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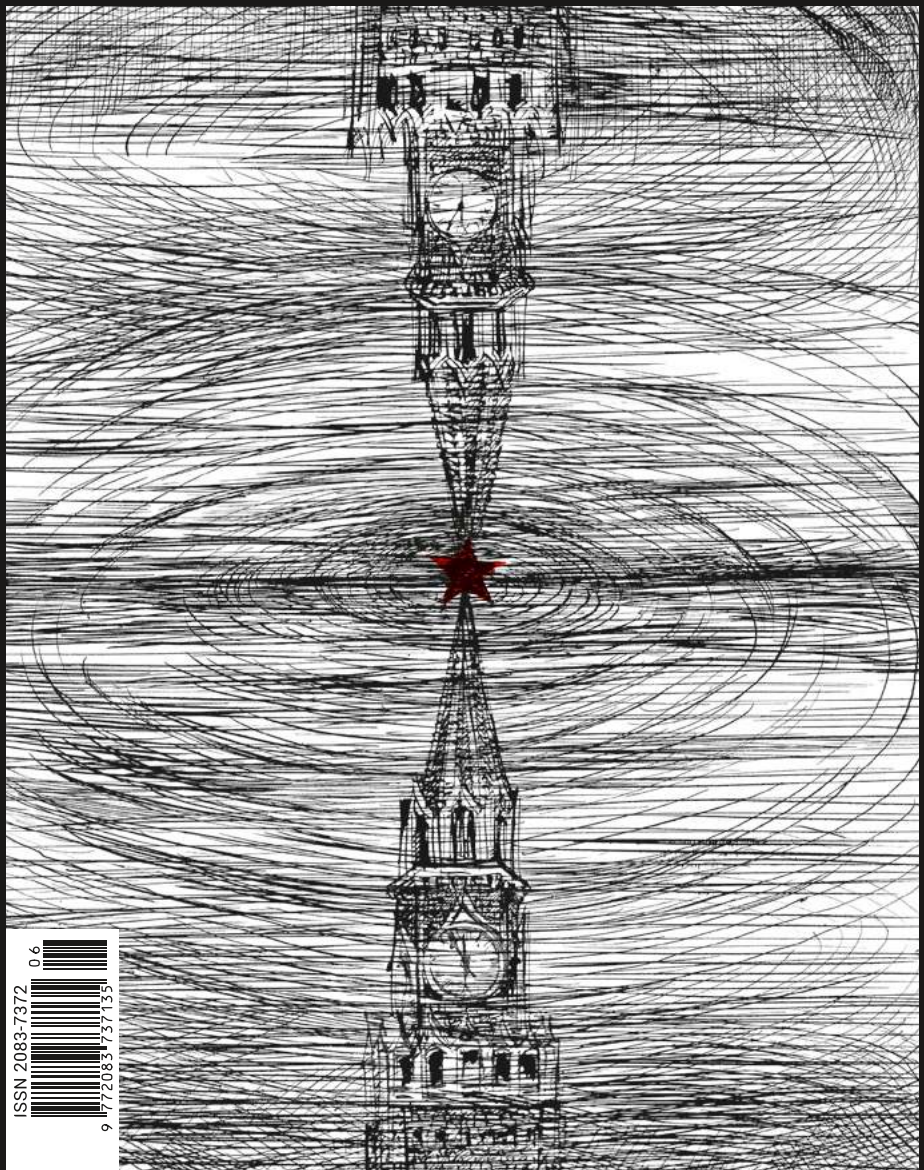
New Eastern Europe

POINT OF NO RETURN

Scenarios on future relations with Russia



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DEAR READER,

These past nine months of Russia's aggression in Ukraine have not only revealed the incredible resilience of the Ukrainian people, but also the fact that the relations of the democratic world with Russia will not be the same, at least in the foreseeable future. With this in mind, we asked the authors of this issue to analyse some different scenarios for the development of the future of relations with Russia. It is very clear that from the perspective of the West, we have already passed the point of no return. Hence, new thinking is needed in policies towards Russia, in whatever form it will take after the war. We look at this topic from various perspectives - from broader ones such as how the West should react to a Russian collapse, to more specific ones such as how Germany needs to entirely rethink its view of Russia. Common themes emerge, including overcoming Russian imperialism, structuring reparations to Ukraine as well as how non-ethnic Russians should be seen.

One more important theme we address is the current situation in Belarus, two years since the unsuccessful protests that were organised following the fraudulent presidential election. Our authors analyse the sober reality in the country which is characterised by repressions and growing totalitarianism. Nearly all democratic forces have fled the country or are in prison. And the regime's support of Putin's war in Ukraine only makes it more difficult for Belarusians who desire freedom and independence.

In fact, all of these topics in this issue are connected to the single most important event in our region this century - Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The only way out of this situation is with Ukraine's victory and a restoration of its sovereign territory. Only then will there be a new hope for positive change in the region and beyond. Let it be our wish for Ukraine, our region and the world for this holiday season as well as the oncoming New Year.

As always we invite you to follow us online and on our social media. Our weekly podcast "Talk Eastern Europe" is also available there. We count on your interest and support.

The Editors

Contents

Future of Russia-West relations

Opinion and Analysis

Interviews

Stories and Ideas

Art, Culture and Society

History and Memory

Zhyve Belarus! Analyses and perspectives. Two years since the 2020 Belarusian uprising

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End of an era

Three scenarios for the future of Russia-West relations

TONY VAN DER TOGT

Understanding the future of relations between Russia and the West depends largely on how the war in Ukraine plays out. In this way, three possible scenarios need to be examined: a Ukrainian victory, a Russian victory, and a long, drawn-out stalemate.

Putin's genocidal war against Ukraine has fundamentally changed Russia's relationship with the collective West, making a return to any form of partnership impossible for the foreseeable future. It would be hard to envisage western governments dealing with the current Putin regime in Moscow as long as it remains in power and refuses to accept responsibility for its war crimes and crimes against humanity (and the damages it has inflicted on Ukrainian infrastructure). Furthermore, the manner in which Putin has raised the stakes even further by proclaiming the annexation of four more Ukrainian provinces seems to preclude any negotiated solution.

In these circumstances, the West can only continue to fully support Ukraine militarily, politically and economically until Russia finally withdraws its troops from Ukrainian territory. Containment and deterrence are once again key elements in defining the West's approach to Russia in an effort to preclude any further escalation into a full-fledged war between Russia and NATO. Although the Russian use of a tactical nuclear weapon cannot be discounted, such a situation would only lead to an almost complete breach in relations with Russia and would

probably contribute to further isolation. This is also true regarding Russia's relations with the Global South, as well as with China.

It is difficult to predict how the outcome of this war will affect not only Ukraine and Russia, but also the collective West and the Global South. Whether a multilateral rules-based order could be restored and how the main players and regions will fit in, all remains to be seen. In this respect, the eventual outcome of the war will be decisive. Broadly speaking, we can envisage three possible scenarios: 1) a Ukrainian victory, 2) a Russian victory, and 3) a long, drawn-out stalemate.

A Ukrainian victory

A Ukrainian victory could be defined in different ways. The fact that Moscow has already not succeeded in forcing Ukraine back into its *Russkiy Mir* (Russian World) could be seen as a victory for Ukrainian courage and its love of freedom and independence. Yet, whatever the outcome of this war, it will be a long road to full reconstruction and reconciliation, both internally and certainly in relation to Russia and Russians.

As far as a restoration of territorial integrity is concerned, there could be several possibilities. A full victory could entail a push back of the Russian armed forces and occupation from not only the territories Moscow has recently claimed to annex "forever", but also a return of Crimea to Ukrainian control. Other options include a return of the territories occupied since February 24th 2022 or the restoration of Ukrainian control over the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (those parts of Donbas occupied since 2014 and recently proclaimed independent by the Kremlin).

Whatever form a Ukrainian victory could take, such a victory would have enormous consequences, both for Ukraine and for Russia. As mentioned before, Ukrainian reconstruction would be a major endeavour that could not be accomplished without large-scale international support, comparable to the Marshall Plan after the Second World War. A major issue would also be whether Russia can be forced to pay for at least part of the war damages it has inflicted on Ukraine and especially, whether the West could use the frozen assets of the Russian Central Bank of approximately 300 billion US dollars for rehabilitation and reconstruction.

In this undertaking, the EU should play a central role as Ukraine has now acquired candidate status and aspires to fast-track membership. However, negotiations on EU membership will still be based on conditionality and will require a difficult internal reform process to consolidate the rule of law and combat corruption. Meanwhile, the US has financed the lion's share of military and other support

to Ukraine and it is about time the EU takes on a more substantial role, at least in revamping its support to Ukraine financially and economically, and paying its fair share in these efforts.

In the meantime, a Ukrainian victory would imply a Russian defeat, not only ostensibly militarily, but also politically. A Ukrainian victory would mean the end of Putin's dream of re-establishing a Russian empire and forcing Ukraine to be part of its Russian World, dominated by Moscow, influenced by Russian culture and its definition of so-called traditional values. This would not be the first time in history when a military defeat would also lead to internal regime change. The "Fortress Russia", based on repression and legitimised by propaganda, would have to face the consequences of military defeat: politically, economically and morally.

As the Russian regime has taken full responsibility for starting this war, this could very well lead to the end of Vladimir Putin's regime, especially in the case of a fundamental split in the current elite, leading to something like a palace coup. But there are also other possibilities, such as a new "time of troubles", with individual regions attempting to gain independence or engaging in internal civil wars. This would not only threaten domestic stability but also raise serious questions about control over nuclear weapons.

On the other hand, a Russian defeat could also lead to a hardening of the regime under a (new) nationalist and revanchist leader, who would wait for another chance to impose his will on other parts of his Russian World, including presumably Ukraine. At this moment, a democratic revolution in Russia seems to be the least probable option, as more than half a million (mostly young) Russians have left the country since the beginning of this phase of the war which started on February 24th. The potential for change seems to have been decreasing accordingly and the loyalty of those who have stayed behind still has to be put to the test.

A Russian defeat could lead to a hardening of the regime under a (new) nationalist and revanchist leader.

In the case of a Ukrainian victory, the future of Russia-West relations will be decided by the fate of the current regime, or the outcome of regime change in Moscow. The possibilities of a revanchist regime, suffering from a Weimar-type syndrome or widespread instability with separatist movements from the North Caucasus to ethnically defined entities in Siberia, should not be discounted. In such cases, the West should mainly react in an attempt to contain instability within the current Russian borders. A revanchist regime in Moscow could also only be contained and deterred from taking its chances against Ukraine again by ensuring that it could not regain its military strength and restart the war all over again. In all such instances, a constructive relationship with Russia would hardly

End of an era, Tony van der Togt

be feasible, as internal problems would distract from external endeavours. Moscow's relationship with Beijing could also take precedence over rebuilding relations with Europe and the West.

A Russian victory

Under the present circumstances, the scenario of a Russian victory could only be presented as an improbable outcome, especially after the recent successful Ukrain-

ian counter-offensives. Although Putin could have presented a limited annexation at an earlier stage as a victory of sorts, such a scenario could only now be foreseen if the West would completely halt its support for Ukraine.

A Russian victory would imply reducing a quasi-independent Ukraine to a rump state, dominated by Moscow and forced to accept a successful annexation of the former tsarist provinces of the so-called Novorossiya region. Similarly, a Russian victory could also result in a more independent rump Ukraine, which would have lost about 20 per cent of its territory to Russia on a semi-permanent basis and which would depend on the West and institutions like the EU and international financial institutions for its economic survival. Whereas NATO membership would be out of the question in such a situation, the remaining part of Ukraine could still attempt to receive security guarantees from its western partners in order to prevent any further territorial aggression by Russia. In this context, a lot would depend on whether this outcome of the war would result in any formal political settlement, albeit on a temporary basis.

A Russian victory over Ukraine would also result in broader Russian claims and demands to rewrite the European security order in accordance with Moscow's wishes. As expressed in its proposals to the US and NATO in December 2021, Moscow demands a complete rollback of NATO to the positions it occupied before 1997. Basically, this would leave the whole of Central and Eastern Europe without NATO guarantees to protect their sovereignty and territorial integrity and would leave these states at the mercy of the Kremlin. At the same time, the region's non-NATO countries, like Moldova and Georgia, would have to fear for their independence in the case of a Russian victory in Ukraine. Therefore, such a situation should be prevented at all costs. Like many European leaders have stated, the war in Ukraine is also our war.

In Russia itself, the regime would feel vindicated by a victory and would present it as a revival of historical Russia and the result of a heroic struggle, similar to the victory in the Great Patriotic War. Any internal contradictions inside Russia would be side-lined, as the regime would justify any suffering on the part of the population as a necessary sacrifice for restoring the great nation to its rightful place in the world. However, in the longer term, it would be doubtful how Russia could survive its economic and financial isolation, especially in its relations with the West. Following the initial enthusiasm of parts of the population, the real consequences of Moscow's actions would become clear and it would be doubtful whether support for the Kremlin could be sustained in the longer term. In such a situation, it could still be necessary to increase internal repression and isolate the country even more from the outside world. Russia's dependence on China would also increase, turning the country even more into a junior partner of Beijing.

Relations with the West would be broken for a long time. It would be impossible to return to any form of business as usual, although in some European countries voices might be heard that some accommodation with Moscow would be needed. But in my opinion, the large majority of western countries would continue to stand by Ukraine and Moscow would remain almost completely isolated from the West. Diplomatic contacts would only serve to prevent any new escalation or resumption of fighting.

Stalemate

If the war turns into a long, drawn-out conflict, everything will depend on the ability of both sides to sustain their military efforts and restrain the other side from making substantial progress on the battlefield. In this case, a decisive factor would be the support of the West in not only preventing a Russian breakthrough or a further escalation into a direct NATO-Russia conflict (with or without the use of nuclear weapons), but also sustaining the Ukrainian economy. After all, this year the Ukrainian economy has suffered eight times more than the Russian economy and is nearing collapse. Although in the longer term the sanctions packages will hurt the Russian economy more seriously, in the short term Moscow can still profit from higher energy prices, even when selling with big discounts to countries like India and China. However, if the West succeeds in gradually closing any loopholes in financial, technological and energy sanctions, Russia's options for continuing its war in Ukraine will be seriously hampered. Indications that Moscow had to buy ammunition and weapons from such countries as North Korea and Iran already point in this direction.

Unity remains crucial to prevent the Kremlin from dividing the West and undermining support for Ukraine.

But the most important developments in this scenario will occur on the home front, not only in Russia, but also in the West. Until now the collective West has managed to fully support Ukraine militarily and financially and with humanitarian aid. Once winter comes, the rising cost of living and higher energy prices will have an impact on the willingness of the population in western countries to continue this support. In this respect, unity remains crucial to prevent the Kremlin from dividing the West and undermining support for Ukraine. In Russia, support for the "special military operation" seems to be already diminishing, as mobilisation is bringing the war home. This is also true for people in the bigger cities, who until now could ignore what was going on in Ukraine. Once the real effects of sanctions start hurting the broader population, repression

and propaganda might not be sufficient to ensure at least passive support for the regime. Whether any serious divides open up between parts of the elite, or between the centre and the regions, is yet to be revealed. Still, sustained western support could drive the point home that the regime is facing a dead end.

In the meantime, any agreement along the lines of the previous Minsk agreements could only serve to halt military actions temporarily, while both sides rearm and reposition themselves to restart hostilities from a stronger position. After all, Russia's war aims (the "denazification" and disarmament of Ukraine) have not changed. And neither has Ukraine's willingness to reconquer lost territory and re-establish full sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Containment and deterrence

As long as the present regime in Moscow remains in power, Russia-West relations will be based on containment, deterrence and a concerted effort to roll back Russian influence in Eastern Europe and within our own societies. Only fundamental change in Russia itself could bring about a new détente or a more constructive relationship. With the current Putin regime, such a reset remains totally unthinkable after its start of a genocidal war aimed at eliminating Ukraine as an independent state and nation. As long as Moscow still has the will and the capabilities to continue its aggression, this conflict will not be settled. NEE

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What would be the consequences of a Russian collapse?

AGNIESZKA LEGUCKA

No one knows how the war in Ukraine will end. However, Russia's weakening position in Ukraine may be an indication of something much greater internally. Three scenarios outlined below can help us understand what might be next for Vladimir Putin and the Russian Federation.

One of the reasons for Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine was to accelerate the process of dividing and weakening the West while strengthening his internal position by repeating the "Crimea effect" of 2014. Meanwhile, there are many indications that through the war in Ukraine, Putin may instead be contributing to the disintegration of the Russian Federation. This would be a paradox of history, as he has accused his predecessors of contributing to the greatest geopolitical disaster of the 20th century, which is how he defined the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russia's military defeat has challenged Putin's domestic and international standing, as was evident at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit held on September 14th and 15th, when Putin was disparaged by other leaders.

Due to the successful counter-offensive in the Kharkiv region since the beginning of September, during which Ukraine's armed forces regained control of some 3,000 kilometres of land, the Russian authorities accelerated the organisation of pseudo-referenda. Faced with the prospect of further territorial losses in Ukraine, the Russian authorities decided to annex four oblasts (Kherson, Zapor-

izhzhia, Luhansk and Donetsk) and to announce partial mobilisation across Russia. The aim was to strengthen the military and administrative pro-Russian forces in the occupied Ukrainian territories and prevent Putin's total military defeat. The president has personally taken responsibility for the success of the special operation in Ukraine. Many speculate that Putin's defeat could lead to Russia's decay. Let us ask the question: if the Russian Federation is already at a stage where it could collapse, what will be the consequences? Or, on the contrary, will the war allow Putin to consolidate both his own position and that of the Putinist system? To answer these questions, we will consider three possible scenarios below. They may not necessarily happen, but they can outline the consequences of what might happen if they do take place.

Strengthening Putinism

By invading Ukraine, Vladimir Putin wanted to prolong the rule of his kleptocratic regime in Russia, which is a country with declining economic and social potential (it produces only three per cent of global GDP). This is due to an outdated economic model based on raw materials. This model generates profits for the country's political elite, but fails to meet the needs of society and provides no modernisation incentives for private businesses. Russia now has one of the highest wealth inequality rates in the world, with one per cent of the population owning 58 per cent of the wealth and the top ten per cent of Russians controlling 77 per cent of the national wealth.

In the first few months, the war in Ukraine helped boost political support for Putin. This was achieved through propaganda, repression and the imperial indoctrination of the Russian public. In the first months of the war, according to a survey by the Levada Centre, support for Putin rose above 80 per cent and 73 per cent of Russians believed that the so-called special military operation was going well. After all, the Russian people only watched it on television, which showed them that the contract soldiers were helping to fight "the Nazis" in Ukraine as labelled by Russia's propaganda. For the population, it seemed that the West was falling on its knees before Russia. Things have begun to change with the partial mobilisation that has shocked Russians.

The war, however, is not over yet; and despite the defeats on the frontline, Putin is still hoping that victory will allow him to consolidate the society around him. This is not an unreasonable thesis, provided victory is understood as the retention of the recently annexed territories and resistance to western sanctions, the most significant of which will be those that come into force by the end of 2022 and af-

fect oil imports. As the majority of Russian oil reaches the EU by sea, the sanctions will cover almost 90 per cent of Russia's oil imports to Europe, significantly reducing Russia's trade profits.

The Russian authorities seek to repeat the scenario of 2014 – when they managed to accumulate enough equipment and troops on the Crimean peninsula to be able to strike further areas of Ukraine after some time. Therefore, Russian diplomacy has been sending signals to Kyiv and the international community since the pseudo-referenda that it is ready for talks. It wants recognition of the new Russian-Ukrainian borders and to conclude a new Minsk III agreement. More specifically, Putin needs a strategic pause to replenish the weakened armed forces in the occupied territories with new reservists from the partial mobilisation.

At the same time, the Russian authorities are blackmailing Ukraine and the West with the potential use of nuclear weapons, thus creating a "nuclear umbrella" over the new territories while they fail to build up sufficient conventional forces. If Putin succeeds in holding the annexed territories and militarising them, he will consolidate his position in power. Then Russia may be able to conduct another offensive against other parts of Ukraine in the spring with conventional forces. At that time, Putin will return to his ultimatum made a year ago about a new European security architecture. This discussed an American withdrawal from Central Europe and Ukraine's abandonment of its NATO aspirations.

Ultimately, the strengthening of Putinism means that Russia as well as China will pose a common threat to the unity of the West. Russia cares about defending its sphere of influence while China cares about undermining the global position of the US. Both, on the other hand, care about undermining the western democratic system, as it will challenge the international order upon which countries like Poland and the wider EU build their prosperity and security. So far, NATO and the EU have maintained relative unity, but with the looming energy, migration, and inflation crises, the prelude of which we are currently experiencing, it is unclear how long this unity can be maintained. This moment of relative unity should therefore be used to promote European interests, strengthen NATO's eastern flank, bolster independence from Russia, maintain sustained military and financial support for Ukraine, and support Kyiv's EU accession process.

Putin's downfall

In authoritarian regimes such as Russia, where a system of repression has been perfected over the years, where there is no independent media, the possibilities for mass protests are very limited. Putin had settled a social contract with Rus-

sians from the beginning of his rule, which was to demobilise Russian society (although propaganda on TV might suggest otherwise). In this way, the population was to stay out of politics and Putin was to provide for the citizens' basic needs. Even in the face of the war he had caused, Russians did not come out to demonstrate by the thousands, as many believed they would not be directly affected by it and they believed that they had no influence on the situation in the country. On top of this, Putin had argued that only volunteers and contract soldiers would fight on the Ukrainian front.

The turning point was Putin's decision on partial mobilisation. The agreement between Putin and the people was essentially broken. Yet, instead of taking to the streets, Russians fled abroad – they chose to protest with their feet. Putin had to choose between the love of the people or defeat and loss of power. The party of war that has formed in the Kremlin was pressuring Putin to escalate further. The propagandists were not making the task any easier, as they were already criticising both the failures of the Russian army and the disastrous mobilisation. Margarita Simonyan – editor-in-chief of the RT propaganda station – tweeted about misconduct among the recruitment committees. Vladimir Solovyov – a Russian propagandist who hosts a nightly TV talk programme – demanded that those in question be executed. When the Crimean bridge was attacked in early October, Simonyan wrote a telling tweet: "And?" She clearly expects Kremlin retaliation in relation to Ukraine.

A split in the elite will see someone from Putin's current political circle come to power. Already we can see a "bulldog fight under the carpet", as the Russians often call the ongoing struggle between the FSB and the armed forces. Whoever he will be, the new leader will weaken the Putinist system because he will need time to build up the loyalty of the elite. It is not out of the question that he will be overthrown quite quickly and replaced by another representative of the elite, which will start a period of severe chaos. The new leader will need time to build the loyalty of his own entourage and, with deteriorating economic indicators, it will be more difficult for him to manage internal crises within the elite. This will reinforce divisions and rivalries between the centre and the regions. Sanctions are already hitting the provinces unevenly and especially those industries that have been linked to imports of western technology, which will only further impoverish the population.

A split in the elite will see someone from Putin's current political circle come to power.

Putin's successor will be weaker, but will continue to pursue a confrontational policy towards the West, as the Russian public will not be able to quickly switch to a pro-western foreign policy course. Such a leader is less likely to offer cooper-

ation with the US or European countries. He will continue to base his policy on close contacts with China, Iran and Turkey, but will seek to freeze the armed conflict in Ukraine.

Disintegration of Russia

The collapse of the Russian Federation is, for the time being, an unlikely prospect. Still, most financial, logistical flows in the country pass through Moscow and St Petersburg. The centralisation enforced by Putin has made the regions dependent on the federal budget, subsidies and Kremlin decisions. Yet, given the looming financial problems resulting from sanctions and the recession that will hit Russia in 2023, together with rising war costs and unequal burdens between the centre and periphery, regional protests may be possible. Added to this will be ethnic tensions and the Kremlin's colonial attitude towards the regions, which became apparent during the organised partial mobilisation. This took the form of ethnic cleansing, as it unevenly included residents of the Far East and North Caucasus and bypassed the larger cities. A factor that will increasingly hamper Russia's development is demography. According to projections by the United Nations, Russia's population will shrink to 138 million people by 2037 (from 142.7 million in 2022).

If there is a breakup of the Russian Federation, it will take on a dynamic and conflictual character.

The war with Ukraine will exacerbate all of these indicators. Some 400,000 people have left Russia since the start of the invasion in February this year, while since the announcement of mobilisation, according to various estimates, between 400,000 and 700,000 people have left Russia in the first two weeks alone. In addition, due to Russia's economic situation and the sanctions, labour migrants have arrived for the first time this year and, according to UN forecasts, this situation will continue until 2028. The Russian authorities were counting on, among other things, territorial conquests in Ukraine to make up for the shortfall in population with mostly Slavic people. Increasing labour market problems in the provinces, a shortage of men and a demographic catastrophe will cause social collapse in some regions of Russia.

If there is a breakup of the Russian Federation, it will take on a dynamic and conflictual character. The greatest unrest will erupt in the North Caucasus, where the boundaries between the republics are still not settled and the dependence on the centre is personal. Security could be fundamentally undermined by Putin's absence. After all, Chechen Governor Ramzan Kadyrov declares his loyalty to

the president himself. There is therefore the possibility that a section of the elite, whose interests will not be satisfied in the face of defeats on the Ukrainian front, may take advantage of the public mood in the regions and rebel against the centre.

Then some western states will face the challenge of a weak and decaying Russia with a diffuse nuclear arsenal. Political calculations will then be different. Central Europe and the Baltic states will be counting on the breakup of the federation to bring an end to an imperial and colonial Russia. They will want to finally deal with the confrontational potential of this geopolitical power. The United States and the United Kingdom seem to have made a strategic choice for the first time in 30 years. They support Ukraine, even if this would entail the prospect of dismembering the Russian state, since Russia under the autocratic Putin currently poses a greater threat to security and the international order than the prospect of its disintegration. This view is not shared, for example, by Germany, which still believes that the breakup of Russia could be more threatening to the international order than the continuation of Putin's terrorist state.

However, the breakup of Russia, while it will cause initial destabilisation and possibly conflict, will contribute to the weakening of the alliance of authoritarians around the world. Emerging new states and republics will seek international partners who may not necessarily be China (which often makes states economically dependent). After the war with Ukraine, some of the former republics of the Russian Federation may seek proper relations with the European Union to recover from economic collapse. The West, as a goodwill gesture, may outline a roadmap for the gradual lifting of sanctions, conditioned on the withdrawal of troops from Ukraine, the payment of reparations and respect for human rights.

A fragmented Russia is not going to be a threat to its neighbours, and will finally come to terms with its colonial past. A divided Russia will be stripped of its imperial aspirations, which become the obsession of each successive leader of the country. These infect Russian society and encourage more conquests, diverting attention away from using the country's potential to develop economically. Just as Russia's history has been a history of conquest focused on space and territory, perhaps the breakdown of this space will finally save Russia. NEE

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Russia-Ukraine

Only one will remain

YEVHEN MAGDA

The Russo-Ukrainian War, which on February 24th 2022 transitioned from a hybrid phase to full-scale conventional war, is not only attracting the attention of the whole world. It also gives us reason to think about what the configuration of relations between the two states will be after the end of the war – a war in which only one of the states may have a chance to survive intact.

The ideological underpinnings of the Russo-Ukrainian War are contradictory. On the one hand, Russian President Vladimir Putin published his article "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians" last summer, which was filled with amateur arguments about the Ukrainians' lack of right to their own statehood. On the other hand, on February 24th 2022, Putin, among other things, declared the need for the "denazification of Ukraine", though he failed to find an adequate explanation for this thesis. Official Russian ideology allows for combining the rhetoric of a "fraternal people" with the "Nazi regime that prevails in Ukraine". This shows a catastrophic lack of understanding in Moscow regarding the foundations and depth of Ukrainian statehood, and the inevitability of its independent development after 1991.

It is worth noting that the Russo-Ukrainian War in its current form has become the largest in Europe since 1945, and the largest in the world in the 21st century. Although the war is still ongoing, we can already state that Ukraine has preserved its status as an autonomous member of the international community, whose state

independence will not be questioned. Thus, it can be argued that the main goal of the Russian "special military operation" has not been and will not be achieved, despite the increased intensity of shelling and limited mobilisation into the ranks of the Russian army.

Ukraine's war of independence

Today we are witnessing (and millions of people as direct participants) the war for the independence of Ukraine. Its participants are the two largest republics of the former Soviet Union, and in the recent past a metropole and a colony. The paradox is that this war for independence is unfolding more than 30 years after its formal declaration. Even if we choose the beginning of the hybrid confrontation between Russia and Ukraine (2014) as a starting point, the situation will not change fundamentally. The war for Ukraine's independence involves the destruction of a number of principles that seemed unwavering after the collapse of the Soviet Union. And – what seems quite likely – the destruction of Russia in its current form. This is evidenced by the scale and irreconcilable nature of the confrontation between Russia and Ukraine, the course of hostilities, the invasion and the information policy of the aggressor.

Ukraine managed to withstand and demonstrate to the international community its own resilience.

Ukraine, despite the power of the Russian strike on February 24th and the following days, managed to withstand and demonstrate to the international community its own resilience. If before the large-scale invasion the West was captive to the assessments of military experts who predicted the imminent collapse of Ukraine's military and statehood, then developments in February through April proved the existence of a solid foundation for independence. At the same time, the process of demythologising Russia, its rapid loss of potential as a prospective partner, as a civilised state capable of acting by established norms, began and continues to this day.

Therefore, Russia, after the pseudo-referendums in the occupied territories of Ukraine, which were the result of the military defeat of its army in the Kharkiv region, has effectively deprived its own borders of sacred inviolability. Vladimir Putin's declaration that "Russia's borders do not end anywhere" now sounds highly ambiguous in its meaning. The United Nations General Assembly resolution on the non-recognition of the results of the pseudo-referendums demonstrated that the international community is on the side of Ukraine. And this already shows the

President Volodymyr Zelesnkyy tours Kherson after its liberation on November 11th 2022. The official position of the Ukrainian authorities has crystallised in their desire to fully restore the territorial integrity of the country.

inability of Russia to win the war against Ukraine and to convince the international community of its victory.

The provisions of the Ukrainian constitution that are filled with real meaning (acquiring EU candidate status and applying for accelerated accession to NATO) are not only propaganda. Their implementation will allow us to talk about the final withdrawal of Ukraine from the sphere of Russian influence. This scenario remains unacceptable for the Kremlin, which will do its best to prevent it. At the same time, it should be understood that until the end of hostilities and the formal end of the war, Ukraine's accession to the EU and NATO should not be seriously counted on.

Kremlin delusions

For a long time, the Kremlin has been exploiting in its state propaganda the idea of the existence of a "triune Slavic people – Russians, Belarusians, Ukrainians". This idea was widespread during the Russian Empire, yet only Russians can count on a privileged status in this trio. Ukrainians and Belarusians – each in their own

way – are exploited and discriminated against. And this alignment of forces not only determines the logic of the Kremlin's policy, but also significantly narrows its room for manoeuvre. The situation in Belarus during the rule of Alyaksandr Lukashenka has illustrated the methodology behind the hybrid dismantling of a post-Soviet republic's statehood. For its part, Ukraine proved to be a tough nut to crack, able to resist Russia despite pre-existing problems and contradictions within both society and the state.

During the war, as recent experience shows, it is important not only to recognise success on the battlefield, but also within society. According to research conducted by the Kyiv-based Rating Group, more than 90 per cent of respondents from among Ukrainian citizens believe in the country's ability to withstand the Russian attack. If this figure was 100 per cent, one could assume problems in the methodology of the survey, or assume that it was conducted somewhere like North Korea. Instead, this figure correlates with the results of the All-Ukrainian referendum held on December 1st 1991. More than 90 per cent of Ukrainian citizens supported the proclamation of Ukraine's independence, and in each region of the country this decision was supported by more than 50 per cent of citizens who voted.

It is worth recalling that the practical application of the slogan "Away from Moscow!" for independent Ukraine became possible only after the occupation of Crimea and the outbreak of the war in Donbas. The Kremlin was once able to impose an agreement on Ukraine regarding the transformation of the Sea of Azov into an inland water body of Ukraine and Russia. While this agreement clearly privileged Moscow's position, by the autumn of 2018 things were changing. In September 2018, then President Petro Poroshenko announced the termination of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between Russia and Ukraine through its non-renewal. And for obvious reasons, diplomatic relations between Russia and Ukraine were terminated in February 2022.

Russia's large-scale invasion made a number of previously habitual processes in Ukrainian politics impossible. The main leaders of pro-Russian political parties ended up in Russia (the exchange of Viktor Medvedchuk for the defenders of Azovstal completed this process). After the end of the war, Ukrainian political actors will not be able to rely on Russian finances, engage with Russian political technologists or use models of Russian election campaigns. The political process in this case looks like a reflection of the fractures that are taking place in Ukrainian society.

The Russian language will gradually lose its position in Ukraine, as well as Russian culture, which will significantly reduce the influence of the "Russian world" on the citizens of Ukraine. It is appropriate in this context to give the example of Kharkiv – a city of 1.4 million inhabitants 40 kilometres from the Russian-Ukrainian border, which has been subjected to barbaric shelling by Russian troops. Given the

fact that the Russo-Ukrainian War has become a military confrontation between the states with the largest number of Orthodox believers, we can predict post-war changes not only in the position of the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine, but also in its influence.

Russian hatred

It is worth highlighting an interesting detail: Russia failed to properly make use of the Ukrainian political emigrants who settled on its territory after the Revolution of Dignity. This indicates both a preservation of imperial thinking among those who prepared the large-scale invasion of Ukraine, and the real scale of Ukrainian political emigration to Russia. At the same time, there are relatively few Russian citizens who are trying to prove their loyalty to Ukraine by word and deed. A significant number of them are instead fighting in the country with arms in their hands.

I would like to note that the Russo-Ukrainian War has already intensified decentralisation movements in Russia, whose participants are increasingly talking about the need to disintegrate the Russian Federation and create dozens of new states in its place. In assessing this process, it is important not to overestimate the real capabilities of representatives of national movements, but also not to ignore them. The Russo-Ukrainian War is clearly a trigger for internal upheavals within the Russian Federation, and its disintegration today does not look like an absolutely unrealistic scenario.

The myth of Russian-Ukrainian friendship was buried on the streets of Bucha, Mariupol and other cities that became places of mass murder.

The scale of war crimes committed by Russian troops in Ukraine since the beginning of the full-scale invasion suggests that hatred towards Ukrainian citizens is an element of Russian state policy. The Kremlin thus acknowledges that a democratic and uncontrolled Ukraine is a threat to its existence, but uses the methods of the 19th and 20th centuries in the largest armed interstate confrontation of the 21st century. The myth of Russian-Ukrainian friendship was buried on the streets of Bucha, Mariupol and other cities that became places of mass murder of Ukrainian citizens. It is significant that the "argumentation" behind the destruction of the inhabitants of Ukraine's occupied territories is often related to the area's higher standard of living.

The development of events also changed the tone of statements made by the political leadership of Ukraine. If in the first month of the war Ukrainian leadership was ready to negotiate with representatives of Russia and even agree on the Istan-

bul Communiqué with them, in the spring of 2022, an understanding that such a dialogue may be impossible began to grow. This was documented in the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine decision on the impossibility of negotiating with Vladimir Putin. This step has become the subject of particular irritation in Russian propaganda, as it encroaches on the positions of the Russian president.

Since autumn 2022, the official position of the Ukrainian authorities has crystallised in their desire to fully restore the territorial integrity of the country, including the territories of Crimea and the Donetsk and Luhansk regions occupied in 2014. This suggests that Ukraine's military victory by way of restoring its territorial integrity will place the values of the international community before the need to facilitate the peaceful dismantling of the current Russian Federation. Otherwise, the threat of revanchism and new aggression against one of its neighbours will be too realistic. Therefore, Ukraine should not only stress its desire to restore sovereignty over its territories, but also emphasise its rejection of territorial gains at the expense of the current territories of Russia. NEE

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After Ostpolitik

Perspectives for future relations between Moscow and Berlin

JAN CLAAS BEHRENDS

Any normalisation of relations with Russia will only take place once Moscow gives up its imperial ambitions and pays for its crimes. There should be no notion of a new policy towards the Kremlin without change at the top and the complete removal of its threat to European security. We cannot repeat the mistakes of 1991.

Germany's post-reunification Ostpolitik has ended in a national and European disaster. A policy that was supposed to foster peace, stability and reconciliation has resulted in war and an energy crisis. This is not to say that Germany is to blame for the aggression against Ukraine. The responsibility clearly lies with the criminal policies of Vladimir Putin and his regime. Nevertheless, Berlin needs to accept that post-reunification Ostpolitik, especially in the last 15 years, helped to enable the Kremlin to pursue its attacks on neighbours. A whole cascade of strategic mistakes by successive German governments helped to destabilise the situation in Eastern Europe and embolden Putin, who could perceive Germany as weak and indecisive.

German political elites were probably amongst the staunchest believers in the proverbial "end of history". For the first time in modern history the country seemed to be surrounded by friends. The mainstream of German politics believed that – at least in Europe – geopolitical competition was over. A post-Cold War order would allow the country to focus on internal unification, foreign trade and the expansion of the European Union. Questions of security and strategy could be outsourced to

the United States and NATO. For a long time, they hardly played a role in political discussions or campaigns.

Painful lessons

Building on the myth that Ostpolitik and détente had ended the Cold War, Berlin sought to engage with Putin's Russia through trade and accommodation. For the most part the official Berlin chose to ignore Putin's crimes in Chechnya. The veto against the further expansion of NATO in 2008, as well as the decisions surrounding the two Nord Stream pipelines, were at the heart of these policies. Although noted by German experts, our Eastern neighbours and the United States, Berlin chose to ignore the radicalisation of Putin's regime and Moscow's use of military force in the post-Soviet realm and Syria. These policies of catering to Russian aggression reached their apex in the two Minsk agreements, deals that provided Kyiv with crucial time but also undermined Ukrainian sovereignty and legitimised the Russian invasion of Donbas.

Even former supporters of Chancellor Angela Merkel recognise today that Germany should have changed course in 2014. But until February 24th 2022 Berlin structurally supported Putin's anti-Ukrainian policies by backing the failed Minsk deals, buying large amounts of Russian oil and gas and failing to provide Ukraine with military aid. The prehistory of Olaf Scholz's *Zeitenwende* (turning point) is the failure of Ostpolitik. The processes of recognising the mistaken decisions of the past and critically reassessing German appeasement of Russia have just begun. Amongst others, I have supported the idea of setting up an independent commission to investigate the failures of our Russia policies, as well as clandestine Russian influence.

Until February 24th 2022 Berlin structurally supported Putin's anti-Ukrainian policies by backing the failed Minsk deals.

This process will be important in order not to repeat the mistakes made towards Russia and in Germany's relations with China. Looking back is also necessary in order to rebuild trust with our neighbours in Central and Eastern Europe and with Ukraine – countries that have been deeply disappointed by Berlin's negligence. It will be a long and painful process because many politicians in Berlin were involved or supported our failed Russia policies. Despite all evidence, the myth of Ostpolitik and of Germany as a beacon of peace and stability still looms large: many now claim they were just "tricked" by Putin. These dangerous new narratives need to be firmly rejected. We need to learn more

about the personal responsibilities of those who held the highest offices of state over the last 15 years.

Still, Germany and the West must also think about the present and the future. While the war is continuing, it is paramount to support the Ukrainian war effort. Ukraine fights for Europe, for our shared freedom. Russia is not only breaking international law. Legal experts agree that the Kremlin is conducting genocide in the middle of Europe. Not since 1945 has Europe seen war crimes on this scale. The majority in Germany realises that there can be no revival of the special relationship between Berlin and Moscow that emerged after 1991. As long as Vladimir Putin stays in power, any attempt at normalising relations is out of the question. Putin and his entourage have to be held accountable for their crimes. Even after Putin, the actions of the Russian political class will demand consequences. Instead of bilateral relations, any future German Russia policy should be embedded in European efforts to contain Moscow's power. Therefore, not only Germany, but the entire western alliance must agree on strict conditions for any normalisation of relations with a future Russian regime.

Preparing for what comes next

At the moment it is impossible to foresee how Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine will end. But we can look back at Russian history and ask ourselves what would have to change in order to stabilise the situation in Eastern Europe in the long term. It is essential that the collective West starts to think about a post-war order. When Russia lost wars – like the Crimean War of 1856, the disastrous war against Japan of 1905, the First World War or the Afghan War (1979–89) – this always meant radical changes in domestic politics. Defeat was often followed by short periods of liberalisation. While we do not know what will come after Putin, we can assume that turning away from an aggressive foreign policy and repressive domestic policy is a plausible possibility. The Russian hawks have nothing to offer – neither abroad nor at home. Their aggression has had catastrophic consequences for all parties.

The rapid collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991 took the West by surprise. The Americans and the Europeans quickly sided with the winner of Russia's internal struggle and supported Boris Yeltsin, who described himself as a democrat. Western governments deliberately overlooked the fact that large parts of the Soviet repressive apparatus continued to exist. In particular, the domestic secret service FSB – standing in the tradition of the Soviet KGB – regained power and influence in Russia as early as the mid-1990s. Putin was chosen as Yeltsin's suc-

cessor because of his KGB background. Once in office, Putin had a free hand to expand the power of the secret services even further. From the 2000s they have dominated the state as well as the economy and subjugated a weak civil society.

At the moment, Russia has become an international pariah because of the attack on Ukraine and as a result of western sanctions. However, the day could come when another Russian ruler will once again try to re-establish relations with the West. Russia needs western technology in order to fend off the threat of becoming a Chinese colony. Historically, modern Russia has moved away from the West time and time again, only to reconnect later. It can be assumed that this will remain the case. We just do not know when the next moment of rapprochement will come.

Before normalisation

If there were to be a new regime in Russia, the West should set clear conditions before broken relations are normalised. Normally, western influence on Russia is weak – but it is the strongest when Russia is in crisis and needs assistance. This will be the case at the end of this war. The West should not miss this window of opportunity. In my view, the West should set six key points as a pre-condition for any normalisation in our relationship with Moscow.

First, the full withdrawal of the Russian Federation from all occupied territories in Ukraine, including Crimea. Moscow must also withdraw from Georgia, Moldova, Belarus and Syria and recognise the 1991 borders. Second, Russia must pay comprehensive reparations to Ukraine and other states like Georgia that have suffered from Russian aggression. Third, there must be a comprehensive disarmament of the Russian army and nuclear forces in exchange for western security guarantees. Moscow should no longer pose a threat to Europe. Fourth, Russian war criminals need to face the International Criminal Court. Fifth, free elections should take place in Russia together with the restoration of the political rights of Russian citizens. And sixth, the destruction of the criminal Russian secret services that have formed the basis of the Russian regime in recent years must also be pursued.

Realistically speaking, the West will hardly be able to achieve all six points. Nevertheless, we should try. These six points are worth pursuing – otherwise our children will still live under the Russian threat. We must not repeat the mistakes of 1991. Additionally, Germany needs to renew its commitment to the West and development a strategic culture in order to overcome the idleness and naïveté of the decades after reunification. Berlin has to realise that it must take responsibility for the failure of our policies. Germany must work hard to regain the trust of our partners in the Baltics, Central Europe and Ukraine. Together we must work out a new policy which will contain a future Russian threat. NEE

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Russian and Rashism

Are Russian language and literature really so great?

TOMASZ KAMUSELLA

In the western media and capitals, voices can be heard that what journalists report from Ukraine under the relentless Russian onslaught should not be identified with Russian language and culture. Why not? This callous attitude rightly offends Ukrainians, because it is none other than Russian soldiers and officers, educated and bred on "great Russian literature", who keep committing heinous crimes in Ukraine.

Following Russia's onslaught on Ukraine in early 2022, the novel term *rashism* (*рашизм*) rapidly coalesced for referring to and negatively assessing the mixed-bag fascist-inflected ideology of neo-imperialism that the Kremlin deploys for justifying and promoting its actions. Yet, in the West too little attention is paid to the Russian language's role in this ideology. In English-speaking countries, governments leave language use to citizens and their choices. Language politics is not actively pursued as a goal in itself or as an instrument for furthering a specific policy. In contrast, this is a norm and even the fundament of politics in Central and Eastern Europe, where the nation – in line with ethnolinguistic nationalism – is defined as all speakers of a language (or speech community).

Not paying attention to this salient aspect of rashism, and to how Russian language and culture are taught and researched at English-medium universities,

gives the Kremlin an upper hand in the ongoing worldwide mass media war that accompanies its brutal and unjustified attack on Ukraine. Miscomprehension of this kind is a tactical weakness that de facto privileges Russia in its irredentist empire-building efforts for "gathering all the Russian-speaking lands" within Russia's frontiers.

Warning

On February 24th 2022, when with Belarus's assistance the Russian military invaded Ukraine, the West woke up to a drastically changed, definitively post-Helsinki, Europe. The good old principles ironed out in 1975 between the Soviet bloc and the democratic world at the meeting in the Finnish capital were discarded. The inviolability of state borders in Europe is no more. The European Union and NATO stick to the principle of equality between all member states, irrespective of their demographic and territorial size, or the sizes of their armies and economies. In Europe small and big states are equal. Yet, Putin's Russia will never abide by this rule, which the Kremlin sees as a constraint. Rather Moscow and Beijing agree that "a weak country must obey a strong country." Hence, Ukraine must obey Russia, while Taiwan must obey China.

The fate of Europe and democracy is now being decided in Ukraine: whether the future will be free and democratic, or rashism prevails. Rashism – alongside Beijing's "socialism with Chinese characteristics"; North Korea's official ideology of *juche*; Moscow's "sovereign democracy"; Hungary's "illiberal democracy"; and Poland's "good change" – is a new name for authoritarianism. In a time of war and a domestic struggle for power, as now observed in Russia, this system appears to be quickly morphing into full-fledged totalitarianism. As a result, rashism seems set to join the odious ranks of Mussolini's fascism, Hitler's Nazism and Moscow's Stalinism.

Rashism is a "schizo-fascism", because rashists go to lengths to deny the fascist character of their ideology and politics.

Not surprisingly, this portmanteau word composed of "Russia" and "fascism" was actually coined in the wake of Russia's 2014 annexation of Ukraine's Crimea. At that time, it was modelled on an earlier neologism, *nashism*, which referred to the political practices of the Kremlin's pro-government party United Russia that enables and promotes "sovereign democracy" and Putin's dictatorship of over two decades. In turn, the term nashism is derived from the name of this party's youth wing "Nashi" (*Наши* "us, our people") that was founded in 2005. The logic of the term nashism reflects

the stark bipolar opposition in which Putin steeps his domestic and foreign politics. It is us against them, the "Christian Russia of traditional values" against the "degenerate West".

Russian ultra-nationalism justifies the persecution of democrats and liberals, the forced assimilation of Russia's ethnic non-Russians and rabid expansionism for rebuilding a Greater Russia. This amounts to a copy of Italy's fascism and Germany's Nazism. The mere rhetorical difference between these two and rashism is that the proponents of the present-day Russian state ideology actually denigrate their democratic opponents by branding them as Nazis and fascists. Yet it is their own programme and actions which are antisemitic, xenophobic and driven by a colonial-style civilisational mission that is bound to result in actual or cultural genocide of the colonised peoples. Rashism is a "schizo-fascism", because rashists go to lengths to deny the fascist character of their ideology and politics. But it is obvious to outside observers that now Russia is a fascist country.

How the world sees Russian

In the West, rather unwittingly, the perception of the Russian language and culture largely follows the wishes of the Kremlin's propaganda and ideology of the *Russkiy Mir* (Russian world). No one questions the fact that Russian is an important language of global communication. After all, it is one of the UN's six official languages. The Cold War made the West oblivious to the fact that quite strangely – in comparison to Arabic, English, French, Spanish and even Chinese – Russian was official only in a single country, namely, the Soviet Union. This lack of attention to language politics prevented western observers from pondering how come that after the 1991 breakup of the USSR, Moscow may still claim the exclusive ownership of the Russian language. Such a claim directly impinges on the sovereignty of the post-Soviet states. Like in Central Europe, post-Soviet states are legitimised through ethnolinguistic nationalism. In practice, this means that a "proper" state must be earmarked for a single nation who speak their own specific language, be it Estonian, Georgian or Ukrainian.

In the wake of the 1991 breakup of the Soviet Union, language and culture were still seen as elements of soft power. This all changed when the Kremlin weaponised language and culture for hard power uses, following the Russian annexation of Ukraine's Crimea in 2014. Even after this breaking point, most western commentators still failed to see how Moscow's control over Russian translates into cultural and political influence and control over Russian-speaking communities outside Russia. In turn, the existence of such Russophone communities is used by

the Kremlin's ideologues to propose that Belarus or Ukraine are "pseudo-states", because Belarusian and Ukrainian are not "real languages". Hence, in Moscow's skewed neo-imperial logic, neither the Belarusian nor Ukrainian nation exists. Their existence is an offense to rashists and their vision of a reborn Russian empire. After all, Belarus and Ukraine should constitute the ethnic and economic core of Greater Russia.

Only in the wake of Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine was the rebroadcasting of Russian television and radio stations banned in the post-Soviet states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. In March 2022, a month after Russia had attacked Ukraine, the EU itself followed with a blanket ban on Russian media outlets that broadcast in Russian and western languages. But somehow Moscow is still able to evade these bans, pumping out Russian propaganda across the European Union, now mainly through the internet. At the same time, the near totalitarian control of the mass media in Russia prevents any western news outlets from broadcasting to the Russian public, who are duped and conditioned by propaganda. On top of that, Russia appears to be winning the propaganda war in the Global South, where the Kremlin's war on Ukraine is widely seen as justified.

Neo-Russification

Moscow's official position is that neither the Ukrainian language nor nation exists; and that Ukraine must be "denazified". What does this denazification mean in practice? At present, in Ukraine the Russian invaders target and destroy museums, monuments, archives, schools and hospitals. Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian children have been already deported to the heartlands of Russia, ensuring speedy Russification. In the areas under Russian occupation the libraries and schools are cleansed of summarily destroyed Ukrainian books. Russian replaces Ukrainian as the language of instruction and Russian syllabuses supersede Ukrainian ones. Russian mobile operators supersede their Ukrainian counterparts in the occupied areas, the Russian rouble replaces the Ukrainian hryvnia and to the levelled Ukrainian cities and towns under Russian control, vans arrive with huge screens on their sides to spread Russian propaganda directly in the streets. The Kremlin's "denazification" is a new name for the old imperial policy of Russification that entails the forced liquidation of other languages, cultures and nations.

And again, the Kremlin's fixation on such monumental feats of language engineering as its main instrument for furthering the goals of Russian neo-imperialism has evaded the West's scrutiny. Eventually, western commentators awoke to the ugly reality of Russian war crimes, only when faced with the widespread employ-

ment of rape as an instrument of warfare by Russian troops and with numerous genocidal-scale massacres methodically committed by the Russian army. The thin red line has been crossed. It is undeniable that the Kremlin's criminal rashism seeks to emulate the Third Reich's genocidal Nazism in methods, justifications and goals. This includes concentration camps and *Einsatzgruppen* (special task forces) to kill captured members of the Ukrainian elite and military forces.

It is undeniable that the Kremlin's criminal rashism seeks to emulate the Third Reich's genocidal Nazism.

Meanwhile, in the western mass media and capitals voices can be heard that what journalists report from Ukraine under the relentless Russian onslaught should not be identified with Russian language and culture. Why not? This callous attitude rightly offends Ukrainians, because it is none other than Russian soldiers and officers, educated and bred on "great Russian literature", who keep committing heinous crimes in Ukraine. After 2014 some high-minded Ukrainian intellectuals believed that Kyiv's efforts to limit the supply of Russian books in Ukraine, including those openly anti-Ukrainian, were harmful to freedom of speech and thought. Now they have no doubts of this kind. After the genocidal massacres in Bucha, Borodyanka or Izyum, and over 22,000 casualties in the completely levelled Mariupol, the question about the link between Russian imperialism and culture needs to be urgently and seriously addressed.

Blind in one eye

How did the West manage to fail to take note of Moscow's continuing weaponisation of culture and language? During the long decades of the Cold War confrontation, "great Russian literature" offered consolation, even a hope that a free Russia of the future is possible, that it may yet turn out to be a "normal European country". At the same time, western Sovietologists and scholars of literary studies did not question the Soviet practice of *not* publishing fiction written in other Soviet languages than Russian before a Russian translation was released. Only then would a translation of this non-Russian Soviet novel or collection of poetry into a western language be permitted. But it had to be conducted solely from the approved Russian translation, not from the Ukrainian, Azerbaijani or Georgian original.

Obviously, this ideologised practice of translating Russian translations made non-Russian Soviet literature appear a poor relation to great Russian literature. To this day, in the West, the belief is rife that Ukrainian, with 40 million speakers, or Uzbek, with 35 million speakers, are "small languages". Hence, a Ukrainian

or Uzbek novel can be translated into a western language – for instance, Swedish with ten million speakers – only after it has appeared in a well-acclaimed Russian translation. The Soviet Union split three decades ago, but such practices of Soviet cultural and linguistic imperialism still persist today. Also on this basis, the Kremlin claims its "right" to the post-Soviet countries as parts of the "Russian world", because they have "no culture worth speaking of" beyond the Russian language. Russian ideologues claim that post-Soviet non-Russian literature is poor and derivative, merely a pale shadow of great Russian literature.

This noxious view has been time and time again repeated by acclaimed Russian authors, including the famous Russian dissident and poet Joseph Brodsky, who found safe haven in the West. Unthinkingly and without having engaged with these non-Russian literatures, western pundits keep nodding in agreement. As a result, they do the Kremlin's bidding, and extend the western seal of approval to Russian cultural imperialism. Some realise what they are doing and in return expect accolades, help and money from Moscow.

Tolstoy and Brodsky, apart from being representatives of "great Russian literature", were also unrepentant Russian imperialists. Quite recently, in 1998, Brodsky de facto denied the right of independent existence to the former Soviet bloc countries. Countering Milan Kundera's 1984 definition of Central Europe as a part of the West that Moscow kidnapped, Brodsky infamously dubbed this region "Western Asia". He did not balk at equating the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Russia with Asia, as long as Central Europe would remain under Moscow's suzerainty. The will and opinions of the nations concerned were of no import to Brodsky. Why should an imperialist care about some "uncivilised natives"?

Principled Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn – who in his writings tore away the veil of oblivion from the genocidal horror of the Soviet gulag concentration and death camps – in the end proved to be another convinced Russian imperialist. Putin co-opted the writer for his political system and Solzhenitsyn was only too happy to follow. Both abhor the West and share the vision of a "pure Orthodox and imperial Greater Russia". In 2007, upon receiving in the Kremlin the State Prize of the Russian Federation from the hands of Putin himself, Solzhenitsyn reflected about Russia's future, saying that "Should someone ask me whether I would indicate the West such as it is today as a model to my country, frankly I would have to answer negatively … The next war (which does not have to be an atomic one and I do not believe it will) may well bury western civilisation forever."

This war of Solzhenitsyn's prediction is now taking place in Ukraine. Democracy, human rights and basic political freedoms are at stake. Some western intellectuals are starting to sense that "great Russian literature" is part and even a weapon of this confrontation. That the beauty of the Russian belles-lettres cannot be re-

sponsibly enjoyed in separation from a conscious reflection on the broader context of brutal Russian and Soviet colonialism and imperialism. Despite some qualified and muted criticisms, most Russian authors, quite happily, have supported the imperial expansion of tsarist Russia, the Soviet Union and now the Russian Federation. Whatever the name is at a given moment, it is none other than Mother Russia, the Russian world, or just the empire that remains their lodestar.

A way forward

The recent proposal that western publishers should make the highlights of Ukrainian literature readily available in high quality translations directly from the Ukrainian originals is a good start. But it is late in the day. What about the achievements of Armenian, Belarusian or Tajik literature? Why not extend this translation programme to masterpieces created in the official languages of Russia's autonomous republics, for instance, in Bashkir, Chechen, Kalmyk, Sakha (Yakut) or Tatar? A whole continent of Soviet and post-Soviet literatures in about 50 languages remains hidden from the western reader's view behind the impenetrable Iron Curtain of "great Russian literature".

Even if such a widened programme is realised, the main constraint is the dearth of qualified translators and researchers in these languages. Another bottleneck comes in the form of how the Soviet Union and post-Soviet states are covered at western universities. Attention is almost exclusively paid to Russian language and literature. In the vast majority of cases, at universities in the UK and North America, departments of Slavic studies are "Slavic" in name only. In reality, students are required to master Russian as the obligatory entry gate to the Slavic world. This methodological narrow-mindedness leaves them convinced that Brodsky was right, that there cannot be any great literature in Bulgarian, Czech or Polish, let alone in Belarusian and Ukrainian.

More attention needs to be given to non-Russian languages and cultures in today's Russian Federation.

Somehow, an aspiring student of Germanic languages and cultures is not obliged to master German first, before she would be allowed to focus on her beloved Dutch, English or Swedish. Why not then extend this open-minded approach to Slavic studies, so that at least two-thirds of incoming students are encouraged to focus on Slavic languages and cultures other than Russian. Yes, for the time being, Ukrainian language and literature should be the main priority! Likewise, more attention needs to be given to non-Russian languages and cultures in today's Russian Federation. Currently one can study these only after becoming able to read Russian-language textbooks of such languages. Only rarely are native speakers of these languages employed at western universities. Russian imperialists approve. But do we? Need we be complicit in facilitating and humouring Russian imperialism, or, in other words, rashism?

This is not just an idle proposal of change for change's sake, but an answer to the West's blind acceptance of Russian imperialism in culture, as embodied by the unthinking worship of Russian language and literature. After all, it is this unquestioned acceptance that helped guarantee impunity for Putin when he attacked Geor-

gia and grabbed Abkhazia and South Ossetia, annexed Crimea and seized eastern Ukraine, or when he levelled areas held by the democratic Syrian opposition. The Kremlin sweetened this poisonous "deal" dished out to the West with gas and oil, including well-paid sinecures for retired German and French politicians, and dirty money for London's financiers in the greedy city. Now with Europe's overdependence on Russian hydrocarbons and money, Putin excels at frustrating the EU and NATO's united response to Moscow's ongoing war on Ukraine, that is, the sanctions and deliveries of weaponry for the Ukrainian army. Indeed, it is high time that the West takes its head out of the Russian noose, before it is too late.

Approach with caution

In such a situation, should we keep reading "great Russian literature"? Yes, of course, but let us peruse it critically, as products of tsarist imperialism, Soviet totalitarianism and Putin's rashism. And importantly, first of all, we need to make up for lost time and get acquainted with the masterpieces of Belarusian, Chechen, Tatar or Ukrainian literature that Russian and Soviet imperialists have done such a good job of hiding from the world in plain sight.

One needs to approach Russian belles-lettres with caution, until a Russian Viktor Klemperer or Primo Levi, and a Russian Thomas Bernhard appear on the literary and intellectual horizon. In Russian literature no robust trend critical of Russian and Soviet imperialism and totalitarianism has yet emerged. Russian authors prefer not to talk back to the powers that be. They leave politics to politicians, and then, in private, where no one can hear, they sob in their writings on the loss of liberty. An overflow of feelings and emotions replaces a sober analysis of the causes of this perennial state of Russian "unfreedom". It is easier to lament beautifully and give in to evoking the tired trope of the unknowable "Russian soul", rather than invest time and effort needed for analysing the situation in the form of an excellent piece of fiction.

The direct and unsparing prose of Varlam Shalamov's stories on the Soviet concentration and death camps was an auspicious beginning. He proved to be a worthy successor of Anton Chekhov, who saw his study of the tsarist penal colony on the island of Sakhalin as his main contribution to literature. Yet, by and large, Russian writers shy away from the task of coming to terms with the imperial, totalitarian and genocidal past of Russia and the Soviet Union. One of the reasons for this is the fact that Putin's rashist regime now actively rehabilitates Stalinism, the KGB, Russian imperialism, Soviet totalitarianism and Russification as the pillars of a future Greater Russia. To most Russians and Russian intellectuals, brought up

in this odious adoration of power and naked violence as a sign of the greatness of their state, the programme is curiously attractive. They know nothing else, even when they sojourn in the West. Their choice is imperial Russia, rashism in short.

A certain hope is that Ukrainian, Belarusian, Tatar or Chechen literature may yet turn out to be a vaccination not only for the West's blind veneration of Russian literature, language and culture, but also for the Russians' masochistic love of totalitarianism and unfreedom. Let the healing begin. It is way overdue. I look forward to at least a steady stream of novels, stories, plays and poems translated into western languages from Ukrainian, Tatar, Buryat, Chechen, Sakha, Tuvan, Uzbek… Although, what we really need is an avalanche for countering the ravages that rashism – Russian imperialism and totalitarianism – has left both in people's heads worldwide and on the ground in Ukraine. Yet, I fear that what will remain of these high-minded promises will be again words, words, words.

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Why Russia needs decolonisation for its future democratisation

MIŁOSZ J. CORDES

Ukraine's recent success on the battlefield has encouraged discussion on potential changes to Russia's political setup. While a new leader would be needed, more fundamental change would be required if the country is to embark on a path towards democracy. The key issue lies in Moscow's relations with its periphery, an exploitative relationship that has persisted for centuries.

The war in Ukraine has been made possible by Russian and Soviet authorities continually focusing their ideological and political attention on European Russia over the centuries. In doing so, they have been ignoring the interests of other regions of the country, as well as their non-Slavic populations. In this sense, 75 per cent of Russia's territory acts as Moscow's internal colonial empire. Not only is it financing the war with its oil and gas, but it is also providing cannon fodder for Russian military commanders, who do not value the lives of Buryats, Tatars or Chechens as much as those of the Slavic citizens. As a result, decolonisation is essential to ensuring the democratisation of Russia.

Europe first

The year was 1582. The Cossack Ataman Yermak embarked on what was then the private enterprise of a merchant family. The Stroganovs were looking for ways to secure their trade routes to the East, repeatedly plundered by Siberian warlords. Although Yermak died in an ambush shortly thereafter, he paved the road for another expedition, this time commissioned by the tsar. Moscow's rulers rapidly expanded their rule eastward. Their authority reached the north-western shores of the Pacific Ocean in less than 200 years. From a small duchy on the outskirts of Rus', Moscow transformed into the Russian Empire, stretching from the Baltic Sea all the way to Korea and Japan.

Yermak could not have known that his expedition would lead to the emergence of a new colonial power. Unlike its Western European counterparts, however, its colonies were officially part of the metropolis. Because of this fact, Russia has only been subject to partial decolonisation. It lost its external dependencies after the Soviet Union collapsed, but it has kept its internal colonies. The results of this phenomenon are blatantly visible in Vladimir Putin's actions in Ukraine, where he is trying to regain territory that he considers essential for the wellbeing of the metropolis. This is being pursued through the use of material and human resources provided by peripheral territories.

In doing so, Putin acts on behalf of merely 25 per cent of the country's total area at the expense of the remaining 75 per cent lying east of the Urals. This is much like how any European power in the 19th and 20th centuries treated their dependencies in Africa, America or Asia. In other words, an area 30 per cent larger than the United States or 65 times larger than the United Kingdom is being exploited in an almost openly colonial way 60 years after the peak of decolonisation around the world.

There are two factors that explain this phenomenon. The first relates to narratives on history and the politics of memory pursued by the Kremlin at least since 2012. These ideas are in fact deeply rooted in Russian imperial rhetoric. The second is the ethnic composition of the Russian armed forces in Ukraine, especially in the face of the recently announced partial mobilisation, and the losses that non-ethnic Russian soldiers have been suffering.

Slavic Pan-Russianness

When Putin announced his return to the presidency in 2012, he published a series of articles, setting the stage for his "new-old" role. More specifically, he de-

scribed Russia as a distinctive civilisational entity based on the legacy of medieval Rus', Orthodoxy and traditional values that Russians have supposedly kept over centuries. Putin's texts partly explain the way he perceives the spatial dimension of Russia's foundations. Its roots are limited to Eastern Europe and to the three Eastern European ethnicities Putin sees as three branches of one Russian nation (*triyediniy russkiy narod*): Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians. They are the backbone of today's Russia, Putin argues, stemming from the alleged unity of medieval Rus' and the dominant role of Moscow.

This partly explains Putin's fixation on Ukraine, as Kyiv was the place where the first Ruthenian Orthodox metropolis was erected. To him, controlling Ukraine is essential to securing the core of Russian civilisation. He confirmed and refined this point of view in July 2021, when in another article he tried to convince the readers that Ukraine is part of Russia.

By pursuing such a narrative, Putin seeks to downplay the influence of other political entities on this vast area, such as the proto-democratic merchant Novgorod Republic or the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. At the same time, he completely ignores the role of non-Slavic nations in the development of Russia's power. Although they have populated the majority of Russia-controlled territories since the rapid expansion eastwards in the late 16th century, they have never become an equal part of the official Russian narrative of history. Children in Khabarovsk and Vladivostok are taught about developments in culture and politics that took place several thousand kilometres away, being told to treat them as their own story.

As a result, today's Russia remains the world's only colonial empire that exploits its own citizens without any apparent legal discrimination. It has never been decolonised for three main reasons, which also partly answer the question that we have all been asking ourselves since 1991: how can Russia ever become a full-fledged democracy?

Internal colonies

Russia's colonies constitute an integral part of the country's territory, much like Algeria was a part of France. The difference is, however, large parts of northern Eurasia east of the Urals that Russia took control of have always been scarcely inhabited and deprived of strong political organisation. It was relatively easy for Moscow and St Petersburg to exert control over lands free from highly organised peoples in spite of their distinctive cultures and awareness of a non-Russian past.

Russia created the bulk of its colonial dominium within its own territory through direct incorporation. Over the centuries it has applied different methods of eco-

nomic exploitation, as well as political and cultural violence. It is important to mention that I am not talking about the peoples living on the southern borders of Russia in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Their political traditions and established cultural heritage have encouraged them to struggle against Russian domination numerous times.

This viewpoint can be explained by looking at what was going on in the west of the empire after the First and Second World Wars. Russia and the Soviet Union first gained and then lost control of areas populated by peoples sharing a strong sense of national identity, often backed by a tradition of their own statehood: Poles, Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians or Ukrainians. Their language, culture and elites managed to survive Russian domination and regain political sovereignty when the moment was right – in 1917–18 and 1989–91. They were not Russia's dominions, but rather provinces in the ancient Roman sense of the word.

As for Russia itself, Putin often mentions its multi-ethnic, multicultural and multiconfessional composition. Yet this is only a figure of speech that justifies Moscow's political control over non-ethnic Russian territories. He is the acolyte of Joseph Stalin, who cut short the policy of *korenizatsiya* (indigenisation) aimed at luring non-Russian elites to the Bolsheviks. This move originally served to consolidate the government's power, still unsure after five years of civil war. However, from the early 1930s onward, Russians were again promoted in the administration and the military, and Russian became the lingua franca of the empire, much like in the tsarist times.

This policy had an equally important economic dimension. Most of Russia's riches lie east of the Urals. They have almost exclusively been employed in the struggle for gaining and maintaining territories and influence in Europe, and to build up the European part of the country. Revenues from oil and gas from the non-ethnic Russian Nenets, Yamalo-Nenets and Khanty-Mansi Autonomous Okrugs fuel investments in Moscow and St Petersburg, and prevent regions like Novgorod, Bryansk or Pskov from economic collapse. This is a typical model of economic exploitation known from the Congo, Egypt or Latin America. In this sense, one could argue that the Russian regions east of the Urals are part of the Global South.

Non-Russian cannon fodder

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has been another exemplification of such colonial thinking. Following successive defeats in Ukraine and Kyiv's successful counteroffensive that struck at the heart of Russia's occupational forces, Putin announced mobilisation. As we see now, this is mostly being carried out in regions where

Russians do not constitute a majority or among non-ethnic Russian inhabitants of the country, such as Buryats, Dagestanis or South Ossetians. Already before mobilisation the backgrounds of the dead soldiers on the Russian side showed that the Russian military command was using non-ethnic Russians as cannon fodder. Now the situation has only intensified.

The Kremlin used mobilisation also to get rid of people who are considered political suspects (or politically suspicious). By the beginning of October, some three thousand inhabitants of illegally annexed Crimea had been drafted. Half of this number was made up of Crimean Tatars even though they are only 15 per cent of the region's total population. Providing recruits that are bound to be killed in battle is way easier than resettling the whole ethnic group, just like Stalin did in 1944.

All in all, Moscow seeks to wage war in Ukraine through the use of ethnic minorities to protect the Russian core of the nation, as well as take advantage of relatively worse educated and poorer citizens. For many people east of the Urals, deprived of steady sources of income and economic opportunities, joining the army is the only way to earn decent money.

Moscow seeks to wage war in Ukraine through the use of ethnic minorities to protect the Russian core of the nation.

It is also easier to make them believe that Ukrainians are Nazis as there is no real or imagined ethnic, cultural and historical proximity between the two groups. You would think twice before you would kill a cousin or a neighbour but you do not have to hesitate if your mindset is shaped by aggressive state propaganda that pertains to some remote areas of a vast country. In addition, the memory of fighting against the Germans during the Second World War is still present among the peoples of the Asian part of Russia.

Such a mindset laid the foundations for the atrocities committed in Bucha. The 64th Motorised Rifle Brigade from Buryatia was based there. Later on, the remaining soldiers of the brigade were sent to the most difficult parts of the front in the Kharkiv area. Some experts argue that the Kremlin want it to be destroyed to conceal its actions in Bucha.

No simple remedy

With western military and financial support and their own determination, Ukrainians are likely to win the war. Although it will leave the country devastated and deeply wounded, it will also provide the final piece in the construction of Ukrainian national identity and statehood. But what about Russia? Even if Putin is

overthrown, will the country embark on a different path or will it remain the pariah of Europe and perhaps even the world?

From my perspective, an answer to these questions to a great extent lies in decolonising Russia. Its political and economic elites (no matter who they will be) need to admit that their task is to govern in the name of all parts of the country. Changing the colonial optics needs to lead to a more equal distribution of wealth, public investments and development strategies.

The Asian part of Russia needs its own Memorial Association, which until recently was uncovering crimes committed by the Soviet regime.

The Asian part of Russia needs its own Memorial Association, which until recently was uncovering crimes committed by the Soviet regime. It also needs to involve local non-Russian leaders, not those who are nominally so (like Sergey Shoigu) but in fact pursue the interests of the European part of Russia and ethnic Russians.

At the same time, however, the mobilisation has triggered a massive exodus of young Russian men. Data presented by think tanks such as Bruegel suggest that the number now exceeds 700,000. This is on top of the four million people that have already left Russia since the beginning of the invasion. With non-ethnic Russians being sent to certain death on the battlefield and ethnic Russians fleeing the country, Russia will face an even more serious demographic crisis in the years to come.

Reform or collapse?

The Russian federal system, nowadays existing only on paper, has to become the country's new reality. All subjects of the nominal federation have to be able to exercise their theoretical rights and gain new ones over time – not on paper but in reality.

Should this not happen, the negative consequences of the war might even go as far as the breakup of Russia. It is not that unrealistic of a scenario given the scope of problems the country suffers from: dependency on fossil fuel exports, lack of innovation, demography and ethnic tensions. Even now Moscow is contributing to increasing the population's discontent by imposing a new war tax on the regions. Their authorities are now obliged to purchase selected equipment for the army when told to do so by local military commanders.

This raises another question crucial to understanding the scale of kleptocracy and corruption in today's Russia: if the municipalities are supposed to purchase the helmets or vests on the free market, does this mean that Russia is full of eas-

ily obtainable military equipment? If so, it can only come from army storehouses. This means that it all has been stolen by the army itself at some point. By buying it, Russian taxpayers are effectively legalising a very sketchy funding scheme.

All of these problems are brewing under the surface of the authoritarian regime that for now keeps them at bay. If that regime ceases to exist, however, the path to Russia's democratisation must occur through decolonisation. Otherwise, both the Russian society and the West will be reminded of the existence of "collective Putinism".

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What happens after Russia falls

HELEN FALLER AND NICK GLUZDOV

Most western experts predict Ukraine will win the war with Russia. When it does, we should allow the Russian Federation to dissolve.

Western politicians want borders to stay the same. Stability is good for capitalism. That is why Olaf Scholz has stalled arms shipments, sending in the first six months of the war enough weapons to keep Ukraine from losing, but not enough to turn the tide. This is why, even after Russia's atrocities in Mariupol, Bucha and Borodyanka came to light, and even with proof of the daily shelling of homes, preschools, and hospitals in Kharkiv, Mykolaiv and Odesa, French President Emmanuel Macron sought to help Vladimir Putin save face. Western leaders also cling to the status quo because they fear Putin will nuke Ukraine. This is an intimidation tactic also employed by the Soviet Union. But Putin is not suicidal.

Held together by force

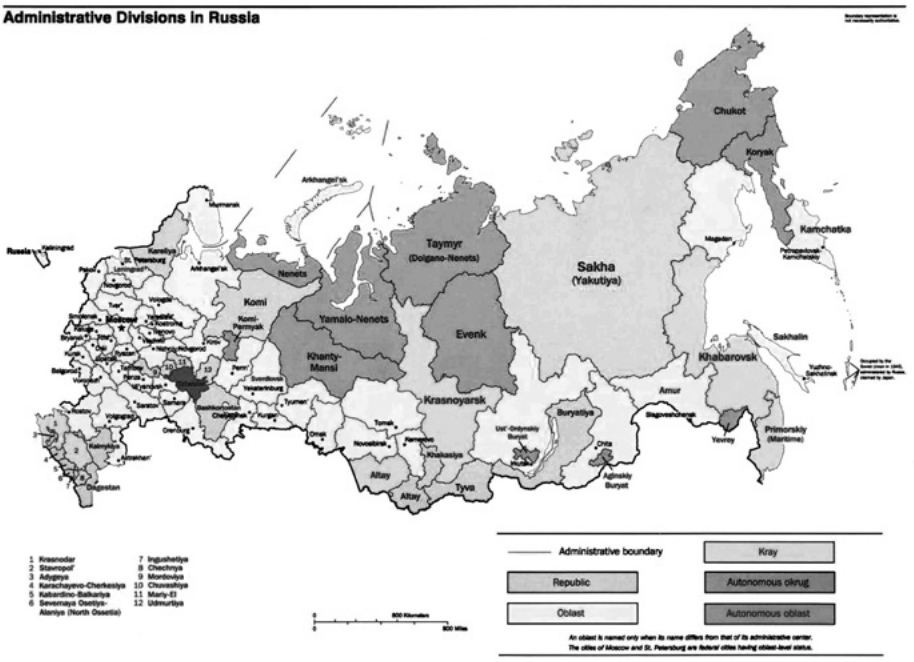
After illegally annexing Sevastopol and Crimea in 2014, the Russian Federation's constitution stated that the country had 85 territories. On October 5th 2022, this number expanded to 89 after Russia held sham referendums at gunpoint in four Ukrainian regions. Even as Putin was signing annexation decrees, the Ukrainian army was freeing Ukrainian territory in the annexed regions. The point is that there is nothing natural or inevitable, or indeed even Russian, about Russia's borders. Kaliningrad is a former Prussian city, an exclave isolated from mainland Rus-

Source: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.https://www.britannica.com/place/Kaliningrad

sia surrounded by Lithuania and Poland. Many other territories are ethnic enclaves with their own languages and cultures, like Tatarstan.

In 1990, Boris Yeltsin visited Tatarstan, then at the vanguard of a confederation of autonomy movements. There, he famously declared that regional leaders should "take as much sovereignty as you can swallow". In March 1992 Tatarstan held a referendum in which 62 per cent of a population that was majority ethnic Russian voted in favour of sovereignty. Then in 2000, Putin visited Tatarstan, officially to celebrate the Tatar holiday of Sabantuy. He then locked himself away for 24 hours with the presidents of Tatarstan and neighbouring Bashkortostan. Behind closed doors, he threatened to unearth Islamic terrorists and turn both republics into Chechnya if they did not conform to his demands. Since then, Russia has been held together by force.

But that no longer has to be the case. Ex-Solidarity leader and former Polish President Lech Wałęsa advocates for freeing the 60 nations that Russia has annexed, bringing its population down from 144 to 50 million and dividing the country into ten or 20 states. Independent scholar Kamil Galeev supports letting the empire collapse so that ethnic Russians finally have the opportunity for enfranchisement in their own political system. Analyst Paul Goble notes that Russian Muslims, now up to one-fifth of the population, increasingly embrace secession.

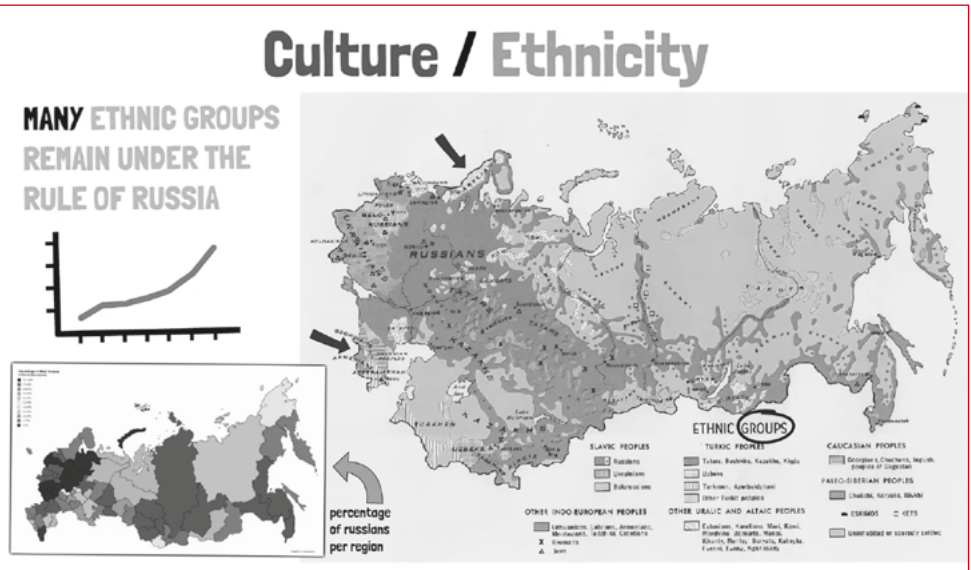


Source: Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division, https://www.loc.gov/item/2009584328/
Author - United States. Central Intelligence Agency

After Yeltsin appointed Putin prime minister in 1999, Russia's social contract became one of creature comforts in exchange for an apolitical outlook. Conscription significantly decreased, with draftees serving for one year instead of two. Meanwhile, Putin dismantled democracy and consolidated his power. He strengthened the police state and started appointing previously elected regional officials, effectively making it impossible to run the country without his decision-making. He controls the courts, the media and the Duma. He jails, murders and exiles his rivals. He robs the provinces of material resources to keep the standard of living high in Moscow and St Petersburg. He created a strongman cult of personality which no one else has the charisma to fill. Now Putin looks weak, the population's creature comforts are eroding and conscription is widespread. It now looks like he can no longer retain power.

What might a post-Russia future look?

Examining the current situation in Tatarstan 32 years after the republic declared sovereignty may give us an idea as to how such a future might look. Since



Original title: "Ethnic Make-up of the USSR (1974). Source: unknown". Source: Center for Volga German Studies, https://www.volgagermans.org/resources/archives/maps/russia

Tatarstan's federal power-sharing agreement with Moscow was in effect until 2017, Moscow exerted more political pressure on it than on other parts of the Russian Federation. For instance, Tatarstan's constitution, ratified in 1992 before Russia had one, specifies that Tatarstan's people must elect its president, and that Tatar and Russian are both state languages.

Putin first appointed Tatarstan's president in 2005, although he only signed the law on appointing governors in 2013. Appointment meant that Tatarstan's president, Mintimer Shaimiev, who promoted Tatar interests while being careful not to upset Russians, no longer had any wiggle room to negotiate with Moscow. In 2010, Rustam Minnikhanov, previously Tatarstan's prime minister, rose to power. Minnikhanov continued Shaimiev's post-2000 policy of slowly, reluctantly conceding authority to Moscow.

In 2017 Moscow forced Tatarstan to change its law requiring the study of the Tatar language in schools. This roused well-founded fears that the language, so closely tied to Tatar ethnicity and identity, might die out. By 2018 there was only one Tatar school in Kazan, the capital of Tatarstan. While it has little political autonomy, Tatarstan's government financially supports Tatar language initiatives that appeal to tech-savvy young Tatars. This includes Urban Tatar, which broadcasts lectures and alternative music; the Mon Experimental Theatre in Kazan; Ana Tele, a Tatar learning portal; and Achyk Universitet (Open University). On Tatarstan Republic Day on August 30th, the popular Tatar rapper Usal performed in

the Kazan Kremlin, the seat of Tatarstan's government. In 2021 (and probably in 2022 too), Usal chanted *Azatka Azat!* (Freedom for Azat!) from the stage in support of Tatar political prisoner Azat Miftakhov.

When Russia invaded Ukraine, despite the ethos of peace so central to Tatar nationalism, the Tatarstan government heartily supported Moscow. The Tatar World Congress passed a resolution in favour of the so-called "special military operation". Among the ethnic minorities sent to Ukraine to fight were Tatars, who are dying in higher numbers than ethnic Russians.

On September 21st 2022, Putin announced partial mobilisation, which in reality was only partial for ethnic Russians as indigenous peoples and non-ethnic Russians were disproportionately selected to fight. Through private channels, the authors of this text received what may (or may not) be the list of Tatarstan draftees for the second wave of mobilisation on October 1st, which Putin cancelled most likely because the first wave was a disaster. Tatarstan's population is 53 per cent Tatar. Yet at least 95 per cent of the names on the list were Tatar ones. In some Tatar villages, sources told us, the military took all the men.

New unity as a nation

Like the ethnic Russians, indigenous peoples voted with their feet. Many crossed the nearest international border where they do not need a visa, into Kazakhstan. Tatars in the European diaspora organised a social media channel to share information about the safest, cheapest ways to travel, how to avoid Russian military officials, what to say to border guards, what their rights are, where to find a place to sleep and how to rent an apartment. The channel has around 600 members.

Like the ethnic Russians, indigenous peoples voted with their feet, with many crossing into neighbouring Kazakhstan.

This outmigration has had three notable social effects. First, communication on the channel occurs primarily in Tatar. This makes the language, which many associate with what they consider unsophisticated village life, both exciting and essential to survival. Second, the Kazakh and Tatar languages are very close. This means that when Tatars speak Tatar in Kazakhstan, they differentiate themselves from the hordes of Russian men massing on the streets of every city. These groups are generally unwelcome, though tolerated by people, including Kazakh Russians. By differentiating themselves, Tatars receive friendly treatment and hospitality and bond with other speakers of Turkic languages on an emotional level. Third, Tatar diaspora communities in Kazakhstan have come

forward to welcome their co-ethnics, feeding them, housing them, advising them on how to obtain legal status to work and posting job opportunities. Many of the men have never travelled outside Russia's borders – evidenced by their questions about how to apply for passports – but now see themselves as part of an international community of Tatars.

Outside of Russia's borders, Tatars, previously pressured to assimilate linguistically and culturally, are finding new unity as a nation. By starting the post-Maidan war in Ukraine in 2014, Putin inadvertently elevated the status of the Ukrainian language and unified Ukrainians as a people. He is currently doing something similar for the Tatars – pro-government and opposition cultural leaders on the Telegram channel collaborate with the common goals of escape, survival and coming together as a community. The social capital of the Tatar language, ethnicity and culture has risen.

What does this mean for the future?

Tatarstan's political elite has succumbed to Moscow, but has also nurtured voluntary language learning and cultural identity. As when the Soviet Union collapsed, that elite will make as few changes to the political structures as possible in an effort to maintain power. Meanwhile, the majority of Tatar men who have left their families will return home, like the Tatars who emigrated from Central Asia to Tatarstan after the USSR collapsed, with a fresh sense of their culture's value. Old structures attempting to maintain stability will encounter vibrant ideas about how to organise society generated outside the Russian police state.

Old structures attempting to maintain stability will encounter vibrant, new ideas about how to organise society.

Certainly, the chance for violence is real. All the soldiers in Ukraine, the perpetrators of war crimes and those simply traumatised by the experience, will presumably return to Russia. Putin's *siloviki*, the security forces, are also a factor. With political instability, increased poverty is certain. State collapse is inevitably traumatic, as we know from the Soviet Union's disintegration.

However, if we lift the sanctions that apply to Russia from potential future breakaway states and offer economic development packages without Jeffrey Sachs's corrupt neoliberalism, we may be able to mitigate many of these horrors and reverse the impact of brain drain. We may be able to further encourage the flicker of imaginative, inclusive, communal-minded thinking observed on Tatar social

media, allowing what is now Russian territory to develop into ten to 20 new states, just as Wałęsa suggests.

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Nick Gluzdov grew up in Kyiv and lived in St Petersburg before moving to Philadelphia in 1999. Half Ukrainian and half Russian, he built an IT company from the ground up. Half of his 80 employees live in Ukraine, and this has given him insights into systems analysis, which he scales to analyse political organisations.

What was so little about "Little Russia"?

JAMES C. PEARCE

Despite earlier mentions, it was not until Peter the Great's reign when "Little Russia" was officially co-opted and could be located on a map. The linguistic distinction of Great and Little Russia was also a key part of establishing a separate "Ukrainian" identity. By 1721, the distinctions between Rus', Russia and all the "Russias" were confused.

Before the 1917 revolutions, "Russian" applied indiscriminately to Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians. They were defined respectively as *Velikorosy*, *Malorosy* and *Belorusy* (Great, Little and White Russians). The Soviet regime did away with this but retained and enhanced the traditional notion of "brotherly" relations, with Russians playing the elder brother role. However, in 2021, Vladimir Putin wrote a now famous article on the "shared history" of Russia and Ukraine. In it, he seemingly revived this pre-revolutionary thinking.

Western atlases and historians also co-opted these terms. One can still find Britons of a certain age who use the terms "White Russia" and "the Ukraine". But "Little Russia" has vanished and is today deemed horribly offensive. Belarus, or *Byelorussiya*, quite literally remains White Russia. But Ukraine was not "little" because it was considered as the "little brother" among the Eastern Slavs. Its modern borders inherited from the Soviet Union are not exactly small and neither is the historic space which it occupied. Nor were Ukrainians a small group situated at the far reaches of the Russian Empire. It is important to highlight in this piece that unlike

Belarus and White Russia, "Little Russia" and "Ukraine" are not – and have never been – mutually exclusive terms. It is, however, a product of a complicated history.

A matter of location

Geographically, and politically speaking, "little" often applies to peripheral places and spaces. In New York for example, Little Italy is not Fifth Avenue or Central Park West, but Arthur Avenue in the Bronx. The Bronx was indeed a world away from New York's high society. But Little Italy was peripheral because the mostly poor and Catholic Italians were looked down upon and discriminated against. They and the Bronx were a part of the city fabric, but confined to its margins, and thus "little" entailed a lower status.

It should also be stressed that regions or places dubbed "great" also imply a periphery. Consider London and Greater London, or even Great Baddow on the outskirts of Chelmsford. Moscow Oblast might be considered Moscow by inhabitants of Yekaterinburg, but Muscovites would not dare consider Sergiyev Posad, Orekhovo-Zuyevo, Zelenograd or even Podolsk as part of Moscow. In the Russian context, "Great Rus'" meant the centre of political and religious power, yet the term only ever caught on when they both had left Kyiv.

Little Russia was nothing like Arthur Avenue, even though it was also peripheral within the context of Peter the Great's Russian Empire and gave it a lesser status. As the reader is no doubt aware, the translation of Ukraine is "at the edge" or "borderland". The question historians have often contended with is at the edge or on the border of what? Some have argued it was on the border of Europe and the Great Steppe; others have maintained it to be the edge of Christendom (or at least Catholicism).

One of the many theories explaining the origins of "White Rus'" for instance suggests it was the Christianised part of Northern Ruthenia, whereas "Black Ruthenia" was occupied by pagans and Balts. This shows why geography cannot be discounted here either. Rome was long considered the centre of Europe, even though geographically speaking, it is more like Vilnius. This means that Ukraine, Belarus and Russia were never peripheral parts of Europe. Both the Muscovite and Kyivan state and culture originated in Europe, but expanded its territory into Asia.

Yet, this in and of itself is telling of the Old Rus' position within Europe – the Eastern Slavs were known well before the Kyivan state came into existence. Throughout Kyivan Rus' history, the princes and princesses of Rus' married into other European royal families. There were high-profile marriages to Norwegian, German, Hungarian and of course Byzantine royalty, forming greater cultural and

trading links. Moreover, many of Russia's oldest churches, like those in the Golden Ring region, were built with the help of German and Italian architects. And it was in the final chapter of Kyivan Rus' history where the idea of a "Little Russia" on the periphery was born.

Towards the Golden Gates

The expansion of Kyivan Rus' in the 12th and 13th centuries began the journey towards a Little, Great and White Russia. To be more specific, it is rooted in the transfer of political and spiritual power from Kyiv to the fortress city of Vladimir. Despite their early mentions by the chroniclers, the Golden Ring cities of Vladimir, Suzdal and Rostov were initially outside the Rus', or what was then considered Rus'. Although according to the *Primary Chronicle*, Rurik settled in Novgorod, Kyiv became the senior most city where the grand princes ruled from and church metropolitans later sat. The grand princes of Kyiv also assumed the title of "all Rus'", as later would the Tsars. This title was chosen because the princes ruled not just the Kyivan lands, but a much larger territory, stretching across the Volga river to the east, and even as far as part of the Urals.

The expansion of Kyivan Rus' in the 12th and 13th centuries began the journey towards a Little, Great and White Russia.

As Kyiv struggled to control its peripheries, consolidate its power and fight off numerous steppe invaders, many of the Eastern Slavs began migrating to the economically prosperous principality of Vladimir-Suzdal, in the northeast of Rus'. Surrounded by vast forestry and rivers, it was rich in furs, timber, fish, wax and located far from the steppe invaders. It was a politically stable principality, headed by a powerful autocrat, who, at one time, controlled Europe's largest army. One can argue that in Vladimir, Russian autocracy as we know it, was born.

Taking advantage of Kyiv's weaknesses, in 1169 Prince Andrey Bogolyubsky of Vladimir-Suzdal sacked the city of Kyiv. He claimed the title of Kyivan grand prince but chose not to remain in the city. Instead, he returned to his new palace in Vladimir, and in so doing, the seat of political power transferred with him. The church metropolitan of Kyiv and all the Rus' moved to Vladimir in 1299. With these transfers, Great Rus' moved and so too did its surrounding territories.

There are various early references to Great, Little and White Rus'. A Byzantine Diocese list from the 12th century references which churches were under the control of Great Rus', namely Rostov, an important bishopric. The name was also used

by Patriarch Callistus I of Constantinople in 1361 when creating the metropolitans of Great Rus' in Vladimir and Kyiv and Little Rus' with its centres in Halych and Novogrudok (Navahrudak). However, these were not official terms yet and the implied territories would change. When political and religious power shifted to Moscow after the end of Mongol rule, Vladimir and Novgorod were still a part of Great Rus', but on the periphery of the Muscovite state.

Kyiv and Galich meanwhile were lost to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Linguistically, these lands began to change. Originally, those in Little, Great and White Russia all spoke a common tongue which derived from the old Eastern Slavonic language, Ruthenian. Among the former lands of Rus' under the control of the Mongol-Tatar yoke, western influences never reached the upper Volga Basin, from where Moscow launched its expansion, also known as the "regathering of Russian lands". As the northern and southern parts of Kyivan Rus' absorbed by Poland were affected linguistically, Vladimir-Suzdal and its surrounding settlements became regarded as the birthplace of the Russian language. Ukrainian and Belarusian were considered linguistically peripheral and dismissed as regional dialects.

When the Soviet state constructed the tourist route now known as the Golden Ring, this idea of the symbolic heartlands of Great Rus' was exploited and became the region's unique selling point. It was to offer something different from Central Asia and the Baltics, and became a sort of escape from Soviet stagnation into a mythical past. However, in a political system with many self-imposed restrictions, the Soviet state had to use the story of Vladimir-Suzdal carefully within a Marxist framework. Whilst figures such as Alexander Nevsky were easy to use as symbols of state power and fighting against the Germans (as in the Great Patriotic War), any connections to the Romanovs had to be downplayed or glossed over. This is despite the fact that listening to the bells of Rostov became something of a fashion in the late 1960s.

Among the former lands of Rus', western influence never reached the upper Volga Basin, from where Moscow launched its expansion.

As such, the first symbol of the Golden Ring motoring route produced a contradictory image: an Orthodox onion-shaped dome, symbolising ancient traditions, and a crane and electricity pylon – a long-standing metaphor for socialist modernity. But mentions of Kyiv or even Novgorod were nowhere to be found. The project was designed to enhance the cultural significance of the regions and local identities to boost foreign tourism. Instead, the Golden Ring became a metaphor for Russian national feelings based on a shared history and culture rooted in an ancient past. Or as the journalist who helped forge it wrote, "the cradle of Russian culture".

Russia looks West

Despite earlier mentions, it was not until Peter the Great's reign when "Little Russia" was officially co-opted and could be located on a map. The linguistic distinction of Great and Little Russia was also a key part of establishing a separate "Ukrainian" identity. By 1721, the distinctions between Rus', Russia and all the "Russias" were confused. After Peter set about carving up Poland-Lithuania and annexing the former parts of Old Rus', Russian bureaucrats embarked on a renaming mission as they themselves underwent a forced westernisation. The northern stretches of Ruthenia became "White Russia" and the southern stretches of Ukraine "Little Russia". Not pleased with such terminology, many set about calling themselves Ukrainians, because the term *ruski* had been appropriated by the Muscovite state and this led to the language being called "Ukrainian".

Over the course of the next three centuries, the Ukrainian language was often banned and actively suppressed even as many Ukrainians made great careers in Moscow as governors, cultural figures and church clerics. After the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, persecutions increased by both the Russian and Austrian authorities, who controlled a portion of Western Ukraine right up to the Ternopil and Chernivtsi oblasts. Retreating Austrians executed Ukrainians who were suspected of sympathising with Russia. Russians suppressed all Ukrainian cultural and political activities, exiled many prominent Ukrainians to Siberia and accused the Austro-Hungarian government of promoting a fictional language to drive a wedge between the Russian peoples.

Little, White and Great were political and geographical terms used to define the lands and peoples caught in the crosshairs of Poland, Prussia, Russia and the Ottoman Empire for almost three centuries. Whilst it cannot be denied that Russia and Ukraine do have a shared history, it has also been severed for at least a quarter of the last millennium. Both sides understand and view the "little" label very differently. The Russian state views it as a symbol of historic and cultural unity whereas the Ukrainian state deems it an oppressive and colonial label. There are merits and mistakes on both sides of this argument, but to coin a phrase, history is an assault on the present.

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Poland's Ukrainian refugee assistance as a transformational experience

MACIEJ MAKULSKI

Russia's war in Ukraine has changed not only Ukraine but also nearby countries due to the massive influx of war refugees. Poland has become the major destination for people fleeing from the war and hosts the highest number of those seeking shelter. What does this new Ukrainian diaspora mean for Poland and what impact will it have on Polish politics, demography and society?

Immediately after Russia's full-scale invasion started on February 24th 2022, war refugees began to stream into neighbouring countries, with Poland quickly becoming the main destination. The refugee influx found the Polish state unprepared for such a situation. There was no pre-existing infrastructure nor administrative experience that would be sufficient to comprehensively manage the crisis by state agencies and civil servants. Moreover, there was a real emotion and readiness to help among Poles and civil society organisations. Thanks to these two factors, we did not see the images and footage we normally see, such as during the 2015 refugee crisis, which showed large congregations of people gathered in temporary (at

least in theory) refugee camps. The vast majority of refugees in Poland found temporary accommodation with Polish families (and Ukrainian who lived in Poland before the invasion), who became hosts and helped to mitigate this unprecedented movement of people into Poland.

What did work at the state level, was the political reaction to the war and refugee influx. The Polish government has shown and maintained, alongside the other Central European states (excluding Hungary), unequivocal support which soon translated into financial and material support, including military equipment. Undoubtedly, support for Ukraine has become an important component of investing in Poland's own security, but one may not notice that in this case, political action went hand in hand with a dominant social and moral attitude.

Crisis in numbers

In terms of numbers, the refugee influx has quickly outgrown initial assumptions by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). As of mid-October 2022, 7.5 million refugees from Ukraine have fled the country and have been recorded across Europe. The number of border crossings on the Polish-Ukrainian border has reached 6.9 million. However, this does not translate into such a high number of people staying in Poland. Hence, there is no clear data of how many people from Ukraine currently live in Poland, with different estimates. The most regularly updated source of information in this regard is the governmental database about the number of applications submitted for a Polish identification number (PESEL). Poland's government made such a procedure possible by adopting a special bill called the "Act on Assistance to Ukrainian Citizens in the Context of the Armed Conflict in Ukraine". It allows Ukrainians access to the public health care system, public education and social protection (e.g. Ukrainians are included in the 500+ programme which grants five hundred zlotys (about 100 euros) for each child in the family every month.

According to official Polish data, there are 192,000 Ukrainian pupils in Polish schools for the 2022–23 school year.

As of mid-October, there are one million people who have been assigned PESEL numbers. Almost 70 per cent are women (the most numerous group is women between 18 and 64 years old). People under 18 account for 42 per cent of the cohort. Regarding education opportunities, Ukrainian pupils choose either to continue education in Ukraine (remote education) or enrol in the Polish school system. According to data provided by the Polish ministry of education, there are

192,000 Ukrainian pupils in Polish schools for the 2022–23 school year. Out of this, 164,197 pupils (85 per cent) are in pre-schools and primary schools (between six and 14 years old). There is no clear evidence of how many pupils attend Ukrainian schools (online) from Poland and how many remain outside any school system, which could be a significant problem as there would be a large group of school-aged children who are receiving no education.

Overall, in terms of hard cash Poland has been at the top of the list of the countries supporting Ukraine. According to estimates by the Polish Institute of Economy (PIE), the value of private aid to Ukraine by Poles amounts to ten billion Polish zlotys (around 2.12 million euros). Overall, Poland's support has been up to one percent of the country's GDP (as of mid-2022). In terms of the ratio of aid to the country's GDP, Poland is third behind only Latvia and Estonia. Poland is also the third biggest military support provider (after the US and UK).

Growing Ukrainian diaspora

The post-invasion cohort of people has only enlarged the Ukrainian diaspora that lived in the country before and grew particularly after 2014 due to the war. Therefore, according to Maciej Duszczyk, a professor at Warsaw University and a recognised authority on migration issues, there are now between 2.3 to 2.5 million Ukrainians in Poland. Besides the one million mentioned above, 850,000 or so people have access to the Polish job market and around 380,000 hold another residence status (the last two groups are mainly people who came to Poland before February 24th). Ukrainians outnumber other nations in having work permits granted in Poland. Ukrainians accounted for 65 per cent of all work permits issued to foreigners in Poland in 2021 alone.

Without a doubt, the existence of a large community of Ukrainians has contributed to the mitigation of the refugee crisis after the invasion broke out. Like many Polish families, they hosted the newcomers in their homes as well and have been (and still are) involved in the self-organisation of help for people trying to settle here or travel further to other countries. In public discourse, one may hear that Putin's war against Ukraine has boosted a positive image of Ukrainians in Poland. While one should not overestimate this factor, the results of opinion polls and studies confirm that Ukrainians enjoyed positive attitudes among Poles even before the current phase of the Russo-Ukrainian War. Annual research by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) indicates that more Poles have positive feelings about Ukrainians than those who have negative ones. In 2022 (results were published before February 24th), 41 per cent of Poles declared warm feelings toward Ukraini-

Photo: Adam Reichardt

A photo from the Polish-Ukrainian border in the early days of the full-scale invasion. As of mid-October 2022, 7.5 million refugees from Ukraine have fled the country and have been recorded across Europe. The number of border crossings on the Polish-Ukrainian border has reached 6.9 million.

ans, while 27 per cent were indifferent and 25 per cent were not sympathetic. Seven percent had no opinion. The numbers were pretty similar to the year before.

Although between 2014 and 2022 the relation of sympathy/antipathy towards Ukrainians has been changing, and not always positive, sympathetic attitudes have outweighed the negative ones. The long-term perspective shows a general improvement in this regard when compared to the beginning of the 21st century, when almost 60 per cent of Poles declared negative attitudes towards Ukrainians and only 16 per cent declared positive ones. In fact, one can argue that the invasion led to a situation where Polish-Ukrainian disputes over common history have become marginalised. No mainstream political party plays the anti-Ukrainian card since it would most likely not find any support among the broader public. This does not mean there were no attempts to stoke anti-Ukrainian sentiment and it would be a miscalculation to expect that these kinds of tensions could not re-emerge sometime after the war.

The lesser-known Other

The reaction of Polish society to the refugee influx came as a surprise to the world and helped create a positive image of a country open to others. In a public

speech in May this year, the US ambassador to Poland, Mark Brzezinski, called Poland a "humanitarian superpower". This posture stands in harsh contrast to what happened at the Polish-Belarusian border in 2021. Back then, Poland was a victim of an artificial refugee crisis engineered by the President of Belarus Alyaksandr Lukashenka. For several weeks, the Belarusian public services and military were transporting people to Belarus from many remote places in the Middle East and Africa, and afterward sending them to the borderland with Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. Although one may not compare the Belarusian-provoked crisis to what is happening now due to the war in Ukraine, back then the general unwillingness of the Polish authorities to support those people who found themselves in very harsh conditions in the forests on the borderland (many of them ultimately died), was met with a broader social apathy. Only a few civil society groups and activists such as *Grupa Granica* have been organising help for these people crossing the border.

As a result of the response to refugees, the US ambassador to Poland, Mark Brzezinski, called Poland a "humanitarian superpower".

From a moral point of view, it was difficult to find a justification for such indifference even if there was a general awareness of the political aspect of this crisis, which was defined as a threat to national security. It is also noteworthy that the Polish government's subsequent decision to build a fence on the border with Belarus and push back the migrants, found full backing from the EU side.

A similar reluctance to host refugees was also present during the 2015 refugee crisis in Europe. Poland, alongside other Central European states and the Baltic republics, was in opposition to letting the newcomers into Europe. At that time, a dominant factor was fear or indifference expressed towards people of a different religion (mainly Muslims). As a result, many people and the Polish government supported the idea of hosting only Christians from outside of Europe.

The long-term perspective

After 1945 Poland found itself in a situation of being a homogenous country. For decades an average Polish citizen has not been exposed to dense relations with people of different cultures. If they were it was rather within the comfort zone of people from other satellite countries of the Soviet Union. Russia's current war in Ukraine and the refugee crisis stemming from it, have the potential to become a transformational experience for Poland in its relations with the Other.

As the results of the last census show, the population of Poland in 2021 decreased by one per cent in comparison to 2011. What is more, there are almost two million people more in the 60/65+ age group and every fifth citizen is older than 60. In other words, Poland faces a demographic collapse and it is difficult to imagine that there will be no pressure from the job market to absorb more and more people from abroad each year. In the first half of 2022, the largest number of work permits was granted to Ukrainians (more than 75,000) but it was followed by countries like India, Uzbekistan, Belarus and the Philippines (in total between 10,000 and 15,000). In other words, the pool of people who are from countries with cultural proximity to Poland is limited and it is likely that more and more people from remote countries and cultures will be coming to Poland in the years to come.

The fact that Ukrainians have been present in the Polish job market, academia and within Polish society as such for the last eight years has undoubtedly contributed to the manifestation of support and help towards Ukrainians arriving to Poland due to the invasion. The other factor is the general aversion (motivated also by a deeply rooted fear of domination) of Poles towards Russia, resulting in political solidarity with the countries which the Russian Federation wants to keep in its sphere of influence. Poland also supported Ukraine during the Revolution of Dignity in 2013–14 and the Orange Revolution in 2004, as well as Georgia in 2008.

At this point, it is still not clear what the dominant strategy of the Ukrainians who are now in Poland will be after the war eventually ends. One may assume that the majority of them will be willing to go back and contribute to the rebuilding and recovery efforts. On the other hand, it may occur that the level of destruction will inhibit a move to Ukraine and many people will find it more secure to stay in Poland.

If the number of Ukrainians remains at the current level, it means that the population of Poland will cross the threshold of 40 million and Ukrainians may account for five per cent of the Polish population. The majority of them will be people of working age, active in the job market. It will be a positive development for the Polish economy and a negative one for Ukraine, which may become a factor in Polish-Ukrainian relations in the future.

What is more, if the trend of the inflow of people from other countries (mainly Asian) increases, Poland might become a much more demographically diverse country in the next decade. Hopefully, the state and society will learn some lessons from recent refugee-related experiences (good and bad ones), and will translate them into a more mature migration policy towards others who are coming to Poland.

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Russia's closure of the Jewish Sochnut agency reveals its true identity policy

VLADYSLAV FARAPONOV

On July 27th 2022, the Russian ministry of justice sued the Russian branch of the Sochnut Jewish Agency – an important non-profit which assists Jewish communities around the world. The recent repression of this Jewish organisation seriously contradicts Russia's own claims that Ukrainians are Nazis who do not tolerate any other nations and cultures.

By the time Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, entered office in the spring of 2019, Ukraine's prime minister was Volodymyr Groysman. This meant that the country's two most powerful positions were occupied by Ukrainians with Jewish roots for the first time in the history of modern Ukraine. At the same time, Russia's state propaganda continued to come up with more nonsense allegations that Ukraine was controlled by far-right Nazis. This prepared Russians for an atmosphere of constant hostility with Ukrainians, as they were labelled publicly as enemies.

Back in the Soviet Union, antisemitism was a clear state policy and was seen in daily life despite not being declared officially. This was partly due to some large segments of the Bolsheviks, including the founders of the Soviet Union, being Jewish.

Up to the late 1980s and especially during the years after the Second World War, Jews were not allowed to hold high-ranking positions. There was a quota on how many Jewish students could be enrolled at universities. That is why the collapse of the Soviet Union was seen as a breath of fresh air for Jews in all the republics of the former Soviet Union. Eventually, it opened a window of opportunity to migrate to Israel and start a new life. Such a tendency was relevant for both Ukrainian and Russian Jews.

At least 1.1 million Russian Jews emigrated to Israel by the time of the Soviet Union's collapse. It is very difficult to identify how many of this number could be considered Jewish just because of their ancestors and how many still practiced Judaism at the time. The general tendency was that as many years and generations pass, in Orthodox society, it is assumed to be much harder to keep practicing Judaism, celebrate Jewish festivals and raise children according to Jewish traditions. In the meantime, the Russian strategy to incorporate other non-Russian nationalities, including Jews, into one land amounted to a policy of assimilation. By creating one people, which claimed to be great, Moscow tried to gain influence over its population and establish a monolithic structure. This has started to crack due to its full-blown war against Ukraine.

New repressions

On July 27th 2022, the Russian ministry of justice sued the Russian branch of the Sochnut Jewish Agency. The Basmanny District Court of Moscow opened the case and the trial itself was delayed several times. At the time of writing, the future of this case remains unclear. Yet, considering the wartime agony within Russia's political leadership and the fact that it was the ministry of justice that filed the lawsuit, it is presumed that the agency will be shut down eventually.

The ministry of justice claims that Sochnut violated Russian law. According to the *Jerusalem Post*, the claims of the Russian authorities are related to the collection and transfer of personal data of Russians to Israel and brain drain. At the same time, the BBC emphasised that these allegations were not the first. Moscow's ministry of justice had previously expressed the same concerns and conducted various checks in the organisation's headquarters around the country. It then fined the organisation for violating some technical standards. However, the government considered this fact as proof of wider guilt and continued pressuring Sochnut.

Moreover, the Kremlin's justification for accusing the Jewish organisation was absurd and could be viewed as very suspicious. The allegations dealt with the fact that Sochnut collected data on Russian citizens and sent it abroad. The organisa-

tion checks if a person has Jewish roots and then send the documents to Israel to be approved. Russia's decision is nothing more than politically-motivated, as the organisation has been operating in Russia for more than 30 years and has helped thousands of people with Jewish roots move to Israel or discover the history and culture of the people and country.

In that regard, Russia's desire to close down one of the leading Jewish organisations in the world reveals the truth behind the Kremlin's strategy regarding the unification of its population. It is much easier to keep a tight rein on a homogenous society, as minorities may protest over many different things. By declaring publicly that Jews are better off leaving rather than staying, Russia did not just violate its own constitution but only announced publicly that nonconformists will face problems. At the same time, from the Putin regime's perspective, this move can be seen as a desire to eliminate "unstable" elements. Jews are certainly viewed as one of them.

It is essential to mention that people with Jewish roots traced back three generations, preferably from the maternal line, are allowed to immigrate to Israel. Of course, Jewish people's motivations to conduct repatriation and migrate differ. They may seek a better life and social and medical care. They do not want to flee a country under the threat of repression due to the discovery of their religious beliefs.

In that case, the closure of the most influential Jewish organisation in Russia indicates on a symbolic level what is going on domestically. In the meantime, it also reveals how the Kremlin regime sees the future of other nationalities in Russia – or rather how it does not see it. What is even more revealing is that the recent repression against the Jewish organisation contradicts Russia's own claims that Ukrainians are Nazis who do not tolerate any other nations and cultures.

As Walter Russell Mead writes, antisemitism indicates "a society or culture that is not ready for prime time and which will fail the tests of modern life; when antisemitism gains a foothold, the canary in your coal mine has just keeled over and died". One can argue that the closure of a Jewish organisation is not a direct act of antisemitism, but it shows that there is little place for the Jewish population. It is clear that Jews are not really welcome in Putin's Russia.

Political pressure ramping up

What impact will Russia's decision actually have? In order to answer this question, it is essential to explain what Sochnut is, what purposes it serves and how important it is for the Jewish people around the world. Sochnut is a key source of transition into the Jewish tradition. The most important work of these organisations, which takes place worldwide, is to guide Jews on a cultural level. It coordinates the

efforts of other Jewish organisations that deal with issues related to culture, such as learning Hebrew, setting up cultural and educational camps for children, providing humanitarian assistance, and financial aid to Jews. Arranging repatriation to Israel is just one of its major functions.

Sochnut is like a bureau, an essential link between other organisations. It is the first place approached by Jewish people who seek various types of assistance. Sochnut is meant to conduct seminars on Jewish history and culture, promote values and attract new members through camps and courses for young people in the countries it operates. Those are the universal rules for Sochnut, which are applicable to Russia as well.

At the same time, it could not be argued that this decision would change the lives of millions. According to Russia's census data, as of 2010, there were little more than 165,000 people in the country who identified themselves as Jewish. The BBC reported in August 2022 that more than 20,500 of Russia's estimated total of 165,000 Jews had left the country since March. There was also a chance for those Russians in third states to apply for immigration documents, so it is likely that a lot of uncounted Jewish Russians are on their way to repatriation.

The BBC reported in August 2022 that more than 20,500 of Russia's estimated total of 165,000 Jews had left the country since March.

Just prior to the justice ministry revealing its absurd claims, Moscow's chief rabbi, Pinchas Goldschmidt, fled the country and his post. He was reported to have felt politically pressured by the government to do so. Goldschmidt did not support Russia's full-scale war, although he was asked to do so. Moreover, he was the chief rabbi for more than 30 years, which once again showed that he served the community well. He was also re-elected for his job last June, so other factors beyond political pressure due to the war are not well argued. On his Twitter, he wrote that "I could not remain silent, viewing so much human suffering, I went to assist the refugees in Eastern Europe and spoke out against the war." This is very important to understand, as for Jewish people the rabbi is the first person they approach in case of uncertainty or when they seek advice. In light of this, the rabbi's resignation should be considered a bad sign for Jews in Russia. As he symbolically pointed out in the op-ed for the *New York Times*, the Jewish people remember that it is the role of faith to counter evil, to fight for the basic human rights of liberty and life.

There is no doubt that the announced "partial" mobilisation in Russia, which may conscript up to one million people according to various media outlets, will likely increase the number of Jews and their relatives leaving Russia. Historical examples are relevant in that regard too. Jews fled the Soviet Union or relocated within it during the Second World War and helped others arrange their lives in

temporary homes or start new lives. It is a key part of Jewish culture to express solidarity with and help other Jews, not to mention hiding them from repressions.

Given those sentiments, Ukraine's leadership, including Volodymyr Zelenskyy, expected Israel to provide more active support to Ukraine. Meanwhile, the Israeli government did not impose significant sanctions on Moscow and has not provided the expected amount of support at the governmental level, including welcoming more Ukrainians to Israel. For Ukraine, Israel is considered to be one of its role models in terms of its domestic security, army organisation, and the level of people's military knowledge. In a time of full-scale war, military experience, including spy operations, are important. This decision of Russia might ultimately be a turning point for Israel to offer help to Kyiv, not to Moscow, which Jews are leaving.

Israel's position

Russia's move may change the Israeli position and make it cut ties with Russia, or at least hold back on cooperation with Putin's regime while it suppresses Jews. Speaking about Israel's assistance to Kyiv, it is expected that it will provide more substantial help to Ukraine. As for now, it is more about private initiatives, not state policy. Since the 1990s, the unwritten rules of normal Israel-Russia relations concerned ensuring that Russian Jews would be free to emigrate to Israel and protecting the rights of those who remained in Russia. That seemed not to be the case this time.

The country faces tough decisions on the international stage, as it does not want to cut ties with Russia, nor forget about Ukraine and its own Jewish population. However, regionally for Israel, Iran is enemy number one today. Therefore, they enthusiastically oppose the lifting of sanctions against Tehran and any potential nuclear activity. Because Russia has already been using Iranian "Shahed 136" kamikaze drones in the Jewish-populated Odesa region to spy on and attack Ukrainian cities, Ukraine and Israel will undoubtedly be interested in collaboration. For example, intelligence sharing is very important and does not require any publicity.

Joining the western sanctions against Russia is a dilemma for Israel. But given the circumstances, it is not the actions of Israeli society or Ukraine that are encouraging Israel to answer this question. It is also quite possible that the EU and the US will eventually ask Israel to make up its mind and choose between opposing or supporting the sanctions.

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De-Stalinisation as a postulate of freedom

MARIUSZ MASZKIEWICZ

Stalinisation – just like the system of the Third Reich – was a source of the greatest tragedy of Europe in the 20th century. It meant deprivation of freedom, forced labour camps (the Gulag), prosecution and massive suffering of millions of people living in Central and Eastern Europe. In its Soviet form, totalitarianism has Stalin's face.

While Europe has managed to, more or less successfully, hold those who created and implemented the Nazi regime accountable, Stalinism, in its light versions, which are often not associated with crime and genocide, has survived until today. Stalinism was one of the bloodiest and most inhumane forms of communist dictatorship. However, in the West, and especially in France and Italy, light versions of communism and Bolshevism had their own devout admirers. Thus, while in Central and Eastern Europe Stalinism is undisputedly associated with what Timothy Snyder calls "the blood lands", its soft forms have been, for decades, nourished by the intellectual elite in the West.

In 2022 we are once again experiencing this brutal form of Stalinism, which future scholars will describe as Putinism. This is, nonetheless, not the only reason why Russia's aggression in Ukraine should be treated as a consequence of not holding communism accountable for its crimes since 1989. The postulate for de-Stalinisation includes an intellectual decomposition of all the elements and areas where the totalitarian Bolshevik virus has developed.

Stalinism – beginnings

The beginning of the Stalinist period dates back to 1929. At that time, an ambitious Bolshevik activist, from the provincial Georgian town of Gori, named Ioseb Besarionis dze Jughashvili (Stalin, Soso, Koba were his pseudonyms) became the leader of the Soviet communist party. After having eliminated his opponents from the Leninist camp (mainly Leon Trotsky) Stalin quickly became a dictator who used murder as a weapon to eliminate not only his political opponents, but also every expression of intellectual independence and economic freedom. Stalin created an authoritarian model, becoming an example for different mutations of communism that developed in Asia and throughout Europe. After his death in 1953 a few attempts towards de-Stalinisation were undertaken, but they were all abandoned in 1964 after Stalin's successor, Nikita Khrushchev, stepped down. After that, during the period of Leonid Brezhnev and Yuri Andropov's rule, the Soviet Union went through a cycle of thaws and "tightening of belts", while from 1986 to 1991, under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev, it experimented with systemic changes known as *glasnost* and *perestroika*, which were a response to the economic crisis of the 1980s.

When the Soviet Union collapsed it seemed that the communist system would also follow and democracy and civil liberties would triumph around the world. However, events turned out differently and quite soon some political leaders inspired by the Stalinist totalitarian model started to gain recognition in different places. This was especially true in a number of post-Soviet states where in the last three decades the political elite have received a democratic ticket to rule with Stalinist methods. The most evident example here is Belarus where Alaksyandr Lukashenka won democratic elections in 1994 and became president of the republic. It then took him only two years to change the state system into a dictatorship (first soft but later hard), based on the Stalinist model.

A similar trend was seen in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Azerbaijan. But also at different time periods in Moldova, the Kyrgyz Republic and Ukraine. In regards to the latter we are talking about the short period of Viktor Yanukovych's rule. However, it is in today's Russia where we see the true triumph of the Stalinist model with the strengthening of the position of Vladimir Putin and his camp.

Overall, the theoreticians and historians of Stalinism agree on a number of features that distinguish Stalinism from other totalitarian systems. They include: unlimited power based on unity rule (consolidation of the party of power that controls state structures); control of all areas of social and economic life through party nomenclature and state apparatus; development of terror and coercion institutions aimed at eliminating enemies (real and alleged) and intimidating the society; mili-

tarisation of large areas of public life; high level of state investments in the economy, central planning; and in the USSR there was also collective farming and focus on heavy industry and military sector (which in the first half of the 20th century was synonymous to modernity). Among other important features that distinguish Stalinism is also an imperial policy aimed at elimination of external threats.

Integral Stalinism

The term integral Stalinism brings an association with another similar term, namely integral nationalism. The latter originated in the 19th-century France and was put forward by a controversial French thinker, Charles Maurras, who had a fascination with fascism. In his theoretical framework the sovereignty of the nation succumbs to a centralised power apparatus, which is expected to act in the name and interest of the people, even though it is independent of them. Other theoreticians of integral nationalism included Dmytro Dontsov, a Ukrainian nationalist inspired by Roman Dmowski, a Polish thinker and politician. Integral nationalism is thus based on an assumption that in democratic systems nations are threatened by different groups and foreigners, which is in contradiction with the main goal of nationalism.

The comparison of integral Stalinism and integral nationalism comes naturally in the analysis of the practice of power wielding in the Soviet Union and the post-Soviet states. Just like in integral nationalism, the principle of citizen's agency is rejected in integral Stalinism. This system has been built by Vladimir Putin since May 9th 2005 when the former KGB spy, now president of the Russian Federation, declared a war against the coloured revolutions that had taken place in post-Soviet states (specifically Georgia and Ukraine).

In that year, the official celebrations of the Victory Day which are held in Russia on May 9th, were followed by Putin's closed meeting with representatives of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The invited attendees included the President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazerbayev, the President of Belarus Lukashenka, the President of Uzbekistan Islom Karimov, Emomali Rahmon the president of Tajikistan and a few other important politicians from the region. During the meeting the leaders agreed on adopting a shared cooperation strategy to counter colour revolutions, if they reoccur. Evidently, all these leaders were afraid of losing power due to a social rebellion or a civic revolt. They were very worried about the wind that was blowing from Georgia and Ukraine.

All of these leaders had been educated in the Soviet Union where they were taught theoretical models of political systems which do not foresee space for ideals

such as freedom of choice and belief. Consequently, like Vladimir Putin, they were convinced that civic activism could never be genuine on the grassroots level. It had to be a result of a plot, a coup or foreign intervention. For them things such as the will of the people, a spontaneous reaction, a civic movement, civic agency, were simply incomprehensible. As a result, they believed that every social activity had to have a moving agency behind it; that agency was usually associated with power apparatus, either domestic or foreign. Thus, since that meeting, there has been a joke that captures their attitude to coloured revolutions: "Why there has been no colour revolution in the US? Because there is no US Embassy there".

Let us now return to case of Belarus. After having seen Georgia's Rose Revolution and the Ukrainian Orange Revolution, Lukashenka started to clean his own political playground and remove all potential threats. He first eliminated civil society organisations, also those representing the Polish minority in Belarus. More precisely, after his return from the earlier mentioned meeting in Moscow, Lukashenka issued an order to state services to eliminate/demand subordination of the Union of Poles in Belarus. To put things in perspective let me present the sequence of events which took place in this process. In March 2005 at its sixth congress the union held elections to select a new leader. These elections were won by Andżelika Borys who then became the union's leader. However, on May 12th 2005, that is after Lukashenka's return from Moscow, the ministry of justice invalidated the congress's independent and democratic decision and brought back the previous leader, Tadeusz Kruczkowski, who was an obedient supporter of Lukashenka's regime.

Another important phenomenon that should also be pointed out here is that after Ukraine's Orange Revolution in Poland we saw an unprecedented level of social support towards democratic and pro-European Ukraine. Yet we also noted the opposite, namely mushrooming of the organisations which exploited historical sentiments related to Poland's former territories in the East and therefore contribute to the stirring of disagreements and conflicts between Poland and Ukraine. As a result, old historical grievances over the Volhynia massacre and Stepan Bandera's activities came to the surface.

In March 2006 after Lukashenka had forged the results of the presidential election in Belarus, protests were organised in Minsk and were crushed cruelly and brutally. This was the first such handling of demonstrators, which was repeated later in 2010 and 2020.

Supporters of integral Stalinism (in a light version) also include the extreme right in Poland. Its radical wing led by Bartosz Bekier, is known for such actions as hanging out posters supporting Syrian president Assad on campuses of Warsaw universities. Assad, with Putin's support, also crushed an Arab coloured revolution in his own state. Besides Bekier, Leszek Sykulski and Mateusz Piskorski are known

supporters of Eurasianism in Poland. This worldview is now popularised at Polish universities which it entered under the label of geopolitics. As such it exploits a certain nostalgia for a world that was ordered and resembles Fascist regimes which are based on anti-democratic assumptions, including those of integral Stalinism. Evidently, in such viewpoint there is no room for individual human beings. Instead, there are ideas and concepts aimed at wielding power over others.

Areas in need of de-Stalinisation

Geopolitics

The first thing that requires urgent de-Stalinissation is Eurasianist thinking which has entered social sciences stemming from the science of geopolitics. This belief derives from the Stalinist interpretation of the world and has origins in Marxism. It assumes a materialistic approach to history and interpretation of social phenomena based on a conviction that human beings, as part of nature, are not subjects but objects of political processes. Among the key concepts and tools of Stalinist materialism are: determinism, which finds its basis in objects, consumed goods, production and natural factors which shape our surroundings and which, all together, are seen as the foundation of human existence. In this way, the geopolitical approach, now promoted in social sciences and humanities, reduces the human world to these material aspects.

Geopolitics thus derives its basic assumptions from areas of knowledge such as geography, demographics, economy, statistics, production relations and industrial outputs. Its proponents have been lobbying for including this "area of knowledge" into academic curricula. However, in their thinking they make an error of dehumanisation. They replace human beings (individuals) with objects and natural phenomena.

The hidden ally of geopolitics is an assumption that in a political system the agency is contractual while human beings (and their value systems) are only an intellectual convention. In this perspective, individualism is replaced by collectivism while group interest dominates over that of an individual. From the Judeo-Christian perspective this approach directly leads to a disdain for human beings and the value system where human beings are put in the centre; like in one of Vladimir Mayakovsky's poems which states *individual – a zero, individual – rubbish*.

Geopolitics is thus closely linked with the Stalinist concept of Eurasianism which is now being built anew and which since the beginning of the 20th century Russian social theorists have been using to explain Russian imperialism, has found its practical dimension in integral Stalinism. From the Polish and European perspec-

tives, the traps and dangers of Eurasianism and geopolitical ideas that derive from it are linked to the recognition of Russia's imperial aspirations based on domination; be it geographic, demographic or economic. That is why the de-Stalinisation postulate is crucial and urgent. It is tantamount to a recognition of the European Judeo-Christian value system and its tradition with respect of traditional values as a primary in comparison to all ideological viewpoints which reject anthropocentrism.

We should also recognise that the dehumanisation that is hidden in the postulates of geopolitics leads directly to totalitarian systems. Such as the Stalinist model currently experienced by the Russian society as it is – more or less – accepting Putin's rule and his aggressive and materialistic version of integral Stalinism.

Urban space

Another postulate regarding de-Stalinisation is made in regards to public space and its architecture. This, of course, does not apply only to monuments, public signs and communist symbols. The main feature of Stalinist architecture is the dehumanisation of urban space. Anybody who has seen at least one Soviet city knows all too well about it. In the Soviet Union, cities were characterised by having no, or limited, places which would allow for the nurturing of "bourgeois" social habits. Such places include cafés, small shops, recreation areas, community building places, and basic substitutes of local governance and civic initiatives. This landscape started to change in the 1990s, when small business started to develop. However, just a few decades later in Russia and other post-Soviet states we see a backslide of these changes and new bureaucratic barriers.

In Poland, Stalinism in the urban space is best exemplified by the architecture of parts of Warsaw.

In Poland, Stalinism in the urban space is best exemplified by the architecture of parts of Warsaw, especially the area around the Palace of Culture and Science. The surroundings of this place still strike with emptiness and make an impression of a space that is inhuman with many challenges when it comes to planning and zoning. Czesław Bielecki, Polish architect and former dissident, has been pointing out to this problem for quite some time now, postulating the need for changes.

It is also important to point out that in many Soviet cities huge monuments were erected with a goal to deprive their urban space of religious character and elements. The point was to destroy, or hide, Christian symbols (crosses, church towers, chapels, etc.). An illustrative example here is Tbilisi and its monument called Mother Georgia, which is a gigantic metal-concrete statue of a woman who is holding a sword in one hand and a chalice in the other. The story that ignorant tourists are told by uneducated tour guides is that this is some kind of an ancient tra-

dition – "chalice for friends, while the sword for the enemies". However, the true reason of erecting this monument in the Soviet times was to remove Christianity and European culture from Tbilisi's urban space. Nonetheless, we can frequently hear opinions against the elimination of communist signs in public spaces. They point to respect for history and heritage. Such argumentation yet leads to nowhere. In the same way, we could have preserved the Nazi symbols.

In many post-communist countries, the urban planners and visual artists already adhere to a grounded practice of separating the ideological layer from art. That is why the dispute whether the Warsaw Palace of Culture and Science should be destroyed seems artificial. It is sufficient to separate (renovation, reconstruction) what creates the ideological waste of public space from what needs to be saved as a witness of an epoch (style, patterns, illustration of aesthetic sensitivity of our ancestors, etc.).

Symbols, signs and heritage

De-Stalinisation is also required in the realm of symbols and language (communication). Certainly, the discourse which is used in public and by public administration institutions in many post-Soviet states requires solid reflection. Such calls have already been made by linguists as well civil society activists who have been fighting for more citizen-friendly public institutions, humanisation of regulations and legal norms, and even the style of official correspondence. In the same vein, in Poland, back in the 1990s, one of the most important Polish dailies organised a large social campaign titled "Childbirth with Dignity". Probably not many people associated it with de-Stalinisation, but the departure from the inhuman treatment of women giving birth in communist Poland which was included in this campaign's postulates was indeed aimed at humanising public life. A symbolic, but not less important, element of de-Stalinisation is the gradual departure in many post-Soviet states (at the state level) from recognising May 9th towards May 8th as Victory Day.

Unfortunately, there is still not adequate respect towards dissidents, the people who fought against communism (former prisoners of conscience, political prisoners, repressed persons). In his works and numerous articles Aleksander Podrabinek points to the lack of legal and administrative infrastructure to allow post-Soviet states to make an effort to respect, honour and take care of the former dissidents. Shamefully, a majority of them live in poverty and oblivion. With some pride, we can say that in Poland the process of dissident recognition has been exemplary and can serve as an example to be followed by other of post-communist states. In Putin's Russia, former heroes and dissidents who had the courage to oppose the oppressive communist machine are now subject to laughter and ridicule. Those who spent years in prisons and the Gulag in the name of European values are now living in poverty, which again is a sign of Stalinism's triumph.

Russian Orthodoxy

I will consciously not be using here words such as the church or Christianity as – since the passing away of Patriarchate Tichon in 1925 – the Russian Orthodox Church shrank to become an underground community or emigrated to other states. The role of the church was taken over by the church administration which was controlled by the Bolsheviks. The majority of the property of the Russian Orthodoxy was taken over by the renovationists of the Living Church. I wrote about this in my book titled *Mistyka i Rewolucja* (*Mysticism and Revolution*).

The conclusion which can be drawn from the tragic fate of the Russian Church can be illustrated by the symbolic meeting between Stalin and Bishop Sergei in September 1943. From that moment on the structures of the Orthodox Church became completely subordinated to the Soviet security apparatus. All with the consent of the humiliated clergy. The process of formatting priests, nominations, management of local churches, and remains of monkhood all became a part of state atheisation policy. Indeed, the bishops agreed to self-limit themselves and reduce the church's role to liturgy service. In the 1970s, after some thaw, they tried, without much success, to point to this tragic fate of the Church and such priests as Alexander Men, Gleb Yakunin, dissidents or leaders of the Catacomb Church.

The reactions of Kirill I, the leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, towards Russian aggression in Ukraine which started in February 2022 only enforces the conviction that Russian Orthodoxy is deeply rooted in the deep waters of Bolshevik Stalinism. The destabilisation of the Russian Orthodox Church will require, first and foremost, a thorough exchange of the church elite, which is an extremely difficult and time-consuming task.

Stalin's moustache peers from behind Katechon's portrait

I found this sarcastic expression – "Stalin's moustache peers from behind Katechon's portrait" – in the text authored by Piotr Doerre, who is a Polish journalist with ultra-right media. However, it turns out that other Polish political analysts, including Marek Cichocki and Adam Wielomski, also use this expression. For example, in his texts written about a decade ago, Wielomski also called Putin a Katechon, meaning an authoritarian leader who is bravely leading his nation towards the future. Yet, by making such a statement, Wielomski did not realise that while searching for a conservative justification for Stalinism he fell into a trap, set up by Moscow for European extreme conservatives.

These two authors also point out that the term katechon ("he who holds back" or "that which holds back") can be found in St Paul's Second Letter to the Thes-

salonians where we read: "the mystery of lawlessness" is active already … Nevertheless, once the "restrainer" is removed, "then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will destroy with the breath of his mouth, annihilating him by the manifestation of his coming. (2:7–8).

The Greek term Katechon (κατέχων) means someone who protects people from the coming of the Antichrist. Katechon is supposed to stop the apocalypse, the rule of the antichrist and win the eschatological battle on the fields of Armageddon. Until today we do not know who, or what, could actually be a katechon as it is described by St Paul. A discussion about this has been going on for almost 2000 years and we will never have any certainty in this regards.

Contemporary researchers provide a few theories. Is it God himself who is trying to stop the collapse? Or maybe this role is played by the Catholic Church led by the Holy Spirit? It cannot be excluded that the term katechon is actually a political term and the Roman Empire was a katechon whose established order was protecting the world and securing the earthly dimension of human existence.

In contemporary thinking there is one more concept of katechon. It is the sublime Eurasian "sacral geopolitics" which is aimed at conservative elites inside and outside Russia. In line with this view, the image that is sent to the international audience presents Vladimir Putin as a representative of the so-called modern conservatism. This conservatism is not an ideology, but rather a political standing made of some kind of "common sense" rules which are in a strong contrast to the collective "progressive craziness" (climate, ecology, cultural revolution, etc.) which has affected a majority of European and American politicians.

It would, nonetheless, be an exaggeration if we said that Moscow has established the network of concepts and ideas that seduced the intellectual elite in the West. Intuitively, we see that, just like in earlier times, also now the Kremlin simply relies on the "useful idiots" and windows of opportunities it finds abroad. The post-Soviet ideology is a desert of ideas. This is a soil that since the collapse of communism has been poorly ploughed. Thus, it bore fruit in the form of different ideas necessary to maintain dictators, on the one hand, and lost wanderers, on the other. This refers to the eremites of the intellectual Armageddon of the Euro-Atlantic world, meaning the defenders of traditional values.

A Roman Catholic pope crying over the death of the daughter of the Euroasian ideologist (keep in mind that Darya Dugina was actively calling for the killing of people) is – in my view – a measure of an intellectual confusion. In the 1920s and 1930s a large part of the European right got caught in a similar trap. At that time, seeing the successes of socialism, enforced by the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, it welcomed – with great hope – the mushrooming fascist movements, which may have been revolutionary and progressive – but their aim was to halt the communist march.

This belief led them to tragic consequences. Doerre correctly points out that the best illustration of this was the fate of Belgian Catholics who joined Leon Degrell's royalist movement. Their "love affair" with the fascists led them to an alliance with Nazi Germany. The Walloon Legion which was formed by Degrell – as part of the anti-communist crusade – marched along with the German troops all the way from Ukraine to Western Pomerania and its members were still being killed as late as May 1945, on the ruins of Berlin! Were the Catholics right in their decision to stand against Satanist Bolshevism by making an alliance with a no less dangerous demon of the nihilist Nazi regime?

I can imagine that the most ardent defenders of Stalinist Russia in Luhansk and Donetsk in a similar scene to that of the falling Nazi regime; how now, on the ruins of Putin's empire, they are giving up their lives in the name of their leader. Degrel's role has been taken on by Igor Girkin, also known as Igor Strelkov, the late Arsen Pavlov, known as Motorola, Alexandr Dugin, or Vladimir Solovyov.

How many of those who hope that Russia would stop the LGBTQ+ offensive and the so-called grand reset would agree with the statement that also here there is a false alternative? How many will come to the conclusion that they are following a false katechon, like children allured by the Pied Piper of Hamelin – who is leading them for destruction? The LGBTQ+, green ideology, and other radical left movements are supported by Russia because they are food for the development of integral Stalinism. Stalinism bred itself from Nazism, because it needed it, like oxygen, to develop. Today with the war in Ukraine we can clearly see that without the myths created by Moscow political technologists there would have been no justification for Russia's brutal aggression against an independent state.

While ending this essay let me just add that the Home Army soldiers, who were the true Polish patriots, were imprisoned in the Soviet Gulag until the late 1950s. They ended their lives marked as fascists imprisoned together with the Wehrmacht soldiers, members of the Lithuanian Riflemen's Union and Japan's imperial army. For Stalin, humiliation of freedom had to be crude and strong. That is why also today we can witness the show in Russian media where Ukraine's Azov soldiers are presented as the embodiment of evil.

The postulate for de-Stalinisation is thus not only limited to an intellectual dimension. It is also a valid political proposal for our times. It serves as a basis for hope that once it is achieved, nobody will want to take our freedom away.

Mariusz Maszkiewicz is the Polish ambassador to Georgia.

GDAŃSK

IT HAPPENED IN GDAŃSK

MACIEJ BUCZKOWSKI

Democracy is something in which we need to nurture, cherish and pursue, especially now in the times where non-liberal versions of democracy, flavoured with a pinch of authoritarianism, are gaining footing in different countries and when it is evident that we need to bravely fight for a real democracy to exist. To answer the challenge of the crisis of democracy we organised Democracy Days in Gdańsk. This year was the sixth edition of this event which is officially called Gdańsk Democracy Week. It was held from September 12th to September 18th at the European Solidarity Centre where we discussed and practiced democracy.

development of civic culture requires a value-based education, learning to take responsibility for oneself but also for others, as well as for the world around us

The idea of this event was inspired by the International Day of Democracy which has been established by the United Nations and is held annually on September 15th. In Gdańsk we organised the first edition of the Gdańsk Week of Democracy in September 2016 upon the initiative of the late Mayor Paweł Adamowicz. His idea was to organise discussions, expert lectures and stimulate a common search for solutions to contemporary problems.

This year's Democracy Days started with a conference titled "Solidarity in development – activism for development". It gathered activists, academics and representatives of the third sector who

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discussed today's volunteering and the value of civic activism. This topic was related to the fact that in 2022 Gdańsk is the holder of the title of European Volunteering Capital.

The programme of the Democracy Week included discussions which were organised in cooperation with the Polish weekly *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Among the discussed topics were: combatting disinformation and fake news at the time of war as well as the principles of investigative journalism, and the rule of "more information, less sensation". These and other topics were debated by journalists working for Polish outlets like *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Onet, TokFM, and *Wirtualna Polska*.

For the first time, as part of the Gdańsk Democracy Week, we also held the Gdańsk Book Fair, driven by the belief that the promotion of readership stimulates the development of civil society and public activism. Good books inspire people to reflect over global affairs, which in turn makes us more immune to propaganda, hate speech and polarisation; as well as all kinds of –isms: populism, chauvinism, nationalism, racism…

Referencing football terminology we can say that Gdańsk Civic Lessons are now a permanent element of the game of the Democracy Week. This time they were complemented by the journalistic workshops.

I already wrote about the Gdańsk Civic Lessons in my previous reports on our activities in Gdańsk which you may remember. However here I want to reiterate that the message of this undertaking can be described by paraphrasing the famous words of the former US President Bill Clinton: "It's Education, stupid!". We thus focus on nurturing the value of democracy among the youngest city residents. Gdańsk Mayor Aleksandra Dulkiewicz puts it this way: "Development of civic culture requires a value-based education, learning to take responsibility for oneself but also for others, as well as for the world around us. Civic culture is about the small gestures and daily activities.

The programme of Gdańsk Civic Lessons has been prepared in close cooperation with teachers and interested organisations to ensure that our teaching of co-operation, co-responsibility and how to live with others is adjusted to the pupils' developmental level and provided in adequate language."

There is no doubt that building civic culture starts with preschool education. This is especially important in today's world which generates numerous challenges, such as disinformation, the climate crisis or economic security. These are the topics that we are now focusing on the most during Gdańsk Civic Lessons.

A friend in need is a friend indeed

Reacting to the humanitarian crisis at the Polish-Belarusian border, and following the example of Lublin and Poznań, Gdańsk decided to offer help to Michałowo which is a commune situated at the border with Belarus. It turned out that the most pressing need of this commune was the so-called Mobile Assistance Unit for its Social Services Centre. The Gdańsk City Council, driven by a belief that "a friend in need is a friend indeed" decided to transfer 100 000 Polish zlotys from its city budget towards the purchase of such a unit.

While justifying this decision at the session of the City Council, the Deputy Mayor, Monika Chabior, said: "People living in Michałowo are under tremendous stress, experiencing numerous difficulties and destruction of infrastructure caused by the migration route that has been established at the Polish-Belarusian border as a result of Alyaksandr Lukashenka's policy. Yet, they have also made a tremendous effort to help the people who are most affected by the humanitarian crisis."

The Mobile Assistance Unit will be supplied with basic medical equipment, clothes, blankets, food and hygiene products. This unit will be also used for distributing warm meals for people in need. Michałowo promised to cover its staffing cost as well as organise volunteers and a paramedic.

The vote on the resolution to support this unit generated a vivid and emotional discussion among City Council members. In the end, the resolution was passed with the following results: 18 votes "for" (passed by the Civic Coalition and Everything for Gdańsk City Council members) and 12 votes "against" (passed by the Law and Justice City Council members).

The case of this resolution brings a very important issue to the fore: regardless of the effort we are making to help the refugees from Ukraine, we cannot forget about the situation at the Polish-Belarusian border. Our humanity, empathy and readiness to help others cannot be selective.

Visit of the Delegation of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance

In October Gdańsk hosted a visit of the representatives of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance who arrived to Poland as part of the

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Commission's cyclical monitoring of EU member states. During this type of visits members of the Commission's delegation meet with the authorities as well as non-governmental organisations. Based on the information gathered during these meetings they prepare reports and recommendations for state authorities.

The delegation arrived in Gdańsk in search of a little hope and positive energy. It seems to us that its member found both of them here, especially after we had presented our two most important models: the Model of Equal Treatment and the Immigrants' Integration Model.

Members of the delegation were also genuinely interested in the scale of problems that Polish local governments faced with regards to the large number of refugee children joining the Polish school system. Together we discussed the challenge of integration of Ukrainian children into Polish schools, which have also been affected by serious systemic crises, such as shortages of teachers. When discussing this topic we mentioned our concerns regarding the new education law which is being advocated by the Polish Minister of Education. As reported, a majority of local governments is of the opinion that this law would limit the authority of school principals and increase the authority of government nominated superintendents as well as limit access to public schools for non-governmental organisations. The delegation also asked us some questions on difficult topics, including the policy towards the Roma community living in Gdańsk.

Infoshare

For many years now, Gdańsk has been meeting place for a large community of IT and new media specialists. The conference called Infoshare is the largest event of this kind in Central and Eastern Europe. It plays an important role in the shaping of the job market in our region. This year was the 16th edition of this conference and took place in October. It gathered over seven thousand participants who listened to almost 200 speeches by experts and specialists from all over the world.

Adam Michnik receives "Spanish Nobel Prize"

In October Adam Michnik received the Princess of Asturias Award in the category "Communication and work for humanity". The granting of this award to Michnik was the crowning moment of the years' long efforts undertaken by Gdańsk city authorities to convince the Princess of Asturias Foundation to recognise Michnik's merits. For a few years now we have been promoting his candidature.

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Our right to nominate the candidate for the Princess of Asturias Award comes from the fact that Gdańsk was the 2019 recipient of the award. We received it in the category de la Concordia (Concord). In its argumentation for granting us the award, the jury stated that our city's past and present has been marked by sensitivity to solidarity, defence of liberty, human rights and peace. The jurors also recognised the 20-year contribution of the late Mayor Paweł Adamowicz to the development of social policy in our city.

In Gdańsk there is no room for "useful idiots"

By the end of October an unusual situation took place in Gdańsk. An organisation called the Club of Polish Thought tried to organise, on the premises of one of Gdańsk's universities, a discussion around the book authored by Aleksandr Dugin titled "The Great Awaking Manifesto and Wartime Writings". Dugin is one of the Kremlin's main ideologues and a lead thinker of Russian imperialism and supporter of the uncivilised war in Ukraine. Mayor Dulkiewicz decisively reacted to this event by stating: "There is no room for discussions with those who hold extremist views, believe in conspiracy theories or adhere to criminal ideologies. Every politician, researcher or journalist, or simply any participant of the public debate, is obliged to damask them and condemn the pseudo-academic gabble which serves criminal propaganda. I do not know what is worse: an intentional promotion of Dugin and his views, which are justifying the scale of crime and destruction committed by Russia in Ukraine, or the lack of knowledge which is characteristic for useful idiots. None of these is acceptable. There is no place in Europe, nor in Poland, and certainly not in Gdańsk for the ideologues of Putin's terror".

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The funeral of Westerplatte defenders

On November 4th a funeral of the 1939 Westerplatte defenders was held at the Military Cemetery in Westerplatte. After 83 years the journey of the ten courageous heroes of the Polish Military Transit Depot was finally completed. Their remains, together with those of their commander – Major Henryk Sucharski – were buried near the place which they were trying to defend from the German aggression and where a majority of them sacrificed their lives.

For us, this day of their symbolic funeral at the Military Cemetery in Westerplatte was a rare occasion to celebrate an important event in Polish history as a community without unnecessary partisan divisions. This was a very important moment for all of us Poles.

However, Westerplatte is a symbolic place not only for Poles. This is a modern version of Thermopylae where the Second World War started and where a small group of defenders heroically resisted the attack of the German aggressor. The cemetery is an element of the first stage of the construction of the new division of the World War II Museum on Westerplatte.

Thus, the discovery of the remains of the defenders was unquestionably a huge success. We should congratulate the archaeologists and the Museum of the Second World War for their efforts in this regard. This, however, does not change the fact and our assessment of how the Westerplatte area was taken away, via a special law, from the City of Gdańsk and is now under the control of the national authorities.

Gdańsk's help to Ukraine

As part of our "Gdańsk helps Ukraine" initiative we delivered a cesspool emptier to the city of Borodianka. The gift was delivered by our delegation led by Deputy Mayor – Piotr Grzelak.

During the visit to Ukraine Gdańsk representatives also signed a declaration of cooperation to ensure Borodianka residents of security and bringing peace back to Europe. The document was signed on November 8th 2022 in Kyiv by Gdańsk Deputy Mayor Piotr Grzelak, representing the Union of Polish Cities, and Kyiv Mayor – Vitali Klitschko, representing the Union of Ukrainian Cities.

On the occasion of this event, Deputy Mayor Grzelak summarised the need to support Ukrainian local governments by Polish partners with following words: "Like it is in the case of our help to Borodianka, also in regards to other cities, we need to have a permanent and concrete dialogue between Polish and Ukrainian local authorities. We would like to make it more systematic through tighter cooperation focused on ensuring security of the residents, on the one hand, and receiving a speedy confirmation of Ukraine's membership in the European Union, on the other hand."

There is no doubt that the war in Ukraine pushes us towards greater flexibility in thinking and acting. We have to react to constantly changing situations including the situation on the frontline, the new geopolitical context and the perspective of new migration waves, as well as the danger of changing social moods and perceptions of Ukrainian refugees in our cities, regions and countries. European local governments are certainly showing flexibility in their activities aimed at facing these challenges.

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The burning need now is to help Ukraine prepare for winter, as it is facing an energy crisis caused by the intentional destruction of its critical infrastructure by the Russian Federation. The call for generators and heating oil made by Lviv's mayor was met with a positive response from Polish cities including Gdańsk, Kraków, Lublin, Poznań and Wrocław.

By reacting to the pressing challenges and the needs of the moment, we do not forget that already now, by these undertaking all kinds of activities, are building a bridge towards a long-term plan for Ukraine's reconstruction. We can also see that the EU investments in training Ukrainian local authorities have brought the much desired result. Evidently, it is the responsibility of these local actors to provide millions of Ukrainians with at least a foretaste of normal life. We are convinced that continuing these trainings is worthwhile, even now. Among potential partners for such initiatives we see

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the European Committee of Regions and Bloomberg Foundation.

Independence Parade

On November 11th Poland celebrates its independence which it regained in 1918. On this occasion, the residents of Gdańsk showed once again that they want to celebrate this event jointly, as a community, but also with their families. They want to enjoy this moment joyfully and safely. Therefore, for the 20th time we organised the Independence Parade which was joined by around 15,000 participants.

Together we sang the National Anthem as well as other patriotic songs and stood for a Family Photo together with our residents from Ukraine and Belarus. The activities that we organised at Długi Targ included a carillon concert played from the tower of the City Hall.

To present the idea of this parade more clearly let me quote the words of the Gdańsk Mayor who said the following to those who gathered on the streets of Gdańsk: "We need to display our patriotism every day. But we do not need big deeds for that. Just look around you and see how many people are smiling now (…) you know that now you can return this smile to a stranger. Can't we do this every day? It is my dream that we carry on this holiday atmosphere into our daily activities in our schools, workplaces, and wherever we are socially active. (…) Only then will Poland be strong, safe and immune to crises. I believe that, just like in 1989 and 1990, during the breakthrough moment, we could change Poland for the better, we are now able to build Poland which will be a home to everyone. Long live the Republic!"

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

Maciej Buczkowski is the deputy director of the office of the mayor of the City of Gdańsk, Poland

The whirlpool of Belgrade's EuroPride

Russophilia and Russian influence in Serbia

FILIP MIRILOVIĆ

The EuroPride events in Belgrade and all the marches against it became a mirror for all the divisions in Serbian society: between democratic and authoritarian currents, between the European Union and Russia, and between the archetypal West and East. This renewed clash was driven not just by the ruling regime, but a level of Russian influence and Russophilia seen rarely in any other European country.

Among all the capitals of South-Eastern Europe, Belgrade received the honour of organising the first EuroPride outside the borders of the European Union. What should have been a peaceful week of equality, liberal values and tolerance in modern societies, turned into a nightmare of violence, incidents and clashes on the streets of Serbia's capital. The anti-pride protest marches overwhelmed the streets, casting a shadow of imaginary tradition, clericalism and nationalism. These views had already brought this country and the whole region to the brink of destruction back in the dark 1990s.

Despite all the indignations, EuroPride took place in Belgrade between September 12th and 18th this year. However, instead of a pride walk acting as a culmination

for the whole event, LGBTQ+ participants and supporters were allowed only to have a symbolic walk of just a couple of hundred metres, while constantly being guarded by the police. On the other hand, before, during, and even after EuroPride, various organisations and political parties, with the support of the Serbian Orthodox Church, organised anti-pride marches throughout Belgrade. Some of them brought out tens of thousands of protesters.

Far-right groups, Serbian Orthodox Church bishops, hooligans and "ordinary" citizens believing in a clerical and national Serbia, marched together but not only against EuroPride. They also marched for Russia, and in support of its war in Ukraine, carrying symbols of the infamous letter "Z" and pictures of Vladimir Putin. The culmination of this protest was a six-hundred-metre-long, intertwined Serbian-Russian flag. The Pandora's box of Russophilia has been opened, again.

Clash between West and East

EuroPride was only one event in a wider culture war that was expanding over the years, but which exploded recently in Serbian society. This single occasion served as an excuse, while being used as a symbol of all the "evil" coming from the West, to present to the religious and right-oriented parts of society an alleged threat to "their" Serbia. Consequently, the anti-pride protests themselves were not only against EuroPride. That was the primary motive, while the real cause for the protests lies deep in the social and identity divisions in Serbian society. The rise of nationalism, and with it the inevitable impulse of Russophilia, are just a logical consequence of the last political and social decade. This did not happen overnight, in fact, EuroPride and all the marches against it were an example of the hidden divisions between the pro-democratic and pro-authoritarian currents, as well as the clash between the European Union and Russia, the archetypal West and East.

The marches against EuroPride are an example of the hidden divisions between the pro-democratic and pro-authoritarian currents in Serbia.

Jovan Byford, a social psychologist and senior lecturer at the Open University in the United Kingdom, reminds us that "ever since early 2000, pride has been a totemic issue within the Serbian nationalist discourse," adding that "the opposition to gay rights was a way of articulating the broader anti-western and anti-liberal sentiment". As Byford explains, "the recent events surrounding EuroPride were the consequences of the fact that the war in Ukraine and the tensions in Kosovo have propelled identity issues at the fore of political

Photo: Bobica10 / Shutterstock

EuroPride took place in Belgrade between September 12th and 18th this year. However, instead of a pride walk acting as a culmination for the whole event, LGBTQ+ participants and supporters were allowed only to have a symbolic walk of just a couple of hundred metres, while constantly being guarded by the police.

discourse." They brought into focus "the question of where Serbia belongs politically and culturally", which is a question that is "routinely exploited by right-wing nationalists and by the Serbian Orthodox Church which sees itself as the main arbiter of identity-related issues".

Under the decade-long rule of the Serbian Progressive Party and its inviolable political figure, President Aleksandar Vučić, Serbia has become a captured state. His regime is primarily responsible for all the identity divisions. Thus, the pillars of power are built on constant fear and imagined threats to the whole nation. As a result, the ruler, as equal to the nation, is the only one who can be its protector. Yet, despite all the calculations made in the previous years, the current situation exploded well beyond the regime's control. Even if some of these changes were orchestrated from the top, it seems that the baton slipped out from the hands of the conductor.

Furthermore, Byford thinks that in some sense the "conflict over EuroPride was a staged proxy war waged by those who believe that Serbia should reject progressive European values and align with Russia". However, there is something even more malignant behind those beliefs. This is their constant hope that major geopolitical changes in the future will allow Serbia to revisit the agenda of the 1990s, in Kosovo, Bosnia and so on.

Even the democratic changes in the 2000s and the fall of Slobodan Milošević's regime did not destroy the hope for a "great Serbia". Established in modern form by the Radical Party and its leader, the convicted war criminal Vojislav Šešelj, back in the 1990s, the hope survived among its supporters. Vučić, once a high-ranking official of the Radical Party and the natural successor to its values, currently disguised in apparent progressiveness, made the survival of this hope possible. He did this by destroying almost everything that was done during the short period of democratic progress and prosperity after 2000. On the other hand, almost full control of the media sector was used for stigmatisation of the EU and the West in favour of Russia's glorification.

However, Serbia is not a unique case when it comes to the expansion of far-right ideologies, as well as the rise of nationalism. Such a process is taking place across Europe. Professor Marija Djoric from the Institute for Political Studies in Belgrade says that the particular problem with Serbia, and the Balkans in general, is the existence of "old generators" of nationalism, which is, in this case, a post-conflict society. On the other hand, "new generators" like the COVID-19 pandemic or the migrant crisis created fear for the survival of "collectivity", such as the state and nation. Indeed, all those groups or political parties that participated in the anti-pride protests were the same that expressed dissatisfaction with pandemic measures or the acceptance of migrants.

Russophilia and Russian influence

Some of the protest's organisers have ties to the ruling party, or to be precise are known as groups controlled by the regime. Yet, on the other hand, it is obvious that for all the big demonstrations, or so-called "walks", the emotional charge among participants is inevitable. Despite messages from the protest's unofficial spokesmen that they are marching peacefully, accompanied by nationalist songs, protesters look more like the riders of the apocalypse, producing constant fear among those who were passing by. It was a strange fear, not a fear for life, but instead the fear that those who were marching are no longer in the minority. Those on the streets, plus those who support them but for some reason were not visible on the streets, present themselves as the majority of Serbian citizens – the same majority who support Russia's war in Ukraine.

Research commissioned by the Serbian Science Fund conducted in August this year showed that 80 per cent of citizens are against imposing sanctions on Russia, while only eight per cent of the population are in favour. It would seem that proportionally more citizens in Serbia support the war than even those in Russia. Rus-

sian influence on these occasions and Russophilia are two different things. However, the malignancy is almost the same, since pure influence would not be possible without the traditionally widespread love for Russia. To be clear, there is nothing wrong in cultivating a love for culture or history, but supporting madness and the personal aspirations of Putin, who has brought Europe to the brink of destruction, is a completely different thing. Currently Russophilia in Serbian society lies primarily in the worshiping of Vladimir Putin's cult of personality.

Historically, Russophilia has taken different forms in Serbia, depending on the circumstances. In the 1990s it was abstract, nostalgic and sentimental. Jovan Byford says that today, "the situation is much worse", because, as he explains, "Serbian nationalists (and indeed nationalists in many other countries) are mesmerised by Putin's aggression and belligerence and believe that they can prosper with the backing of a resurgent and strong Russia … for them, Putin's Russia represents a mixture of an authoritarian, socially conservative, Orthodox Christian state, which is what they aspire to."

Russophilia has taken different forms in Serbia, depending on the circumstances.

Let us come back again to the protests. Beyond the protest organisers linked to the ruling party, there are others who do not hide their links to Russia. One of the protests was led by the infamous Night Wolves biker gang, whose connections reach up to the Kremlin. Their presence in the first row, given their well-known connections in Serbian far-right circles, does not look like a pure coincidence. They were there for a reason.

Dusan Janjić, the founder of the Forum for Ethnic Relations, a think tank in Belgrade, says that without clear Russian influence through intelligence work, it would not have been possible to organise such a massive meeting and bring tens of thousands of people onto the streets of Belgrade. Indeed, it is unusual to gather so many protesters without clear organisation and leadership. It was obvious that someone provided them with logistical support. Janjić believes that these marches are a combination of the dissatisfaction of a part of the population that wants an even closer alliance with Russia, and the excellent monitoring of Serbian society by Russian intelligence services. Bearing that in mind, as he explains, it is not surprising that among the anti-pride protest leaders were some people who are labelled as being very close to Russia and its interests.

On the other hand, Djoric from the Institute for Political Studies thinks that "although Russian influence exists, it should be borne in mind that there are also western influences." However, she says that considering the geopolitical position of Serbia, being at a crossroads of East and West, it is not illogical to be a subject of interest for different foreign factors.

The main social media platform for mobilising the marches was Telegram. A lot of channels belong to local far-right groups, which are cooperating with other Russian groups, some of them are even involved in the Ukrainian war. The content they are sharing through these groups is very similar to those of pro-war Russian Telegram channels. Although examining Telegram does not prove Russian intelligence work, it at least shows that some of these channels are using the same or similar patterns for propaganda.

It is important not to forget the role of the Serbian Orthodox Church in all these events.

However, it is important not to forget the role of the Serbian Orthodox Church in all these events. The connections of the Serbian Church with Russia are traditional. Their open Russophilia is no secret either. The previous patriarch said in 2019 that the "Serbian people are lucky enough to tie their small boat to a big Russian ship." Even though the current Patriarch Porfirije, in the beginning, seemed to be less radical than some stubborn circles inside of the church, he is slowly showing that his beliefs and attitudes are changeable depending in which direction the wind blows. Right now, it looks like the Siberian wind is blowing for them.

When asked about his opinion on Russian influence in the anti-pride protests, Jovan Byford argues that if one scrutinised, for instance, the funding of political parties, certain politicians' business interests, the media, and so on, one "would uncover the flow of Russian funds". On the other hand, Russia can also "exploit politicians' egos and ambitions", or their "genuine political and ideological affinities". Furthermore, it can also "intimidate them through a projection of power which may or may not be real".

Benefits from destabilisation

How does the Kremlin benefit from identity divisions in a small Balkan state like Serbia? Facing an almost cataclysmic scenario in Ukraine, where a "special military operation" has not gone anywhere near as planned, the Putin regime is seeking more areas of destabilisation across Europe. Riding on the wave of Russophilia, the Kremlin benefits from identity divisions in Serbia as it hopes to create an environment that will not so easily allow the Serbian government to impose sanctions.

Yet, imposing sanctions on Russia is probably just a matter of time, even for the current Serbian regime, or at least imposing them partially. The reason is that at some point, there will no longer be any alternative. However, in a social environment such as the current one, that decision probably will not pass without conse-

quences. If EuroPride managed to trigger such a massive protest, what would be the reaction of the aforementioned 80 per cent of the population who are against sanctions if they realise that their small Serbian boat is trying to untie itself from the big, beloved Russian ship?

Byford agrees that Russia's goal right now is to "generate instability in Europe and undermine the whole European project". Moscow is trying to "create crises, conflicts and divisions on Europe's borders". Sometimes it may not even need a specific goal or endpoint in sight. The point is to create problems that Europe would be obliged, but perhaps unable, to resolve, and consequently drag attention away from its eastern borders. "This would then expose Europe as a failed project," Byford adds. In the meantime, the Balkans are an ideal setting for this kind of activity, especially since all of the tensions and issues from the 1990s remain largely unresolved.

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Towards a dissolution?

Lex Inzko and the fight over history

ALEKSANDRA ZDEB

The denial of the Srebrenica genocide is one of the biggest issues facing Bosnia and Herzegovina today. In this sense, the complete annihilation of a nation or an ethnic group requires the destruction of testimonies and memory as well. It is clear that without justice and paying tribute to the victims, peace cannot be achieved. And without peace, Bosnia and Herzegovina will eventually collapse.

In July 1995 in and around the town of Srebrenica the population of Bosnian Muslims was massacred by the military forces of the Bosnian Serbs under the command of General Ratko Mladić. Opinions on how to describe these mass killings differ between those who believe it was "only" a war crime and those who, in line with the verdict of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, recognise it as a genocide. Evidently, Srebrenica's history did not end with the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement. In the post-war period it has been faced with a new challenge: the denial.

The reinterpretation of the Srebrenica massacre and attempts to penalise its deniers have become an element of election discourse and political rivalry in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which in the summer of 2021 also engaged the international community. In fact, the Serbs from the Bosnian Republika Srpska used the imposed regulation of the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina stipulating punishment for denying genocide in Srebrenica, to enforce their own pro-autonomy

movement. This has brought the Bosnian state one step closer to dissolution. As a result, when the memory of the massacre is used as a dirty political tool, peace and reconciliation look like foggy ideals of the past.

Genocide and denial

During the four-year war in Bosnia and Herzegovina the strategy of ethnic cleansings was brought to perfection. However, the cruellest and bloodiest massacre took place in the summer of 1995 in Srebrenica. It was a multi-ethnic, Serbian-Muslim enclave located in an area of strategic importance for the territorial integrity of the new Serbian state. From the beginning of the war the city was taken over, a few times, by both sides – Muslim and Serbian. With time, it became the destination of choice for Muslims, who came here from other areas where they could no longer stay for various reasons. The area, besieged and cut off from humanitarian aid by Serbian forces, faced over-population as well as food, shelter and medical products shortages; as a result, it became a humanitarian catastrophe. In 1993 it was declared a safe area by the United Nations, but since March 1995, when Serbian forces took control over the town and its surroundings, access to humanitarian assistance was hindered and, consequently, the population's living conditions worsened.

In this situation, over just a few days in early July 1995, over 8,000 Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks), men and boys over the age of 12, were murdered by Serbian armed forces and paramilitary units in an act of genocide. Women and children, who were also victims of various crimes, including rape, were expelled from the city. In 2004, the Appeal Chamber of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia univocally determined that the Srebrenica massacre was a genocide. It was aimed at the purposeful elimination of one ethno-national group, which is considered a crime by international law. In 2007 this interpretation was repeated by the International Justice Tribunal. Other international agencies, including the European Tribunal of Human Rights and the UN General Assembly also passed resolutions recognising that the Srebrenica massacre was an act of genocide. Indicatively, Bosnia and Herzegovina abstained from passing such regulations.

Despite court rulings, the denial of the Srebrenica genocide is present in local political discourse, the media, the politics of memory and Bosnian education system. The spectrum of scepticism stretches from the questioning of the court's decisions that the massacre was a genocide, to a denial that a massacre ever took place in Srebrenica. Instead, it is said that an anti-Serb coup was organised. Also, the number and type of victims is questioned and the Serb war leaders are glorified. These are just examples of the tactics used by the genocide deniers.

With the passing of time, genocide denial, which is in line with the nationalistic discourse of the Serbian political elite, has become increasingly more visible. This, in turn, is interpreted as the last element of the genocide itself. It is also the official position of the authorities of Republika Srpska – one of the entities that make up the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina and inhabited mainly by Serbs. However, it also influences Serbs' vision of the Bosnian state as well as Republika Srpska, which was often referred to as a "genocide creation" (*genocidna tvorevina*) by Muslim politicians.

Politically motivated commissions and studies

In 2002, when Bosnian Serbs were still actively trying to undermine the validity of Bosnia and Herzegovina's existence, the Bureau of Government of Republika Srpska for Relations with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia issued a highly controversial publication titled *Report about Case Srebrenica* authored by Darko Trifunović. In his text he claimed that 1,800 Bosnian Muslim soldiers were killed during fighting, while 100 died as a result of exhaustion and around 100 perished as a result of personal revenge or lack of knowledge of international law. The report also mentions the existence of mass graves, yet suggests that they were created for hygienic reasons.

In 2003, responding to the statements issued in this report, the Human Rights Chamber of Bosnia and Herzegovina ordered Republika Srpska, among others, to conduct a full investigation into the Srebrenica massacre. A commission that was then established presented its final report on June 4th 2004 (amended on October 15th 2004). In the text of this document it was admitted that at least 7,000 men and boys were killed by Bosnian Serb forces. At that time the president of Republika Srpska, Dragan Čavić, who was under strong international pressure, also admitted, in a speech, that a few thousand civilians had been killed by Serbian forces in violation of international law and that Srebrenica constitutes a dark chapter in Serbian history. Subsequently, the government of Republika Srpska issued official apologies to the families of the massacre's victims.

The year 2004 was thus the only moment in recent history when the Bosnian Serb political elite were willing to offer an apology and reach out towards reconciliation. In fact, this situation was to a large degree a result of the international pressure put on the then ruling Serb Democratic Party (SDS). Things changed with the Office of the High Representative entering into a passive phase and the takeover of power by the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) led by Milorad Dodik. It was Dodik's government which in 2010 started a revision of the 2004 re-

port, claiming that the number of victims in the report was higher than the real one, while the language of the text had been manipulated. What is more, in July of that year, during the 15th anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre, Dodik said that even though he recognises the murder which had taken place in Srebrenica, he would not call it a genocide. He also added that had there been a genocide, then it was committed against the Serbian inhabitants of the region (meaning eastern Bosnia).

SNSD's growing influence, as well as that of Dodik himself, allowed the parliament of Republika Srpska in 2018 to dismiss the 2004 report and organise a new commission to review it. This moment marked the peak of the ongoing policy of denying the genocide and historical revisionism, which has been practiced by Republika Srpska's government for well over the last ten years.

The report published in July 2021 by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Suffering of All People in the Srebrenica Region between 1992–1995 was aimed at verifying whether the thousands of Bosniaks who were murdered by Serb forces in July 1995 were indeed civilians. The report also accused the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia of organising politically biased trials of Bosnian Serb political leaders and military personnel. Finally, the report challenged classification of the Srebrenica massacre as a genocide. The authors of the report stated that after Srebrenica had been captured by Bosnian Serbs, the 28th Division of the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina established a military column of over 12,000 members and broke through the Serbian lines. They then headed towards the territory controlled by Bosniaks. This column was then attacked by the forces of the Bosnian Serbs, who killed between 4,000 to 5,000 people, which was deemed a legal military activity.

The report also stated that a few thousand Muslims were cruelly killed while people who were responsible for this crime should be punished. However, it also stressed that among these victims there were between 2,500 to 3,000 prisoners of war and only a few hundred male civilians. It also stated that it is impossible to determine whether these crimes were committed for any other reason than the elimination of a military threat. This report was prepared by one of the two Serb commissions. The second one released in April 2021 also a highly controversial report. It states that during the war in Sarajevo there were also ethnic cleansings committed against the Serbs, which were ignored. These two reports demonstrate that the official narrative of Republika Srpska has changed; it denies the genocide in Srebrenica and presents Serbs as the true victims of the war – a position which is usually denied to them.

The year 2004 was the only moment in recent history when the Bosnian Serb political elite were willing to offer an apology.

Lex Inzko and a "new-old" crisis

Considering the history of the reports issued by Republika Srpska and the behaviour of its politicians, it is clear that the regulations that penalise the denial of the genocide in Srebrenica that were introduced in July 2021 did not appear out of thin air. Such initiatives have been undertaken for over a decade now. In fact, there have been already two attempts to pass the law that would ban the genocide's denial, but the bill did not pass the vote in 2011 or 2016.

Also, the first attempt to change the criminal code to introduce such a ban was made in 2009 and followed by a second try in 2017. During the last attempt – in April 2021 – when Serbian and Croat representatives in Bosnian House of Peoples voted against changes in the criminal code, Denis Bećirović, one of the initiators of the law, stated that since the deputies of the main parties of the Bosnian Serbs and Croats, SNSD and the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), did not support these changes, the time had come for the High Representative to propose a solution. His call was supported by the organisations representing the victims of the genocide. In the end, already back in July 2019, Valentin Inzko, the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina from 2009 to 2021, had announced that he expected that by July 2020 a law on genocide denial would be passed. He also stated that after that date he was ready to impose regulations on the basis of the so-called "Bonn powers", even though the last time he had to force through his decisions was 11 years earlier.

As is often the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the parliament did not manage to pass the legislation. Thus, in July 2021, Inzko introduced an amendment to Bosnian criminal code which enforces punishment from six months to five years of imprisonment for the public denial, approval, diminishing, or justification of genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes, if it takes place in a way that could stimulate violence or hatred. Providing any form of recognition, awards, special positions or privileges to people who had been convicted of genocide, crimes against humanity or war crimes can be punished by imprisonment of no less than three years. The same punishment is foreseen for people who name streets, squares, parks, bridges, institutions, buildings, communes or cities after a person who had been convicted of those crimes. As part of the justification, he pointed to the decision of Republika Srpska's parliament to refuse to take away the medals that had been awarded to three war criminals.

Reacting to the so-called "Lex Inzko", Dodik stated that he had no other choice but to pursue the secession of Republika Srpska. It was not enough that according to the official position of Republika Srpska there had been no genocide. The penalisation of genocide denial was put in force in a way which had been boycotted

for many years by the Serbs, that is by means of the decision of the High Representative. Consequently, all Serbian parties withdrew their representatives from federal institutions. Then the National Assembly of Republika Srpska voted for laws which prevented implementation of the new regulations and amendments to the criminal code which criminalised attempts to accuse the RS of being responsible for a genocide on its territory.

Continuing this streak, in December 2021, Republika Srpska's parliament passed a series of laws which allowed a transfer of power in the area of defence, justice and security from the central level to the entity. These legal acts also stipulate that the laws passed at the federal level in the aforementioned areas, together with the decisions made by the High Representative, do not apply in Republika Srpska. What is more, they called for the authorities of Republika Srpska to establish within the next six months their own institutions, including an army, intelligence agency and anti-corruption office. It has been almost a year and those institutions have not been created but in this way, Dodik has made successful attempts (which have been undertaken in the last decade and a half) to undermine the integrity of the federal structure of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The last months have also been described as a return to the politics of the 1990s and pre-war tensions.

The January commemorations of the Day of Republika Srpska, which have been deemed illegal by the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, were accompanied by numerous nationalistic provocations. Yet, in a way, this is nothing new. For over two decades, Serbian and Croatian politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been defined by artificially created impasses and abuse of its constitutional system to force solutions that would fit the interests of certain stakeholders. The main cause of this escalation of tensions is the increasingly worsening economic situation and growing social discontent in Republika Srpska which have translated into a drop in support for SNSD. For decades such an escalation in ethnicized politics has been used to distract public opinion from contemporary problems and consolidate public support for the most radical parties. However, this is not all. The current stalemate has to be overcome if Bosnia and Herzegovina is ever to become a truly functional state.

Falsehoods, fraud and half-truths

Declassified protocols show that the European Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Olivér Várhelyi stated that the responsibility for the current crisis, which brings the risk of a renewed conflict in the region, lies with Lex Inzko. Thus, EU officials are working on an "amendment" to the regulation to make it ac-

ceptable to all parties. For the moment, in February 2022, the National Assembly of Republika Srpska supported a bill on establishing its own agency to control its justice system – the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council, thereby undermining the authority of the federal justice institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This only deepened the political crisis in the country. It also shows that in Bosnia and Herzegovina the genocide in Srebrenica has proven to be a very effective political tool while politics in the country, despite the passage of time, is still dominated by ethnic interests.

As David Tolbert, former president of the International Center for Transitional Justice, stated: "Denial is the final fortress of those who commit genocide and other atrocities. […] It not only damages the victims and their communities, but also promises a future based on lies, sowing the seeds of future conflicts, repression and suffering." A complete annihilation of a nation or an ethnic group requires the destruction of testimonies and memory, while falsehood and half-truths create confusion, making it difficult to distinguish what is true in a sea of lies. It is clear that without justice and paying tribute to the victims, peace cannot be achieved. And without peace, Bosnia and Herzegovina will eventually collapse.

Yet, everything suggests that this is what Dodik wants – or at least he bases his political capital on such claims. Recognising what took place in Srebrenica as a genocide would be a signal that Republika Srpska treats seriously its past, origin, as well as its belonging in the Bosnian state. It is thus not surprising that discourse which is based on the denial of the genocide in Srebrenica fits Dodik's agenda and his secessionist plans. It also explains why he will try to take advantage of the decision imposed by the High Representative after 11 years of his passivity and indecisiveness. NEE

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Strategies for the German Baltic Sea Council presidency during the Zeitenwende

IRIS KEMPE

Berlin's ongoing presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States could not have come at a more crucial time. Faced with increasing regional uncertainty in light of Russia's aggression in Ukraine, Germany must now take decisive action to ensure continued high-level cooperation in the area.

On July 1st, Germany took over the presidency of the Council of the Baltic Sea States (CBSS). Cooperation among the states bordering the Baltic Sea has become more important in view of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. Currently the CBSS has ten member states plus the European Commission. In March 2022, Russia's membership, as well as the observer status of Belarus was suspended by the other member states from CBSS activities while in May it decided to withdraw from the council. Ukraine has an observer mandate with increasing strategic importance in the CBSS. Other observers include France, Slovakia the United States and others. Due to the current situation, the CBSS has not undertaken its normal summit diplomacy, annual meetings of foreign ministers or alternating meetings of heads of state and government. Instead, it has pursued such meetings at the level of deputy foreign ministers at most.

With Russia's withdrawal, the CBSS is now facing the fundamental question of *quo vadis*? The changing situation calls for the German presidency to present a new strategy developed by the Federal Foreign Office in conjunction with the Bundestag.

New life needed

Much of the CBSS's work is done in project formats that are primarily designed and financed by the respective presidency and supporting funds from the member states or other donors. Accordingly, the German presidency this year has the task of breathing new life into the CBSS in these difficult times, after many years of crisis and in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine. Of course, this began with Russia's hybrid warfare against Ukraine in 2014 and only became more aggressive with the beginning of the invasion on February 24th 2022. In response, the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz declared the new reality a *Zeitenwende* – a turning point. While Scholz mostly had the security situation in mind, the issue is broader and encompasses making Ukraine an actor of peace and European cooperation.

In practical terms, Russia launched the military war against Ukraine in a blatant violation of international law. Ukraine fights to defend itself against the Russian troops. The West responds by providing military support and imposing sanctions against the Russian economy, leaders and population. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is a watershed moment also for the Council of the Baltic Sea States. As aforementioned, a few days after the start of the invasion, ten members decided to suspend Russia's membership of the council. As a result, Russia announced its withdrawal from the council in May.

The remaining member states of CBSS include Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Sweden and the European Union. They all agreed at the foreign ministers' meeting in Kristiansand, Norway, on May 25th to continue to use the CBSS as a forum to promote cohesion and cooperation in the region even without Russian membership. The organisation is needed in a wider Europe as a platform for political dialogue. During the meeting in Kristiansand the foreign ministers of Lithuania, Norway and Germany were present. Annalena Baerbock from Germany represented the incoming presidency that started on July 1st. The participants agreed on the importance of the CBSS and committed to continuing the platform's work without Russia. In this way, the CBSS should further develop its agenda within this *Zeitenwende* mentality, by strengthening the long-term involvement of Ukraine.

In the CBSS, diplomatic cooperation is organised by the foreign ministries as well as national parliaments and regional assemblies. The next annual meeting will

now be hosted by the German Bundestag in Berlin between August 26th and 28th 2023. This year's conference focused on the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine. Until the beginning of this year, five legislative bodies from the Russian Federation – including the State Duma and the assemblies of the relevant regions such as Kaliningrad, St Petersburg and Novgorod, which were previously members of the Baltic Parliamentary Conference – were still actively involved.

The Baltic Sea Parliamentary Conference is the parliamentary forum of the Baltic Sea region. It was founded in 1991 and brings together members of 22 national and regional parliaments with the aim of promoting a common identity for the Baltic Sea region. The delegation of the German Bundestag, which was led by Johannes Schraps, a member of the German Social Democrats since March 2018, included five MPs.

The priorities of the German presidency

The German presidency focuses on issues linked to the council's priorities in general terms. The projects and initiatives, as well as support for the thematic networks of the German presidency, are in line with the priorities of CBSS cooperation. This is organised by the secretariat and based on the Vilnius II declaration. These priorities include regional identity, a safe and secure region, and a sustainable and prosperous region. These three priorities aim to address the themes of sustainable development, environment, sustainable maritime economy, education, labour, culture, youth engagement, civil security, children and human trafficking. Based on this, every presidency sets its own targets and implements them in the framework of their diplomatic work and project activities. In the case of the current German presidency, it is focusing on offshore wind energy, the removal of munitions waste, and youth, which harkens back to the former Baltic Sea Youth Dialogue. To gain success amidst the *Zeitenwende*, the German presidency should pursue dialogue with experts from all CBSS members for input and contributions. A similar meeting was held in Berlin in December 2014 including the former CBSS member of Russia.

The members of the Council of the Baltic Sea States share the goal of becoming climate neutral by 2050.

As aforementioned, the top priority of the German presidency is the promotion of offshore wind energy in the Baltic Sea. The members of the Council of the Baltic Sea States share the goal of becoming climate neutral by 2050 at the latest. The Baltic Sea region offers great potential for the generation of renewable energy,

especially through offshore wind turbines. In close cooperation with the energy ministers, the members of the Council of the Baltic Sea States would like to agree on the implementation of ambitious offshore targets and initiate concrete cooperation.

The second goal is the removal of munitions waste in the Baltic Sea. The dangers posed by munitions waste in the Baltic Sea have recently attracted increased attention. The seabed is littered with an estimated 400,000 tonnes of conventional explosives and around 40,000 tonnes of chemical weapons. This is roughly equivalent to the total load of 11,000 semi-trucks and poses a deadly threat to the environment and marine life. Germany would like to use the Council of the Baltic Sea States as a platform to forge a common understanding on the waste's impact and the challenges associated with it in the sea. Under the German presidency, regional cooperation on this important topic will be further developed.

The dangers posed by munitions waste in the Baltic Sea have recently attracted increased attention.

A third priority is youth as a driver for issues of remembrance and reconciliation. Germany sees the value of cooperation between young people from different countries in the Baltic Sea region. This provides answers to the challenges of the region and beyond. Such activities cut across the entire work of the Council of the Baltic Sea States. This topic is of particular importance against the backdrop of the current European Year of Youth. A previous example was the Baltic Sea Youth Dialogue in September 2014, which started with a youth dialogue in Tallinn on historical reappraisal. The young participants presented results at the European Commission in Brussels, as well as at the Genshagen Foundation near Potsdam.

The German presidency is called upon to organise activities together with civil society actors and young people under the umbrella of the European Year of Youth. The possibilities are manifold. Seminars, festivals, conferences, debates, dialogue events, political projects, special programmes, information campaigns, research, publications and many other formats are possible. The further development of the Baltic Way to a Baltic Sea format is to be considered. With this objective in mind, the German presidency has proposed the following approach for youth cooperation in the Baltic Sea region:

- Developing a civil society textbook for students by students
- Individual member states such as Germany, Lithuania and Poland continuing to work together to create digital educational material about a common Baltic history, present and future
- Preparing and presenting a textbook of civil societies in the CBSS member states in English, as a working language of the group

- Project design in consultation with the German presidency of the CBSS. Gaining partners including expert opinions and testimonies of contemporary witnesses
- Developing democratic and future-oriented teaching materials and opportunities for designers and decision makers to publicly present their work.

Strategic steps for the future

It is important that the German presidency seeks to transform the council in today's crisis of changing times. An important first step was taken in 2022 in Kristiansand, Norway. The agenda to be developed will be shaped by the open window of opportunity for the CBSS. The foreign minister of Lithuania suggested to stand with Ukraine. It also will be a commitment to continue and strengthen our regional cooperation for the sake of the safety, security, and well-being of the Baltic Sea region. The next meeting may act as the continuation of the annual summits of heads of state and government, or meetings at the level of foreign ministers. The content at this level largely concerns the implications of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, especially since Kyiv is an observer state and will need assistance in rebuilding activities after the war. An important strategic step is the adaptation of existing goals to the new challenges. Already in the run-up to the reform of the Vilnius Strategy, it is important to engage in dialogue with regional decision makers and think tanks to make the CBSS an active player in changing times.

Beyond purely diplomatic cooperation, it is also important to adapt the second level of project work accordingly. The German presidency has already started with three initiatives: offshore wind energy, the removal of munitions waste and youth cooperation. The task now remains to adapt these priorities to the goals of changing times, so that the Council of the Baltic Sea States continues to play an important part in shaping peace and development in the Baltic Sea region.

The author would like to thank Cornelius Ochmann for his input into this article.

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A waste of energy

DYLAN VAN DE VEN, SAMUEL FRERICHS,
ALEXANDER MALYARENKO

Turkmenistan has the potential to become an important energy source at the crossroads between Europe and Asia due to the drastic energy shift in European, Eurasian and Asian energy landscapes. Recent developments indicate Turkmenistan could change future energy flows due to the war in Ukraine, which could also help its over-reliance on China.

The ups and downs of the global hydrocarbons market strongly affect Turkmenistan, for its economy and exports are heavily dependent on natural gas. The COVID-19 pandemic battered the country, reduced energy demand and worsened domestic woes, such as reported food shortages, emigration and inflation. The economy appears to have struggled to recover from the 2014–15 drop in global energy prices, with IMF data indicating negative growth in 2016, 2019 and 2020. In seeking to recover, Ashgabat appears to be focusing on increasing its dependence on China by enlarging pipeline capacity. Its diplomatic efforts are also targeted at building a pipeline that would run through Afghanistan to India, though the project is widely considered to be unfeasible. Serdar Berdymukhamedov successfully became the third president of the Turkmen nation thanks to the government's staged presidential elections. His father and former president, Gurbanguly, still maintains crucial roles in the nation's power apparatus and is likely to continue exerting influence on national and foreign policy questions.

Despite Russia's invasion of Ukraine inducing shifts in the fundaments of the international energy landscape, Turkmen authorities seem unlikely to dramatically adjust their domestic or foreign policies. Ashgabat's early, hesitant response was to start talks with Iran and Azerbaijan to reach gas markets in Turkey, Azer-

baijan and Europe. Since the summer, relations with Russia seem to be warming thanks to Moscow-led overtures. China will and should remain a key energy partner. However, the Turkmen authorities ought to be wary of intensifying their reliance on Beijing. The dynamic already heavily favours China, as Turkmenistan lacks substantial alternative export destinations. It will soon be clear if Ashgabat will reorient away towards Brussels or even Moscow – though the status quo could well hold, as is common in the insular state.

When doors close, windows open

Russia's war in Ukraine has ruptured Central Asian supply chains and reduced investments. China is Turkmenistan's largest trading partner by a wide margin, with Russia in second place. Luca Anceschi, a professor at the University of Glasgow, alongside other experts, is of the opinion that Berdymukhamedov is likely to preserve Turkmenistan's rentier system and safeguard an undiversified economy, in which China will continue to play a dominant role. Even so, Ashgabat can enhance its economic resilience by diversifying its gas exports away from over-reliance on China. Beijing accounts for approximately 90 per cent of total hydrocarbon exports. There are initial signs of change and continued dialogue, as Turkmenistan has intensified discussions with Iran and Azerbaijan on swaps and gas deliveries in recent months. Iran could emerge as the biggest game changer for Turkmenistan's energy export policy if the two countries could cooperate to provide gas to Azerbaijan and Turkey either through direct deliveries or swaps.

Swaps between Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan would be limited to three billion cubic metres a year due to the decaying pipeline between Iran and Azerbaijan. However, the link with Turkey is underutilised and sanctions artificially reduce Iran's gas production. Tehran should face few obstacles in ramping up deliveries to Ankara through swaps with Turkmenistan. Pipeline deliveries to Turkey would free up Turkish demand for liquefied natural gas (LNG), enabling LNG shipments destined for there to pivot to the European Union instead. This would be the swiftest way for Turkmenistan to influence the EU gas market. However, sanctions on Iran remain and the renewed Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, also known as the Iran nuclear deal, has not made any significant progress in 2022 and may complicate Tehran's relations with Ankara.

Although Ashgabat has repeatedly expressed its interest in large-scale gas exports to the EU, having already completed the 30 bcm annual East-West Pipeline in 2015, the necessary link to Azerbaijan is missing. Trans-Caspian Resources proposes a small, five bcm a year interconnector project that could be constructed

within six months at a cost of under 500 million US dollars. Within 18 months, its capacity could increase to between ten and 12 bcm. Turkmenistan should have this production capacity available without additional investments. Implementing the connector project will entail finding investors and convincing Azerbaijan to cooperate, which may be feasible considering the warming relations between Ashgabat and Baku.

The long-touted Trans-Caspian Pipeline (30 bcm annually) is both another potential next step after the interconnector project and a viable standalone project, according to Robert M. Cutler, Director of the NATO Association of Canada's Energy Security Programme. The Southern Gas Corridor infrastructure between Georgia and Turkey would need to be upgraded and additional compressors would need to be installed to deal with increased volume. Turkmen gas is able to flow to Europe, but its deliveries would be constrained, and it is unclear who would foot the bills.

Three's company

Despite these challenges, the largest issue may be Russia's response. Cutler points out that Ashgabat could see relations with Moscow as more valuable than five to 12 bcm of annual gas exports. Turkmen authorities may also worry that gas deliveries would stop at these smaller amounts rather than expand to their capacity. Indeed, Russian President Vladimir Putin has taken steps to solidify relations by visiting Turkmenistan to attend the Sixth Caspian Summit on June 29th this year. This was Putin's first trip abroad since Russia's unprovoked and large-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24th.

Vladimir Putin has taken steps to solidify relations by visiting Turkmenistan to attend the Sixth Caspian Summit on June 29th.

Putin's second and third international visits showcase the apparent importance of the region at large. In July he travelled to Iran, while on September 15th and 16th he attended the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation meeting in Samarkand, Uzbekistan – his only other international trips since February. During the summit, he emphasised the need to diversify cooperation between Russia and Turkmenistan in the economy and energy fields. Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov was awarded the fourth class of the Order "For Merit to the Fatherland" at the end of August by Putin, who invited him to Moscow in October. Recipients of this award are typically well-known Russian citizens rather than former Central Asian heads of state. Two days later, both Serdar and Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov met in Ashgabat with Alexei Miller, head of the Russian gas giant Gazprom. According to

Turkmen media, Miller expressed interest in continuing to purchase Turkmen gas. This appears to be a concerted attempt by Moscow to maintain relations among a shrinking group of friends or partners, while conveniently undermining the EU's search for new gas flows.

Both Ashgabat and Moscow are seeking new clients for their gas. In June 2022 China became the largest importer of Russian gas due to the progressive loss of Gazprom's German and other European destinations. Russian capacity is slated to hit 80 bcm of natural gas annually to Asia once all of its LNG projects are fully online. That said, technological sanctions are hindering its capacity to complete its projects, and even if it manages to overcome them, it will take at least four or five years to reach such volumes.

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In contrast, Russia exported 155 bcm to the EU in 2021, down from 201 bcm in 2019. Russia itself is a small but growing destination for Turkmen gas. Having restarted exports to southern Russia in 2019 after a 2015 dispute over price and export amounts, Turkmenistan could change future energy flows due to the war in Ukraine. Russia presents an opportunity for Ashgabat to diverge from its over-reliance on China, though Moscow may also dictate prices for Turkmen gas, as it did in the past. Turkmen deliveries could dry up depending on the price of Turkmen gas compared to domestic supplies. Russian infrastructure will also play a role here as it is needed to get the gas to where it is needed domestically. Reversing the original intention of the system, Russian gas can be exported to the region through the Soviet-era Central-Asia-Centre pipeline, which sought to deliver gas from Central Asia to the Soviet Union's "centre", i.e. Moscow and the surrounding areas. Recent advances made by Gazprom and the Kremlin to purchase Turkmen gas and mend relations could prove but empty gestures, resulting in Russia halting purchases of Turkmen gas, or even becoming a competitor in the region.

Love thy neighbour

Two decades have passed since talk of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline surfaced. Ashgabat shows persistent interest in TAPI, and the project received support from all countries involved. However, the Taliban-led government in Afghanistan faces severe sanctions and the country is subject to armed conflict. Breaking ground in Afghanistan is yet to start. Turkmen domestic expertise and capital are insufficient for the project's scale. Experts interviewed

agree that the cost to serve Pakistan and India would render Turkmen gas uncompetitive. Even so, Ashgabat is fixated on making progress on this project through high-level meetings. Professor Anceschi believes elites continue to peddle the project to make it appear that they are actively pursuing diversification and new projects, while in reality they are content with the status quo. With the status quo appearing to shift and continued signs of domestic economic troubles, Ashgabat should consider economically viable alternatives.

Hydrocarbon-rich Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan both seek to halt gas exports due to exploding expected domestic demand by 2024 and 2025 respectively. Kazakhstan is looking to replace its coal-dominated energy and heating source with gas due to the poor domestic ecological situation caused by its over-reliance on coal. Although Uzbekistan has produced similar gas volumes to Turkmenistan, most of its production is consumed domestically. The January 2021 social unrest in Kazakhstan sent a clear message to Uzbekistan about the need to prioritise domestic consumption. This is especially true considering the growing Uzbek population, many of whom are young and are faced with an unattractive labour market – and thus, a potential source of social discontent. The Uzbek government will need to provide heating to its population, which at 34 million is by far the largest in Central Asia, compared to the runner-up Kazakhstan at 19 million. Turkmenistan's official population is six million, though Anceschi believes it is likely to be in the 3–3.5 million range, with unconfirmed reports placing it at just 2.8 million inhabitants.

Uzbekistan is further developing its petrochemicals industry, requiring gas as feedstock. Pipeline C of the Central Asia-China Gas Pipeline allocates ten bcm annually to Uzbekistan and five bcm to Kazakhstan in Chinese deliveries, though recent Uzbek and Kazakhstani supplies were significantly below these allotments. Turkmen gas could replace these shares, assuming Tashkent and Astana agree, and Chinese demand picks up. This would serve to enhance Turkmen dependence on China but at least would not require further pipeline investments. Tashkent and even Astana could import gas from Ashgabat for domestic needs, though Russian gas could prove more attractive if it is sold at cutthroat prices. Uzbek and Kazakhstani intentions of increasing domestic production may further hinder Ashgabat's attempts to enter these markets, though their actual production may fall short of domestic demand.

Do not hold your breath

Turkmenistan has the potential to become an important energy source at the crossroads between Europe and Asia due to the drastic energy shift in Europe-

an, Eurasian and Asian energy landscapes. As Russian gas exports to Beijing keep climbing and are likely to remain competitively priced, Turkmen elites may find their personal revenue streams in the country threatened, therefore necessitating the search for alternate destinations and partners. Iran may come out less isolated internationally than before, providing another potential path forward.

Any future contracts between Turkmenistan, Iran and/or Azerbaijan would pave the way for larger deliveries to Turkey and the EU. However, failure to link gas reserves towards Europe within one or two years would cast doubt on Turkmenistan's ability to do so further down the road. However, Cutler believes the country could have a couple more years to complete its western link. A Turkmen pivot towards the West is likely to illicit a response from Moscow, including exerting serious diplomatic pressure on Ashgabat to halt its reorientation. As an influential Caspian littoral state, Russia might also stonewall any construction efforts to link with Azerbaijan through the Caspian Sea on environmental grounds. Even so, Turkmenistan has more options – and more incentives – than it did before to sell its excess gas production capacity to Europe. Despite this, it does not seem to be making use of them. NEE

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Inaction is something we cannot tolerate

An interview with Oksana Bulda and Liza Bezvershenko from "Promote Ukraine", a Brussels-based media platform for expertise and civil society initiatives in Ukraine and the EU. Interviewer: Agnieszka Widłaszewska

AGNIESZKA WIDŁASZEWSKA: How was Promote Ukraine (PU) established back in 2014 and what kind of activities has it been focusing on since then?

OKSANA BULDA: After the war started in Ukraine in 2014, there was a need to create a Ukrainian hub, so to say, to promote Ukrainian interests and share information about all of the developments related to the situation in Ukraine. At first, it was perceived more as a diaspora organisation but with time, given that Brussels is the heart of Europe, there was a need to launch wider activity. PU went through many transformations. It was at first more Ukrainian, then we had more Belgians on board, now we are an international organisation. We were first established rather as a lobbying organisation, however, now we cover all possible topics related to Ukraine, such as humanitarian aid, political lobbying, refugee support, cultural events, etc. We have established a platform to share experiences and information amongst experts not only on Ukraine, but also on Europe, and now also on Russia. We have a journal, *Brussels Ukraïna Review*, in which we share opinions on different matters, from business development in Ukraine, to political escalations, culture and our experience of working in Brussels. We also have an app, which is called "Leads Ukraine", it gathers information about Ukraine-related events all over Europe.

What were your first impressions when the invasion started on February 24th? What was your first team meeting like, how did you organise yourselves?

LIZA BEZVERSHENKO: I wasn't a member of PU before the full-scale invasion started. I happened to be in Brussels when Russia invaded and we were just looking for ways to protest and

bring awareness about everything that was happening. The invasion started on Thursday, so you can imagine how many protests we had on Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday … it was Oksana who was organising them. That weekend I approached Maryna, one of our directors, and asked her if they needed help with coordination because there were so many people like me who just wanted to be engaged. It is difficult to explain what we were all going through but I can tell you that what each of us needed was a sense of community, understanding and support. Unfortunately, despite all the help we have received from foreigners, this is something that could be understood only by Ukrainians.

Our first team meeting within the new structure was held on February 28th, it gathered some who were, like myself, not members of PU yet, but wanted to take leadership and action. Seeing all these people who decided to act, despite all of the emotional trauma that we were all carrying, gave me hope and adrenaline to be more productive. Afterwards, we had hundreds of people coming to help, our office was like a never-ending meeting room. We had foreigners, Ukrainians, MEPs, heads of humanitarian organisations, refugees, and grandmas, who didn't know how to help, so they were just making coffee for every member of the team, or cleaning our office space. One of our friends came and asked, "Do you guys eat?" and we said "No, actually, we forget to eat" – so he organised free lunches for us, which were delivered to our office for several months. We got so much help and support, I have never experienced anything like this in my life.

Oksana do you have any observations as to how the organisation operated before and after the start of the full-scale invasion?

OB: I've been a PU member since 2018, when I was based in Kyiv. Back then, I was mostly engaged in helping with the journal, but also launching local projects in Ukraine. PU was more oriented towards politics, for example, we had online schools to empower women and young girls to try their chances in politics. Now the organisation is much bigger, it has gone through quite a rapid transformation, sort of from start-up mode to one of the biggest Ukraine-related hubs in Europe.

When it comes to the escalation, we had already known that it would be quite a tragic situation for Ukraine. Just the day before the invasion we had a protest, but many people still did not understand the level of escalation that was going to take place. I remember talking to our partners and friends from the UN and all the bigger organisations, who you'd think would have first-hand information, but they all said that "Russia is not going to attack, it is just an escalation, it is just a bluff" while our message was "we do believe that it is going to happen, that's why you, as a responsible organisation, have to prepare yourself". Unfortunately, the invasion happened when nobody expected it, however, we, as an organisation, and I believe also the majori-

ty of Ukrainians and Eastern European friends of Ukraine, knew that it was going to happen.

We then shifted to cover all possible ways to support Ukraine. On my side, it was mostly about protests because I knew how to approach the Belgian police and fill in all the documents in order to get permission. We all stopped our full-time jobs in Belgium and switched to full-time volunteering.

LB: Before, PU focused mostly on advocacy, manifestations, social media and PR. After February 24th, we launched four new streams. The first was humanitarian aid – since the very first day we were very decisive on our position that we can fundraise for and supply protective equipment. This was very hard to do at first because the EU was not yet very certain on its approach towards supplying weapons to Ukraine. Many foreigners did not want to donate money to protective equipment. The second stream was helping all the displaced Ukrainians who were coming to Belgium. We had to think in advance what would be the solution to the housing problem, how we would integrate refugees into Belgian society, and how we would help them with all the bureaucratic questions. Our third stream was fundraising. We started to organise events, we launched donation campaigns for aid, protective equipment and medical supplies. The fourth new stream was coordination, since there were so many of us. I think that in the first few months we had around 100 people that we had to manage.

You mentioned that some of you had to give up your jobs and switch to volunteering. Are you still volunteering or are you paid for your work for PU?

OB: I was a full-time lawyer in Belgium. I worked for an IT company, but since the start of the invasion I could not work anymore, I was on sick leave and I was dedicating myself fully to volunteering. However, as Liza mentioned, it's mostly Ukrainians or our friends from Eastern Europe who are able to fully understand what we are going through. Due to my high involvement with the PU, I lost my full-time job. However, for me, helping my country is the priority, so I am still a full-time volunteer, and I will remain so until Ukraine prevails.

LB: I also had a full-time job, I was working with Ukrainian civil society but at the same time I wanted to do something visible in Brussels as well, so I was helping Ukrainian activism in Ukraine and I also joined Ukrainian activism in Brussels. Now I also have a full-time job but not at PU, I'm volunteering outside of my working hours and this is the typical situation for the majority of us working for PU.

I would like to delve more into the different streams Liza described. How many refugees are still in Belgium and what kind of support do you provide to them?

LB: As of today, according to the statistics from the Belgian government, there are over 59,000 displaced Ukrainians in Belgium. These are the people who are registered and have received

temporary protection status, we do not know how many are unregistered. Within the first months, we organised a first warehouse for distribution of humanitarian aid, where people started to bring food, clothes, even furniture. The biggest challenge at the time was of course the Belgian bureaucracy. My brother had to stand in a queue from three in the morning to three in the afternoon to get registered, some people had to stay overnight. It is not up to me to assess how easy this was to organise but I know that people were very frustrated that it was taking so long during the first weeks. Then it got better. Belgium organised an online registration system and people started to receive some social support.

From our side, we were organising aid and starting to think of how to engage people and unite them, because while some people were staying with their families in Belgium, some came without knowing anybody here. We decided to organise activities to make them feel better, first of all psychologically. The Ukrainian cultural centre was created, it is now in our office and we have art and dance therapy, language courses, psychological support, physiological consultation and consultations on integration in Belgium. We also organised some projects for people who started looking for jobs.

In terms of humanitarian aid sent to Ukraine, what kind of products have you been sending and how have you organised it logistically?

OB: We chose to mostly focus on supporting our defenders, providing them, upon request, with certain items that they needed, which we could buy in Europe, but also with extra material which is not for military use, for example food, medical kits, clothing, etc. We try to dedicate all of our events towards raising funds to support our defenders. One of our major achievements was that we were able to purchase an ambulance that was delivered to the frontline. We were also able to purchase vehicles for the army. In addition, we support some of our volunteers whose relatives are on the frontlines – sometimes we receive lists of items from them, which can include anything. Soon we will do a trip to Kharkiv and the recently liberated territories to deliver humanitarian aid. We have two more upcoming requests for military support from one of the battalions in which one of my relatives is currently serving, they need vehicles, bulletproof vests and helmets.

We took the decision to focus more on military support because the biggest struggle in the West has been with providing weapons. Everybody is ready to provide diapers but when it comes to bulletproof vests it becomes a problem. A lot of people have concerns that they are dual-use goods but a bulletproof vest is saving your life, you can't choose to use it to kill somebody. It is a very special feature of PU that we have taken this direction, and it is not easy to buy bulletproof vests in comparison with other humanitarian aid items, as

they are sensitive goods. In the beginning we worked a lot with the Ukrainian embassy in Belgium, they organised the logistics to deliver any type of goods to Ukraine. Over time the embassy has focused more on humanitarian aid rather than military aid, so we had to look for other ways of delivering these products.

Luckily there are enough people, Belgians and Ukrainians, who drive their own cars and deliver products to Western Ukraine, where we have volunteers who then deliver the goods to the people who have asked for them. We are also in direct contact with the ministry of defence and some other institutions in Ukraine, which also support us in the smooth and certified clearing of these products on the border. If we have the opportunity to buy our own vehicles we just pack them with anything we can and drive ourselves to Ukraine.

How do you contribute to keeping Ukraine at the top of the international agenda, particularly considering that you are based in Brussels?

OB: When it comes to protests, it has become more difficult to gather people and engage journalists, so we're trying to be more creative. Just yesterday we collaborated with several other organisations, so the topic was not only Ukraine, but also Georgia and Moldova, and this brings another context into our activities. To invite more people to participate we need to set up a play of sorts. Yesterday's protest was about staging a pretend vote to designate the Russian mission to the EU as an exclusion zone. We also try to invite more high-ranking politicians and speakers. Moreover, we have a very strong PR team who write all of the press releases, launch events, create social media campaigns, contact journalists – combining these elements helps a lot. One of the best examples was when we had a protest in front of the Brussels opera theatre, which had just launched a Russian season. Before holding a protest we tried to contact them and tell them that it was inappropriate to hold such a season. When there was no reaction, our European volunteers helped us to write an open letter, which the PR team then sent to journalists. We then organised a protest, but also with a creative performance. As a result, we have been able to enter into a dialogue with the theatre and now they are in partnership with us, trying to promote Ukrainian culture more.

LB: Indeed, the synergy of our working groups creates a very big impact in Brussels. Besides the very loud and visible protests we also have a very strong advocacy team. We have specialists on Germany, NATO, different institutions, and together we discuss and decide what is the best way to approach them. We talk to the permanent representations of EU member states in Brussels, we were also invited to speak with the office of Charles Michel, where we presented our priority list of needs, which are (at the moment of recording the interview): more sanctions, designating Russia as a terrorist state and designating the Wag-

ner Group as a terrorist group. We also advocate for confiscating Russian assets and transferring the money for Ukraine's recovery. I think it is this combination of loud and visible street protests together with closed-door events that puts us in a very good place to be the go-to organisation for Ukrainian civil society.

How do you cope with working in these circumstances on an everyday basis, how do you support each other as a team?

OB: For me it is just about being among people who share what I'm going through. I still remember when I had to do my full-time job and then I would go to the PU office and as soon as I would enter I would feel relief. It's just unbelievable how much the community and the right people in the right place can do, that's why we all lived in that office almost 24/7 in the beginning. My whole family was in Ukraine when the escalation started and when you hear people's stories it is just heart-breaking but when you are together, you see that yes, it is difficult, but we know that in the end we will receive funds, we will get the attention that we need and we will help Ukraine – this empowers you to make the impossible possible.

During one of the EU summit protests it was very difficult for me, I understood that for so long we had been in the same place, asking the EU for the same stuff and there was still very limited progress and I just felt bad and had to sit down and have a moment for myself. Then one of the journalists came and said that "you deserve the right to have your moment but Ukraine needs you." One of our volunteers also came to me and said, "today I saw a video of one of our defenders fighting alone in the trenches against two Russian soldiers. They dropped a grenade onto him, he caught it and threw it back." The fight was caught on a drone, our defender sacrificed his life for free Ukraine. The volunteer told me, "Can you imagine how it must feel for him to be there in such a moment? That's why we here, in Brussels, in peaceful Europe, we have to get ourselves together and keep going no matter what." I still remember that conversation, I had my moment, and then went directly back into the crowd and we kept asking until our requests were heard.

LB: I agree with Oksana. The inspiration from the people that surround us and the people who are fighting in Ukraine, this is what keeps us going because if they can fight so bravely, we have to be brave enough to go out onto the streets, meet our partners and decision-makers and voice bravely everything that we need. We need to be consistent and insist on increasing weapon deliveries and sanctions and we will never be tired of doing this because this should go on until Ukraine wins. We will never settle for any peace agreement which will be against Ukraine's interests and will violate Ukrainian sovereignty.

Any final thoughts?

LB: It is very important to understand that this is not only a war between

Ukraine and Russia, we are all a part of it and inaction is also a negative contribution to the war. Inaction is something we cannot tolerate because it is really possible to help from any place you are currently in, on your own frontline, whether it is the informational, humanitarian or military space. Maybe you're a journalist, maybe you bake cookies, you can always approach us in Brussels and we can fundraise, donate and help. We all have to take responsibility for everything that is happening because we cannot allow this complete violation of human rights, European values, human values, to happen in the 21st century.

OB: I want to highlight that we need more weapons – this is my message, one that just last year would be very unusual even for myself. It is unbelievable to see that during our protests children know the names of the fighter jets or what kind of guns our army needs. We have many requests not just from Ukrainian soldiers, but also from the International Legion. It is our joint effort to keep peace in Europe and in the world in general. That is why if you can donate or help PU get some items that could save the life of a soldier, contact us because that's where Ukraine needs the help the most. Many Western Europeans have concerns that giving more weapons might escalate the situation, but it has already been escalated as much as possible. We can win this war only together and I wish there was another way, but unfortunately the only way we see is the military solution to achieve peace in Europe. And in order to achieve this peace, we need more weapons.

Oksana Bulda is an international legal advisor. She is actively involved in volunteering at the Legal Hundred NGO, where she provides advice to soldiers and temporarily displaced people on legal matters related to their status. She also volunteers at the NGO Promote Ukraine, where she is involved in awareness raising and lobbying for Ukrainian interests in Europe.

Liza Bezvershenko is a volunteer coordinator at Promote Ukraine focusing on advocacy, awareness raising and fundraising for Ukraine. She is an alumna of the College of Europe in Natolin.

Kharkiv – the city of resilience

PHOTO-REPORT BY WOJCIECH KOŹMIC

An unexploded missile is lodged into the street in front of an administration building in Kharkiv. A reminder that the Russian invasion continues and comes in many forms.


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Local residents camp out at the metro station in Kharkiv. The level of shelling of the city by Russian forces makes it extremely dangerous to go out onto the streets while the metro has become a safe place for shelter and life.

Stautes and monuments protected from explosives and shrapnel. Residents in many large cities of Ukraine have used sand bags and other forms to protect their local heritage from the war.


МАГАЗИН

Modern East Germany's dependence on Russian oil evokes old divisions

ISABELLE DE POMMEREAU

Germany's decision to pursue the European Union's plans to stop importing crude oil from Russia has stirred up social tension in the East German town of Schwedt. Despite reassurances from the government in Berlin, the town, which hosts Germany's largest oil refinery dependent on Russian oil, is fearful of the aftereffects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

From her office on the outskirts of the quiet town of Schwedt in Brandenburg, a German town bordering Poland that stretches for miles, Gabriele Manteufel points to a huge, sprawling maze of pipes, furnaces and tankers. It all comes together to make a gigantic refinery. Every day the CEO's sons come by to fill up the family-owned tankers with propane, a by-product of refined oil. They then dispatch the gas to their customers in this north-eastern region. Since the days of the Cold War, crude oil piped in from Almetyevsk in in Tatarstan in Central Russia – 5,000 kilometres away flowing directly into the former *Petrolchemisches Kombinat Schwedt* or PCK – has been providing jobs for thousands of workers, as well as gasoline, jet fuel and heating oil for Berlin, Germany's East and parts of Poland.

This industrial city on the Oder river to the east of Berlin owes much to the PCK refinery. After the Red Army's advance decimated Schwedt in the last days of the Second World War, it was the refinery which helped the city rise again, transform-

ing the village into a thriving model "socialist city". After painful restructuring in the 1990s, the refinery gradually gave a region, made fragile by the reunification process, stability and self-confidence again. Manteufel's husband, who had been trained at the refinery as a heating specialist, had fled communism in the 1980s to work in Bavaria. After the Berlin Wall fell, it was the refinery that lured him back to his native Uckermark, of which Schwedt is the biggest city, to launch OderGas, a small family-owned propane distribution business.

Not just any refinery

Yet now, Germany's decision to go ahead with the European Union's plans to stop importing crude oil from Russia by this coming January has thrown Manteufel's life into limbo once again, and that of the region as well. For PCK is not just any refinery. The end point of a Cold War era oil pipeline called *Druzhba* (Friendship in Russian), it was configured to refine special crude oil from the Urals and remains entirely reliant on Russian oil. And since 2015, the business has been Russian owned, with 54.4 per cent of its stakes belonging to Rosneft, the Russian public oil giant close to the Kremlin.

The refinery is a symbol of the ties between Russia and the former East Germany during the Cold War, an anchor of jobs and identity since the 1990s, and now after February 24th in the eyes of Brussels and Berlin a sign of a dangerous dependence. For these last two groups, it is clear that these bonds have to be broken. That is why Berlin agreed to an embargo on Russian oil levied as part of an EU package of punitive sanctions against Vladimir Putin, despite massive opposition from regional politicians.

Yet in the Uckermark, one of Germany's poorest regions where nine out of ten cars drive with Russian petrol and pretty much everybody is directly or indirectly connected to the refinery, the news of the embargo unleashed fear and social unrest, rekindling old wounds tied to the upheavals of reunification that never really healed. The embargo means "destroying a cheap, reliable and environmentally-friendly energy supply system while giving us the illusion that we are doing something to end the war," said Manteufel on the eve of a televised public debate in the summer titled: "sanctions or jobs: what's most important?"

"It is not by sending weapons to Ukraine, cutting Russian oil, ruining our economy and people's lives that the war is going to end!" Manteufel adds. For her and the entire region the decades following reunification had been extremely difficult. It had taken a long time to rebuild, and for Manteufel's family business to take off. There were personal challenges as well. Six years after he launched the

company, Manteufel's husband died accidentally, forcing her to leave her job as a schoolteacher and take over the company with the help of her two sons. This year she finally, although she is still paying off her loans for the big tankers, "reached the point where we could say, 'we made it'". She then added, "and now this! And it's the East that has to pay again!"

The fear that the refinery would have to close once Russian oil stopped flowing brought the residents out onto the streets. Twice since the spring Germany's Economic Minister Robert Habeck had come to Schwedt, to reassure residents that Berlin would not let the refinery down, but he was greeted with boos.

"When I heard Habeck, I was taken back 32 years," Kraus Schreiber, a local master baker who also heads a regional crafts and trades organisation said to wide applause that hot August 30th evening. In a letter Schreiber sent to German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in the name of local crafts people, from hairdressers to bakers that is yet to receive an answer, he demanded an end to the sanctions against Russia and a halt to weapons shipments to Ukraine. The main argument was that Germany's "ambitious and ideological energy policies are sacrificing the social peace of our country". A government taskforce was set up "for the future of Schwedt", which included politicians and local businesspeople. However, it failed to bring conclusive results.

In the Uckermark, one of Germany's poorest regions, the news of the Russian oil embargo unleashed fear and social unrest.

Residents demanded written proof that the refinery would not die. Helmut Kohl, the chancellor of reunification, had also made promises in the 1990s to "transform Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Saxony-Anhalt, Brandenburg, Saxony and Thuringia into flourishing landscapes where life is good," said Schreiber. But what many people here remember most perhaps are the massive layoffs, East German groups taken over by West German firms, the cities emptied of their populations, lives shattered and the feeling of not being heard or talked to. "Promises are just empty words," he said. "Let's tell the politicians: We don't follow you anymore!"

Concrete solution?

On September 16th, Habeck came back to Schwedt, this time with his boss, Chancellor Scholz, and with a concrete answer. Berlin had seized the assets of Rosneft's German subsidiary in PCK and the two southern Germany refineries it holds minority stakes in, Miro and Bayernoil. Scholz said that with the Schwedt refinery under the trusteeship of the *Bundesnetzagentur*, Germany's energy regu-

lator, Berlin's hands would be free to keep the refinery and its 1,200 jobs afloat, and to secure the energy security of the country. Berlin would invest 825 million euros in and around the refinery. It would upgrade an existing oil pipeline from the port of Rostock on the Baltic Sea so it could transport non-Russian crude. The alternative oil would be brought by tankers there. Poland would help, providing oil through Gdansk.

"Nobody has to fear for their jobs," Scholz told hundreds of workers assembled in a packed cafeteria of the PCK refinery, which stretches for kilometers in what used to be forest land. When a sceptical worker asked about this "F... embargo" Scholz responded calmly that embargo or not, Vladimir Putin could do with PCK what he had done with Gazprom and Nord Stream One, that is turn off the oil tap; and that suppliers, insurance companies, banks, IT companies were increasingly reluctant to work with the refinery as long as it had ties with Russia's Rosneft. "We know that Russia is not a reliable partner anymore."

Berlin has seized the assets of Rosneft's German subsidiary in PCK and the two southern Germany refineries it holds minority stakes in.

Schwedt's Social Democratic mayor, Annekathrin Hoppe, breathed a sigh of relief, as did union representatives. Yet Gabriele Manteufel called the government's seizing Rosneft's stakes in the refinery a "smoke and mirrors" measure meant to appease workers that will only drive up inflation and bring companies to the brink of bankruptcy. But, she also said, it will fail to address the key question: how to source 12 million barrels of oil coming through the refinery each year? Not getting enough oil would force her to get propane trucked to her, a prohibitively expensive initiative. Down the line, that could choke the family business.

In socialist times, Klaus Schreiber had been a math teacher. After the Berlin Wall fell, he brought his parent's old family bakery the German Democratic Republic had let rot back to life, took loans he is still paying off and, little by little, created two bakeries. He calls Scholz's handling of the refinery a slap in the face of all those who, like him, rolled up their sleeves after reunification, creating businesses and recreated their lives.

Germany's contradictory energy policy?

The debate over the future of PCK lays bare the contradictions and dilemmas involved in Germany's energy policy as the country struggles to battle its most serious energy crisis since the Second World War while simultaneously manag-

ing its green transition. The situation reveals how differently Germany's East and West perceive the war in Ukraine and how to deal with it, a sign of how, more than three decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the country remains deeply divided.

For the decades following the Second World War, Germany relied on cheap Soviet gas, oil and coal to power its heavy industry, insisting that doing business with the Kremlin would only improve relationships with Moscow. Berlin's reliance on Russian fossil fuels only grew in recent years, a way to offset the country's effort to wean itself off nuclear and coal energy.

"This reliance could be justified at a time when it was thought that commercial relationships with Russia would bring peaceful change, including democratic change in Russia," said Thomas Pellerin-Carlin, head of energy at the Jacques Delors Institute, an independent think tank in Paris. "But at the very latest in 2014, one should have seen that this policy of 'change through commerce' did not work." Today, Germany is paying the price for "putting itself at systemic risk … and never investing a euro to deal with that risk," adds Thierry Bros, a professor at Sciences Po Paris specialising in energy issues. "The wake-up call is hard."

Deep ties

It is especially difficult in the country's economically fragile East, to where most of the oil imported from Russia flows. Nowhere is Russia's encroachment into the country's energy landscape as profound and visible as in Schwedt on the Oder river, a city of roughly 30,000 to the east of Berlin. The efforts to move away from it are painful and contested. Schwedt and the region's energy infrastructure remain directly linked to that of the former Soviet Union, which makes getting oil from other providers difficult.

Schwedt's ties to Russia's "black gold" run deep. Schwedt grew and shrank with the refinery. It was but a rubble of ruins with 8,000 inhabitants in 1958 when East German leaders chose it as the site of the country's first oil refinery, mainly because of its location. It was one hour from Berlin, next to the Oder River and close to Poland, where a soon-to-be-built pipeline supplying crude oil to the region would run. Socialist leaders envisioned something big. Schwedt, with its refinery, would be like Eisenhüttenstadt (then called Stalinstadt), the first "socialist city" the party had created a few years prior around a gigantic steel factory not far away. Schwedt and Stalinstadt were to catapult East Germany into the industrial age, showcasing the socialist state's modernity.

Today still, residents remember the euphoria as workers and their families moved here by the tens of thousands in the years that followed. The main driver

was the construction of the Druzhba Pipeline, a joint effort to bring crude oil to "fraternal socialist people" including Poland, Hungary and then-Czechoslovakia in 1958, heralding a booming era for the region. Helmut Zahn, a local fisherman, remembers the busloads of "tourists" arriving from all over the German Democratic Republic to visit the "socialist model city". He also remembers the shock and trauma of reunification, when entire streets and districts of the town were razed and turned into green fields. He is proud that PCK, which counts a bit more than a thousand workers down from 8,000 in the 1980s, survived to become one of Germany's most modern refineries.

"What we went through in the 1990s is happening again," he says. To him, Berlin is "sacrificing" the region just as it did after the wall fell. "It is time that we create an independent East German republic," he argues. "We have to get out of NATO, out of the EU."

That Rosneft, the Russian oil giant, gradually gained control of the Schwedt refinery after buying up TotalEnergies's 16.6 per cent stake one year after the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, did not seem to raise eyebrows until very recently, and that was mostly outside of the Schwedt region. Six years later, in 2021, Shell tried to sell its 37.5%per cent of PCK shares to Vienna-based Alcmene, which is owned by Estonia's Liwathon Group. However, Rosneft opposed the deal and moved to acquire them to secure a 92 per cent majority in the refinery. The deal received the blessing of Germany's antitrust authorities – and that of top politicians, including Minister President Dietmanr Woidke on February 21st 2022, three days before Vladimir Putin's tanks rolled into Ukraine.

Since then and in the wake of the war, Berlin has put the deal on hold. To Pellerin-Carlin of the Jacques Delors Institute, Rosneft's journey in Schwedt fits into an "overall strategy on the part of Russian oil companies to acquire strategic assets in Germany and the German government's failing to react to this, out of naivety and greed". Shortly after the invasion of Ukraine, Habeck said that "we are paying a price for letting Rosneft gain control of the refinery."

Soviet heritage and sanctions protests

Yet, while the current anti-Putin sanctions have broad support in Germany as a whole, they are widely unpopular in Germany's former East. The refinery being the lifeblood of this fragile region partly explains why. Why did Berlin not do the same as Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, which are also linked to the Druzhba Pipeline, and negotiate a temporary exemption from the import ban, asked Uckermark Christian Democrat PM Karina Dörk this summer. OderGas CEO

Gabriele Manteufel says that she does not sympathise with Putin but asks, "if it is not Germany, won't it be India and China that will buy Russia's crude to resell the refined fuel to Europeans?"

However, there is the significant factor of Soviet heritage and East German ties with Russia, which also explains the local scepticism of Berlin's sanctions. South of Schwedt on the Oder river in Eisenhüttenstadt, one feels close to Schwedt residents' anxieties over the future of the refinery. "The experience of having lost everything after the fall of the wall is omnipresent today," says Michael Reh, a native from East Germany's first "socialist city" who is now responsible for its business development. In a way, Schwedt and Eisenhüttenstadt share similar fates. As with Schwedt and its refinery, Eisenhüttenstadt and its gigantic steel factory EKO along the Oder Spree Canal, today only a fraction of the size from the heyday of socialism, was the pride of socialist Germany. In both cities, residents experienced loss after the reunification, of homes, jobs and identity.

Today, the refinery and the steel complex, now owned by giant Arcelor Mittal, remain the region's number one employer. At the same time, energy-hungry industries are hit hard as a result of the aftereffects of Russia's invasion. Skyrocketing energy prices recently forced Arcelor Mittal to furlough many of its Eisenhüttenstadt workers.

"Politicians say that the future of the refinery is safe, but who believes that?" asks Reh from his office at a city hall constructed in the imposing socialist realist style of Germany's "first socialist city". "The refinery was born because of the Druzhba Pipeline. If you cut the flow, there's a structural problem."

"Schwedt depends on the refinery just as much as we depend on EKO, and that is something that unites us," Reh adds. "We are told: 'we're going to live without gas and coal, and we're going to do that tomorrow,' but at what price? Are we going to run our factory with wind and solar energy?"

There is a sense that the government is endangering the region's existence just as, in their eyes, it had in the 1990s.

From Schwedt to Frankfurt on the Oder to Eisenhüttenstadt, mistrust of Scholz and his government runs deep. There is a sense that the government is endangering the region's existence just as, in their eyes, it had in the 1990s. Pegged to this mistrust is a bigger scepticism towards the West and the United States in particular. "In the West people look towards the Americans, here in the East we have a different relationship with Moscow," explains Gabriele Manteufel. Michael Reh complains about what he sees as Berlin's "ideological energy policy". "This is what we went through in East Germany, and we know where it all led to: it failed," he says. After the Berlin Wall fell, few industries survived, and those that survived need energy.

Manteufel in Schwedt and Reh in Eisenhüttenstadt are fearful. They worry about social unrest. With the war, they say, the rift between Germany's East and West is getting wider again. "The social peace is in danger."

No good solution

Meanwhile, people's discontent has been seized on by populists on the right and left. The hard right Alternative for Germany (AfD) has rallied people into taking part in "Monday demonstrations" similar to the anti-migrant Pegida demonstrations that shook Saxony in 2015. On a recent Monday, more than 10,000 residents took to the streets in various cities of Germany's former East. The posters they carried proclaim their message: "If PCK dies, so does Schwedt"; "No to a government that takes us to the abyss"; "Yes to PCK, no to the USA"; "No to war mongering, no to Russian sanctions."

From her office close to Lindenallee – the former Stalin Street – Schwedt Mayor Annekathrin Hoppe points to the flame on top of the refinery in the distance, in what used to be a forest. It is the refinery's flare. "As long as that flame is burning, the refinery is working and people feel safe," she says.

But how long will the flame continue to burn? Keeping the refinery running is a herculean task. Will that happen up to the year's end? Upgrading the Rostock pipeline so it can carry enough crude oil to make the refinery work will take a long time. The oil would have to be transported to Rostock by tankers, and the port brought up to standard to accommodate the new traffic. But where will it come from? Imported oil from Kazakhstan via *Druzhba* is an option, but belligerent Russia could stand in the way.

"There is no good solution," says Thierry Bros, the energy expert in Paris. "The good solution would have been not to let the Russians take too much power in the refinery."

Some, like Uckermark native Michael Kellner (The Greens) from the Economy Ministry, say the trouble with Russia could also be a chance, an incentive for the region to transform itself. And indeed, part of the money Olaf Scholz promised the region in September will go to attracting start-ups and research centres that will work toward replacing crude oil with "green oil". NEE

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Ukraine's defiance goes beyond the battlefield

KATE TSURKAN

Poetry may not have the power to stop Russian missile strikes but Ukraine's literary festival season, which carried on in spite of the horrors of war, became a testament to the importance of defending culture during the invasion. After all, the Russians have been very clear that they do not recognise the Ukrainian identity.

In Chernivtsi, a small Western Ukrainian city located on the border with Romania, September begins with poetry. Artists from throughout Ukraine and all over the world have been gathering there for the past 13 years during the annual Meridian Czernowitz Festival. Due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, this year's festival was different, and, in the words of Meridian's chief editor Evgenia Lopata, "a small miracle". Shortly after the start of the invasion on February 24th, cultural projects in Ukraine were either put on hold or suspended altogether. Some of Ukraine's most famous writers – including a few published by Meridian Czernowitz – have enlisted in the armed forces or prioritised much-needed volunteer efforts over writing.

Six months into the invasion, Chernivtsi remained the only region in Ukraine that had not been hit by Russian missile strikes. However, this was no guarantee that the city would remain untouched by the horrors of war. The question remained: should the Meridian Czernowitz festival take place during wartime or not? According to Lopata, it was always a matter of how, not if.

An outdoor poetry reading and discussion during the 2022 Meridian Czernowitz Festival in September 2022. Despite the war and martial law, this key cultural event still took place in Chernivtsi, Ukraine.

Finding refuge in poetry

While choosing locations for the events, the organisers of the festival could not go with many of their preferred locations, such as the city's magnificent drama theatre, a testament to the wonders of 19th century Austro-Hungarian architecture. This is because they were not close enough to bomb shelters that could fit all of the guests and participants. Security guards were hired to watch over each event, and although the sight of stern, cross-armed men standing by the entrances of poetry readings added to the cognitive dissonance of those three days, it was nonetheless a relief that safety was the number one priority.

There was also the question of getting permission from the local government. Chernivtsi had a new governor, as the former left in disgrace following a corruption scandal. Unfortunately, the new one did not seem very interested or familiar with literature. As the fiery young Lopata told me, when the governor's office said that she did not have permission to stage the festival and police would show up to arrest her and end the event if she proceeded, she defiantly replied: "I have journalists coming from all over the country. Go ahead, arrest me in front of them and see what happens." Thankfully, the festival's opening ceremony carried on without a hitch.

Absent from this year's Meridian was Serhiy Zhadan, Ukraine's heartthrob rock star poet. He is not only Meridian's biggest star, but the most well-known

and beloved contemporary writer in the country. His events always command large audiences of adoring fans. This year, his presence would have posed a huge security risk, especially if the air raid sirens were to sound during a music performance or poetry reading. However, Zhadan and his punk rock band had planned a tour across Europe in the months of August and September to raise funds for volunteer efforts in his native Kharkiv. Yuri Andrukhovych – Meridian's other big star and a staple of the Ukrainian literature scene since the country's independence in 1991 – had also embarked on a literary tour across Europe to promote Ukrainian culture during wartime and thus did not make it to Chernivtsi for the festival.

Nevertheless, some of Meridian's other stars were around for the three-day event, such as poet Kateryna Kalytko and prose writer Andriy Lyubka, who both presented their latest books. Lyubka's collection of essays titled *Something's wrong with me* had been scheduled for release back in April; the room was packed with eager fans who had been patiently waiting to hear his witty and notorious exchanges with the literary critic Oleksandr Boichenko. I found myself sitting next to Lyubka's wife Yulia (a good friend of mine and fellow translator) who blushed as he read a fantastical essay about when she had forced him to throw out a pair of grungy old shorts at the beginning of their relationship – "my first capitulation", he teasingly called it.

Likewise, the consecutive poetry readings by Yuri Izdryk and Iryna Tsilyk were packed, as was Irena Karpa's presentation of her new novel *Just don't tell anyone about it.* Meridian's events have always been well attended, but I had never seen so many people gathered together to listen to poetry readings. The main venue – beyond the Paul Celan Centre on Kobylianska Street – was a meeting room in the Magnat Hotel across the street. The walls were stripped bare and were dimly lit, which indicated renovations were underway. Nonetheless it gave the aesthetic of us sitting together in a bomb shelter, with poetry shielding us from the threat of Russian missile strikes.

The power of words in the face of evil

Meridian Czernowitz is ultimately the brainchild of the writer and radio broadcaster Igor Pomerantsev. According to Svyatoslav Pomerantsev, Igor's nephew and founder and president of Meridian, it was his uncle who ushered him into the world of contemporary Ukrainian literature and unwrapped the mythos of Chernivtsi back when he was just starting the publishing house. The 74-year-old former Soviet dissident speaks in a tranquil and unhurried manner that enchants everyone within earshot of him. Back in the Soviet Union, Igor Pomerantsev gained the at-

tention of the KGB for his possession and circulation of so-called forbidden literature, so he has a deeper understanding than most of how powerful words can be in the face of evil. He eventually went into exile with his wife and son, becoming a staple of the BBC Russian-language service and Radio Svoboda. As Igor Pomerantsev addressed the audience during the opening ceremony of this year's Meridian Czernowitz festival, he reminded them that "Poetry is against death, and war is death. I believe in the victory of poetry. True, poetry does not have guns, cruise missiles or cluster bombs, but it has high-precision words against which guns are powerless."

This certainly remained the rallying cry throughout the entirety of the three-day festival. On multiple occasions attendees burst into tears of joy telling me how grateful they were to have attended such an event. Perhaps we were all emboldened by the wine, but our feelings were sincere. The past few months had imposed a heavy psychological burden on us all, whether we had friends and family on the frontlines or not.

There are varying levels of suffering during wartime, none of them enviable. The war was also constantly on our minds. For example, Lyubka has spent much of his time since March raising funds to purchase cars for soldiers on the frontlines. A donation box was set up in the Paul Celan Centre specifically for this cause, but nonetheless, people approached him to give money at every chance, including during our interview. During my interview with Irena Karpa, some women approached our table outside the cafe to thank her for coming to Chernivtsi, saying how important it was to see her here.

As Igor Pomerantsev explained to me in the days following the Meridian festival, "Emotions overwhelmed all of us and literature took a step back. In the context of war, tears mean more than poems; human touch is more necessary than brilliant metaphors. It is difficult for me to admit." At the same time, it was poetry that led us to experience this collective catharsis. Cognitive dissonance reigned supreme during those three days, but I believe that none of us were ever more thankful for poetry than we were in that moment.

Defending culture during wartime

Meridian was the first but certainly not the only literary festival to take place following the Russian invasion. This year, the Lviv Book Forum took place in early October. However, it was by invite only due to security concerns. On the second day of the festival, Ukrainians woke up and rejoiced in the news that Putin's precious Crimean bridge had been bombed. I, too, rejoiced, but worried that some-

thing bad would happen (actually, it did on the following Monday – when massive strikes against the country's energy infrastructure began) but not a single air raid siren sounded during the festival, nor did it during Meridian.

Peter Pomerantsev, Jon Lee Anderson, Misha Glenny, Emma Graham Harrison and other big names in western journalism joined Ukraine's literary elite at the impressive Ukrainian Catholic University. The discussions were broadcast live online for those who could not attend. Over the course of four days, there were discussions centred on the role of women in wartime, propaganda, cultural identity in the face of imperialism, and more. However, it must be said that the most compelling conversations were those where Ukrainian literary figures engaged in dialogue with western literary greats, including the prodigious translator and public intellectual Yurko Prokhasko with Margaret Atwood (attending remotely); and Crimean Tatar activist Alim Aliev with the 2021 Nobel Prize winner Abdulrazak Gurnah (also attending remotely). After all, the main goal of Ukrainian literature in translation has always been to convey that the country's writers are just as talented and worthy of attention as other writers who contribute to the canon of world literature. Ukrainians fight for their freedom, but one should not forget that Ukrainian literature is worth more than just the world's tears.

Ukrainians fight for their freedom, but one should not forget that Ukrainian literature is worth more than just the world's tears.

Perhaps no one articulated what is at stake for Ukrainian culture better than the writer Oleksandr Mykhed in his speech during the opening ceremony at the Book Forum. Shortly after the start of the invasion, his home in Hostomel was destroyed by a Russian missile strike. Mykhed and his wife fled to his mother's native city of Chernivtsi, and he enlisted in the Ukrainian armed forces.

"What is the state of the Ukrainian book industry during the full-scale Russian invasion?" declared Mykhed. "Writers, translators, and publishers are dying. The shells of the occupiers destroy publishers' warehouses. Libraries are burning. The Russians are burning Ukrainian books and clearing libraries of 'enemy' literature. Many publishing houses stopped working altogether. Some of the niche publishing houses founded by veterans closed down because all the staff have gone to the front. Book sales have sunk into the abyss. Bookstores have only recently reopened. Paper and printing materials became more expensive. Hundreds of books that were due to be published this year will never see the light of day. Generations of authors will not have their rightful entry into the literary sphere. Thousands of forced migrants will never seek relief in literature, translation, and art because they need first and foremost to survive. Others try to rediscover the value in creative work in the blood-soaked fog of war."

Poetry, sadly, does not have the power to stop Russian missile strikes. But Ukraine's literary festival season carrying on in spite of the horrors of war is testament to the importance of defending culture during wartime. After all, the Russians have been very clear about how they do not recognise the Ukrainian state as legitimate and have, throughout history, either murdered Ukrainian artists or tried to claim them as their own.

The opening lines of a poem by Kateryna Kalytko, in this context, seem like an appropriate rebuke to Russia's genocidal campaign:

What's going on?

They came to kill us.
We are being killed right now. We
Will continue to be killed.
We will never be killed.

Why do they want to kill us?
We are the antithesis
Of stolen history...

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The best story

The Ukrainian past in Zelenskyy's words and the eyes of the public

FÉLIX KRAWATZEK AND GEORGE SOROKA

In the current Russian war in Ukraine, history and the historical narratives underpinning the conflict are featuring front and centre. The Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, has been very effective in his use of historical references, especially when addressing international audiences.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent fighting in that country have been accompanied by an avalanche of historical rhetoric from both sides, underlining just how important narratives about the past are for this conflict. As Joseph Nye reminds us: "Conventional wisdom has always held that the state with the largest military prevails, but in the information age it may be the state (or non-states) with the best story that wins." In this regard, references to a shared history are particularly effective in crafting stories of national belonging and mission, grounding an individual's membership in a wider community and linking that community to a mental geography and a coherent temporal trajectory.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has proven especially adept at not only deploying historical analogies, but also carefully targeting them when addressing diverse audiences. Drawing liberally on the lessons of the past, Zelenskyy has framed Ukrainian efforts to repel Russia's incursion in terms of defending Europe's post-1945 achievements in protecting human rights and promoting peaceful coexistence between states. Indeed, the Ukrainian president's background as a Jew

who lost family in the Shoah has only made his challenge to the civilised world to make good on its promise of "never again" all the more poignant. This has allowed him to exert moral pressure on western countries to deliver weapons to Ukraine and impose far-reaching sanctions on Russia.

Between freedom and slavery

When addressing Ukrainian audiences, Zelenskyy often invokes memories of the Second World War, calling for the mobilisation of popular resistance to Russian aggression and encouraging his compatriots to "win this patriotic war of ours". Unsurprisingly, the historical narrative he presents to Ukrainians at home vehemently counters Vladimir Putin's claim that Ukraine is an illegitimate state, with Zelenskyy stressing Ukraine's innate Europeanness. This claim is only strengthened by his emphasis on the desire Ukrainians today exhibit for joining the European Union and NATO, support for which has risen dramatically across the country since February 2022.

However, Zelenskyy's most striking use of historical rhetoric occurs in the international arena. In this context, Ukraine's president leverages a kaleidoscope of historical analogies, ones calculated to resonate with specific audiences and ensure that they empathise with the violence that Ukraine is currently suffering. In this respect, Zelenskyy's attempt to forge a shared bond between Ukraine and foreign audiences stands in stark contrast to the largely ineffective response that followed the 2014 annexation of Crimea.

German politicians and society are among the most complex audiences with which to connect on the basis of a shared historical worldview. This is due to their country's fraught past and ongoing domestic debates over how to relate to Russia and the post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe more generally. When addressing the Bundestag on March 17th 2022, Zelenskyy drew on two specific aspects of the historical arsenal available to him. First, he stressed the successful overcoming of Germany's East-West divide and tied it to Ukraine's own internal divisions. Second, he emphasised Berlin's continuing responsibility to be a moral beacon to the world in light of the crimes of Nazism. Referencing Germany's own struggle for unity and self-determination, Zelenskyy stated that "It's as if you are behind a wall again. Not the Berlin Wall, but one in the middle of Europe. Between freedom and bondage. And this wall grows stronger with every bomb that falls on our land, on Ukraine. With every decision that is not made for the sake of peace."

Drawing further on Germany's historical consciousness, Zelenskyy invoked Ronald Reagan's famous June 1987 "Berlin Wall" speech. Echoing the American

president, who exhorted Mikhail Gorbachev, the USSR's last leader, to "tear down this wall", Zelenskyy metaphorically asked the same of Olaf Scholz. Such references to brighter moments in German history permitted Zelenskyy to challenge Germany's politicians to unequivocally support Ukraine, while exhorting them to help overcome the geographic and political divisions that still exist on the European continent.

Simultaneously, we find the Ukrainian president mentioning the Second World War and the extreme violence suffered on the territory of what became independent Ukraine in 1991. In this same speech Zelenskyy recalled the 2021 visit of German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier to Babyn Yar, a ravine on the outskirts of Kyiv where more than 33,000 Jews (among others) were executed during the Nazi occupation and where a Russian missile strike in early March 2022 reportedly damaged parts of the Holocaust memorial complex. Germany, like other western countries, has adopted a cosmopolitan memory norm. This demands that the extreme violence of the Second World War, centred on the Holocaust, is to "never again" be repeated. And this was exactly the chord that the Ukrainian president struck in the Bundestag: "I appeal to you on behalf of everyone who has heard politicians say: 'Never again.' And who saw that these words are worthless. Because again in Europe they are trying to destroy a whole nation. Destroy everything we live by and live for."

In Germany these words have a particularly strong moral bearing and serve to polarise political debate. Zelenskyy continued by emphasising the return of violence to places destroyed during the Second World War: "It is difficult to survive without the help of the world, without your help. It is difficult to defend Ukraine, Europe without what you can do to ensure that we are not looking backwards once again after this war. After the destruction of Kharkiv… For the second time in 80 years. After the bombings of Chernihiv, Sumy, and Donbas for the second time in 80 years. After thousands of people have been tortured and killed, for the second time in 80 years. After all, what then is historical responsibility; what happened 80 years ago has not yet been atoned for before the Ukrainian people."

Connecting with history

When addressing audiences in the formerly communist countries of Europe, Zelenskyy emphasised their importance to the European Union. This appeal resonates on multiple levels. For example, it grants countries such as Poland or the Baltic states the acknowledgement of their history as integral to the history of Europe as a whole and recognises them as being "properly European", a recognition they

have been striving for since their accession to the Union in 2004. Speaking before the Polish parliament (Sejm) on March 11th 2022, Zelenskyy charmed his Polish audience by stressing Poland's crucial place in the history of European integration. He likewise referenced Polish heroism in protecting Europe, echoing how Poles portray key moments of the Second World War, such as the Warsaw Uprising, in their national narrative. Zelenskyy, moreover, glossed over the history of shared violence between Ukraine and Poland and symbolically united the two countries in extolling their significance for all of Europe: "We can do everything together. And this is the historical mission, the historical mission of Poland, the historical mission of Ukraine to be leaders who together will pull Europe out of this abyss, save it from this threat, stop the transformation of Europe into a victim."

In the Baltic states the tone Zelenskyy sets is similar, with great stress placed on the importance of each of these countries' histories for Europe. On April 12th 2022, the Ukrainian president thanked the Lithuanian parliament for having been among the first to support Ukraine after the Russian invasion, stating that such support is proof of "the values that underlie the unification of nations on the European continent after the Second World War". In his speech Lithuania also became a stand-in for European values more generally: "Of course, if everyone in Europe were as principled and respected the values of Europe as you do in Lithuania, and we are proud of you, I am sure that the Russian leadership would not expect that they would go unpunished. Probably, this war would not have begun. They would not have dared to make the decision to start it."

Zelenskyy references Polish heroism in protecting Europe, echoing how Poles portray key moments of the Second World War in their national narrative.

Meanwhile, speaking to Lithuania's own suffering at the hands of the Soviet Union, Zelenskyy emphasised that the Lithuanian people, "like no other understand how the occupiers can destroy freedom and at what cost independence must then be rebuilt, which you have done in an exemplary fashion". According to him, it is because of these historical experiences that Lithuania is in a particularly strong position to provide the moral leadership Europe requires to "truly save and uphold common values". More broadly, Zelenskyy argued that the post-communist countries are today proving that "the common values of freedom, human rights, respect for state borders and prevention of a war of invasion are in fact alive, not something outdated and only worthy of a museum".

Even in instances where there exist fewer obvious historical parallels, Zelenskyy and his speech-writing team have managed to identify events that can be used to build a rhetorical bridge between Ukraine and the target audience. For example,

on April 21st Zelenskyy addressed the Portuguese parliament, just a few days before the anniversary of the 1974 Carnation Revolution, which saw the overthrow of the Estado Novo regime. He used this anniversary to link the shared experience of dictatorial rule endured by Portugal and Ukraine: "The Carnation Revolution … freed you from dictatorship, you clearly understand our feelings. You understand exactly the feelings of all other nations in our region that seek freedom. What does Russia bring to Ukraine? Death and dictatorship." This constituted a particularly meaningful reference as the Carnation Revolution heralded the start of the so-called "Third Wave" of democratic transitions that eventually brought about the collapse of the Soviet system and communism in Europe.

It is no accident that Zelenskyy adopted the same tone of Winston Churchill when addressing British audiences.

Similarly, when addressing the British House of Commons on March 8th, Zelenskyy appealed to British heroism and exceptionalism, themes readily invoked in debates prior to Britain's 2016 referendum on EU membership. Particularly noteworthy in this regard was Zelenskyy's paraphrase of Winston Churchill's famous 1940 "We shall fight on the beaches" speech, which the British prime minister delivered after the Wehrmacht forced Allied troops to evacuate from Northern France. In attempting to rally the public, a defiant Churchill stressed that Britain would never give up: "We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender." It is no accident that Zelenskyy adopted this same tone when he stated that "We will not give up, and we will not lose. We will fight until the end, at sea, in the air. We will continue fighting for our land whatever the cost. We will fight in the forests, in the fields, on the shores, in the streets."

Contentious Holocaust comparisons

Despite the overall effectiveness of Zelenskyy's appeals, his historical analogies have not gone unchallenged. For example, in his address to the Israeli Knesset on March 20th, Zelenskyy drew direct parallels between the extermination of Jews and Russia's war against Ukraine: "Listen to what the Kremlin says … When the Nazi party raided Europe and wanted to destroy everything … [t]hey called it 'the final solution to the Jewish issue'. You remember that. And I'm sure you will never

forget! But listen to what is being heard now in Moscow. Hear how these words are said again: 'Final solution'. But already in relation, so to speak, to us, to the 'Ukrainian issue'." Furthermore, along with claiming an equal status as victims, Zelenskyy argued that "Ukrainians have made their choice 80 years ago. They rescued Jews." In response, Israeli politicians strongly condemned the drawing of comparisons between Moscow's incursion into Ukraine and the Holocaust, as well as the perceived whitewashing of Ukrainian crimes against Jews.

Comparisons to the Holocaust are never trivial and they are deeply offensive to those who stress the uniqueness of the planned extermination of European Jews. Moreover, Israel has a sizeable Russian-born population and many dual citizens living in the country. Disapproval of Zelenskyy's comments was voiced by Bezalel Smotrich, leader of the Religious Zionist Party, who stated that "His criticism of Israel was legitimate, as was his raising expectations of us, but not his infuriating and ridiculous comparison to the Holocaust and his attempt to rewrite history and to erase the role of the Ukrainian people in the attempts to exterminate the Jewish people."

In bringing up the issue of complicity in Nazi violence, a complicated topic of controversy in Ukraine as elsewhere, Smotrich challenged the very foundation of Zelenskyy's historical narrative. Along similar lines, Yuval Steinitz, a member of Israel's Likud Party, pointed out the issue of comparing "a regular war, as difficult as it is, and the extermination of millions of Jews in gas chambers in the framework of the Final Solution". He dismissed any attempt to do so as "a complete distortion of history".

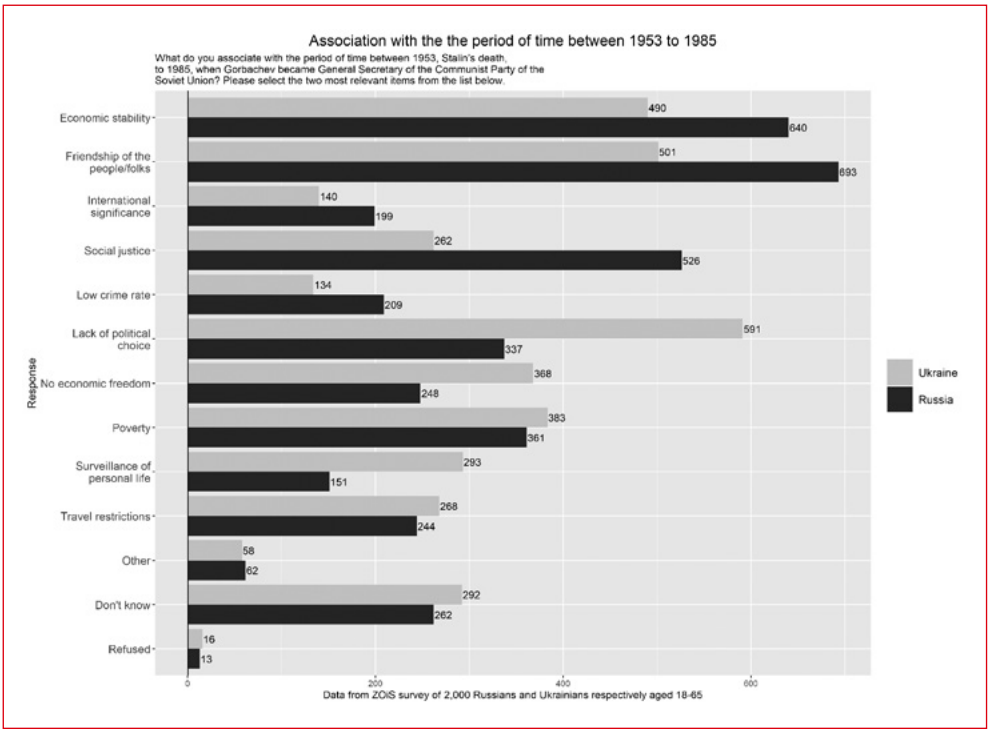
Unity in fragmentation?

Historical narratives are only as effective as the extent to which they appear socially grounded and legitimate. Zelenskyy's narratives concerning history would not be nearly as persuasive on either the domestic or international stage if they were not at least minimally congruent with broader attitudes in Ukraine. In this regard, although Ukrainian collective memory is still far from unified, societal views on the past have changed quite rapidly since the 2013–14 Maidan protests, with interpretations of history rooted in the Soviet era increasingly giving way to more national ways of remembering.

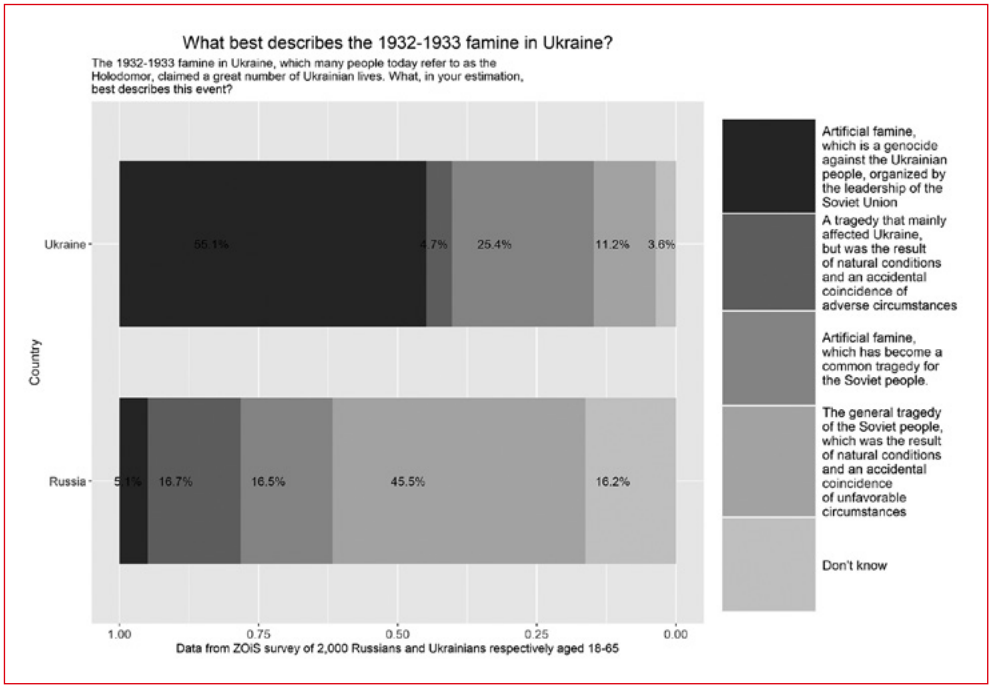
In January 2021 we were able to conduct a survey on historical attitudes in Ukraine, which provides an important pre-invasion baseline, even if the implication it carries for today's situation can only be speculated about. Our results illustrated that, on average, there was a fair degree of congruence between how elites utilise

history and the views of the past actually held by ordinary Ukrainians. This is despite the persistence of very noticeable differences based on the respondent's region of residence, their age and whether the survey was taken in Russian or Ukrainian. Nevertheless, as other research has demonstrated, regional differences in how the past is understood are gradually becoming less prominent, although nationalist views continue to be most dominant in Western Ukraine.

An intriguing point of comparison between respondents in Ukraine and Russia, where we ran an equivalent survey in the same timeframe, concerns markedly differing attitudes towards the Soviet era between the time of Stalin's death and before Gorbachev came to power. Provided with a set of five positive associations and an equal number of negative ones, more Ukrainians than Russians cited the negative associations, especially the lack of political choice and the surveillance of personal life. Conversely, Russians outnumbered Ukrainians in referencing positive associations, being particularly likely to mention social justice, friendship with neighbouring countries and economic stability. These findings highlight that Ukrainian respondents contrast post-Soviet developments with Soviet-era shortcomings, whereas Russian respondents find themselves contrasting post-Soviet failures and uncertainties with a perceived period of past stability.

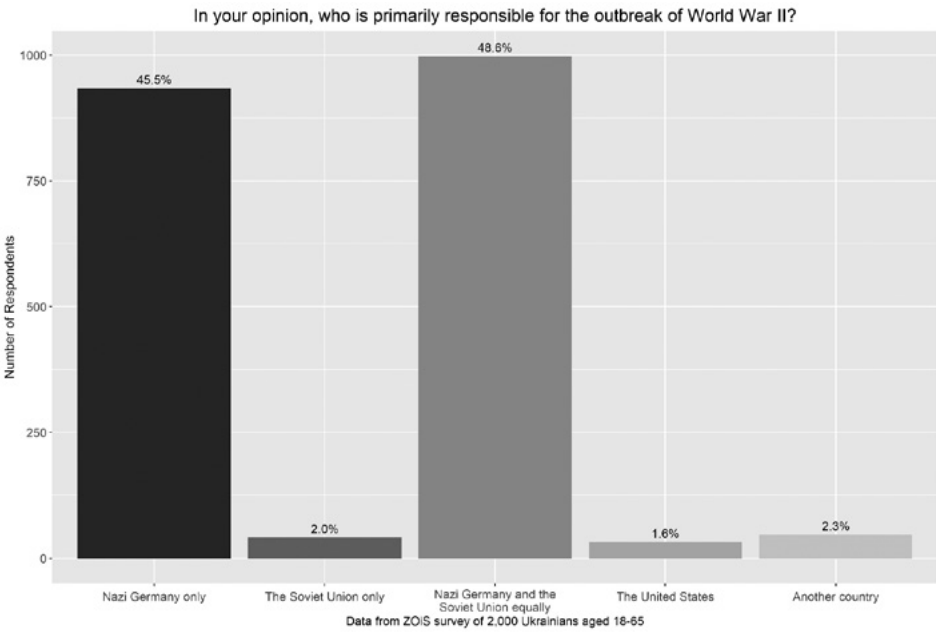


The topic of the 1932–33 famine in Ukraine, known as the Holodomor, has also become a key topic of political discourse. Former President Viktor Yushchenko, in office from 2005 to 2010, sought to make the Holodomor the fundamental historical experience on which to base Ukrainian identity, introducing in 2006 a law recognising the famine as a Soviet-orchestrated genocide. While at the time this was a controversial position, acceptance of this narrative has increased noticeably since the overthrow of Viktor Yanukovych's pro-Kremlin government in February 2014. As of January 2021, 55 per cent of Ukrainian respondents affirm that they think the Holodomor is best described as an artificial famine and genocide that deliberately targeted the Ukrainian nation. Meanwhile, 36 per cent of respondents – primarily those living in Eastern Ukraine – embrace the perspective that the Holodomor constituted a common tragedy of the Soviet people, be it as an artificial famine or the result of natural conditions. In contrast, in Russia more than 60 per cent of those surveyed agree with this second characterisation.



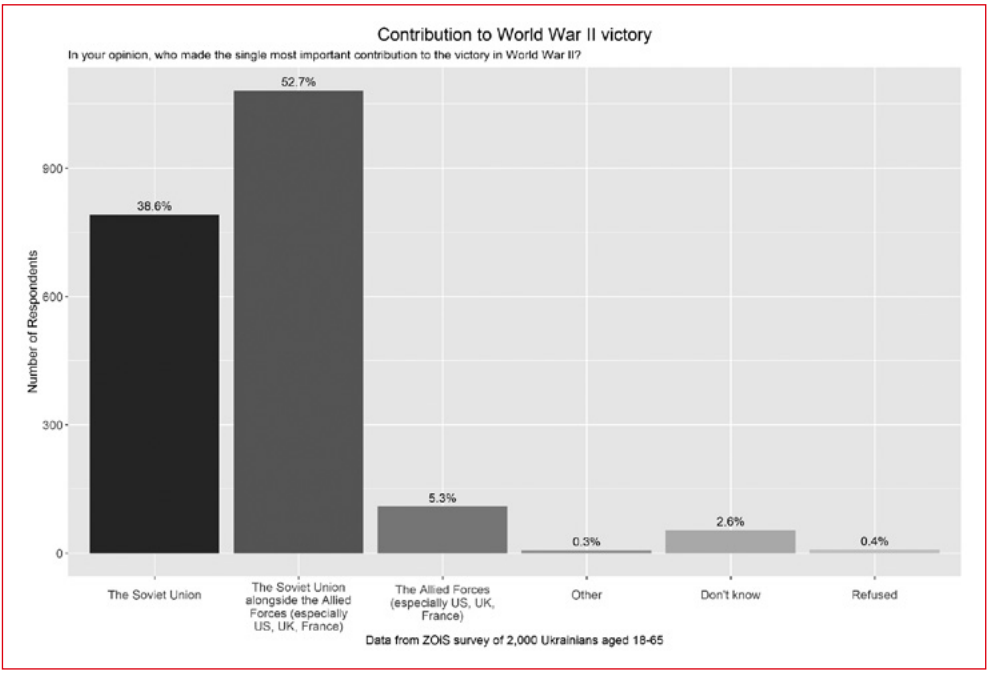
Attitudes displayed across Ukraine also diverged profoundly from those in Russia when we posed the question of which state was most responsible for the outbreak of the Second World War. In Ukraine, a plurality replied that it was Nazi Germany alongside the Soviet Union which bore responsibility for the start of this

war. The viewpoint corresponds to an EU resolution from September 2019, which assigned co-responsibility for the war's inception to Hitler and Stalin. In contrast, 80 per cent of respondents in Russia ascribed blame to Germany alone.



Complementing questions about guilt for the start of the Second World War are those relating to who made the largest contribution to ending it. Ukrainian respondents are most likely to mention that it was the Soviet Union alongside the Allied Forces that played this role (whereas 39 per cent cite the USSR alone). In contrast, 70 per cent of Russians believe it was solely the Soviet Union. These divergent views illustrate the complexity of articulating European views on history. By way of comparison, a plurality of 44 per cent of respondents in Germany (where we also conducted our survey) stated the largest contribution was made by the Allied Forces and 34 per cent mentioned the Soviet Union alongside the Allies. These findings reflect the diverse post-war historical reality and convey the challenges associated with "Europeanising" the contradictory 20th century.

While it may surprise some that history is featuring front and centre in this war, who controls the historical narratives underpinning this conflict – and thus shapes the hearts and minds of the outside world – is every bit as important as which side dominates on the battlefield. Zelenskyy has made ample and very ef-



fective use of historical references, especially when addressing international audiences. His claims appear authentic because he mirrors a Ukrainian reality that is increasingly at odds with Russians' perceptions of the past. Despite mnemonic divisions within Ukraine remaining regionalised when our survey was conducted in 2021, Ukrainian history has, to a meaningful extent, already been folded into a wider European worldview. This comes with all the challenges implied for other post-communist states that have tried to navigate and integrate the historical substrate underpinning European integration.

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What the past is for

Polish-Ukrainian memory politics and Putin's war

DANIEL EDISON

Despite contentious differences in memory, Polish-Ukrainian relations have remained close and notably strong in important national moments. This reflects two aspects of Polish society: a generation of youth acclimated to supporting Ukrainian sovereignty with compassion, and a national memory politics which allows humanitarianism, but only when it fits into a politically suitable narrative.

In 2003 the Polish philosopher and historian of ideas Leszek Kołakowski gave a speech at the American Library of Congress titled, "What the Past is For". Kołakowski believed that history serves not to predict the future nor to gain technical advice on how to deal with the present, but to discover the values constitutive of human identities. He told his listeners that "to say that [the events of the past] do not matter to our lives would be almost as silly as saying that it would not matter to me if I were suddenly to erase from my memory my own past personal life … The history of past generations is our history, and we need to know it in order to be aware of our identity; in the same sense in which my own memory builds my personal identity, makes me a human subject."

Made just over ten years after the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, Kołakowski's plea to know the past reflected a trend in post-communist politics. The nations, territories and states which inherited the legacies of Nazi and Soviet

dual occupation, genocide, destruction and reconstruction were left with uncertain identities after decades of manipulated public life. Collective introspection had been substituted for the party-controlled memorialisation of politically advantageous historical narratives. How young states dealt, and are still dealing, with these legacies largely determined the outcome of their political development into the 21st century.

Integrating the past with the present

Polish Netflix shows often focus on the terror and trauma of Soviet and Nazi occupation and particularly in how they manifest in the present. This summer, the streets of Warsaw's tourist district displayed an exhibition comparing children's drawings of the war in Ukraine to those made by Polish children in the Second World War. Construction workers in Lublin recently uncovered a long-forgotten mural bearing the message *Solidarność żyje* (Solidarity lives). The question is in what form do these legacies live and how are they shaping the future? This is particularly the case in Polish-Ukrainian memory politics.

Journalist Jeffrey Gettleman has written that the most challenging aspect of understanding the war in Ukraine is the question of "how to integrate the past with the present". The war has been laden with many historical layers. For instance, this is clear in its continuity with the tradition of Russian imperialism and Putin's own invocation of "Nazism" in his justification. Polish President Andrzej Duda even said that "history is repeating itself" in Ukraine. One such layer is Poland's national embrace of Ukrainians and support for the Ukrainian military. In the 1990s public opinion polls found that Poland feared Ukraine more than any other neighbour, reflecting the lingering memory of the ethnic cleansing of 1943 led by Ukrainian nationalists under Stepan Bandera in Volhynia, and of competing Ukrainian and Polish nationalisms reaching back centuries. Yet Poland has contributed more to Ukraine's sovereignty than any other country besides the United States and the United Kingdom. Its response to the refugee crisis has been so warm as to allow American Ambassador Mark Brzezinski to label Poland a "humanitarian superpower".

This close relationship is in some ways not a surprise – Poland and Ukraine made great efforts following independence to set aside questions of historical trauma to affirm each other's sovereignty. This readiness was accompanied by gradual historical reconciliation, as Poland moved towards European integration quickly, using its power in the West to diplomatically support Ukraine's sovereignty in the East. In 2004 and 2014 Poland led international efforts to stand behind Ukrainian democracy. In 2014 it was a Polish diplomat, Radosław Sikorski, who led mediation

efforts amidst the Maidan revolution despite the presence of Ukrainian nationalists celebrating Stepan Bandera on the Maidan. And yet this cultural alliance may be more fragile than it appears, particularly as the far-right Law and Justice party (PiS) has radicalised memory politics since coming to power in 2015. The government has increasingly lost the seemingly permanent social support of Western Europe, as it has flaunted EU norms and requirements. Trouble with national memory has begun to resurface in Polish society.

Yet, Poland's younger generation has been so ready to support Ukraine in part because the post-communist Polish stance has been one of reconciliation. As this stance has shifted since 2015 towards a revitalisation of a mythical narrative of national martyrdom, suffering and heroic innocence, this reconciliation may prove temporary. While such memory politics will not likely put into question immediate support for Ukraine, it threatens the theoretical limits of Polish humanitarianism. This is due to its connections to nationalist political narratives, such as hatred of Russia or redemption in the face of the West.

Politicisations of the past

For a newly formed Polish Republic in the 1990s, moving beyond the legacies of genocide, Nazi occupation and Soviet-imposed oppression throughout the 20th century made historical identity a priority. Like the fellow post-communist states of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Ukraine, it created the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN). Without parallel outside of the post-communist space, these groups are not only charged with establishing archives around national traumas and supporting historical research, but also with shaping public education around history and even prosecuting those found guilty of past crimes against the nation. The Polish institute has gained notoriety since 2015, after which the PiS leadership, led by Jarsoław Kaczyński, took advantage of the institution to radicalise their platform of Polish nationalism by promoting a myth of national innocence and oppression in the 20th century. Its increased activities often led to conflicts within the country, analogues of which are familiar in the West, like battles between state authorities and locals over the removal of statues originally built as Soviet monuments. The removal of Soviet statues is pursued by the IPN as part of its decommunisation campaign in public spaces.

However, much of its activities move beyond the question of symbolic memorial, allowing PiS to bring memory politics into education, diplomacy and the everyday running of the state. In 2020 Poland lifted the statute of limitations regarding communist-era crimes. This increased the prosecutorial powers of the IPN

and allowed communist – often synonymous with Russian – oppression to drive contemporary discussions. This came as Duda said PiS aimed to "cleanse Poland of dirt", particularly in its legal system. The claim of communist collaboration has been central to problems of judicial tampering, which have frustrated the European Union. In response, the PiS government has claimed that it is trying to "eliminate black sheep among judges". PiS co-founder Kaczyński claims that courts are often staffed by "privileged groups" from "communist times".

More threatening politicisations of the past by the highest levels of the Polish government have come in the form of public statements and the attempted control of traumatic political symbols. In July 2022, Poland's education minister publicly suggested that only Polish tour guides should show the Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial to visitors, including Israeli visitors, to avoid "distortions of the truth". The government has also demanded over one trillion US dollars in reparations for damages from Germany with plans to ask the same of Russia. These are not merely cultural problems but geopolitical moves, strengthening the PiS model of authoritarian nationalism both at home and in Europe. As the EU has blocked billions in COVID-19 recovery funds for Poland and Hungary due to problems of judicial independence, Polish leaders have increasingly expanded their retrospective politics to include not only Russia, but Germany. Warsaw has suggested that Berlin's hesitancy to support Poland and cut energy ties with Putin is in essence support for the war in Ukraine. Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki has said that he will not let Germany "lecture us on democracy" and "spit in our face", while Kaczyński has gone further, suggesting that if the EU does not fulfil its obligations towards Poland, then it has no reason to act friendly towards the EU.

Controversial policy

No discussion of PiS's memory politics would be complete without its most internationally notorious move, in passing what became known as the "Holocaust Law" in 2018. This law made it a criminal offense to attribute crimes perpetrated by Nazi Germany in Polish territory to the Polish nation, and although it was later modified to make such statements civil offenses punishable by fines rather than jail time, it still remains in place. The passing of the law was met with international outcry. The Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial Centre labelled it "highly problematic" and suggested that the law "contradicts existing and accepted historical knowledge". Its targets have included scholars like Jan Tomasz Gross, whose work includes the book *Neighbours*, which revealed the history of Polish pogroms against Jews instigated by, but not committed by, the German occupying forces.

Even if the applications of the law were strictly limited to German crimes, it would still be historically inaccurate. As historian Edna Freiburg has written, the Nazi occupiers "drew upon Polish police forces and railroad personnel for logistical support, notably to guard ghettos where hundreds of thousands of Jewish men, women and children were held before deportation to killing centres". Even some nationalists fighting in the underground resistance, held to be the pinnacles of Polish martyrdom, helped Germans track down Jews and aided in the claiming of Jewish property by Poles. Indeed, institutional and individual complicity and collaboration were clearly present during the Nazi occupation. Jan Karski, a Pole who willingly entered Auschwitz to build its underground resistance, himself described Polish antisemitism as "ruthless, often without pity. A large part avails itself of the prerogatives that they have in the new situation … To some extent this brings the Poles closer to the Germans".

To discuss these facts should not be held as unpatriotic. It remains true, as with most realities of genocide, occupation and terror perpetrated by Hitler and Stalin, that patterns of resistance and collaboration cannot fit into neat boxes. To acknowledge that thousands of Poles engaged in the Holocaust, as they also engaged in Soviet collaboration and rule, is not to negate the thousands that resisted, helped Jews and sacrificed themselves. However, approaching such choices as human decisions made by complex subjects is the starting point for understanding. As Kołakowski puts it, "our identity… [as] my own memory builds my personal identity, makes me a human subject."

Painful reminiscence

While the Polish Home Army, or AK, is honoured as the primary armed resistance group against Nazi Germany, having led the heroic 1944 Warsaw Uprising, its relationship with Ukraine complicates its character. Historian Timothy Snyder has written that "the AK's plans for a rising, as formulated in 1942, anticipated a war with Ukrainians for the ethnographically Ukrainian territories that fell within Poland's pre-war boundaries. By 1942, the formation of sizable Polish partisan units in the east could not but remind Ukrainians of Polish territorial claims."

Preparation for an ethnic war in what is now Western Ukraine was paralleled by Ukrainian nationalists, particularly the infamous Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists, and its armed wing, the Ukrainian Insurgency Army, or UPA. The UPA was led by Stepan Bandera, a nationalist who had welcomed the Nazi invasion as an opportunity to create an ethnically homogenous and independent Ukraine. In anticipation of such a struggle, Bandera's UPA led an ethnic cleansing of West-

ern Ukraine, which claimed the lives of thousands of Poles, 40,000 of whom were killed between the spring and summer of 1943 alone.

Polish antagonism towards Ukraine has remained present in memory since these years, and led to the 1947 Operation Vistula, a state-led campaign to ethnically cleanse concentrated areas of Ukrainians, as well as other minority populations, across Poland in order to weaken their community identities. The operation, which forcibly moved about 140,000 Ukrainians, was not led by a Russified communist collaborator or traitor to the Polish nation but rather by General Stefan Mossor, who had fought with national hero Józef Piłsudski for Polish independence from Bolshevik forces two decades earlier, and who had only joined the communist party in 1945 in an attempt to support the Polish state.

The massacres of Poles by the UPA and Operation Vistula have been central to Polish memory politics before Putin's invasion of Ukraine. The authors of the 2018 memory bill also accused Ukraine of honouring "criminal formations and a criminal ideology of integral Ukrainian nationalism" and of trying to distort the history of the 20th century. In this sense, we can understand how public opinion polls in the 1990s found that Ukrainians were the most feared neighbour among Poles.

How can we reconcile this emotionally charged relationship with the outpouring of humanitarian support since February for Ukrainian refugees and the country's armed forces? How can Poland, which only four years ago was engaging in antagonistic ethnic memory politics with Ukraine, have come to a position in which the American ambassador in Warsaw has labelled it as a "humanitarian superpower?" We can begin to answer this by examining the generational divides among Polish memory visible in Polish art and political landscapes, to find a crossover between young Polish humanitarianism and far-right nationalism which has allowed such a united response to Ukraine. This response allows for both a promising future for less antagonistic memory politics, and a strengthening of the PiS narrative.

Two threads to the response

As mentioned, despite these contentious differences in memory, Polish-Ukrainian relations have remained close and notably strong in important national moments like 1991, 2004, 2014 and now in 2022. As is well known, since the outbreak of the war close to four million Ukrainian refugees have been allowed to enter Poland. Some have moved further into the EU, eventually returned to Ukraine, or remained indefinitely in the country, as is the case for 1.5 million of them. Many of these people have been given temporary homes by Polish civil society. As of July 2022, 600,000 refugees were receiving government monetary support. This re-

flects two aspects of Polish society: a generation of youth acclimated to supporting Ukrainian sovereignty with Polish compassion, and a national memory politics which allows humanitarianism, but only when it fits into a politically suitable narrative. In this case, it is hatred of Russia – the symbol of communist oppression – the fear of Eastern insecurity and the ability to reclaim itself in the eyes of the West.

The first of these strains is the more optimistic one. Plenty of young people in Poland care about supporting Ukraine solely because they see atrocities happening to people they care about and wish to help. Indeed, Brzezinski did not merely suggest that Polish people should be awarded the *Time* Person of the Year, in addition to Zelenskyy, but specifically young Poles. While the government has undertaken a large response, the true leaders of the humanitarian response are the civil society and NGOs. A young Polish political science student I have spoken with suggested that Polish support for Ukraine was not surprising, but that it had begun as soon as they gained independence in the 1990s, after which Poles acknowledged the need to affirm Ukraine and vice versa. While he acknowledged – with a grimace – that Bandera remained a national figure in Ukraine, he suggested that such nationalism was fairly empty for most Ukrainians, that they use the symbol without knowing its origins, to which they feel no connection. He predicted that these nationalist symbols have and will continue to become less central to discourse.

Young people in Poland only remember the Volhynia massacre through stories from their grandparents or great grandparents.

This reflects the diplomatic success of memory politics between Ukraine and Poland after independence, the ability to set aside contentious questions and move towards reconciliation. Young people in Poland only remember the Volhynia massacre through stories from their grandparents or great grandparents, just as those in Ukraine have only a mediated memory of Operation Vistula. This correlates with generational changes across Polish society. In 2021, 30 per cent of Poles between 18 and 34 years of age considered themselves to be "left-wing", which was the first time that percentage was greater than "right-wing" or "centrist", and the largest percentage since communist times. Only nine per cent viewed the Catholic church, central to PiS politics and Poland's position as one of the most anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-abortion states in Europe, favourably. This is indeed a generational change as the majority of the country remains right-wing and Catholic.

In this optimistic thread of analysing the Polish response to the war, 2022 is perhaps the greatest achievement in historical reconciliation following those of the 1990s, 2004 and 2014. It is also one which may help ingrain a political memory based on compassion rather than fear or hatred. As Jeffrey Gettleman wrote,

"countries are living things that grow and change. They are shaped by their past but not chained to it, just like us."

While the country has been politically unified in its support for Ukraine, this does not mean that generational divides have disappeared. Rather, Ukrainian compassion fits into the template of nationalism shaped by PiS memory politics, meaning that while it remains fruitful now, it is not the basis for an ongoing foreign policy of compassion. Many in the West have suspected that, after years of fighting with Brussels over its capacity to follow EU regulations, particularly judicial independence, Poland's leading role in European efforts to aid Ukraine and move away from energy dependence on Russia has simply been an "opportunity to score some points in Brussels". Some also hope that it reflects an inflection point of a move "for Poland back toward the liberal West". However, others perhaps more insightfully, see that nationalism remains a component part of the government's policy. Poland was recently found to be at the top of a list of countries with negative sentiment towards Russia – 94 per cent of Poles consider it to be a danger. This correlates with a country whose government has founded its support on revisiting communist trauma, and with a country in which 74 per cent of its inhabitants believe it has suffered more than any other nation. A recent *New York Times* article read that "the more significant factor in Poland's welcoming attitude toward refugees, experts say, is that helping them feels like helping Ukraine's struggle against Putin. And for many in Poland, that feels like self-defence."

The difficulty of moving beyond the past

The above illustration reflects how these two interpretations of humanitarian help converge: as younger Poles increasingly shift away from nationalist politics, many of whom seem to hold few grudges against Ukraine, their support has overlapped with that of PiS and its supporters. While as recently as 2018 it described the Ukrainian state as possessing a "criminal ideology of integral Ukrainian nationalism", Warsaw nonetheless gives the central role of national oppression to Russia, allowing support for Ukraine to become not a means of genuine reconciliation, but of building more upon a narrative of national endangerment.

The fact that this drives PiS's response to the war is made clear by the disparity of its response to Middle Eastern refugees as opposed to those from Ukraine. In 2021, Poland allowed a migrant crisis to occur on its border with Belarus by refusing entry to several tens of thousands of refugees from conflicts in Central and Western Asia. Of course, these are groups removed from memory politics built on a hatred of Russia. Months later, it welcomed four million Ukrainian refugees

even as it built a "border wall" in the north to exclude certain immigrants. Whilst this situation is supported by PiS and Poland at large, clearly these policies diverge strongly from each other.

In this sense, the unification of young Poles, increasingly moving away from support for the authoritarian and nationalist PiS, with the government on the issue of Ukraine becomes more dangerous, particularly when we ask more about the "redemption" which some say Poland seeks in the eyes of the EU. As far as PiS is concerned, this is not the redemption of a past conflict with Ukraine, nor a form of redemption for deviating from EU norms (which would suggest an acknowledgement of political wrongdoing). Duda, and particularly Kaczyński, have seen themselves rather as the vanguard of a different form of politics, along with Central European partner Hungary. Kaczyński flaunts EU regulation not because he sees no value in European integration at large, but rather because he sees the authoritarian-trending, illiberal nationalism of Poland and Hungary as a model of European government which will ultimately prove more resilient than liberal democracy. By leading the response to this humanitarian crisis, PiS's redemption in this case therefore refers to something which readily supports Islamophobia, homophobia and right-wing politics.

In the long term, the war in Ukraine may reveal the fragility of the Polish values of historical reconciliation. In late July 2022, Ukraine's ambassador to Germany caused controversy over his claim that Stepan Bandera was "not a mass murderer of Poles and Jews", leading to a frustrated Polish response and revealing the difficulty of moving beyond the past.

This year will be one of the most significant for developments in the millennium-long chain of Polish-Ukrainian relations. How will these years, in the words of Kołakowski, come to be viewed in future Polish subjectivities? There is good reason to hope that they will prove to signal a long-term enforcement of compassion and democratic support, not only towards European neighbours, but of these values themselves. However, there remains the possibility that some Poles remember it not as a moment when their country showed Europe how to care for fellow human beings, but as another stage in a national history of resisting Russian evil. This will only further justify nationalistic campaigns to "cleanse Poland of dirt", to fight "the dictatorship of left-liberal views", and to ask all Poles to "devote themselves entirely to their homeland". NEE

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Zhyve Belarus!
Analyses and perspectives

Two years since the 2020 Belarusian uprising

A special section dedicated to understanding the current situation in Belarus in cooperation with the Analytical Group "BELARUS-UKRAINE-REGION" at the University of Warsaw's Centre for East European Studies

Read on pages 163-207

Download all of the reports by the analytical group "BELARUS-UKRAINE-REGION" available here

CENTRE FOR EAST EUROPEAN STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW

ANALYTICAL GROUP BELARUS UKRAINE REGION

DEAR READER,

In the next pages of this issue we present to you articles written by members of the Analytical Group called "BELARUS-UKRAINE-REGION". The name of the group was chosen for a reason. It was formed at the Centre for East European Studies at the University of Warsaw in the autumn of 2020, right after huge demonstrations in Minsk and across Belarus were organised against the rigging of the presidential election and against the Minsk regime in general. Meanwhile, the year 2022 brought a new and significant development in the region, namely Russia's unprovoked military aggression against Ukraine. Since this moment, Belarus ceased to be the most important topic in analysis of the region. Even more, it turned into a participant in the aggression by making its territory available for the gathering of Russian troops before the war. The country then allowed the aggressor to attack Ukraine from its territory at the outset of the war.

Today, just like Belarus two years ago, Ukraine has become the centre of attention, not only for us, its closest neighbours but also for the whole world. As expected, the ongoing war is covered by media all over the globe. In the democratic world the interpretation of this aggression is quite straightforward, as it points straight to the source of this conflict. Conversely, the Russian media, but also official state media in Belarus, offer a completely different explanation of what has been taking place in Ukraine. In Russia, for example, the war is not called a war, but a "special military operation". As a result, the Russian army is not presented as an aggressor but a saviour. In the same vein, Ukraine is not shown as a victim of the invasion but a country that has been ruled by a fascist regime that has been persecuting the ethnic Russian population.

Before February 2022 our experts and researchers focused on what we agreed to call "Belarus-2020". By this term we refer to a multi-dimensional process of political and social change taking place in Belarus since 2020, that is the last presidential elections and the protests that were organised in reaction to their forged results. Thus, the reports and analyses that we prepared in regard to this development focused on these events' many different aspects. They include "classical political science" analyses of change in the political system, its actors and the elite, as well as analyses of the economic situation, Belarus's foreign policy and new methods of propaganda. Naturally, we did not avoid looking into topics such as identity, culture and the media. The presented texts reflect that as well.

Significantly, the war in Ukraine has pushed us to once again pursue wider reflection and offer some new interpretations of the events in the region. This has been the case mainly because the outbreak of the war has in fact corrected a number of misjudgements that were once popular regarding what a modern war looks like. But this war has also confirmed the esteem of some European and world leaders. In other words, while some politicians, through their reactions to the war, have proven to be true statesmen, others have shown terrible weakness and thus proved to be insignificant. More than anything else, this war has shown us the great value of human solidarity that we saw when so many people across the world offered help to the countless refugees who were escaping the horrors of Russian aggression.

Finally, this war has shown us that no country, or its people, live in isolation from others. That is why, it is not only our region, or Europe, but truly the entire world that is affected (in one way or another) by this conflict. For our Analytical Group this too meant a change in focus, by including Ukraine in the area of Belarusian studies and academic investigation. We thus expanded the scope of our research area and included in it this new angle of Belarusian-Ukrainian relations. We probably do not need to convince the readers of this magazine that the future of Belarus also depends on developments in Ukraine.

Last but not least, I would also like to encourage you to engage with our other reports, which you can access on our website. This can also be accessed through the QR code that is provided in this special section.

JAN MALICKI, Director, Studium Europy Wschodniej Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego
[Centre for East European Studies, University of Warsaw, Poland]
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Belarusian political elites

New, imagined, lost?

MAXIM RUST

The reality in today's Belarus is that of decreased enthusiasm and less social mobilisation. The ruling elite of the Lukashenka regime is still wielding power and a large part of the society that was active during the 2020 protests is now living abroad or imprisoned.

When today we reflect on the protest movement that started in Belarus in 2020, we can see that one of its distinguishing features were the so-called new faces of the opposition that the whole world focused on and admired. Namely, the world became fascinated by the new Belarusian political leaders who were expected, and hoped for, to change, or fix, the country's political system, drawing on the then enormous social energy that translated into political mobilisation unprecedented for Belarus. Assessing the situation from today's perspective, I would argue now that neither the public opinion nor the expert circles in the West have accurately estimated the change that has taken place in Belarusian politics, which in fact took place as a result of networked mobilisation and the digitalisation of communication.

Little did we know

In hindsight, this wrong estimation by foreign analysts, as we can see it today, can be explained in several ways. First, it was rather naive to put all bets on one person, namely Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, even though she indeed was the main face and symbol of the protests. Second, there was an assumption, popular indeed,

which suggested that the protests had shown that the authoritarian Belarusian regime was weak and in its dying days. Unfortunately, in this regard the analysts were wrong again. In 2022, Belarus is still ruled by exactly the same elite that was there in 2020.

For the sake of honesty and academic rigour, we should now admit that in many of our observations and conclusions about the protests we were taken by the revolutionary mood and as a result underestimated the adaptability and flexibility of the Belarusian authorities. This was not the first time that such a thing has happened either. Third, it is quite clear that until this year most analysts, or the general public, did not think that anything worse than what we have seen in Belarus since 2020 could happen in our region. Little did we know. Russia's aggression in Ukraine not only proved us wrong, it also redirected everybody's attention, overshadowing the already decreasing coverage of Belarus in international media, day by day.

Enriched by today's perspective, we should again take a look at Belarus, its main political actors and the overall social and political framework which – for analytical reasons – we decided to call "Belarus-2020". Only then will we see that those who now constitute the Belarusian political elite can be divided into three groups: 1) representatives of the old opposition (the old counter elite), 2) the authorities (the ruling elite), and 3) the new opposition (the new elite). For proper understanding of the situation as well as the formulating of any hypothesis about future developments, these three groups should be analysed from an empirical position, without succumbing to the temptation of normative "wishful thinking" or an attempt to revive the social energy from 2020.

And the reality that we have today is that of decreased enthusiasm and social mobilisation. The ruling elite of the Lukashenka regime is still wielding power, and a large part of the society that was active during the protests is now living abroad or imprisoned. In addition, the Russian aggression in Ukraine has created great uncertainty regarding the future of all these actors. Therefore, an analysis of each of these groups and the change they have undergone in the last two years may bring us some new conclusions.

Unmet great expectations

As stated before, the first group is that of the old counter-elite. It includes representatives of the oldest Belarusian opposition movements and parties. With regards to this group, I do not see anything that in some way would surprise me. Already back in 2019 and 2020 I was predicting that these two years would be decisive for their existence as a full-fledged actor on the political scene. And indeed

today, two years later, we can see that the old counter elite is more of a historical phenomenon than today's reality. Its representatives either disappeared from the political scene (for all kinds of reasons) or joined the new elite. Some yet, like the prominent Zianon Pazniak, the icon of the Belarusian national movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s, have been strongly and harshly criticising both the ruling elite and the new opposition leaders. This fact, despite being discussed in public debate, did not yet lead to any significant change.

The second group is the current ruling elite. Or to put it simply – the power elite. This group is not limited to Alyaksandr Lukashenka's closest circle, that is the government and the heads of ministries. Such an interpretation would be too narrow and simplistic. This group also includes a vast array of officials. Not only do they form the Belarusian establishment but they also heavily depend on the current system of power. In fact, everything that they have has been provided to them by Lukashenka's regime. Thus, any system change could shake their positions and threaten their stability. Both their own and that of their families. Whether they follow their conscience or not is a secondary issue; of primary concern is their official and demonstrative loyalty to the system. There is a quite popular opinion, both in the West and in Belarus, that representatives of this group are not legitimate holders of power. Regardless of the validity of this viewpoint, it does not change the fact that this group does wield political power in Belarus.

One of the greatest hopes of 2020 was that the Belarusian system and its ruling elite would begin to crumble from within. At that time, we were pointing to all the scratches appearing on the system's foundation, stating that they would soon become cracks and that the regime would fall apart. It was also hoped that some officials and representatives of the security forces (*siloviki*) would move to the protesters' side and form a new critical mass which in the end would change Belarus. Today, we know that such a course of events did not take place.

The power elite, although clearly weakened after 2020, had nonetheless learned their lesson and carried on. Not only did this group not collapse, but in many ways it consolidated its power. In this consolidation we see a greater role played by the military, which is increasingly more active in political and decision-making processes, as well as more authoritarian tendencies in government decisions and activities than before. As a result, the Belarusian state has turned into a "besieged fortress", while members of its ruling elite have been continuously showing that they would not give a single inch. Hence, they have used massive and brutal repressions against their opponents, as well as a complete purge of the political and media field. These tactics deprived the opposition which remains in the country of the tools that would allow it to reach its audience and operate. The tightening of freedoms by the power elite will still be observed for a long time to come.

As stated before, the power elite has also learned lessons from the 2020 protests and has responded to them in a their own way. The best example here is the "constitutional referendum", which was held in late February of this year. It allowed for yet another system change in Belarus (referenda with an aim to change the political system have been organised by Lukashenka since 1995). It empowered the All-Belarusian People's Assembly, an extra-parliamentary body dominated by government supporters, by turning it into the highest representative body. As a result, we will quite likely see a rearrangement of Belarus's political scene in favour of those who are in power. Expected amendments to the legislation on political parties will most likely mean the possibility of forming a wide, pro-government, quasi-opposition. The aim of this change will be to give the impression of a multiparty system.

Lastly, it should also be noted that in the last two years the Belarusian authorities have finally recognised the power of digital and social media and have started using them to their advantage. As a result, the quality of state propaganda has significantly improved, following the example of Russian propaganda.

How not to repeat mistakes?

The third group I choose to call the new elite, which is, of course, not an objective term. Looking at this group as a whole, we can say that although it is still a very "young" player, its influence is considerable. Most importantly, the great expectations that were expressed regarding Belarusian political developments in 2020 were precisely related to the emergence of this new elite. As a group, it is made up of the representatives of democratic forces consolidated around one leader – Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. However, it should also be admitted that this group does not only have one face, even that of Tsikhanouskaya. It is made up of many politicians and organisations that were formed in 2020. They include the Office of Tsikhanouskaya, the National Anti-Crisis Management, the Coordination Council and many other initiatives. All these organisations generated huge public enthusiasm, however all of their leaders had to opt for working from abroad. In Belarus, they were doomed to lose their freedom.

The activity of the pro-democratic forces did not bring much-expected change within Belarus.

From the perspective of the last two years, we can see that the activity of this group, although impressive and respectable, did not bring much-expected change within Belarus. Instead, we see a certain disconnect in the activity of the new elite, who operate mainly in the realm of international relations and, very importantly,

in the digital sphere given the deterioration of political activities inside Belarus. This situation resulted in a decrease in protests, as well as brought on a wave of despair regarding the new leaders. Objectively speaking, such a course of events was unavoidable and resulted in the "internal migration" of many who were active in 2020. Not to mention those who were arrested or had to flee the country.

Unfortunately, we can also see emerging new conflicts within the new elite. They most often take place between Warsaw and Vilnius, which are the largest centres of the Belarusian political diaspora now. What is most worrisome, however, it that because of these conflicts some people have already started to believe that the new democratic elite may soon cease to exist. The risk of such a scenario is stressed now even more when everybody is more focused on Ukraine than Belarus.

Fortunately, the scenario of divided and marginalised new democratic forces did not come true. This is something worth noting. The aforementioned leaders and organisations, understanding the situation, decided to return to the conceptual assumptions of the common goals agreed in 2020. In August of this year, they established the United Transitional Cabinet with an aim to bring together various democratic organisations that share a common goal. The main question that evidently arises with regards to this body is whether it was formed too late? The answer of course can always be that it is better late than never. The leaders of the new elite have also repeatedly said that they are glad that constructive criticism has emerged within the opposition, that there is an "opposition to the opposition" that acts as a normal mechanism in democratic systems. While it is impossible to disagree with such a statement, we should also keep in mind that these forces do not operate in a democratic and competitive system. Therefore, the new elite is faced with the challenge of not repeating the "mistakes of the old opposition" by marginalising its potential inside the country and becoming simply another Belarusian organisation in exile, operating from abroad.

> The Belarusian reality means a country where the status quo of the political system has been preserved.

An uncertain future

These issues offer a general outlook of the Belarusian elite from today's perspective. They show that at the moment the two most active and important actors are the ruling elite and the new elite. While making this statement, I try to refrain from the trap that analysts often fall into when analysing the situation in Belarus. This trap is simply a mismatch between our perceptions and the reality on the ground.

Photo: Dmitriy Drozd / Shutterstock

One of the greatest hopes of 2020 was that the Belarusian system and its ruling elite would begin to crumble from within. At that time, we were pointing to all the scratches appearing on the system's foundation, stating that they would soon become cracks and that the regime would fall apart.

And that reality means a country where the status quo of the political system has been preserved.

Keeping this in mind, I distinguish three major factors that will affect the Belarusian elite in the near future. First, brutal as it may sound, we have to admit that life in Belarus goes on. As stated before, we underestimated the flexibility and adaptability of the ruling elite. Whether we like it or not, it is the group with the most influence in the domestic scene in Belarus, and it is the power elite that still holds all the cards. Second, it is important to keep in mind that political developments, after all, do not take place in a vacuum. For Belarus this means parliamentary and presidential elections in the next few years. No one doubts that the power elite is preparing for them and will do whatever it takes to maintain authority. That is why the new elite cannot ignore these "elections" and must prepare for them accordingly.

Third, we need to think about political life in the post-"constitutional referendum" Belarus. The "referendum" indeed passed somewhat unnoticed, mainly because it was held in February this year when everybody's attention was on the war in Ukraine. This does not mean that we should no longer follow political develop-

ments in Belarus, especially once the stipulations of the "new" constitution take force. In this regard, it is important to pay attention to whether or not this new legal arrangement will indeed lead to the formation of a "controlled" opposition, with the old political parties gradually abolished. Such a scenario would clearly further narrow the possibility of their legal operations. Evidently, the system is moving in this direction. However, earlier speculation that the regime, through constitutional engineering, is preparing the ground for a planned transition of power, is rather unlikely to come true.

The war in Ukraine will be crucial for further developments and the actors that play key roles in them. The future of both the power elite and the new elite may depend on how Belarus manoeuvres between Russia and Ukraine, and especially whether it officially enters the war or not. Given what took place in February 2022, this last question points to great uncertainty indeed.

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From utopia to dystopia

JUSTYNA OLĘDZKA

In August 2020 the whole world learned that there are two "Belaruses". One is the utopian imaginary of "Lukashism" headed by a soft dictator, and the other is a dystopian, oppressive state in which the greatest enemy of power is a society fighting for their rights. From the term "the dictatorship of prosperity", only "dictatorship" remained and "prosperity" was enjoyed only by members of the power elite who show absolute loyalty to the leader.

Alyaksandr Lukashenka's retention of power for 28 years was widely regarded – even considering the standards known from other post-Soviet states – as a phenomenon of its own. There is no place for any deep philosophy in his leadership because the only goal of this politician was to survive at any cost. For the story of Lukashenka is not the tale of a politician of great stature, whose political career is a streak of success translating into an increase in state power and the well-being of citizens. On the contrary, the last three decades of Belarus's history have been that of mental, economic and political stagnation and regression, which were supposed to be compensated for by a propaganda narrative oozing from the monopolised media. It was the media's power and effectiveness that made it possible to create the image of a utopian state with a society without aspirations satisfied with its leader. It was through propaganda that the "Imaginarium of Lukashenka" was built – a symbolic universe that the leader shared for many years with his devoted supporters and politically indifferent citizens.

Authoritarian coma

What was Belarus created by Lukashenka like? In short, it could be defined as a maximally simplified world in which the key dogma states that the foundations of the socio-political order are determined only by the leader, and that the role of society is reduced to passive acceptance. For years, the pillars of "Lukashism" were determined by a key triad of ideas: the primacy of state identity over national identity, neo-Soviet historical policy and social conservatism. At times, these ideas were joined by a feigned "Belarusianisation". Utopian Belarus turned out to be a state full of appearances, in which the leader only pretends to be great while enduring numerous humiliations and affronts from his closest ally. In order to preserve power, he even agreed effectively to be a "potato dictator" and "meme" his image. While there was a semblance of reformist readiness to follow the changing social and geopolitical circumstances, in reality the measures used in political practice were neither revealing nor innovative. On the contrary, they could be counted among the already tried-and-tested arsenal used by other satraps. This includes the marginalisation of the legislature, the subordination of power, the zeroing or abolition of term limits, the ritualisation of rigged elections, and pseudo-constitutional referenda. All the instruments used by the Lukashenka regime have previously been tested in Russia, Kazakhstan or Turkmenistan. Over the following decades, the instrumentalisation of law progressed in Belarus and its authority, like that of the state, virtually ceased to exist. However, this was only one manifestation of the widespread destruction of a political system that was gradually but systematically degenerating.

All the instruments used by the Lukashenka regime have previously been tested in Russia, Kazakhstan or Turkmenistan.

Throughout the years, the core of Lukashenka's leadership legitimisation strategy was to continually convince Belarusians that, due to the peculiarities of the country's geopolitical position and the nation's dramatic history, the main understanding between the leader and society should be based on stability. To be clear, this does not include prosperity, concerns for human and civil rights, or the possibility of individual self-fulfilment. Stability should be maintained at any cost. However, this fixation on stability, in reality, meant a conscious effort by the authorities to create permanent political and mental stagnation in society. As a result, Belarus slowly became the leader's personal fiefdom and opposition protests became fewer and weaker. It was as if the belief that anything can ever change was gradually fading among Belarusians. They have learned how to live in a state without prospects, and how to survive in Lukashenka's phantasmagoria. Some of them enthusiastically accepted this reality,

some in their powerlessness passively waited for change, and some chose a better life in exile or paid for their resistance with arrests and imprisonment.

A pervasive sense that there were few alternatives allowed Lukashenka to put the country into an "authoritarian coma", in which all democratic tendencies were effectively halted. Another thing is that after 1994 this was relatively easy, as there was a lack of socio-political projects competing with Lukashism. Most worthwhile initiatives were short-lived and after a while swallowed up by the ideological vacuum left by the bankruptcy of communist ideology. In turn, the authorities deliberately perpetuated beliefs in society that all forms of political participation should be channelled into state-controlled organisations. Minsk also promoted the idea that elections are only ritualistic and plebiscitary and that the key to the happiness of Belarus and Belarusians is the survival of the personalist regime, in other words: Lukashism. Thus, a project of gradual modernisation without democratisation was pursued, which in practice meant the creation of a whole system of interconnected political and economic vessels, the bloodstream of which was the redistribution of wealth carried out at Lukashenka's own discretion. The beneficiary of successive tranches of credit support from Moscow, the IMF, the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, or the EU was not the Belarusian people, but the power elite headed by the president. Intensively promoted activities in the international field, such as the mock multi-vector nature of Belarus's foreign policy, in fact helped to prop up the personalist authoritarian regime. The propaganda-generated construct of a "dictatorship of prosperity" in a stable patrimonial state, has been reinforced for years by myths circulating in the public space (effectively fuelled by the president himself) about the extremely high level of legitimacy Lukashenka's leadership has managed to maintain in society thanks to his economic successes.

Two Belaruses

In August 2020, not only Belarusian citizens, but the whole world learned that there are in fact two Belaruses. One is the utopian imaginary of Lukashism headed by a soft dictator, and the other is a dystopian, oppressive state in which the greatest enemy of power is a society fighting for their rights. From the term "the dictatorship of prosperity", only "dictatorship" remained and "prosperity" was enjoyed only by members of the power elite who show absolute loyalty to the leader.

The deliberate exclusion of individuals or entire social groups from this Imaginarium created by Lukashenka is characteristic of the erosion of legitimacy, which indicates a short-term or permanent break in the legitimacy chain. By consciously

ceasing to internalise the values, beliefs or standards of behaviour imposed by the leader, an increasing number of Belarusians are building an autonomous space resistant to Lukashenka's propaganda. As a result, they stop engaging with power-controlled groups and structures. It is now not uncommon for them to create with others alternative spaces for political participation, both within Belarus and in exile. The most advanced expression of such activity is the creation of a Belarusian government-in-exile. Today, some part of the Belarusian diaspora even believes that their homeland has ceased to be independent and has, in fact, been annexed by the Russian Federation.

The high level of oppression by the Belarusian regime is largely preventive – they use blind terror, hoping for a chilling effect.

The regime learnt relatively quickly how to respond to such outbreaks of legitimacy erosion, and significant adjustments to Lukashenka's survival strategy emerged. One of the key instruments to minimise the risk of delegitimisation has been the repression of the opposition civil society. This high level of oppression enforced by the regime is largely preventive – the authorities use blind terror, hoping for a chilling effect. A wave of arrests, Bolshevik-style show trials and long prison sentences followed. To this day, physical, psychological and economic violence is used against citizens. In addition to beatings, intimidation or rape, severe financial penalties are also applied. Those who are "inconvenient" to the authorities are dismissed from their jobs, removed from their destroyed and/or confiscated property, prevented from running private businesses and threatened with the termination of their parental rights. Overall, they have their professional and personal lives destroyed. Whoever is not with Lukashenka has become a "traitor", "fascist", "extremist", "terrorist", "servant of the West", or a neo-Soviet "enemy of the people". Further, the state police fight against all manifestations of "extremism" – opposition websites, stickers with the slogans "Sasha 3%" or "Luka" and any object in white-red-white colours. Even pairs of socks can now be considered "extremist".

No longer a land of milk and honey

One of the ways that the authoritarian system is consolidating itself is the growing implementation of multiple parallel social engineering projects. The belief that a perfectly obedient, controllable society can be created from the top down stems directly from the mentality and experience of the leader himself. Therefore, almost everything is normatively defined in Belarus today, and a constitutional referendum even adopted a legal obligation for citizens to take care of their health.

However, the Belarusian leader still lacks a new opening that would allow him to genuinely strengthen his position both in the power system and society. The successive ideological proposals he promotes document this conceptual regression. Indeed, it seems that Belarus is increasingly reverting to the past in its political, economic, historical and symbolic spheres.

Meanwhile, Lukashism, in the midst of a post-election internal crisis and an external crisis such as the Russian aggression against Ukraine, is trying to survive by simulating changes to the state's political system in a constitutional referendum. This is being done by introducing a new legislature that does not change the actual balance of power. The propaganda message promoted by the authorities is factually shallow and lacks finesse in its form. This is the newspeak according to which the state has to "overcome negative trends in the economy" and achieve a "stable, dynamic pace of development". Society also has to carry out tasks in a "comprehensive" and "responsible" manner. Power calls for inclusive social mobilisation in which citizens are presented not as passive elements but as full-fledged political subjects. However, Lukashenka declares "Mobilise everyone!" The state's harvest campaign, which includes potato and sugar beet digging and a corn and flax harvest, awaits eager Belarusian citizens – civil servants, students and schoolchildren – ready to be re-educated through hard work. As a reward, the leader prohibits further price rises and introduces "the obligation to unconditionally saturate the domestic market with goods and services". Such a message is of course reminiscent of the traditions of Soviet propaganda, but this is not the first time the Belarusian leader has sought to lower social tensions by serving Belarusians with empty promises.

In 2016, Lukashenka declared his willingness to implement structural reforms in the economy alongside the need to adapt the constitution to the changing geopolitical environment. All this appeared in the form of vague visions and was simply an attempt to buy time. This time, such a mechanism for escaping real change in the political, economic and social spheres will not work because, after 2020, Belarusian society completely lost confidence in the government-controlled mass media, especially as the Belarusian infosphere has become a Kremlin-controlled field of information confrontation. By exploiting the multifocal, cross-border, networked structure of the propaganda and disinformation ecosystem, Minsk has risen to become the main regional distributor of the Russian message. A similar process of subordination to the Russian narrative is taking place with the rapid securitisation of Belarus's historical policy. History is once again becoming a field of confrontation – according to the nomenclature used by Minsk and Moscow –

The propaganda messages promoted by the Belarusian authorities is factually shallow and lacks finesse in its form.

played out on the "historical front". No one will believe in the future of the utopian Imaginarium of Lukashenka anymore. Today's Belarus is not a land of milk and honey, a peaceful land of conservative farmers and programmers. This is a country whose symbols have become the state detention centre on Akrestsina Street and the BELARUS 1523.3 MTZ tractor, given – like the country itself – as a birthday present to Vladimir Putin.

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The re-Sovietisation of Belarus

ALIAKSANDR PAPKO, KACPER WAŃCZYK

The nature of the crisis in Belarus is the same as in other countries of the region, with the collapse of old Soviet structures in the economy, society, politics and ideology. Alyaksandr Lukashenka does not understand the urbanised modern society he is trying to rule. In order to re-establish control, his regime is trying to move the society backwards. Repressions will be extremely costly for Belarusian society, but Lukashenka's goal is unlikely to be achieved.

The past two years saw growing pressure from western sanctions on the Belarusian regime. Each move Alyaksandr Lukashenka took since 2020 has further limited his room for manoeuvre. After each of his decisions – the brutal crackdown of the 2020 protests; the repressions that followed; the grounding of the Ryanair plane; and finally, the support for the Russian invasion of Ukraine – a new wave of sanctions was introduced. The World Bank assesses that Belarusian GDP in the first half of 2022 diminished by 4.2 per cent, and by the end of the year it will contract by 6.2 per cent. Lukashenka's answer to this loss of legitimacy and economic crisis is a re-Sovietisation of the economy and society. State interventions in the functioning of enterprises have increased. Mass repressions have imprisoned thousands of people and many have now fled the country. Indoctrination in schools is on the rise. Will all these measures reshape Belarusian society and make it loyal to the regime?

Photo: Ruslan Kalnitsky / Shutterstock

According to one estimate, the number of post-2020 Belarusian emigrants is around a quarter of a million people. This means that up to one-third of those who took part in the 2020 protests were forced to leave the country.

Cutting ties with the West

After the European Union's sanctions in June of this year, the Belarusian economy can only count on the Russian market. At least in terms of the things that matter. The export of the essential elements of Belarus-EU trade, such as oil and metal or chemical products, is almost entirely blocked. Moreover, the sanctions have blocked traditional export routes of oil products and fertilisers through the Baltic states since the beginning of the year. Finally, the state's participation in the aggression against Ukraine closed the single largest market for Belarusian oil products. Kyiv had not restricted this import, even though it verbally supported EU sanctions against Minsk. Lukashenka's support for Russian aggression was thus the last straw that finally changed the Ukrainian position.

Not surprisingly, Minsk's reaction was to turn to its only ally – Moscow – as Lukashenka frequently does. Russia has always been Belarus's crucial economic partner, yet the post-2020 developments have brought the two countries even closer together. Despite the fact that they both recently restricted the publication of detailed trade exchange data, some information suggests that Belarusian exporters are using Russian Baltic ports to transport goods that were earlier sent through Latvia, Lithuania or Estonia. In this way, some oil products found their way to the Russian market.

According to Belarusian statistical data, Russia is the destination for around 58 per cent of Belarus's foreign trade. This information indeed gives the impression of a return to the old days, when Belarus was a part of the Soviet Union. According to Belarusian Prime Minister Roman Golovchenko, Russia is also about to loan over 1.5 billion US dollars to finance import substitution projects in Belarus. According to him, seven projects worth about 330 million US dollars will be launched in the machine industry before the year's end. This indicates that Moscow counts on Minsk's help in replacing imported goods that Russia has lost due to the sanctions.

Yet, it is still difficult to assess whether this policy will be enough to compensate for the loss of the traditional market and the growth of transport costs. While Belarusian electronic appliances have the potential to expand their share of the Russian market, another important product – Belarusian trucks – is losing ground to Chinese ones. Equally important is that Belarusian agriculture, being the source of most exports to Russia, has been in crisis for many years. Therefore, a rise in their exports is also unlikely.

Hope for new markets?

In the past, Lukashenka frequently tasked his subordinates with seeking new foreign markets for Belarusian goods. These attempts never resulted in substantial changes in the geographical structure of Belarusian exports. One reason is the tight connection to the Russian market described above. The other is the limited range of goods that Belarus can present to new partners.

To extend its foreign trade reach, Minsk has recently applied for membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. However, the organisation rather focuses on security and political cooperation and does not support economic collaboration between its members. At the same time, as long as, for example, China remains interested in buying Belarusian fertilisers, one should not expect a meaningful growth in Belarusian machinery exports to other Asian countries.

Another project that the Belarusian authorities are advertising is the substitution of high-technology products currently under sanctions in Russia. In September this year, Lukashenka famously presented the "Belarusian laptop". However, he admitted that the machine was made with only 12 per cent of components produced domestically.

Minsk has always been known for its manual command of the economy. Yet, for a long time, Lukashenka was at least trying to keep up appearances and pretend that he is not the sole decision maker in this regard. In 2022 the gloves were taken off and now everything is clear, including the fact that Lukashenka introduced price

limits and blocked exports to stop food prices from rising. In addition, the authorities have continued to increase all kinds of taxes, especially those aimed at influential private companies (in Belarus these are the ones that actually make a profit).

Other ways of tightening control over the economy are connected to the domestic political situation. The ongoing repressions against those who oppose the regime and Belarus's participation in the Russian aggression in Ukraine further led the authorities to introduce some new forms of supervision over society. Lukashenka hoped that this would help him better control the domestic economy. In October 2022 he ordered local authorities to start controlling the movement of highly qualified employees of state-owned farms, where a lack of skilled labour is acute. As a result, no manager or specialist in these places can quit their job without the permission of a local executive. Lukashenka believes that such control should also be introduced in the education and healthcare sectors.

The authorities have also been restricting the functioning of private social services. As a result, many private schools have been closed or forced to renew their educational certificates. Parents whose children attended such facilities have thus been told to move their kids to state institutions. The rationale behind these decisions has been explained by the Minister of Education Andrei Ivanets, who stated that many private schools had relations with "countries unfriendly to Belarus". A similar process has been taking place with regards to private medical services. The authorities began to conduct more frequent and thorough controls of such places, aiming to close as many as possible. To justify his deeds, in June this year Lukashenka said that "No one is going to make money on people's health". He claims that more resources could be directed to other parts of the economy by limiting private social services.

Back to Soviet times

The level of repressions that we are seeing in Belarus now has not been recorded since the time of Stalin. Based on the estimations of the human rights centre *Viasna*, in October 2022 there were more than 1,300 political prisoners jailed in Belarus. Every day police forces detain around 14 people for political reasons. Between one to two of them are subsequently punished under criminal law and are sentenced to several years in prison. The scale of these repressions is so large that even the human rights activists admit that they are able to register only up to half of all "political" detentions. Therefore, the true number of political prisoners in Belarus could even be as high as 4,000. This would mean that dissidents account for more than 12 per cent of the entire Belarusian prison population.

A survey conducted in August 2022 by the Centre of New Ideas among the opponents of the regime has shown that six per cent of respondents had relatives and close friends in prison. One-third of the respondents had prisoners among more distant colleagues. According to another study conducted by the sociologist Andrei Vardamatski, every fifth Belarusian has a close or distant friend among those who had to flee the country. Vardamatski estimates that the number of post-2020 emigrants is around a quarter of a million people. This means that up to one-third of those who took part in the 2020 protests were forced to leave the country. This is not surprising given the large purges that took place in the public sector and mass layoffs that took place on political grounds, affecting up to 200,000 people. This is every tenth person employed in public administration, schools and universities.

After the mass protests which took place in reaction to the 2020 elections, Lukashenka's regime banned the activities of about one thousand NGOs. This was a clear attempt to move Belarusian society back to Soviet times, where only initiatives serving state power were allowed. The remnants of the independent trade unions still existing in 2022 were abolished in July of this year. The Supreme Court liquidated the last existing organisations of this kind.

The regime has declared almost all independent media "extremist organisations". As a result, the majority of journalists have moved to neighbouring countries and restarted their work from abroad. More than 30 media employees remain imprisoned. The same is true for the majority of independent social and economic research centres. In addition, the authorities have introduced a series of regulations that have also strengthened control over various professions, especially those that have large social impact.

In addition, many Soviet practices have been reintroduced in public schools. For example, newly adopted instruction on extracurricular activities requires classroom teachers to monitor their pupils and "cultivate their feeling of patriotism". In line with this concept, at the beginning of each week pupils are obliged to listen to the national anthem. Military and patriotic education is now a school subject taught by newly hired teachers. As part of this education, pupils attend classes on "patriotic subjects" once a month. These lectures are often given by invited police officers or state officials. Finally, in 2023 another Soviet tradition will be restored. Schoolchildren will have to start wearing uniforms.

Are the repressions working?

Repressions on such a large scale have indeed weakened society's ability to oppose the authoritarian regime. Research conducted in 2022 by the Centre of New

Ideas shows that more than half of regime opponents try to escape from their traumatic experiences, focusing on work and family life. One-third have decreased their consumption of news.

Sociologists gathered around another research project called the Belarus Change Tracker point out that two years after the early stage of the protests, the dividing lines within Belarusian society have stabilised. As a result, we can see that less than half of Belarusian citizens are now willing to accept the existing authoritarian system, while slightly more than half remain sceptical or opposed to the regime. Similar "stabilisation" is also visible in the world of mass media. Thus, in August 2022 Belarusian state-owned TV and Moscow-controlled media had the same popularity as independent Belarusian media working from abroad.

Nevertheless, about 60 per cent of regime opponents admit that they still discuss political developments with their friends. This means that the social networks built in 2020 are still in place. People do not regret their participation in the protests. They perceived the events which took place in 2020 as the emergence of a new Belarusian political nation. They do not believe that the revolution has ended. Moreover, while in 2020 less than five per cent of Lukashenka's opponents accepted violent methods as a means of political struggle, two years later more than half of them see violent protests as acceptable.

The challenge of re-Sovietisation

To re-establish Soviet social and economic structures, Lukashenka is looking for new resources. He would probably like to have 75 per cent of citizens employed in the public sector, as was the case 30 years ago. However, currently only half of Belarusians are employed by the state and that is mainly in healthcare, education, the police, the military and public administration. The number of employees in state-owned factories is in constant decline. Furthermore, since 2020 we have not seen state-owned enterprises recruiting new staff. Truth be told, these Soviet-era enterprises are not designed to make profits and in order to expand they need enormous funds. And this is something the Belarusian authorities have been seriously lacking.

There is one more element which was crucial to the existence of the Soviet system and which Lukashenka is missing: the much-developed Soviet social engineering which could provide a tempting ideology and a vision of the future. Lukashenka has clearly lost this charm as evidently today the Belarusian people no longer understand his speeches about the greatness of the long-dead USSR, "best management practices" from the communist times or his advice on how to manage collective

farms. The majority of Belarusians now represent a very different generation. They grew up after the fall of communism, in big cities, in independent Belarus.

Attempts to brainwash the younger generation and "strengthen discipline" in the public sector will thus have limited effects. For the moment, the additional "ideological" work has fallen on the shoulders of low paid, stressed-out and therefore increasingly scarce and incompetent personnel. Attempts to get people "attached" to agriculture, education or healthcare by forbidding them to quit their jobs will only have the opposite effect. The university admissions for these professions will gradually go down, increasing the deficit of highly skilled employees. Mass layoffs on political grounds may have produced some career opportunities for those who want to work in state media, schools and universities. However, the young careerists who get hired there do not seem to demonstrate talent and competence. Most of the "monitoring" and patriotic events that they are assigned to organise turn into senseless, routine activities which bring nothing more than increased paperwork.

Certainly, mass emigration has weakened the protest potential of Belarusian society and this has been a huge blow for the country's human capital. Yet, at the same time, the migration of hundreds of thousands of entrepreneurial Belarusians to countries such as Poland and Lithuania has dramatically increased the people-to-people contact between the EU and Belarus. Belarusian NGOs and media also quickly learnt to work from abroad and help civic activists functioning almost clandestinely in Belarus. The same can be said about business. About four thousand Belarusian firms, which is one per cent of those functioning in Belarus, have registered in EU countries since 2020.

By cracking down on civil society and business, the regime is in fact fighting the supply of modern products, services and ideas. No matter what, Lukashenka cannot eliminate the demand for them. This issue continues to appear wherever the old Soviet system cannot meet the needs of a non-Soviet society. This includes the need for high-quality medicine, modern education, interesting recreation, independent media and an attractive national identity. The response to all these desires is thus offered by private companies and civic initiatives. Accordingly, in providing their services, they act either openly or without the knowledge of the regime.

How to help Belarusians?

The nature of the crisis in Belarus is similar to what we see in other countries of the region. It is the long-term process of the collapse of old Soviet structures, be it in the economy, society, politics or ideology. Lukashenka does not understand the modern urban dwellers that he is desperately trying to rule. In order to re-es-

tablish control over people, his regime has been trying to move the society backwards. Thus, even though repressions will be extremely costly for Belarusian society, Lukashenka is unlikely to achieve his goal. Terror can last for years, but the regime will exist only as long as it has financial resources for the security forces and the support of the Kremlin. What it will not have is the support of the people.

Clearly, the future of Belarus is also being decided on the battlefields in Ukraine. This fact does not mean that western governments and societies should wait for the end of the war to act in support of the Belarusian democratic forces. It is necessary to act now in order to help Belarusians build a new economy, a new political culture and a new identity, one that is not based on the Soviet past.

We should also do what we can to constrain Belarusian state-owned enterprises that serve the regime. It is thus necessary to simultaneously invest in human capital and the further development of the private economy in Belarus. It is already quite well known that the democratic upheaval which Belarus experienced in 2020 would not have been possible without a dynamic private sector and its developed contacts with the West. It is thus necessary not to build additional visa barriers, but rather facilitate the employment of Belarusian healthcare workers, IT specialists and entrepreneurs in the European Union. Assistance should also be given to Belarusian youth so they can receive quality education in Poland, Lithuania, Estonia and other countries. There is no doubt that we should support Belarusian companies in the EU, especially if they plan to establish connections with people who are still in Belarus.

It is almost certain that even though Lukashenka's regime will try to break all ties with the West, relations with those who are in the country will still be possible because demand for contacts with the EU is high in Belarus. As stated before, Belarusian society has already outgrown its ageing Soviet-era authoritarian leader and craves a bright, new future. It wants nothing to do with the Soviet past.

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Belarusian language and culture

Is the patient more alive than dead?

KATARZYNA BIELIAKOWA

One of the ways to save the Belarusian language is to maintain courage in preserving and displaying the Belarusian identity. This includes pride in Belarusian history and language, which should be used especially in everyday life. Since it is nearly impossible to do this inside the country, perhaps the best place to start is within the Belarusian diaspora.

The consistent and managed destruction of the Belarusian language and culture has become one of the hallmarks of Alyaksandr Lukashenka's rule and a distinctive feature of his regime's activities since 1996 (together with the increase in Russian influence). As a result, in today's Belarus, people who use the Belarusian language in their everyday life are discriminated against, while representatives of the Belarusian culture are persecuted. Belarusian citizens can be arrested for displaying their Belarusian identity in the streets of Minsk even when they speak Belarusian while offering guided tours, or wear socks with white-red-white stripes. This is the Belarusian reality today. Why is this happening and is it possible to stop these processes are questions asked by everyone who cares about the future of a sovereign Belarusian state and the freedom of the Belarusian people.

Short renaissance

Belarus remains one of three post-Soviet countries (together with the Kyrgyz Republic and Kazakhstan) where the Russian language still has an official status. After centuries when (old) Belarusian was the language used on the territory of present-day Belarus under the rule of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, it was replaced by Russian in the late 18th century when the area was taken over by the Russian Empire.

In more contemporary times, Belarusian became the official state language only in 1990, when the Supreme Soviet of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic passed a law on languages to gradually increase the prestige and use of Belarusian. This was followed by the creation of a National Language Programme to support this endeavour. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and Belarus's independence, the status of the Belarusian language was further reinforced by the 1994 Constitution (Article 17). This declared it to be the sole official language of the newly independent state, though Russian was given the status of the "language of inter-ethnic communication". In addition, article 28 of the 1992–94 Law on Language in the Republic of Belarus proposed that the Belarusian language be used in the sphere of culture. Thus, we can say that the early 1990s was an exceptional period for the Belarusian language renaissance but, unfortunately, it proved to be too short.

The controversial 1995 referendum organised by Lukashenka not only altered the system of separation of political power in the country but also introduced an "insignificant" change with regards to language. Namely, as a result of this law Russian became the second official language of Belarus. Since then, the two languages are considered equal, however only in theory. It is indeed quite symbolic that the first referendum which expanded the powers of the president also deprived the Belarusian language of its status as the sole state language. In the same way, the main symbols of Belarus's independence – the coat of arms (the *Pahonia*) and white-red-white flag – were replaced with Soviet-era symbols which represent the times of autocracy and repressive ideology.

The early 1990s was an exceptional period for the Belarusian language renaissance but, it proved to be too short.

The Belarusian people, who had no earlier experience of participating in political life, voted for the return of the Russian language largely because the usage of Belarusian was often looked down on in society (it was rather spoken in the villages than by the urban elite). In the same way, they opted for the return of the Soviet-era symbols that were better known to them compared to the old emblems from the times of the Grand Duchy. Evidently, symbols are not just meaningless

images – their selection can also offer an insight into social sentiments, in this case Soviet nostalgia. However, we cannot say that in this regard Belarus is alone in reassessing the past. Indeed, it is sufficient to take a look at other countries in the region, including Belarus's neighbours (specifically Latvia and Lithuania) and their decommunisation attempts.

There is no doubt that the stipulations of the 1995 referendum presented the first serious barriers to the development of the Belarusian language. As a result of this popular vote, Belarusian ceased to be used in legislation, even though it is stated in the law that at least 50 per cent of the state's legal acts should be written in Belarusian. So far, the republic's 2006 Code on Culture has been the first and only legislative act written in Belarusian (out of 26 codes) and only eight codes in total had been officially translated into Belarusian by April 2021. Indicatively, the 2006 code emphasises the "priority of development of the Belarusian national culture and recognition of the Belarusian language as one of the factors shaping national mentality". Practice yet shows that these are empty words, even if the authorities attempt to show some recognition of the importance of the Belarusian language and culture by proposing a list of organisations responsible for its development. These groups include museums, educational institutions, theatres, etc. Yet again, these organisations also use Belarusian very rarely, and this can be noted even by looking at their official webpages.

Between 2012 to 2018, as many as 482 Belarusian language schools were closed down.

The challenge of preserving language and culture

The situation in the educational system is very dire. Between 2012 to 2018, as many as 482 Belarusian language schools were closed down. Russian thus remains the primary language of education and is used even to teach courses on Belarusian history. The situation in academia is even worse. In fact, there are only a few places in the whole country where Belarusian is the language of instruction. The majority of them are actually the departments of Belarusian language and culture. Thus, an overwhelming majority of students, even if they obtained secondary education in Belarusian, have no choice but to use Russian at universities, no matter which degree they decide to pursue. Russian is also the language used by the academic staff. All this shows that Belarusian academia still carries the legacy of the Soviet times and does not participate in European structures or models of higher education. Instead, the point of reference is Russia and its academic institutions.

The publishing market also reflects the difficulties faced by speakers of the Belarusian language. A mere 12 per cent of books published in Belarus are in Belarusian. These are mainly school textbooks. Since 2020, publishing companies that printed Belarusian-language books have been shut down. Many owners and workers of private bookshops have been persecuted by the authorities and have been forced to leave the country and re-open their businesses abroad. There is also no state policy on translating books into Belarusian. Thus, in recent years all translations of popular foreign literature into Belarusian have been financed by community collections. This fact also illustrates the divide that exists between civil society and the state regarding the Belarusian language and culture: people are trying to save what is being destroyed by the state.

The preservation of Belarusian art remains another challenge, which can also be explained by economic factors. In other words, many artists know all too well that there are not too many opportunities for them to earn money (in Belarus or abroad) by performing in Belarusian. In this context, it is indeed quite noteworthy that some rock bands still write their songs in the Belarusian language.

Unprecedented political pressure

The political and social processes that have taken place in Belarus since 2020 have demonstrated a growing disconnect between the Belarusian people and the regime. The Belarusian authorities have become more hostile towards everything Belarusian. As a result, there have been unprecedented repressions of prominent artists and educators, who fight to preserve the national idea, national symbols, Belarusian language and overall – freedom.

Despite the fact that because of the repressions the protests ended in the second half of 2020, layoffs of cultural workers have continued to take place, and in the second half of 2021 they intensified. Many employees in cultural institutions were fired for political reasons, although this was done in a very underhanded way. Officially, it was declared that there will be no mass layoffs. Instead, employees were terminating their contracts (in agreement with the employer). Throughout this process, special "attention" was paid to Belarusian-speaking cultural activists.

Other forms of discrimination against cultural representatives include searches, raids, the confiscation of electronic devices, administrative and criminal prosecution, detention in poor pre-trial facilities without access to correspondence and communication with relatives and friends, the creation of a cultural activists "blacklist" (people on such a list cannot organise concerts or any other cultural events), and the removal of anti-regime writers from school curricula. Books by authors

who speak and write in Belarusian have also been added to lists of "extremist materials". Among them is Anatoly Tarasau's *Short Course on the History of Belarus*. There are also books about Belarusian symbols on these lists, as well as those authored by writers who were forced to leave the country and publish their books abroad (e.g. *Dogs of Europe* by Alhierd Bacharevič).

As of October 2022, there are 1,344 political prisoners in Belarus. Many of them are cultural activists, poets, writers, musicians, actors, artists, teachers, dancers, literary scholars, librarians and culture managers. Most of them were sentenced to imprisonment for a period of one to 14 years. In addition, since 2020 we have seen unprecedented pressure put on non-governmental organisations active in the cultural field. Many of these organisations have already been shut down – as of September 2022 at least 77 have suffered this fate. Among them was the respected Francišak Skaryna Belarusian Language Society. It was one of the oldest NGOs in Belarus whose mission was the revival of the Belarusian language.

Invisible occupation

The most recent large wave of repressions began after February 24th 2022, which is the day when the Russian Federation began, also from the territory of Belarus, its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. These repressions were directed against those Belarusian artists, cultural figures and activists who opposed the war in Ukraine and the role Belarus has played in this war. These people recognised that the Russian invasion of Ukraine is actually an implementation of Russian policy against both Ukraine and Belarus. This policy has been made clear, on many occasions, by Vladimir Putin, especially when he stated that Ukraine and Belarus are not "real nations" and as such do not deserve to be independent states. In this viewpoint, Russian language and culture should dominate and replace those of its two neighbours. If we can say that in Ukraine this idea resulted in a war, in Belarus it is taking the form of an invisible occupation, where Russian language and culture are supported by Lukashenka's regime.

However, since the outbreak of the war more and more Belarusians have started to come to an understanding that they are in the same position as their southern neighbour. Therefore, they are now convinced that it is worth preserving what has not yet been destroyed by the regime and the "big brother".

In my view, one of the ways to save the Belarusian language is to maintain courage in preserving and displaying the Belarusian identity. This includes pride in Belarusian history and language, which should be used especially in everyday life. An example to follow could be that of the Belarusian diaspora. Its representatives

organise concerts but also promote films, performances and TV programmes for children that are in the Belarusian language. They have also opened (or re-opened) Belarusian book shops and publishing houses of Belarusian books abroad, as well as established language clubs. They do this to help preserve and promote the Belarusian culture, but they also do it for themselves.

Naturally, all of the democratic forces should pay special attention to cultural and language issues, which will be of key importance once the country is free again. The rebirth of the Czech language in the 20th century will offer a good example for the new democratic authorities. Once the new Czechoslovak republic was established after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Czech language returned to the public sphere after centuries of German language domination. This was thanks to the political will of the republic's political class but also that of Czech society. This example also shows that there can be no "choice" when it comes to what should come first: regaining freedom or preserving the native language and culture. We cannot and should not choose between these three elements. We need them all.

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Neo-totalitarianism as a new political reality in Belarus

PAVEL USOV

The large shift that has taken place within Belarusian society has illustrated both a high demand for change and the loss of broad support for Alyaksandr Lukashenka. This has led the ruling elite to realise that the regime can no longer operate in the same conditions it had pre-2020. Serious restructuring was thus necessary to ensure that the regime maintains its overall control of the state and counters any form of anti-system civic activity.

The political system in Belarus has undergone a series of changes since Alyaksandr Lukashenka came to power in 1994. Over this period of 28 years it has evolved from a hybrid regime, which included elements of façade democracy, to a neo-totalitarian one. This transformation was possible because of changes that had taken place within society and the state, and which in the end allowed for the formation of new authoritarian institutions, practices and methods. It also resulted in the restriction, or complete destruction, of democratic participation and the elimination of people's autonomy in the political process. By 2022, the Belarusian system of state power has reached the level of absolute control, while the regime adopted a model which we call neo-totalitarian.

(Neo)totalitarianism

The definition of (neo)totalitarianism refers to the form of the highest political supervision by the state over its institutions and social groups. It is aimed at strengthening the existing power structure through the elimination of internal threats. This can be achieved with legal (from the point of view of those in power) and illegal tools. These instruments can range from court hearings to direct physical violence applied by state structures against citizens or social groups that are perceived as threats to the regime.

(Neo)totalitarian supervision is also inclined to a long-term policy of ideological expansion and information control. It thus envisions the dismantling of non-governmental organisations and opts for the maximum restriction of civil liberties. In line with these assumptions, the Belarusian regime has embarked on the process of eliminating all kinds of civic activities that it perceives to be unfavourable to the legitimacy and stabilisation of the political system. This process, in turn, has led to a visible simplification of political life and social reality. In other words, the fewer social and political activities or initiatives that are organised, the easier it is to exert control over political life. In this situation, it is also easier for the regime to steer the society towards a preferred type of political behaviour and emotions.

Belarus's fast transformation in the (neo)totalitarian direction can be also explained by the course of the most recent crisis (first electoral, then political). It started during the 2020 presidential elections, when it became evident that Lukashenka decided to forge the results of the vote. This crisis, which started with mass mobilisation and protests, clearly showed that there is a real threat to Lukashenka's power. The response of the regime at that time was to apply military methods against those who opposed it.

The militarisation of politics which took place in the aftermath of the August 2020 elections marked the beginning of a transition towards the new political model. By then, it was already clear that with the high level of social discontent the regime could no longer rely on its earlier semi-democratic mechanisms. Lukashenka knew all too well that the only way to keep the situation under control was to engage with the repressive security apparatus and use violence against those who protest. These new methods of state control over society were eventually legalised by the referendum organised on February 27th 2022.

It is evident that despite the repressions and widespread terror, Lukashenka is a weak leader and there is a deep disconnect between society and the state. This is also why he opted for a systemic restructuring of the state and its institutions. However, practice shows that authoritarian systems, despite their reliance on force, repressions and forgeries, need some form of social support. It is said that the level

of guaranteed support should equal around 30 to 40 per cent of voters. In addition, they need devoted loyalists in the state's bureaucratic and security apparatus.

Façade democracy and hybrid practices

Under Lukashenka, Belarus has seen a number of crises which have made a serious impact on the structure and functions of its political system. Almost all the presidential elections that took place in Belarus in this century (2001, 2006, 2010) were accompanied by protests against vote fraud. The reaction of the authorities has always been repressions against the participants and civil society at large. The noose around non-governmental organisations and the opposition as a whole was tightened as a result. These actions were followed by an increase in the politicisation and "ideologisation" of the education system, as well as greater control of labour unions and restrictions on independent media and the information space.

Throughout almost the whole period of Lukashenka's presidency, the majority of society remained indifferent to politics, also treating the opposition with great distrust. The crises that occurred in reaction to subsequent elections did not seriously affect Lukashenka's position nor the integrity of the system. Therefore, the regime did not need to abandon its "democratic tools" and continued to pursue the so-called façade democracy. The lack of systemic change also allowed Minsk to avoid pursuing repressions and state terror. Once the crises were over, a return to some form of hybrid practices was possible.

Throughout almost the whole period of Lukashenka's presidency, the majority of society remained indifferent to politics.

Thanks to these few elements of democracy, even if they were used for propaganda and manipulation purposes, a bit of freedom and autonomy was afforded to civil society. Also faced with a favourable geopolitical context, the Belarusian regime was soon described as "authoritarianism with a human face". Thanks to all this and the myth that Lukashenka is the guarantor of the country's stability and independence, the regime was allowed to engage in dialogue with the West.

These aforementioned democratic elements of Lukashenka's authoritarian rule not only served as a basis for the legitimacy of his power but also gave the illusion that political participation and justice were present in Belarus. This allowed for the model of façade democracy to become rooted in the system for a long time. It allowed opposition parties to operate and participate in elections at all levels even though it is also true that they were used by the authorities as part of their political manipulation. Such was the case with Tatsiana Korotkevich, the pseudo-op-

position candidate with the "Tell the Truth" organisation, who participated in the 2015 presidential elections.

In the country's façade democracy, civil society organisations were allowed to operate alongside some independent media outlets (for example Radio Svaboda, European Radio for Belarus, Belsat, the opposition publishing houses *Narodnaya Volya* and *Nasha Niva*, etc.), which even enjoyed some degree of editorial freedom. There was unregulated access to various alternative internet-based resources, especially the website *Tut.by*, which was an online publication that did not necessarily position itself as an opposition medium but which, nonetheless, played an important role during the last political crisis, especially in its early phase. Blogs were another form of online activity that proved effective in the consolidation and coordination of protests. There was some freedom in the area of culture and ideas as well as some degree of pluralism in political and ideological debates. As a result, we had Lukashenka's Soviet ideology, a pro-Russian (that of the "Russian world") outlook and the national-democratic discourse of the opposition. Finally, but also importantly, some degree of private initiative in the economic sphere was permitted.

An unprecedented year

As argued above, until 2020, despite the obvious political and ideological control of the state, there was some degree of freedom in Belarus. This was especially true with regards to the circulation of alternative information. As a result, opposition politicians could be heard by society and could even access, albeit unsuccessfully, the procedures of the "façade democracy". Additionally, in crisis situations, such as the spring and summer of 2020, all of these instruments and processes allowed for a fairly rapid mobilisation of society against the regime. As such, they led to the destabilisation of the entire system.

Until 2020, despite the obvious political and ideological control of the state, there was some degree of freedom in Belarus.

In fact, the 2020 protests and crisis differed significantly from all previous ones for many reasons. First, the political activity that was observed in Belarus in 2020 went beyond the boundaries of an exclusively "opposition electorate". Second, the protests were a result of rapid politicisation and the involvement of a large part of society in political events. Third, political activity and mobilisation moved outside Minsk and reached peripheral localities. Fourth, mass protests took place in many cities throughout Belarus. Fifth, broad support for opposition candidates was visible at every stage of the election pro-

cess: registration, signature collection and voting. Sixth, the ideological sphere of the state eventually started to disintegrate following open criticism of the regime by reputable religious organisations. Last but not least, the bureaucracy and power apparatus also began to disintegrate as a result of disloyalty, sabotage or simply the outflow of personnel.

Thus, the large shift that had taken place within Belarusian society that illustrated its high demand for change, on the one hand, and the loss of Lukashenka's broad support, on the other hand, led the ruling elite to reach the conclusion that it can no longer operate in the same conditions. Its survival now required a complete rejection of any (including façade) forms of democratic participation and autonomy within civil society. Serious restructuring was thus necessary to ensure that the regime maintained overall control of the state. To achieve this, it would have to apply repressions to counter any form of anti-system civic activity.

Many institutions created during the 28 years of Lukashenka's rule were meant to support and cement the political system. They included agencies of the bureaucratic and repressive state apparatus, the so-called ideological and political "vertical", many pro-government organisations and the state's entire system of indoctrination. Altogether, they allowed for a rapid defence against the crisis in 2020 and subsequent restructuring and readjustment of the state. Needless to say, the Russian Federation played an important role in this process. An assessment of the Kremlin's role and influence in Belarus's political crises is worth an article in its own right.

Terror and repressions

All non-democratic regimes rely on methods of violence and repressions against political opponents and critical citizens. Lukashenka's regime is no different in this regard. It also resorts to repressions during political crises, however before 2020 they were not on a scale that we are seeing now. In fact, we can say that from 2020 to 2022 the functioning of Lukashenka's regime was almost entirely based on the implementation of repressive practices against citizens. Looking to the future, we can also say that all available indicators suggest that the authorities have no intentions of abandoning their current policy of terror.

Matter-of-factly, terror and repression have become the key instruments of domestic policy in Belarus. This is evidenced both by the functioning of the repressive state and security structures, which use all available resources to destroy the political opposition, and the further restrictions within criminal and administrative legislation. The purpose of these new laws is to create a formal basis for the implementation of repressions. As a result, a large infrastructure of terror has al-

ready been created in Belarus. This includes the state security committee, the ministry of internal affairs (the main directorate for combating organised crime and corruption), the prosecutor general's office and the investigative committee. The goal of these institutions is to eliminate all political threats. In addition, a network of provocateurs and informants has been created and is actively involved in identifying and eliminating all kinds of threats to the regime.

The widespread political terror is designed to ensure the following: an atmosphere of fear in society in order to prevent the potential mobilisation of citizens; stop certain groups and individuals from undertaking political and intellectual activities through arrests and demonstrative long-term imprisonment; push out the passionate part of the population, which grew in number in 2020, and which constitutes a threat to the regime also beyond the state borders; and create an information vacuum to isolate society through the destruction of the internet, which is the main tool of internal communication and societal mobilisation. Here the point is not only to block and take down websites and online publications, but also to control the use of information. Restrictions also help to consolidate the bureaucracy and law enforcement apparatus through the identification and elimination of disloyal employees.

"Re-ideologisation"

The direct result of the introduced policy of state terror is the consolidation of the political space. If earlier the regime allowed for the existence of some form of civil society to show its "managed democracy" in action, in the current (neo)totalitarian system there is no place for such elements. The (neo)totalitarian system allows for the existence of only those political actors who strengthen it. It is also worth noting the changes which are taking place within the system itself. Specifically, we can now observe a profound psychological and mental transformation among all representatives of the power structure. This is translating into a complete abandonment of basic moral norms, as we can see in their direct calls to murder political opponents. These calls for violence are also evidenced in the unmotivated destruction of people's premises and living spaces.

Another element that clearly serves the consolidation of totalitarian practices is the intensified process of re-ideologisation in political and public institutions. The term re-ideologisation refers to the formation of a unified information and ideological space within society, as well as forcing citizens to accept the official interpretation of both historical facts and current events in Belarus and the world. Examples of this process include the authorities' attempts to destroy all alternative

sources of information, ideas and organisations. Thus, along with journalists and politicians, victims of repressions also include the intellectual elite. In this way, Lukashenka's regime seeks not only to achieve an information monopoly, but also the complete control of thought in order to hinder the process of building a new ideological system.

Through this intensive process of re-ideologisation, the regime is attempting the following: to provide a theoretical base for the new political system and create a need for maintaining order; introduce an ideological compass for the ruling elite and bureaucrats; rebuild Lukashenka's image as the protector of the country and its people; recharge the ideological vertical by including the education system within the indoctrination strategy; and create a new group of the so-called "state-people" (referring to state functionaries, employees of militia units, state employees, teachers and others) who work directly for Minsk. Speaking about institutional changes in the country, it is necessary to understand that neither the policy of repressions nor the reformatting of the system would have been possible without a certain amount of loyalty among a considerable part of the population. These people continue to serve the state apparatus and have joined the process of establishing the new system.

All said, it should be noted that at the moment the political system in Belarus is in the process of reformatting. New institutions and mechanisms, as well as forms of management that will serve the stability of the regime, are being used to achieve this. The war in Ukraine has contributed to the acceleration of this process, but also generated some new threats to Lukashenka's regime. This, in turn, is leading to the tightening of an already extremely limited number of freedoms.

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In anticipation of a new world

OLEKSANDR SHEVCHENKO

Despite being neighbours, the societies of Ukraine and Belarus know very little about each other. The Kremlin's use of Belarusian land in its invasion of Ukraine suggests that this divide may persist into the future. However, it is clear that the two countries' democratic populations will have great potential for cooperation in the years ahead.

The analytical group BELARUS-UKRAINE-REGION was established at the end of 2020 at the University of Warsaw. At that moment it was already quite clear that the Belarusian revolution of 2020 would not lead to a quick change of power in Minsk. There was also not yet much talk of a full-scale war in Ukraine, which is Belarus's neighbour. In fact, analysts and observers who spoke about such a threat in 2021, or even early 2022, would usually add a disclaimer that in their view, the breakout of a war was a very unlikely scenario.

Not to irritate Lukashenka once again

It is thus not surprising that in 2021 also for Ukraine the most important issues regarding Belarus were the further development of relations with the regime of Alyaksandr Lukashenka and the status of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya and her office. Throughout 2021 the authorities in Kyiv had maintained some ambivalence with regards to both. Thus, despite not recognising Lukashenka as president, the Ukrainian government refused to limit economic cooperation with his regime and

did not join all of the European Union's sanctions against Belarus as they could "harm Ukrainian-Belarusian economic relations".

In a similar vein Tsikhanouskaya, the leader of the Belarusian opposition, was never invited to Ukraine, neither by the cabinet of ministers nor the office of the president (although invitations were sent by the Ukrainian parliament). Not a single meeting between Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Tsikhanouskaya has ever taken place. Until the end of 2021, this behaviour by the Ukrainian authorities towards Minsk was explained as Kyiv's desire to maintain Belarusian-Ukrainian economic cooperation, which required not irritating Lukashenka.

Not a single meeting between Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya has ever taken place.

These various issues were the main topics of inquiry for the Ukrainian members of our analytical group. We were trying to determine the economic importance of Belarus for Ukraine, looking for opportunities to build dialogue between Ukraine and the Belarusian democratic society. At the same time, we recognised the unwillingness of the Ukrainian authorities to aggravate relations with the Lukashenka regime.

The real turning point in our understanding of the situation came on November 30th 2021. On that day, Lukashenka recognised the annexed Crimea as legally Russian. To us it was a clear indication that the red line in Ukrainian-Belarusian relations had been crossed and that from now on relations with the Belarusian dictator would not be accepted by Ukrainian society. In the context of growing military tensions, caused by the accumulation of Russian troops along the Ukrainian border (including also in Belarusian territory), such a "burning of bridges" by Lukashenka looked ominous.

Today, knowing what happened on February 24th 2022 and later on, we can say that by November 2021, the decision to invade Ukraine had already been made in Moscow by then. Thus, Lukashenka, by recognising the annexed Crimea as Russian, speaking sharply against the Ukrainian authorities and later refusing to sell electricity to Ukraine, played the role that was assigned to him by the Kremlin. Lukashenka's destructive behaviour towards Ukraine at that time should have obviously raised additional questions among the Ukrainian authorities and society.

The curse of war

On February 24th 2022, all of the above issues became irrelevant. The entry of Russian troops into Ukraine from the territory of Belarus changed everything completely and likely for a very long time. It is also what will predetermine the na-

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Ukraine's relations with a democratic Belarus should be seen as something that will determine the future of Eastern Europe.

ture of relations between Ukrainians and Belarusians for generations to come. Evidently, the nature of these relations will, in one way or another, be marked by the curse of the current war.

The reaction of the analytical group BELARUS-UKRAINE-REGION to this new stage of Ukrainian-Belarusian relations included the publication of two texts. The first one is titled *From Silence to War*. It analyses the evolution of the Ukrainian government's policy towards Belarus. The second one, titled *Exiting Point Zero*, is an attempt to find the ground and foundations on which Belarusian-Ukrainian relations can be built in the future. The second of the two articles gained a significant amount of attention as it was republished by one of the most popular Ukrainian foreign policy websites, *Evropeyska Pravda* (*Європейська правда*).

There is no doubt that the further development of Belarusian-Ukrainian relations, although it is difficult to predict during the still very active phase of the war, is one of the key issues for the future of the entire region of Eastern Europe. Based on numerous testimonies, it is now known that in the first hours of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, many western heads of state were certain that Kyiv would fall rapidly, and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who had been offered an escape would indeed do just that. The majority of foreign diplomats stationed in Ukraine quickly left the country, with the notable exception of the Polish ambassador and a few others. This fact suggests that at the moment of the outbreak of the war, the

western world was mentally prepared for Ukraine to return to Russia's sphere of influence, a place where Belarus currently resides.

That is why it can now be argued that the heroic resistance of the Ukrainian people to the Russian invasion has not only altered Russia's plans. It has also changed the scenario on which many western leaders internally agreed. In other words, the war in Ukraine has created a new geopolitical reality in Europe. A reality for which neither the East nor the West had been prepared.

A huge responsibility

Regardless of how the situation develops further, this new reality has changed Europe and the world for a long time to come. Evidently, there is no return to the status quo before February 24th. For those of us who work in the world of academia, science or journalism, this entails a huge responsibility. There is no doubt that the future is also in our hands. Unlike before, we cannot only aim at predicting it but also attempt to shape it.

Further relations between Belarus and Ukraine, as well as the place of these two countries in the region and on the world stage, is thus one of the most important topics we should focus on now. As it has been already said, in late February and early March 2022 the Ukrainian people created a new geopolitical reality, for Europe and the world at large. As a result, they will continue to be the co-creators of the future world order and one of its most important participants. Their moral right to this role will be determined by their own deeds, but also by the esteem towards Ukrainian courage expressed by the societies in most European countries.

The situation of Belarusian society is completely different. The truth needs to be told that their biggest asset and hidden force is the large Belarusian diaspora spread throughout Europe (with their primary places of residence being Poland and Lithuania). Also importantly, although the 2020 protests showed us the true desires of the Belarusian people, Lukashenka, thanks to Russian support, has nonetheless managed to suppress the protests using ruthless methods.

We can thus assume that once the Russian influence in Belarus gets weaker (which could be the result of a political crisis within Russia after its defeat in Ukraine), those who are now in exile will take over power in Minsk. A truly independent, democratic Belarus thus will also further change the geopolitical situation in Eastern Europe and the continent as a whole.

In such a situation, Ukraine's relations with democratic Belarus should be seen as something that will determine the future of Eastern Europe. If this alliance is established with the aim of joint integration with the EU and NATO, its economic

and political potential will be comparable to that of the Visegrad Group. A strong commitment by the two countries to regional integration will further strengthen already existing trends and could provide further influence to regional leaders such as Poland. In such a case and against the current distrust of Ukrainians towards Belarusians, which arose after the invasion of Russian troops from the territory of Belarus and could last for quite a long time, the objective geopolitical interests of Ukraine and the democratic society of Belarus would at such a stage coincide.

A new hallmark

Overall, the primary interest of both countries is the existence of each other as independent countries, outside the Russian zone of influence. For this reason, it is clear that some kind of a Belarusian-Ukrainian alliance, or maybe even a union, will eventually be established in the years to come. The level of its integration and specific foreign policy goals will depend on different external factors, which are unknown today. However, what is already known is that such an alliance will augment the political and economic influence of the Eastern European region and its position in the common future of Europe. It can now be stated with great confidence that this will be one of the hallmarks of the new geopolitical reality.

From this perspective, the task of the "Ukrainian" part of the work pursued by the analytical group BELARUS-UKRAINE-REGION has been to find, or even create, the fundamental prerequisites for future Belarusian-Ukrainian cooperation. We have already identified great potential for such change in the future based on the analysis of geopolitical, historical, cultural, social and economic factors. Evidently, the first challenge to overcome is the current distrust that the Ukrainians feel towards Belarusians.

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Secondly, there needs to be an increase in the currently low level of knowledge among Ukrainians and Belarusians about each other. This is still a legacy of the Soviet times, when Belarusians and Ukrainians communicated with each other "through Moscow" and got to know each other not through direct contacts, but through books, films and songs that were approved by the central Soviet authorities. At the same time, the 28 years of Lukashenka's regime in Minsk explain why the majority of Ukrainians perceive Belarus as a pro-Russian country ruled by one dictator. The Belarusian culture has been systematically suppressed by the regime and remains little known in Ukraine.

Thus, referring to the potential of the Belarusian diaspora and its presence in many countries throughout Europe, we stress the need to create a framework for future cooperation between the two countries. This can already take the form of platforms for negotiations between the Ukrainian and Belarusian democratic societies today. This goal may look very ambitious and go beyond the political analysis of the current situation, as was the case at the beginning of our group's work. However, it reflects the spirit of the present time, which is a time of change and challenges. This era is a time of anticipation for a new world. A world whose shape also depends on our work now.

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Gudijos istorija for the 21st century

ANDRZEJ PUKSZTO

With regards to Belarus, it is difficult to ask Lithuanians, or actually any other neighbouring society, about how they perceive Belarusians. The truth is that in this country we are dealing with two entities: the official Belarus and the Belarus of the opposition.

At first glance, in the autumn of 2022, Vilnius has enjoyed a normal life. The capital of Lithuania has finally almost returned to its pre-pandemic pace of life. The majority of institutions are now working like they were before. The same can be said about small shops, coffee shops and restaurants. Even though the prices that you pay there are much higher. It is also not difficult to notice that some new places have been set up. For example, on Gediminas Avenue there is a bar called *Pahonia*, while Vilnius Street is now home to the Belarusian House, which is located near the main government building.

There are many flags and Ukrainian symbols around the city as well. But a careful eye will also spot the white-red-white Belarusian flags. Compared to the situation from two years ago, when words such as COVID-19 or SARS were completely unknown here, we can say that the Russian language is much more often heard in the streets and public spaces. Its users are usually Ukrainians, for example the refugees who have fled from Kharkiv, or Belarusians, who – in large numbers – arrived here from Minsk. But there are also representatives of the Russian minority in Lithuania.

Thinking about this new ethnic mosaic, I cannot help but think of an online post that was made by a well-known Lithuanian professor, the women's rights researcher Dalia Leinartė. In it she complained about the new reality, which in

her view, has been pushing the Lithuanian language out of the public space. As a remedy, she proposed that the language of communication with Ukrainian and Belarusian migrants in Lithuania should be English.

Ukraine in focus but not instead of Belarus

To say that Ukrainian refugees and support for Ukraine have pushed the Belarusian issue out of the media agenda in Lithuania would not be true. For sure, there is less space for Belarus now, especially when we look at the situation from before February 24th 2022. First and foremost, the Vilnius office of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya does not allow us to forget about our neighbouring state. Also importantly, the threats that Lukashenka poses towards our country do not leave us indifferent. In the summer he even encouraged all of Belarus's democratic neighbours (Poles, Lithuanians, Latvians and Ukrainians) to come to his state if they want to buy kasha grains and salt. By uttering these words, he was trying to say that the situation in these countries, which are either current or aspiring members of the EU, is now very dire and that they subsequently require help from neighbours. Also, the difference in prices between these countries and Belarus is significant and that is why people living in Poland and Lithuania are apparently flocking to the border to do their shopping in Belarus.

To say that support for Ukraine has pushed the Belarusian issue out of the media agenda in Lithuania would not be true.

Lukashenka's anger with Lithuania is actually not ungrounded. Not only did our country take in Tsikhanouskaya in August 2020, after she had fled from Belarus in fear for her safety and life, but we also cut the majority of our economic ties with Belarus. The most painful for the Belarusian ruling elite was the halting of the transit of mineral fertilisers produced by Belaruskali, which is one of the biggest state-owned chemical producers in Belarus. Before, exported fertilisers from this plant were transported by Lithuanian Railways to the harbour in Klaipėda, thereby significantly enriching the Belarusian state coffers for many years.

To complete the picture, let me add that in early October of this year an individual named Mantas Danielius, who introduced himself as a lawyer and business consultant, was detained in Lithuania on charges of espionage. He was suspected of passing information he had been collecting among Belarusian refugees to the Belarusian KGB. Danielius's case is an illustration of the fact that Lukashenka's regime has not forgotten about Lithuania and despite reduced diplomatic relations it remains active with regards to our state.

Two Belarusian anniversaries

In autumn 2020, Lithuania became a destination for many Belarusian refugees, especially those who work in the IT and new technologies sectors. In a way, we can say that our country saw an opportunity in hosting world-famous firms from Minsk. However, we do not know to what extent these techies are supporting the Belarusian opposition. If they are, they are doing it quietly and secretly.

Understandably, the activity of Belarusian firms in Vilnius and other Lithuanian cities is less known to the public eye than the political activities of the representatives of the Belarusian opposition. For example, in early August of this year a conference called "New Belarus" was hosted in Vilnius. Its aim was to unite different opposition groups that are now active in Vilnius, Warsaw and other European cities.

Most importantly, by creating the government in exile, Tsikhanouskaya wanted to prove that her intention was not to waste time and that she has plans for Belarus's future. At a banquet organised at Vilnius's City Hall on the occasion of the second anniversary of the protests in Minsk, Tsikhanouskaya thanked the diplomatic services from the main European states and the US – but above all Lithuanian politicians and diplomats – for their support of democratic Belarus. On the other hand, the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the European Humanities University, which is often called a Belarusian university in exile, was poorly reported on by the media and stayed, in a way, in the background. This academic centre, which Lukashenka closed down back in 2004, found its place on Belarus's opposition map. However, it does not have a good reputation among the Belarusians, even though the number of students attending it has increased in the last two years.

Belarusian studies

The rapid changes in international affairs have made it fashionable to survey the residents of one country on their perceptions of those who live abroad and especially in their neighbouring states. With regards to Belarus, it is difficult to ask Lithuanians, or actually any other neighbouring society, about how they perceive Belarusians. The truth is that in this country we are dealing with two entities: the official Belarus and the Belarus of the opposition.

In regards to the opposition, it is worth mentioning the Congress of Belarusian Researchers, which has been active for ten years now. This international gathering of scholars specialising in Belarus is held every year in Kaunas, which was Lithuania's interwar capital. It was only organised in Warsaw for one year. In 2022, like before, the event gathered a few thousand specialists from different academic ar-

eas, including linguistics, sociology, economics and others. They arrived in Kaunas from all over the world. The conference is organised by a small team of academics who work at the Vytautas Magnus University and researchers with a Belarusian organisation called Political Sphere. Initially criticised by the Lithuanian ministry of foreign affairs and Lithuanian media, in recent years this event has gathered the support of all of Lithuania's most important institutions.

One of the congress's organisers is historian Rūstis Kamuntavičius, who in 2021 published a now very popular book. It is the first concise history of Belarus in Lithuanian. Before him, nobody dared to prepare such a publication. In fact, many Lithuanian researchers were simply of the opinion that the history of Belarus overlaps with Lithuania's history, while others simply claimed that this was a topic that was not worthy of much attention.

Kamuntavičius provocatively called his book the *History of Gudia*, not Belarus, referring to the Old Lithuanian geographic term. There have already been two editions of the publication and new ones can be expected in the future. This shows that today Lithuanians are more and more interested in Belarus and are united in the conviction that without a democratic and pro-western Belarus, there can be no safe Lithuania.

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Saahil Menon

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