side, coming to terms with historic legacies was closely linked with the elite of the Social Democratic party of Germany – developing a rapprochement with Moscow, Warsaw, Prague and East Berlin. This included symbolic acts such as Willy Brandt falling to his knees in Warsaw in 1970, which became a symbol for Polish reconciliation with Germany. It also included signing treaties with West Germany's eastern neighbours and the Four-Power Treaty with the Allies, which were completed between 1970 and 1973. This can be considered the first step of a new Eastern policy, opening reconciliation with the East and solving problems of the post-Second World War settlement.

The realities of Europe have changed since then, and the dividing lines were replaced by German reunification in 1989 and the eastern enlargements of the EU in May 2004 and of NATO in successive rounds in 1999 and 2004. At the same time, Russia underwent its own transformations, as the Soviet Union disintegrated and its main successor state, the Russian Federation, sought a role in the new international system. The national and international developments of conflicts indicated that eastern policy should no longer equalize the perception in strategic terms. Members of the Warsaw Pact joined western institutions, and in this period of time it looked as though Moscow would come closer to the western values of democracy and a market economy. Developments included the framework agreement between the EU and Russia, the Partnership and Co-operation Agreement signed in 1997 and the Eastern Partnership programme dedicated to the six neighbouring countries, from Belarus to Azerbaijan. The Eastern Partnership set different priorities related to the countries involved. Since 2007, the Partnership and Co-operation Agreement has required either negotiating a new agreement or extending it on an annual basis if the two partners decided not to end the agreement.

Towards a European agenda

Considering the changes in Eastern Europe, the conflicts in Georgia and eastern Ukraine convinced Heiko Maas, the German foreign minister since March 2018, to bring the idea of a new European Eastern policy to the agenda in late 2018. The strategic target was security and stability in Eastern Europe. In the current situation, forty-plus years after Brandt, it is more about creating and implementing a European consensus for Eastern policy. In this regard Russia presents a particular

challenge. Since the countries of Central Europe joined the EU, they are directly bordering the target countries of a new Ostpolitik. They have extensive – and often negative – historic experiences with the Soviet Union and are interested in developing the European and democratic spirt of their neighbours. With this intention, Lithuania, under the leadership of Andrius Kubilius and Gediminas Kirkilas, has been developing a "new Marshall Plan" for bringing Ukraine as well as Georgia and Moldova closer to the European Union. Based on this, a new declaration for Eastern partnership, a Berlin process II, should be developed during the German EU presidency in 2020.

Currently, the former Eastern bloc is much less homogenous, not characterised by Kremlin dominance and central committees, but by democratic countries with their own independent culture, language and history. Enlargement of the EU did, however, sharpen a new dividing line by introducing the Schengen regime between the former Soviet countries and the new member states of the EU. The Estonian city of Narva and the Russian city of Ivangorod, for instance, are united by history and culture represented by a joint castle on both sides of the river Narva, but they became divided by the EU border.

The overall goal for Europe's relations with Russia is to manage risks with a neighbour that is both a security threat and a potential partner. What is particularly challenging for a new European Ostpolitik are the limits of partnership with Russia when there are conflicts of co-operation in the countries of the Eastern Partnership such as Georgia or Ukraine. The Kremlin perceives the countries of its "near abroad" as belonging to a sphere of Russian influence, and Moscow has gone so far as to use armed conflict and new hybrid warfare techniques to assert that claim.

It is important to perceive the countries of the former Soviet bloc from their perspective of independence in cultural and historic terms.

Considering the latest developments in the region, it is important to perceive the countries of the former Soviet bloc from their perspective of independence in cultural and historic terms. Furthermore, they should no longer be considered an appendix of Moscow but seen as fully independent states. Depending on their national development, they have the opportunity to become members of western institutions such as NATO and the EU. In more realistic terms, of course, western institutions are well advised to act beyond the terms of only offering membership while having in mind all kinds of co-operation on social and economic levels that pave the way to potential accession.

The most important thing for a new European Eastern Policy is an issue of national as well as European importance. The member states that have more recently

joined the EU are of particular importance, considering their historic experience with the Soviet past and their ability to develop resilience and overcome those obstacles, as well as their efforts to build European and democratic values. That means creating a framework of conditions such as solving the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, having committed actors and establishing a European dialogue on the issues – one that combines government discourse with the input of the European Commission and regional think tanks embedded in democratic civil society.

An institution of partnerships would bring a revitalised spirit to Eastern European policy.

This deep and comprehensive discourse, on a wider European level, about setting political priorities among joint interests and common values would be a crucial step towards the goal of developing democracy and stability both inside the EU and amongst the neighbouring Eastern countries. In the framework of reconciliation, the United States could also have a particular and positive effect. Previously, Washington and EU institutions as well as the member states played important roles; today the two actors are pulling in different directions, even if their strategic goals are still similar. Overall, the actors in Eastern policy have been changing significantly. Previously, dialogue took place between actors that were in favour of agreement, even if they held opposing values. Based on this, it was possible to develop institutions and address a joint agenda with different perceptions on both sides. Today, the approach of overcoming clashing values via dialogue of partnership does not exist, but the two sides are trying to increase their political and economic influence. Even though the sanctions imposed on Russia since 2014, followed by the counter-sanctions, did not have political success in terms of solving the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, they also have a negative impact on partnership and co-operation. This is a particular challenge for a new European Ostpolitik: to change from confrontation between a Russia-driven Europe to a Europe dominated by the values of the EU.

Implementation of a new European Eastern policy

Instead of encouraging co-operation through the opening of potential windows for partnership, which was the guideline of the previous renewal of Ostpolitik in 2006–07, a new European Ostpolitik should take the concerns and historic experiences of the more recently added EU member states seriously by developing and implementing a new strategy of partnership. A European partnership council should be established in addition to the already existing institutional framework, such as co-operation at a governmental level in the OSCE and the Council of the

Baltic Sea States, and on the level of NGOs and think tanks, such as the Eastern Europe Studies Centre (EESC) in Vilnius, the Estonian Centre of Eastern Partnership, and the Polish Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW). An institution of partnerships would bring a revitalized spirit to Eastern European policy. Partnership on all levels of co-operation is very much needed. This is true even if the East and the West spend a lot of effort on establishing partnerships but do not develop a deep, comprehensive character that goes beyond individual signs of reconciliation.

The former approaches have not been so successful because they bypassed historic problems and their impacts today. They also failed to establish a discourse on resilience between Russia and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe that were also involved with the Eastern Partnership states. The best-case development would be a European process of understanding and forgiveness, which ideally could be the foundation of a new European Ostpolitik. In any event, bypassing the set limits on the former Ostpolitik to indicate the dimensions of the subject, it is possible to refer to the estimates of the former chairman of the organisation Memorial, Arseniy Roginskiy. According to his estimates, 7.1 million people were arrested under state-directed terror campaigns during the entire Soviet period. According to other calculations the number of victims was close to 12 million people. Similar questions about suffering arise as a result of German National Socialism in 1933–45. To this day the countries of the former Soviet Union are particularly affected by the painful experiences of the past. As for the states of Central Europe, their particular input is guided by the memory of Soviet repression, which culminates in the feelings of defensiveness and of being threatened. But in the current European Eastern policy, these issues are not addressed from a national perspective, leading to discrimination and the devaluation of certain peoples. Instead, they are viewed in a European context that emphasises partnership and bonds among countries and peoples.

Taking these countries' experience seriously is important for partnership and future co-operation. These efforts should also be connected with the German experience of dialogue and co-operation as the beginnings of an Eastern policy. In a difficult time for European democracies, it will help strengthen them against internal and external attacks. To follow this approach, the policy should be based on a general paradigm of optimism that supports resilience. An important goal is to show how strength from the past could be gained for a future based on European and democratic values. The successes of co-operation must be worked out and presented as a result of resilience. Thus dealing with crises becomes an instrument for shaping co-operation and the future. Based on the experiences of the painful past, the affected societies have also developed the strength to shape an economic, social and political future that is part of Europe.

New institutional framework

These two overarching positions – having a dialogue among equals with existing institutions and developing new institutions – indicate very different priorities and risks of partnership which should be considered in an institutional framework of co-operation, such as the OSCE or the Council of the Baltic Sea States, combining operational work with summit diplomacy. Russia has already learnt to use institutions to implement its own priorities in opposition to European aims. The institutions could become useful settings for dialogue and co-operation even if partnership is not guaranteed.

In addition to the international organisations, single EU member states such as France and Germany or groupings such as the Weimar triangle and the Visegrad 4 Group are connecting historic experience with new opportunities for dialogue and should be used as such. The existing institutions should be linked with founding new institutions. A decade of Eastern Partnership should be celebrated on the regional level as well as on the level of the founding actors. For instance, a mandate of an Ambassador for Eastern Partnership ought to be developed and rotated among the most important countries of the Eastern partnership, in particular those with signed Association Agreements.

Furthermore, one should consider the Lithuanian approach towards developing a new Marshall Plan which could be a process led by the EU and G7 capitals (Ottawa, Berlin, Paris, Warsaw, Stockholm, Vilnius, Washington, etc.) and institutions (the European Commission, the Council of Europe, international financial institutions and major EU development banks). In this respect, the European Commission's proposal on the Reform Contract for Investment in Ukraine is a good starting point to boost reforms and for better investment implementation. The annual Ukraine Reform Conference (to be held in Toronto this year) could be another platform for this purpose. This process-led initiative could boost a digital, a transport, and an energy infrastructure connectivity agenda for the EU Association countries of Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova. Furthermore, it could develop an EU investment guarantee instrument to boost public and private investment capacities of the EU Association countries.

In the spirit of differentiation the group of EU Association countries, countries from the Western Balkans could expand further with the remaining Eastern partners, depending on their European ambitions and successful implementation of the euro-integration reform agenda. As for Russia, the EU shall adopt a strategy for an open European Russia that would create opportunities for long-term transformation that would contribute to the stability and prosperity of the EU, as well as strengthen transatlantic unity.

Economic growth

In very general terms, economic co-operation and trade is also in Russia's interest. The Russian elite is interested in western investment and technology, which is currently blocked by sanctions, indicating a linkage between interest in modernisation and international conflict prevention. Facilitation of visa-free travel should be introduced in cases that make partnership between Russia and Europe possible. That should be the case for those under the age of 25 from Russia and the EU. From the European side it requires an agreement on the level of Schengen regulations and it should be negotiated among the member states involved. In the case of partnership dialogue and for the purpose of cross-border co-operation, visas should be issued free of charge.

Shaping the future through economic, social and political co-operation would increase institutional ties. Therefore it makes sense to set up institutions that are not blocked by a Russian veto power and that are capable of overcoming emerging democratic crises. They should support modernisation and international security through co-operation and dialogue.

In contrast to the Eastern policy of the 1960s and 1970s, which was mostly run by Germany, the new policy should be a European strategy that takes other EU member states into consideration, including countries sharing borders and historic experiences with the former Soviet bloc. Overall the goal should not be about developing new dividing lines but establishing new platforms of communication. From the European side, institutions to consider are the Weimar triangle of Poland, Germany and France; co-operation in terms of the Visegrad 4 countries and initiatives of growing importance such as the Three Seas Initiative (also known as the Baltic, Adriatic, Black Sea [BABS] Initiative), should also be examined.

Overall the goal should not be about developing new dividing lines but establishing new platforms of communication.

Russia should not be totally excluded from the Partnership Council dialogue. While it is difficult to imagine a successful dialogue that includes Russian government officials, Russian organisations or actors that share European values should be allowed to share their opinions. The Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum as well as the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum are of particular importance and should be considered accordingly. Furthermore, developing a European Civil Society Council for Central Asia makes sense. Examples for this might be NGOs and think tanks such as Memorial, Carnegie and others. Co-operation and extended support between the EU and NGOs in Eastern European countries is especially significant now as more and more of those countries introduce "foreign agents laws"

that inhibit the functioning (or even survival) of NGOs that could domestically deliver any sort of Western impact. In addition, as the Russian government has established GONGOs (government-organised non-government organisations); the EU and its member states should increase the amount of NGOs driven by democratic values, and in particular committed to a dialogue of European Eastern policy.

Even if the West and Russia share interests in co-operation, both sides have different value sets and are instrumentalising their values to have a global impact. That might be the case in direct terms: having different values that influence the other side not as a basis to facilitate partnership and co-operation but to dominate the other side. In the worst case, this could cause international conflict and would require particular institutional coverage depending on the countries involved.

In addition to continuing dialogue with Russia, a revised European Ostpolitik differs from previous strategies. Today's European Ostpolitik must take the experiences and concerns of the newer EU member states seriously. Their techniques of resistance and attitudes of resilience should be seen as an instrument for overcoming historic problems. In other words, it is important to differentiate the approach towards Russia from the countries of the Eastern Partnership that are interested in European co-operation and in favour of democratic values with their own history, language and culture.

Dialogue is possible, but the value set should be considered according to priorities and the windows of opportunity for partnership. On the other hand, the existence of different values and priorities means that participants, beyond listening to each other, should not expect co-operation to happen overnight.

Iris Kempe is a non-resident fellow of the American Institute for Contemporary German Studies. Previously she was senior advisor at the Council of the Baltic Sea States and regional director at the Heinrich-Böll-Foundation South Caucasus.

Looking 30 years ahead is about dilemmas and choices. The 440 million Europeans remaining in the EU know the world is changing, they know about climate change, about China, about migration, about welfare state reforms. People are ready for the choices, provided they are set out in this wider geopolitical landscape.

Luuk van Middelaar in 2049: Open Future

IMAGINE WHERE EUROPE MIGHT BE IN 30 YEARS' TIME. FROM THE EVOLUTION OF THE INTERNET TO THE GEOPOLITICS OF RENEWABLE ENERGY, THIS COLLECTION OF ESSAYS, STORIES AND INTERVIEWS SEEKS TO CAPTURE LIFE AND SOCIETY IN 2049.

IN PRINT OR FOR FREE ONLINE, THIS SPECIAL EDITION BRINGS YOU PERSPECTIVES AND ANALYSIS NOT TO BE FOUND ELSEWHERE. TRANSLATIONS IN POLISH, FRENCH AND MORE AVAILABLE ONLINE.

www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu

@GreenEUJournal Green European Journal

CENTRE FOR
CONTEMPORARY
ART
LAZNIA

ART THE

my liberty

19.07
— 28.07.2019

Dolne Miasto
(The Lower Town)
GDANSK

NON-FESTIVAL AND CITY

artistic actions
and interventions
in public space,
concerts,
performances,
workshops,
film screenings

Bolesław Chromry
and Magdalena Sawicka
Mirella von Chrupek
Open Group
Filip Ignatowicz
Marcin Janusz
Agata Królak
Honorata Martin
Luka Rayski
Marcin Różyc
Seikon
Mariusz Waras
Ada Zielińska...

organizers:

GDAŃSK
city of freedom

CENTRE FOR
CONTEMPORARY
ART
LAZNIA

XII HISTORICAL PAPER COMPETITION

NAMED AFTER OLEG KEN

Are you fascinated by
the modern history and culture?

Are you interested in Poland, Russia,
Central and Eastern Europe countries?

Are you a student or PhD candidate
curious about the world?

If the answer is **YES,** send us your
research paper by **31.10.2019.**

Attractive prizes are waiting for the winners!

DETAILS:
sanktpetersburg.polskijinstitut.gov.pl, petersburg@instytutpolski.org

Organizers:

Instytut Polski Sankt Petersburg

The Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding

СПбИИ РАН

Media Partners:

Актуальная наука Конкурс

New Eastern Europe

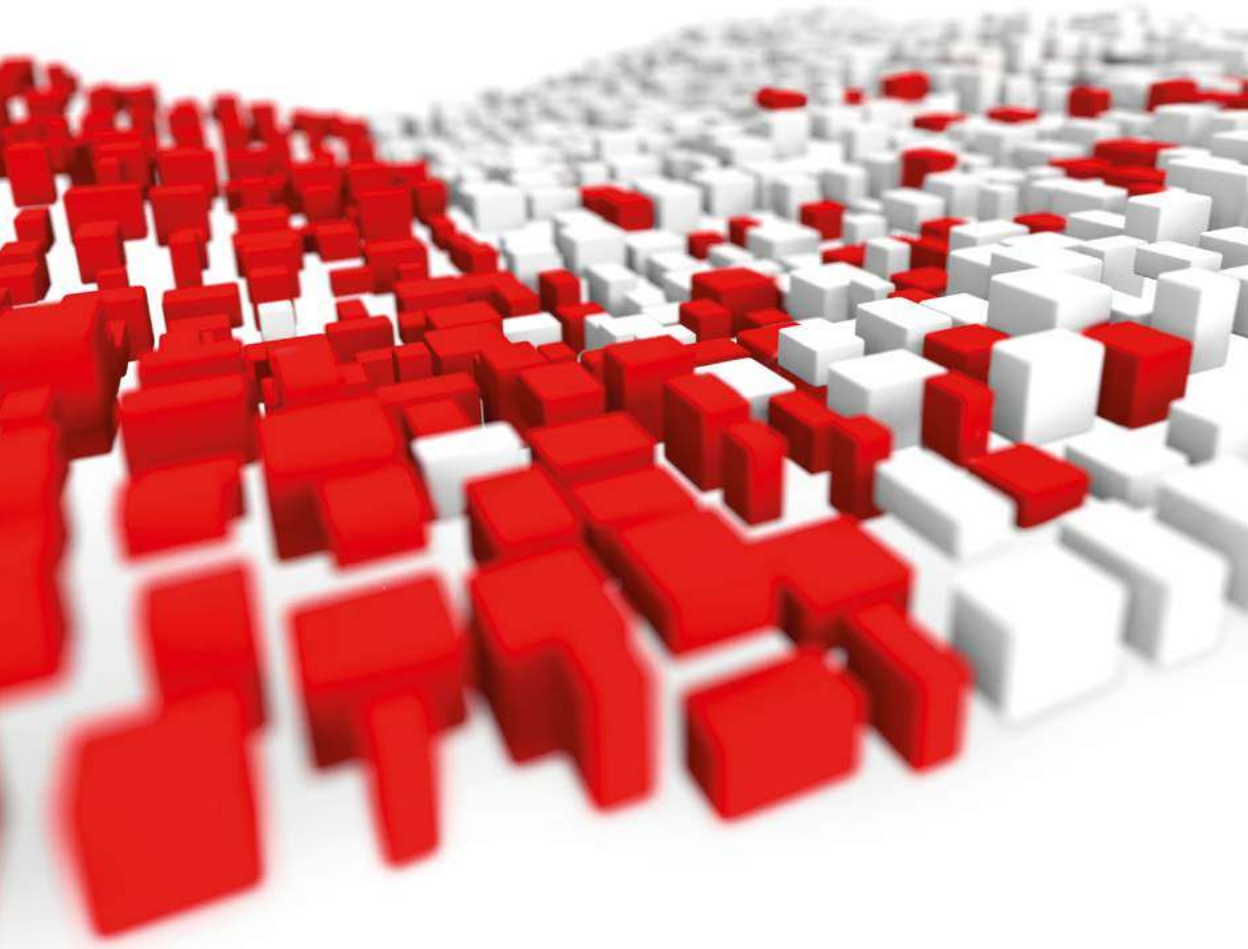
Nowa Europa Wschodnia

'89 2019 GDAŃSK

ŚWIĘTO WOLNOŚCI I SOLIDARNOŚCI

1–11 CZERWCA

2019gdansk.pl



GDAŃSK

ECS europejskie centrum solidarności

FUNDACJA GDAŃSKA

ZAPRASZAMY DO ŚRODKA

ECS europejskie centrum solidarności

ecs.gda.pl

When bridges turn out to be walls

MYKOLA RIABCHUK

With all due respect to my western friends, I cannot accept calls to construct "bridges" with Russia right now, unless and until Russian proxies stop killing my fellow citizens. Only after the shooting stops and Russian troops withdraw from Ukrainian territory can we engage in any kind of dialogue.

The only bridge I remember seeing in my childhood was the railway bridge across the Styr River. It separated the city of Lutsk, where I was born, and Rovantsi, a village where I used to spend my summer holidays at my grandparents' house. The bridge separated two banks of the river rather than connected them. I do not misuse the word. The bridge was closed for civilians and only military personnel from a small garrison nearby were allowed to cross, maintain and guard it from the high towers on both banks.

The adjacent territory was encircled with barbed wire but it did not prevent us, little boys, from penetrating the bushes along the banks for berry picking or fishing. But the villagers had to take a ferry boat down the river to get across to the city, or cross the frozen river on foot when the boat was docked for the winter months. It was always a problem in late autumn when the boat was already docked but the ice was not solid enough to walk on. For a few weeks, the villagers were almost completely cut off from the outside world. If there was an emergency, one could go ten kilometres to reach a car bridge. But nobody really owned a car at that time, so it had to be a real emergency for one to take the boggy road.

Symbol of omnipresence

However I have never heard any complaints with regards to the railway bridge that stood attractively nearby but was completely blocked for civilian traffic, even in emergencies. Nobody ever dreamt about this shortcut. It seemed to be blocked not only for people physically, but also for their thoughts. The bridge was a non-object, a non-entity, a kind of theatrical decoration, a Potemkin edifice. Nobody knew why it was guarded so tightly. American spies were barely interested in the marginal object on an obsolete rail line which served just a few trains a day. And saboteurs from the local anti-Soviet guerrilla units were extinguished for more than a decade. The bridge was probably devised as a sacral object, a symbol of state omnipresence and vigilance, secrecy and incognizance – in the best traditions of Franz Kafka.

Maybe this early experience made me highly distrustful of the "bridges" metaphor, as presumably uniting people and nations, and whatever else they manage to connect. Soviet propaganda was abundant in this kind of rhetoric which only exacerbated my distaste for the image. For me, a bridge was actually a wall, a fake, a Kafkaesque object. Later on, I discovered many more simulacra like that – at the Soviet border, and then at the Austrian, German, Italian…

My most recent, and perhaps most relevant, experience comes from Donetsk, a city I visited in 2012 shortly before the war. Of the many remarkable things in the city, I was greatly impressed by the so-called Bridge of Russian-Ukrainian Friendship. It was a weird construction on a high slope of the Kalmius River which resembled a trampoline for jumping into the water, or perhaps a parachute tower, more than a "bridge". It looked like a message to the Russians: "We've built our five metres, now please do your five hundred."

> As long as myths determine people's behaviour, they are definitely more important than reality.

The irony was apparently mine, not the designers'. They embellished the "bridge" with kitschy Soviet-style images: Russian birches and Ukrainian guilder roses, coats of arms and national flags and two opulent ladies (one of them with a Ukrainian traditional wreath on her head, the other one with a Russian *kokoshnik*, or headdress). Yet the most impressive of all images was one of Winnie-the-Pooh and his friend Piglet walking along the "bridge" hand-in-hand. I was a bit puzzled by the odd symbolism of the particular couple, which had nothing to do with the national state or folkloric symbols surrounding them.

Once again I indulged in a heretic assumption that the architect might have meant to be ironic. But who stood for Winnie-the-Pooh and who was Piglet? It

looked rather natural that the bear embodies Russia. But why should Ukraine be a piglet? If we reject this politically incorrect interpretation – and we, of course, reject it – then the opposite, even more subversive, interpretation comes to the fore: a huge Mr Yanukovych, the then-president of Ukraine, resembles the bear, while a dwarfish Mr Putin looks like the piglet. I expressed my uncertainty to a local friend who accompanied me, and he got startled: "Pssst!" he told me. "Don't speak so loud! Not all the people here would get your jokes!" So the "bridge", once again, appeared to be a wall – as I always suspected. Two years later, more walls were monumentally erected throughout the region.

Walls inside our heads

Back in 2001, I published an article with a provocative title "Two Ukraines". It stirred some controversy as many readers, especially those who never read beyond the title, perceived my essay as a treacherous attempt to split Ukraine into two parts. I was accused of demonising the eastern part of the country, exaggerating the regional differences, and pouring water on the Kremlin's mill. The criticisms were merely shooting the messenger or accusing the doctor of causing the illness by his diagnosis. I did not intend to demonise anybody, or deepen historical fissures between the regions. And, moreover, I certainly was not a Putin ally, either by choice or default. By "two Ukraines", I did not mean "west" and "east", or "Russian-speaking" versus "Ukrainian-speaking", or anything like this.

I wrote about two different projects of state/nation building; two different types of identity; and two systems of values. I did not refer to the walls between the regions, but primarily the walls within Ukrainians' heads. Since 36 per cent of the public have never left their own region, and another 36 per cent have travelled outside their region only once, there is not much chance for them to shake their deeply entrenched mutual biases and stereotypes. In 2006 pollsters asked respondents to estimate the proximity between inhabitants of different Ukrainian regions and some neighbouring states "in their character, habits and traditions" along a ten-point scale. Predictably, the capital city, Kyiv, and the central part of the country around it were recognised as being closest, while the neighbouring states, from Poland to Turkey, recognised as being the furthest away. There was one exception, however. Russia and Belarus received higher proximity ratings than Ukraine's own western regions.

While the high rating of closeness to Russia could be explained by the high percentage of ethnic Russian in Ukraine and the de facto dominance of Russian media and culture that tends to glamorise all things Russian, the unusual closeness

Photo: Andrew Butko (CC) commons.wikimedia.org

Picture from 2010 of the Russian-Ukrainian Friendship Bridge in Donetsk.

to Belarus may only have ideological explanations: Belarusians are considered as proximate "in character, habits and traditions" only because this is a persistent mantra, a major part of the Soviet myth about the tripartite East Slavonic nation, still broadly disseminated by Moscow. In fact, Ukrainian citizens have very limited contact with Belarus and their knowledge of Belarusian "characters and traditions" – let alone the language, culture and history – is close to nil. The highly "proximate" Belarusians in the Ukrainian public's assessment are virtual Belarusians that have little to do with reality.

We may also argue that similarities with Russia in these assessments are "imaginary" as well as western Ukrainians – who are broadly perceived as almost "foreigners" (not necessarily "worse than us" but certainly "very different from us"). These assessments confirm the vitality of imperial myths and stereotypes still promoted by Russia. As long as myths determine people's behaviour, they are definitely more important than reality. In the case of Ukraine, it means that the various barriers between the different groups and regions are largely imaginary. It also means that such barriers are very difficult to dismantle insofar as they are based on the myths unamenable to facts and logic.

Painful process of emancipation

In a 2016 survey the same pollsters applied a different methodology that makes it difficult to compare the two polls. But at least one peculiarity remained rather stable. Ethnic Russians are still perceived as the closest "in culture, traditions, and views" – as close on a five-point scale as inhabitants of central Ukraine. And western Ukrainians, in both surveys, are still perceived as the "furthest" away – similar to the level of inhabitants in the European Union. This does not mean that western Ukrainians are seen as "worse" but are still rather "alien"; just like Russians (and Belarusians) are not seen as "better" but still "ours"; part of the imaginary post-Soviet, Orthodox-Christian, East Slavonic community. In this way, there are still "two Ukraines", dispersed unequally from the west to southeast: a Ukraine that seceded for good from the quasi-religious East Slavonic "ummah" a long time ago and a Ukraine that still is in the painful process of emancipation.

In Pierre Boulle's novel from 1952 *Le Pont de la Rivière Kwaï* (and the 1957 Oscar-winning film based on the book), the main hero, British Lieutenant Colonel Nicholson, constructs the bridge that ultimately turns out to be a wall – between him and his countryman, his moral integrity and war-time demands, his professional pride and his patriotic duties. The story is fictitious but set in a real environment – the 1943 construction of the Burma Railway that had to connect Rangoon with Kuala Lumpur. Nicholson is one of many prisoners of war forced by the Japanese military authorities to work on the project. He appears to be an honest and courageous man, with a lot of dignity and strong principles. Nonetheless, he collaborates with the enemies and, as a senior officer, makes his subordinates work honestly and efficiently with no acts of sabotage, either active or passive.

He is not driven by any personal interest but a sincere belief in the importance of work: the war will be over but the bridge would remain and would serve to the people. Moreover, he is confident that the British POWs should prove their superiority over the Japanese in both labour skills and technology. At the end, he tries to rescue the newly-constructed bridge from his fellow-countrymen who plan to blow it up, and he pays with his life for his perverse professional pride and distorted perfectionism.

Since 2014, I recall that plot every time I hear calls from my western colleagues to build bridges with Russian friends rather than walls, to shake hands and hold dialogue. The war will be over, they say, but the translations will serve future generations, the songs will be sung by millions in both countries, and the friendly family ties should be not sacrificed for the sake of a transient and presumably minor squabble. The problem with all of this is that the conflict is neither minor nor, alas, transient. It has at least lasted two centuries, and runs not over a piece of land or

trade agreement with the EU, but the very essence of the Ukrainian nation and its right to exist as a sovereign entity, with its language, culture and dignity.

Not the right time

I studied in Moscow in the 1980s and had good relations with my Russian fellows, but eventually I lost most of them. This did not happen in 2014 when Russia invaded my country and most Russians cheered it on, but much earlier, in 1991, when we gained independence and all my ex-colleagues responded scornfully, with poorly disguised irritation. "We are one nation", they argued, "We're almost the same people!" Their notion of "sameness", however, worked only one-way: we, Ukrainians, were supposed to become "the same" – but not vice versa.

With all due respect to my western friends and their beautiful pacifist souls, I cannot buy their calls to construct "bridges" with Russia right now, unless and until Russian proxies stop killing my fellow citizens with an active or passive consent of the majority of Putin's subjects. Only after the shooting stops and Russian troops withdraw from Ukrainian territory can we engage in some kind of dialogue and search for eventual *modus vivendi*.

Until then all the "bridges" we will try to build will resemble that over the River Kwai. It would help little, if anything, to break the wall of stereotypes that separate Russians from real Ukraine, but it would certainly facilitate the movement of Russian tanks, operatives and toxic propaganda into my country. The argument that the artists who travels to Moscow performs not for Putin but for the good Russian people sounds as odd to me as the artists performing in Berlin during the Second World War.

These kinds of "bridges" were misused for decades and brought much harm to Ukraine, as they erected and solidified different walls between, and within, Ukrainian regions. During the war, the only response should be to blow them up and to erect the only real wall that separates us from the rogue state to the east. It might be difficult, costly and harmful in many terms, but it is a matter of national survival. I'm very sorry to say this with respect to Lt. Colonel Nicholson and his perfect but very untimely construction skills.

Mykola Riabchuk is a Ukrainian writer and scholar. He is the honorary president of the Ukrainian PEN Center. He is also a member of the editorial board of *New Eastern Europe*.

Contemporary Russia's power vertical

Clans controlled by the Kremlin

VAKHTANG MAISAIA

Despite the fall of communism nearly three decades ago, Russian leaders have continued to pursue illiberalism and authoritarianism – especially Vladimir Putin, whose popularity remains high even as he plunders the country's financial assets. Putin's ability to strengthen and manipulate the power vertical and its accompanying clan system are crucial to his control of Russia as a whole.

Contemporary Russian politics, starting in 1990 when the country declared its sovereignty and de-facto independence from the Soviet Union, has experienced all types of regime shifts. The newly post-Soviet Russia began as a fragile democracy, albeit one that leaned more towards illiberalism than freedom and continued to endure hard authoritarian governance. Over the years it travelled down the path of greater totalitarianism. The political turbulence facing the country over the last few decades (not to mention the last several centuries) profoundly impacted the development of its political system. Between 1990 and today, three main political trends and historic "waves" influenced the political realities of certain periods and thus how the country, as an independent actor of international politics, behaved within those same timeframes." These three waves include:

1) A tangible democratic republic (1991–1995): The first round of Boris Yeltsin's presidency was affiliated with political chaos and criminal plurality;

2) An oligarchic republic (1996–1999): Reflected with a new type of governance labelled as the *semibankirshina* – a simple local influential tycoon council dominated by kleptocratic rulers in the Kremlin; and
3) The Putinisation republic (1999–today): The endorsement of the so-called sovereign democracy concept and restoration of Soviet symbols and governance style.

Putinising the power vertical

The third wave introduced above is the most significant one in terms of the political transformation. This period took place in conjunction with a greater level of autocratic governance and the closing of society to supposedly non-Russian cultures and values. However, the most recent part of this wave could be considered separately as the socio-political situation in contemporary Russia is worsening. The economic situation reveals continued deflation of the rouble, a result of the sanctions carried out by the West against Russia in the wake of its aggression in Ukraine. The rate may soon become 1 US dollar to 100 Russian roubles. This could lead to catastrophic budget problems and possibly "sequestration" – a term from the Russian *секвестирование*, which means the suspension of federal programmes, the freezing of social projects, and the reduction of allocations towards the military-industrial complex.

Recent surveys by the Levada Center indicate that Putin's support may be seriously weakening and could reach a new low of 49 per cent.

The internal political situation has become tense and the Kremlin-created "power vertical" has begun to gradually freeze. The Kremlin is assisted by the Russian stabilisation fund in which the following institutions are united: state corporations, the national wealth fund, and the reserve fund. The strategic reserves of the stabilisation fund are around 300 billion US dollars (in 2013 this amount was equal to around 850 billion US dollars). Despite this drastic drop and the general precariousness of the current economic situation, Vladimir Putin's approval ratings are still quite high. According to data from surveys conducted in the autumn of 2015 by the influential Levada Center, around 80 per cent of the questioned population supported Putin.

Yet more recent surveys by the Levada Center indicate that his support may be seriously weakening and could reach a new low of 49 per cent. Putin's personal popularity could fall, or at least become a moot point, as he and the inner circle surrounding him continue to exploit Russian resources for their own gains. The vertical

system, built earlier by Yeltsin, functions to establish and maintain a patrimonial state – a system in which the highest political leader considers the country to be his own personal property. According to some reports, Putin is a successful oligarch who personally controls 37 per cent of stock in the oil corporation Surgutneftgaz, the value of which is around 20 billion US dollars. Putin also controls 4.5 per cent of Gazprom and is reported to have 50 per cent of the shares in a company called Gunver, a global energy trading business. Based on several sources, the financial capital and revenue flows of Putin varies and incredibly so. According to reports from 2006 to 2017, the financial turnover of this company was 40 billion US dollars and net profit was eight billion dollars. Based on different sources, the personal capital of Putin could be as high as 30 billion US dollars. As one of the leading specialists in Russian politics, political analyst Stanislav Belkovsky has claimed that Putin's financial fortune reaches 70 billion dollars while *Bloomberg* has gone even further, citing his fortune at 84 billion dollars.

The power vertical is the integral structure of Russia's executive government, which acts on the principle "from top to bottom".

In general, the power vertical is the integral structure of Russia's executive government, which acts on the principle "from top to bottom". Today's model is built on a clan-based patrimonial hierarchy and the principle of a balance of power. The clans are all controlled by Putin and the system is reminiscent of the Soviet politburo system. These clans can be categorized according labels such as *siloviki*, military, liberal (often also associated with St Petersburg), technocratic and oligarch, as outlined below.

The *siloviki* clan

The term *siloviki* is derived from the Russian word *sila*, meaning "force". This clan refers to Russian politicians and governmental officials who come from security and intelligence agencies, special forces or the military – many of whom were recruited to top posts by Putin himself. The clan includes leaders of key agencies: Nikolai Patrushev, secretary of the security council; Igor Sechin, chairman of the fuel and energy committee of Russia (a former officer of the GRU, then the main Soviet directorate for foreign intelligence); Viktor Ivanov, leader of the Federal Service of Drug Control; and Mikhail Fradkov, head of the foreign intelligence service and a former prime minister (2004–07). Political lobbying of the clan is done by Vladimir Zhirinovsky, chairman of the Liberal-Democratic party (and also a former GRU officer). Sergei Ivanov, chief of presidential administration, and Sergei

Naryshkin, director of foreign intelligence and a former minister of defence, are also considered to be members of the clan. Commander of the National Guard of Russia, Viktor Zolotov, is also an influential member of the group.

This particular clan controls several media holdings, such as NTV (a Russian television channel) and several newspapers including *Izvestia*. They own the Rosneft oil company – the vice president of which is Aleksei Patrushev (son of Nikolai), and Igor Sechin is the chairman of its board of directors. One of the clan's achievements is the federal rule on the establishment of special services and private protection services by business corporations, which was adopted in 2006 by the state council. In addition, the clan controls the special purpose centre of the Federal Security Services (the FSB, led by Aleksander Bortnikov). The *siloviki* are by far the most influential grouping in the entire hierarchal clan structure.

The military clan

The military clan is led by former deputy Prime Minister, Dmitry Rogozin, and the current Minister of Defence, Sergei Shoigu. This clan strongly co-operates with the *siloviki*. Financial support for the clan comes through the military-industrial complex as well as the weapons export industry, led by Viktor Chemezov (Putin's close friend). In 2015 Russia gained 10 billion US dollars via its arms sales abroad. In addition, special federal financial programmes, in the range of nearly 1.2 trillion dollars support the military clan and its activities. With this mass quantity of resources, the defence ministry has developed new warfare technologies and weaponry, including new strategic weapons and space technologies (such as the fifth generation T-50 fighter jet). At the same time, the military clan controls the export of Russian-made weapons on the black market, which, according to some reports, brought in an additional four billion dollars in 2015 alone. The clan controls important media holdings, such as the television channel Zvezda.

The military clan controls the export of Russian-made weapons on the black market.

It also leads the GRU – which still survives its Soviet predecessor as a strategic military intelligence agency – and operates special purpose brigades (of which there are approximately ten). Ramzan Kadyrov, the leader of the Chechen Republic who co-operates closely with both the military clan as well as the *siloviki* clan, has his own personal guard of about 10,000 soldiers. These so-called death squadrons are subordinate to Kadyrov and implement special clandestine operations (for example, the murders of the well-known human rights protector, Anna Politkovskaya and opposition

leader, Boris Nemtsov). The structure of the death squadrons is concealed and is very hierarchical. They have separate bases, special burial grounds for weapons and documents, and secret bank accounts by which they receive money.

The liberal and St Petersburg clans

This clan of liberals is made up of figures like Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. It has close ties with Arkady Dvorkovich, who was deputy prime minister until May last year. The clan controls the whole apparatus of the ministry of foreign affairs and the state and corporate structures of foreign economic orientation – for instance, Vneshekonombank, Vneshtorgovii Bank (VTB), etc. They also have some influence over Gazprom (Medvedev is chairman of the supervisory board). The clan controls the media holding Russia Today and is considered a more intellectual and technical grouping.

Similarly, the St Petersburg clan mostly includes representatives of powerful groups which were active during the Yeltsin period. It is led by Anatoly Chubais, chairman of the board of RAO UES (the main electricity provider in Russia), Sergei Kiriyenko, head of Rosatom and former prime minister, and Leonid Melamed, former head of Rosnano, a state-owned venture capital fund. Other members include Vladislav Putilin, chairman of Rosatom's supervisory board, and Andrei Fursenko, Russia's minister of education. The clan has a strong financial base. In 2014 the revenue of Chubais's corporation was 20 million roubles and Rosnano has capital in the range of 130 billion roubles. The clan's leaders have strong intellectual power but are weaker as a political grouping. Still, the St Petersburg clan has some influence over foreign policy, particularly Anatoly Chubais'a geopolitical doctrine of "liberal imperialism", which argues for soft power geopolitical influence in the neo-imperialist "near abroad". Lobbying is done by political parties such as the Union of Right Forces (led by Leonid Gozman), Mikhail Barshchevsky's Civilian Power, and Mikhail Prokhorov's Civic Platform. The clan is more economically liberal-oriented and has tense relations with the *siloviki* clan.

The technocratic clan

Vladislav Surkov, head of the government executive office and main Kremlin ideologist, leads the technocratic clan. Surkov formulated the ideological concept of Russian sovereign democracy. The main idea behind sovereign democracy, according to Surkov, is to adjust democratic values to Russian traditions and away

from the principles which exist in the West. Its main motto is "The state is everything." Other leaders of this clan include Valentina Matviyenko, chairman of the Federation Council, and Vyacheslav Volodin, former secretary general of the United Russia party, deputy chair of the government and first deputy chief of staff of the presidential administration. This particular clan has a big impact on regional party leaders and governors who are on the party list. They control a fraction of the leading party in the Duma, the whole party nomenclature, the Young Guard of United Russia youth movement and the All-Russia People's Front (a political coalition created by Putin in 2011 that acts as a mediator between the ruling party and nongovernmental organisations). Certainly at least two NGOs controlled fully by the Kremlin (independent NGOs in contemporary Russia have it very difficult to work after the adoption of the so-called foreign agents law) creates "fruitful soil" for promoting the so-called power vertical – an integrated structure of executive power from the top down. The clan controls geopolitical processes in the near abroad and has an eye on the situation in the Russian-occupied Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions of Georgia. It is an influential, flexible and strong grouping, but is not as stable or as solid as the *siloviki* and military clans.

> The main idea behind sovereign democracy is to adjust democratic values to Russian traditions and away from the principles which exist in the West.

The clan of oligarchs

Putin sits atop the clan of oligarchs, which is led by Russia's three main magnates: Alisher Usmanov, Oleg Deripaska, and Roman Abramovich. Deripaska is the most influential political figure of the oligarch clan. His personal wealth is equal to 21 billion US dollars, and main holdings include the companies Rusal (aluminium production) and Glavmosstoroy (a construction and rental business). He also owns Basic Element, the largest corporation of mixed business, and has shares in machine-building. The deceased Georgian oligarch, Kakha Benduqidze, was a business partner of Deripska's through which Mikhail Saakashvili established direct political ties to lobby for Russian private capital in Georgia (which led to the privatization of the Zestaponi Metallurgical Factory). Deripaska later bought Benduqidze's corporation Powerful Cars (*Dzalovani Manqanebi*) through the German company Siemens. This action led to Deripaska becoming the main oligarch of the heavy-engineering industry. On Putin's instructions, Deripaska started to carry out military orders which included the production of intercontinental bal-

listic missiles. The second most influential oligarch, Usmanov, is often described as Putin's personal banker and who carries out his personal orders. This clan is quite influential and plays a key political role in the country.

Kremlin-controlled clans fuel the power vertical

This configuration perfectly fits the prolongation of Putin's reign under the aegis of the power vertical and reflects the monopolising authoritarian regime which dominates Russia. The intricate clan system has proven useful during a time when a "new Cold War" is developing, and Putin's rhetoric, in his 2019 New Year's Eve speech, was especially aggressive as he tried to divert attention away from internal turmoil towards external enemies. His personal vow that "Russia has no allies and partners" is fully expressed in the Soviet-style political culture, cronyism and kleptocracy that run rampant in Russia today.

All these ingredients combine to establish and strengthen a new type of political architecture known as the "patrimonial state", a system of governance where a single ruler treats the state as his personal property. The whole of Russia suffers under this system now – and should the power vertical ever collapse, there is no doubt the country will continue to suffer for long time afterwards.

Vakhtang Maisaia is a professor and head of the MA programme on international security studies at the Caucasus International University, a visiting professor at Tbilisi State University, a visiting professor at the International Black Sea University (IBSU), and a deputy director of IBSU Black Sea Region Geopolitical Research Center. He is also an adjunct professor at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszynski University and Warsaw University, both in Poland.

Gagauzia

Geopolitics and identity

RUSIF HUSEYNOV

Gagauzia is an autonomous territorial unit located in the southeast of Moldova. Yet, the complex geopolitical situation in which the tiny region finds itself accentuates the challenges that still exist in the post-Soviet space.

Gagauzia (or *Gagauz Yeri* in the local language) is a small autonomous region in southern Moldova. Established in its current form in 1995, and officially known as the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, the entity covers 1,832 square kilometres and is divided into three dolays (districts) situated in four enclaves. Out of the population of 155,600 (which makes up 4.6 per cent of Moldova's population), the Gagauz people represent the majority of the region's inhabitants (82.1 per cent), followed by Bulgarians (5.1 per cent), Moldovans (4.8 per cent), Russians (3.8 per cent) and Ukrainians (3.2 per cent).

A Turkic ethnic group with Orthodox Christianity as their main religion, the Gagauz migrated to present-day Moldova and Ukraine in the late 18th and early 19th century. Since then the core group has lived under the Russian Empire, the Kingdom of Romania, the Soviet Union and the Republic of Moldova.

National awakening

Decades of Russification and Sovietisation, a weak development of Gagauzian language and the multi-ethnic nature of Bessarabia, have left their traces on the construction of Gagauz identity. Underdeveloped during the Soviet period,

Gagauz national consciousness only awakened and proclaimed itself a separate ethno-territorial entity in the late 1980s. Initially an intellectual movement, Gagauz nationalism received a strong push from the perestroika reforms. The national awakening was boosted even more by the surge of the movement in Moldova which lobbied for a unification with Romania – a prospect that would affect all national minorities in Moldova.

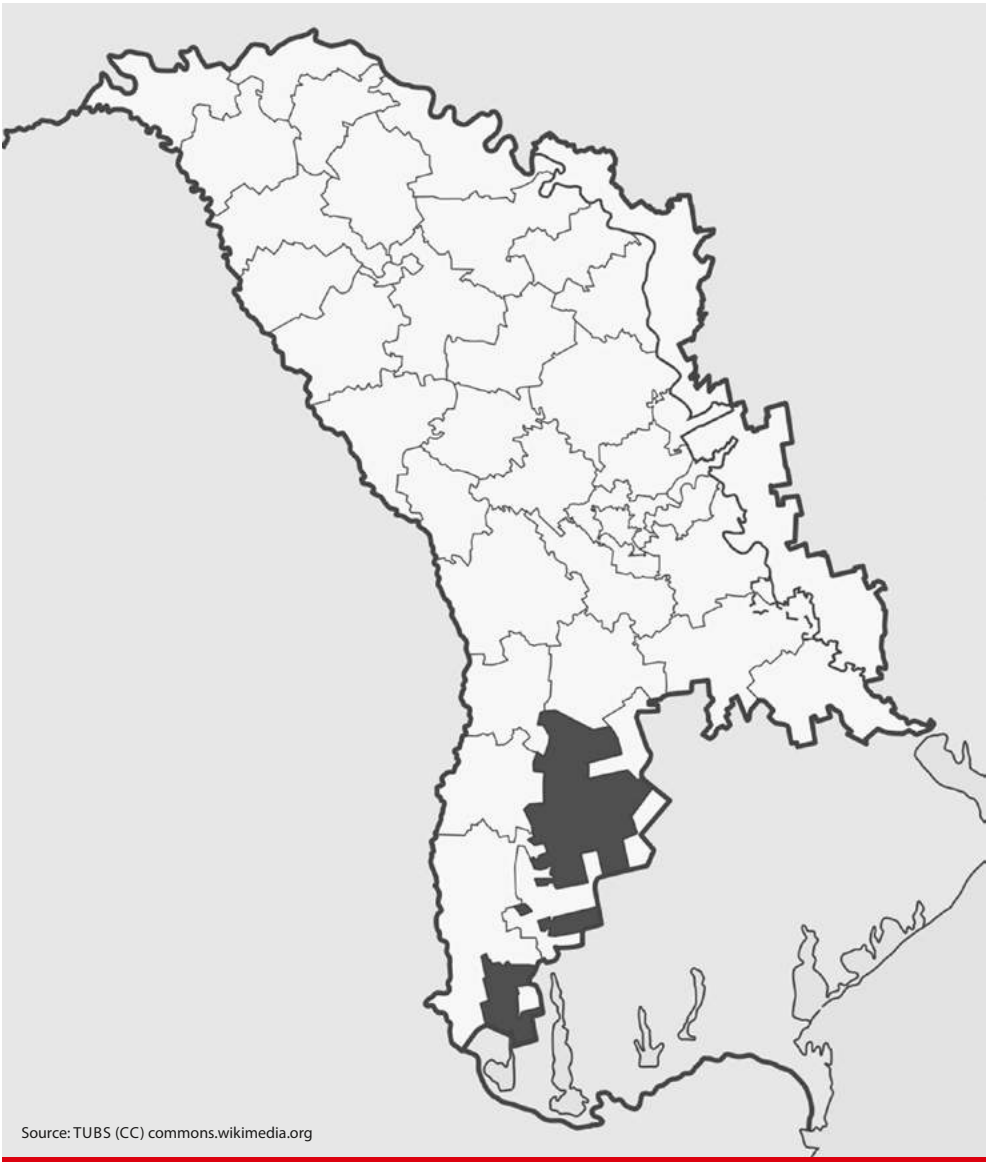
In August 1990, following the first democratic elections in Moldova, but before the fall of the Soviet Union, the Gagauz national movement organised a congress of local deputies and announced several key postulates: the freedom and independence of the Gagauz from the Republic of Moldova; the decision of the Gagauz to establish their own state; the desire of the Gagauz to keep their Soviet citizenship and to not accept Moldovan citizenship; and the election for a Supreme Soviet of the Gagauz Republic. In other words, the local representatives proclaimed an entity which they called the "Gagauz Republic" – independent from Moldova but subject to Soviet authority.

Underdeveloped during the Soviet period, Gagauz national consciousness only awakened and proclaimed itself a separate ethno-territorial entity in the late 1980s.

As stated during the congress, the Gagauz movement was not nationalistic. It was designed to enable the Gagauz people to survive and co-exist together with other ethnic groups. Interestingly enough, a similar quasi-independent Transnistrian state would be proclaimed in Tiraspol only a couple of weeks later (in September 1990). The decision on Gagauz autonomy was soon annulled by Chișinău as unconstitutional. In order to suppress the centrifugal tendency in the region, Moldovan Prime Minister Mircea Druc mobilised thousands of Moldovan nationalists and initiated, in October 1990, what became known as the "March to Gagauzia".

A counter-mobilisation was launched in Gagauzia where local residents decided to defend themselves, mainly with steel bars and other improvised means. Supporters came in from Transnistria. Russian troops stationed nearby in Bolhrad also arrived in the region, rolling their tanks across Gagauzia several days and helped prevent bloodshed. The tensions that lasted several days threatened Moldova with another hot conflict. Although the situation did not escalate into a war, it still accelerated the autonomy processes in Gagauzia. By the end of the year, the Gagauz Republic held its own presidential election and elected Stepan Topal as its leader.

The Soviet authorities also attempted to regulate the uneasy situation in Moldova. In November 1990, Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev assembled the Moldovan,



Source: TUBS (CC) commons.wikimedia.org

Map of Moldova with areas of the Gagauzia republic marked.
As seen in the map, the autonomous republic is not contiguous.

Gagauzian and Transnistrian leaders and issued a decree to normalise the situation in the Moldovan SSR which virtually abolished the Gagauz Republic in exchange for some level of compromise from Moldova. Support for the USSR stayed high in Gagauzia, even during the final days of the empire. The August 1991 putsch in Moscow was welcomed by the majority of the Gagauz, who were celebrating the

first anniversary of the republic and constructing the state, creating state symbols (flag, coat of arms, a national anthem), a national bank, a university, and even a self-defence battalion.

Yet the state formation – despite the existence of the Gagauz Republic from 1990 to 1994 – did not follow the path of Transnistria for several reasons. First, both the leaders and the populace in Gagauzia remained relatively fractured. Second, the 14th Army secured Russia's direct presence and influence in Tiraspol. Third, unlike the agriculturally-based economy of Gagauzia, Transnistria, due to its industrial facilities, had always been more closely linked to Moscow and not subordinate to Chișinău.

Peaceful solution

Unlike the Transnistrian case, Gagauzia did not become a bloody battlefield; it was solved after numerous meetings between Chișinău and Comrat. As a result of a series of talks, the parliament of Moldova passed the law "On the Special Legal Status of Gagauzia (Gagauz Yeri)" in December 1994, granting the Gagauz territorial autonomy within Moldova and devolving control of some political, cultural and economic issues to the entity. One of the major provisions of the document – (Article 1.4) stipulates that, in the event of a change in the status of the Republic of Moldova as an independent state, the people of Gagauzia possess the right to self-determination. This provision was a reaction to the popular sentiment of a united Romanian-Moldovan state, of which the Gagauz historically had a negative collective memory.

According to the document, Gagauz, Russian and Moldovan are to be accepted as official languages, with Moldovan and Russian set for administrative purposes. Article 4 allowed Gagauzia to display its own symbols together with those of the Republic of Moldova. The *Halk Toplușu* (or the People's Assembly) is designated as Gagauzia's legislative authority. It is made up of 35 members and every settlement in Gagauzia is represented by this gathering thanks to the specific electoral system. The executive power lies with the *Başkan* (Governor), who is elected for four years, as are assembly members. According to the document, the Başkan must speak Gagauz and be a member of the Moldovan government.

The statute set in motion a series of events in 1995, the most significant of which was the settling of the administrative boundaries (settlements were able to choose whether they wanted to be part of Gagauzia). In March 1995 a referendum was held in 36 settlements where Gagauz either constituted over 50 per cent of the local population or where a third of the populace initiated such a referendum.

Consequently, three cities and several communes were included into the Autonomous Gagauz Territory, while the remainder rejected the proposal.

The Gagauz proudly state that their conflict was probably the only one in the post-Soviet space that was solved peacefully. What makes this accomplishment more exemplary and remarkable is that it was achieved directly by the conflicting parties and without any third-party mediation or interference. Yet Topal points out in his memoirs the positive role of Turkey's leader, Süleyman Demirel, in the peaceful and prompt solution of the Gagauz conflict. Demirel visited Gagauzia in the summer of 1994 and embraced the Gagauz people by promising Turkish support.

At the time of its adoption, the Gagauz Autonomy Law seemed quite liberal even by European standards, and it was relevant to some European countries that had ethnic minorities. Romania, however, was critical of the document, fearing an "atomisation" of Moldova and that similar demands would emerge from Romania's own ethnic minorities.

Geopolitical influence

Gagauzia currently has many internal problems (i.e. a lack of real protection for the Gagauz language and culture, poor infrastructure, unemployment, etc.) while its relations with the central authorities in Chișinau are often tense. Through the years since the 1994 autonomy law, boundaries between the regional and central competences have been blurry, and to date have still not been clarified. Another problem, which is currently being addressed, is the harmonisation of Gagauz laws to Moldovan legislation.

The current state of Gagauzian affairs strongly reflects its troubled past and geographical location – a border region over which various empires fought and treated as geopolitically important. Even today, Gagauzia is subject to the geopolitical influence of various power sources, which defines its current situation and identity. The Gagauz have ethnolinguistic connections with Turkey and a strong historical and contemporary affiliation with Russia. With Moldova's desire to drift westward and the EU's advance into the region, Gagauzia has experienced European influence. In other words, the three big powers – Turkey, Russia and the EU – are in the process of strengthening their role in Gagauzia while this influence is exerted in forms of geopolitical ideologies: pan-Turkism, the Russian world and European values.

Caught in an entangled web of influences and given the weakness of Moldova, Gagauzia is thus an active recipient of external soft power projects. Since the early 1990s, Turkey has been a major donor to the region by referring to linguistic and

ethnic ties and identifying the Gagauz as a "brother nation". For instance, TİKA (the Turkish Development Agency) conducts impressive construction and education projects. Russia, on the other hand, relies on the influence of the Russian language and shared historical legacy, especially Soviet nostalgia in Gagauzia. One should also not forget that the Gagauz Orthodox Church, just like the Moldovan, is under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church. The heavy Russification that has been conducted in Gagauzia since the 1950s has not only made the Gagauz community Russophone and Russophile, but has also endangered the native language. An oral language for centuries, Gagauz first received a Cyrillic-based alphabet in 1957 and switched to the Latin script in the 1990s. The mother tongue of the Gagauz community has been overshadowed by Russian, the primary language at regional schools for decades.

Even if Moldova continues to go westward, Gagauzia will have no power to protest against it.

Even today there are no kindergartens or schools with Gagauz as the main language of instruction. Rather it is only taught a few hours per week, like other foreign languages. Russian-language kindergartens, and the current trend of communicating with children in Russian (even within the family), raises concerns that the next generation might not be able to properly use the Gagauz language, further risking its existence and damaging the Gagauz identity. As a result, Gagauz is classified as "definitely endangered" by UNESCO and, according to some estimates, is spoken by 180,000 people (150,000 of whom reside in Moldova).

Outside international attention for decades, Gagauzia entered the headlines in 2014. After Moldova signed the Association Agreement with the EU in November 2013, the Gagauz authorities initiated a referendum to display their preferences. The referendum on February 2nd 2014, which was organised against the backdrop of escalating violence by the Yanukovych regime against protesters at the Maidan in neighbouring Ukraine, was considered illegal by Chişinau but supported by Moldova's opposition parties. With a turnout of over 70 per cent, 98.4 per cent of voters decided they were in favour of joining the Russian-led Customs Union, and 97.2 per cent voted against closer EU integration. A similar figure (98 per cent) reasserted Gagauzia's right to self-determination once the political status of the Republic of Moldova changes. Thus Article 1.4 of the law on the Special Legal Status of Gagauzia received a new dimension: the provision is not only aimed at Moldova's hypothetical reunification with Romania, but at Moldova's membership in the EU.

While the legal issues surrounding the referendum are subject to debate, Gagauzia's message of autonomy – albeit symbolic – to Chişinau, Brussels and Moscow was crystal clear: the political entity reserves the right to display its geopolitical

orientation. But it is also worth knowing that even if Moldova continues to go westward, Gagauzia will have no power to protest against it. The relatively positive outcome in the referendum was what generated interest from western political and academic circles.

After the 2014 referendum, the EU began paying more attention to the region. As a third geopolitical civilisation that joined other two (the Russian world and pan-Turkism) competing over Gagauzia, the EU launched several multi-million-euro projects specifically aimed at the region. Moreover, certain policies with regards to Gagauzia have been carried out by governments and NGOs from EU member states, especially Romania (construction), Bulgaria (passportisation) and Sweden (civil society activities).

In other words, ethnolinguistic affiliation (ethnic kinship with the Turks, Russian as a lingua franca in the region), historical narratives (allegiance towards Russia, the painful Romanian period, and Soviet nostalgia), a complex geopolitical situation (sitting at the crossroads of the EU, Russia and Turkey), incomplete national consciousness and emigration (guest workers in Russia and Turkey, as well as in the EU to some extent) further complicate the situation. All serve as factors that influence regional identity.

As once stated by a Romanian journalist, the Gagauz, like many other small nations, are forced to be friends with big neighbours and speculate on their own identity. On their own the Gagauz would usually use the Russian language, eagerly take money from Turkey, and turn to the West when it comes to respecting civil rights.

Rusif Huseynov is the co-founder of the Topchubashov Center, Azerbaijan. His main interest is in peace and conflict studies, while his focus areas mainly cover Eastern Europe, the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Rail Baltica strives to stay on track

LINAS JEGELEVICIUS

The ambitious Rail Baltica project that aims to build a rail link from Helsinki to Poland has hit many hurdles and continues to face many setbacks. Despite some progress in overcoming these barriers, many questions remain unanswered – including whether the rail system will be operational in 2026, as planned.

The staggering 5.8 billion euro Rail Baltica project, to be built from the Estonian capital of Tallinn to the Lithuanian-Polish border, has become so complicated and sophisticated that the Latvian Transport Minister, Talis Linkaits, recently admitted that "Something will be built by the end of 2025, for sure." Yet, how different the nearly 800-kilometre railway line will be from the proposed form remains to be seen. One thing is clear, however – many hurdles still remain in order for the Rail Baltica project to go forward. There are abundant deficits in the project's budget and a lack of land purchasing – not to mention the need to ensure no damage to cultural heritage sites – for the projected railway path.

"The Rail Baltica project has fallen behind schedule," Linkaits admitted in an interview with Latvian Radio in late February. "Experts believe that implementation of the project will take about two and a half years longer."

This means that several individual construction projects that are part of Rail Baltica to start in 2020 will certainly begin much later. "We are working to secure all the necessary financing," he said. "We are talking to Brussels and the other Baltic countries on rational use of the funds allocated for the project. At the same time, we are also considering additional financing because with the money we have received so far we will not be able to build anything great."

More costly than expected

According to Linkaits, "something" will definitely be constructed by 2025, but it will certainly not be the entire railroad. Yet if it all goes without any major new impediments, the railway infrastructure should be completed as a double-track railway line for mixed traffic, suitable for minimum 740-metre long freight electrified trains in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. The line will be operated through the European Rail Traffic Management System (ERTMS) and the capacity shall be ensured for the trans-shipment in existing and new railroad terminals. Passenger trains will be able to reach speeds of 249 km per hour on the line and freight trains will be able to travel up to 120 km per hour. Once the 700 kilometre railway from Lithuania's Kaunas to Estonia's Tallinn is completed, a trip from Vilnius to Tallinn, for example, would take four and a half hours, and Kaunas to Riga would take two hours, half the time it currently takes.

When it comes to the project's cost of 5.8 billion euros, some 2.5 billion are to be invested in Lithuania alone, with 85 per cent of the money expected to come from the EU. The EU's financing of the project has not officially changed, but as the project has evolved and stumbled, it has become clear that it will cost more than originally estimated. This is where Brussels starts to cringe.

The EU's financing of the Rail Baltica project has not officially changed, but it has become clear that it will cost more than originally estimated.

Catherine Trautmann, coordinator for the North Sea-Baltic region of the EU's Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T), warned in early January that the financing of Rail Baltica could be "changed or influenced" by the next European Parliament which may turn out to be more euro-sceptical (and therefore Rail Baltica-sceptical). "This year will be very important for the project. We cannot say if we've stopped or if we could return to this matter later. Baltic states together with Poland and Finland have to work to demonstrate political will to implement the project," Trautmann said. Budget discussions, according to her, are always difficult, especially considering Brexit. "Britain's exit from the European Union is something to keep in mind. We know the costs and we will have to cover them," she emphasised.

For now, Rail Baltica has secured overwhelming support from all EU countries part of the corridor, as well as Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. In a major boost for the project, Finland announced in February that it will support the Rail Baltica. The Finnish government believes that once the railway is completed it will be an important new route from Finland to Central Europe and further west.

They also hope it will promote the development of the core network corridor from Helsinki to the north. Helsinki's decision is believed to alleviate the Baltic states' discussions with the European Commission on the necessity of more financing in the next EU multi-annual budget.

"There will be another vote interested in defending this project. Finland will be a good partner," said Krisjanis Karins, Latvia's new prime minister, on February 4th. Importantly, Finland's support may also get Poland to be more interested in the project. "Finland's participation will bring a high level of railway technical expertise into the project and can prompt Poland to join," Iveta Kancena, the acting head of the communications unit of Latvia's ministry of transport, told me.

Following its decision on February 1st the Finnish government decided to establish a new state-owned company, Suomen Rata, to develop various railway projects with Rail Baltica listed as one of the company's areas of work. The company will have five subsidiaries and one of them will aim to become a shareholder in the Rail Baltica joint venture. In a nod to Finland, in late February, the supervisory Board of Rail Baltica appointed Timo Riihimäki as CEO of the management board of the company set up in order to implement the project.

Amid the possibility of a new European Parliament with a high number of EU-sceptics and what it could entail, the Baltic countries remain largely unfazed.

Leadership change

Estonia and especially Lithuania have notably squabbled with Latvia over the suitability of its support of former Rail Baltica CEO, Baiba Rubesa (a Latvian national), which many believed has hindered the project's progress. Acknowledging the conflict, Rubesa said in early February that for the past two years, Rail Baltica's management board has been saddled by the consequences of slow decision making which has left an impact on the ability to deliver the project faster and on time. "In fact, the joint venture's supervisory board has consistently limited the ability to build a proper Rail Baltica company as one effective delivery unit, which has made the implementation process even more challenging," she said mindful of her forthcoming resignation. In her self-defence, she said she has felt "uncomfortable" as the CEO who did not "please the special interests" of the shareholders and beneficiaries by choosing to follow the high values of corporate governance, transparency and honest project implementation.

Photo: European Commission Audiovisual Service

European coordinators for the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) in charge of the Rail Baltica project in 2013.

Amid apprehensions to the possibility of a European Parliament with a high number of EU-sceptics and what it could entail, the Baltic countries remain largely unfazed. "Today we feel support from the EC and also from the European Parliament," Rasmus Ruuda, head of the PR department of the Estonian ministry of economic affairs and communications, told me. "I am not clairvoyant and able to predict the future about a new EP, but we know that Rail Baltic will also be, in the future, a competitive and essential project for Europe."

Domas Jurevicius, his counterpart at Lietuvos Gelezinkeliai (Lithuanian railways) echoed the sentiment by saying the project is being executed "as planned" and that all the foreseen steps will be made regardless of the outcome of the EP elections in late May. However, Kancena, of Latvia's ministry of transport, was more blunt, warning that there is no indication that an agreement will be reached within the existing European Parliament. "Thus it cannot be excluded that the new European Parliament might have other priorities which might have an impact on the potentially available funding for the Rail Baltic project and its future," she underscored.

Mollifying these concerns, Trautmann, the TEN-T network corridor coordinator, insists that the European Commission is "deeply involved" with Rail Baltica project's implementation because it is the only one in Europe's east with such importance for the region and Europe as a whole: "This is why we should be consistent…The

Baltic states should be connected with Europe's railway network. If we want to be a new hub for freight – from China, from Russia, from other neighbouring countries – this is the way to involve the Baltic states with Poland and Finland in the game," she emphasised.

Route troubles

What also purports the complexity of the project is the necessity to protect 126 potentially significant cultural and historical sites along the railroad section in Latvia. According to archaeologist Uldis Kalejs, who participated in the assessment of the potential cultural and historic sites where the railroad is to be constructed, some of the sites date back to the Middle Iron Age, others to the 16th or 19th centuries. However, it is land purchasing procedures and technical designs that are thought to produce the most difficult problems with land owners, stakeholders, environmentalists and NGOs in each country.

Despite the looming prospect of massive litigations, Arenijus Jackus, director of the Rail Baltica coordination department at Lietuvos Gelezinkeliai (Lithuanian Railways), is confident that all land purchases and technical design work will be finished by 2023, only slightly later than initially planned. "What will effectively remain for the course between 2023 and 2025 will be the actual railway construction," he told me. According to him, 53 bids have been received for the technical design procurement procedures with 500 kilometres of track, accounting for around 57 per cent of the entire railway line, to be designed during that stage.

In an important milestone for Lithuania, the final approval of a railway spur from Kaunas (the country's second-largest city) to the capital Vilnius, which has initially been left out, has been delivered to Brussels. Rail Baltica seeks to connect the respective capitals of Latvia and Estonia, Tallinn and Riga. In a tweaked plan, the detailed route alignment from Kaunas to Vilnius must also be approved by the end of 2021. A year later, the land acquisition and technical design of this route, as well as the connection from Kaunas to the Lithuania-Polish border should be completed in Lithuania (from Kaunas to Vilnius and from Kaunas to the Lithuanian-Polish border).

Big plans for 2019

A significant bulk of the Rail Baltica work is planned for this year. According to Ruuda from Estonia, the most important work scheduled for this year includes

drawing up and approving a detailed technical design of the project implementation in Estonia (in August 2018 the preliminary design of the project was completed). "The preliminary design is one step further from the spatial plans and identifies the actual object to be built on the route – the railway area width is around 60 meters, around 80 bridges and viaducts were designed, more than 20 ecoducts/ green bridges, etc.," he said.

Secondly, completing the design of the local Rail Baltica-related facilities is a main task for this year. The most important local facilities include the international passenger terminals in Tallinn, Ülemiste and Pärnu, rolling stock maintenance facilities in Rae county, close to Tallinn and Muuga and Pärnu cargo facilities. Thirdly, they will commence land acquisition.

"2019 marks the actual start of land purchasing where altogether more than 600 land plots (around 800 hectares) will have to be acquired by purchasing or exchange. Land ownership is one of the most important prerequisites for the start of construction," Ruuda stressed. And finally, the start of the railway construction in Estonia is also expected this year. "As with all big infrastructure projects, the challenges include financing, time frame, environmental impacts, etc. Today we see that these can be managed," he said.

Completing the design of the local Rail Baltica-related facilities is a main task for this year.

Asked about the Rail Baltica works this year, Kancena, of Latvia's ministry of transport, told me that the initial planning stage of the project in Latvia has been successfully finished and officials are currently working on the design of the Latvian stretch of the railway. "As far as Latvia is concerned, the main tasks for 2019 are as follows. Firstly, signing of the Riga Central Railway Junction and Related Infrastructure Design and Construction contract which will be split into three phases; secondly, completing the Rail Baltica RIX Airport Railway Station and related infrastructure; thirdly, to commence the detailed technical designs for the remaining two sections, Vangaži (at the Estonian border) and Misa (on the Lithuanian border)," she noted.

Apart from these prioritised components, studies will continue on energy supply, railway maintenance facilities, control, command and signalling, safety as well as exploring the synergy between 1435mm and 1520mm railway networks in the future. Asked about the challenges ahead, Kancena pointed to a very strict implementation timeline as the prerequisite for the project's financing. "A serious challenge to accommodate is that bids provided by potential suppliers during the tendering process tend to exceed the allocated budget under CEF (Connecting Europe Facility) financing agreements, therefore it is of crucial importance to look for and find synergies in order to minimise capital expenditure."

Meanwhile, Lithuania aims to move forward with the technical design of the project this year as well as the purchase of land from private owners for the construction of Rail Baltica's stretch from Kaunas to Lithuania's border with Latvia. Some 945 hectares of the total 1,244 hectare area needed for the railway line are on privately-owned land, with the track crossing almost 1,200 private land parcels, which will undoubtedly spark resistance from many landowners. It also passes through 187 hectares of state-owned land. "So far, the biggest challenge is the ongoing railway reconstruction works in the stretch between Kaunas and Palemonas, due to which train traffic has been changed," Jurevicius told me.

Will passengers be able to dash between Kaunas and Tallinn at never-before-seen speed in the Baltics by 2026? None of the interviewees dared to make such a promise.

Linas Jegelevicius is a Lithuanian journalist and editor in chief of *The Baltic Times*.

Eastern Europe's last tango

A journey through the interwar musical scene

JULIETTE BRETAN

The early Polish interwar music, which merged traditional folk motifs with intoxicating modern rhythms, spoke of a more technologically minded, progressive Polish musical scene where arrangements altered day-by-day as musicians skipped between bands, and new compositions could be finalised overnight. But it was the tango which often took centre stage. And this was true for many other countries in the region at that time.

C'est sous le ciel de l'Argentine, où la femme est toujours divine (It is under the sky of Argentina, where the woman is always divine), croons the absorbing refrain of the French "Le Dernier Tango" ("The Last Tango") – a seemingly commonplace helping of the early 20th century tango-fever which had taken Western Europe by storm. Though written in 1913 by French musicians, it was still unquestionably Argentine. The melody had been pilfered from the 1903 "El Choclo" ("The Corn Cob") by Argentine composer Angel Villoldo and the French lyrics bore those familiar flashes of delirious desire prevalent in any tango of the period. But, far from being the last tango, it was this French number which siphoned the rhythms of tango even further away from its Argentine roots and first brought it to the stages,

microphones and hearts of Eastern Europe which drank liberally from its shattering sound. Though the refrain stuck, "under the sky of Argentina" it was not.

The old-guard, loutish, Corn Cob Argentine original, packed with double entendres, is better known than the European variant. But in French, as in its later Polish and Russian, "Le Dernier Tango" tells the same compelling, highly tango-esque story of a tumultuous relationship between one impressionable male tourist and one enchanting femme fatale, with their brief and fervent rendezvous ultimately shattered as he is deposited for the affections of another. The traveller then invites her to dance one last tango, during which he murders her. Melodramatic, yes – but it was imbued with the exact feverish, superlative-laced passion which would later become symbolic of an Eastern European tango.

Tango moves East

Wasyl Sydorenko, a reference specialist with the Petro Jacyk Resource Centre at the University of Toronto Libraries, explains that "Le Dernier Tango" was in fact one of the first best-known European tangos from France, seeping East around the mid-1910s. "It came to Ukraine via Odesa and was sung there by Jewish-Ukrainian singer Isa Kremer," he tells me. "The tragic subject of the lyrics of this tango was used to create the plot of an early Ukrainian silent film."

Sydorenko knows Ukrainian tango well, with a childhood steeped in classical music and peppered with his father's collections of old Ukrainian tango scores. But while Sydorenko admits that this early tentative era of modern Ukrainian music petered out following the Russian Revolution and the Spanish flu, the "Le Dernier Tango" had already made its way to Poland. When it was first heard as "Ostatnie Tango" on the stage of the Czarny Kot (Black Cat) cabaret in Warsaw in 1919, it was the opening chords to a vibrant musical culture Poland craved to accomplish after the nation had regained independence.

"Le Dernier Tango" was one of the first best-known European tangos from France, seeping east around the mid-1910s.

The Polish version was first performed by the charming, wide-grinned Karol Hanusz, depicted on the song's sheet music with a cane and top hat in true flâneur style. The song's legacy ultimately earnt Hanusz the epithet as "King of Polish Tango". Yet Hanusz, whose influence has been all but forgotten in Polish culture today, did more than just croon about Argentine skies. As "Ostatnie Tango" drew other Polish musicians to more modern sounds, Hanusz too was personally responsible for championing their talents. One of his best-known protégés was the effervescent Eugeniusz Bodo – think a Polish

cross between Maurice Chevalier and Clark Gable. Bodo would ultimately become the poster boy for Polish interwar culture with fingers in every cultural pie – stage, screen, music – and even establishing his own restaurant, Café Bodo, in 1939.

In the early days, buoyed by the intoxicating rhythms of musical experimentation in Western Europe and America, Polish music blossomed jazz, foxtrot – and especially tango – from its speakers. One of these was Syrena Records: a behemoth of the Eastern European recording world, established in 1908 which was pumping out millions of records even before the First World War.

In the early days Polish music blossomed jazz, foxtrot – and especially tango – from its speakers.

Hanusz was one of many eager-eyed Polish musicians whose experiments in modern styles were ardently and irrevocably stamped on the face of the country's cultural history via the rich, warm tones of Syrena. But three of Syrena's giants were the Gold Brothers: Artur and Henryk, and their cousin Jerzy Petersburski – whose jazz of the early 1920s had brought a lighter music into mainstream Polish culture. They held a powerful monopoly over Polish music throughout the interwar period and tasted success early. Petersburski's runaway hit was the 1929 "Tango Milonga", a more potent cousin of "Le Dernier Tango", which was sold for 3,000 shillings in Vienna to be transformed into the more western success-story "O Donna Clara".

Paris of the East

The early Polish interwar music, which merged traditional folk motifs with intoxicating modern rhythms, spoke of a more technologically minded, progressive Polish musical scene where arrangements altered day-by-day as musicians skipped between bands, and new compositions could be finalised overnight. But it was the tango which so often took centre stage. From 1919 to 1939, Syrena Records churned out millions of tangos on brilliant blue, gold-smattered discs, cadences weeping a heartfelt and Slavic melancholia. Many artists who achieved popularity in the burgeoning Polish musical scene had multi-ethnic backgrounds, carving discs in which, for example, lively buoyant Russian melodies could creep into aching Klezmer.

Syrena's base was the Polish capital Warsaw; which, with its exquisite streets, where porticos dripped from luxurious three-storey apartments and elegant artifices oozed cabarets, became known in the period as the Paris of the East. Its Moulin Rouge was probably the Adria Restaurant, complete with revolving dance

floor and winter café garden – bombed in the Second World War, the shell still exists today, but the swathes of silk piling through its doors and glittering neon lights have long since been extinguished.

But, in actual fact, the modern sounds of Polish interwar music were not really nurtured in Warsaw. Instead, the eastern city of Lviv, with its linguistic, ethnic and social panorama, became a Polish cultural heartland in the interwar period, the birthplace of many celebrities of the age. From 1933 every Sunday, Polish Radio dutifully transformed into a Lvovian locale, as the comedian duo Szczepcio and Tońcio giggled their way through their "Lwów's Merry Wave", a transmission broadcast from Lviv, which leached a distinct accent of Polish yesteryear. This interwar Polish brand of Received Pronunciation was a Lvovian-esque patois from the East, which merged elements of Ukrainian pronunciation with Polish, and became the multi-ethnic signature to all Polish cultural production of the age.

Lviv would come to be a bastion of Polish culture even after war had again shattered the region, when the Polish King of Jazz – Henryk Wars, an already prominent player in cultural spheres – established his Tea Jazz Orchestra in the city, protecting the last vestiges of the Polish golden age of music. Bodo played there, touring with the orchestra across the Soviet Union before being held on trumped-up charges of espionage by the Soviets and starving to death in a Gulag in 1943. Another musician in Wars's eclectic Tea Jazz blend was Irena Yarossevich, performing under the name Renata Bogdańska. She would later marry the Polish General Władysław Anders, becoming the Polish cultural sweetheart Irena Anders.

Unmistakable undertones

But Yarossevich rose to fame singing in Ukrainian in the interwar period, when Lviv – apart from being an artery of Polish music – was also home to budding young Ukrainian musicians. She performed in the Ukrainian jazz-band Yabtso, an orchestra established in 1934 in an effort to curb the domination of Polonia in local music circles. This new Ukrainian band on the scene which, as Sydorenko puts it, "vied for popularity with Henryk Wars", brought Ukrainian folk flavours to Lviv's musical output. Where their concerts ran for nine hours at a time, so too did the music flow; a deep, unapologetic, potently Ukrainian liqueur of tradition and modern sound.

Yabtso included Leonid Yablonsky, as well as Anatoly Kos-Anatolsky and Stepan Huminilovych. Their star, however, was the mellow-faced Bohdan Vesolovsky, now known as the father of Ukrainian tango: a composer with dark, inquisitive eyes, always sharply dressed in big collars and tweed and slick side-parting, who

left behind him almost 130 classic hits of old-school Lviv. And, whilst his "Pryide Shche Chas" ("The Time Will Come Again") – written when he was 22 – gained popularity in both Ukrainian and Polish crowds, his "Chy Spravdi?" ("Is it really so?") spoke to a Ukrainian population saturated by feelings of exile, paralysed by a lack of independence. In fact, these were unmistakable undertones, says Sydorenko, to the Ukrainian musical output of the 1920s and 1930s.

"In some ways," he explains, "Ukrainian interwar music was just as 'modern' and 'progressive' as in Western Europe, but in other ways it was still 50 years behind the times." He adds that even in musical circles of today not everyone agrees that there are Ukrainian compositions within the genres popular seventy years ago – back then, Ukrainian music, just like Polish, was decidedly multicultural. The rousing lilt of prized national or regional tunes toyed against more modern harmonies in a landscape shattered by ethnic struggle.

Sydorenko's view is that Ukrainian music between the wars even varied across the different segments of the Ukrainian landscape, beginning with the world of "Le Dernier Tango".

"In Russian Ukraine, which included all the territories following the Third Partition of Poland," he explains, "tango appeared before the First World War. There were two vectors of dispersal, one originating in St Petersburg, one in Odesa."

But after 1918, musical production in Soviet-dominated Ukraine was ultimately stifled under a crushing weight of repression. Though modern influences still dripped into this quarter, the taste of new music was far richer in the West.

"In interwar Polish Ukraine," Sydorenko explains, "the main vector of influence was Warsaw and the many cabarets that visited Lviv."

Though this helped to increase the popularity of other styles like foxtrot, it was again tango which particularly intoxicated Ukrainian crowds, from Polish to Soviet quarters. And Sydorenko believes this was mainly due to one man: the captivating Petro Leshchenko.

"Recordings by Leshchenko," he explains, "were probably the single-most important medium for introducing the tango in all parts of Ukraine."

Grassroots approach

Animated, warm, with a wide, toothy smile, Leshchenko eventually would become known as the "King of Russian Tango", but he was, in fact, the embodiment of the most sundry of Eastern European melting-pot identities. He had been born into a Ukrainian family and rising to fame singing in Ukrainian and Russian in Latvia, before crooning the tangos and foxtrots of multiple Eastern European nations

from his base in Bucharest in Romania. Jerzy Petersburski was one of his favourite composers, but so too was the only female composer of light music in interwar Poland, Fanny Gordon. Gordon – who had Jewish and Russian roots – had taken the Eastern European recording world by storm in 1929 with her "Pod Samowarem" ("Under the Samovar"). This song was popular in Poland and Russia – there performed by Leshchenko – but the song also made its way to Lithuanian speakers.

That country was also brimming with the new, modern sound of the jazz age: Gordon's heady, jovial tune was sung by the charming Danielius Dolskis, the leading proponent of Lithuanian takes on popular music. Lithuanian interwar culture found its home on the little stages of cafés and restaurants, which hosted a variety of artists from Eastern Europe who interspersed foreign schlagers with more home-grown songs. But it was inherently multicultural too: in cafés across Kaunas, Moishe Hofmekler's Hofmeklerband dabbled in the light tunes of new Lithuania alongside the classical music in which he had been trained, a trend also prevalent for his Polish and Ukrainian musical cousins. Hofmeklerband also competed with an ensemble founded by Daniel Pomeranc, a Lithuanian jazz pioneer who had initially played in the famed Berlin orchestra led by Marek Weber – a musician who was, incidentally, born in Lviv.

It was at the grassroots level that musicians came together to promote the delicious, velvet, cosmopolitan sound of modern styles.

And it was at this grassroots level, even away from recording companies like the Polish Syrena, that musicians really came together to promote the delicious, velvet, cosmopolitan sound of modern styles. As Sydorenko notes about Polish Ukraine, "there were cabarets in the big cities and sometimes even in the smaller towns of Volyn" – but, he told me, with a story evoking the Polish Eugeniusz Bodo's own gastronomic enterprise, "the most important cultural centre in Eastern Europe for this type of music was the restaurant night club of Petro Leshchenko in Bucharest. The who's who of Eastern Europe all came to his establishment."

And the city in which Leshchenko capitalised on an Eastern European hunger for interwar sounds was itself a proponent of the modern music scene. I spoke with Oana Cătălina Chițu, a singer who has recently released two albums of interwar Romanian classics, who led me to another café: her father's. It was there, the only café in her village, where as a child she first learnt of Romanian tangos, performed by her father to entertain customers, just as musicians had done back in the 1920s and 1930s across Romania.

But Bucharest was the epicentre. If Warsaw was dubbed the Paris of the East, Bucharest was, strangely enough, known by another variant of the name of that freethinking French capital: Little Paris. As Chițu puts it, "the city was open, cos-

mopolitan and vibrant with life." This oozed into its music too – and particularly its tangos – which were replete with distinctly Argentine, yet Romanian flairs.

Her most recent album is a celebration of interwar star Maria Tănase, whom Chițu calls "an icon of Romanian music". With a seductive, plush and brassy alto voice, Tănase – known as the Édith Piaf of Romania – wrapped millions in the beguiling strains of modern and traditional song, earning her a domestic and even international following. But, just as Chițu's earlier "Bucharest Tango" album testifies, Tănase was one of many gifted Romanian musicians of the age. As the *lăutar* Zavaidoc recorded folk songs on Columbia Records, Jean Moscopol, the Romanian Valentino, slipped between Bucharest and Berlin as he brought the most renowned popular hits back to his home country, all imbued with his distinctive, almost purring intonation. Here, as in Poland, Ukraine and Lithuania, the musical borderlines of traditional and popular, international and domestic, were decidedly fluid.

A new era

Then there was the youthful Cristian Vasile, now seen as "the last troubadour" of a more dynamic music age. Vasile inundated Romanian crowds in cafés and restaurants with delicious, aching interpretations of tangos fraught with devastation. His classic is "Zaraza", a tango from 1931 positively saturated with desire and with a melody plucked straight from Argentina. Its devastating narrative and beguiling rhythm ensured success in Romanian interwar music circles. In 1939 it swept north to Poland, where Wiera Gran and Albert Harris also popularised the song among Polish audiences ever-hungry for Eastern European light music. Ironically, it was there that the benign original title of "Zaraza", Spanish for "chintz", had to be altered to "Gdy guitar gra piosenkę" ("When the guitar plays a song") – "Zaraza" is a Polish word for plague. In fact, a few years later it would transform again in Poland into "Pierwszy sierpnia dzień krwawy" ("The First Day of Bloody August"): one of many songs commemorating the Warsaw Uprising of 1944.

In Romania, as in Poland, Ukraine and Lithuania, the musical borderlines of traditional and popular, international and domestic, were decidedly fluid.

In its Romanian home, however, "Zaraza", also achieved semi-legendary status – but here for a darker, more twisted reason. The ambiguous lyrics lent themselves perfectly to the cultivation of a myth which in some circles even today is still entertained with sincerity. The story goes that Zaraza was in fact the name

of a captivating beauty, a Romanian Helen of Troy, for whom Vasile had fallen. Incandescent with jealous rage, an antagonist Zavaidoc arranged for Zaraza to be killed – leaving Vasile devastated. He then, of course, did what any distraught tango-esque lover would and, stealing her ashes from the crematorium, devoured them with a spoon. Some say this is the reason behind the real-life deterioration of Vasile's sumptuous voice – though the more likely cause is cancer.

"Zaraza", a perhaps more unnerving cousin of "Le Dernier Tango", signalled that the new era of sophisticated light music was veritably in full swing across Eastern Europe. When war and the communist regime abruptly snatched this beguiling needle away, it appeared an abrupt end to the smooth, mesmerising, polychromatic tones of Eastern European musical enterprise – not least because so many gorgeous interwar artists from across the region did not make it through the war.

Yet, just as there has been a vintage revival in recent years in musical circles in Poland, so too are Chițu and Sydorenko helping to preserve and cement the velour legacy of interbellum Eastern Europe in a worldwide musical consciousness. Under the sky of Argentina – or of Eastern Europe – there is a woman, or a song, "*toujours divine*".

Juliette Bretan studies English Literature at the University of Cambridge and also works as a freelance journalist, specialising in Eastern European culture and current affairs. Her blog, *Visions of the Vistula*, researches specific cultural pieces from Polish history.

1989

A YEAR OF REVOLUTION AND CHANGE

The timeline of 1989 in Central European countries illustrates the speed at which the socialist system fell apart in these countries. Citizens showed courage, rejecting political selfishness and defying state violence. Their revolutions for justice and freedom overcame the counter-revolution, though partly because by this point the communist ideology was crumbling. Worldwide, 1989 was a difficult year in the history of the human rights movement. Its accomplishments were neither conclusive nor fully genuine. In China, violence and lies won over plurality and dignity. The Soviet Union remained for some time yet, on the edge of collapse. Violent regimes and insurrections continued to inflict oppression, humiliation and genocide across Africa and Latin America. Much of that would change by the early 1990s. But this progress was fleeting. As remarkable as the changes of 1989 and later were, they did have underlying failures which many ignored for too long. Arguably, 1989 rather marked the end of one period more than the beginning of a new era.

HUNGARY

January 12th Hungarian legislature adopts "democracy package" **March 15th** Huge demonstrations on Hungary's National Day; convinces party to negotiate **April 22nd** Round table talks begin **May 2nd** Border fence is dismantled **September 18th** Agreement for transition signed **October 7th** Communist party dissolves itself **October 16th-20th** Legislature schedules elections for 1990

POLAND

January 18th Communist party gives General Wojciech Jaruzelski green light to negotiate with Solidarity opposition **February 6th** Round Table negotiations begin **April 4th** Round Table agreement signed **June 4th** Semi-free elections give Solidarity resounding victory **August 24th** Tadeusz Mazowiecki becomes first non-communist prime minister in Eastern bloc **September 13th** Non-communist government takes power

BULGARIA

October-November Ecological protests in Sofia; suppressed by the regime **November 10th** Communist leader Todor Zhikov ousted by politburo **November 10th-17th** Censorship and restrictions on assembly are lifted **November 17th** Mass protests **December 11th** democratic elections announced

ROMANIA

December 16th protests break out in Timisoara **December 21st** Nicolae Ceaușescu organises a mass rally which turns against him **December 22nd** After shooting at the people, the military switches sides **December 22nd** Inter-party coup and 1990 elections announced **December 25th** Execution of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

November 17th Student demonstrations crushed by police **November 18th-24th** protests grow from 200,000 to 800,000 **November 24th** Communist leadership resigns **November 27th** Nationwide general strike announced **November 28th** Party announces it will dismantle the totalitarian state **December 10th** Gustáv Husák appoints a largely non-communist government **December 29th** Václav Havel elected president by the legislature

EAST GERMANY

September-October Leipzig demonstrations grow to 300,000 **October 18th** Erich Honecker replaced by the party **Early November** Protests break out in East Berlin **November 9th** The Berlin Wall falls **November** A new government takes power in East Germany **December** Round-table and agreement towards unification

The poverty of utopia revisited

VLADIMIR TISMANEANU AND JORDAN LUBER

In 1989 massive protests erupted from an increasingly restive population. The language of the intellectuals finally reached the people. The regimes found themselves unable to use tanks and bullets to maintain their utopian blueprints. Disenchantment with Marxism was a cathartic experience for Eastern Europe.

The story of Marxism in Eastern Europe begins with Stalinist fanaticism and ends with liberal revolutions in 1989. As the ideological determination of the elite faded through the second half of the 20th century, intellectuals advocated for human rights and dignity. Eventually, the wider populations revolted against communist totalitarianism, and the regimes found their pillars of terror and propaganda insufficient for ensuring continued domination. But with nationalist and fascist ideologies rising today, the journey of humanism in Eastern Europe goes on.

For decades, Marxism held Eastern Europe in its grip. Soviet tanks, Leninist parties and, allegedly, enthusiastic masses ensured there was no official politics or thought outside of the communist party dogma. Obviously there were niches, enclaves – oases in the desert, to use Hannah Arendt's metaphor. Eventually Marxism in Eastern Europe miraculously collapsed. The dictatorships ended and were replaced by pluralistic societies and democratic governments. The triumph of common sense over utopia was possible for two reasons: elite disenchantment and dissident humanism that was often, but not always, linked to Marxist revisionism.

Transcending the paralysis

From 1944 to 1989, Marxist Eastern Europe was a strange combination of external imperialist imposition and genuine national decisions. Moscow was the

capital of the Soviet Bloc but, bizarrely and disastrously, the majority of the bloc's population passively acquiesced in the communist project. Dissidents were few, besmirched and isolated. Thus, only once the overbearing elites lost their hubris, and only once the artists, philosophers, writers, students, professors and activists could offer something different, could Marxist power be destroyed. Once the Marxist regimes were no longer willing to engage in total public massacre, like in China, and once the citizenry had an alternative to place their trust in, could the paralysis be transcended. This is the meaning of what we can call the "poverty of utopia" (and the title of a book published by Vladimir Tismăneanu, a co-author of this essay, with Routledge 30 years ago).

Ideological hubris and epistemic infallibility represented the cornerstone of the Marxist regimes in Eastern Europe. The elite, from generals to torturers to censors to bureaucrats, had the utter and irrevocable confidence that what they were doing was right. As crazy as it was, as blatantly false and destructive as their actions were, they genuinely believed what they were doing was just for humanity. Such an attitude enabled them to lie, torture, steal, murder, rape (think of Beria, though his actions were typical), humiliate and oppress at unprecedented levels. They were ideological. While they were neither scholars nor intellectuals (unlike Marx and, it must be admitted, Lenin and Trotsky), they nonetheless, to their own satisfaction, believed they truly were doing the right thing. Novotny, Zhivkov, Ulbricht, Honecker, Encer, Gomułka, Ceaușescu, were certain that history was on their side. They had no remorse, no pangs of conscience and no regrets. The same can be said about Ion Iliescu, a self-styled Gorbachevite, who never admitted the historical failure of his belief system.

Similar to Fidel Castro or Robert Mugabe, they were actors, not doctrinaires. Yet however crude and simple they were, ideology is in the mind of the beholder, measured by an individual's faith, not by his or her intellectual thoroughness. Their misdeeds were faithfully executed because they sincerely believed their actions were securing a classless and free society and that the human beings they trampled on were actually evil agents of the demonised West. Liberty and dignity outside the ideology and Party was always false, only totalitarian liberation could bring true justice.

Over the decades of Marxist domination in Eastern Europe, the equation changed. First, there was revolutionary fervour, the memories of the Second World War and the alibi of Eastern Europe's laggard historic development. But after two or three decades, global revolution could not be hailed as imminent – Nazism was not a credible threat and, despite total intervention and restructuring, Eastern European production, innovation and living standards were falling exponentially behind the democratic West. All the while the elites remained brutal, privileged

and pig-headed. To the populations of Eastern Europe, Marxism, at least in its current incarnation, was clearly a lie, or at least a failure.

Even the Marxist elite could not ignore the problem. They were having trouble maintaining their faith. Unlike in Stalin's time, as Czesław Miłosz wrote, the lie had become too big for any "captive mind" to overcome. Increasingly, they became mere gangsters, oppressing for pure shameless power rather than a righteous mission. From Lenin and Stalin we arrived at Brezhnev, devoid of anything except the apparent will to rule. Utopia was abandoned; they settled for neo-totalitarianism, often called post-totalitarianism. These circumstances brought working class unrest and intellectual dissent, endorsed by the enlightened groups within the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, for a while terror and lies rolled on.

Elite transformation

The story of the 1968 Prague Spring and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia did little to shake the elite's faith; they believed it was a fascist counter-revolution engineered by the West. Their crushing only reasserted the delusional ideology rather than refuting it. Throughout the 1960s and 70s the elite transformed from ideological to routinized behaviour. As their failures became increasingly clear to observers – and painfully obvious to their subjects – the chance of a global revolution plainly slipped away.

Still genuinely believing that they were keeping out the evil capitalists, and at the same time abandoning all pretexts of being leftist, they became a police state violently dedicated to stability for the benefit of themselves. This became clear with the introduction of Martial Law in Poland in December 1981. Residually ideological as they were, they did not recognise their shameless transformation. Even so, it was not stable: in the 1980s they would lose all hubris. They would no longer have the skilful lies or wilful violence to preserve their system against a massive challenge coming from below. Because of their sclerosis, if that challenge came, they would not be able to meet it.

The year 1968 also affected another group: the intellectuals. With their distaste for the Leninist regimes, they turned from Leninism to Marxism, recognising the original distortion that Lenin had introduced. They went to Marx himself and then just to young Marx, and then to post-Marxism and eventually liberal humanism. This was the other key ingredient of the collapse of Marxist hegemony in Eastern Europe. Communism always needed the support of the intellectuals. Lenin was only able to get away with it because Russia was in anarchy and war, and all the Russian intellectuals had either fled, were irrelevant, or were exiled or killed by the

Cheka. Even Stalin had to court the intellectuals, spending a significant amount of his time and planning to deploy propaganda and terror in order to keep Russia intellectuals broadly supporting him (and it worked, an embarrassing testament to the potential of leftist intellectuals for cruelty).

Eastern Europe was much more liberal, intellectual and bourgeois than Russia. As crucial as intellectuals were for Soviet communism, they were more vital for the regimes in the Eastern European Soviet Empire. The regimes knew that if they lost the support of the intellectuals, they would eventually face a hostile public. At such a point, when the lies were no longer enough, all that was left was violence – not the kind that is hidden in prisons and concentration camps, but immense, public massacre, like in China. Through the 1960s, 70s and 80s, the intellectuals in Eastern Europe gradually abandoned Marxism and eventually arrived at diverse but unified theories of human rights. Once this happened, within a few years the populations of the region lost their faith in Marxism and then their fear of the regimes. Coming onto the streets as individuals – in the tens, hundreds, thousands and by 1989 the millions – they presented a challenge to the system that it could not really face.

The regimes knew that if they lost the support of the intellectuals, they would eventually face a hostile public.

Abandonment

How did Eastern Europe arrive at such a place? For the first decade after the war, intellectuals in Eastern Europe, fully and enthusiastically, supported Marxism. So strong was their support they not only supported communism, but Stalin and Stalinism. They were truly ideological: they believed the ends justified the means, that a revolution, a transformation and final completion of human history was being performed. All the violence was, to them, defensive and justified; they believed that all things democratic and liberal were feudal and bourgeois, tyrannical and alienating, while communism would, regardless of its evident flaws and sins, bring freedom, happiness and justice forever. Lies were acceptable, in fact morally necessary, because it hacked through the web of distortion that the bourgeois system of democratic exploitation had constructed. Propaganda was bringing education and truth to the masses, mobilisation was building a positive community and a worthwhile life, and terror was the legitimate alternative to total war and eternal slavery.

By the 1960s no serious intellectuals were communist – they were only Marxist. They left behind Soviet communism, Stalin, and even Lenin. They were hardly considering any other Marxists beyond Marx himself. And, even then, increas-

ingly throughout the 1960s they only considered young Marx. The older Marx had focused on scientific determinism and "the dictatorship of the proletariat" – two themes which easily, inevitably, Leszek Kołakowski said, led to Leninism and Stalinism. But young Marx wrote about the human spirit, alienation, rights, freedom and a society of tolerance and equality for all. Studying the supposed foundational texts of the Marxist regimes was immensely dangerous; they were discovering the outright treason being committed against Marx's humanist ideals. Austrian revisionist Marxist Ernst Fischer even published a book titled *What Marx Really Said*.

After the crushing of the Prague Spring, no one remained any sort of Marxist at all.

After the crushing of the Prague Spring, no one remained any sort of Marxist at all. They were now either post-Marxist liberals (such as Leszek Kołakowski, Ágnes Heller, Ferenc Fehér, János Kis, Karol Modzelewski, Jacek Kuroń and Adam Michnik) or pure liberals (never having been Marxist at all, like Václav Havel). Unlike Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev could offer little to keep the intellectuals supportive of their oppressive missions. These intellectuals, after the Prague Spring, even abandoned the young Marx. They realised that the young Marx offered no antidote to the Soviet colossus because the regimes were able to co-opt him into their ideological concoctions. Through the 1970s they searched for a new philosophy and cause and found it in human rights.

Losing credibility

The Helsinki Accords of 1975 meant that a commitment of western democracies to uphold human rights was combined with the Eastern European intellectuals' own search for a new moral philosophy and political programme. From the mid-1970s onward – with Havel's *The Power of the Powerless* and Michnik's *The New Evolutionism* – Eastern European intellectuals were decidedly rebelling against the Marxist regimes, and were advocating for universal human rights and for a society based on tolerance rather than war-like mobilisation and conservative peace.

The Soviet project was so coercively asphyxiating for human societies and unnatural for human beings that only totalitarianism could hold it together. Propaganda and terror had to be ubiquitous or the entire project would quickly unravel. Over the 1970s and 80s, the project lost all credibility – the lies could no longer cover up, excuse, or justify the oppression and deprivation. Congruently, the elite lost their revolutionary fervour and hubris. They were just as unrepentant but no longer had the will to respond to any disturbance of their fragile monolith. Mean-

while, the intellectuals were heroically and relentlessly espousing the idea of human rights. Eventually, especially once Moscow itself lost its self-assurance to use tanks against crowds, it reached its conclusion.

In 1989 massive protests erupted from an increasingly restive population. The language of the intellectuals had finally reached through and inspired the public. The regimes found themselves unable to use tanks and bullets to maintain their utopian blueprints. Disenchantment with Marxism was a cathartic experience for Eastern Europe: the elite turned to naked, shameless corruption and the intellectuals turned back to the human subject. Eventually the people were able to take advantage of the new situation. They demanded liberty and the regimes soon melted away, leaving Eastern Europeans to finally build democracy.

This project, of course, is currently in peril. The question now is: will Eastern Europeans stand for tolerance and diversity, or will they fall for new hatreds and myths? After so long and heroic a struggle, over the past 30 years, will they change their minds and decide they cannot bear the costs of universal freedom? Increasingly, from Poland to Hungary to Romania (just as in the US, Italy, the Netherlands, France, Germany and Austria), Central and Eastern Europeans seem to be saying they would prefer projects which reject the human spirit, human nature and human rights for a system of proto-totalitarian euphoria, delusions and glory. The honesty and humility of the intellectuals and the people are as critically necessary today as they were during the Leninist ordeal. The idea of human rights, with all the inevitable costs a free and pluralist society imposes upon each other, remains the only thing that is just, decent and good.

Vladimir Tismaneanu is a political scientist, sociologist and professor at the University of Maryland, College Park.

Jordan Luber is finishing his studies as an Erasmus Mundus scholar in the European Politics and Society: Václav Havel Joint Master Programme at Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland. He is also an editorial intern at *New Eastern Europe*.

The circle of hope

Samizdat, tamizdat and radio

EUGENIUSZ SMOLAR

I left Poland in 1970 with no hope that things would ever change for the better. Back then, would you dare to hope that Soviet communism could implode with just a little outside help?

I first got involved in dissident activity with a group of friends in high school during the early 1960s. During my studies at Warsaw University, my engagement with the movement grew. However it was all rather innocent then – mostly discussions about the past, present and the future, and some attempts to unnerve communist activists during public meetings at the university by asking awkward questions on issues such as the Katyń massacre or the exploitation of Poland by the Soviet Union. It was innocent until Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski were imprisoned for three years in 1965. After that, our group – built around Adam Michnik – started to be harassed by the secret police. To protest against oppression and censorship, we organised student demonstrations at the University of Warsaw in March 1968 that soon engulfed almost all Polish universities, medical schools and polytechnic institutes. Many young workers joined in as well.

The communist authorities responded with mass imprisonment, and antisemitic and anti-intellectual propaganda. I avoided arrest that March and went on to participate in the organisation of protests against the August 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact (which included Polish troops). Only then was I imprisoned, as was my future wife – Nina. My brother, Aleksander, had been behind bars since the previous March. The witch-hunts resulted in the imprisonment of thousands of students and workers. Many were fired from their jobs and

hundreds received prison sentences. Some 15,000 Polish Jews emigrated. This was the fate I chose, as well as the fate of my wife and brother.

Émigré publishing

We wound up in Sweden and continued our studies in Uppsala. With my brother in Paris and a group of friends outside Poland, we slowly but surely took up a form of activism familiar to the Polish émigrés for the last few hundred years: namely, publishing. We set up a political quarterly entitled *Aneks* and later went on to publish books. It was not about *belles lettres*, it was about political thinking, and about finding an answer to the basic question asked by Jacek Kuroń: "What can be done in a situation where one cannot do much?"

What started in Sweden as a small publishing operation by a group of friends grew considerably, especially when I found myself working for the BBC in London after 1975. Annually, we smuggled thousands of copies of the *Aneks* quarterly and books we printed ourselves into Poland. We also used our channels to help other émigré publishers. As the Polish democratic opposition grew after 1976, mainly in the form of the Workers Defence Committee (KOR), we became its closest partner, supporter and ambassador.

Under communism there were different types of samizdat or underground publishing. On one level, there were writers like Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Andrei Sinyavsky and many others in the Soviet Union who wrote simply because they could not stand the oppression. These free thinkers – writers, journalists, essayists and poets – wanted to express themselves despite, or against, the system. They felt, without much optimism, that they could save their sanity and souls by writing, whatever happened to their bodies. The second level of samizdat, which took place in Poland throughout communism, took the form of intellectual-cum-political resistance. Most of the time, it was limited to small and often isolated groups of friends – mostly students – who trusted each other.

Finally, the third level of samizdat was related to various forms of resistance and political mobilisation of the opposition on a genuinely massive scale. This is largely a unique Polish phenomenon linked to KOR (1976–1980), later to the Solidarność trade union (1980–1981) and finally to eight years of the Solidarność movement's underground struggle following the imposition of martial law in December 13th 1981. Since 1976, independent underground publishing grew in Poland, reaching a truly industrial level. For example, the Warsaw-based *Tygodnik Mazowsze* printed 80,000 copies per week in the 1980s! And this was just one of many. Between 1,000 and 5,000 copies of books were printed of every title.

This level of publishing was instrumental in helping independent public opinion to mature, strengthening the cohesion of the Solidarność movement, preserving the authority of Lech Wałęsa and other underground leaders. It also served as one of the instruments of the bloodless transformation of Poland in 1988 and 1989.

The *Kultura* approach

In 1964 I was in Moscow and saw, with my own eyes, the production of samizdat literature: the typing and re-typing of some literary books by a group of young, paid collaborators. I was amazed because we did not do such things. Samizdat was known since the late 1940s in Poland, but it functioned on the margins of independent intellectual circles; it only became an important part of the opposition movement after 1976. The explanation is that Poland was a relatively freer country – someone not involved in open political opposition could travel to the West. Thousands of Polish intellectuals, tourists or sailors smuggled back anything in print of importance, particularly the Paris-based monthly *Kultura* and books published under the same roof of the Instytut Literacki (*Institut Littéraire*), but also Polish magazines and books from London, Rome and New York.

If someone was determined to publish, he or she preferred to smuggle it into the West and get it published there (*tamizdat*). Polish tamizdat was significant, as some of our most important writers and poets lived in the West and published in Paris or London – Witold Gombrowicz, Czesław Miłosz and Gustaw Herling-Grudziński, just to mention a few.

Jerzy Giedroyc and *Kultura* were different from many émigrés, they re-thought the post-war reality and managed to open themselves to new ideas.

Also, while describing Polish tamizdat, one needs to take generational differences into consideration. On the one hand, you had the London-based Polish government-in-exile, and many political, social and cultural organisations that represented the traditional Polish émigrés loyal to the pre-war state structures. The fact is not only did they not have much contact with what was happening in Poland, they often refused to keep in touch with the members of the opposition, fearing that anything and everything was controlled by the secret police and ultimately the KGB. Most of them believed this to be an obvious truth until 1976.

Since 1947 Jerzy Giedroyc and his small, dedicated team in Paris published a very influential monthly called *Kultura*. As different from many war-time émigrés, they re-thought the post-war reality and managed to open themselves to new ideas

and thus better understood the social, economic and political changes taking place in Poland. *Kultura* – to loud protests from very many émigrés – accepted Poland's post-war borders and reached out to the Russians, Ukrainians and Lithuanians. Several special issues of *Kultura* were published in Russian and Ukrainian and were met with enthusiasm within the USSR.

We all considered ourselves to be pupils of *Kultura* and there was a close co-operation and trust between *Kultura* and us at *Aneks*. We organised and co-ordinated assistance for the opposition in Poland, and exchanged texts. Very often, an article or a book would arrive in London with a note asking us to send it to *Kultura*, Radio Free Europe, *Russkaia Mysl*, *Kontinent* or *Listy*. But there were also some important differences between us. It is not just that we, the young Turks, wanted to have our own impact. When Jerzy Giedroyc established *Kultura*, he rightly believed that the road to freedom would take a long time. And since intellectual and political life in Poland was highly censored and regulated, with the secret police always in the background, Giedroyc attempted to assume the role of an intellectual-cum-political leader with *Kultura* as his main weapon.

We never did this and saw ourselves as an intrinsic part of the opposition. It is not by chance that the title of our magazine was modestly called *Aneks – Annex to the Censored Press in Poland*. We always felt that the objective of our effort in the West was to help the opposition in Poland, and later in Czechoslovakia, Hungary and elsewhere.

In various ways, we helped readers formulate their own ideas, based on the most important intellectual and political trends in the West. We believed this might – someday – lead to action, but we knew that action risked reprisal and imprisonment. We were safe in the West. To us, publishers of tamizdat, the most important medium was always samizdat and the people who produced it – the members of the democratic opposition.

On the other hand, in the 1980s in London – with Jan Kavan (later Czech Foreign Minister) and with George Schöpflin (now a Hungarian MEP) – I published an English-language quarterly *The East European Reporter* which aimed to inform westerners and the growing independent public opinion in our countries about the current developments.

Samizdat – infrequent phenomenon

Censorship in Poland was a bit more relaxed than other communist states. It is a known fact that, in the 1950s and 1960s, many people in the USSR learnt Polish, read Polish books and magazines because there they could find western authors

that were banned in their own countries. In Poland the atmosphere was a bit less strict and, with the exception of those blacklisted, one could publish officially if the content was not openly anti-communist. There were several heavily censored but immensely popular Catholic publications, such as *Tygodnik Powszechny*, *Więź* or *Znak* for which many non-Catholic authors also wrote.

This is why the Polish samizdat was a rather rare phenomenon. Most Polish writers preferred to compromise and negotiate required changes with the censors in order to get something officially published. They often accepted, with a heavy heart, the censored version and only when something was rejected would it be sent abroad to be published in London or Paris – often using a penname.

The situation changed in 1976 when KOR (and later other groups) spawned the underground publishing movement. In 1977, among the very many political publications, the independent literary quarterly *Zapis* appeared – the first issue left the editing table with eight copies, subsequently typed and retyped many times over. After two years, it was already distributed with around 1,000 copies, properly printed.

The importance of *Zapis* lies in the fact that a group of intellectuals said: "Enough is enough – we want to publish our works uncensored."

The importance of *Zapis* lies in the fact that a group of intellectuals said: "Enough is enough – we want to publish our works uncensored."

The importance of *Zapis* lies in the fact that a group of intellectuals said: "Enough is enough – we want to publish our works uncensored." The existence of an uncensored literary magazine gave writers, poets and essayists a choice, and many decided, for the first time in their lives, to write and publish uninhibited, putting their names out in the open. For the first time since 1945, they would not be jailed, only harassed and banned from official literary or academic life. We in the West would find money and help them financially.

From underground to achievement

For the samizdat–tamizdat–samizdat interrelation, *Zapis* became an excellent example. We initiated co-operation with the magazine *Index on Censorship* which agreed to use its imprint for the edition published discreetly by *Aneks*. Out of the 2,000 copies of every issue of *Zapis*, printed in fully professional form, we would smuggle around 1,500 copies into Poland. And then some people, often far away from Warsaw, would reprint a London edition.

Our own operation was similar. We would print 2,000 copies of *Aneks Quarterly* and smuggle 1,500 copies into Poland. Every issue and every book would be reprinted in the underground. We reprinted some underground magazines and

books in London. *Aneks* publishers reprinted all issues of two quarterlies: the left-of-centre *Krytyka* and the more conservative *Res Publica*. This is how tamizdat was intimately intertwined with samizdat. There is a pertinent question which needs to be answered here: At what point did independent publishing activity influence public opinion to support the opposition – namely, the Workers Defence Committee (KOR) in Poland, Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, and the intellectual opposition in Hungary?

This depended very much on the nature of the regime in question, the level of repression, as well as the international context. In Poland, the determining factors were 1) the 1975 Helsinki Agreement that provided the basis for the demands to respect human and civil rights; 2) the organised action of KOR and other organisations between 1976 and 1980; 3) the massive loans the Edward Gierek regime took out in the West that made it more vulnerable to western pressure and kept it on a relatively liberal course; and 4) the massive scale of the activities of the Solidarność trade union (1980–1989).

The radio not only produced daily news programmes, but read out on air individual articles, essays and whole novels which reached a truly massive audience in Poland.

The role of KOR was particularly significant as it not only defended oppressed and imprisoned workers, students and intellectuals, but because it fought for free speech. Consequently, its great achievement was that, during the Gdańsk shipyard strikes in August 1980, the workers, supported by KOR activists, demanded not just higher wages but the creation of the independent trade union and freedom of expression. This was a point of no return.

The circle of hope

However, the circle of hope would have been incomplete without a third very important actor that had reinforced both samizdat and tamizdat. This was the western radio stations, the intertwined broadcasting activity of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, the BBC, and, to a lesser extent, the Voice of America and Radio France International.

We did not only produce daily news programmes but read out on air verbatim individual articles and essays, whole novels or historical handbooks which reached a truly massive audience in Poland and in other Soviet-dominated countries. Every broadcast was repeated several times over the course of a week. The importance of this cannot be overstated – such co-operation meant that the articles published as

samizdat or tamizdat reached tens of thousands of readers and millions of listeners on the other side of the Iron Curtain.

What is important here is that Radio Free Europe and the BBC paid quite generous author's fees which were then sent by us to the authors back in Poland, eventually helping them remain independent from the authorities. What I called the Circle of Hope was complete. It was a very dynamic process, in which one part influenced the other two: samizdat-tamizdat-radio-samizdat-tamizdat-radio…

Summing up, I left Poland in 1970 with no hope that things would ever change for the better. Who would dare think back then that Soviet communism could implode with just a little outside help? However, in time we became aware that anything we could do to help feed the cycle, to make the Circle of Hope work, would help push back Soviet communism, and make it disappear. And so it did. Good riddance.

Eugeniusz Smolar is a member of *New Eastern Europe*'s editorial board. His study of economy at Warsaw University was interrupted by imprisonment as a result of participation in student demonstrations in March 1968 and protests against the Warsaw Pact armies' invasion of Czechoslovakia in August of that year. Following his release from jail, he immigrated to Sweden in 1970 and studied at the Uppsala University. In 1975 he joined the Polish Section of the BBC World Service and in 1982 he became its deputy director, and later on director (1988–1997). He was a co-founder of the émigré political quarterly *Aneks* (1973–1990) and the Aneks Publishing House. Following his return to Poland in 1997, he became a member of the Management Board of Polskie Radio S.A. (Polish Radio) responsible for programming (1998–2002), and later became its Programme Director. In October 2005, he became the President of the Center for International Relations where he now works as a Senior Fellow and Member of the Board. He has been involved in the Polish-Czech, Polish-German, Polish-Russian and Polish-Ukrainian dialogue.

The Polish Round Table

A bird's-eye view

PAULINA CODOGNI

Today, the 1989 Round Table is still a topic of an important discussion in Poland, one that in the last years has become more intense than ever before. Many participants of the discussion are still active in Polish political life, including former presidents and prime ministers. A majority of them stresses the positive aspects of the negotiations. Yet the Round Table has always had fierce critics.

The Polish Round Table negotiations, which started in February 1989, were one of those events whose meaning was not clear from the very beginning. In a way, we can compare this moment of Polish history to Julius Caesar's crossing of the Rubicon in 49 BC, after he ignored the order of the senators who were well aware of his high ambitions and wanted to keep him away from Rome. It marked the beginning of the end of the Roman Republic, while from that moment on, the phrase "crossing the Rubicon" refers to a decision, or a historical event, which brings about irreversible consequences.

Two sides

When the representatives of the Polish democratic opposition and the government coalition sat together for negotiations in February 1989, their goal was to prepare a plan for a transition which would allow Poland to emerge from the deepening economic crisis. They had different motives to join the negotiations.

The opposition team (Solidarity) wanted to re-legalise at the lowest possible price the Solidarność trade union. Its leader, Lech Wałęsa, was not participating in the discussions, but was monitoring the negotiations. The authorities, led by the Chairman of the Council of State, General Wojciech Jaruzelski, wanted to move the burden of the government to the opposition. In other words, they wanted to introduce necessary painful changes to neutralise the opposition's influence in Polish society. The authorities were also aware that they could no longer keep the society engaged as people were demotivated by meaningless elections and could now refuse to go and vote.

In that case, how was it possible that representatives of these two sides which, until then, could not engage in dialogue, decided to start negotiations? There are many factors explaining this decision, but the economic crisis was undoubtedly a large element. Secondly, an important role was the respect each side and the Polish society had for the Catholic Church whose representatives were continuously calling for dialogue. However, external factors also played an important role, especially the position of the US President Ronald Reagan, and Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms in the Soviet Union, as well as the standing of Pope John Paul II who provided Poles with strong spiritual support.

Both sides realised that undertaking negotiations was necessary because of the strikes that had erupted in 1988. Their first wave took place in the spring, lasting from April until May 1988, while the second, much longer one happened between August and September that year. Interestingly, the opposition and the authorities came to a completely different, even contradictory, conclusion. For the leaders of Solidarity, the strikes were not a threat to the system. Indeed, very few workers participated in them, and the chances of greater support in the factories were small. The authorities, on the other hand, saw the workers' protest as a beginning of a larger wave, which could turn into a much significant and real threat. They were also afraid that the "old" opposition leaders, whom they saw as predictable, could have been removed from the decision-making process. This interpretation meant that the 1988 strikes were led by relatively young people who did not have any direct experience of Solidarity in 1980.

Talks about talks

The direct effect of the second wave of 1988 strikes was a meeting between the leader of the Solidarność trade union, Lech Wałęsa, and General Czesław Kiszczak. It was during this meeting when the agreement on starting the negotiations was made. These "talks about talks" started in early September 1988 and lasted

until January 1989. They took place during an extremely crucial, although often underestimated, period. It was then – before the start of the Round Table negotiations – when the decision was actually made to re-legalise Solidarność at the price of the opposition's participation in parliamentary elections. Thus, the official talks, which started in February, were preceded by a few high-level meetings between Wałęsa and Kiszczak, as well as a few other lower-ranking officials. These talks illustrated that, on both sides, there was a sense of a common goal and trust, although some tensions which led to a serious impasses took place, lasting until the very last moment.

The Round Table talks started on February 6th 1989 and lasted for two months until April 5th 1989. Almost 600 people participated in them. There were three main thematic groups, also known as big tables (*stoliki*). This included a table negotiating the political reform, a table negotiating re-legalisation of Solidarność trade union, and a table discussing economic and social matters. In addition, negotiations were taking place at ten subtables (*podstoliki*). All these talks included leaders of the opposition and the communist party. However, they also involved representatives of government and state institutions, as well as organisations like the associations of farmers, teachers, students, scouts, and academics. There were also opposition groups representing illegal associations of students, farmers and scouts. During these two months, the participants discussed many fundamental matters regarding Polish politics and economy, but also some more specific issues, such as the need for better ways of delivering drugs and medicine to rural areas, improvement in health and safety conditions for miners, and the safe transportation of toxic waste through Poland. Significantly, security and foreign policy were not discussed at all.

Neither the government coalition nor the opposition were prepared for the difficult and long confrontations they were about to face.

Neither the government coalition nor the opposition were prepared for the difficult and long confrontations they were about to face. The experience of Marshal Law, which was introduced in Poland in December 1981, hung heavy for the opposition, and that is why they had little faith that the talks would produce anything substantial. Thus in the early phases of the negotiations, the leaders of Solidarity perceived elections not as a means, but a price to be paid for the re-legalisation of the trade union. This thinking was based on the conviction that it was the free and independent trade unions, not the opposition's presence in parliament, which would lead to real change in Poland.

After the difficult negotiations, the leaders of the communist party agreed to hold free elections in the Polish Senate and partially free elections in the parlia-

ment's lower house – the Sejm. The agreement allowed for only 35 per cent of Sejm mandates to be obtained through competitive campaigns, while the rest were reserved for members of the ruling coalition. The opposition came to the realisation that elections were not only a price for the re-legalisation of Solidarity, but a huge opportunity. In the end, both sides agreed on two election rounds. If none of the candidates managed to get 50 per cent or more in the first round, the second round would see two candidates with the highest score competing against each other. This formula, which was agreed on during the negotiations, was a combination of election rules known in both democratic and authoritarian regimes.

It is difficult to understand why the Polish communist authorities were certain they would win in free and competitive elections.

Both sides also agreed that subsequent elections would be completely free and that there would be a four-year transition period – something which they – nonetheless – understood in very different ways. The ruling coalition needed this time to reinforce its power through the implementation – with the opposition's help – of socially painful and unpopular, but unavoidable, economic reforms. The opposition, in turn, needed time to organise itself and get prepared for the fully democratic elections, planned for 1993.

The moment of truth

From today's perspective, it is difficult to understand why in 1989 the Polish communist authorities were certain they would win in free and competitive elections. One of the possible explanations could be that the communists were confident of their experience and certain that the opposition would not have enough time to get adequately prepared. The first round of elections was planned for early June 1989, only two months after the official signing of the agreement of the Round Table, which took place on April 5th that year.

June 4th 1989 became the moment of truth. All 261 Solidarity candidates, with the exception of eight, passed the 50 per cent threshold and thus received the necessary number of votes to take over both chambers of parliament. Those who did not get that number of votes went on to the second round. All Solidarity candidates, except one, were elected into parliament. The coalition side had a very different outcome. Only three of its candidates managed to achieve 50 per cent in the first round. Another disaster the communist party faced was the failure of the so-called national list, which had the names of the coalition's 35 main leaders. Only two of

them managed to pass the 50 per cent threshold, and since no second round was foreseen, it meant they could not get into the parliament.

The unexpected results of the June elections completely changed the Polish political landscape. In just a few months the agreements that were established during the Round Table were outdated and the concept of the "transition period", which assumed limited participation of the opposition in executive power, lost its validity. Even with Jaruzelski elected to the newly established office of president, the communist party faced serious obstacles while forming a government. Thus after Kiszczak's failure in establishing a new cabinet of ministers, the opposition got a realistic chance to take part in government. The mission to form a government was then assigned to Tadeusz Mazowiecki, who asked members of the opposition and the communists to co-operate. On September 12th 1989, the composition of the new government was officially approved by parliament. Mazowiecki became the first non-communist prime minister, since the end of the Second World War, in the whole Eastern European bloc.

One gate

The outcomes of the Round Table were a surprise for both sides, while the dynamics of future events turned out to be completely different than planned. The course of events can probably be best explained by the psychology of the negotiations. Clearly, the months-long talks, which took place both before and during the official negotiations, allowed some barriers to be overcome. As a result, both sides started treating each other more as partners than enemies. Both the communists and the opposition, during the talks, stressed the need for establishing partnership. One of the participants on the authorities' side, Tadeusz Mrzygłód, put it this way: "When I came here I thought it would be a game where we will be shooting at two different gates, one gate will be the one of the authorities, while the other one will be the social and unionist gate. It turns out that we are all shooting at one gate." Yet it would be a mistake to think that the situation was easy for the opposition. The words of Władysław Frasyniuk, who during a meeting with Tadeusz Zakrzewski (a journalist with state-owned media), illustrates the attitude then: "I was jailed for a few years; together with my fellow prisoner we were watching you and your colleagues programmes and was dream-

The outcomes of the Round Table were a surprise for both sides, while the dynamics of future events turned out to be completely different than planned.

ing that the moment will come when we will be able to spit straight into your face. Unfortunately, the situation in the country is such that I cannot do that."

Today, the Round Table is still a topic of important discussion, one that in the last number of years has become more intense than ever. Many participants of the Round Table discussions are still active in Polish political life, including former presidents and prime ministers. The majority of them stress the positive aspects of the negotiations. Their general way of thinking is well expressed by the words of the late Bronisław Geremek who said: "We had a vision of a national tragedy. We knew that the decomposition of the economy was progressing very fast and that if we did not quickly find some kind of an arrangement, alliance or agreement, we could wake up in Poland's ruins. Had we treated Poland as an animal farm, it would have of course been better to wait until the managers finally prove their inefficiency, take it to a complete ruin, and then we could take over all power. However, we were not thinking about an animal farm, but our country."

Criticism

Despite all that has happened, the Round Table negotiations have always had its critics. Historians are constantly faced with their "black legend", which argues that the talks were participated by "red" and "pink" commies, meaning the acting and former members of the communist party. This argument states that they joined the talks in order to gain access to the state enterprise and funds. Supporters of this theory believe that the Round Table was only a show organised for the people, while the opposition and the communists signed a secret protocol. Another line of criticism argues that the opposition should not have engaged in any negotiations with the communist generals, who were responsible for the earlier persecutions of the regime's opponents. Critics who have invoked this line of argument have also stressed that allowing the opposition to participate in the negotiations meant that the authorities were weak. Negotiations with the opposition, in this way, only served to prolong the reign of the communist party. In truth, even Wałęsa agreed that the Round Table made the subsequent lustration process difficult.

Critics argue that the opposition should not have engaged in any negotiations with the communist generals who were responsible for the earlier persecutions.

Finally, some of the criticisms also have a symbolic dimension. Because of the negotiations, there was no "Storming of the Bastille" nor any symbolic moment

of change. The Polish people had no chance to experience a sense of catharsis or new order. The logic of the Round Table consisted of something else. It is probably best expressed by the words of the late Kazimierz Dziewanowski, a witness to the events, who said:

"The Round Table was an unprecedented event in the [socialist] bloc of states. It took place after decades during which we were seeing changes in various pieces of furniture, starting with the court benches [where oftentimes falsely accused would sit]… to podiums and church pulpits. And since [a round table] is such an unprecedented piece of furniture, its idea and way of setting up could not be flawless. I think that this piece of furniture raised too many expectations in the beginning and was too poorly prepared. It was the first such table where nobody was pounding it with their fist but where arguments, proposals and ideas were presented – it became a witness to many elaborated and beautifully formulated, but very general, declarations, while later it was burdened by a huge pile of details… I am perfectly aware that there will be voices that will argue that many issues were missed, ignored and forgotten. All this is true, but it is also clear that, after over 40 years of silence, you cannot, in just a few weeks, talk over every matter and solve all important problems of a medium-sized European country."

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

Paulina Codogni is an assistant professor in the department of Central-Eastern Europe and Post-Soviet Studies at the Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Science. She specialises in civil resistance and is an author of a book *Okrągły Stół, czyli polski Rubikon* (Round Table, as a Polish Rubicon) published in 2009.

The bodies of the Velvet revolution

Remembering 1989 in the Czech Republic

ČENĚK PÝCHA AND VÁCLAV SIXTA

During the 1990s, the commemoration of November 17th 1989 was dominated by the generation of witnesses and former dissidents. Today, it is mostly in the hands of the younger generation that did not directly participate in the events of 1989; they must find other ways to formulate the significance of the commemoration.

Národní Street in Prague has become a place of commemoration of the last Czech (Czechoslovak) great historical turning point – the fall of the communist regime. On November 17th 1989 a student march was violently repressed here. This event triggered nationwide social changes leading to the fall of state socialism. The two authors of this article do not have the events of November 1989 in their living memory, yet in our teenage years, the surge of our parents' generation was the closest one can get to the so-called "great history". Although it might seem that the current generation has not done anything that will be written into future history books, history has certainly not ended. The way the commemoration of November 17th has been changing suggests a shift in how history is understood and what the current topics of the politics of memory are.

Two levels of memory

Laying wreaths, lighting candles at a memorial plaque, showing red cards at protests against the current President, Miloš Zeman, slam poetry events, readings of Václav Havel's works, shining torches in the hands of demonstrators calling for the resignation of the prime minister, the march of the Velvet Carnival allegorical procession, and writing messages on the wall – these are just some of the ways people in the Czech Republic in recent years have remembered the fall of state socialism. What these diverse forms of remembrance all have in common is the emphasis on their performative dimension: All who want to participate in remembrance come to Prague's Národní Street, also because of the rich cultural programme that accompanies the celebration every year.

There are two basic ways of talking about November 1989 and memory in the Czechoslovak context. On the first level, memory was an important co-driver of the events that happened at that time and a reservoir of the symbols of the protesters. The wave of protests that occurred as early as January 1989 foreshadowed the march on November 17th where mostly students commemorated the legacy of Jan Palach, a student who set himself on fire in January 1969 in protest against the occupation of the Warsaw Pact troops (August 1968). It seems that the protesters began to remember the political activity of the late 1960s and used these symbols for their own purpose. It is the commemoration of Palach's sacrifice, which was very clearly associated with his physicality, to which the symbolic act of self-immolation strongly refers. Palach's face became an identifiable symbol of protest.

The second level of memory was the creation of a narrative describing the changes in 1989. November 17th 1989 is often mentioned in connection with bodies – this time with the collective body of a student march that was a victim of police violence. In the end, the police beatings were acts that mobilised society and resulted in the Velvet Revolution, which, incidentally, happened without any physical violence. Given how closely the remembrance of November 17th 1989 is associated with physical experience, we have chosen the body as a metaphor that will help us understand the changes in the remembrance.

Let us now shift our attention to the present. November 17th 2018, in the afternoon. Although Národní Street is closed off because of the celebrations, there are two tram cars with numbers 39 and 89 on them at the "Národní divadlo" (National Theatre) tram stop. Inside, every half hour visitors can learn about the history of the events they are commemorating. A video shot on November 17th 1974 is playing on a screen which depicts laying wreaths at the memorial plaque with international guests in attendance. November was also commemorated in Czechoslovakia before 1989. While today the transition to democracy is at the centre of attention,

in the period of socialism, commemorations focused mainly on the fight against fascism, commemoration of the student protest against the Nazi occupation in 1939 (a student named Jan Opletal died and another nine student leaders were executed, others died in concentration camps, Czech universities were closed). So at the very beginning of the commemoration there were bodies – dead bodies as the victims of Nazi violence and malevolence. The funeral of Opletal took place on November 15th 1939 and that turned into a great manifestation.

Making connections

The events of 1939 were commemorated as International Students' Day – an international day in 1941 that was proclaimed in London in connection with the Nazi repression of students at Czech universities. This day was also remembered after the war, although it reflected the Cold War rivalry. Students and representatives of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia commemorated this holiday as a day of struggle against fascism and the suffering of Czech students and teachers. However, at least according to the media at that time, the commemoration was rather awkward, mainly conveyed by laying wreaths in memory of the victims. If there was any movement on the Students' Day, it was in the direction of restriction against direct political references, for example, celebrating in the form of an innocent student carnival.

Today's relationship between the two dimensions of November 17th is well illustrated by the topography of celebrations that take place on Národní Street.

Today's relationship between the two dimensions of November 17th is well illustrated by the topography of celebrations that take place on Národní Street (i.e. a place connected with police violence against students). Today, Albertov (the place of Opletal's funeral) is the place where politicians make speeches and then move to Národní Street. There the cultural programme is attended every year by tens of thousands of people.

There have been several attempts to connect the two places. The first attempt dominated the 20th anniversary (in 2009) when the Opona society organised a march called 20 Years Without a Curtain – A Thing to Celebrate!, which followed the same route as the 1989 march. A more recent attempt was a run that followed the same route; the event is now organised annually under #runjinak by the platform *Díky, že můžem* (Thanks that We Can). The two events focus on 1989 (the year 1939 is not that important), but their concepts differ. While the march in 2009 focused on civil society and critical engagement, the run is an apolitical way to join

the celebrations. The last major attempt to emphasise the importance of 1939 was a proposal to rename the day as "International Students' Day and the Day of Fight for Freedom and Democracy", which was approved by the chamber of deputies, only to be rejected in 2016 by the Czech senate.

There is also something else connected to Albertov – two commemorative plaques. The first was unveiled in 2006 and has the simple inscription: "When – if not now, Who – if not us?" and the date November 17th 1989. It is a quote from one of the student banners in 1989 at the meeting in Albertov. The second commemorative plaque was placed directly across the street in 2014. The dates November 17th 1989 – November 17th 2014 are engraved on it together with the explanation: "25th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution and the march of students of Prague universities from Albertov to Národní Street." This plaque is dedicated to "all the brave citizens of our country who were not afraid to express their opinion and fight for freedom and democracy", and was unveiled by the presidents of the Czech Republic, Poland, Germany, Hungary and Slovakia to mark the 25th anniversary.

Although a commemorative plaque is always a reflection of the official celebration and politics of memory, it is clear the two versions point to different aspects of remembrance. While the plaque commemorating the 25th anniversary will soon become outdated (although it is the more recent one), the plaque that only bears a simple inscription is far more likely to survive because it can be interpreted in different ways. The simpler plaque calls for more activity, and the inscription can be updated by one's own political activity. This is one of the dominant symbols of how November 17th 1989 is commemorated today – a call for civic engagement. If we were to refer again to the physical aspects of remembrance, the newer plaque is rather static and refers to the so-called laying of wreaths, while the older one's inscription can be perceived as a call for action, not just physical movement. However the question remains: what should this engagement look like?

Link to the past

Last year's protests against the current politicians were on such scale that Prime Minister Andrej Babiš, who faces allegations of co-operation with the Communist State Security, chose to lay a flower on Národní Street in the early morning hours. Zeman decided not to come at all. Yet both of them were attacked – at least symbolically – because the flowers they had laid were thrown into the bin by protesters, an act that was investigated by the police. In this way, in the minds of some of the participants in memory acts, the two politicians became a symbol that links to the dismal past. Throwing flowers away could have been seen as act that is more in

line with the police violence in 1989, rather than active political action. The group that has organised the Velvet Carnival (Sametové posvícení) since 2012 works with political symbols in a more sophisticated way. The Czech word *posvícení* refers to a church consecration ceremony – so November 17th 1989 is a metaphor for the consecration of a new regime. Thus the Velvet Carnival is both an opportunity to celebrate and to criticise the present situation, when everything is overturned in the carnivalesque sense. There were masks present in the procession that are caricatures of politicians and the current political scandals along with various forms of social inequality. The body is present here wearing masks. Unlike bowing to buried bodies, the carnival bodies are a symbol of active life and political engagement. In this sense, mockery does not equal violence; rather it is a call for dialogue.

The Velvet Carnival is both an opportunity to celebrate and to criticise the present situation.

Looking back at the various forms of commemoration, we can thus distinguish between political and apolitical forms of engagement. We may ask whether the November 17th events or the particular commemorative acts (e.g. organising a run, a speech, lighting a candle, a concert, etc.) is a particular political demonstration, or a cultural celebration that puts the current political topics of today out of sight.

Important division

Let us turn back to three decades ago. It was 1989, on a rainy day in the town of Most in Northern Bohemia. A group of students are trying to persuade the local miners to join the general strike in response to the violent crackdowns on the students on Národní Street. The hostile expressions on the miners' faces clearly show that the situation is heading towards a conflict rather than an agreement. To the question "what was the government's greatest mistake?" the group of miners respond: "That it was too soft". A scene from the film *Něžná revoluce* (*A Tender Revolution*), directed by Jiří Střecha and Petr Slavík in 1989, clearly shows that acceptance of the revolutionary ideals outside its centre in Prague could by no means be taken for granted. Every year, crowds walk through the centre of Prague to commemorate November 17th 1989. We can also ask how do these miners spend this day? What did the regime change for them and their children?

This picture has its counterpart in events that already happened between November 8th and 11th 1989 in the same region of Teplice. In that period, hundreds – and later thousands – of people gathered to protest against the disastrous air pollution, and through a petition they forced the city leaders and representatives of the

communist party to negotiate with them. The negotiation took place on November 20th, but under the influence of the Prague events, its content went far beyond air pollution in the local region. Nevertheless, here too the physical dimensions of the protest came to the fore, when the protesters were no longer willing to accept the serious effects the poor state of the environment had on their bodies.

The tension between the local and the national (Prague and the regions) is one of the central themes that links the years 1989 and 2019. Indeed, historian James Krapfl (author of *Revolution with a Human Face*, 2013) has shown that the key actors in the early days of the revolution were the local leaders of the Civic Forum, who collected ideas from citizens, organised protests and negotiated with representatives of the local authorities. He has referred to the period between November 17th and November 27th 1989 as a time of a true bottom-up mobilisation in most of Czechoslovakia. Neither this mobilisation, nor its main actors are much commemorated today, and the same is true for the problems that border regions face now.

The tension between the local and the national is one of the central themes that links the years 1989 and 2019.

The fact that local activists would neither have their voices heard nor be recognised at the national level could already be seen at the national congress of the Civic Forum that took place on December 23rd 1989 where two-thirds of the 92 delegates were hailed from Prague. Krapfl then links the disappointment of the local activists with the departure of the ideals of the revolution, which, according to him, is symbolised by two post-November politicians, Václav Klaus (the Czech Republic) and Vladimír Mečiar (the Slovak Republic). The miners from Most and the organisers of the mass mobilisation of the Czechoslovak population, in the first phase of the revolution, represent the bodies that are excluded from today's celebrations, namely, those who stand on the margins.

Next generation of commemorations

During the 1990s, the commemoration of November 17th 1989 was dominated by the generation of witnesses and former dissidents. Today, it is mostly in the hands of the younger generation that did not directly participate in the events of 1989; they must find other ways to formulate the significance of the commemoration. If we want to look at contemporary remembrance from a distance, we have to remember that even our own bodies become part of particular commemorative acts.

We should think about what part of our bodies do we want to become during the celebrations – is it the static body, recognising the victims of violence in the

past, but not going any further? Another option is to take seriously the call for action that should not be only limited to one day a year. It is also important to have one's own movement under control so that it does not turn into violence, like the case of throwing away flowers or throwing eggs at politicians.

After all, non-violence associated with regime change in Czechoslovakia is still the major legacy of the Velvet Revolution, which was triggered by a violent act. But this act was eventually transformed into an activity that led to change. The insight into both the history and commemoration of November 17th 1989 leads us to the conclusion that one of the central issues of the current anniversary should be a focus on the incorporation of the currently excluded bodies into the discussion surrounding 1989.

Čeněk Pýcha is a historian and media theorist. He works at the education department of the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes. He is co-author of the educational website http://socialismrealised.eu.

Václav Sixta is a historian and educator specialising in contemporary history and its commemoration at the education department of the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes.

May 1st 1989, Gdynia campaign rally for candidates of the Solidarność trade union running for parliament in the first semi-free elections after the Round Table discussions.

Photo: Leonard Szmaglik / European Solidarity Centre Collection

May 27th 1989, a pro-Solidarity election rally in Tczew (40 km south of Gdańsk). From left to right: Olga Krzyżanowska, Szymon Pawlicki, Bogdan Lis and Lech Kaczyński.

Photo: Leonard Szmaglik / European Solidarity Centre Collection

Decorations supporting Solidarity for the special automobile rally organised at the end of the election campaign. Gdańsk, June 3rd 1989.

Photo: Janusz Bałanda Rydzewski / European Solidarity Centre Collection

Commemoration of the Hungarian 1956 Revolution on October 23rd 1989.

Photo: Fortepan archive / public domain

A young Viktor Orbán addressing the crowd as a representative of the youth during the funeral and reinterment of Imre Nagy on June 16th 1989.

Photo via Elekes Andor (CC) www.flickr.com

October 23rd 1989 – the proclamation of the Republic of Hungary, before the Parliament.

Photo: Fortepan archive / public domain

In November 1989, East German students sit atop the Berlin Wall at the Brandenburg Gate in front of border guards. The destruction of the once-hated wall signalled the end of a divided Germany.

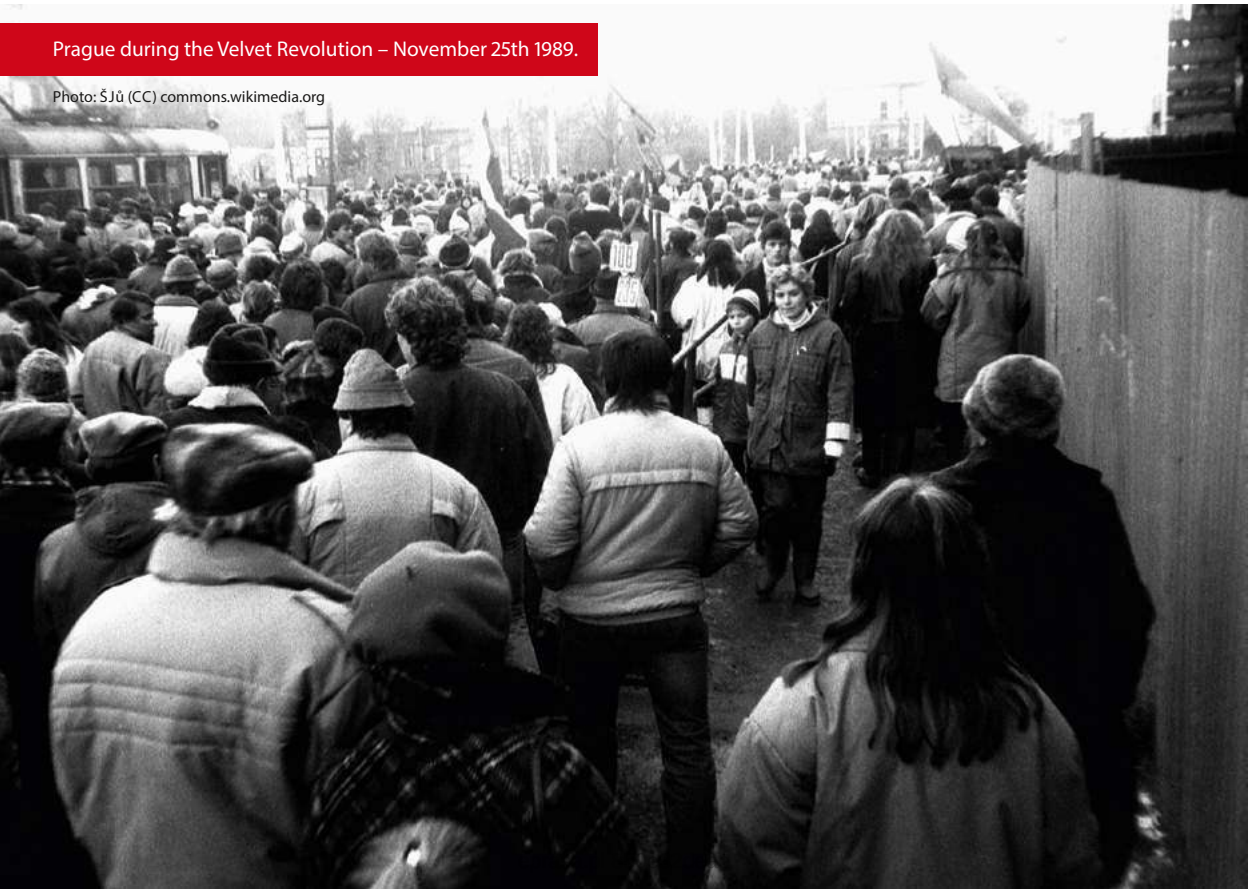
Photo: (Public Domain) University of Minnesota Institute of Advanced Studies / US National Guard

A December 1989 demonstration in Timișoara, Romania. The Romanian anti-communist revolution that started in Timișoara in 1989 was a chapter with many human losses.

Photo: FORTEPAN / Urbán Tamás (CC) commons.wikimedia.org

Prague during the Velvet Revolution – November 25th 1989.

Photo: ŠJů (CC) commons.wikimedia.org



We must not forget the values we fought for in 1989

Interview with Markus Meckel, a German theologian and politician. Interviewer: Kristin Aldag

KRISTIN ALDAG: As an active member of the opposition in East Germany, you were very much involved in the events of the peaceful revolution in 1989. What was the most influential moment or event for you that year?

MARKUS MECKEL: It was a very moving year for me. At the beginning of the year, together with a friend who, like me, was a Protestant pastor, I decided to set up a social democratic party in East Germany. That was, of course, a daring idea, because establishing a political party in the communist GDR was completely illegal. On the other hand, the establishment of the Social Democratic Party was an attack on the ruling Socialist Unity Party's self-understanding since it had defined itself as a union of the working class of social democrats and communists. But that was the way it was meant to be. It was basically a message that said "we need a different system, we need democracy, and for that we must anticipate both democratic behaviour and democratic structures".

At that time, we did not know our decision was made only a few days before the establishment of the Round Table Talks in Poland, which started on February 6th. That was only a few weeks after Gorbachev's speech to the UN General Assembly in December 1988. His speech demonstrated to us that Gorbachev himself was already well on the path to substantial change. He had begun with *perestroika*, an internal reform process with an external dimension. In 1988, elections were held in the Soviet Union which was unimaginable before. At the same time, this reform process was a signal of what was possible for Poland and Hungary, which were already much more internally in motion. In Poland, we saw the willingness of the Polish communist party to negotiate with Solidarność, naturally under the pressure of political and economic conditions. There was also some movement in Hungary. Our decision to set up a party was part of that larger movement, a dynamic that had great significance.

On October 7th we formally set up our party, still underground, and two days later we already saw the first huge demonstrations in Leipzig where 70,000 people turned up. There was a danger that the protests would be bloodily suppressed. But this did not happen and we became sure we would be successful in establishing democracy. Hence, if I were to name the most important event of the GDR as a whole it would be October 9th, because it was the moment we could say "we can make it with democracy". Then, of course, the Berlin Wall fell on November 9th. I would call the fall something like the storming of the Bastille in the French Revolution; that is to say, the day became a symbol of the Central European revolutions where everyone witnessed something that can no longer be reversed. In this respect, I see November 9th not only as an important day in Germany, but the day of the victory of the Central European revolutions.

Were you already aware that all eyes were on Germany?

We really did not know what was going to happen then. Since October 9th we had been extremely active in demonstrations, building up the party, in structuring the opposition and in turning the party into a political force. On the other hand, we tried to increase the pressure of the public on the streets. When Erich Honecker (leader of the communist party) was overthrown in October, the state was completely thrown off track. The communist party became anxious and tried to reorganise itself. At the beginning of November, there were the first resignations within the party, the politburo and the entire leadership. From then on, the collapse of power could be observed. And it was certain that there had to be free elections.

At the beginning of November, just before the fall of the Berlin Wall, we started preparations for a Round Table in the GDR. But then the wall came down. Public awareness today often pretends that the fall would already represent German unity, but of course this was not the case. With this date it only became clear the process of democratisation could no longer be completely separated from the question of German unity.

To what extent was the idea of a Round Table in the GDR inspired by the events in Poland?

The Round Table in Poland was a major inspiration for us. The Hungarians also imitated it in the summer of 1989. It was, so to speak, the symbol of a negotiated revolution. That, I believe, is the great merit of Poland: a model developed that could be applied throughout Central Europe, thus creating a symbol of non-violence. Some people in Poland are nowadays fiercely opposed to this narrative arguing that it was a toothless revolution. I would daresay that that is precisely what made it special!

Were you aware at that time of the reactions of other countries to the develop-

ments in Germany? Were there impulses or influences from the GDR on the other countries?

I think there was a sign in Prague in November which read: "In Poland the revolution took 10 months, in the GDR 10 weeks and in Prague 10 days." I think there is something about this; it was a process of acceleration. The events in Poland were the first big signs that something would happen, that the communist party would be forced to sit at the table. That was also a sensation for us. And then, of course, the election in Poland (which was very decisive), made it clear where the public stands. That, too, was a huge encouragement for us that something could be done.

But Hungary also played a central role. Hungary had begun to dismantle its border structures with Austria in the spring of 1989. By the end of June there was a public presentation of this dismantling process with the Foreign Ministers Gyula Horn (Hungary) and Alois Mock (Austria) celebrating the dismantling of the border installations. This signified hope for many East Germans who did not want to change anything, but simply wished to leave. In the course of the summer, 50,000 people from the GDR arrived to the West via Hungary and then on to other countries. The situation made it possible for the opposition and those who wanted to leave in order to unite. Before that, there were tensions in the GDR between those who wanted to leave and those who wanted to change something, – as the saying went: "Don't go away – support the fight for change here." But in the end, both contributed to the change and those who wanted to leave also took to the streets with the others.

However I don't believe in the domino effect, as it was depicted on a well-known poster about ten years ago. This model said it started with the first domino in Poland, the second in Hungary, then the GDR, and then Czechoslovakia. One tips the others over. One cannot say that the changes in the GDR only began when the domino tumbled in Poland. But it was tremendous encouragement.

Previously, it was assumed that nothing would change without something changing in Moscow. That was the experience of the last number of decades: 1953 in the GDR, 1956 in Poland and Budapest, 1968 in Czechoslovakia. Tanks appeared and crushed the protests by force. But now something changed in Moscow. There were new messages and the release of Central Europe from coercion. That gave us the space for freedom that we had to feel. For us in the GDR, it was already clear at the beginning of the round table that, in the end, there would be totally free elections. It was only a matter of clarifying the details of the election, the electoral law and so on. That did not mean the GDR was any better, but the dynamics that had begun in Poland and Hungary in 1989 accelerated the process. Hence, each country had its own history that led to the revolution, but the transformations in 1989 are ultimately a common event,

as if connected by pipes underground. There were also relations between the various opposition forces, but also between the public.

Is there still a common memory or a common European narrative about the year 1989?

Even within one country you don't necessarily have a common narrative, as the year 1989 is highly controversial. Take a look at Poland. Many would certainly tell a completely different story than the one I have just told. This applies to Hungary as well. Viktor Orbán was a young student leader at the time; he became famous for a speech given in July 1989 at the reburial of the revolutionary Imre Nagy. At the time the common message was "Back to Europe". Today, Orbán talks with nationalist tones.

Today, the forces of PiS or Fidesz are basically anti-European and they take a very sceptical view of the European values these countries promoted at the time. Freedom and liberal constitutional structures were the essence of the image of Europe back then. Today when Orbán says he wants an illiberal democracy, one wonders where the impetus of 1989 had gone. We wanted to return to this liberal, enlightened Europe – the Europe of integration, the Europe that stands for freedom, the rule of law, and a rule-based foreign policy. It is important to link our memory of that time with that as well. In this respect, memory is always a contentious issue. Memory is something very much contemporary. It is essential not only for remembering past events, but also the values we stood up for back then, together with Poland, Hungary, the Czechs and Slovaks, the Baltic states and so on.

Were these values of freedom, a return to Europe, at least from your memory, shared by everyone?

That's the key element. When the Americans talk about the fall of the Berlin Wall, it is often with the rhetoric that Bush used at the time: "We won the Cold War"; and the symbol for this is the fall of the Berlin Wall. But it was not a victory of the West against the East, it was a victory of freedom and democracy, the rule of law and liberalism, the enlightened values of the West, which we all shared. It was not that the West ultimately defeated the East, but that the people in the East themselves stood up for these values with a great deal of risk and commitment. This was the breakthrough for a liberal, democratic Europe based on justice.

There were also various groupings within the East: the Baltic states belonged directly to the Soviet Union, while Poland, Hungary formed a part of the socialist bloc. Did that also make a difference in terms of the feeling of wanting to break out of the bloc or the Soviet Union?

It certainly made a difference, because the Soviet Union ultimately collapsed only in 1991. In addition to the internal contradictions and Gorbachev's hesitation, it was simply not possible to

preserve this complex structure and to design it in an emancipatory, democratic way. At that time, the idea of a free, independent nation played a major role: a free Poland, a free Hungary, a free Czechoslovakia. After the First World War, many of these countries emerged as democracies. The developments also had a national dimension for the GDR, but it was not a nationalistic dimension. Instead, we fought for unification. The framework of the nation was one that was related to freedom. After the communists had suppressed much of the national history and tradition, it was now revived and revised. That, of course, was one of the reasons why there were a whole series of problems afterwards, for example in the Balkans.

Of course, it also had this dimension in the Soviet Union. Let us take a look, for example, at the will of a free Ukraine and the fight for independence of the Baltic states. Some photos of the Baltic states, which seem to remind us of 1989, were in fact already taken in 1988 when the Baltic states already had the masses on the streets calling for the independence. In this regard, there are also some underground connections and pipes. The revolutions have the same spirit, but it was always a liberal one. Of course, even then there were also nationalists in these circles, who later organised themselves and caused a lot of trouble. We must not just look at it purely harmoniously. But the impetus was definitely an emancipatory, liberal one, and in Central Europe it was clearly related to Europe.

The slogan "Back to Europe" had something very emphatic and liberal about it. I have always been critical of this catchline. If you look at European history, it is easy to forget that both National Socialism and Communism, the two totalitarian dictatorships of the 20th century, are European offspring and creatures of intellectual and political history. This "back to Europe" has somewhat ignored this negative angle. Yet "back to Europe" then referred to a return to the Enlightenment, to Christian values, back to what the Polish May Constitution already expressed at the end of the 18th century: a separation of powers with legislature, government and independent judiciary, and the rule of law.

Was there ever any doubt in the GDR, including in the opposition, that there would be a unification of Germany, that it was logistically feasible?

I grew up in the East. My parents come from the West. I always understood myself as a German in this collectivity, but until the end of the 1980s, I didn't think it was possible to live in freedom or German unity. It was not even imaginable. One hoped for that, but didn't really think it was possible. When it became possible to take concrete steps, we naturally took them with commitment and joy. But until I was 35, I didn't think I could ever live in a democracy or even have freedom.

That is why I really must say that it is amazing that we Germans were able to achieve both freedom and democracy,

and then unification in 1989/90; and all of this only 45 years after the horrors we Germans brought to Europe. This was the hour of happiness for Germans. Of course, we have done something to make it happen, but in the end it is a great gift that we Germans not only live together in peace and friendship with all those whom we have caused terror, but also share these values in the European Union. We can be grateful for that, but it is also a responsibility that we share with the others, to ensure that these values continue to be upheld in the future.

Did the GDR and the other Central European states continue have a common sense of responsibility after 1989, and did they continue to work together to establish freedom and democracy?

Yes, that feeling has been present. The emergence of the Visegrad countries at the beginning of the 1990s is already a result of this common sentiment. They wanted to walk the road back to Europe and towards the European Union. There are not many politicians from the GDR who were later active in European affairs and foreign policy, but for me it was a matter of the legacy of 1989. It was important for me to make it possible for these states and peoples, who achieved freedom and democracy together with us, to share these transatlantic and European institutions. That is what I have worked very hard for during my time in the German Bundestag. It is also a consequence of 1989.

One can draw a connection from 1989 to 2004. It has been a challenge to stand up for this. In 2005, we had the Berlin Declaration on the road to the Lisbon Treaty. On that occasion, I worked intensively and successfully to ensure that not only the Treaty of Rome, which is hailed in the West as the foundation of the EU, is celebrated, but also the new members who, through their struggles and the implementation of justice and freedom, are a new source of the European Union. I find it essential that they are members of the European Union by their own right and not by mercy or charity.

Markus Meckel is a German theologian, politician and public intellectual. He served as the GDR's foreign minister in the lead up to German unification in 1990.

Kristin Aldag is a student at the Jagiellonian University and an intern with *New Eastern Europe*.

No bloody revolution

JÁNOS SZÉKY

The year 1989 unfolded quite differently for Hungary than the rest of the Central European states where there was some sort of revolution. As opposed to all other countries in the Eastern bloc, the new political system that came into place was seemingly designed in advance.

The consensual term for the historical events that took place in Hungary in 1989 is *rendszerváltás*. In Hungarian it literally means "changing of the system", as in Changing of the Guards. There are two other versions: *rendszerváltozás* ("the change of the system", using an intransitive verb) and *rendszerváltoztatás* ("making the system change", with a transitive and causative verb), reflecting some politico-linguistic subtleties that may be hard to grasp for a non-Hungarian speaker. The word "system" has special Hungarian connotations here, meaning the constitutional order or form of state.

What is important is that *rendszerváltás* is a way to avoid using the word "revolution", as there was no such focal event in Hungary of masses of people going on the streets and toppling the government. Neither does it mean "transition" in the scholarly sense, which often refers to three aspects: dictatorship to democracy; command economy to market economy; and East to West. For some reason, the rule of law (or in Hungarian usage, *jogállamiság*, which is a literal translation for German *Rechtsstaatlichkeit*) began to supplant democracy, to the extent that the pre-1989 regime is called "the non-rule-of-law system" in the Constitutional Court's documents. The transition of the economy and international policy – involving company law, the two-tier banking system, the opening of the stock exchange, and the "trade and co-operation treaty" with the European Community – initiated by the reformed communist government actually preceded the first steps towards political transformation.

Messy transition

Even the political transition looks messy for most people. As opposed to all other countries within the Eastern bloc, the new political system was designed in advance – "in the womb of the old society," as Marx would say. The forum where it was designed was called the National Round Table (official name Trilateral Co-ordinating Talks) from June to September 1989, with the governing Hungarian Socialist Workers Party (HSWP) on one side, the opposition (itself organised in a round table) on the second side, and a selection of pro-communist civil organisations on the third side (to make things more cumbersome).

Right until the very end, the wider public had only a vague idea of what the talks were about, and although all the protocols and transcripts were published around the millennium, only a few experts can say they are familiar with the real proceedings. There were also only a few people whose words mattered. At the Opposition Round Table, there was József Antall, a centre-right politician who became the first prime minister after the transition; Péter Tölgyessy, a young legal scholar from the liberal party SZDSZ (Free Democrats Alliance); Viktor Orbán of Fidesz, who at the time was a centrist liberal whiz-kid; and, maybe, Imre Boross, a lawyer, who represented the historically important Smallholders Party, but was expelled some months later as his party began to slide into demagoguery and anti-intellectualism.

Right until the very end, the wider Hungarian public had only a vague idea of what the talks were about.

Originally, these people and their friends only wanted to deal with one challenge, namely, fixing the conditions for a free election. But soon they realised they can and must co-operate with the reform-minded legal experts of the government (officially not subordinated to the HSWP anymore) in shaping the new, democratic constitution. However there was a problem with legitimacy and authority as the negotiators were not democratically elected, nor had they the mass support of Solidarity or the Polish Roman Catholic Church; on top of that, any agreement had to be passed through the non-democratic rubber-stamp parliament in order to achieve legal status.

The outcome was an overwrought compromise between democrats who were still wary of each other's intentions. The constitution, which was formally an amendment of the 1949 constitution of the People's Republic, was originally intended as not much more than a manual for the transition and was defined as temporary in its own preamble, but remained in force until 2011. One of its most prominent features was the multitude of "two-thirds acts", that is, clauses about which acts must be passed or amended with a qualified majority, which for the first two dec-

ades of the new republic meant the mandatory consensus between the government and the opposition. This not just prevented adjusting the law to changing requirements, but was an obstacle to effective governance, as the opposition was prone to resist for resistance's sake. The Fundamental Law of 2011 was not a remedy to this problem; on the contrary, victorious Fidesz used its own two-thirds majority to extend the same rule to matters of the economy, such as taxation.

Hungarian democracy from the very beginning was doomed for self-destruction.

Mandatory consensus was paired with probably the world's most complicated electoral system (which was based on the German law, except without the federal checks) which meant to create an artificial balance between two large blocs. This resulted in the consolidation of two large blocs more or less in balance, but politically more and more polarised as the easiest way to define one was as the antithesis, or the enemy, of the other. In this way, Hungarian democracy from the very beginning was doomed for self-destruction. All the same, this was not obvious during those years, as we enjoyed our newly gained freedoms – freedom of movement, being able to enter into the West whenever we like, freedom of speech, and a free press. Actually, all these preceded the constitutional process of 1989; they were perceived as the results of the dictatorship's gradual self-dismantling.

Rehabilitating 1956

We tend to only remember the good things, but the Hungarian dictatorship was also the most liveable during its last couple of years, so one could easily get the impression it was not toppled but evolved into a free political system. This may even be partly true. Antall was famous for mocking his ministers who complained about how "commie" strongholds prevailed: "You should have made a bloody revolution, gentlemen," meaning, "but you didn't". As I said, there was no revolution as we know it. But why, after all, is 1989 such a memorable year? What was there to fight for, and to win?

One of the peculiarities of *rendszerváltás* was the large demonstrations were started with some surrogate targets in mind rather than demanding the fall of the dictatorship itself. For instance, showing solidarity with the oppressed Hungarian minority in Ceaușescu's Romania; protesting against the building of a hydroelectric plant on the Danube that would destroy one of the country's most beautiful landscapes; and, most of all, rehabilitating the memory of 1956. For most people who lived through 1989, the crucial moment was the funeral and reinterment of

Imre Nagy, prime minister of the 1956 revolution, and his fellow martyrs on June 16th 1989 – the anniversary of their execution in 1958.

The rehabilitation of 1956 and revealing the truth about the horrible retribution – the execution of hundreds and imprisonment of thousands – were, of course, opposition territory. By early 1989, however, the politicians of the HSWP who wanted to reap the rewards of recent and earlier reform policies, but wanted to distance themselves from the dictator, János Kádár, caught the opportunity offered by the now-legal cult of 1956.

One should not forget that these were the days following Solidarity's victory in the Polish elections (June 4th), and HSWP realised that, although it was by far the most popular party, it must secure its advantage. So the funeral was attended by Prime Minister Miklós Németh and Speaker of the Parliament Mátyás Szűrös, and broadcasted on the state television, showing the government's support. Everybody from the head of the government through the Round Table Opposition to non-incorporated radicals were interested in framing the event as a system changing moment. It might have been – but at a heavy price. They suggested that the regime named "the Kádár System" must fall because of the original moral sin of its founder, that is, Kádár's reign of terror after the Soviet suppression of the revolution, rather than the general basic defects of the communist system, the lack of liberty and the economic cul-de-sac.

The funeral was originally organised by an NGO of 1956ers called the Historic Justice Committee, and political parties were not to be represented among the speakers. However there was one exception – Viktor Orbán, who was asked to speak in the name of "the Hungarian youth" rather than Fidesz. Public memory has preserved his speech as a courageous call "for the Russians to leave", but what he actually demanded was free elections, where "we can elect a government that would immediately start negotiations about the withdrawal of Russian troops without any delay". This implied that the current Németh government would not do that, although by then an artillery division had already left Hungary. Early the following year the same government started and signed negotiations about the complete withdrawal of troops before the free elections.

Interpretation

Thirty years have passed since then and the today's Orbán government has removed Imre Nagy's monument from the Martyrs' Square near parliament. The pro-government media tries to destroy Nagy's image, arguing that he was really a communist and citing historians who say he was an NKVD informant. The evidence

may be real, or it may be fake (not an uncommon Russian secret service tool), but the campaign clearly shows that the aim of today's government is to nationalise a left-wing and liberal narrative which was central to the *rendszerváltás*.

The government has announced intentions to commemorate the 30th anniversary of those events. The period of remembrance began on March 15th 2019 (on that day in 1989, there was a large joint opposition demonstration remembering the 1848 revolution) and will end on June 19th 2021, 30 years after the last Soviet troops left Hungary. The government has declared, "Western Europe left Central Europe to its own fate after the Second World War, but the national communities of Central Europe grabbed the chance and achieved their freedom and independence on their own."

This reveals a few things about how Orbán and his government see 1989. For them, it was a revolt of the victims of Western Europe. It was a cluster of national collectivist events and freedom should be understood here only in the national sense. It remains to be seen if government propagandists in Hungary will recognise the role of Miklós Németh and the then Foreign Minister Gyula Horn in the withdrawal of the Soviet troops. Most likely they will emphasise Orbán's heroic achievements – a much less complex storyline.

János Széky is the editor of *Élet és Irodalom* (*Life and Literature*), a weekly Hungarian newspaper about literature and politics.

Beyond nostalgia

EUGEN STANCU

The 30th anniversary of the fall of communism is an important milestone for Romania. Yet this anniversary is not present within the public space. Instead, today's challenges appear to be far more pressing for society.

For many Romanians, the fall of the communist regime in 1989 was an unexpected moment that brought hope for a different way of life and a better future. Nicolae Manolescu, a Romanian literary critic, public intellectual and politician in *The Right to Normality* (published in 1991) pleaded for the restoration of normalcy after the political, social and cultural "rupture" brought by the communist regime in Romania. But what did this "normality" mean, and who was asking for it?

There were numerous politicians, in particular former political prisoners or émigrés, mainly from the historical parties that were revived after the fall of communism and who maintained that the path for post-communist Romania should be found in the interwar period. The few decades between the two World Wars were a time Romania was a democratic country with rather functional institutions. It had a flourishing economy and a fruitful cultural scene that was connected, even synchronised, to the wider world. The communist regime imposed by the Soviet Union after the Second World War was considered a historical accident and an interruption of the "organic" trajectory of Romanian history.

Belgium of the Orient

Apart from politicians, there were other prominent public voices who thought the same: the inspiration for the post-communist period – social reconstruction and general development – should be found in interwar Romania. For instance,

Octavian Paler, a Romanian writer and civil activist during the 1990s and early 2000s, wrote about the interwar period, referring to it as the veritable miracle in which we synchronised with the West and managed to transform Bucharest into a little Paris; and Romania, a Belgium of the Orient.

For others, the interwar period offered not only inspiration but the key to survive during communism. Andrei Pleșu, a former Romanian foreign minister and president of the New Europe College, a prestigious institute of advanced studies in Bucharest, is a case in point. In an article written around a question asked by Bruce Ackerman – namely, how he managed to intellectually survive during communism – Pleșu explained that the most important intellectuals of his generation were the product of formative stages spent near former political prisoners. These intellectuals were arrested when the communist regime took power in Romania, pardoned only after 1964 and become the transmitters of a tradition of "intellectual normality". As Pleșu explains, "educated before the Second World War in a democratic Romania with good schools and good teachers who had studied at great European universities – a Romania which made the appearance of Constantin Brâncuși, Tristan Tzara and later the triad of Mircea Eliade, Eugen Ionesco and Emil Cioran possible – these former political prisoners were for us a guarantee of continuity."

For many Romanians, the interwar period offered not only inspiration but the key to survive during communism.

But this is only one side of the story. The other one was manifested and felt at the level of ordinary people who became the "social victims" of 1989. More and more, because of the protracted post-communist transitions, the communist regime was reconsidered by the general public as a lesser evil than the system of "wild capitalism" and "original democracy" – two terms used to critically and ironically refer to Romania post-1989. Many could not adapt to the new social reality – to the market economy and capitalism where one has to struggle for a living and identify opportunities. People started to long for the paternalist, yet precarious, stability they had become accustomed during communism.

To paraphrase Svetlana Boym, the communist regime began with futuristic utopia and ended with nostalgia. In post-communist Romania, there were two competing registers of nostalgia felt which informed citizens' hopes and dreams for the future. On the one hand, there was the idealised interwar period; and on the other hand, communist stability. The latter was now considered by many as not so adverse, if only Nicolae Ceaușescu, the last leader of the Romanian Communist Party, had not "perverted" it. This should be taken into account as overtones when referring to the commemoration of 1989.

Ongoing process

This year, three decades since the fall of communism, we celebrate a significant milestone. Coming to terms with the past is still an ongoing process in Romania. Many things were done, but there is much more to accomplish. Nonetheless they come to the fore every year – and here, I shall mention a few.

The most central action over the past three decades has been the condemnation of the communist regime. In 2006 Romania became the third former Eastern European communist country (after the Czech Republic and Bulgaria) to officially condemn its communist past. In order to achieve this, the Romanian president, Traian Băsescu, established the "Presidential Commission for the Study of the Communist Dictatorship in Romania", headed by Vladimir Tismaneanu, a Romanian American political scientist and professor at the University of Maryland, College Park. The commission drafted an extensive report where the president in it condemned the Romanian communists as "illegitimate and criminal". However, the condemnation did not solve the problem of its memorialisation. In December 2006 one of the commission's proposals was to establish a national museum of communism. The proposal was accepted by the president, but so far nothing has been done due to a lack of consensus, and the tendency to politicise any proposal or attempt to reach a solution.

According to official records, there were over 1,100 deaths and more than 4,000 injuries during the 1989 revolution.

Nevertheless the 30 year commemoration is not very present in the Romanian public space. This is largely because it overlaps with another a significant anniversary. In 2018 Romania celebrated a century since the formation of the modern state. After the First World War, all the provinces in which Romanians were the majority in united with the Romanian Kingdom. The centenary was celebrated last year, and the government decided to extend it for two more years.

However, coming to terms with its communist past is not an easy task for Romania and it is an ongoing story. It is not only about getting a consensus on its memorialisation, but also about solving the legal criminal issues related with the 1989 revolution. The Romanian anti-communist revolution that started in Timișoara in 1989 was a chapter with many human losses. According to official records, there were over 1,100 deaths and more than 4,000 injuries during the 1989 revolution. In Romania, the commemoration always means the remembrance of those who died for freedom. But in the three decades since the fall of communism, it has still to be clearly established who should be held responsible for those victims.

Broken promises

Even if the Romanian communist party was condemned as illegitimate and criminal, the problem with those held responsible for the victims is still pending. The process of the revolution has been tremendously politicised. It was opened, closed and re-opened again. Certainly, it remains one of the most contentious chapters of the post-communist period. Last year, President Klaus Iohannis approved the criminal prosecution request against Ion Iliescu, Petre Roman, and Gelu Voican Voiculescu. By the end of the year, two of them – Iliescu (former president of Romania: 1992–1996, 2000–2004) and Voican Voiculescu (president of the Romanian Institute for the Study of 1989 Revolution) – were officially accused of crimes against humanity. They were officially sued in April 2019; but what could be mostly achieved by this is a symbolic condemnation. Both are rather old and the trial will certainly be a long one.

Nevertheless, today's challenges appear to be far more pressing for society than the commemorating of the 1989 revolution. These concerns are mostly related to the current state of Romanian democracy and the rule of law. At the end of March this year, 12 embassies in Bucharest issued a joint statement on behalf of 12 countries, (Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United States) asking the Romanian authorities to abstain from any amendments on the judicial laws that would further weaken the rule of law in the country. Moreover there are discussions on the European level about the possibility of invoking Article 7 of the Treaty of the European Union against Romania.

This is only a snapshot of 2019 – the year when Romania celebrates 30 years since the fall of communism. The commemoration should be held against the promises of 1989. Yet Romania has not become the place that has realised the hopes and dreams it had 30 years ago. For instance, the undeniable reality is that over the past ten years, almost four million Romanians have left the country. Many emigrated, mostly to Western Europe, in search of a better life. In 1989 many Romanians dreamed of a better future in their own country, but today more and more are escaping in order to seek a better way of life elsewhere. Compared to the enthusiasm and hope felt in 1989, today's imagination about a bright future in Romania has, sadly, all but disappeared.

Eugen Stancu is a Romanian historian, editor of www.lapunkt.ro cultural magazine and a visiting fellow with the Institute of Human Sciences in Vienna.

Bulgaria's taboo

RADOSVETA VASSILEVA

In recent years, Bulgarians have gained better clarity about what happened during communism because of the efforts of researchers who dared dig up the dirt and make their findings available to a broader audience. And it is only now that the crimes of communism have been included in the mandatory school curriculum. This transparency is essential for understanding the political processes in Bulgaria post-1989.

I was born in Bulgaria in 1985, but I first learned about the particularities of communism in an academic setting in 2003 when I started university in the United States and enrolled in various classes on political science and history. Until then, my understanding of communism was entirely based on conversations with my family and the obscure samizdat books which my grandfather kept in his library. Communism was only included as a mandatory topic in Bulgaria's high school history textbooks in 2018 – a move criticised by the Bulgarian Socialist Party (a member of the Party of European Socialists and the largest opposition force) because the "benefits" of communism were not covered in the new curriculum. When asked to define these benefits, the party's leader Kornelia Ninova pinpointed construction, healthcare, education and security.

During the communist period, Bulgaria built many roads and factories which have subsequently been closed down. Healthcare was free, but of poor quality. In fact, in 1986, the communist regime purposefully hid the news of the Chernobyl nuclear accident and did not take any measures to protect ordinary citizens from the radioactive cloud which passed over Bulgaria. May 1st (Labour Day) parades were held in major cities under the radioactive rain. Education was also free, but

all subjects were heavily ideologised. The mass surveillance and torture of critics did not contribute to a feeling of security. Moreover, it was recently established that between 1960 and 1987 Bulgaria was bankrupted three times, which the regime hid by publicising false data. The future was bright only for the members of the inner circle of the communist party who enjoyed a luxurious life and diverse privileges. Yet this is not the main point of the article. What is more important is that generations of Bulgarians could only learn about communism by themselves and not everyone assumed this responsibility. In turn, political leaders can exploit this lack of knowledge. Why is communism such a taboo topic in Bulgaria and why do statements like Ninova's pass without public outrage?

1989

The main problem is that we do not exactly know what happened in 1989. Other former communist states had their revolutions, but in Bulgaria the regime fell under its own weight. One wing of the omnipotent party trumped another and our communist dictator, Todor Zhivkov, was forced to step down on November 10th 1989 after an inner party coup. Zhivkov's place was inherited by Petar Mladenov, a figure from the inner circle of the communist party. Anti-regime demonstrations quickly intensified. The first mass protest in Sofia took place on December 14th 1989. Between January and May 1990, round table talks on the country's future were held between the communist party and the opposition. Almost one million citizens famously demonstrated in support of the opposition on June 7th 1990 – the biggest mass protest to date in Bulgaria.

Other former communist states had their revolutions, but in Bulgaria the regime fell under its own weight.

Bulgaria had its first democratic elections in the summer of 1990. They were won by Bulgaria's communist party which had reinvented itself as the Bulgarian Socialist Party. It is doubtful, however, how democratic these elections were since there was little privacy at the polling stations and local party leaders supervised the process. The spirit of communism lingered on. This may explain why Bulgaria's transition to democracy was not fully possible and why the communist establishment was never really challenged. Bulgaria's prosecutors brought a number of charges against Zhivkov in the early 1990s, but the trials were terminated because of his death in 1998. Communist leaders, heads of concentration camps and torturers were never convicted for their actions either, despite ample evidence, including witness statements. Meanwhile, because of the refusal to include communism in the mandatory cur-

riculum for so long, many young people know of these crimes only vaguely, if they know of them at all.

It is striking that one of the first priorities of Ninova, when she was elected as leader of Bulgaria's Socialist Party in 2016, was to organise a pilgrimage to the house of Todor Zhivkov. It is also shocking that in 2018 Boyko Borissov, who is serving as prime minister for the third time since 2009 and is the leader of the GERB Party, referred to Zhivkov as one of two "greatest universities" in his life. Borissov was Zhivkov's personal bodyguard. In addition, one may wonder which political party – the socialist party or GERB (which labels itself as right-wing and is a member of the European People's Party) – has more members.

Because of the refusal to include communism in the mandatory curriculum for so long, many young people know of these crimes only vaguely.

The same pattern can be observed in Bulgaria's institutions. One of the scariest organisations in communist Bulgaria was *Darzhavna sigurnost* – the secret services responsible for mass surveillance and the harassment of citizens who opposed the regime. Sadly, the same circles which controlled the institution of terror have an important influence on Bulgaria's current intelligence. In 2013, Bulgaria was shaken by mass protests because of the appointment of Delyan Peevski, a controversial member of parliament, as head of DANS (Bulgaria's national security agency). Vigilant civil society members subsequently uncovered that his grandfather was a colonel and an influential figure in *Darzhavna sigurnost*. Indeed, experts argue that the establishment of DANS in 2008, which was supposed to modernise Bulgarian intelligence, rehabilitated *Darzhavna sigurnost* because many of the hired employees had previously worked for the repressive institution.

Critical state

After the fall of communism, Bulgaria did not carry out a substantive reform of its constitution either, which means the country still has a "Soviet" prosecution – an entirely vertical structure without checks and balances which, in the words of the President of the Venice Commission, allows its misuse for political aims. Bulgaria has lost hundreds of cases in the European Court of Human Rights and is a leading violator of the European Convention on Human Rights because of the abuses of the prosecutor's office. The Council of Europe has called for reform multiple times. Nevertheless, the Soviet model has remained intact to this day.

Moreover, since 2017 Borissov's government has been enacting legislation which further increases its excessive powers. As stated by the president of Bulgaria's Supreme Court of Cassation, which fights the corrupt status quo: "Woe befalls anyone who opposes the untouchable status of [Bulgaria's] Chief Prosecutor." One may add that the same fate awaits inconvenient opponents of the government – political persecutions are still common.

30 years after 1989, and despite the fact Bulgaria is a member of the EU, its democracy is in a critical state; this should not come as a surprise in light of the above considerations. The 2019 World Justice Project's "Rule of Law Index" ranked Bulgaria 54th in the world, just after Mongolia. The latest Corruption Perceptions Index by Transparency International ranked Bulgaria as the most corrupt EU member. In 2018 the authoritative *Nations in Transit* report, by Freedom House, downgraded Bulgaria to a semi-consolidated democracy – the decline started when Borissov first came to power in 2009.

Missed opportunities

The year 1989 symbolises hope for democracy and a better future in post-communist states. In Bulgaria, however, it stands for missed opportunities. Society is profoundly divided: an opinion poll carried out in November 2017, in commemoration of 1989, showed that 41 per cent of Bulgarians would rather live under communism while 41 per cent would rather live in the current "democratic" period. Many citizens are nostalgic for communism because they are misinformed due to years of censorship and propaganda. Poverty and economic decline have not helped either. Bulgaria has the lowest GDP per capita in the EU as well as the lowest median earnings, which has caused a huge wave of emigration. This may shed further light on why some people are tempted to romanticise the past: in communism, the regime provided jobs.

Sadly, communist nostalgia is also the perspective that key political parties promote.

Sadly, communist nostalgia is also the perspective that key political parties promote. After all, their leaders are products of that system, so they have an interest in glorifying it. When mainstream media reports on the commemoration of November 10th 1989, their messages are succinct and vague. In stark contrast, there are Bulgarians and friends of Bulgaria looking for answers and trying to gather the pieces of the 1989 puzzle. In the 1990s and 2000s, there were noteworthy research outputs on the history of Bulgaria's communism, but they were printed by small publishers and in limited volumes. In the past decade, however,

the internet has opened new opportunities for ordinary people and researchers to share their testimonies and archival materials. For instance, Pametbg.com and Desebg.com are two online projects aimed at ensuring more transparency about Bulgaria's communist past.

In parallel, more established publishers have supported the effort of researchers, thus bringing their work to a broader audience. Recently, Tomasz Kamusella's *Ethnic Cleansing During the Cold War: The Forgotten 1989 Expulsion of Turks from Communist Bulgaria* (2018) has raised further awareness of one of the largest ethnic cleansings in Europe, which escalated in 1989 and has been largely ignored to this day. Almost 60,000 Muslims went on strike against Bulgaria's regime in the spring of 1989. In the same year, the regime expelled approximately 360,000 Muslims.

The parallels between communism and Bulgaria's current regime are inevitable – not only are some of the actors the same, they have also revived the repressive practices of the past.

In turn, Borislav Skorchev's *The Belene Concentration Camp: 1949–1987*, also published in 2018, is the first large-scale study of the horrifying abuses that took place in this facility. It is the result of ten years of archival research and is longer than 900 pages. Vili Lilkov and Hristo Hristov's *Former People* (2017) sheds light on how the totalitarian regime exterminated members of Bulgaria's intelligentsia who resisted communism. The inquiry relies on the archives of *Darzhavna sigurnost*.

To be sure, one should not forget there is a third group which recognises the damages of communism but advocates for closing the chapter by declaring Bulgaria's transition period completed. This is most visible in the activities of the Millennium Club, an NGO mostly consisting of young people born after 1981, which organises conferences and occasionally engages in research activities. They argue that millennials – roughly those who were born between 1980 and 1996 – are much more concerned about the future than about the past, and that Bulgaria needs to focus on a different debate.

Challenging the taboo

In recent years, more Bulgarians have gained better clarity about what happened during the communist period because of the efforts of scholars and researchers who dared dig up the dirt and make their findings available to a broader audience. It is only now that the crimes of communism have been included in the mandatory school curriculum. Transparency is essential for understanding the political

processes post-1989. Meanwhile, the parallels between communism and Bulgaria's current regime are inevitable – not only are some of the actors the same, they have also revived the repressive practices of the past.

Hence, it is difficult to close a chapter that has not been read to the end. To reconcile with the past we need patience and an inquisitive mind. Maybe when we have a clearer idea of the extent of violence during the communist period we will know why dissidents were not as vocal in Bulgaria as in other countries, and why Bulgaria never faced a revolution. Maybe then we will be more equipped for an appraisal of what followed, including the current deplorable state of Bulgaria's democracy. Maybe then we will be better placed to understand what needs to be done to ensure a more prosperous future. While a millennial myself, I do not subscribe to the views of some members of my generation mentioned above. I am convinced that it will take a long while before a true transition to democracy is completed. One thing seems certain, however: the taboo of identifying and calling the crimes of communism by their real names is currently being challenged on a grander scale. This is a development which could be refreshing for Bulgaria since it can be the foundation of a more substantive debate and, maybe, more sober decisions.

Radosveta Vassileva teaches law at University College London. Her research interests encompass comparative public and private law and EU law. She maintains a personal blog dedicated to the rule of law in Bulgaria.

The curse of perestroika

ANASTASIA SERGEEVA

Perestroika spawned entrepreneurship and readiness to undertake independent actions. It broadened access to managing the country and created the ground for creativity and innovation from one side. However from the other side it opened the Pandora's Box of social, ethnic, national, economic and territorial conflicts.

It became common in Russia to remember Mikhail Gorbachev only in the negative sense and to blame him for the "breakup of the Soviet Union" and further troubles of Russia. Only one person was worse than him – Boris Yeltsin – and nothing was possible to do with this stereotype. However this year has seen a new trend – on March 2nd, Gorbachev's birthday, positive comments and wishes for long life were posted on Facebook and other blogs. He was thanked for *perestroika*, for the freedom he gave and the opportunities he provided. At such moments one becomes witness to how eras change: a new generation is emerging. Yet, it would probably take another 30 years to bring understanding of the inevitability of the fall of the Soviet empire; the wounds would finally heal and the Weimar syndrome would release my country.

Social divisions

Life in the Soviet Union was very different. Despite the declared equality for everybody, the stratification and division of the society was visible. People were divided into Muscovites and others; urban citizens and country folk; the working class and the intelligentsia; party members and non-party; the nomenclature and the rest. Soviet society was like a large and complex pyramid made up of smaller

pyramids – every enterprise, every organisation, every sphere of life looked like a small pyramid, where the more successful people went to the top. The distribution of the benefits depended on one's position in the pyramids.

The most curious point was that those who stayed at the bottom were the happiest and most satisfied. They had a clear and easy plan for development, while those who came to the top of their respective pyramid saw that they had no chance to jump higher (for different reasons – sometimes ethical, sometimes because of their nationality or origin), so they felt a glass ceiling and became frustrated. It was a fact that the Soviet system changed the structure of the society greatly during the 70 years of its existence. This was partly due to changing global trends and challenges and partly shaped deliberately by the authorities. The agrarian and poorly educated society with a small ruling elite in the beginning of the 20th century transformed into an urbanised and educated one, with the obvious improvement of living standards. By the end of the 1970s, the majority of Soviet citizens could read, write and count, had a stable social security system with basic medical care, a guaranteed job and minimal income and free education. For the absolute majority there were enough reasons to feel satisfied and even happy. Many of them followed the path from powerless peasant (without passports, ownership, stable income and pension), to the city *limita* (workers hired by quotas to the great construction projects, called "limits"), and then to the professional blue collar workers.

Soviet society was like a large and complex pyramid made up of smaller pyramids. The distribution of the benefits depended on one's position in the pyramids.

"All my kids have a professional education from a technical college!" proudly said one my acquaintances who is around 70 years old. "We got a three-room apartment from the state, as we had two children, we planned to buy a *Moskvich* (a car made on the base of Opel models) and got land for a dacha (6 acres of land, usually in the bad swamp territory near the city was possible to get for long-term use)." At the same time the unsatisfied minority was growing larger and larger. Urban dwellers who lived in town for several generations and the indigenous citizens of some republics (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, first and foremost) felt the invasion of a hostile culture to their area and were frustrated with the destruction of their surroundings.

Another bigger group was made up of the urban youth, children of the intelligentsia and nomenklatura. Their expectations were also higher and they felt their glass ceilings even in high school. They desired self-realisation and development, they wanted to participate in public life and have influence. And they felt themselves closed in the country while they had access to information about the other

world – about the West. They also felt uncomfortable in the world of shortages, crowds, lines, censorship and undeveloped infrastructure.

Special access

The Soviet Union was a country of lines and shortages. The country was short of goods, prices were artificially undervalued and thus the market relations developed in a different paradigm than in the countries of the "decaying capitalism". Money was less valuable than connections – which gave opportunities to get ahead, break through and solve problems. People had to find "their own" doctors, freezers, shop assistants in the butchers and groceries (the group "salesmen" was a special privileged caste, as they had access to goods and were able to distribute them). Every executive position had special access to a certain good: holiday products, opportunities to send children to summer camps, trips to the sanatorium, special access to medicines, or a car. There were special closed "distributers" (shops with closed access) for the nomenclature where they could order goods from special lists. They also had special ateliers to order clothes and shoes. They had "state dachas", apartments in special "elite" apartment blocks (with a concierge and security service), cars with drivers in corporate garages. That is why one of the first initiatives of Boris Yeltsin in 1991 was to refuse all privileges (they would build new ones afterwards).

Another source of special access was connected to currency exchange. During the 1970–80s there was quiet a large group of people in the bigger cities who had access to foreign currencies while the free circulation of currencies was strictly prohibited. Officially, Soviet citizens who had foreign currency from foreign trips or work outside the country had to change it to special "bonds" which were possible to spend in special shops called *Berezka*. The network was originally established for foreign tourists, so they could buy some urgent common goods, but then they became a source of speculation and half-controlled currency circulation.

Foreigners, as a social group, also had a special place in the Soviet unofficial economy. As soon as the Soviet Union started developing international tourism and actively introducing western technologies to upgrade the Soviet industry, more and more foreigners came to big cities and tourist areas. Since they were limited in the communication with regular citizens, they were circled with special people who worked in the *Intourist* service. Hotel, restaurant employees, airport and railway staff, interpreters, guides – these people used their unique opportunities for direct contact with foreigners. They established a black market for foreign currency and illegal trade of the import of goods. The market of private services was also flourishing by the end of 1970s – special girls with higher education and knowledge

of languages chose the career of "foreign currency prostitute" as a chance to live better and even to find a foreign husband and escape the country.

The majority of the people who communicated with foreigners were to some extent connected to the KGB, but the corrupted system absorbed the special services, step by step, as it gave access to goods and opportunities. Generally the incorporation of the KGB into all institutions in the country became ubiquitous. Every organisation, enterprise, university, school and small institution had secret agents and semi-official positions connected with the KGB. In the organisations with more complicated structures, those people were incorporated in every department. My parents remembered their friend who defiantly left the room or asked to stop a conversation when he felt that the topic becoming dangerous. He didn't want to snitch on his friends. But not everybody was so sincere and the majority wrote regular reports with numerous facts against their colleagues and friends. The good reports provided career opportunities, and some of them successfully converted their positions into money or influence in modern Russia.

Blat (useful connections) were important not only in private life. It was a basic part of the Soviet economy. If you wanted to get the necessary piece or accessory for your production process, you had to have *blat* with the certain partners and had to do some mutual illegal business deal. Starting from the very beginning of the industrialisation process, when the system of *pyatiletka* (a five-year plan) was introduced, the ruling elite had impossible demands to increase growth. And they never wanted to hear about limits and barriers. What emerged was a massive system of statistic falsifications instead. First it was moved by fear (if you couldn't report about the plan's implementation you would be called *hostis publicus* and killed). After Stalin's death and changes in the political system it turned into a profitable business.

Black market

By the end of the 1970s specialists and experts understood that the Soviet system had no future; that the model of a planned economy had completely failed. The worst point was that nobody knew how to change the situation – all attempts of the struggle with corruption threatened the security of the state. As a result, the country issued technically official statistics and public reporting in the media, which had nothing to do with reality, and a great black market – at all levels and in all spheres, where criminals, trade mafia, salesmen, state officials, law-enforcement officers and other numerous "infrastructure people" were involved. Finally the segment of unofficial workshops (*tsekhs*) appeared. The production of goods was

sabotaged at the official state level with the falsified statistics and the goods created in these illegal workshops flowed to the official market using various manipulations of documents. The part of this black market was also developed outside the country and was connected both with illegal mafia groups and legal industries there.

As the black market wasn't studied, it wasn't reported publicly, so nobody could really evaluate its scale. After the collapse of the USSR the debris of this black market was divided between the interested elites and they took control of it in their republics, legalising the funds and assets in the new economy. The current oligarchic systems were born out of this Soviet system with all the bad sides of it (including the fraud and falsifications). Even now there is a lack of complex understanding of this topic, but the first investigations, started during Yuri Andropov's time in the Central Asian republics, have showed that the corrupted system sprouted from a very low level of every state farm to the Kremlin elite.

The sophisticated level of development of the black market explains why the first changes and opportunities during *perestroika* led to the country's collapse so fast. Everything was prepared, so one light push and a change of the rules was enough to open the black market and to get rid of the burdensome obligations of the planned economy. By the time of Brezhnev's death, the elite understood the level of instability of economics and the impossibility of intense growth. The only sphere which showed regular and effective growth was the military industry and it was explained by percentages of the budget which were spent on it. In everyday life, however, goods were disappearing, more and more cities and regions had to turn to the system of ration cards, but the cards were not an effective policy. It was difficult to buy goods even with the cards.

The life of an ordinary person in the USSR consisted of standing in lines, and the most important communication tool was the spread of rumours in these lines. Taking into account that there were no cell phones at that time, children were also an important element in communication. They could quickly run home and tell other family members where goods were available or which shop was just stocked.

Reformers not by choice

The changes in the elite after Brezhnev's death opened the first changes. Andropov tried to fix the economic issues with the instruments and skills he had available. He started with repressions to increase labour productivity, but it was impossible while the system was based on false data. By the time Gorbachev was in power there was no chance to maintain the status quo from the previous eras. He and his team were reformers because they had no choice. The economic indica-

tors worsened, debts increased, the overall inferiority of the model and the mafia structure inside it was becoming obvious.

Uskorenie (acceleration), *glasnost* (openness), and *perestroika* (restructuring) – these three words became Gorbachev's international mantra. The attempt to increase labour productivity revealed the level of the falsification in the statistics and accounting documents, so the acceleration demanded openness to show this information and to struggle with the ineffectiveness through the public discussions and complaints. After the level of the degradation was opened the restructuring became the only answer to the challenge. The opening of new opportunities and partial legalisation of the black market through the co-operative system (a system of small private business) caused the last point to destroy the illusion of stability for the majority of the citizens.

Perestroika revealed the level of social inequality and showed how different people lived differently.

Perestroika spawned entrepreneurship and readiness to undertake independent actions. It broadened access to managing the country and created the ground for creativity and innovation from one side. However from the other side it opened the Pandora's Box of social, ethnic, national, economic and territorial conflicts. It revealed the level of inequality and showed how different people lived differently. *Perestroika* strengthened this difference and tore the country apart.

This year is the thirty-year anniversary of the Georgian riots. They began with a series of well-known protest rallies in the national republics which were suppressed by the state. However, social and economic protests arose regularly during the whole Soviet period. There was no open information about it, but they all were spontaneous reactions to the injustice of the situation. The protests were suppressed; but it was obvious that as soon as they began in different parts of the country simultaneously there would not be enough resources to stop them. The national element of the protests in the 1980s also were not a result of Gorbachev's action. The very first event was in Yakutia, which were riots and clashes between youth criminal gangs; between Russians and Yakut nationals (it was common for such regions to have criminal gangs of different nations). The clashes led to the protests of the Yakut youth and as a result the national issue was brought to the table.

Who gets credit

Gorbachev inherited a country which was pretending its economic and social/political well-being. Even the Chernobyl catastrophe was not a random event. The

universal practice of fraud and falsification in industry brought the great catastrophe because it was impossible to maintain safety without accurate and real data. Another element of destabilisation was the emerging youth culture. The sustainable system of criminal gangs in the cities, which clashed with each other for territory and influence, started also to fight with the militia and although still lost most battles, they already felt more empowered, becoming more fearless. In the post-Soviet countries these gangs transformed into mafia groups. But they appeared before *perestroika* and were not caused by it. At the end, the uncontrolled mafia organisations recruited more and more people who had nothing to eat and little to lose.

Do we have Gorbachev to thank for this? He certainly should get some credit. Maybe not for the freedom and opportunities, which we would have taken anyway, but for the deliverance of Russia and other Soviet republics to the horrible 1990s; for the fast depressurisation of access to power; for the opportunity of new elites; the fast opening of the country with free access to information; and of course for the closing of the threat of a third world war, for at least 20 years, when the new generation without conspiracy theories and spy-mania could emerge.

Anastasia Sergeeva is a co-founder and member of the For Free Russia Association, based in Warsaw. She emigrated from Russia in 2012 and now lives in Warsaw working as a political consultant and analyst.

EASTERN CAFÉ

Vladimir Putin

What's left to say?

ADAM REICHARDT

We need to talk about Putin. How the West gets him wrong. By: Mark Galeotti. Publisher: Penguin Random House, United Kingdom, 2019.

There are few people in the world today that are blamed for the ills of the West like Vladimir Putin. And for good reason. There is indisputable proof that Russian actors (Kremlin-backed) interfered in the US presidential election in 2016 (despite not having access to the final Mueller Report) via a massive social media network, hacking of the Hillary Clinton Campaign and some shady financial dealings. There is clear indication that Russia was involved in influencing voters ahead of the referendum which has led to the mess that is now called Brexit.

Russia's direct intervention in Ukraine by illegally annexing Crimea via unmarked military units later called "little green men" and its active support and supply of separatist entities in eastern Ukraine has led to the loss of over 13,000 lives and over a million people being displaced, and which has forced NATO allies to open their eyes wide to the possible threat looming from the neighbour in the East. From Syria to Venezuela – it would seem that in every place the West has some objective to achieve, Russia is there, ready to demoralise western resolve and force western policy-makers to rethink their strategy. Meanwhile, western societies, driven by social media and encouraged by Russian trolls, often question whether liberal democracy is the right system and have begun electing populists to

power – some directly supported by Kremlin resources, others reflecting the Kremlin narrative, while others indirectly help achieve Kremlin aims of weakening western unity and discrediting democracy and the rule of law. And who is often blamed? The man at the top – Vladimir Putin.

The bogeyman in the Kremlin

But do we over-obsess with Putin? Glancing at the countless number of biographies available, including his own autobiography, the question is certainly worth asking. The pages of this magazine itself have dedicated a couple of issues over the last eight years to him – the most recent was issue 2/2018, titled "The Many Faces of Putin". We have a text in this very issue which examines the Putin inner circle and who has influence in Russian decision-making – domestic and foreign. His name has almost become synonymous with that of a villainous character; a strategic mastermind who has calculated his every move, seemingly always one step ahead of his perceived enemy – the West.

This is the topic of the latest book by Mark Galeotti titled *We need to talk about Putin. How the West gets him wrong*. The title already indicates the thesis that Galeotti proposes in the short 143 pages of the book: We give the Russian president way too much credit. Galeotti is not a new face among Kremlin-watchers and is certainly well-positioned to write such a biography. The author is a senior non-resident fellow at the Institute of International Relations in Prague and has authored countless books, some more academic than others. He maintains a blog, ominously titled "In Moscow's Shadows" where he often writes on organised crime in Russia, Russian politics and security affairs.

We need to talk about Putin is well-written and an easy read. It is a sort of guidebook to everything Putin and Kremlin, without getting too deep into the weeds. Galeotti provides a succinct outline of Putin's life and times before and during his rule in Russia and we meet the cast of characters of the most important people in Putin's circle. The book is short and concise. Grab it for your next short flight.

As the title suggests, the author's objective is to give us a new take on an already exhaustive topic – the role of Vladimir Putin inside and outside of Russia. Specifically, Galeotti argues the West overestimates Putin's role as a bogeyman who can be blamed for everything wrong in the world (from our subjective perspective) – Trump's election, Brexit, the migration crisis, the rise of far-right populism in the West, etc. For any author writing an analysis about Putin this is a challenge – one of which and I am not convinced Galeotti has fully met. Yet, that is not to say the

book is without merit and its thesis is worth further debate.

Oftentimes the reader is met with familiar (and correct) arguments we know to drive Putin's behaviour. On geopolitics Galeotti writes: "Putin has a view of what being a great power in the world means that is more rooted in the 19th century than the 21st … he sees a great power as having a voice in all global issues of consequence, not because it necessarily has interests at stake, but rather because this symbolises this status." On domestic politics, Galeotti convinces, Putin values personal ties and loyalty above all. Money or even ideology is not a motivating factor. It is indeed power, devotion and faith in the man that will keep the country on the right path to greatness. Putin is surrounded by those who believe he will make Russia great – even greater – and their loyalty outweighs their corruption and massive plundering of public resources. Above all, Putin takes care of those closest to him. "For those in his trusted inner circle, Putin will move heaven and earth to look after them," we read.

Against contemporary thinking

At the same time, the author does present arguments that challenge western alarmist views of Putin – which often perceive Putin as a grand strategic mastermind moving pieces on a global chessboard while the rest of the world plays checkers. Yet, Galeotti argues, Putin does not play chess. He has no grand strategy. Instead he fights Judo. He reacts to moves and attempts to predict the moves of his opponents. In geopolitics he is an opportunist, not a strategist. There is no masterplan. In fact, the author labels the Putin system as an "adhocracy" – a system that has developed not based on some rules or plan but on how loyal one is to the boss on the top. And that is also why official titles matter little, everything is ad hoc.

What's interesting is that Galeotti argues that the Putin system is based on a bottom-up approach of activities aimed at achieving Kremlin aims. In other words, it is not Putin who dictates the objectives and methods or tools; he may set the tone, but instead it is the people on the ground – working in RT or Sputnik or managing troll factories – who "guess" what the Kremlin, ultimately Putin, would want as a result of their work. This means that functionaries of the system can get too overzealous in trying to please their boss (and their boss's boss). And who gets credit for promoting the Kremlin narrative in the West?

Galeotti also argues that Putin is not the murderous tyrant that western media often make him out to be. Deaths or assassination attempts of prominent Russian critics (e.g. Boris Nemtsov or Sergei Skripal) are not the result of a hit ordered by Putin himself, Galeotti

asserts; but rather they are more likely the result of a personal feud: "People die not because Putin wants them dead, but because some other powerful figure does, and Putin doesn't care enough to stop them."

Galeotti further breaks contemporary thinking on Putin in some of the biographical parts of the book. Everyone is familiar with Putin's background as a KGB agent and how this most likely shapes his thinking until today. Yet, no one really asks the question as to what kind of KGB officer he was. Certainly our imagination gets the best of us without all the facts. As Galeotti writes, however, Putin was an absolutely average KGB officer. He had no spectacular career. He spent his formative years of 1985–1990 in Dresden doing mostly paperwork and drinking beer.

Another more provocative argument is counter to our perception of Putin as a strongman in control of everything. In fact, the Putin that Galeotti presents is largely a coward. His strongman persona is theatrics. When the pressure is high, the author maintains, Putin goes into hiding. The case of the murder of Boris Nemtsov, an outspoken Putin critic, is cited as an example. After it became clear that the Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov had a hand in the assassination, Putin was unsure how to react. So he disappeared to give himself time to formulate a reaction that wouldn't risk him looking weak or provoking a strong reaction from Kadyrov. Galeotti argues this is classic Putin. He is no macho – he minimises risk.

Putin was an absolutely average KGB officer. He had no spectacular career. He spent his years in Dresden doing mostly paperwork and drinking beer.

The symbol

Earlier this year polls coming out of Russia showed trust in the government has reached an all-time low. A slow economy, misadventures abroad and the row over a rise of the retirement age began taking a toll on Russian confidence in its government. Putin's approval rating dipped to a low not seen since before the annexation of Crimea. Yet, Putin's popularity is not the most important fact which would indicate a loss of faith, Galeotti would argue. According to the author, Russians treat Putin not as a man, but as a symbol. Russians can be dissatisfied, unhappy or even angry at their life situation while at the same time remain loyal to Putin as the symbol of Russia. "To vote for him is not to en-

dorse a programme," he writes, "but to express patriotism." That's why it makes it so difficult to read Russian social attitudes towards Putin and why he would never be removed from office.

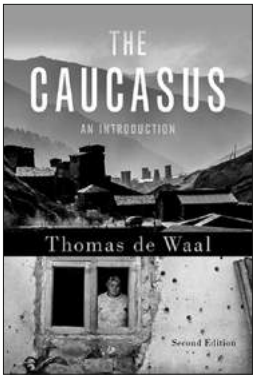
In all, *We need to talk about Putin*'s greatest takeaway is that the Putin regime is a much larger creature than just one man, and it does not always have a plan or strategy. Yet at the same time, no matter how much we want to avoid it, Putin is the man on top. It is he who sets the tone; it is loyalty to him that shapes the current system. And this leads to the final topic of the book, the part that is most fascinating, which looks at what comes next. Galeotti argues that there are strong signs that Putin himself has become bored, disengaged and out of ideas. As a result, Russia has fallen into routine – both domestically and internationally. A gloomy sense of hopelessness, he writes, has fallen over Russia. Is it time for Putin to retire? And if he does, what comes next? No one knows for sure. But certainly, if Putin does get out, there's a whole new conversation to be had. NEE

Adam Reichardt is the editor in chief of *New Eastern Europe*.

Accidental borders and blurred identities

KRZYSZTOF STRACHOTA

The Caucasus. An Introduction. Second edition.
By Thomas de Waal. Publisher: Oxford University Press, 2019.



Thomas de Waal is one of the top specialists on the Caucasus region. His works often become instant classics. Born in 1966, de Waal is British and has Dutch and Jewish roots. He is a descendent of the famous Ephrussi bankers who had connections with the once multi-cultural Odesa and Vienna. In fact, an interest in world affairs runs deep in the de Waal family: Thomas's brother, Alex, is a highly regarded expert on Africa.

After having graduated from Oxford University, de Waal became a journalist and foreign correspondent. Starting in 1993 he covered the post-Soviet space for a decade, working with the BBC, *The Times*, *The Moscow Times* and *The Economist*. He has also worked as an expert on the Caucasus and Eastern Europe with such institutions as the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, The Conciliation Resources and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington DC and Carnegie Europe. Thus far, de Waal has authored four books on contemporary Caucasus. Among them is the controversial *Black Garden* (2003) which focused on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and was criticised by the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh authorities. In effect, de Waal has been banned from travelling to Russia.

A must read

To put it simply, Thomas de Waal is a very astute author with a special sensitivity to the outside world. In addition, he impresses with his skills as well as his personal experience with the Caucasus – and even more broadly within the post-Soviet space. His writings, therefore, are surely a must read. If an author writes a book with the subtitle *An Introduction* it is safe to assume that its content will be a reflection of the western debate on the subject matter. In this way, it has also the potential of influencing western thinking about the Caucasus for generations to come.

As the title suggests, de Waal covers the Caucasus region – Transcaucasia and the South Caucasus. He dives into the region's past, culture and – at long last – politics. He hastily goes through the region's ancient history, devoting a mere 37 pages out of the book's 260 pages to it. He introduces the geography of the region and its ancient residents: Georgians, Armenians and Azeri as well as their religions (i.e. Islam and Christianity). His story becomes even more vivid when Russia enters the game – first as the tsarist and later as the Soviet empire. This story takes another 60 pages of the book.

Yet the central – and most mature and best analysed – period in the book is the collapse of the Soviet Union and its aftermath. Here de Waal excels, writing about the establishment of the independent states in the South Caucasus, military conflicts over Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, as well as the "great game" over energy resources in the Caspian Sea region and the transit trails in the Caucasus. Finally, there is a discussion on Georgia's pro-western reforms, which were cooled down with the 2008 war.

It is clear that de Waal knows the contemporary topics best and their analyses benefit from his personal experience. Consequently, the last decade which – in the case of Armenia has led to the takeover of power by Nikol Pashinyan – is not given much coverage in the book, being rather an impressionistic, even slightly melancholic, completion of history.

Nation- and state-building

Because of its subtitle, the author has no choice but to write about almost everything – though at different lengths. Despite this, the book can be divided into three or four main themes which, together, create its narrative. The first theme focuses on the nation- and state-building processes. While writing about the Armenians, the Georgians, the Azeri, but also about the Abkhazians, Ossetians and Caucasian Kurds, de Waal illustrates a whole plethora of

these processes. In his analysis there is room for the centuries' long myths that spread as well as historical narratives and identities that were hastily created by academics and ideologists who were fascinated by the nationalistic ideas that were reaching them – mainly via Russia and Turkey – from the West. There is also a story about the nationhood and statehood's long coming of age and the difficult fights for it, as was most evidenced during the collapse of the Soviet Union. While discussing these matters, de Waal also talks about the emergence of independent republics during the collapse of Tsarist Russia, which was somewhat against the initial intentions of their leaders.

In this part of the story, de Waal presents a strong, almost idyllic, image of the Caucasus as a peaceful, multi-cultural place in Tsarist and Soviet times, as well as the drama centre of bloody ethnic conflicts which accompanied the emergence of the independent republics that led to an almost sterile homogeneity of today's republics and their capitals. Elaborated idealism and sacrifice are mixed with the most basic of instincts; patriotism is inseparably tied with the criminal world, while intellectuals and academics are simply war instigators. De Waal does his best to keep an equal distance from all the participants, which is never easy.

De Waal does his best to keep an equal distance from all the participants, which is never easy.

Russia is a very important – fundamental, in fact – theme of the book. For de Waal Russia is explicitly the region's state. It is the driving force, one that provides a modernising power. It is the vehicle which has allowed the blurred identities of the region's residents to acquire features of a modern nation, while the borders that were established in Moscow and the status of some territories determined the shape of today's states. In a sense, the Caucasus always needed Russia which here has no alternative. This is also true today, even when the Russian Federation is a much weaker state.

"In between" region

The last "grand" topic of the book, which connects the above-mentioned themes, is the crisis and collapse of the Soviet empire. Its first signs were spotted in the Caucasus, specifically in Nagorno-Karabakh and on the streets of Tbilisi. The analysis of these moments is accompanied by descriptions of the metamorphoses through which the structures connecting the centre with the pe-

ripheries had undergone. Without any doubt, the anatomy of the functioning and collapse of the empire based on the example of the peripheral region of the Caucasus is the greatest academic and analytical value of the book.

These processes are masterfully analysed. With pietism and eloquence, de Waal takes advantage of his own experience, and also the distance that comes with the passage of time. This is the greatest charm of the book. The story is further energised by anecdotes shared in the text and the specially prepared boxes which allow us to learn more about wine, Baku jazz, and the building of Soviet Florida and Riviera in the Caucasus. There are also references to literature, film and music. Skilfully, de Waal plays with some national stereotypes, which makes the reading of the book particularly enjoyable. At the same time, we get the author's synthesis of very complicated issues. It is well thought out, but also a result of de Waal's experience, vigorous but written with distance. Serious, but also ironically nonchalant – I would say British in the best meaning of the term.

And this points to something dangerous that is visible in the book. Namely, the Caucasus (one that de Waal surely likes a lot) is not treated here as an independent agent. Rather it is depicted as a region that has acquired accidental borders and has flexible and blurred identities. There is no guarantee of strong statehood and democracy here (especially in its liberal variation). In a way the Caucasus charmed the West, and the bewitched West somewhat shares responsibility for the 2008 war that was "provoked by Georgia". For de Waal the Caucasus has always been an "in-between" region, while in fact it was a political and civilisational extension of Russia, or at least its justified claims for domination.

Politics is a domain for large and wise players, as de Waal seems to be telling his readers. To be sure it is not for the weak and broken Caucasus, nor any small or medium-size state. Thus while describing the 2008 war, the author does not mention the visit that five presidents (from Poland, Ukraine and the Baltic states) paid to Tbilisi at the most dramatic moment of the war. In this way, de Waal is again very British, but, this time, more in the "good" 19th century meaning of the word. In this sense, the Caucasus remains an interesting place on the map. However, if anyone thought that the region means anything to the world, their views got outdated in 2008. Thereby, it could be a topic for interesting books.

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

Krzysztof Strachota is the head of the department for Turkey, Caucasus and Central Asia at the Warsaw-based Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW).

The taste of evil

MAŁGORZATA NOCUŃ

Błoto Słodsze Niż Miód. Głosy Komunistycznej Albanii (Mud is sweeter than honey. Voices in communist Albania). By: Małgorzata Rejmer. Publisher: Wydawnictwo Czarne, Wołowiec Poland, 2018.

Małgorzata Rejmer's most recent book titled *Mud is sweeter than honey. Voices in communist Albania* is a remarkable story about a country that emerges from the darkness after suffering the impact of communist totalitarianism. Rejmer became known to her readers first in Poland and then abroad through her book about Romania (*Bucharest. Dust and blood*). She penned a unique story about a country experiencing change and gained recognition as one of the greatest Polish journalist and writers of her generation.

However, *Bucharest* was written in a very different way than her latest book on Albania. In *Bucharest*, Rejmer discussed Romania from the vantage point of her own experiences and impressions. She is one of the main characters in the book, perhaps even the main one. In the book on Albania, meanwhile, she remains in the background, much against the popular fashion of Polish reportages. We do not learn a lot of details about her personal travels, what she feels in her observations, nor what she eats or where she sleeps. Instead, Rejmer hides behind her main characters – voices that introduce the reader to the bloody reign of the dictator, Enver Hoxha. The stories of these two countries are very different. Ceaușescu is faced with the "people's justice", murdered by his own citizens. Hoxha dies peacefully and following the logic of such regimes – some even cried after his passing.

Universality of evil

Mud is sweeter than honey is a universal story. If we changed the country described to one of the countries of the former Soviet Union, we would read about similar things. We would hear of innocent people being tormented in prisons and expelled, about persecution and how neighbours snitched on neighbours, brother on brother. We would learn how people lived in fear, as everyone was a potential spy and every word could be your last.

Evil (irrespective of geography or culture) takes on the same shape and enslaved people behave in the same ways. The tormentors and executioners are absolved with the same arguments in totalitarian states. The same goes for the voices supporting the regime (it gives a false sense of security, because there is order, because education and health care are free, and because there is no unemployment). The beauty of those willing to stand up to the regime, paying for it with persecution or their own life is also the same. Rejmer shows us how totalitarianism transforms a person, how fear functions and what havoc it wrecks in the mind. It always follows the same pattern: the citizen has no rights, court trials are manipulated, and the prospect of poverty, hunger and daily humiliation never go away. The ordinary citizen becomes accustomed to the bleak reality of living in a country/prison.

The author has the gift for listening. For the book she decided to live in Albania. She learnt the language and experienced the local atmosphere, figuring out what daily life looks like. In the end, she began looking for "voices" – the main characters of her book. The reportage is full of emotions and stories. It is a book about them for us – namely, people living in Western and Central Europe, the United States and Australia. It is an important book that should be translated into English. Albania – a country on the Balkan Peninsula – is a relatively forgotten place. If it evokes any associations it is its beautiful sea, warm climate and great sacral architecture. Though what about the history of Albania and its people? The legacy of Enver Hoxha's regime? These are the forgotten issues, ones that are often silenced.

From dreams to fear

Hoxha took power in Albania after the Second World War. The dates are not crucial and Rejmer refrains from mentioning them, as this is not a history book. The context in which it took place is important: "Supported by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, Enver Hoxha took control over the devastated country which had seen three armies and two partisan groups in just six years. The war

had destroyed a third of all homes and almost the entire infrastructure. The new Albania was being born out of ruins and mud." The new Albania was intended to be a country of equality: citizens, equal to the law, with the same opportunities. It was intended to be a just and prosperous state, without illiteracy. However it became a giant prison camp. A place which saw collective punishment.

What seems to be the leading plot of Rejmer's story? Fear. In fact, fear becomes the main character of the stories. Citizens tremble with fear: the educated ones – because they could say too much, misstate a joke, have illegal books at home; teachers could pass along "unsuitable information" to their students, and, of course, students could ask the wrong questions. Anyone could end up behind bars for anything. Everyone was in danger. At one point Rejmer writes: "here, even the trees have eyes".

The workers and farmers were afraid. The incarcerated were afraid – because they already knew what it was like. The elite were afraid, even those at the very top. They might live in the capital in accommodation that was considered luxurious at that time, but even there the walls had listening devices. The party could hear your every word and could show up at your door at any time. They could lead you out, never to be seen again.

The new Albania was intended to be a country of equality: citizens, equal to the law, with the same opportunities. However, it became a giant prison camp.

Touching stories

"You will never comprehend what Albanian communism was. Somewhere on the peripheries of Europe was a place like North Korea. A country that was a bunker, a fortress. People say that our form of communism was like a little Holocaust. Just like it is impossible to explain the Holocaust, it is impossible to explain what it was like to live in a country that was a prison. One could present facts and stories, but it will not show our suffering," one of Rejmer's interviewees admits. However she tried to go on and write their stories in an attempt to explain their suffering.

The book is full of touching stories. Some of which force a tear. One is about a prison riot. The prisoners having said "no" to the regime felt free, if only for a brief moment. However they paid dearly for this short-lived sense of freedom. Another is about a young couple, expecting a child, wanting to escape abroad. They plan the escape carefully but at the bor-

der he escapes and she is caught, so he decides to return for her (without giving too much away, one can expect the story ends tragically).

Escape is one of the main motives of Rejmer's reportages. To get out of the hell hole. Leave for Greece, run away, over land or sea and risking the wellbeing of the family that remains. And those who flee are not always out of the woods. Rejmer discusses Albanian spies who are living abroad. Even when you think you are free from the Albanian hell, there is always a chance that personal information (best if it is the most intimate type) makes it back to the "right" ears.

Translated by Daniel Gleichgewicht

Małgorzata Nocuń is a Polish journalist and the deputy editor in chief of the Polish bimonthly *Nowa Europa Wschodnia*.

The unheard voices of war

ZBIGNIEW ROKITA

Інтернат (*The Boarding School*). By: Serhiy Zhadan. Publisher: Meridian, Chernivtsi, Ukraine.

Serhiy Zhadan is one of the most talented contemporary Ukrainian writers. His writings stand out not only because of the author's literary talent but also because of his background. Namely, Zhadan is one of the few prominent Ukrainian authors who does not come from Galicia or Kyiv. His roots, in fact, are in Donbas, or – more precisely – a small town in the Luhansk oblast which is called Starobilsk. From there Zhadan moved to Kharkiv, another city in Ukraine's east, where he lives today. Being outside Kyiv gives Zhadan a unique perspective which he well expressed in his literary portraits of Donbas, and which were the topic of his two large novels: *Voroshilovgrad* (2010) or *Mesopotamia* (2014). In these books, Zhadan focussed on the region which, until now, was not the number one priority among Ukrainian intellectuals. Conversely, they rather treated it with indulgence as an unknown and Russified periphery. Even more so, it was believed that Donbas had to be "converted" to be Ukrainian.

Polyphony of voices

Clearly, Zhadan's books teach us more about Donbas than any political science or sociological analyses. The writer did not need to "convert" to Ukrain-

ian, just a few years after the collapse of the Soviet Union he graduated with a degree in Ukrainian language studies at the Kharkiv University. He did it at a time when studying the Ukrainian language in this part of the country was like learning Latin or ancient Greek. As exaggerated such a statement may sound, there certainly is some truth to it. Zhadan writes in Ukrainian, is socially engaged and during the Revolution of Dignity took an active part in the Kharkiv EuroMaidan, for which he paid a price. He was assaulted while standing on the barricade outside the administration building.

Ukrainians are also now paying less attention to the war themselves and have apparently learnt to live in parallel to it. The western perception that Ukrainians speak with one voice while blaming Moscow for the war is flawed.

After the revolution he travelled to the war-torn Donbas, starting in autumn 2014. There the worlds were so intermingled with one another that it was very difficult to even grasp where the border was. He saw all the tragedies of the war and based on these experiences he came up with the idea for his latest novel – *Інтернат* (*Internat, The Boarding School*).

Zhadan admits that the Russian-Ukrainian war is often viewed through numbers: thousands of people killed and wounded, over one and a half million displaced and homeless. And yet he also wanted to give these numbers a human face, a name and an opportunity to speak. He found a language to describe the hell of war, sketching the picture from its worst possible moments – starting in 2015. This is a difficult art. Not only is the war still ongoing and the writer's work resembles here that of the doctor doing an open-heart surgery, but also due to its smaller scale than the conflict in Syria, for example, it is slowly moving into oblivion. Both in Ukraine and outside.

Ukrainians are also now paying less attention to the war themselves and have apparently learnt to live in parallel to it. The western perception that Ukrainians speak with one voice while blaming Moscow for the war is flawed. When the Kyiv-based International Institute of Sociology asked people for their opinions in that regard, it turned out that only 52 per cent of respondents blame Russia and the separatists for the war, while 15 per cent pointed to Ukrainian authorities and the oligarchs. One third reportedly did not have an opinion. In the eastern parts of the country, those who accused Russia were naturally smaller in numbers – merely 29

per cent. In turn, 17 per cent pointed to Ukraine's fault, while as many as 54 per cent had no opinion.

Zhadan knows all too well that in his hometown Kharkiv not everyone supports the narrative of the Maidan elite. He knows that the Ukrainian reality and the perception of the war is much more than simplistic divisions. Thus in the book he does not create additional cleavages, nor strengthens the existing ones. Instead, he shows the polyphony of voices and lets the real people talk. It's important especially if we take into consideration that in last presidential election pro-Russian candidates received more than 15 per cent of votes in the first round on March 31st.

No heroes

In Polish press Zhadan recently wrote: "Old women who spent their lives in mining towns, who have never really left the borders of their small locality and who have now, because of their unfortunate fate, found themselves at a historical watershed, stood up and were trying to talk the history down, they were trying to convince it to have mercy on them, not to kill them, not to destroy the remains of their world. …But to whom could they say that? To whom were their voices directed? I think that from the beginning they were directed internally and they were convincing themselves – this does not affect us, we have nothing to do with this, this is not our story, not our time… Somehow then, at the time of this first winter of the war, I realised about who I wanted to write. Namely, these are the women who stubbornly pretend that death with who they share a staircase, has nothing to do with them."

In Zhadan's book there are no heroes. The protagonists are ordinary people who are scared, trying to make ends meet and wanting to survive. They also often try not to notice the war, just like before they did not notice the state in which they lived. Indeed, the project of integrating the Ukrainian society was not completed before 2014. Many residents of Donbas also lived in parallel realities: Ukrainian, Russian or Soviet. They did not even manage to become accustomed to an independent Ukraine by the time public buildings changed flags. One of the few undeniably positive protagonists of the book is the school principal – Nina. She opposes the taking down of the Ukrainian flag from the building and scolds the phys. ed. teacher for not participating in elections and thus not knowing who represents him in the parliament.

Zhadan's protagonists are people whose existence we could only guess – they include apolitical pensioners, passive teachers, and intimidated female employees of a tourist agency. While writing about them, Zhadan does not

overuse such terms as "Ukraine", "Russia" or "Putin". This for sure is praiseworthy as otherwise we could get pushed onto a well-trodden path. Through his book, he rather asks such important question as: Wouldn't the situation be similar in many countries that are considered developed? Don't people – in their mass – at a time of war think about survival, not focusing on ideals and sovereignty? Hasn't it always been this way? Wasn't the narrative about the ancient wars which we know so well primarily based on the generals' diaries and showed too little sensitivity to the ordinary people? Probably yes, as indeed these ordinary people who are trapped by wars rarely have their own chroniclers.

Zhadan keeps the reader engaged until the very last page and throughout the entire book we have a sense that something unexpected can happen at any moment.

Zhadan fills this gap. On a side note, the chroniclers are even more missing in combat zones where people have to live next to the permanent fighting. Such is the case today in Donbas where the frontline has long been stabilised. The chroniclers could also accompany people who return to their little homelands, but find that these are no longer the same places that they once knew. They no longer have the same trees, birds, neighbours, even relatives who – as it often turns out – chose to fight on the other side. The tragedy of this land is that it is inhabited by people who are homeless, even when they have a house.

Pasha

The book talks about three days in the life of a Ukrainian language teacher named Pasha. He has to cross the frontline to bring his teenage nephew home. The land that Pasha travels through has no rules. It is the post-apocalyptic world of *Mad Max*. Words are increasingly blurred in their meanings and it is hard to understand what people mean when they say "ours" or "theirs". Here, a bullet can hit you from any side and it is difficult to tell one army from the other. Thus, Pasha, when meeting his former students in uniform, sees that they are fighting on both sides.

Zhadan keeps the reader engaged until the very last page and throughout the entire book we have a sense that something unexpected can happen at any moment. As a result the reading of the novel is, on the one hand, one of the most unique aesthetic experiences, but,

on the other, it is also a psychological challenge, given the faithful presentation of the brutal reality.

Overall, Zhadan stays away from the world of big politics. Instead, his stories smell of sweat, urine and canned meat. Most importantly, despite his pro-Ukrainian views the writer does not treat Ukraine as a sacred cow – at one point he describes a drunken Ukrainian soldier playing with a grenade and thus putting the people around him at risk. Zhadan's bravery in this regard is for sure worth our great esteem.

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

Zbigniew Rokita is a Polish journalist specialising in Eastern Europe. He is the author of a recent book titled *Królowie strzelców. Piłka w cieniu imperium* – a report on Eastern Europe of the last century shown through the prism of sport and politics.

The dialogue continues online…

www.neweasterneurope.eu

While you wait for your next issue of *New Eastern Europe* stay connected with the latest opinions and analysis from Central and Eastern Europe at our website which is updated regularly with exclusive content. Here are some of the articles that have been most popular recently.

Russian fuel for Salvini's EU election campaign?

Read our exclusive interview with Stefano Vergine, an Italian investigative journalist and co-author of the recent book *The black book of Lega* which investigates ties between the Kremlin and Italy's Lega party.

How to lose friends and alienate people or Germany on Nord Stream 2

Wojceich Jakóbik

Germany's proceedings around Nord Stream 2 will not only hurt this country, but also European common policy as a whole from a security point of view.

Will Belarus be the next Crimea?

Vitali Shkliarov

Provided that Russian authorities can pull it off without openly resorting to unlawful measures, the annexation of Belarus in one way or another would present a much bigger gain for Putin than it would a headache.

Bulgaria's denial of its Ottoman past and Turkish identity

Tomasz Kamusella

Despite more than five hundred years of Turkish rule, the majority of present-day Bulgarians demonise and reject "non-Bulgarian" – that is, Turkish, Muslim, or Roma – influences in their history and culture.

Follow us on Twitter > *@NewEastEurope*

Join us on Facebook > *www.facebook.com/NewEasternEurope*

Sign up for our weekly newsletter > *http://neweasterneurope.eu/sign-up-for-our-newseltter/*

34. DNI SZTUKI WSPÓŁCZESNEJ

BIAŁYSTOK, 20—26 MAJA 2019

ASIA LIFE! SINGAPUR
performans

DZIARY
Maurycy Gomulicki

GŁÓD
Aneta Groszyńska

HENRIETTA LACKS
Anna Smolar

JEDEN GEST
Wojciech Ziemilski

WRÓG LUDU
Jan Klata

SIKSA

NIGDY WIĘCEJ WOJNY
Weronika Szczawińska

WOLNOŚĆ I CENZURA W CZASIE POSTPRAWDY
panel dyskusyjny
Edwin Bendyk / Alex Freiheit
ks. Wojciech Lemański
Anda Rottenberg / Tomasz Sikora
Serhij Żadan
moderacja: Anna Łazar

Więcej informacji na:
www.bok.bialystok.pl, www.dsw.bialystok.pl
/dsw.bialystok

organizatorzy

BOK Białostocki Ośrodek Kultury Miejska Instytucja Kultury

Honorowy Patronat Prezydenta Miasta Białegostoku

wschodzący Białystok

patron medialny

New Eastern Europe

New issue of the HERITO quarterly

Women of Central Europe

☞ More information: www.mck.krakow.pl/eng