Bimonthly **November-December** **No 6 (XXXIX)/2019**
20 PLN (w tym 8% vat) | 10 EUR | 12 USD | 7 GBP
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New Eastern Europe

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A true makeover or cosmetic change?

ISSN 2083-7372 06
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DEAR READER,

The year 2019 has certainly been a year of change for the region of Central and Eastern Europe. The most spectacular has been the meteoric rise of Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Ukraine – who won the April presidential election with 73 per cent of the vote. His new party, named "Servant of the People" after the popular TV series and made up of many political novices and outsiders, won the snap parliamentary elections this past July – handing Zelenskyy an exceptional amount of power.

Beyond Ukraine, another unexpected change seen this year was the anti-oligarch coalition of pro-European reformers and the more pro-Russian socialists in Moldova, breaking the status quo in that country and bringing new hopes for progress. Another shock came in Kazakhstan when Nursultan Nazarbayev, who ruled the country for 30 years, suddenly announced his resignation. New faces also emerged with presidential elections in Slovakia, which saw pro-environmental lawyer Zuzana Čaputová win an unlikely victory, as well as in Lithuania with businessman and political newcomer Gitanas Nausėda moving into the presidential palace in Vilnius.

Of course, we still have many of the same old faces in the region as well. The most notable is Alyaksandr Lukashenka in Belarus – a man who has been in power for 25 years now. Yet, his aim of stability for the country has been a delicate balancing act. While in Georgia, the society is becoming fed up with a lack of options and a stagnating socio-economic situation – as seen in the unrest that exploded in Tbilisi over the past summer. Even Vladimir Putin's grip on power in Russia is being questioned after protesters defied authorities in Moscow.

All of this has led us to ask the question as to what extent these new faces represent real change in the region? Is this part of a wider trend that indicates deeper social transformation or is it more of the same, with just an upgraded, modern look? These are the questions that we, together with our authors, explore in this closing issue of 2019.

As always, we would like to thank all of readers and subscribers for your ongoing support. *New Eastern Europe* is more than just a publication, it is a global community gathering those with a deep interest in the region. We are grateful that you are with us in this endeavour. You can also join us online at www.neweasterneurope.eu or find us via Facebook, Twitter or Instagram.

Finally, we would like to take the opportunity to wish all of you a very happy and peaceful holiday season.

The Editors

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New Eastern Europe
www.neweasterneurope.eu

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

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

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Texts and opinions published in *New Eastern Europe* do not necessarily reflect the views of the funders, publishers and editors.

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

Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland

NARODOWY PROGRAM ROZWOJU CZYTELNICTWA

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The section on the Weimar Republic has been prepared in partnership with Deutsch-Russische Austausch.

DRA FOR A EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY

The section on Weimar is co-financed by the Foundation of Polish-German Cooperation as part of the programme "1939–1989–2019: history for (re)consideration". The funding for this project has been transferred through the Foundation for Polish-German Cooperation from the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Auswärtiges Amt

FUNDACJA WSPÓŁPRACY POLSKO-NIEMIECKIEJ
STIFTUNG FÜR DEUTSCH-POLNISCHE ZUSAMMENARBEIT

Legal Services Provided by KOKSZTYS S.A.

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Identity politics is nothing new

A conversation with Francis Fukuyama, professor, writer and public intellectual. Interviewer: Maciej Makulski

MACIEJ MAKULSKI: I would like to focus our conversation on your new book *Identity Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* and to give our readers a proper context of what your new book is about. Why, in your opinion, is the concept of identity so central now? In your book you provide a very interesting history of how the concept of identity has evolved over the centuries, which means, for me, that identity has been present within the public debate for a long time. Why, then, it is so relevant for politics in the 21st century?

FRANCIS FUKUYAMA: I think that the politics of the present has shifted from 20th century politics. In the 20th century the big political divisions were really over economic ideology. It was divided by a left that was social democratic, and in some cases Marxist, that wanted greater economic equality, more redistribution and more social protections; and a right that was more oriented towards the free market and towards individual freedoms. That has been changing in recent years towards an axis that is defined more by identity – meaning one's membership in groups that are usually fixed by biology – in terms of ethnicity or race – and sometimes religion. This shift has been taking place over time but it became most evident in 2016 with the election of Donald Trump and the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom: these were both right-wing populist movements based on identity. Trump has pursued conservative economic policies, but his real appeal is in attacking foreigners, attacking immigrants and wanting to close the United States off from flows of people, and his very illiberal trade policies – he said that he liked trade wars and thought they were easy to win. This is a kind of conservatism that is very different than the one that existed under Ronald Reagan who was in favour of immigration and promoted free trade. In fact, Reagan had a very internationalist foreign policy.

I think that this rise of populist nationalism is also seen in many other countries – you have a version of that

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here in Poland. There is also a version in Hungary, and we can see it clearly in Turkey. And that is basically why I wrote this book. It was in reaction to this rise of populism and trying to understand why it was happening.

I would like to try and reach the core of the problem related to identity. I got the impression by reading your book that this is connected to many other concepts. In one chapter, you argue that identity and the politics of identity are not bad as such, but the problem is when identity is a substitute for true public discussions about serious social problems, such as economic inequality or immigration as you just mentioned. In other words, should we avoid the instrumentalisation of identity?

The question is really what kind of identity one is advocating. I think one of the trends that has been taking place in identity politics as a whole has been a focus on narrower and narrower identities rather than larger and more integrative ones. In progressive politics in the United States, for example, the left has redefined itself away from worrying about the broad working class to worrying about specific injustices related to African-Americans, women, the LGBTQ community, the disabled or indigenous peoples. These are real social justice issues, but they also have tended to fragment the left. Sometimes there are internal conflicts among these groups because they do not actually agree on a common agenda. This has moved the focus away from the broader issue of inequality. On the right, it has been very negative because the right-wing identitarians define national identity in ethnic terms. In the United States there has been a rise of white nationalism and this idea that real Americans do not include all of the diverse minorities that actually make up the country.

In other countries it may take the form of religion. In Sri Lanka or Myanmar we see a militant form of Buddhism that has been very intolerant. In India the rise of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP represents a shift from a liberal vision of India towards a Hindu nationalist one. From the standpoint of liberal democracy, these cases represent negative developments.

What is your opinion about comparing our contemporary political and social reality to different periods in history? Many experts have suggested that the current political atmosphere is now similar to the interwar period, especially in terms of the rise of nationalism in Europe. Do you find such comparisons useful? Can we learn from history?

We never truly repeat the same historical patterns. But, yes, identity politics is nothing new. I think the first major manifestation of this type of politics was seen in 19th century European nationalism. The dynastic politics of medieval Europe began to give way to states that were organised on cultural grounds, by language and by cultural background, and which was obviously a very traumatic period that ultimately led to two

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world wars and the undermining, self-undermining, of European civilisation. The interwar period was simply the last phase of that protracted struggle.

I would argue that things are different now. There is a return to nationalism in certain quarters, but there are also much stronger institutions in place. There are large structures like the European Union and within each individual democracy are constitutional structures that attempt to put checks on powers. So that it would be much harder to stage a takeover the way that Mussolini or Hitler succeeded in doing in the 1920s and 30s. In that regard, things are different. The experience of that earlier form of nationalism really has created a kind of inoculation against its return in the most virulent form.

In your book you write that theory and theoretical thinking are important and people tend to forget about this. I agree with this statement and would like to ask a more theoretical question. How do you understand the relations between nationalism and modernisation? These two concepts are discussed together in your book. Do they always come hand in hand, or is one a condition of the other or a consequence of the other?

One of the traditional historical interpretations of why nationalism emerged after the French Revolution has to do with economic modernisation. When you shift from an agrarian to an urban industrial society it is very disruptive. This is what Ferdinand Tönnies referred to as the shift from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* – from a village society to an urban/industrial society. People lose their social connections once they leave their little peasant village and move to the big city and they feel alienated and socially unmoored from their familiar surroundings.

One of the arguments about nationalism was that it filled that void. It told people who they were – not just Hans living in a particular little village, but a German living in a large country called Germany and connected to people by a common language and culture. Ernest Kellner, the great social theorist, argued that this is why we now see a rise of Islamism in the Muslim world, because a similar process of urbanisation and social disruption is taking place there. This can also take the form of people moving from Morocco or Pakistan to Western Europe. They lose their connection with their local village life and they begin asking this question of who they are. This is especially pertinent for second generation of children who feel less connected to their parents' or grandparents' culture while, at the same time, not integrated into European society, leaving them more vulnerable to an appeal by a Muslim preacher, to be recruited into a certain Islamist political circle that provides them an identity.

I would like to shift the conversation a little bit to get your opinion on what is happening in relation with Russia through the prism of the politics of identity. My im-

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pression is that very often we hear voices claiming that Russia should be somehow westernised. That this is the only way to normalise relations between the West and Russia. But what if Russia does not accept the values and rules of the West? Can you imagine a different way to build good relations with Russia?

Yes, but it really does require a shift in the way the current Russian government thinks about national identity. I think that Vladimir Putin rose to power because he appeared at a moment when Russia was extremely weak and suffered a great humiliation of having lost not just its great power status and the breakup of the Soviet Union but even a greatly diminished power base within the Russian Federation. He compensated for that loss by telling Russians that they

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should take pride in themselves, which is a normal thing for leaders to do. But the version of Russian national identity he chose was unfortunately one that involves a kind of imperial notion of Russia needing to dominate the countries in its immediate neighbourhood. This has led to the occupation of territory in Georgia, Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea; and the interference into the politics of all of its neighbours. I was recently on a panel discussion with Alexei Navalny who argues that Russian national identity is important. But you can have a Russia that does not see its own dignity lying in the domination of its neighbours; one that acts as a normal European country, that does not want to take over territory or assert itself in the Middle East. In fact, there is no reason why that could not happen. I do not think it is necessarily somehow in the genes of Russians to be imperialistic. It just happens that this is the course that Putin has chosen.

But that would require a lot of time. Putin has chosen to build this myth based on the Soviet victory in the Second World War and the fact that Russia is a very old country with a rich culture, arguing that Russia has always been a global power. So to change that narrative, it would require a grassroots approach to convince Russians that their identity can be built on other elements…

True, but these things can happen rather quickly. If you think about what Mikhail Gorbachev did in the 1980s, it was a rather rapid shift. In many ways you have a younger generation of Russians that really are not happy with their current situation. They do not want to be isolated. They do not want the sanctions and are worried that their economy is stagnating, or that they're living in a kleptocracy where the senior leaders in the society walk off with most of the wealth. It seems to me that change is possible…

When talking about identity and liberalism, Columbia professor Mark Lilla wrote in his book, *The Once and Future Liberal: After Identity Politics*, that among the different processes that influence liberalism, the most detrimental is education based on identity, which helps strengthen the separation of groups within society. Do you agree with this?

I largely agree with Lilla and I think that we need to specify when this form of identity politics goes wrong, because it grows out of social movements that are basically trying to seek justice for certain groups that have been marginalised and disrespected – and there is nothing wrong with that, in fact those are good causes. The problem arises when these identities become seen as essential and more important than any other characteristics. In other words, the fact that someone is white is more important than the fact that he or she has good ideas or certain talents. That is the point in which this type of politics becomes a source of intolerance, not of pluralism and liberalism. And it is not a general characteristic. You see it in

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universities, in the arts and certain areas of culture – where it becomes even more intense.

If we realise that there are some problems with the educational system related to identity issues, I think we can also see education as a tool for making it more effective. The question would be how should we think about education?

This is a very complicated discussion. It's not just a question of institutionally changing the way we educate. It is really much more about the content. In the United States, in the humanities, we have had this rise of postmodernism as the dominant mode in which a lot of literature departments or anthropology departments think, which basically begins from a premise of extreme cultural relativism that you cannot make any judgments about one culture being more sophisticated or more complex than another culture (this, in particular, refers to western culture). In other words, there is no reason to privilege western culture over the culture of some obscure tribe in the South Pacific. Making cultural generalisations is not permissible. That has led to a real problem. A lot of schools have stopped teaching basic courses on western civilisation because this is regarded as the domain of dead white men. That is what I mean by the point at which identity politics becomes essentialistic. If the only thing you know about Plato is the fact that he's a white male, and not that he's a great philosopher, there is something wrong.

This is the main problem I see in contemporary education. It is more powerful in certain places than in others. In anthropology departments there is an extreme form of this. In cultural anthropology there really was a whole ideology attached to non-judgementalism, especially on any subject that touches upon things like race, gender, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. It is really not subject to a rational debate anymore.

Instead it is a substitute for a real discussion about the content of education…

In this sense, yes.

At the end of your book, you write that we cannot escape from politics based on identity. But you also give some hints, or even recommendations, for both the European Union and the United States as to what can be done to make the politics of identity more palatable. What is the most important task ahead of us? What kind of recommendation is the most important?

I think we need to work on creating more integrative identities, which, for better or worse, has to be done on a nation-state level. In the European Union there was hope after the Second World War that you could move into a post-national era where being European would supersede being German or Italian or Dutch, etc. That simply has not happened. In a way, it will not happen because the real locus of power still is a nation state. The nation state is what organises police forces and armies and coercive mechanisms. Some power has

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been delegated to the EU on economic matters, but fundamentally, people do not see themselves first as European and then, only secondarily, as Polish or German. As long as that is the case, I think we have to pay attention to national identities. But they have to be liberal ones. They have to be ones that are open to the diversity of the people living in these societies. This is threatened in two directions: first, by a left that does not care about national identity at all; and second, by a right that wants to define national identity in ethnic terms. Neither of those is an appropriate response.

This interview took place during the 2019 Boris Nemtsov Forum which was held October 9–10 2019 in Warsaw.

Francis Fukuyama is an American professor, public intellectual and writer. His most recent book is *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*.

Maciej Makulski is a contributing editor with *New Eastern Europe* and co-host of the *Talk Eastern Europe* podcast.

Listen for more: This interview will also be featured on the Talk Eastern Europe podcast.

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A cold summer in Russia

A new wave of repressions and the rise of solidarity

ARTEM FILATOV

The scale of repression in Russia is now more serious and terrifying than in 2012. At the same time, the Russian public has become more mature and fearless. Independent groups of lawyers provide free legal advice, journalists and activists defend human rights, and various crowdfunding campaigns provide financial assistance to those detained. As a result, prisoners feel encouraged even when they face the brutality of the system.

This summer was marked with a series of unprecedented political protests in Moscow, which started on June 12th and finished on September 29th. First, Russian citizens demanded justice for investigative journalist, Ivan Golunov, who was absurdly charged with the possession of an illegal substance with intent to distribute. Golunov was released days after the charges as a result of pressure from journalists, human rights activists and protesters on the streets of Moscow. Then in July a larger campaign started with the demand to register independent candidates for the Moscow City Parliament elections. All these protests were brutally suppressed with batons and mass arrests – on July 27th alone, 1,373 citizens were taken to police detention.

The authorities opened a number of criminal cases against protesters but civil society has effectively demanded the release of a number of the jailed protesters. At the end of the season, on September 29th, more than 20,000 Russians gathered in a sanctioned rally with the request to stop the repressions. It was the first

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time in Vladimir Putin's Russia that diverse political movements made a show of solidarity with those in jail. Does this mean that Russians are strengthening and maturing enough to contain Putin's authoritarian rule?

Price of activism

This is the second time in a decade the Kremlin has reacted to a wave of protests in a criminal way. The previous one was the notorious "Bolotnaya Square case" in 2012 when the investigative criminal committee of Russia qualified the mass gathering as criminal, alleging that the protesters were violent against the police. It was a day before the inauguration ceremony of Putin when protesters came to central Moscow to express their anger, and the police failed to provide security (as recognised by the European Court of Human Rights and other international organisations). More than 30 people faced criminal charges in 2012 and the protest movement was shocked and demoralised by this brutal reaction.

A number of laws had been introduced and adopted in Russia since then in order to stave off protests. Protesters now face administrative fines from 10,000 to 300,000 roubles (140–4,200 euros) if their actions are not sanctioned by the authorities. Protesters can be arrested and held for up to 30 days in jail. But there are also more severe forms of punishment for those who face these administrative measures. The latest example is the unprecedented brutal case of Moscow activist, Konstantin Kotov. He was charged with the repeated violation of public assemblies because he was attending protests and was sentenced for four years in prison in September 2019. Kotov did nothing violent or harmful, he was peacefully attending rallies in Moscow and was detained by the police and fined several times. His case shows what the real price is for political activism in Russia today.

At the same time, one cannot ignore the fact that several thousand Russians were ready to attend unauthorised rallies in Moscow and risk facing these serious consequences during the summer. This illustrates that a real demand for change is now growing and the authorities are unable to change the public mood with repressive means or with shows on state-controlled television which are widely attributed by many Russians as "Kremlin propaganda". What is more, the older generation is particularly angry due to the recent pension reform which has increased the age of retirement for both men and women, and decreases in social welfare payments. Younger people are also unhappy with a drop in life standards, and the lack of opportunities offered in Russia.

Yet despite all these factors, it was still very difficult to predict the Moscow summer protests. The trigger was the government's refusal to register independent

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candidates in the Moscow city Duma (city parliament) elections. Since the 1990s this parliament was described as one of the weakest in Russia, with a very small number of functions and limited decision-making authority. The most powerful body in Moscow (of course not mentioning the Kremlin) is the Moscow city government and its mayor, Sergey Sobyanin. The elections in the Moscow Duma were never perceived as important for the opposition.

For a significant number of Moscow citizens it was a situation of taxation without representation. I had a chance to discuss this with opposition leader, Lyubov Sobol. According to her for many Russians aged 18–35 it is absurd not to have a choice in elections. Older people have experienced life in the Soviet Union where choice was very limited: one single news programme on television, one brand of shoes, etc. But for the younger generation, it is natural to choose between different brands – they do not want to tolerate a lack of political choice.

Growing protest mood

This past summer in Moscow many well-known independent public figures and politicians decided to take part in the regional elections. It included Lyubov Sobol from Alexey Navalny's Anti-corruption Foundation, Ilya Yashin, Yulia Galyamina, and many others. All these candidates have a proven record of being in opposition to the Kremlin, and, without access to state media, they received mobilising supporter.

> The team of Moscow mayor, Sergey Sobyanin, fuelled the crisis by blocking independent candidates from running in the elections.

It was the team of Moscow mayor, Sergey Sobyanin, who fuelled the crisis in the Russian capital. The authorities decided to block independent candidates from participating in the elections. According to Russian media, the decision had been taken after opinion polls data highlighted the popularity of opposition candidates in the central districts of Moscow. At the same time, the opposition had overcome significant administrative obstacles in order to be registered. Candidates were able to collect the necessary number of signatures of potential voters for their support. Nevertheless, the Moscow election commission disqualified the signatures of approximately 100,000 citizens claiming they were fake. It almost immediately led to outbursts of anger on the streets.

The first authorised rally gathered around 20,000 people, while the subsequent one on July 27th was declared unauthorised by the city administration. Among the 15,000 participants, 1,373 were detained at the rally – a new post-Soviet record.

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A lone picket protest for detained journalist Ivan Golunov in Moscow last June. Golunov was absurdly charged with the possession of an illegal substance with intent to distribute.

Most of the unregistered candidates for the Moscow city Duma elections were handed administrative sentences up to 30 days in prison. The Russian investigative committee opened a criminal probe into an alleged "mass riot" during the events of the 27th. Despite all this, citizens attended another protest on August 3rd. Riot police and military units blocked citizens on the streets, mobile internet coverage in central Moscow was limited and 1,000 people were brutally detained by special forces. Next was the authorised rally on August 10th which gathered approximately 60,000 protesters; it was considered to be the biggest protest event since 2011–2013.

These events significantly changed public attitudes towards Sobyanin, Moscow's mayor. Prior to the large-scale police operation on the city streets, Sobyanin was perceived as a rather progressive mayor who effectively transformed the post-Soviet city into a comfortable and modern megapolis. But many young people demand more – not only new recreation areas and public spaces, but real representation in public bodies.

In August this year Sobyanin appeared on television and expressed his support for the brutal police operation. This made him even less popular among Moscow's middle class and younger generation. One of the examples of scorn towards Sobyanin was a YouTube video by popular rap singers who praised Sobyanin. This received more than 1.5 million dislikes on YouTube and was eventually removed as it has become one of the most disliked video ever published on the internet in Russia.

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Unprecedented tactics

This new wave of protests was the longest in a decade especially taking into account that summer is when Russians usually go to their dachas or on vacation and pay very little attention to politics. The crisis in Moscow was interpreted by officials as an organised threat to the ruling system. From the very beginning, it was crucial for the "siloviki" – which includes heads of Russian investigative committee, Alexander Bastrykin, and the chief of Rosgvardia special squads, Victor Zolotov – to show their ability to tackle the problem.

The broad criminal case against protesters was opened three days after the protest rally on July 27th. Dozens of investigators began working on the case. The authorities reported that demonstrators attacked police forces and created a dangerous situation in Moscow. In fact the situation was the opposite: citizens were beaten by the police. Seventeen protesters were prosecuted or given significant prison sentences. Prosecutors dropped some of the charges after a public backlash.

The aim of the Russian authorities was to uncover a foreign influence as there is a general belief among the ruling class that such events are always inspired by the West. One of the targets for investigation was the Anti-corruption Foundation opposition leader, Alexey Navalny. A money laundering case had been opened against him and the offices and homes of activists were raided in more than 40 regions.

Finally in October the Anti-corruption Foundation was officially labelled as a "foreign agent NGO" the title which in Russia leads to limitations according to the current law. By coincidence the decision was declared by authorities on October 9th, the birthday of opposition leader Boris Nemtsov who was murdered in front of the Kremlin. Several days later according to Navalny, the prosecutor's office asked the court to confiscate the only flat of the Navalny family. It was after Russian police forces demanded opposition leaders pay back a hefty amount of 18 million roubles (around 250,000 euros) in "damages" following the summer protests. The judge refused the prosecutor's request.

Media were also the target of officials as the State Duma hosted hearings regarding "foreign manipulation". A Duma parliamentary commission accused the Russian service of German public broadcaster Deutsche Welle inspiring protesters in Moscow via social media and interference in internal affairs.

The main aim of the authorities was to isolate the protesters and to raise the cost of participating in unauthorised rallies. Efforts to take children away from protesters were a new tactic. There are two such cases: the families of Dmitry and Olga Prokazov, and Petr and Elena Khomskikh. The parents came to the rallies with their young children and the prosecutors argued they abused their parental rights and endangered the lives of their children by taking them there. The authorities

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claimed that the young Khomskikh daughters were "very close to a large group of aggressively-minded demonstrators".

After the court proceedings, both couples received a formal warning; in the Khomskikh case, the prosecutor's office still insisted on stronger punishment for the parents. Their lawyer told the press that this decision was politically motivated and that it limits the ability of adults with children to protest in Russia.

Less fear, more solidarity

The scale of repression is now more serious and terrifying than in 2012. At the same time, the Russian public has become more mature and fearless since then. There are independent groups of lawyers ready to provide legal advice for those detained, and journalists and activists who defend human rights support those arrested by coming to the court. Various crowdfunding campaigns have also provided financial assistance. As a result, prisoners feel encouraged even when they face the brutality of the system. Maria Eismont, the lawyer for activist Konstantin Kotov who was sentenced to four years in prison for attending unauthorised protests, has said the lawyers are now unable to release innocent people from prison because judges pay no attention to the facts. At the same time, with help of the campaigners, lawyers give publicity to the imprisoned activists and they are able to bring their cases to the European Court of Human Rights.

The government's harsh reaction to the protests has provoked public anger from groups who rarely criticise the authorities.

The case of 21-year old student, Egor Zhukov, mobilised students for a broad campaign. Zhukov studies political science at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow and hosts a YouTube show about Russian politics. He was detained and charged with participating in mass riots. After Zhukov was jailed, students started a series of one-person pickets in front of Moscow's police headquarters. His supporters published an open letter with a call to release Zhukov and organised a crowdfunding campaign to collect money for his legal defence. As a result of the campaign, Zhukov was released from prison and taken under house arrest until the end of December; he is now charged with a different a crime – "extremism," which has a very broad definition in Russian law.

The government's harsh reaction to the protests has provoked public anger from groups who rarely criticise the authorities. In mid-September the Moscow court sentenced the young actor, Pavel Ustinov, to three and a half years in prison. According to the prosecutors, he allegedly injured a riot police officer. Yet accord-

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ing to a video, Ustinov was just gazing at his phone near a metro station. This evidence, however, was ignored by the court. Several days later dozens of people, in front of Putin's administration offices in central Moscow, were queuing for one-person pickets in support of Ustinov. Famous Russian actors and YouTube celebrities demanded the immediate release of Ustinov. Afterwards even state television hosts and ruling United Russia Party officials made statements about justice for the young actor.

At the end of September, a day after a rally demanding the release of all political prisoners, the Moscow city court overruled Ustinov's prison term. His original sentence was replaced with a one-year suspended sentence. Some of the others arrested were also released after calls from various members of society, including Orthodox priests, teachers, psychologists, journalists and film stars.

The main message coming from the Kremlin is that it wants to control what is happening on the streets and in elections. At the same time, the authorities are ready to change their mind regarding some specific cases when faced with public outcry. But it seems that officials consider such decisions as a weakness of the system. The court verdict in the Ustinov case shows that the arrested protesters are perceived as guilty no matter what the situation is. It is like "Russian roulette" for the protesters as they could easily be put in jail. At the same time, more people show their readiness to protest despite the risks they may face.

The bad news for Putin is that his propaganda is no longer effective and he needs more and more police to control the situation. The bad news for the protesters is they still have no solid agenda and they lack strong leadership.

The demand for change is high. This is what can be heard from opposition figures, such as Navalny and Mikhail Khodorkovsky, prominent economists like Sergey Guriev, and Moscow taxi drivers. The most likely scenario is that confrontation will continue until the parliamentary elections in 2021 and the presidential elections in 2024. But the main lesson from this summer is that citizens are learning fast, while the system may provoke a large-scale crisis even when it is not expected.

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Shadow of a bear

How Viktor Medvedchuk turned from a marginal man into a grey eminence in Ukraine

PETRO BILIAN

Since the collapse of communism, Viktor Medvedchuk has been a prominent face in Ukraine's political scene. His higher ambitions, however, have never come to be realised. He is now back in the parliament raising new questions of a political comeback.

On August 29th 2019 the first session of the new Ukrainian parliament since the July elections was convened. Now, the majority of the Verkhovna Rada is held by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Servant of the People party which holds 254 of the 450 seats. The second largest fraction is the pro-Russian Opposition Platform – For Life; with 44 deputies, it cannot pride itself on having much influence. As a matter of fact, neither can any of the other opposition parties. This, however, does not mean that the 65-year old Viktor Medvedchuk, who is the most influential representative of the Opposition Platform, has stopped hoping he can have impact on the game, particularly if an opportunity arises.

Medvechuk became involved in Ukrainian politics a quarter of a century ago when he ran for a seat during the 1994 parliamentary elections. He then competed in a fierce contest against Viktor Morozov, who was the first minister of defence in independent Ukraine. Medvedchuk lost the race, but gained important political experience.

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From the bottom up

Viktor Medvedchuk was born in 1954 in Siberia. His father was sent there as punishment for his co-operation with the Nazis and membership in the Ukrainian Insurgent Army during the Second World War. Needless to say someone with such a background could not dream of a decent career in the Soviet Union. Yet in the mid-1960s, the Medvedchuk family returned to Ukraine, where the young Viktor finished his education. As a calculating and ambitious young man, he started to dream of a career in the militia. Medvdechuk's first steps to fulfil this dream failed, however. In 1971 he was not accepted into police school because of his "improper" past. Interestingly, however, a year later the 18-year old Medvedchuk was accepted into the Department of Law at the Taras Shevchenko National University in Kyiv, one of the best universities in Ukraine. How come the young Medvedchuk, with his tainted background, was given the chance to study at university?

Dimitry Chobit, Medvedchuk's first unofficial biographer, claims it was at this time that Medvedchuk became a secret informant for the militia. He was very active as a student and became the chairman of a Komsomol division which recruited militia volunteer assistants. In the Soviet Union, this meant helping keep public order at public dances and on the streets. Militia assistants could also drive away hooligans. It is possible that Medvedchuk took this role too seriously when, during one of the interventions, he struck a teenager. And it just happened that that the boy who was hurt came from a very influential family and the case ended up in court.

In 1974 Medvedchuk received his verdict – two years of imprisonment. He was dismissed from the university. Back then something like this really meant the end, but not in Medvedchuk's case. A few months later the verdict was reversed, and Medvedchuk was allowed to return to university. From this moment on, things went well and Medvedchuk graduated. He passed the necessary exams and became an attorney-at-law. Soon afterwards he became a defence lawyer in two very high-profile trials that involved Ukrainian dissidents: Yuri Litvin and Vasyl Stus, both of whom were imprisoned and later died in Soviet labour camps.

Explaining his role in these two cases, Medvedchuk has claimed that the trials were staged by the KGB, and as an attorney he did not have any influence on them. However, it is well known – and evidence can be found in the archives to support it – that in the two cases he was acting in favour of the prosecutor. Regardless of this experience, or maybe because of it, Medvedchuk, at the age of 35, became chairman of a law office in the Kyiv district. One year later, in 1990, he became a chairman of the Union of Attorneys of Ukraine. He was also a member of the Union of Attorneys of the Soviet Union which had a seat in Moscow.

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Success and failure

In 1991 the Soviet Union collapsed and Medvedchuk's dream of a career in Moscow seemed to have all but disappeared. Or maybe not? The collapse of communism and the emergence of an independent Ukraine created unprecedented business opportunities in Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities. Medvedchuk, who became a member of an informal group called the Kyiv Seven, also saw opportunities. The group gathered people like Valentyn Zghursky, who was the former mayor of Soviet Kyiv and as such had an extremely wide network of contacts, and Hryhoriy Surkis, who was soon to become the owner of the famous football club, Dynamo Kyiv, and a future vice president of the European Football Association (UEFA).

The group quickly gained political influence which allowed Medvedchuk to take part in the 1994 parliamentary elections. As mentioned above, he unsuccessfully ran for parliament. The Kyiv Seven also faced failure during the presidential elections which took place in Ukraine in June of that year. Looking at them now, one can identify a certain paradox – Medvedchuk and his friends openly supported Leonid Kravchuk, the nationalist candidate. Thereby, they were against Leonid Kuchma who was calling for closer ties with Russia and maintaining Russian as the official state language of Ukraine. Yet it was Kuchma who won the elections. As president, he did everything to remove his rival's supporters from the political scene.

Yet, this was not the case for Medvedchuk and his friends. Medvedchuk even became an advisor to Kuchma for some time, and managed to build a strong political organisation – the Social Democratic Party of Ukraine – before the subsequent elections in 1998. During the campaign, the party not only built on the success of Dynamo Kyiv, but also had its election list open with the former President Kravchuk to be followed, in second place, by the former prime minister (and former head of the Security Service of Ukraine, and the first deputy of the republic's KGB during the Soviet period), Yevhen Marchuk. Third place was given to Medvedchuk.

The party described itself as a group of professional-patriots and pragmatics. They created an image of themselves as those who were not capable of extreme action. Their active media campaign may not have brought much success, but the party did get into the parliament. The flexible attitude of party activists attracted new members and the fraction's size doubled. Consequently, Medvedchuk became a deputy speaker in the parliament.

Success, personal ambitions and the oncoming presidential elections led to disarray in the party ranks, however. Marchuk had presidential ambitions, and in 1999 decided to pursue this goal. However many party members were not excited by this idea and Kravchuk proposed Medvedchuk as the party's candidate. Despite support in many regional divisions of the party, Medvedchuk refused and

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convinced his colleagues to support Leonid Kuchma. At the same time, he was already looking to the next election in 2004.

Velvet takeover

During the 1999 election campaign, President Kuchma promised economic reform and a pro-European trajectory for Ukraine. This was actively supported by his supporters, including Medvedchuk and his party. From today's viewpoint, Medvedchuk's behaviour is hard to comprehend. But back then, he was intensely involved with the notion of Ukrainian nationalism to the point that he wrote a doctoral dissertation on it. Thus when Vladimir Putin in 2017 called Medvedchuk a nationalist, to a certain degree he was right.

During the 1999 elections, Kuchma promised that once he wins, he will be a renewed Kuchma. For this to happen, he first had to beat the communist, Petro Symonenko, who was advocating the need for improved relations with Russia, breaking ties with the West, and a complete nationalisation of the domestic economy. Kuchma beat Symonenko but did not have strong support in the parliament. Since the majority was unstable and closer to centre-left, Kuchma understood that he would need the help of Medvedchuk's organisational talent and legal skills. And, indeed, Medvedchuk masterfully managed to break up the centre-left majority and assemble a new one in its place. This time around it gathered democrats and centrist parties. It also included the renegade left wing which supported the president and was ready to vote for his economic reform and co-operate with the International Monetary Fund. In order to describe what was happening in parliament, Medvedchuk used the term "Velvet Revolution", even though it more resembled a takeover of power than anything else.

> Kuchma understood that he needed Medvedchuk's organisational talents and skills to masterfully assemble a new parliamentary majority.

Although Medvedchuk and his party colleagues were the engine of the overthrow, they did not become its beneficiaries. The rapid popularity of the Social Democratic Party of Ukraine started to raise concerns among its political rivals, particularly President Kuchma. For this reason, Medvedchuk did not become the chairman of parliament. Instead, he had to accept the position of first deputy. That was only half the battle, however. That majority which Medvedchuk built would soon start working for the government of Viktor Yushchenko, who had just moved from being the head of the National Bank to become Ukraine's prime minister.

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Unplanned catastrophe

In 1999 Ukraine was on the edge of bankruptcy. There were regular stoppages in the supply of electricity, and salary payment delays for public sector employees. Yushchenko, as the newly elected prime minister, proposed a surplus budget which would force big businesses to pay taxes and which assumed a resignation from the barter-based system in the energy sector. This new management style overlapped with an increase in prices for Ukraine's main export goods on global markets. In effect, the sale of metals and other goods brought about an astonishing six per cent growth. Because of this success, Yushchenko went from being Medvedchuk's political rival to his personal enemy. He was the man who destroyed Medvedchuk's political dreams. Obviously, Medvedchuk did not want to surrender, it was not in his nature. After his initiating of a series of intrigues around the government and the National Bank, as well as a scandal that arose around Kuchma's involvement in an orchestrated plot to kidnap and kill a journalist in April 2001, an anti-government majority started to emerge in parliament, which eventually led to the dismissal of Yushchenko. Despite that, Yushchenko's popularity seemed untarnished and he managed to create a powerful opposition bloc called Our Ukraine. In 2002, his party won the parliamentary elections and Yushchenko could start seriously thinking about becoming the prime minister again and perhaps run for the presidency two years later.

Things did not seem to be going so well for Medvedchuk, however. Even if he had defeated Yushchenko in the first round, he would not have been able to permanently remove him or deprive him of important positions in Ukrainian politics. It was around this time that Medvedchuk started to look shady, resembling Cesare Borgia, the Duke of Valentinois who became an inspiration for Machiavelli's *The Prince* – a man of unquestionable talent but also someone who could be quite scrupulous. It was also around this time when Medvedchuk's role in the Litvin and Stus trials resurfaced, as well as the speculation about his co-operation with the KGB. In light of this, it was hard to expect strong support from voters or any sort of victory in presidential elections. The situation became even more complicated with the rise of another ambitious politician, backed by the Donetsk clan. In autumn 2002 the governor of the Donetsk oblast, Viktor Yanukovych, became the prime minister, someone who also had presidential aspirations.

Murky genius

At this time, Medvedchuk came up with the idea of political reform. He envisioned that Ukraine should transform from having a presidential system to a parlia-

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mentary one. This plan assumed a departure from the presidential elections based on the popular vote to a system where the president is appointed by parliament. This idea appealed to Kuchma who, in June 2002, nominated Medvedchuk as head of his administration. In August of that year in a speech on the Day of Ukraine's Independence, Kuchma publically spoke about the reform. But the public's reception of this idea was ambiguous. Yushchenko and his supporters, not surprisingly, were against depriving future president of his prerogatives. Since Yushchenko held a clearly pro-western position, his opponents – willingly or not – joined the pro-Russian group.

At that time, the "fat years" had just started in Putin's Russia. The surplus of gas that Russia was selling on international markets provided it with the resources to initiate integration projects on the post-Soviet space to compete with the West. Medvedchuk quickly started to understand that it was not enough to have good relations with the Russians. Relations required friendship, which was something he was good at. As head of the administration of the president, he often met with his Russian counterpart, Dmitry Medvedev, and sometimes even Vladimir Putin. In 2004 Putin became the godfather of Medvedchuk's daughter. This is probably the best memory Medvedchuk has from this year, which will in the end turn out to be very challenging for him. First, it turned out there was not enough votes for his political reform, and later the protests on the Maidan, which were provoked by massive forgeries in the elections leading to the Orange Revolution, destroyed Medvedchuk's political ambitions once again.

Yushchenko and his supporters did not fully succeed either. The negotiations which took place after the forged elections in 2004 were supervised by international intermediaries and pushed for a compromise. It was agreed that the elections would be repeated, but the constitution would be changed to limit the powers of the president.

Stuck in a trap

When Yushchenko came to power, Medvedchuk moved to the opposition which was strongly against the president's pro-European direction and his aspiration to join the European Union and NATO. In this new role, he managed an aggressive anti-NATO campaign and criticised Yushchenko's decisions. This, however, did not stop him from developing warm relations with Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, who was seen as Yushchenko's ally during the Orange Revolution. These relations were warm to the point that, in 2005, Tymoshenko proposed Medvedchuk as a candidate for either the deputy prime minister or Ukraine's ambassador to

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Moscow (hoping that she could use his relations with Putin). However, this plan proved unsuccessful.

Viktor Yanukovych's coming to power in 2010 did not change much for Medvedchuk. The new president may not have wanted Ukraine's integration into NATO, but he pursued EU integration. What complicated matters for Medvedchuk was Yanukovych's decision to reverse, with the help of the Constitutional Court, the political reform, resulting in presidential powers becoming more executive in nature. Medvedchuk, in response, created a movement called the "Ukrainian Choice" which aimed at promoting direct democracy. He demanded a separate status for the Russian language, the federalisation of Ukraine and, of course, closer ties with Russia.

During Yaunkovych's presidency, Medvedchuk did not have any spectacular success. New opportunities came his way after the 2014 Revolution of Dignity, the Russian annexation of Crimea, and the outbreak of war with Russia-backed separatists in Donbas. First, the oligarch, Ihor Kolomoyskyi came up with a proposal to nominate Medvedchuk as a governor, arguing that he could help install peace in Donbas. This did not happen. Instead, then President Petro Poroshenko, decided to use Medvedchuk's services as he wanted to have someone with access to Putin and who could help him organise an exchange of prisoners. This task was assigned to Medvedchuk who accomplished it with limited success; he also used every possible occasion to criticise NATO, the EU and the West.

Now, after the July parliamentary elections this year, Medvedchuk has returned to parliament. For the moment, the leading party, Zelenskyy's Servant of the People, does not leave much room for political intrigue. Hence Medvedchuk remains in the shadows. Yet, as always, he appears ready to come back and promote a legal change to Ukraine's political system, establish direct democracy and repair relations with Russia. Time will tell if he will ever succeed. NEE

Translated by Paulina Siegień and Iwona Reichardt

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We want to transform Ukraine

A conversation with Sviatoslav Yurash, a deputy of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine with the Servant of the People party. Interviewer: Kateryna Pryshchepa

KATERYNA PRYSHCHEPA: Can you tell us the story how you became an MP?

SVIATOSLAV YURASH: In February 2019 I joined Volodymyr Zelenskyy in his presidential run. It has a backstory, but I joined in February, and I have been with the president ever since. I think the president has his heart in the right place, and has the right team to put his mind in the right place – and the mind of the whole Ukrainian nation. And for me it was clear that a man like this could one, defeat Petro Poroshenko, and two, unite the Ukrainian nation. And that is what he has done. The question was what part this victory should I take credit for and what capacity do I see myself taking in the future. It was clear that the most useful capacity for me was as a communicator. A member of parliament seems like a natural continuation; and being as young as I am, I could not expect to be elected for other positions, so I chose to run as a member of parliament from Zelenskyy's party.

To clarify your motivation…

My initial reasons to support Zelenskyy were caused by Petro Poroshenko's misuse of power. Poroshenko abused the power he was given by the Maidan, and it was clear to me he was going to be defeated. So I was looking for someone who could defeat him. When Zelenskyy announced on January 1st that he was going to run, I was curious. I wanted to know what were his views and qualities besides the entertainment industry, and I found someone who was very clear, very determined and very structured. So I was looking for a way to become a member of the team. I went through friends in show business and managed to connect with Zelenskyy.

So did you meet him personally when you were working for his campaign?

Not at first, but I met him later during the presidential campaign and many times since. When I joined in February, the first person who vetted me was Ivan

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Bakanov, the chief of the campaign, who is now the chairman of the security services, or SBU. I told him my goals, the ways I could contribute to the campaign and voilà; the day passed, and I was in.

Were there many people like you working on the campaign, or were professional campaigners the majority?

Two-thirds of those working for the campaign were like me or people from Zelenskyy's entourage. And one-third of the people were integrated with Ukrainian political structures, and who could advise on how to do things.

And who were the people deciding on the campaign strategy?

The head of the campaign was Bakanov, so the final decisions belonged to him. But there were also people like Nikita Poturaiev, who essentially advised based on their vast experience.

Who was deciding on things like slogans, statements, ads? Who was running the campaign's social media?

Slogans and that sort of thing – there is no shortage of creativity among the people working with Zelenskyy, so there were always a lot of suggestions. The social media campaign was managed by Mykhailo Fedorov, who is now the deputy prime minister. He had a team working with him.

And what was your field of work?

Three things. First, civil society. I was trying to connect and build bridges, to explain who Zelenskyy was and what was his agenda. Second was international contacts; and third was advising on the campaign in Galicia (western Ukraine) – my home region.

So do you credit yourself with Zelenskyy's result in the western regions of Ukraine?

My advice wasn't always listened to. For example, the advice about relations with the church. The key to all the public issues in Galicia is the Greek Catholic church. It doesn't require you to bow to the church, but if you meet a priest and have a photo taken with him it detoxifies your image. So I advised our team to open relations with the church.

But the campaign managers decided against that?

Yes. They listened to other pieces of advice but not that one. There were separate campaign offices in Galicia (Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv and Ternopil), so I was not solely responsible for that area. My primary efforts were in Kyiv. I was trying to explain Zelenskyy's agenda to civil society.

Do you think you were successful?

Yes. We were able to bust the myths and challenge strong public opposition against Zelenskyy. My idea was to bring together representatives of civil society and have them meet with Zelenskyy in person. It didn't work out that way, but I managed to bring people one by one, including those from NGOs and from Plast (Ukrainian scouting organisation), and introduce them.

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I had an impression that Plast members went with Sviatoslav Vakarchuk in the end…

In the parliamentary elections, yes. In the presidential elections, many supported Zelenskyy. But I was working, first and foremost, on the detoxification of his image in those circles, because their dislike of Zelenskyy was not based on the reasons they gave, but because of aesthetic reasons. They all despised *Kvartal* (Zelenskyy's show and entertainment company – editor's note). They were all accustomed to western-style late night comedy and for them KVN style was repulsive so we had to work on that (KVN – is a Russian and former Soviet comedy competition show. Zelenskyy's career in show business started and was defined by his participation in KVN – editor's note).

Did you consider any other potential presidential candidates prior to joining Zelenskyy's campaign?

I did. I had been thinking about those elections for a very long time. Two years prior to the elections I thought Sviatoslav Vakarchuk was going to run and win the elections. So I was trying to motivate people to support him, but he decided not to run.

Did you have any criteria to assess potential candidates?

I was looking for someone who could win – someone who would not compromise on broader issues and someone who was for the free market.

You were not ready to accept Poroshenko as president for a second term. Why?

I despised Petro Poroshenko. I met him at the Maidan. I thought that he was a petty tyrant (*samodur*) seeing himself as the all-knowing centre of the universe. So I was never a fan. During the 2014 presidential elections, I wasn't able to vote. I registered to vote in Donetsk, where I was based at the time, but the elections in Donetsk did not take place. But he was elected with a clear majority so I thought we had to give him a chance. The moment when I became an outspoken critic of him was the time of the change of prime minister and the way it was handled. I was never a fan of Arseniy Yatsenyuk, but the way he was displaced under the cover of oligarchs made me see that Poroshenko is everything he pretends not to be.

Despite that, the new president and your political party decided to keep Arsen Avakov as the minister of interior after the parliamentary elections. He was appointed by Poroshenko…

Avakov is corrupt, but in reality Avakov and Poroshenko are the worst of enemies. Avakov was the reason Poroshenko couldn't rig the elections. I also met Avakov at the Maidan and later in Kharkiv in 2014. The reason why Kharkiv was stabilised so quickly in 2014 was thanks to Avakov. Not only thanks to law enforcement, but to the deals he made with the local elite. The loss of Kharkiv could have been much worse than the loss of Donetsk.

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Photo courtesy of the College of Europe in Natolin.

When was it decided that you would become an MP candidate? Did you approach the campaign managers declaring your wish to become a candidate, or did they approach you?

It just became clear from a certain point – after my media involvement during the campaign.

And how were other potential MPs from the Servant of the People selected?

They were recruited from different sources – those who were working for the campaign, local leaders and public figures and those recommended by people working for the campaign. There were factors such as experience, personal appeal and one's chances of winning in a particular district. People who were working for the campaign went through an additional vetting process to see if they were team players and if they could contribute as MPs.

Could you give reasons why people like Zhan Belenyuk (an Olympic medallist and

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world champion in Greco-Roman wrestling) were added to the party list? Was he prepared to be an MP?

Let's define our terms. What is a member of parliament? Should this person be an academic who would be juggling the terms or should it be a communicator? In my view, this person should be a communicator who connects the experts with the public. Belenyuk, being an international sport celebrity and the first African Ukrainian to be elected an MP, is in a unique situation. Not to mention the fact that Ukrainian sport is a huge subject. So Belenyuk is perfectly entitled to be an MP.

But how are you going to select experts to communicate with? Experts can have their own beliefs and agendas.

You should have many of them and see them in action competing with each other, and then see their biases in action. If you remember the campaign videos, there were many people sitting around and debating issues. That was a small part of what was taking place. The role of the MP is to be sitting in the middle of the debate and decide which arguments are strongest.

Regarding the activities of your party in parliament, there have been controversial decisions. There were reports that only some MPs from the Servant of the People are authorised to talk to the press, and the majority are not.

This is a myth. It is just that some people, like myself, feel more at ease talking to the press, or are better experts in some specific area, and there are people who are more confident in practical work. And, moreover, not all contact with the media is time worthy.

Your party colleagues have decided to suspend opposition MP, Iryna Herashchenko, for five days recently. This was a controversial move.

Ms Herashchenko called us "Russian green men" and there is a law on the books that states that an MP who offends other MPs can be suspended for some period of time.

It looks like a silencing of the opposition. The decision to suspend was taken by the committee on the rules of procedure where the chairman's seat and the majority of seats are held by the Servant of the People MPs.

I have been on committee meetings with Ms Herashchenko. She uses every opportunity to make a statement and to talk for an enormous length of time on every issue in order to obstruct any work. That's her job, to stall the process. The point is that Herashchenko is not a victim, but an obstructive politician, who does everything possible to obstruct the process, which she has a right to do. But the story is not about her, but about the rules and following the law in parliament. They accuse us of not following the law, which is untrue. And if occasionally they do not like us following the law, they create all this drama.

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Can you tell me more about your party's political agenda? What do you want to achieve in the next two or three years with your majority in parliament?

Broadly speaking, we want Ukraine to feel like a completely different place after we have completed our five year term. What it means is deregulation and the rule of law.

But could you be more specific? Deregulation to what extent?

Basically, we want to do an audit of the government structures, and dispose of features that do not have any useful functions. In that sense, we are libertarians.

Yet, it doesn't seem that your party has a detailed plan of action thus far. Different ministers sometimes make contradictory statements…

We are having a public discussion on the direction of change and the statements indicate the process of discussion. But since we have a majority in parliament, we can speak about the future with confidence because we can shape it, and we do not have to compromise with the oligarchs or the opposition.

There seems to be a political consensus of oligarchs who support Zelenskyy's presidency.

Some oligarchs decided not to work against us after the first round of the presidential elections, but it wasn't like that from the outset and the campaign was not dependent on the oligarchs.

Zelenskyy and the Servant of the People had support of the major TV channel in Ukraine, 1+1, which belongs to Ihor Kolomoyskyi.

1+1 TV was helpful. That's true. But that was just one of the factors of our success.

Sviatoslav Yurash is a deputy of the Ukraine's Verkhovna Rada for the Servant of the People party. At age 23, he is the youngest member of parliament. He is the son of Andriy Yurash – a Ukrainian official who was heavily involved in Petro Poroshenko's efforts to gain Autocephaly for the Ukrainian Orthodox Church.

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Uncertainty and risk in Lukashenka's times

ALEXEI KAZAKEVICH

The last 25 years in Belarus should not be seen as a period of development that was based on some predetermined plan. Rather it is a story of maintaining power, local successes and the failures of one man.

The history of a country can be divided into periods of growth and decline, euphoria and insecurity, crises and rebuilding. In Belarus, however, the past 25 years can be described as the time of Alyaksandr Lukashenka. Yet, a true picture of this period is much more blurred and nuanced. It is therefore difficult to make a clear, one-sided, assessment of the last quarter century and call it a period of decline or growth. We cannot even say that it was a period of strengthened sovereignty or increased external dependencies, a period of development or the weakening of national identity. The history of this epoch is a history of contradictory strategies, and that is why its main outcomes are worth a deeper look.

Strong authorities, weak institutions

Already at the very early stages of his rule, Lukashenka managed a full grab on power. His political programme was based on the promise of a strong government, and this is what 44.8 per cent of citizens wanted when they voted for Lukashenka in the first round of the 1994 elections. At that time, Belarusians were clearly exhausted from the economic crisis, corruption and political instability that haunted the state since it gained independence after the fall of the Soviet Union. The second round of elections brought Lukashenka even greater success with over 80 per cent

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of the vote. The 1996 referendum, which presented changes to the constitution and consolidated Lukashenka's support, was condemned as undemocratic by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and western powers. Nevertheless, it allowed Lukashenka to implement his programme and gain full control over the executive branch. This in turn led to a situation where his decrees and orders became more powerful than laws that were passed by parliament. The last stage of consolidating Lukashenka's regime – which included an exchange of the ruling elite, an exclusion of opposition from politics and decision-making, and control of the information space – took place in the aftermath of the 2001 presidential elections.

The political system that was introduced still exists today. First and foremost, it does not suppose significant co-operation with political opposition and civil society and their visible representations in state bodies. Since the 2016 parliamentary elections, only two MPs could have been called forms of opposition, which is still better than between 2004 and 2016 when there was not a single one. In regional councils, which have around 18,000 deputies at different levels, there are probably around ten representatives who could be associated with the opposition. The opposition's participation in executive power, even the holding of secondary posts, is out of the question at this time. It is the president who nominates ministers and heads of state committees, regional executives and judges. Even deputy ministers and heads of large state-owned enterprises are nominated by Lukashenka.

This organisation of the political system has one special characteristic. Namely, an exceptional weakness of state institutions. Clearly, the president has never showed an interest in participating in the game of politics. He has never built a coalition nor any political organisation or party. As a result, Belarus now has a system that is very simple. The president remains the only guarantee that the rules of the game are followed, that conflicts are solved and the main decisions are made.

This weakness of institutions is actually a very unique characteristic. In most authoritarian regimes, various forms of collective political activities can be identified. In Belarus, on the other hand, they are simply absent. The Belarusian parliament has no fractions, nor political groupings. There are no political groups in local councils. Deputies to the parliament initiate less than three-five per cent of laws per year. Since 1996, when the referendum took place, parliament has not vetoed a single presidential decree; while in the past decade no bill proposed by the president and cabinet of ministers has been refuted. The role of the local councils is even more marginal.

Interestingly, no political party representing Lukashenka has been created. Political parties – those that both support and oppose the regime – operate on the peripheries of political life. In the current parliament, only around 15 per cent of

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deputies are affiliated with political parties, which is actually a record number since 2000. The same can be said about the Belarusian civil society. A majority of active NGOs are perceived as disloyal towards the government which, in turn, limits their opportunities of working with the authorities. The largest, publically funded organisations, such as the Belarusian Republican Union of Youth or the Belarusian Union of Women, are essentially part of the bureaucratic apparatus.

Following the Soviet model, Lukashenka has developed quite an effective bureaucratic structure which is centralised and loyal. This administrative "vertical" concentrates all political power. The state machine is thus quite different from what exists in other post-Soviet states. It is characterised by a high degree of steering, which is used to guarantee relatively effective public services and a small degree of petty corruption. Ultimately, this system of stability and obedience depends on one man. All other political institutions, apart from the administrative vertical, are extremely weak. This makes the system fragile and unpredictable, especially in a situation where an opportunity to change power arises – should it be an internal conflict, or an intervention from outside. Being a prolongation of the Soviet system, the Belarusian system is incapable of solving this problem.

Foreign policy

In July 1994 when Lukashenka came to power, Belarus was an independent state for less than three years. Its foreign policy was still at a very early stage of development. It was haunted not only by problems of weak state institutions, personnel shortages and lack of experience, but also by the lack of public consensus in regards to the direction of foreign policy.

Like domestic policies, the government did not want to engage in a complicated and balanced game in terms of foreign relations. It chose Russia as the priority and directed its efforts there. It is difficult to say to what extent this decision was driven by economic interests and political values and to what extent it reflected populistic tendencies and personal ambitions of Belarus's president on the Russian political scene. Nonetheless, all efforts were put into the pursuit of this strategy.

Consequently, in April 1996, Lukashenka and Yeltsin signed an agreement on the creation of the Belarusian and Russian "community"; while in April 1997 a "union" was sealed to become, in 1999, the Union State. The latter directly assumed that Belarus would renounce part of its sovereignty. However, from the very beginning, closer relations with Russia were pure improvisation without any concrete plan. The Belarusian authorities showed they had ambitious plans to participate in the Russian political project and to profit from it, mainly with access to cheap

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Russian gas and markets. The Kremlin, in turn, wanted to have Belarus in its political orbit and to use integration to increase its popularity at home.

However, once Vladimir Putin became president of the Russian Federation, this model of relations became outdated. Lukashenka's goal was to use Russia as much as possible in order to increase revenue. He wanted to achieve this without losing power or the state's sovereignty. For Moscow, meanwhile, it was crucial to keep Belarus dependent on Russia and, at the same time, decrease its support of the Belarusian economy. The political game between Belarus and Russia has always been non-transparent. Both sides never fully trusted one another and the real effects of their common actions were rarely in line with the earlier declared goals. Regardless of all of that, Moscow has managed to keep Minsk within its political network and economic dependence. Belarus, in turn, has managed to maintain relations with Moscow without fully surrendering its sovereignty. Relations between the two states depend on the relations between their leaders and informal agreements.

Russia has many mechanisms to influence Belarus. These include a visible domination of Russian media in Belarus, economic dependence, and pro-Russian attitudes within the Belarusian political elite. Russian influences are also to be found within the security and military agencies, which creates the risk of external manipulation.

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Since 1996, Belarus has been generally isolated from the West. However, after 2008 – and even more visibly since the 2014 Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine – the authorities took some serious steps to diversify its foreign policy and find a counterbalance to Russian dominance. As a result, Minsk's relations with the West gradually improved. The initiative to host negotiations over the conflict in Donbas was considered Lukashenka's success. In 2015–2016 the European Union relieved the majority of its sanctions against Belarus, while the US removed sanctions in 2015. But the consequences of long-term isolation are still felt. The intensity of co-operation with the EU and US is relatively limited when compared to engagement with Moscow.

Consequently, Belarusian foreign policy remains asymmetrical. The level of co-operation and dependence on Russia significantly outweighs all other political and economic alternatives. An attempt to find counterbalance in the West, China or elsewhere has only brought limited results. At the same time, relations with Russia remain non-transparent and unpredictable. All this poses a serious threat to Belarus's independence.

Economy: crisis, growth and stagnation

There is no other issue that would cause as much discussion over Belarus as the economic successes and failures of Lukashenka's government. For many post-Soviet leftists who feel nostalgic towards the Soviet past, Lukashenka remains a symbol against neoliberalism. The same is true the other way round – for liberals, he is an anti-hero, one who kills entrepreneurship and business initiatives. Yet this contradiction is no longer valid. Over the past decade Belarus has adopted market-based policies, even though the role of the state in the economy remains dominant. Lukashenka's strategy includes retaining large state-owned industry, subsidising the rural economy, large social transfers, as well as healthcare spending. Thus, inequality remains relatively low and there is not much of a gap between the rich and poor. Given all of this, salaries are not high. Large unproductive branches of the economy are being kept afloat which is accompanied by a low level of entrepreneurship and an insufficient use of new technologies and research.

Lukashenka has managed to retain much of the Soviet economic legacy and social programmes, but has had less success in building new enterprises and branches of the economy. In the last decade, development in the information technology sector has not compensated for the losses generated in traditional branches of industry, mainly in machine-building.

As mentioned above, during Lukashenka's time Belarus has been through a few periods of economic growth and prosperity and decline. This includes the eco-

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nomic crisis of the mid-1990s followed by a period of stable growth in 2002–2008. Certainly, the latest global financial crisis hit Belarus much harder, and since 2012 its growth has slowed down. As a result, the country was hit by a recession in the years 2015–2016, while what took place in the next number of years resembled stagnation more than development.

Strong ideology, weak identity

Lukashenka's activities in the area of culture and history have always been inconsistent. They are not based on any concrete strategies. In the early years of Lukashenka's rule, there was a clear focus on Russia (its culture, language and history) with a constant emphasis on "unity" and "closeness" between the Belarusian and Russian nations. The two nations were said to have been united by the legacy of Soviet history. The turning point came with a 1995 referendum which made Russian the official language of Belarus, while historic Belarusian symbols (like the white-red-white flag and the Pahonia coat of arms) were replaced by modified Soviet emblems. The true Russification was taken one step further when practically all Belarusian schools were closed in urban areas. Russian became the language of politics, business and higher education, while the Belarusian language started to be treated as a sign of political disloyalty.

This policy became problematic in the early 2000s. The sole focus on Russia, Russian history and culture started to hinder the resilience of the Belarusian state. As a result, a new tendency emerged which included clearing culture and political ideology from Russian nationalism and filling it up with the "ideology of the Belarusian state". The centre of the new system was to be built around such terms as "nation-state" and "sovereignty". Officially, the new policy entered into force in March 2003. The search for a "Belarusian model of development" and a "Belarusian path" was accompanied by hundreds of articles, television programmes, and many books and conferences. Apart from the intellectual component, the new policy included wide information campaigns and the creation of ideology departments in all state agencies. Despite this, attempts to create a culturally neutral "ideology" did not succeed. Starting around 2008, there has been a careful inclusion of different elements of Belarusian culture its and pre-Soviet past into the official ideology. This tendency called "soft Belarusanisation" received a new impulse after the Russian Federation invaded Crimea in 2014 and war broke out in eastern Ukraine.

The sole focus on Russia, Russian history and culture started to hinder the stability of the Belarusian state.

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Since then the usage of Belarusian in social and business life has lost its political sensitivity. Belarus's history from before the Soviet period received more representation in museums, school curricula, historical research and state media. The authorities even allowed the erection of monuments to such historical figures as Tadeusz Kościuszko (in 2018), Gediminas (in 2019), and even to celebrate the 100 years since the establishment of the Belarusian Soviet Republic.

Yet despite these changes, Lukashenka's record of building a Belarusian identity is full of contradictions. The programme to support the Belarusian language has not yet been approved, while the official historical narrative is still based on the Soviet period and the glorification of the Great Patriotic War (1941–1945). Russian media and popular culture have not lost their dominating position either. In the last 25 years of Lukashenka's rule, the many problems of Belarusian identity remain unresolved.

Lukashenka's rule is not the past yet, although we can point to some characteristics of his rule. Certainly the last 25 years should not be seen as a period that was based on some predetermined plan. Rather it is a story of maintaining power, and the local successes and failures of one man. In addition, Belarus has established quite an effective state apparatus, one that guarantees political stability and lacks serious internal conflicts. It is also clear, however, that the country has paid a heavy price for stability that includes weakness of political institutions, the breaching of political rights, and the lack of democratic rule.

The history of Lukashenka's rule is thus characterised by contradictions and the future remains uncertain. The stability of the country's economic and political system solely depends on one man, which will generate a huge risk when a transfer of power takes place, be it as a result of an internal crisis or external intervention. All this could have unpredictable results not only for Belarus, but for the region as a whole. NEF

Translated by Paulina Siegień and Iwona Reichardt

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The downfall of a captured state

DENIS CENUSA

In June this year Moldova ended its one-party rule and political deadlock when a pragmatic coalition of pro-democratic and pro-Russian forces took power. This coalition now faces a series of challenges, which puts justice reform and anti-corruption as the top priorities. Realistically speaking, however, to deliver any substantial outcomes the government is going to need time, support and stability.

Moldova has produced an unexpected, though much welcomed, democratic recovery after it disembarked from the oligarchic-centred political system in June 2019. The unequivocal recognition by the major powers – the European Union, the United States and Russia – was certainly instrumental in helping Moldova overcome its political deadlock. The Socialist Party and the ACUM bloc of pro-democratic forces have, for now, put aside their geopolitical differences and agreed to govern together.

More than four months have passed since power peacefully transitioned (in mid-June 2019) to the coalition, while the former ruling party – the Democratic Party under the oligarchic leadership of Vladimir Plahotniuc – went into opposition. Initially, the coalition claimed the country is "free" from oligarchic influence. However, there are voices from within the ACUM bloc and elsewhere that question the coalition's ability to successfully accomplish its de-oligarchisation agenda.

Opposition instincts

The ruling coalition has begun what it calls the "cleansing" of state institutions and the public sector from malicious practices in an effort to dismantle the

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oligarchic pyramid of power. Different institutions have undergone an informal lustration process (e.g. anti-corruption, prosecution, etc.) that castigated former allies of Plahotniuc. The legislature lifted the immunity of five MPs that represent the core of the oligarchic regime – Shor Party and the former ruling Democratic Party. Three of them are investigated in the banking fraud case and the other two for deviations committed in the 2013 privatisation of the Chișinău International Airport. Consequently, this has led to an implosion of the former potent power vertical. Yet the governing coalition, still led by their oppositional instincts, often blames the presence of oligarchic interference when the reforms are delayed or fail.

The authorities readily confess their mistakes or constrains. This allows them to sow more realistic expectations with the public. Communication with domestic and international media is frequently used to promote the government's agenda or to mitigate the errors. Engaging with audiences, via live sessions on social networks, is still the main mode of direct communication by Prime Minister Maia Sandu (via Facebook) and President Igor Dodon (primarily via Odnoklassniki).

In order to deliver any substantial reforms, the government is going to need time, as well as political stability.

Inside the reform agenda, the justice sector and the fight against corruption are combined as the top priority. In order to deliver any substantial policy outcomes, the government is going to need time, as well as political stability and mandate-longevity. Meanwhile, cooperation with external partners such as the EU, US and Russia has intensified. Through an active foreign policy, more financial support is being sought which could help offset the complicated production of "successful reforms" at home.

It is important to note that Moldova experienced political change through democratic means, even if it occurred amid a political and constitutional crisis provoked by an oligarchy-driven struggle for power. Taking a look at the wider region, this situation bears little resemblance to the well-engineered "new faces" paradigm which has brought Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his Servant of the People party to power after this year's Ukrainian election. Nor are there any similarities with the 2018 Armenian Velvet Revolution that completely swept the old kleptocratic parties from the decision-making process. Within these comparisons, Moldova seems like a less spectacular case of political transformation in the Eastern Partnership region. However, what is common in all these cases is the struggle against the old systems: the corrupt oligarchic and kelptocratic ones.

The degree of political change in Moldova, nonetheless, is less dramatic in comparison. On the one hand, the society is strongly polarised and it injects geopolitical preferences in its voting decisions (e.g. pro-West vs. pro-Russia). This is

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a very difficult task for a national leader looking to unite the country. Recent polls suggest that popularity for the main political leaders – Dodon, Sandu and Andrei Năstase – is below 30 per cent. This means that Moldova lacks a figure like Zelenskyy or Nikol Pashinyan who have the ability to unite.

On the other hand, if there were to be early elections, none of the current governing parties would manage to obtain a parliamentary majority. The pro-Russian socialists or the pro-EU ACUM bloc would need a coalition partner to rule with certain stability. At the same time, a stable government depends on the personalities within the coalition. In Ukraine and Armenia, the new ruling classes have a complete majority in their legislature and total control over the executive. This means a surplus of decision-making power and a prosperous terrain to unconditionally conduct the most sensitive reforms. Such a political comfort does not exist in Moldova's coalition-based government, and may in fact be good for the country's democracy.

Old habits die hard

Even the most well-intentioned government would be unable to perform miracles in such a short period of time, especially when taking into account the several urgent issues left behind by their predecessor. Inflated public expenditure as a result of unfeasible populist projects overstretched the state budget. It did not help that EU aid was suspended in 2018 due to failed reforms (on money-laundering and anti-corruption) and democratic backsliding. The ineffectiveness of the banking fraud investigation (which saw the disappearance of one billion US dollars from Moldovan banks in 2014) led to no asset recovery and allowed the preliminary sentencing of businessman Ilan Șhor to avoid prison; in fact, he subsequently entered parliament, and even fled the country after the oligarchic regime fell. Many state institutions, under pressure, adopted controversial decisions and thus discredited themselves. Crushed by a complicated election system and other limitations, the democratic institutions suffered a major breakdown, thus undermining the fairness of the February 2019 election.

The first steps taken by the Socialist-ACUM coalition matched the demands expressed in the declaration titled "On Moldova as a captured state" adopted on June 8th 2019. This brought increased political pressure as the ruling coalition worked to remove the heads of key positions such as the intelligence service, central electoral committee, the prosecutor office and the anti-corruption centre. Several other institutions like the national bank, the audio-visual co-ordinating council, the energy regulatory agency, the prosecutor's office, as well as the magistrate councils,

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have retained their leaderships which were appointed during the oligarchic regime and thus remain heavily mistrusted. The coalition perceives these institutions as Plahotniuc's unconquered fortresses.

The goal is to depoliticise every corner of the state system. State secretaries (formerly deputy-minister positions) who expressed political loyalty towards Plahotniuc's Democratic Party were sacked. Similar cleansing acts took place within the diplomatic representation abroad. Sandu demanded that ministers assess their staff and remove those who "do not act for the benefit of citizens" or commit acts of sabotage against the government.

Despite the harsh attitude against the former government's control of state institutions, the coalition has yet been unable to restrain its own instincts of politicisation. Examples include the information and security service and the anti-corruption centre, which are now headed by people affiliated with the Socialist Party. A more dramatic situation unfolded around the appointment of the constitutional court's six judges. Two candidates were appointed, but the legal procedures were neglected, while at least three of the six judges openly backed the ruling political force. Finally, the new head of the constitutional court – Vladimir Turcan – was, not so long ago, one of the leading voices of the socialists within parliament. These cases question the willingness, and the ability, of the Socialist-ACUM coalition to break old habits and to truly invest in independent institutions.

Challenges ahead

During the end of summer, the government and parliament showed some dedication to moving forward with the reform agenda. The concern about Plahotniuc's potential to engineer sabotage, as well as the huge public demand for swift results, limited the government's room for manoeuvre.

The coalition should weather the late-October local elections. The by-election for four liberated seats in the legislature will also take place under the mixed voting's principle of single-member constituency. This came about as a result of the decision by Maia Sandu and Andrei Năstase to hold onto their jobs as prime minister and minister of interior respectively, while the fugitive oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc gave up his parliament seat from abroad. The independent candidate Viorel Melnic renounced his seat as well. The elections will take place approximately five months since the coalition came to power. The results will assess the political mood of the county since democracy has resurfaced.

Nevertheless, the government needs a transfusion of stability which can be achieved if the new coalition agreement, sealed in the middle of September, will

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last long enough. Any decisions the government makes needs to persuade rural voters, where democracy is often seen as an empty concept, especially if it does not come with higher social payments or other material benefits. Additionally, the political spectrum, thanks to the wind of democratisation, is showing signs of revitalisation on both the political left and right. On the right, the pro-unification with the Romanian political party – Save Bessarabia Union (USB) – is condemning the ACUM bloc for governing with the pro-Russian socialists. The pro-Romanian stance is voiced including from within the ACUM bloc by such MPs like Octavian Țîcu, who broke ACUM's homogeneity when decided to run in the local elections in Chișinău against his colleague and minister of interior, Andrei Năstase. On the centre-left, the Moscow-linked former mayor of Bălți, Renato Usatîi, and his Our Party and the re-activated Communist Party will certainly challenge the Socialist Party in power.

In terms of reform, the coalition's energy is channelled towards the justice system. It can produce a positive chain reaction in other policy areas, qualitatively transforming the public and private sectors and improving the public confidence in the state. The reform includes the following: 1) an evaluation mechanism to select judges; 2) the rationalisation of the fight against corruption; and, 3) a multi-layered filter to appoint the prosecutor general. Firstly, a mechanism to evaluate judges will target all three levels of the court system. A similar concept will be used to assess the prosecutors. According to the minister of justice Olesea Stamate, European experts who served as judges or prosecutors in the past should form one-third of the future 18-member evaluating committee. Secondly, the anti-corruption prosecutor's office has to deal with the large corruption cases, with smaller corruption cases transferred to the anti-corruption centre. Previously, the prime minister suggested establishing a special office that would coordinate the justice and anti-corruption reforms. Thirdly, the next prosecutor general will go through more filters of selection, with a starting point at the ministry of justice, after the prosecutor law was amended. The superior prosecutor council will continue to participate in the selection, but only based on the final candidates filtered by the ministry. Attracting civil society and lawyer associations will infuse meritocracy, as well as the elimination of the criterion regarding the mandatory five years of prosecutor experience.

East-West balance

In relation to foreign affairs, the coalition has to survive the challenge of its geopolitical dichotomy. Restoring relations with major regional stakeholders is what matters the most. Yet the socialists, through the voice of President Dodon,

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popularise the idea that Moldova will not become a member of the EU any time soon. Although it sounds pragmatic, this is also discouraging the slightly revitalised pro-EU mood within society. At the same time, Dodon is a consecrated promoter of the "balanced external policy" which entails a strategic partnership with Russia. Sandu has openly admitted that the ACUM bloc is dealing with European integration while the socialists are good at exploring opportunities from Russia (e.g. gas prices, trade, migration issues). The distribution of responsibility represents a way out of a dangerously sensitive policy area. Even if the EU remains the top priority and the European budget assistance is restored, with the macro-financial assistance available soon, the socialists naturally lean towards the East. They like the idea of activating co-operation within the Commonwealth of Independent States and conducting an informal dialogue with the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union. In fact, too close a rapprochement between the socialists and the Kremlin entails medium and long-term risks, which could limit Dodon's ability to exercise political control over the security sector including the ministry of defence, the intelligence services and the bureau co-ordinating the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict.

The Socialist-ACUM coalition needs to implement the new engaging deal, without which the internal cohesion of the ACUM will inevitably strain. The latter already contains several rebellious voices that justifiably fear the indirect influence Moscow has through the political empowerment of the socialists. In this respect, such warnings require preventative action instead of rejection or trivialisation. In parallel, overcoming the oligarchic legacy should be further prioritised. The government also has to deal with the critical structural shortcomings that make the state vulnerable to vested interests.

In the end, genuine shock therapy may be needed to make the institutions function properly. The recently initiated justice reform could become the favourable solution, thus enabling that the necessary checks-and-balances are in place. However, without a stable, coherent and efficient government, real political will, incisive public scrutiny and active conditionality-based external assistance, any of the changes will be, at best, cosmetic.

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Listen for more: Check out the Talk Eastern Europe podcast episode 19: Strange Bedfellows in Moldova.

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Slovakia's new wave and its limits

PAVOL SZALAI

The new Slovak president illustrates that an alternative to Central European populism is politically viable. But her power is tamed by constitutional limits and the lasting and deep political polarisation between liberal democrats and conservative nationalists. The latter can particularly bar her allies from building a stable government after the February 2020 parliamentary elections.

Three days before the June European Council meeting, Slovak Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini was still against the target of reaching climate neutrality in 2050. But two days before the summit, Pellegrini met the new Slovak President and made a U-turn the very same day. He said Slovakia was in favour of the EU goal, steering away from the other countries in the Visegrad Group. On June 20th the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland together with Estonia eventually blocked the approval of the target by the European Council. But Slovakia was not among them and stood alongside France and other Western European countries arguing for a more ambitious climate policy.

It is not clear why the Slovak prime minister changed his opinion. Zuzana Čaputová, the new president, had barely the power to force him to do so. But it is safe to say that Čaputová significantly contributed to Slovakia's shift. As a matter of fact, Pellegrini announced his decision standing next to her. Just a couple of days before, the new president, a former activist, in her inaugural speech warned against the threat of the climate crisis and climate refugees.

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Fragmented political map

This story says a lot about Slovakia's new political arrangement after Čaputová's election victory. Environmental issues, together with the rule of law, are her stated policy priorities. They distinguish her not only from the current government and – to a large extent – from the former President Andrej Kiska, but also from her peers in the other Visegrad countries. New alliances with Western European countries, be it to the detriment of regional ties, are a real possibility for her. Indeed, Čaputová resembles Emmanuel Macron more than Miloš Zeman.

But her power is limited. First of all, the Slovak constitution reduces the authority of the president to a largely ceremonial role. Most of the executive power is in the hands of the government. And Slovakia is far from having a powerful pro-European government in line with Čaputová's political values. Although the upcoming 2020 parliamentary elections in February are an opportunity to defeat the current nationalist populist coalition (including a Hungarian party in decline), there are four possible outcomes: a liberal democratic government, a nationalist populist alternative of the Orbán or Kaczyński variety, a combination of parties from both camps, or a political deadlock. Given the fragmentation of the Slovak party system, whatever the coalition's composition, it can be threatened with instability. The worst-case scenario from Čaputová's point of view would be a strong nationalist populist government which would marginalise her. And even if the elections result in a government that is friendly to her, the fine compromise – just like her own public support – can be shattered by certain social issues like gay rights or migration.

A strong story

Čaputová has a strong story which gives her the clout of authenticity, a key asset in today's electoral campaigns across Europe. As a lawyer she offered her services to several non-profit causes. But it was the landfill case in Pezinok, a vineyard town 20 kilometres from Bratislava, which gained her the reputation of an internationally-recognised activist for the environment and rule of law. In the case lasting 14 years, Čaputová defended the rights of the residents of Pezinok against the local oligarchs building the landfill. The waste dump was at odds with the law, regulation and jurisprudence, and it correlated with an increased rate of cancer in the surrounding area.

As an attorney, she stood against certain ministries, state authorities and courts. Opposing them, she fought for the inclusiveness and transparency of the process

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of the construction of the landfill. In 2013 Čaputová won the case before the Court of Justice of the European Union which acknowledged the inhabitants' right to information. Echoing this decision, the Slovak Supreme Court later ruled that the waste dump was illegal. Čaputová's contribution was recognised internationally when she won the Goldman Environmental Prize awarded by a US non-profit.

The legal battle – bearing the ingredients of Čaputová's future political stance – was a story about protecting the rights of Slovak citizens. Indeed, the landfill developers had too many connections in the local law enforcement agencies. For a certain time, one of their representatives was none other than Marian Kočner, a controversial businessman now charged with the murder of the Slovak investigative journalist, Ján Kuciak, and his fiancée, Martina Kušnírová.

Campaigning on an anti-corruption and pro-environment platform, Čaputová won the March presidential election with 58 per cent of the vote.

Čaputová was engaged in politics before the murder: as a member of the local city council, and, several years later, the vice chairwoman of the centrist party Progressive Slovakia. But she decided to run for president as a result of the murders. The rest is history: the more that Čaputová became known, the more public support she received. Campaigning on an anti-corruption and pro-environment platform, she finally won the March 2019 presidential election over the candidate of the ruling Smer-SD party and Vice President of the European Commission Maroš Šefčovič. She defeated him with 58 per cent of the vote.

The conservative vote

Čaputová's victory, however, has already some bitterness to it. Although she showed empathy for voters of extreme and nationalist candidates during the second round of the election, most of them probably did not vote for her, according to an analysis by the daily *Denník N*. Their preferred candidates were Marian Kotleba, leader of the Popular Party Our Slovakia, who is nostalgic of fascism, and Štefan Harabin, a controversial judge and former minister of justice who is close to Vladimír Mečiar, the former authoritarian prime minister. In the first round, together they accumulated 25 per cent of the vote. As for these voters, Čaputová expressed sympathy for their "frustration from the arrogance of the powerful and from the injustice". Yet, they did not rally to her.

It is also noteworthy that both Kotleba and Harabin branded themselves as conservative. Their defence of traditional values contrasted with that of Čaputová's re-

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Slovak President Zuzana Čaputová has a strong story which gives her the clout of authenticity, a key asset in today's electoral campaigns across Europe.

fusal to condemn LBGT rights, abortion and immigration. In the second round, she had to face also the conservative and anti-immigrant tones in Šefčovič's rhetoric. Despite her liberal views, Čaputová attempted to reach out by saying "I want to speak also to conservative voters". But she did not win over many Christian voters, which was then reflected by the decision of the main conservative opposition party, the Christian Democratic Movement, not to support any of the two candidates in the second round. It was unsurprising that she lost to Šefčovič in one of Slovakia's most conservative districts.

Čaputová did not fully unite liberals and conservatives against the current government, and divisions remain present in the current opposition. This may mark not only the president's tenure, but also the stability of a future government. History has a lesson to tell in this regard: socio-cultural issues were one of the major reasons for the fall of the two most recent centre-right governments in 2006 and 2012.

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Limits

The other limit to Čaputová's power is the Slovak constitution. The Slovak president's role is largely ceremonial. He or she can veto laws voted by the parliament, but the latter can overturn the president's veto with an absolute majority. He or she appoints the prime minister, who still has to win the confidence of parliament. The president de jure appoints and recalls ministers, but de facto has to follow the requests of the prime minister.

The president has a slightly larger field of manoeuvre concerning foreign policy. According to Article 102 of the Slovak constitution, "the president shall represent the Slovak Republic externally, negotiate and ratify international treaties". But traditionally Slovak presidents use the provision of the same article allowing them to "delegate the negotiating of international treaties to the government of the Slovak Republic or, upon the consent of the government, to its individual members". There is one simple reason for this: the president does not have the administrative capacities to conduct foreign policy.

Although Čaputová voiced clearly some of her views in domestic and international debates, the constitutional and administrative limits have already curbed her power to enforce them. The president may have won the prime minister's blessing for EU's climate neutrality in 2050, but she lost the battle with the parliament over a new law on nuclear energy. Čaputová vetoed it in July in order to protect the right of citizens to information, the inclusiveness of the permitting process, and the possibility to question the decisions of Slovakia's Nuclear Safety Authority. Given both Čaputová's personal experience and the tensions with Austria over the construction of two new Slovak reactors, her concerns were understandable. Yet she did not convince parliament which, in September, overturned her veto.

Čaputová has been more successful with the rule of law. In what became one of her strongest political declarations since she took office, she called for the resignation of Monika Jankovská, a state secretary at the ministry of justice, last August. In the past, Jankovská exchanged a thousand text messages with Marian Kočner who, according to the disclosed communication, used her political influence to advance his own interests. Constitutionally, the president cannot recall a state secretary; it is the government's prerogative. Again, the real reason why Pellegrini did not support Jankovská is hard to know, but it is reasonable to speculate that the president contributed to the public pressure against Kočner's ally.

Promoting the rule of law internationally, the new president has defended liberal democracy on her visits to other Visegrad states. In Prague, she expressed an "understanding for the Wenceslas Square full of peaceful people, because I had an understanding for the squares in Bratislava", drawing an implicit parallel between

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the protests against the abuse of power by Andrej Babiš in the Czech Republic and former Prime Minister Robert Fico in Slovakia. In Budapest, she reminded Viktor Orbán, that "liberal democracy … is the best way to protect the rights of all minorities", echoing the paradox of Hungarian's regime being illiberal at home and at the same time promoting the rights of Hungarian minorities abroad. And in Warsaw, Čaputová recalled the 30th anniversary of the fall of communism when Poland was "a big inspiration for the whole region" and paid homage to Lech Wałęsa, a political enemy of the current government.

As for the Visegrad Group, Čaputová said in Budapest that "it must be about promoting the values of democracy, freedom and rule of law, also the values of European integration, in line with the initial agreement which gave rise to the V4, so that we are not perceived as those who divide or weaken the European Union". When she later visited Paris, she warned the V4 that Slovakia is "ready to build partnerships which will go beyond our geographic region".

But can Čaputová translate her rhetoric into official foreign policy? Currently, France and other countries attempt to advance the rule of law procedure against Hungary, according to Article 7 of the Treaty of the European Union triggered earlier by the European Parliament. Slovak diplomacy is steered by Miroslav Lajčák, the foreign minister and a nominee of the Smer-SD party, who prefers "dialogue to sanctions", although Article 7 foresees a continued dialogue before any decision on the suspension of a member state's rights in the EU Council. In any case, Slovakia did not give any sign of wanting to make progress in the procedure against Hungary according to Article 7 at the latest General Affairs Council.

Overcoming divisions

Čaputová nevertheless remains a beacon of hope for Central Europe. She is living proof that a proponent of liberal democracy can win a popular election in a Visegrad country, and she has shown that she can still work on important issues with Visegrad partner countries. With Polish President, Andrzej Duda, she shares the view of NATO as a guarantee of security. With Hungarian President, János Áder, she agrees on the importance of the fight against climate change. At the same time, she represents an alternative to the nationalist-populist governments in Hungary, Poland and even in her home Slovakia.

Moreover, she has not broken with the traditions of her predecessor, Andrej Kiska, and remains in favour of the EU and NATO, defends human rights and criticises corruption. But liberal democracy is so important to her that she exports her views abroad and is ready to seek new partnerships beyond the Visegrad.

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In the current political setup, Slovakia's new president is in conflict with the ruling class in the region, and thus undermines the Visegrad's image of a united front against the West. Čaputová is a unique politician in the region, just as she is the only Slovak president who did not seek to become a member of the communist party. She resembles Václav Havel more than any other Slovak politician since 1989, which was determined by her own dissidence in the Slovak oligarchic democracy – paradoxically enough – after the fall of communism.

Čaputová resembles Václav Havel more than any other Slovak politician since 1989.

As said before, her power is limited. She has experienced her first number of setbacks: the mixed results in uniting liberals and conservatives, and her failure to translate her views into government policies. Given the polarisation of Slovak politics, social and cultural identity issues will be her (and her allies') biggest challenge.

For her to make real change in Slovakia, these divisions have to be overcome and government stability guaranteed. And that is a very difficult task. It remains to be seen if Čaputová is heralding in a new political wave in Slovakia and the Visegrad, or if she turns out to be the exception to the rule.

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Authority without power?

LIEPA ŽELNIENĖ

In his electoral campaign Gitanas Nausėda presented himself as a peacemaker. He promised a new standard in Lithuanian politics, one without intrigue or fighting. He explained that problems can be solved with dialogue. During the campaign he tried to appeal to all voters, but the people do not want a president without an opinion.

It was May 26th, almost midnight, when it became clear who will take over Dalia Grybauskaitė's chair as Lithuania's president. Gitanas Nausėda stood on the stage in front of the presidential palace, together with his wife, and celebrated his victory. "Things will be different," Nausėda said in his victory speech. It has been over two months since Nausėda's inauguration and the question remains – what has changed in Lithuania? What changes does Nausėda want to bring about and does he have a power to change much at all?

For the last decade, Lithuania was a country that, though small, was well known around the world. Much of this was thanks to Grybauskaitė who, as president, was called the Iron Lady for her forceful language and principled positions. She has left big shoes behind to fill. Nine candidates were brave enough to attempt to fill them. In the end, the Lithuanian public put its trust in Nausėda, a 55-year-old economist who has been working in a commercial bank for the past 18 years. He was known as someone who often appeared on national media, usually criticising the government.

Presidential debt

Nausėda, however, had one serious disadvantage – he has almost no experience in politics. He was an adviser to the Valdas Adamkus campaign in 2004, but decided not to work for Adamkus as president after the election. When he was

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seeking the presidential bid, Nausėda was offered support from the main opposition party, the Homeland Union, but in the end decided to run as an independent candidate. Only in the last number of days before the second round did he receive an endorsement from the leading Farmers and Greens Union. He was also supported by Adamkus.

To be an independent candidate in Lithuania is not an easy task. You are forbidden from receiving financial support from private businesses and political parties do not support you; you only can use your own money or else receive financial support directly from private individuals. Nausėda's campaign was not cheap – it cost about 330,000 euros. His rivals started to ask questions and demanded that he publish his spending before the election. Nausėda refused, however. After the election, it was estimated that Nausėda was nearly 40,000 euros in debt. Nausėda claimed that he was going to pay the debt with his own money.

"My 2018 income declaration shows I am capable of doing that," Nausėda said. It is impossible to know if the president was telling the truth. By law, the president's declaration for 2018 is not public. Before the election he had to declare his wealth and income for 2017, and he will have to declare it for 2019. But there is a gap in the law which allows him to bypass the 2018 declaration. Nausėda could have disclosed how much money and wealth he and his family had last year on his own accord, but he refused to do that. This decision leaves the question open – did Nausėda really have enough money to pay his campaign bills?

Peacemaker or twaddler?

In his electoral campaign Nausėda presented himself as a peacemaker. He promised a new standard in politics, one without intrigue or fighting. When asked about his favourite basketball team, he said he supports the three main ones. He said that all the political problems can be solved with dialogue. This was understandable during the campaign, of course, when he was trying to catch voters across the political spectrum, but the people do not want a president without an opinion.

After Nausėda was elected, people started to ask if he really has one. The first test came with the reshuffling of cabinet ministers. Nausėda, in the past, was critical of the social welfare and health ministers, so many hoped he would not approve of them in a renewed cabinet. This did not happen, and in fact only three ministers actually changed, and that was due to the ruling coalition's decision, not the president's. Additionally, Nausėda had argued that Rokas Masiulis, the minister of transport and communications, was one of the best politicians in the cabinet. Masiulis was one of the three ministers who lost their cabinet roles.

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Before the election, Nausėda said that, in domestic politics, he will employ "presidential soft power", suggesting his moral authority. But what is the president's word worth if outstanding ministers are being removed but those who are criticised remain? Nauseda said he could not risk the stability of government and admitted he had to accept the ministers who were proposed and had political support in parliament.

President's party?

One explanation for Masiulis's departure is interesting. Nausėda started to hint at the possibility of Masiulis creating a new political party (Masiulis himself has never said a word about such a plan prior). According to the constitution, the president cannot be a member of any political party. However, as Lithuania is a semi-parliamentary state, it is very important for him or her to have the backing in parliament. Nausėda's words have led some to speculate that he may plan to follow in the footsteps of Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskyy and create his own political party as Lithuania will have parliamentary elections in 2020.

When asked about it, Nausėda explains that he was speaking about a niche that exists in the country. His chief advisor, Povilas Mačiulis, said that Nausėda is very much in favour of professionals seeking to participate in politics and to ensure a closed loop is not created. "For there to be changes, new people are needed. The president hopes that the coming elections will bring novelties, that there will be new people, who will help accomplish the main goal – the vision of a welfare state." Mačiulis also noted that the president is not participating in any current or future party activities. Maybe not, but on July 30th the centre of registers reserved the name for a new political entity – the Welfare State Party. As I write this, the centre has not disclosed whose initiative it was.

Many speculate Nausėda may be planning to launch his own political party ahead of the 2020 parliamentary elections.

Nevertheless, the welfare state was the main theme of Nausėda's campaign. He explained his five main goals, which he plans to achieve in his five year term: a reduction in income inequality; boosting the fiscal revenue from today's 30 per cent to 35 per cent of GDP; reducing regional exclusion; more effective use of EU funds; and progress in public education.

"These indicators of the welfare state, in particular, will constitute the criteria for assessing the overall work of the government and of all the political forces. Therefore, when appointing ministers, signing laws, expressing criticisms or praise,

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I will assess everything based on how the institutions and officials serve the well-being of the Lithuanian people," Nausėda said. He promised that the first step to achieve his main goal will be taken together with next year's budget, for which the president presented his proposal.

Yet according to some economists, the budget proposal has little to do with Nausėda's promised "welfare state". Nerijus Mačiulis, a Swedbank economist, said it would be a sad state, rather than a welfare state, if Nausėda's idea of increasing social security spending by 100 million euros that would go on raising pensions and disability benefits is accepted by the parliament. The prime minister and minister of finance both said that this initiative is unattainable. Nausėda, himself an economist, is criticised for putting forward such an unfeasible proposal and some have accused him of populism.

Continuity in foreign policy

The main responsibility for the president is not domestic policy, rather it is foreign affairs. And here we can see Nausėda's first few steps. He has already visited Poland, Latvia, Estonia, Belgium and Germany. It looks as though he will continue the path that Grybauskaitė set, talking about the importance of a strong NATO and European Union. Regarding Russia, Nausėda has said he will soften rhetoric, but declared that Lithuania's relations with Russia will not change until Moscow alters its behaviour towards Ukraine. Nausėda has not announced any plans to meet Vladimir Putin.

"What could I be talking about with Mr Putin at this point? As long as we have the situation in Ukraine, as long as the escalation of tension continues in the entire region, I see no point in exchanging diplomatic pleasantries and, importantly, I have no moral right to do so – there is nothing to celebrate, tensions are felt throughout the region," Nausėda said in an interview with LRT TV.

Yet the biggest challenge might lie in domestic historical policy. In July, Vilnius's mayor Remigijus Šimašius decided to take down the memorial plaque of Jonas Noreika, a pre-war Lithuanian military officer and an anti-Soviet resistance fighter, also known as Generolas Vėtra (General Storm). Šimašius said he made the decision because Noreika, the head of Šiauliai County during the Nazi occupation, signed documents establishing a Jewish ghetto and expropriating Jewish property. A huge protest broke out and Pro Patria, a nationalist organisation, produced and reinstalled a new Noreika plaque.

At first Nausėda tried to respond with calmness. He called for "a moratorium on erasing historic memory" and said that Lithuania should avoid a situation

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when different mayors have different policies on such painful and sensitive issues. But when the new plague was installed, Nausėda's tone changed. He blamed Šimašius for the unwise decision, but said nothing about the placing of the new illegal plague. The president's opinion was very different from the minister of foreign affairs, Linas Linkevičius, who noted that the hanging of the new plague will damage Lithuania's image and could have a negative impact on relations with Israel and the United States.

Saturday's president?

By now, the new president has given more thought to his own image than his country. As the philosopher Gintautas Mažeikis wrote in a recent column, Nausėda has authority, but he still does not have power. For the first two months he had 12 people in the department of communications, but only one in his domestic policy group. Lithuania still fondly remembers president Grybauskaitė whose words were strong and powerful. If she criticised someone you knew her words would be followed with action. She knew how to play the political game and had real power.

Nausėda, for now, is just a picture of a president. Well-educated, intellectual and a collector of antique books, he looks good on Saturday pictures from small town festivals. He knows how to talk to the average voter. But to become a real president, Nausėda has to gain real political power. Perhaps this could be achieved by the new political party being established, which could ensure a strong force for the president in parliament. Without something like this, Nausėda may take Lithuania from being a semi-parliamentary state to a full one, where the president is a ceremonial figure, only required for representation, organising forums, mediations, and beautiful pictures. NEE

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From revolution to politics

MATEUSZ KUBIAK

For almost a year, Armenia has been undergoing a process of state reforms. Expectations are high. However, despite some initial positive results, any true success is still distant. The problems faced by the state are systemic in nature and cannot be solved through revolution alone.

Elected in May of 2018, the government of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan was in a honeymoon phase until the end of the year. At that time, it only had nine mandates in the 105-seat National Assembly which put any bigger reforms at risk of being blocked from moving forward. The situation changed in December with early parliamentary elections when the political alliance called My Step received a constitutional majority and now has the power to build, at least in theory, a "new Armenia".

Even a glimpse at the agenda of Pashinyan's government shows some similarities with the rule of Mikheil Saakashvili, who came to power in neighbouring Georgia after the Rose Revolution in 2003. Pashinyan's priorities are clearly put on domestic politics and include the introduction of neoliberal economic reforms, combating corruption and organised crime, as well as decentralisation. That being said, it is of course impossible to equate Armenia's problems today with the destruction of Georgian statehood that took place in the early 1990s. In addition, Saakashvili not only had a record of successes but also failures. Hence, what lies ahead for the Armenian government remains an open question.

New rules of the game

According to the available research of public opinion (at the time of writing, the newest data come from the May polls), the anti-corruption campaign is perceived

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as the greatest success of the new Armenian government. Starting from last year, almost every week brings new arrests or accusations. At the same time, systemic reforms have been initiated, including the anti-corruption strategy which is envisioned to last up until 2022. These policies still provide Pashinyan with a relatively large social support despite a certain fluctuation in its level. The new rules of the game have also brought multi-million budget inputs. Thus, despite some criticism that has been expressed regarding the apparent "leniency" to the abuses that take place in strategic areas – such as mining – the overall social assessment of the anti-corruption efforts remains positive.

The economy is the second sphere in which activity of the new government is visible. The neoliberal strategy undertaken in Armenia, regardless of our assessment, is now being implemented. For instance, the flagship tax reform has already been passed in the parliament and will introduce a flat tax. The current government actively pursues foreign investors and sees foreign capital as needed to fuel Armenia's development. In addition, the authorities want to show their support to small and medium-sized enterprises which they promised tax breaks and a commitment to fight monopolies that flourished under the previous government.

Pashinyan's government was quick to showcase the data which confirmed the effectiveness of the first reforms. It particularly prides upon the increased levels of foreign investments and state revenue. Rationally thinking, however, it is way too early to conduct a serious assessment of the new policies as many of the problems which clearly burden Armenia cannot be cured overnight. The country will most likely continue to struggle for quite some time, facing challenges like social stratification, poor demographics (including a debilitating brain drain) and weak institutions. These problems will remain on the surface of Armenia's political life even if its GDP or any other indicators increase. As a matter of fact, these were going up even under the previous government and evidently, this process did not bring an automatic improvement in people's living conditions.

Pashinyan vs Kocharyan

The earlier mentioned support that Pashinyan's government is now enjoying does not mean that the new authorities do not have any opponents. Quite the contrary. The parliamentary opposition holds 44 of 132 seats in the National Assembly. Its members are active critics of the government and form the Prosperous Armenia party which is led by Gagik Tsarukyan – an Armenian oligarch who has managed to escape the anti-corruption fever. Another opposing force in the parliament are Pashinyan's former allies from Bright Armenia group. Yet the prime minister's most

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bitter enemy is to be found not in the parliament but behind bars (at the time of writing). Robert Kocharyan served as Armenia's president from 1998 to 2008 but has been recently accused of accepting multi-million dollar bribes and a bloody dispersal of election protests at the end of his term.

Kocharyan is rarely perceived in a positive light, however his case remains one of the most widely commented ones in Armenia today. There are a few reasons which explain this. First, no president has been previously brought to justice and put in jail in any post-Soviet state. Second, and this is what adds zest to the whole situation, Kocharyan argues that his case is politically motivated and should be regarded as an act of revenge on the part of the prime minister. Pashinyan was indeed involved in the organisation of the 2008 protests, subsequently charged and sent to prison. Even more, the legal basis for his charge was exactly the same one that is being used against Kocharyan today – namely, the attempt to destroy constitutional order.

Hence Kocharyan's case has taken a very stormy course. Controversies were arising both around some of the former president's activities and included such facts as hiring a PR firm and paying for street demonstrators, as well as around some decisions that were made in regard to the case overall. Records also indicate Pashinyan has been putting personal pressure on the investigation. The selection of judges to try the case was repeated five times as judges started to resign. Finally, when following the court decision Kocharyan was released from custody, Pashinyan called for blocking the court buildings and starting a new stage of his revolution – this time against the judiciary.

The prime minister's intervention (including his announcement to lustrate all judges) generated mixed reactions in the public while the Council of Europe expressed its concern. Even though the final stage of activities on Armenian transitional justice is taking place in co-operation with international organisations (changes in judiciary are nonetheless very much needed), the whole situation has generated a discussion on the similarities between Pashinyan and Saakashvili who are both hot-tempered and – according to some – may have inclinations towards authoritarian rule. The latter tendency is especially relevant to today's Armenia where the prime minister holds quite a wide range of power.

From Russia with distrust

Kocharyan's confidence during the court case was probably caused by his strong connection to Vladimir Putin, with whom he has had a long history of co-operation. Its results include, among others, a dominant position that Russian firms have in

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the Armenian gas industry, transportation or telecommunications. It has also been reported that there are close personal ties between Putin and Kocharyan. Most importantly, Putin may continue supporting Kocharyan (at least to some extent) because of the current lack of trust in Russian-Armenian relations. Clearly, Russians do not know what to expect from the new authorities in Yerevan and are suspiciously looking at the reform programme. Considering Armenia's dependency on Russia, especially in regard to defence and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and its closed border with Turkey, this is a serious limitation for Pashinyan's government.

> The Kremlin does not know what to expect from the new authorities in Yerevan and is suspiciously looking at the reform programme.

Nevertheless, Moscow sees Armenia's current internal policies quite problematic. The fight undertaken by the new authorities against the previous political and oligarchic establishment deprives Russia of some of its influence. Russian officials have lost some personal connections as well as are seeing the weakening of some Armenian monopolies which were often in close co-operation with their own monopolies. Russia's position in Armenia has also been weakened by the new reforms – as seen in the energy sector where the Armenian government is pushing for diversification of gas supplies and lowering dependence on Moscow. For the Kremlin, these activities could signal Armenia's gradual "emancipation" from its influence.

Seemingly, a less problematic area of the Russian-Armenian relations is the overall direction of Armenia's foreign policy. Pashinyan recognises the importance of Russia's security guarantees and knows where are the red lines. He has not questioned Armenia's membership in the Eurasian Economic Union nor proposed a more radical turn towards the West. At the same time, he is not afraid of criticising Russia's gas supplies to Azerbaijan. That said, it is clear that Armenia's current foreign policy is more of a continuation of the manoeuvres that the former president, Serzh Sargsyan, had initiated. It may not be an ideal scenario for the Kremlin, but it is acceptable as long as it does not breach the regional status quo.

Without a view for peace

Just as naïve as it would be to think that Pashinyan could break the alliance between Armenia and Russia, it would also be so to expect that his government will quickly solve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It is unlikely that this situation would change even though the new authorities in Yerevan have intensified talks with Azerbaijan. For months now the frontline has been seeing peace (although

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fatal casualties have again been reported since the summer of this year) and the crisis communication between the decision-makers has been brought back. An agreement was also reached to continue humanitarian aid. All these may not be much, but for sure there is a qualitative difference between today and previous years. So why it is still believed that there is no chance for peace?

Despite the activities of the new Armenian authorities, the country's society remains unwilling to make even the smallest concessions towards the Azeri side, which is equally resilient to any concessions as well. Clearly, Nagorno-Karabakh is a key point of reference for people living in both states which have mutually exclusive demands. For example, even though the talks are carried out at the level of ministries and even heads of the states, Azerbaijan society will never agree to Pashinyan's proposal to include in them the authorities of the unrecognised Nagorno-Karabakh Republic. For the record, it is unclear which authorities the prime minister even has in mind. The internal politics of the unrecognised republic is quite messy and in 2020 its residents will decide in elections as to who will succeed Bako Sahakyan – who has ruled there for the last 22 years.

What conclusions can one draw from the above analysis? Certainly, changes in Armenia will continue to take place at their own pace which can be considered rather evolutionary than revolutionary. This is true for a few reasons and many of them have been explained earlier: the systemic nature of some internal problems and the impossibility to reformulate foreign policy, including towards the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. However, one more thing is of key importance here. Namely, Pashinyan's political rankings.

The importance of the political factors in present-day Armenia can be illustrated by the case of Lydian International, a British-American company that the previous government has allowed to extract gold from the Amulsar mine and which was supposed to invest 400 million US dollars, thereby becoming the largest individual investor in Armenia's history. The decision for this investment, however, is contested by both environmentalists and a significant number of Armenians. As a result, the prime minister has had no choice but to start manoeuvring between his voters (and political supporters) and foreign investors. Seemingly, this is the most telling evidence that Armenia has already undergone a transition from "revolution" to "politics". NEE

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A hot summer in Georgia

WOJCIECH WOJTASIEWICZ

Georgia has witnessed strong political tension over the last several months. Tbilisi Pride, anti-Russian and anti-government protests, trouble with the construction of the Anaklia sea port, resolving the ownership dispute of the country's popular opposition TV channel Rustavi 2 and the change of prime minister. A year ahead of parliamentary elections, Georgian politics is shaken as the Georgian Dream decided to go on an all-out offensive aiming at electoral victory.

The first act in a series of events that stirred Georgian society this past summer was the announcement of plans to organise the country's first LGBT pride week – Tbilisi Pride. During the events, an international conference and theatre performance were planned. However, the biggest controversy was that the parade was supposed to march through the centre of Tbilisi. The ministry of internal affairs claimed it would not be able to provide adequate security for the participants and tried to convince the organisers to cancel the parade, recommending another venue, arguing it would be safer for the crowd.

The LGBT activists declined the offer. They emphasised that the authorities had been doing what they could to prevent them from exercising their constitutional right to demonstrate from the very beginning. "Our goal was to raise the visibility of our community in Georgian society. Demands such as civil partnerships are demands for the future," says Giorgi Tabagari, one of the organisers of the Tbilisi Pride.

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Unexpected guest

This self-restraint of the activists is easy to understand when one takes into account how strong homophobic sentiments can be in Georgia. The parade announcement has mobilised its opponents – including far-right groups and conservatives – headed by the businessman, Levan Vasadze. Vasadze advocated for the creation of a "civic guard" that would prevent immodest behaviour from occurring on the streets of the Georgian capital. A similar message came from the highly-respected Georgian Orthodox Church. The Georgian Patriarch Elias II said that homosexuality is a sin and that its public exposure was against Georgian values and traditions.

The organisers faced a dilemma: to go through with the parade, risking riots and attacks; or to cancel everything, thus letting months of preparation go to waste. This dilemma was abruptly suspended with the unexpected arrival of a Russian delegation to Tbilisi. The delegation came for a session of the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy. After anti-Russian and anti-government demonstrations broke out, LGBT activists decided to postpone the date of the parade to not add further fuel to the fire. Finally, a small meeting of LGBT activists took place at the beginning of July in front of the ministry of interior building on the outskirts of Tbilisi.

> The sight of a representative from the Russian Duma in the Georgian parliament speaker's chair was a shocking display.

Prior to this, there was real outrage in Tbilisi. The head of the Russian delegation, a deputy speaker of the Russian Duma, Sergei Gavrilov, was overseeing the assembly while sitting in the chair of the speaker of the Georgian parliament. This infuriated the opposition MPs, as well as a large segment of the Georgian society. The appearance of a representative from a country that occupies 20 per cent of its territory (i.e. Abkhazia and South Ossetia) was a shocking display. Until this day, it is hard to fathom who could not have foreseen the consequences of such an action. Was it the administration of the parliament, the authorities more broadly, or was it a conscious choice by the governing party to use it as a red herring in order to distract the population from the emotions connected to Tbilisi Pride?

The same evening some 20,000–30,000 people appeared in front of the parliament to protest against the incident. Earlier the assembly had been cut short and the Russian delegation was rushed out of the country. The demonstration soon turned into street clashes between some of the protesters and riot police. Law enforcement units used tear gas, rubber bullets and water cannons. 240 people were injured, including 80 officers, during the clashes that continued throughout the

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night. Three people partially lost their eyesight. The opposition accused the government of acting under Russian command, while the ruling party accused their political adversaries of attempting a coup.

Demonstrations continued for the next several days with large attendances, but with a more peaceful atmosphere. The protesters put forward a number of demands, some of which were accepted, including: the resignation of the Speaker of Parliament, Irakli Kobakhidze; parliamentary elections with a full proportional system (not like the previous mixed proportional-majoritarian representation system, where half of the MPs were elected through a single-member/winner-takes-all district) in 2020 instead of 2024; and the release of those detained during the protests. The Georgian Dream forces put all their efforts into defending Giorgi Gakharia, the minister of interior, as his resignation was demanded by the protesters who claimed he used disproportionate force. The protests lost momentum in the subsequent weeks. By August, only a small number of people stood outside the parliament.

The changes to the electoral law will have a significant impact allowing for a more pluralist parliament.

Nevertheless, the changes to the electoral law will have a significant impact. On the one hand, it will make a more pluralist parliament possible – for example, a legislative chamber without any absolute dominance from the ruling party, and the increased likelihood of coalition governments. In all, this could be a positive development for Georgian democracy. On the other hand, the new parliament could be more fractured, as the Georgian Dream has suspended the five per cent threshold for the 2020 elections. This increases the chances of small and extreme groups to enter the legislature. Critics believe that the governing party opted for this as an insurance. In case they do not win a parliamentary majority, they would be able to attract smaller groups to its side.

Hassle on the Kura River

The June events in Tbilisi have had an impact on the relations with Russia. Many strong words were uttered against the Kremlin by both the Georgian opposition and the government itself. The Georgian President, Salome Zourabichvili, described Russia as an enemy and occupier. Russian authorities viewed the Tbilisi protests as another example of anti-Russian, Georgian hysteria. Vladimir Putin's sanctions, introduced on July 8th, came in the form of halting flights between Russia and Georgia. This step was meant to punish the rebellious Georgians by hitting

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their tourist industry, one of the pillars of its domestic economy. After June 20th, a large number of Russians cancelled their summer holidays in the Black Sea resorts of Kobuleti and Batumi. The limitations put on the arrival of Russian tourists also caused a drop in hotel prices by 15–20 per cent. Unfortunately, the internet campaign "Spend Your Summer in Georgia", which encouraged foreigners to visit the country, did not make up for those losses.

July was filled with equally important developments. There was a final decision on the ownership of one of the most popular TV channels in Georgia, Rustavi 2 (a channel connected to the opposition). The court battle over this case has lasted a few years. Finally, the European Court of Human Rights decided that the channel should return to the previous owner, Kibar Khalvashi. Up until then, the owners had been the Karamanishvili brothers, who were close to the former President, Mikheil Saakashvili. Nika Gvaramia, the director of the channel, was a former minister for Saakashvili's United National Movement. However, the issue of Rustavi 2 ownership is far more complicated. In 2005, Khalvashi apparently took over the channel at the behest of the post-revolutionary government through the means of extortion. The funds were received from then influential minister of defence, Irakli Okruashvili, the right-hand man to Saakashvili.

This decision will shake up the balance on the Georgian media market, and it will certainly have an impact ahead of the upcoming parliamentary elections. Controlling TV, where 85 per cent of Georgians get their news from, could have a massive impact on the results. Until now, Rustavi 2 has been closer to the opposition and remained one of the most popular channels next to Imedi, which is associated with the ruling party. State television is of marginal importance and has low viewership. In the beginning of August, the prosecutor office charged Gvaramia with abuse of power and endangering the finances of Rustavi 2. The new-old owner decided to remove the director of the channel. He was followed by a large number of journalists and production crews, who went on to create a new television channel, the Main Channel, in early September.

Further shake-up

The government was indirectly involved in another conflict this summer. This one pertains to a strategic investment – the construction of a new deep sea port in Anaklia, on the so-called border with the separatist Abkhazia. The consortium responsible was an American-Georgian group headed by one of Georgia's largest banks, TBC. In July, its founder and director, Mamuka Khazaradze, was charged by Georgian prosecutors with money laundering together with his deputy (they

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all resigned for the sake of the good name of the bank). Allegedly, a money transfer of roughly 17 million US dollars was made in 2008. Khazaradze claimed these accusations were unfounded. In his view, the prosecutors acted on behalf of the ruling party that was attempting to halt the construction of the port in Anaklia by the current consortium and handed the investment over to businessmen connected with Bidzina Ivanishvili, founder and head of the Georgian Dream party, and considered the most influential person in Georgian politics. The investment is important when it comes to strengthening Georgia's role in the transit between Europe and Asia.

The opposition could not believe the decision to nominate Giorgi Gakharia as prime minister, describing it as "spitting in the face of Georgian society".

Officially, the government is supportive of the project. It emphasises that Khazaradze is attempting to cover up his failure in attaining funds, accusing the government of creating obstacles for him. At the beginning of August, Khazaradze and his deputy resigned from their positions in the consortium so that the investigation would not hurt the investment. However just a few days later, an American partner, Conti International, withdrew from the project. They did not state the reasoning behind the decision, but it means that the completion of the investment is now in serious jeopardy. It is important to note that in the beginning of September in Anaklia, Mamuka Khazaradze announced the emergence of a new political movement that would participate in the 2020 parliamentary elections. A shadow government is supposed to be presented early next year.

After a few weeks of a relatively calm summer, Georgian politics was abuzz again with speculations that a change of prime minister was looming. The possible resignation of Mamuka Bakhtadze would not be anything extraordinary. Prime ministers and ministers are generally considered fronts for the Georgian Dream, with Ivanishvili as the one who is really in control. It was the name of the next head of government that shocked many people. The media reported that the new prime minister would be Giorgi Gakharia, who the protesters demanded to be sacked just two months earlier. Media speculations, in the end, turned out to be true and there was a shake-up in many of the top ministerial positions. Vakhtang Gomelauri, who was previously the head of the state security services, became the new minister of interior. Irakli Garibashvili, the former prime minister and secretary general of Georgian Dream, became the minister of defence. Levan Izoria, the previous defence minister, became head of security services.

The opposition could not believe the decision of nominating Gakharia as prime minister, describing it as "spitting in the face of Georgian society" and "starting a

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war with it". Furthermore, they refrained from participating in a vote of confidence for the new government. Georgian citizens attempted to understand the motives behind placing a controversial figure like Gakharia as the head of government a year ahead of the parliamentary elections. It appeared to be a provocation, an absurdity, or even madness.

Yet, the decision of the ruling party can be interpreted in another way. The Georgian Dream is fully aware that it will be difficult to win the next election. They have not fulfilled many of their campaign promises, especially socio-economical ones. There is also the natural wear-and-tear process that all ruling parties experience. That is why it has opted for a strong head of government with political experience. Someone like Gakharia would not hesitate to employ all means necessary to make sure his party is victorious. As a former minister of the interior, he will know exactly how to use the state apparatus and services to reach his goals. It seems that we can expect further infringements on Georgian democracy through different forms of extortion, limiting the right of assembly for citizens and the opposition, the arrests of people "uncomfortable" to the regime, and the expansion of media control. It could even increase so-called administrative measures, changing or falsifying the election results.

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There is no doubt that the June demonstrations were not only anti-Russian, but anti-government. The incident with the Russian delegation became the last straw after several years of frustration within Georgian society caused by poor life quality and unfulfilled social reforms. The domestic economy is modestly growing, but there still remains the problem of high unemployment (73 per cent of Georgians believe this is the main problem) and low wages. The Georgian Lari has been depreciating for years which, in turn, has resulted in less purchasing power and excessive debt. Add to this the year-long political battles between the two groups connected to the informal leaders, Bidzina Ivanishvili and Mikheil Saakashvili. Many Georgians are fed up with both groups – recent polls indicate that 30 per cent of the public is unable to decide which party they would vote for. The emergence of a third option, which would carry the hope for a better tomorrow with it, is in the air. The present situation, according to the polls, is viewed negatively by two out every three people.

During the protests this summer, it seemed that this new political movement could be shaped by its leaders – students, NGO activists, artists. The initial enthusiasm and hope, however, disappeared together with the end of the demonstra-

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tions. A lack of financing and structure became very clear in the end. It is hard to envisage Mamuka Khazaradze's movement being a success either. His entry is just another case of a wealthy person involving himself in Georgian politics.

It appears the political situation will intensify over the coming months. Even if Georgians are tired of it, the election campaign will still be decided between the camps of Ivanishvili and Saakashvili. It is possible that the elections will take place earlier than next fall, which would benefit the Georgian Dream. In the end, Georgia is entering a very important year, with a finale that could decide the country's democratic future.

Translated by Daniel Gleichgewicht

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New president, old authorities

OTHMARA GLAS

Kazakhstan's presidential election on June 9th was a breakthrough. It was the first election in the history of the young country where the main candidate was not Nursultan Nazarbayev, who had ruled Kazakhstan for almost 30 years. The country's new president is Qasym-Jomart Toqaev, a long-time diplomat and confidant of Nazarbayev.

"I have made a difficult decision for myself – to resign from the powers of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan." It was a historic moment when Nursultan Nazarbayev announced his resignation live on TV on March 19th 2019. He made an unusual decision for a region where presidents tend to die in office rather than resign. This step came by surprise for many at that time but had been in preparation for years.

As the head of the senate – and according to the constitution, first in line to replace the president – Qasym-Jomart Toqaev became Nazarbayev's successor. Toqaev, a career politician and diplomat, has been working with him since the beginning of Kazakhstan's independence in 1991. During his resignation address, Nazarbayev introduced the new president: "I know him well. He is an honest, responsible and indispensable person … I believe that Toqaev is the person we can entrust with the governance of Kazakhstan."

After only a few weeks in office as acting president, Toqaev announced snap elections for June 9th. Parties and organisations had two months to nominate their candidates, collect money and signatures and prepare a campaign. For weeks, people went on the streets to call for free and fair elections. The demonstrations

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Kazakhstan's new president, Qasym-Jomart Toqaev, has a lot of diplomatic experience, serving in Beijing, as well as the Director-General of the United Nations office in Geneva between 2011 and 2013.

were quashed and access to news outlets and social media in the weeks leading up to the election were blocked. As expected, Toqaev won the election with nearly 71 per cent of the vote. However, the protests continued, and he soon had to deal with more social unrest.

Why did Nazarbayev step down?

Nursultan Nazarbayev ruled Kazakhstan for almost 30 years, first as the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Kazakh SSR and then as the president of Kazakhstan after April 1990. He managed the country's politics following the break-up of the Soviet Union and during the years of economic decline that saw a mass exodus of hundred thousands of people. Economically, Nazarbayev built the country on resource-rich soil. Politically, he found a balance between the neighbouring political giants Russia and China. Looking at certain indices, like the Hu-

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man Development Index, Kazakhstan has been performing well compared to other post-Soviet countries. Yet, at the same time, Nazarbayev has built an authoritarian system with barely any opposition. He won the presidential election in 2015 with 97.7 per cent of the votes.

Nazarbayev's resignation in March of 2019 was preceded by social unrest and economic decline. Social allowances are small, the education system and resource-based economy need reform, and corruption is widespread. In 2018 GDP growth was a respectable 4.1 per cent but not high enough to escape the middle-income trap – a situation, in which a country gets stuck at a certain income level. The value of the national currency, the tenge, has been falling for years.

Earlier this year, the United States-run Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reported on mothers who renounced their "Hero Mother" status. These are women who have seven or more children and get a golden ring and a monthly state stipend of 40 dollars per month. The Kazakhstani government is encouraging people to have many children but fails to support families in an adequate way. In February, five girls, aged between three months and 13, died in a fire in the capital Astana. The parents had to leave their children alone during the night to go to work but could not afford child care. A malfunctioning heating system caused the fire to break out.

Following these events, at the end of February, Nazarbayev sacked his entire cabinet, stating that social issues have not been resolved because of "the inefficiency of the government … to work with the population, to listen to people's problems and to inform them of the work undertaken and the policies carried out". Nazarbayev's resignation came at a time when people were so upset that they were ready to go to the streets to protest for greater rights. He clearly wanted to avoid a situation like the one in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan in 2010 when then-president Kurmanbek Bakiyev was ousted by protesters in Bishkek. Some observers believe that he was also influenced by the events in Algeria where mass demonstrations in March ousted the president, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who had served since 1999.

Who is the new president?

One day after Nazarbayev's resignation, Qasym-Jomart Toqaev was inaugurated as acting president. Since 2013 he was the head of the senate and, according to the constitution, first in line to replace the president. Toqaev was born in 1953 in Almaty. His father, Kemel Toqaev was a well-known Kazakh writer and veteran of the Second World War. At the age of 17 he entered the Moscow State Institute of International Relations. In 1975 Toqaev joined the Soviet foreign ministry and was posted to Soviet embassies in Singapore and Beijing. After the collapse of the

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Soviet Union Tokaev was appointed as deputy foreign minister of Kazakhstan and later promoted to first deputy foreign minister. In 1994 he became the minister of foreign affairs and from 1999 to 2002 served as deputy prime minister. He was also the Director-General of the United Nations office in Geneva between 2011 and 2013.

While Nazarbayev's resignation caught many people by surprise, it was not so unexpected for those who followed Kazakhstan's politics and could observe preparations for a power transition. In 2010 Nazarbayev was bestowed the official title of 'Elbasy' (leader). In 2018 the security council, which implements national security policy, became a constitutional body that is led by the Elbasy. In this way, the now 79-year-old Nazarbayev remains at the top of the security council and can remain there until the end of his life. Furthermore, Nazarbayev is still the chairman of the ruling party, Nur Otan, and a member of the constitutional council. As Toqaev became president, Nazarbayev's daughter, Dariga Nazarbayeva, took over as chair of the senate. This means that if Toqaev was to step down, she would become the acting president. Some experts have speculated that the actual plan is a power transfer within the Nazarbayev family.

Civil society awakens

Nazarbayev's resignation gave new momentum to Kazakhstan's civil society. Young people, in particular, who had not known any other president, rejoiced with posts on social media: "We declare March 19th a holiday!" However, the first wave of euphoria for change after Nazarbayev's declaration quickly rescinded when Toqaev was sworn in as the new president. His first decision in office was to rename the capital from Astana ("capital" in Kazakh) to Nur-Sultan (Nazarbayev's first name). A few days later, during the Nauryz spring festival – one of the most important holidays in Kazakhstan – the first protesters gathered against the renaming. An online petition was signed by around 40,000 people within a few hours.

On April 26th two activists held a banner during the Almaty Marathon which read: "You cannot run away from the truth." They were arrested and detained for 15 days – the maximum possible sentence. Soon after, an artist, who hung a banner on a bridge in Almaty quoting the constitution, was also arrested. In the following days, more banners popped up around the country. The authority's high level of insecurity was especially evident in the case of a young man in the western city of Uralsk, who held a blank sheet of paper just to prove that he would get arrested for holding a blank sign with no slogan at all (and he was).

"I have a choice! You cannot run away from the truth!" was heard on the streets of Kazakhstan during the weeks before the election. It seemed that a window of

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opportunity for the civil society had opened for the first time. Hundreds of people gathered in the bigger cities on May 1st, officially called the "Day of Unity", to call for free and fair elections, the release of political prisoners and the final withdrawal of Nazarbayev from politics. In Almaty, the meeting went on for several hours as a peaceful demonstration before the police intervened and arrested dozens of people. Further protests were announced for Victory Day celebrations on May 9th. In response, the authorities began to block social media and messenger services like Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. Websites of news outlets that reported on the protests, including Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, were also inaccessible. While the authorities had taken such actions in the past, the scale of this digital blockade was unprecedented.

The election

Originally, the next presidential elections were scheduled for 2020. Yet, on April 9th, Toqaev unexpectedly announced snap elections for June 9th. Seven candidates, the highest in the history of Kazakhstan, competed for presidential office. Among them was Daniya Yespayeva (Ak Zhol party), the first female candidate ever to run for president. While most candidates could be called loyal to the regime, Amirzhan Qosanov (Ult Tagdyry party) was widely seen as the opposition candidate. The former journalist worked in the government under Nazarbayev but was jailed twice for organising unauthorised rallies; most notably one to support the victims of the 2011 Zhanaozen massacre.

Although Toqaev is now the officially elected president of Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev remains in control.

Almost 12 million voters were registered. Visiting polling stations, the transparent ballot boxes were remarkable. Voters did not take care to fold their ballots correctly and everyone could see their vote. As expected, Toqaev won with 70.96 per cent of the votes. Qosanov received 16.23 per cent. Voter turnout was announced at 77.5 per cent.

Local and international election observers have raised suspicions about these numbers. In its preliminary report, the OSCE noted "significant irregularities observed on election day, including cases of ballot box stuffing and a disregard of counting procedures meant that an honest count could not be guaranteed … there were widespread detentions of peaceful protesters on election day in major cities." In the days after the election, more demonstrations against the results took place. According to official statements around 1,000 people were detained. Nevertheless, Toqaev's second inauguration took place on June 12th.

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Challenges ahead

Although Toqaev is now the officially elected president of Kazakhstan, Nazarbayev remains in control. His first months as acting president were marked by an insecurity of authorities. Young people saw a window of opportunity and went on the streets to call for democracy. Police officers and judges who were not yet familiar with Toqaev's wishes (over)reacted with detentions and sentenced people to the maximum penalties. The election in June gave more stability to the current regime. However, on September 18th, his 100th day in office, Toqaev announced a reshuffle among top officials. Krymbek Kusherbayev, presidential chief of staff and a confidant of Nazarbayev, was dismissed. Whether it is Nazarbayev or Toqaev behind the decision remains unclear because Kusherbayev has caused hard feelings among the authorities.

The second president has many issues to solve. In addition to the existing socio-economic problems, the protests continue. In June an ammunitions depot exploded in the small town of Arys. Three people were killed and some 45,000 inhabitants evacuated. Left without alternative accommodations, videos depicted an angry group of protesters in front of the local branch of the Nur Otan party. In the beginning of September mass protests against Chinese expansion took place after plans became public that China wants to transfer factories and workers to the western region of Mangystau, where the country's oil and gas reserves are exploited. For years, demonstrations have been taking place against the working conditions and the betterment of foreign workers compared to Kazakhs. Kazakhstan has its bids on a key role in the Belt and Road Initiative and counts on investments from China. Toqaev, who reportedly speaks Chinese, needs to now find a balance between growing economic dependence on its neighbouring country and further unrest. NEE

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Listen for more: Check out the Talk Eastern Europe podcast Episode 18 – Kazakhstan's managed transfer of power.

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Lord of the flies

Power struggles on Central Asia's island of democracy

RUSIF HUSEYNOV

With its unique political model, Kyrgyzstan, in a region full of autocratic regimes, is sometimes called an "island of democracy". This reference, however, does not imply full ascension of democracy.

Kyrgyzstan is often understood to be the only democracy in Central Asia. A transfer of power has happened here more often than its neighbours. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have witnessed replacement at the top following the death of their respective rulers; in Kazakhstan, the presidential change happened this year with the approval of its long-serving president Nursultan Nazarbayev, who, as an *aksakal**, still retains significant political power; Emomali Rakhmon has been ruling Tajikistan, unchallenged, since the mid-1990s, when he rose to power after political turbulences and a bitter civil war. In other words, the mere number of presidents in the region's authoritarian regimes cannot be compared to Kyrgyzstan's five (or six, if we include Ishenbai Kadyrbekov who was in power as a one-day caretaker leader in 2005). Yet, almost every presidential handover in this mountainous republic that has taken place was accompanied by riots and clashes which resulted in bloodshed.

* Aqsaqal or aksakal (literally meaning "white beard" in Turkic languages) is a reference to elderly people, who are respected and listened to as senior and wiser members of the community among Turkic peoples.

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Discontent

The first cataclysm transpired in 2005, branded the Tulip Revolution, in line with other colour revolutions in the post-Soviet space (e.g. the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003 and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in 2004). The historic event brought down Kyrgyzstan's first post-Soviet president, Askar Akayev. Having served uninterruptedly from 1990, and exceeding the two terms initially permitted by the Kyrgyz constitution, Akayev was ready to nominate himself for a fourth term. But his plans were disrupted by demonstrations that took place immediately after the 2005 parliamentary elections in February and March. Akayev's candidates became victorious amid allegations of fraud, while his children won seats fuelling speculation on dynastical succession. Criticised both at home and abroad, the parliamentary elections sparked popular discontent, which turned into civil unrest.

Opposition supporters soon took over key cities and towns in the south. Although Akayev initially dismissed any negotiations, he was forced to flee the country once the protestors stormed the presidential complex in Bishkek after clashing with police. On March 24th 2005, Akayev, together with his family, escaped to Kazakhstan and later to Russia where he issued his resignation on April 3rd 2005. The Kyrgyz parliament later stripped him of the title "First President of Kyrgyzstan", as well as all relevant privileges.

The main factors that contributed to the crisis included the difficult economic situation, deep-rooted corruption, nepotism, the contradictions in government and administration. Although the victorious revolution was diverse and had no one leader, it was Kurmanbek Bakiyev that won by a landslide victory in the presidential election in the same year. Despite initial hopes, Bakiyev's tenure and reputation was damaged by the economic situation, allegations of corruption and assassinations of prominent politicians.

In foreign policy, Bakiyev walked a delicate geopolitical tightrope by manoeuvring among Russia, the United States and China. One of the most infamous episodes of the Bakiyev era, the events around the US military base at Manas Airport, clearly illustrates inconsistency within Kyrgyzstan's external course. Despite the Kyrgyz leader's initial promise to the Kremlin on the closure of the military base in exchange of nearly two billion US dollars in Russian aid in early 2009, the Americans outbid the Russians and maintained control over the base. It caused serious cooling in Russia-Kyrgyzstan relations. A negative campaign was launched against Bakiyev within Russian-language media, while duties were imposed by Russia on its energy exports to Kyrgyzstan, which affected fuel and transport prices in the Central Asian republic.

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Domestically, Bakiyev's policies did not improve the lives of the populace, who became further enraged with rising heating costs during the winter of 2010. It resulted in a series of demonstrations against political corruption and increased costs of living, the first was held in the city of Talas on April 6th 2010. The clashes between the opposition and the government the next day turned into a violent revolution and soon spread nationwide, where the protestors seized control of administrative buildings and a state television company in the capital. Having imposed a state of emergency, Bakiyev fled to the Jalal-Abad region. Acknowledging that he lost control of the situation, Bakiyev blamed foreign forces for the instability in Kyrgyzstan, invited UN peacekeepers into the country, and even considered relocating the capital to the south, where he hoped to receive more support.

Turmoil and bloodshed

After the April 15th negotiations between opposition leaders and Bakiyev, the latter left for Kazakhstan where he issued his letter of resignation. He was later given refuge in Belarus. Although the interim government soon announced the end of the domestic conflict, which claimed more than 80 lives and left over 400 wounded, it did not end at that point, extending in the form of interethnic clashes. The summer skirmishes between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks led to the expulsion of thousands of residents, while, according to Roza Otunbayeva, then head of the provisional government, the death toll as a result of mass killings, gang rapes and torture was as high as 2,000 people. Although some claimed a Russian hand in the ousting of Bakiyev, Russian politician Vladimir Zhirinovsky insisted that the United States was involved in order to gain control of Manas Air Base.

History repeated itself as the second Kyrgyz leader faced a revolution that ultimately toppled him. Although it became bloody and tensed interethnic relations, its outcome formally turned Kyrgyzstan into a parliamentary republic by reducing presidential authority. The subsequent president, Almazbek Atambayev, could have entered the country's history as a leader who managed to relinquish power in a pacific manner. Yet his post-presidency activities still led to further turmoil and bloodshed.

Having considered the fate of his overthrown predecessors, Atambayev did not extend his single term envisaged by the constitution.

Having considered the fate of his overthrown predecessors, Atambayev did not extend his single term envisaged by the constitution. Although he left office in a timely manner in November 2017, he did not plan to leave Kyrgyz politics. The

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transfer of power initiated by Atambayev was, in fact, designed to extend his rule (later as prime minister) by using the Putin-Medvedev scheme: the constitutional changes in 2016, toward the end of his tenure, strengthened the power of prime minister at the expense of presidential authority. Moreover, Atambayev strategically placed his own allies in key governmental positions, including that of the prime minister.

Sooronbay Jeenbekov, an old friend and colleague, became the handpicked successor after a thorough casting. Although Jeenbekov seemed a good choice and controllable president for Atambayev, the alliance between the two soon turned into enmity, as the former, not wanting to serve as a mere puppet, refused to share power and reinforced his own authority. After assuming office, he began removing Atambayev cronies from top government posts, even arresting some of them. Atambayev, through his media holding, launched an information war against Jeenbekov and insulted him in March 2019 by saying "I apologise to everyone for bringing this person to power." In response, the members of Kyrgyz parliament stripped Atambayev of his immunity and called for a criminal case to be opened against him.

The in-fighting between two political forces ended in favour of Jeenbekov, the incumbent president, and heralded a new cycle in Kyrgyzstan's domestic politics.

The saga intensified this past summer when Atambayev, trenched in his compound, publicly expressed his desire to fight back. He was backed by the largest party in the country, popular media and his large number of supporters. Moreover, Atambayev flew to Moscow in July in a desperate and unsuccessful attempt to secure the Kremlin's endorsement. The standoff peaked when the Kyrgyz authorities ordered a special operation to detain Atambayev on August 7th. Within two days elite forces stormed the residence, but Atambayev's supporters resisted and returned fire. Ultimately, the ex-president was detained amid violent clashes which left a police officer dead and nearly 80 people injured, some seriously. Atambayev's actions were viewed as an attempted coup.

The in-fighting between two political forces ended in favour of the incumbent president and heralded a new cycle in Kyrgyzstan's domestic politics. Two notable aspects – both positive and negative – should be noted here: the avoidance of a third revolution, and the failure of a peaceful transfer of power (although it had a huge opportunity to set a relevant precedent for the neighbouring countries). Yet the experiment itself was flawed as the outgoing Atambayev used all the administrative resources available to promote his protégé, Jeenbekov, and push back against other competitors.

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Thorny path of democracy

With its unique political model, Kyrgyzstan, in a region full of autocratic regimes, is sometimes called an "island of democracy". This reference, however, does not imply full ascension of democracy. The country has experienced transition of power several times, more than any other Central Asian state. The revolutions in 2005 and 2010 swept away the leaders and were intertwined with interethnic clashes; the second revolution, in particular, witnessed a lot of bloodshed. The third transfer of power, peaceful at the beginning, also brewed antagonism and ventured into a duel.

Moreover, the fate of the ousted leaders could not be called respectable post-presidency retirement. Since the Tulip Revolution, Akayev has been living in Russia, where he currently works at Moscow State University. Bakiyev is based in Belarus, where he has allegedly been granted citizenship. Together with his sons, Maxim and Zhanysh, also in Belarus, they were sentenced by a Kyrgyz court to long prison sentences for corruption and abuse of office. Atambayev, who had masterminded the arrangement to prolong his political career, now finds himself behind bars, demonstrating that the transfer of power in a post-Soviet state, especially one in Central Asia, can be accompanied by risk and unpredictability.

Lacking important natural resources like their rich neighbours, Kyrgyz leaders are usually unable to secure public support through petro- and gas-dollars. Thus, both society and political system does not allow the person at the helm to feel overconfident to establish a full autocracy. Despite its sacrifices in the form of a near-civil war, the Kyrgyz form of democracy is simultaneously uneasy and thorny due to the slow pace of necessary reforms, as well as the regional divide, the established clan system, nepotism, cronyism, and corruption. NEE

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Overcoming challenges with innovation

Capacity building in Ukraine

BEREND DE GROOT, MARIA MASLOWSKA,
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From the very beginning, the European Union's Support Group for Ukraine has focused on governance issues, for which it has mobilised close to 300 million euros in support between 2015 and 2019. With this and the deployment of other resources, the EU is closely involved in the implementation of key reforms. A lot has been accomplished, but many challenges lie ahead.

Five years ago Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity signalled the beginning of an extraordinary period of change. This included the enormous reform programme initiated with the signature and implementation of the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (AA/DCFTA) with the European Union. After decades of stalemate, this alignment to western and often specifically European standards, rules and structures was a particular challenge to Ukraine's institutions, some of which had remained largely unchanged since the times of the Soviet Union.

Ukraine's international partners are accompanying these changes with significant support. Notably, the European Union and its member states, as the biggest international donor, were from the beginning paying particular attention on how to assist the country in the implementation of the agreements. During the early stages of these joint efforts, the main challenges included the institutional weak-

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nesses and the lack of appropriate administrative capacity. As part of President Jean-Claude Juncker's promise to reward extraordinary reform efforts with extraordinary support, the EU has developed a number of innovative solutions to address these challenges and promote change.

Challenging environment

One of the most visible innovations is the creation of the Support Group for Ukraine (SGUA), launched in 2014 as a reaction to the Maidan events and the enormous need for reform. The European Commission aimed to provide strong and innovative support to strengthen Ukraine's management and absorption capacity and enable its administration and institutions to implement the ambitious Association Agreement / DCFTA. For the first time, a dedicated entity of this sort was set up for a non-EU country. It brings together around 40 EU officials from sectoral commission services and experts from EU member states. As a result, there is more – and differently – qualified EU staff working on and with Ukraine in Brussels and at the EU Delegation in Kyiv, thus allowing for a deeper analysis, more co-operation, support and policy dialogue.

The SGUA, beyond working on sectoral reforms, from the very beginning focused on governance issues for which it has mobilised close to 300 million euros in EU financial support between 2015 and 2019. With this and the deployment of other resources, the EU is closely involved in the implementation of key reforms such as decentralisation, the judiciary and law enforcement agencies, public finance management and wider public administration. The challenge of a large number of reforms running in parallel is compounded by the lack of adequately qualified "agents of change" within the administration. Thus, the SGUA gradually developed, and with international partners, notably the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, implemented a number of instruments and approaches which are often referred to as the "Ukraine Reform Architecture".

> The EU is closely involved in the implementation of key reforms such as decentralisation, judiciary, public finance and public administration.

In late 2015, in light of increasing social demand for change, the government saw itself facing mounting challenges. The situation further hindered success. For example, the lack of institutional capacities, notably of post-Soviet administrations, to cope with the transformation challenges was becoming more and more visible as a barrier. In the case of Ukraine and the AA/DCFTA, one can compare this to

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making available the construction plan for a Ferrari car to those who do not have the necessary skills to put the pieces together; those who, at the same time, have to build new roads. To make things even more challenging, all this was happening against the backdrop of a neighbour's continuous aggression.

More than a year after the start of the first post-Maidan government, the existing and largely unreformed administration was led by reform-oriented ministers and deputy ministers who mostly joined the government from the private sector and were now living on a salary of around 300 euros per month – an income that does not really allow one to live a comfortable life in Kyiv. Many lived off their savings or other sources and were now reaching the end of their funds. They were often supported by "volunteers" – people who were usually financed by international partners and NGOs. At the same time, there was a very strong sense that civil servants were by definition corrupt and the source of many of Ukraine's failures. In this way, many thought they should not earn much more than a minimum salary. There was also a growing understanding that the reform effort would take a long time before it was going to deliver, despite a strong sense that things were running out of time and the risk of losing public support. And, finally, Ukraine was experiencing a whole range of other extremely negative factors: the ongoing Russian destabilisation of eastern Ukraine; the very fragile economic situation; no way of increasing the salaries of officials, while the army required better equipment and pensions; and an underfunded health system.

There was a growing understanding that the reform effort would take a long time despite the risk of losing public support.

New starting point

In autumn 2015, as part of the SGUA and the EU delegation in Kyiv, we were intensely discussing with the Ukrainian government how the EU could best support public administration reform – a project that had already been under preparation and discussion. The then Prime Minister Arseniy Yatseniuk suggested that international partners should pool their resources to create a special fund from which the government would then increase (top-up) the salaries of those driving the reforms. This is a formula which had been tried out before – by the EU and others – and failed. Other solutions were needed, and fast. Notably pressed by the then finance minister, Natalie Jaresko, to match the short-term needs and medium- to long-term solutions, we developed a new model which accepted that profound reform of the public sector was necessary. The EU also provided high-level

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technical assistance consisting of senior practitioners from various EU states for the development of a robust strategy on public administration reform which was finally adopted by the government in June 2016.

This was the starting point for our support. It assumed that certain elements would be necessary for success. First, based on Ukrainian strategic documents, there is a budget support programme which lasts until 2021 and foresees an annual EU support of around 20 million euros to the national Ukrainian budget – subject to annually fulfilling progress on pre-agreed reform areas. This partially contributes to the additional fiscal space the government requires to implement the reforms, including increases in salaries. As there would not be sufficient space to increase salaries across the board, the government, at this phase of the reform, decided to increase the salaries of a limited number of the so-called reform posts. These are positions of particular importance for the newly created functions in the ministries, and which had to be filled through transparent and merit-based recruitment procedures. Civil servants already working for the government could apply as well as newcomers – but both had to go through the same rigorous selection process. With an average of seven candidates per position, 17 state secretaries were selected following open competition. With computer-based testing, web streamed interviews and the participation of civil society in the selection panels, these competitions were still not perfect, but were a satisfactory improvement on what used to take place before.

Another important element was the need to recognise the fact that the fully-fledged public administration reform would take decades to implement. To aid this process, we offered reform support teams (RST) for targeted temporary expert support to ministries. Ministries having sectoral reform strategies as well as institutional restructuring plans could apply. This combination of sectoral reforms with a commitment from the ministry to re-organise itself as well as the temporary nature of the scheme were key characteristics. The teams are there to design and implement sectoral strategies and priority reforms as well as to help lead the transformation of the ministries. They are composed of Ukrainian professionals, adequately qualified and often relatively young, selected through a transparent, merit-based process. The RSTs take part in functional reviews of the ministries, reorganisation, planning, and human resource management processes. They assist the leadership to make the ministries more policy-driven and efficient. At the same time, they are supposed to bring new qualities and a new culture to the often over-bureaucratic, process-oriented post-Soviet institutions.

A third component is the Reform Delivery Office (RDO) working with the prime minister's office. This group is an advisory body to the Cabinet of Ministers, co-ordinated by the prime minister and headed by the Minister of the Cabinet of

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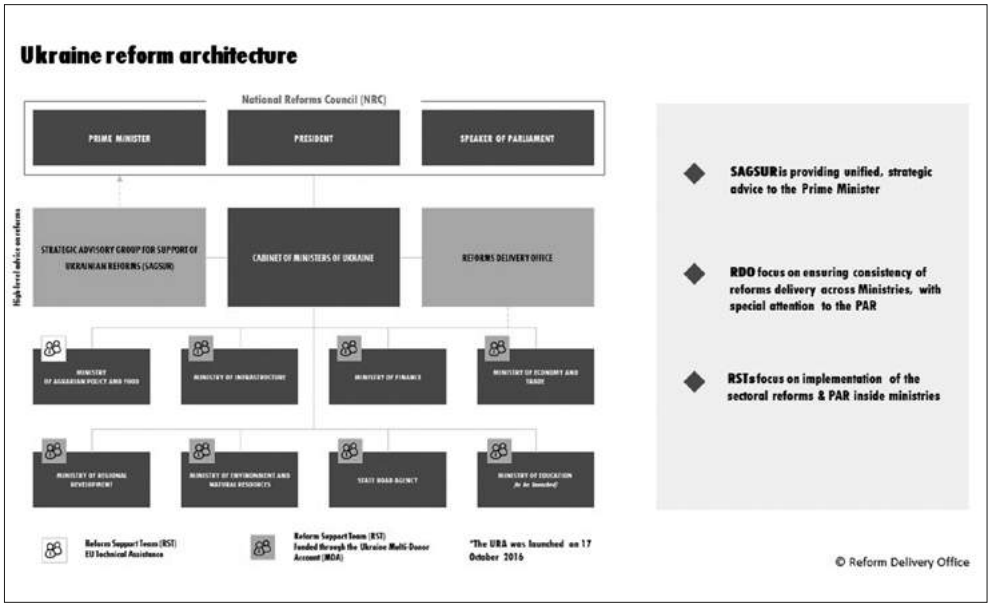
Ministers. The RDO is primarily responsible for the development and implementation of the annual government reform plan, overall co-ordination and ensuring consistency of reform delivery across the government. The team – which was partly built on the ideas and structures of the post-Maidan reform council, pays particular attention to the implementation of Ukraine's public administration reform.

Having realised that without quality staff reforms will not materialise, the now former Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman, in 2017, announced a massive recruitment undertaking to "reform staff positions" in ten ministries, two agencies and the secretariat of the cabinet of ministers. In parallel, those institutions were to transform and create the capacity for policy-making by establishing new policy directorates. So far around 600 people were recruited or selected and close to 38 per cent of them come from outside the civil service.

Agents of change

Our first assessments from within and outside Ukraine have shown that the reform support teams and the Reform Delivery Office seem to be an efficient tool for the quick delivery of particularly complex reforms. With their unique positions within the ministries, the teams tend to integrate more into the internal structure and provide an added quality to the existing civil service. The graphic below presents the architecture of how it works.



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Examples of deliverables include a government mid-term action plan 2017–2020, a revamped VAT refund system, a national transport strategy, an analytical report of the Top-100 state-owned companies, a pilot project on the liquidation of non-operational state-owned companies, plus numerous other sectoral proposals. Special in this regard is the additional EU support provided for the roll out of the highly successful territorial reform and decentralisation which, via the U-LEAD with Europe project, saw teams of Ukrainian experts established in all 24 regions.

The most important result, in our view, is that this approach has been bringing new, highly-talented individuals closer to (and into) the public service. As agents of change they can reinforce existing reform drivers and are doing so now in areas such as public finance, agriculture, energy efficiency, environment, economic development and infrastructure. This should be supporting the creation of a nucleus and, over time, may form the critical mass of a new generation of civil servants. Some former RST staff are already applying for permanent positions, thus ensuring the continuation of reforms and a sustainable reinforcement of the civil service in the long run.

Three more elements are important parts of this approach. Firstly, the composition of SGUA allowed us to accompany the processes much more intensely than is usually the case. This included hands-on participation, focusing on the transparent and merit-based recruitment of key officials, the definition of Ukraine's "Reform Staff" programme, and the swift build-up of the basic capacity needed to manage the public administration reform process. Having recruited some staff permanently in Kyiv, further facilitated this approach. Secondly, comprehensive reforms such as public administration will never work without some international experts involved. The EU is therefore making available very substantial and broad support, ranging from general support to co-ordination and the implementation reforms to very specific issues, such as the development of a human resource management information system.

Finally, there is an element of the reform architecture that goes beyond public administration: since mid-2016 the Strategic Advisory Group of Support to Ukrainian Reforms. This is a group of international and Ukrainian experts, around ten people in total. Originally set up with a double leadership of Ivan Miklos and Leszek Balcerowicz, it was later solely led by Miklos. His team of former ministers and high-level personnel from transition countries, such as Poland and Slovakia, was working directly with Prime Minister Groysman, the presidential administration and a few other key ministries.

How is all of this managed and financed? Here an important distinction needs to be made. First, budget support and technical assistance are paid and managed by the EU as part of a dedicated EU reform programme following the usual pro-

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cedures of bilateral EU–Ukraine co-operation. Second, for the implementation and further development of tools like reform support teams, Reform Delivery Office, and others outlined above, we have joined forces with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and a Multi-Donor Account that has been running for a while in Ukraine, which receives financial contributions from 17 countries and supports other innovative reform activities such as the Ukrainian Business Ombudsman. The EU is by far the largest financial contributor to this reform support.

As already noted: it is too early to assess the long-term impact but the initial results are encouraging, and a discussion about the replicability of some of these elements has started. However, it is important to keep in mind that the reform architecture is not an end in itself, but rather a means to an end and part of a much wider effort.

Key lessons for what's ahead

The EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy anticipated that the years ahead would be a time of "predictable unpredictability". Indeed, the global system has become more uncertain and less stable. Electoral processes in several of the Eastern Partnership countries this year – not least in Ukraine, but also in Europe with the European Parliament elections in May – have impacted the dynamics of the transformation and reform paths. Future success will require sufficient flexibility and adaptation skills on both sides to match ambition and expectation with reality in order to continuously search for innovation to overcome the challenges. It will have to be seen how the new administration intends to use the possibilities offered by the URA. The instrument is flexible and allows for adaptation to changing structures and working methods. The EU is demonstrating that it stands by its partner countries in their ongoing reform efforts. Sustained and effective reform is key to the continued success of the Eastern Partnership. The scope and depth of co-operation are determined by the EU and its partners' ambitions and needs, as well as the pace and quality of the reforms. With the AA/DCFTA as the staple of our co-operation and the roadmap for our success, the EU on its side also has to be innovative. Ukraine, the EU and other international partners are constantly trying to find ways to notably address a key challenge on the domestic front: the current weakness of the public administration (which will take time to reform while also requiring help to deliver visible successes in the short-term).

It is difficult to imagine how a country like Ukraine can achieve such ambitious objectives without substantial and comprehensive change. As seen in other coun-

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tries, such change has to be addressed in many ways, which includes making the government a competitive employer and attracting the best national talent. We have started to see a new generation of Ukrainians working on developing and reforming society – and, as international partners, we are trying to assist in this effort.

There are already some key lessons learnt about how the EU and the international community at large can assist Ukraine on its transformation path. First, there has to be strong buy-in from the country's leadership as well as a genuine momentum to introduce structural reforms. This has been the case of Ukraine after the Revolution of Dignity. As a response to this, we were able to roll-out very comprehensive reform programmes in areas such as public administration, decentralisation, energy efficiency and the fight against corruption – all of which are directly or indirectly benefitting from the reform architecture.

Second, support needs to be conditional upon more comprehensive and structural reforms being implemented in parallel. The success of both the Ukraine reform architecture and the wider public administration reform are, in fact, strongly co-dependant. Reform support teams and the Reform Delivery Office have been "enablers" for wider reform processes. By joining efforts and combining their respective strengths and areas of expertise, the EU and European Bank on Reconstruction and Development have achieved stronger leverage and higher policy impact. Indeed, there is scope for even more of this among Ukraine's international partners.

This paper is based on a presentation given by Peter M. Wagner at a conference of the EU-STRAT project (11 April 2019, The Hague; http://eu-strat.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/EU-STRAT-final-conference-programme.pdf). We thank notably Ilze Milta, Tetyana Kovtun, Anton Yashchenko, Kataryna Wolczuk for valuable comments and suggestions for improvement.

Berend De Groot, Maria Maslowska, Stefan Schleuning and Peter M. Wagner are officials of the European Commission and have been involved / are involved with Ukraine as part of their work in the Support Group for Ukraine in Brussels and/or the European Union Delegation to Ukraine in Kyiv. The views in this article are their own and they do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission.

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International justice on hold

QUINCY CLOET

It has been over five years since the conflict has broken out in Ukraine, which saw Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea as well as direct military support for separatism in Donbas. Yet little has been done to achieve justice for the civilian victims of these devastating events. Recent steps taken by the European Court of Human Rights and the International Criminal Court may indicate some slow progress ahead.

The inauguration of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, recent parliamentary elections and the formation of a new government have brought the question of justice back to the forefront of Ukrainian politics. Until now, little has been achieved in terms of ending impunity for criminal acts and human rights abuses perpetrated during the 2013–14 EuroMaidan and events in Crimea and Donbas. It remains to be seen whether Ruslan Riaboshapka, the new prosecutor general of Ukraine, will pursue a decisively different course of action supported by a recently-decreed legal reform commission. Nevertheless, domestic developments cannot overlook what takes place at the international level. In truth, international justice has little to show after five years. Both the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) have expressed an interest in Ukraine, and are at various stages of examination and legal adjudication. The high expectations that come with their involvement, however, have yet to materialise.

From the beginning, the prospect of international justice playing a constructive role in dealing with the aftermath of the EuroMaidan, as well as the events in Crimea and Donbas, meant a silver lining for Ukrainian citizens and civil society organisations with little faith in the domestic judicial system. There was hope that international bodies would be better equipped to deal with cases that went be-

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yond Ukraine's capacity to identify and charge individuals responsible for attacks against civilians at the Maidan or separatist aggressions by Russian-backed forces in eastern Ukraine.

A promising start

It took Ukraine only a couple of days after President Viktor Yanukovych was removed from office and fled the country to start the path of international criminal justice. The first declaration to the ICC was signed on February 25th 2014. It offered the court jurisdiction with reference to the events that occurred at the Maidan between late November 2013 and February 2014. A second declaration, filed on September 8th 2015, enlarged the scope to conflict that was occurring in eastern Ukraine and the occupied territory of Crimea. No time limit was specified in the second declaration, which means that the ICC is authorised to investigate present and future events. Soon after the two declarations, the ICC's Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) chose to open a preliminary examination into the case. As such, the OTP takes a closer look at the situation in Ukraine, gathers evidence and examines the court's jurisdiction, as well as the admissibility of probable international crimes before it presents a final assessment. Based on this, the prosecutor of the ICC, currently Gambian lawyer Fatou Bensouda, makes a recommendation that is subject to approval by a Pre-Trial Chamber (PTC).

A large number of cases related to human rights abuses in Ukraine were brought before the ECHR over the last several years.

The ECHR works in a somewhat different fashion. Rather than focusing on individual perpetrators of international crimes, it is primarily concerned with human rights abuses committed by state parties. The court does not take up cases of its own but receives individual or inter-state applications. Ukraine signed and ratified the European Convention in the 1990s which still provides fundamental political and civil rights to its citizens. A great number of cases related to human rights abuses in Ukraine were brought before the ECHR over the last several years. The majority were individual cases concerning the severe use of violence, unlawful imprisonment, torture and damage to property. Ukrainian lawyers and civil society organisations have been providing legal assistance to applicants. Meanwhile, there are a more limited number of inter-state cases concerning Russia and Ukraine that were taken to the court. While much of this sounds promising in terms of international justice for Ukraine, the present situation is marked by a sense of ambivalence.

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Case(s) thrown out

The ECHR has processed over 4,000 individual cases lodged against Russia and Ukraine, yet many of these have been declared inadmissible for lack of evidence. For instance, in a July 2016 ruling regarding a number of houses that were severely damaged or destroyed by shelling, the court noted that the applicants "have failed to submit any relevant documents supporting their Convention claims." While the ECHR took the exceptional circumstances of the conflict in eastern Ukraine into account, it noted that no attempt was made to obtain "at least fragmentary documentary evidence to substantiate their allegations." Since then, many cases lodged before the ECHR have met a similar fate, partly due to a lack of documentary evidence regarding the ownership of property or the context of the violation.

Many examples reveal a severe inadequacy in the preparation of cases by the applicants' legal representation. Last year, the court even took an unprecedented step of prohibiting one Ukrainian lawyer from representing or otherwise assisting applicants in both pending and future applications. The ECHR discovered that the lawyer in question had forged documents and also lodged applications on behalf of deceased Ukrainians without notifying the court of their deaths. Although such cases are exceptional, malpractice effectively has barred a large group of Ukrainian citizens from international adjudication by way of the ECHR. In 2016 alone, more than a thousand unsubstantiated cases were rejected, leaving alleged victims with no immediate recourse.

Individual applications that are still pending before the ECHR, neither declared inadmissible nor rejected at the outset, will be dealt with once the court has ruled on the inter-state cases. These concern the events on the Kerch Strait last November, the detention and prosecution of Ukrainian nationals, the abduction of children and, more generally, human rights abuses.

In September of 2019, the ECHR held a public hearing regarding Russia's alleged human rights violations in Crimea. As the hearing showed, this and other inter-state cases hinge upon Ukraine's argument that Russia should be treated as an occupying power – or as a complicit actor through its support for the separatists in Donbas – and therefore should be held accountable for human rights violations. If the ECHR sides with Ukraine, in the case of Crimea, it would mean a strong legal condemnation from the international community. Yet in previous years the Russian Federation has taken steps to limit, or even resist, the implementation of ECHR and other human rights related judgements. Unlike minor cases when there is no significant media exposure, it is likely that Russian authorities would accept the court's decision and ensure its implementation.

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Interests of justice

With the ECHR in the process of examining the inter-state cases, the ICC appears to be in the back seat. Nevertheless, the last couple of years have seen some important developments from the prosecutor's office. The most recent report on preliminary examination activities regarding Ukraine shows that the ICC's Bensouda has worked on the subject matter jurisdiction for alleged crimes and is considering whether to classify the conflict in eastern Ukraine as a non-international armed conflict, between Ukraine and the separatists in Donbas, or an international armed conflict between Ukraine and Russia, or possibly both. Among others, the OTP focuses on attacks against civilian population, enforced disappearance and killings, deprivation of liberty and torture, forced conscription, seizure of property, hostilities that amount to war crimes and gender-based crimes.

Bensouda has increasingly sought to distinguish between the Maidan events, eastern Ukraine fighting and the occupied territory of Crimea. In 2016 she concluded there was not enough evidence of a widespread or a systemic attack directed against the civilian population at Maidan that would constitute a crime against humanity. This conclusion, however, is still subject to change in light of new evidence. So far, there are a few hints from the prosecutor to the appropriateness of an investigation. The preliminary examination is not yet finalised and a number of major hurdles still remain.

Much of the work is complicated by the fact that Ukraine has signed but has never ratified the Rome Statute that is responsible for the functioning of the ICC and the implementation of international criminal law in a domestic setting. The ICC was established with the purpose of ending impunity (only) in situations when states are unable or unwilling to persecute sufficiently grave crimes. This is referred to as the principle of complementarity and permits state parties to refer cases to the ICC for investigation. Whereas the two declarations signed in 2014 and 2015 give the ICC jurisdiction over Ukraine, the fact that the country is not a state party to the Rome Statute comes with certain drawbacks. In particular, Ukraine relies on Bensouda's initiative for a preliminary examination on the number of admissible cases and her overall assessment of the situation. Moreover, even a positive OTP assessment can still be halted by judges who are part of the Pre-Trial Chamber. One example shows the risks associated with this process.

Earlier this year, there was a lot of anger and disbelief after the PTC decided that an investigation into the conflict in Afghanistan would not serve "the interests of justice." Although the chamber found there was a reasonable basis to consider that crimes within ICC jurisdiction have been committed in Afghanistan and would be admissible before the court, the judges believed the current circumstances could

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not deliver a successful investigation and prosecution. Much of this assessment relied on non-legal factors, namely, the amount of time that has elapsed since the events and the lack of co-operation between the involved parties with the OTP (most notably, the Taliban and the United States). Just before the PTC ruling, the United States had exerted considerable pressure on the court with hostile official statements and the withholding of a visa for Bensouda. It is easy to see in the Ukrainian context how other countries could respond with similar tactics and hope to sway the opinion of the PTC.

Ratifying Rome

The Afghanistan decision sets a precedent which has immediate implications for Ukraine. Future co-operation from the Russian Federation or the self-proclaimed "Donetsk People's Republic" and "Luhansk People's Republic" is unlikely. Involved parties will likely refuse access to relevant documents, witnesses and the locations where alleged crimes were committed. Such non-legal considerations may be taken into account again in the future when considering the likeliness that perpetrators of international crimes can be delivered to The Hague.

The Ukrainian government's degree of co-operation with the ICC has also been lacklustre in previous years, possibly because it is reluctant to see the prosecutor examine, as Tomasz Lachowski wrote in 2015, "all possible crimes committed by all parties of the conflict," including those committed by Ukrainian armed forces. At the onset, there was an unreasonable expectation that the ICC would end impunity for all crimes committed on Ukrainian territory – including minor violations. Yet past experience shows that the prosecutor tends to limit the scope of investigation to high-level decision-makers, and it does not distinguish between the different sides of the conflict. As a consequence, Ukraine has no discretion in what cases should be brought to trial.

> While the International Criminal Court does not have a reputation of delivering swift justice, it is one of the most effective instruments to address major unlawful acts.

Any chance that the ICC succeeds, however, relies on support of the Ukrainian government. To increase the possibility of a full investigation, Ukraine could avoid a review and the use of "the interests of justice" by the PTC altogether with a referral that automatically authorises a formal investigation. Either the United Nations Security Council or any state party can make such a referral. If Ukraine would ratify the Rome Statute

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and become a state party, it would dispose of its own means to refer a situation to the ICC. While this option does not exclude the possibility that the ICC's judges may decide against a trial at a later stage, it does allow the prosecutor to begin a full investigation and charge persons who committed the alleged crime. However, the Rome Statute's ratification has been on hold since 2016 and there has been little sign of an increased initiative despite the campaigning of civil society organisations.

While the ICC does not have a reputation of delivering swift and decisive justice, it is one of the most effective instruments at the disposal of countries that may not have the resources to address major unlawful acts. Many reports have noted systemic problems with Ukraine's judicial system due to a lack of staff, resources and good administration. Even if the new prosecutor general and Verkhovna Rada have good intentions about fixing these problems, time and resources will be required to overcome these challenges. There is no need to keep international justice on hold. The ECHR may well rule in favour of Ukraine on a number of human rights cases. In the meantime, the ICC should be a crucial actor, both in ending impunity for grave crimes and in supporting compliance with international legal standards. NEE

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Big brother to the rescue?

Can artificial intelligence help in Ukraine's fight against corruption?

KRISTINA V. ARIANINA

In August 2019 David Arahamiya, leader of the Servant of the People party in Ukraine's parliament, announced his party's intention to use Artificial Intelligence technology to fight potential corruption in parliament. He did not say what AI platform they may use or explain the technical aspects of the initiative, which leaves a lot of questions to be answered.

Transparency International's 2018 Corruption Perception Index (CPI) puts Ukraine in 120th place out of 180 countries. With a CPI score of 32, where 0 is highly corrupt and 100 is very clean, Ukraine has a long way to go in its fight against corruption. Since the country became an independent state in 1991, every government administration has vowed to tackle corruption. While the country has started to implement extensive anti-corruption measures in recent years, it has not shown any significant improvement.

In August this year, Ukraine's newly elected parliament, dominated by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Servant of the People party, announced plans to use artificial intelligence (or AI) technology to prevent corruption in Ukraine's parliament, the Verkhovna Rada. How this new initiative can help in Ukraine's fight against corruption remains to be seen.

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Persistent problem

Transparency International scores countries on how corrupt their public sector is viewed by analysts, businesspeople and other experts. It began ranking Ukraine's perceived level of corruption in 1998, when it ranked 69 out of 85 countries. On the scale of 0 to 10, Ukraine ranked 2.8 at the time. Over the next two decades, Transparency International added more countries and territories to the CPI index. While there were times when Ukraine moved up in the rankings – for instance, when it moved from 152nd to 144th in the 2012 listings – its CPI score has remained consistently low. Under the CPI 10-point scoring system in place through 2011, Ukraine, year after year, hovered within the 1.5 to 2.8 range. Under the 100-point scoring system adopted in 2012, the highest CPI score Ukraine has ever received was 32.

Various Ukrainian governments have recognised corruption as a "major problem". One after another, the country's leaders have pledged to eradicate corruption: from Leonid Kravchuk, Ukraine's first president, to Volodymyr Zelenskyy, today's incumbent president and a former TV comedian. Since 2014, at the insistence of the International Monetary Fund and the European Commission, anti-corruption reforms in Ukraine have finally begun to take off. The recent anti-corruption initiatives are too numerous to list here. To name just a few, following the adoption of several anti-corruption laws, Ukraine's government has established the National Agency for Prevention of Corruption (NAPC), a state agency responsible for the formulation and adoption of the national anti-corruption policy. Ukraine has also equipped itself with a slew of investigative and prosecutorial bodies specialising in public corruption. They include: the National Anti-Corruption Bureau of Ukraine (NABU); the State Bureau of Investigation; a national agency for finding, tracing and management of assets derived from corruption and other crimes; and a specialised anti-corruption prosecutor's office.

Since 2014, at the insistence of the International Monetary Fund and the European Commission, anti-corruption reforms in Ukraine have finally begun to take off.

The Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine's parliament, has also a specialised anti-corruption committee – the Committee on Preventing and Combatting Corruption of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, which is tasked with carrying out anti-corruption investigations. Other measures include the creation of an online procurement system, called ProZorro, and an electronic asset declaration system for public officials. These initiatives, all taken within a span of less than five years, are remarkable. But they have not resulted in real change. Few cases have been referred to prosecution

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and even fewer cases have resulted in convictions. The NAPC and the specialised prosecutor's office have themselves been involved in some scandals. Without adequate auditing and data verification, the e-procurement and e-declaration systems have had a slow start.

All eyes (and hope) are now on the much-anticipated High Anti-Corruption Court, which began operations on September 5th this year, and the new prosecutor general. According to Zelenskyy, "Everything will start in the autumn, when we have both the Anti-Corruption Court and the prosecutor general."

Big Brother

On August 4th 2019 Zelenskyy's Servant of the People party added a new twist to the anti-corruption reforms, this time aimed at the Verkhovna Rada itself. David Arahamiya, the Servant of the People's leader, announced his party's intention to use AI technology to fight potential corruption in parliament. Arahamiya did not say what AI platform they may use or explain the technical aspects of the initiative. He only offered a general outline and description of the technology and called it "Big Brother". According to Arahamiya, "Big Brother" will continuously monitor votes, detecting patterns and flagging "anomalies" for further investigation.

Using AI technology as an anti-corruption tool is not entirely new. Sweden, for example, uses it to uncover fraud and tax evasion.

The term "artificial intelligence" was coined in 1956 by John McCarthy, one of the founders of AI research, who defined it as "getting a computer to do things which, when done by people, are said to involve intelligence". Many different definitions for AI exist today, but it generally refers to "machines that respond to stimulation consistent with traditional responses from humans, given the human capacity for contemplation, judgment, and intention … AI works by combining large amounts of data with fast, iterative processing and intelligent algorithms, allowing the software to learn automatically from patterns or features in the data".

There are four main types of AI systems: reactive machines, limited memory, theory of mind and self-awareness. AI has numerous applications, from game playing to navigation to self-driving cars. AI is used in these and other contexts through the application of a number of processes, including machine learning, deep learning, natural language processing, expert systems and fuzzy logic. Various industries employ AI, including healthcare, education, automotive, retail, finance, and legal.

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Using AI technology as an anti-corruption tool is not entirely new. Sweden, for example, uses it to uncover fraud and tax evasion. The UK government also uses AI to identify welfare fraud. AI technology looks for patterns in submitted claims, such as the same phone number or descriptions written in a similar style, and flags suspicious claims for further investigation. The government of Singapore has tested AI to identify procurement fraud through an analysis of financial data, procurement requests, tender approvals, and the names of government and vendor employees and their family members.

In December 2018, the US Treasury Department's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) and federal banking regulators issued a joint statement to encourage financial institutions to consider innovative approaches, including AI, to enhance their anti-money laundering compliance programmes. Indeed, many financial institutions already employ AI to uncover money-laundering, tax evasion, and fraud.

Big data, little data

The benefits of AI are immense; it has the ability to analyse vast amounts of data and reveal patterns and anomalies and identify relationships, all at the speed and complexity that no human can match. However an AI platform will only be as good as the data provided and the human training it receives. Considering this, it is not clear whether, or how, AI technology could be of benefit in fighting against corruption in the Rada.

Little is known about how the Rada would employ "Big Brother". To explain how AI may assist with the detection of voting aimed to benefit corrupt interests, Arahamiya offered the following hypothetical: "Imagine, someone votes for two months in a certain way, and then all of a sudden, nine people vote according to a different scenario … in a way different from usual." There are 450 deputies in the Verkhovna Rada. If they vote on, say, 100 legislative proposals a day, the amount of data may be well suited for AI assistance.

Yet the data may lack quality from the AI's perspective for two reasons. First, "button pushing", or non-personal voting on behalf of, or instead of, absent delegates has been a long-standing practice in the Rada. Until this problem has been addressed, no AI platform can analyse voting history or patterns effectively since one cannot be sure who cast the votes. Second, considering the wide range of issues legislators vote on daily, there may be too many apples and oranges for the AI to compare. To illustrate this, in June this year, the Rada voted in favour of the establishment of boundaries of the Sokal district of the Lviv region, military

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chaplaincy and professional higher education. On July 11th the Rada adopted legislation on a myriad of issues, including sexual offenders' registration, alternative energy resources and a free trade agreement between Ukraine and Israel. If one were to load all of these votes into an AI system, it is difficult to see how corrupt tendencies could emerge.

It seems that patterns or anomalies could only be detected if you were to categorise votes to see how a particular Rada deputy has voted, for example, on all the bills related to alternative energy resources or trade agreements. Once that is done, however, the AI does not seem necessary as the size of data would shrink considerably. With corruption being such a hot topic in Ukraine, the use of artificial intelligence as a tool against it in the new Rada, will likely spark interest. Whether this will materialise into something tangible is less certain.

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Intermarium in the 21st Century

A new path for Europe?

NICK A. COHEN

In sharp contrast to the world in which Józef Piłsudski originally proposed an Intermarium alliance, the political climate today is ripe for regional collaboration. Eastern European nations are now long established and, therefore, unlikely to express the reticence that 1920s Lithuania and Ukraine did in returning into union with Poland.

In interwar Europe, newly-independent nations in the east found themselves suspended between two competing threats: German expansionism to the west and Russian imperialism to the east. In an effort to combat these threats, Józef Piłsudski, chief of state and First Marshal of the Second Polish Republic, advocated for a federation of Eastern European nations, interconnected in terms of economics, defence and politics. His proposal failed, and one by one the nations in Europe's borderland fell prey to the threats surrounding them. Today, Eastern European nations are again surrounded by threats, from Russian adventurism in the east to sublimation under EU politics in the west. Learning from its mistake 100 years ago in not banding together in solidarity, Eastern Europe should come together in a 21st century adaptation of Piłsudski's proposal, creating a strong and independent region capable of asserting itself on the international stage.

Piłsudski's proposal, known in Polish as *Międzymorze* and by its Latin cognate *Intermarium* (both of which translate to "between the seas"), was formulated in

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the context of post-WWI Europe. Recognising that the fledgling nation-states in Eastern Europe could never stand up to the imperial designs of Europe's power players on their own, Piłsudski advocated for an economic, defence and quasi-political association modelled loosely on the medieval Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. In its most ambitious iteration, the Intermarium coalition would have formed a united political community stretching from the Baltic Sea down to the Adriatic and Black Seas, capable of pushing back against economic, military and political pressures exerted by powers both to the east and west.

Piłsudski's Intermarium

Piłsudksi's Intermarium drew heavily on his Promethean plan, which was intended to weaken the Soviet Union by supporting nationalist movements among non-Russians to Poland's east. Through the dual-pronged approach of Prometheanism and Intermarium, he hoped to strengthen Poland's eastern border and to neutralise the growing Soviet threat. In the first few years of independence after the conclusion of the First World War, Piłsudski attempted to enact both plans, although he never expressed these sympathies explicitly or systematically. Rather, he approached their development much the same way as he engaged in domestic politics – through his cult of personality and personal entreaties.

For several reasons, his efforts were largely unsuccessful. Internationally, Piłsudski met with strong resistance from foreign nationalists due to the legacy of Polish political and cultural domination during the period of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Lithuanians, in particular, were reluctant to re-join any form of union with the Poles, as they had been unequal partners in the Commonwealth. The leader of the Ukrainian nationalist movement, Symon Petliura, was more sympathetic to Piłsudski's Promethean initiative, as he recognised the existential danger that Soviet expansion posed to Ukraine, although he never expressed outright support for the Intermarium. Belarus, whose territory would have formed the most significant geographical barrier to Soviet expansionism, had only a weak national movement during the early interwar period, with no strong desire to counteract increasing Soviet influence. Ultimately, the only newly-formed nation in Eastern Europe willing to engage in any formal political, economic or military alliance with Poland was Romania, which concluded a series of treaties beginning in 1921 with the Polish state, although none of these treaties approached the level of integration envisioned by Intermarium.

The great powers were likewise reluctant to support Polish initiatives aimed at weakening Russia. Immediately after the war, neither France nor Britain viewed

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Bolshevism as a serious political development and were therefore unwilling to engage in any behaviour they saw as potentially threatening their longstanding alliance with imperial Russia. Instead, both powers urged Poland to follow Wilsonian principles of self-determination along purely ethnic lines, in the hope that this would satisfy both nationalist desires in Poland as well as traditional Russian foreign policy objectives.

Piłsudski also met with strong domestic resistance, led chiefly by Roman Dmowski and the National Democrats. Dmowski's vision for Poland aligned with that of France and Britain, namely, an ethnically homogeneous Polish state. Any attempt to incorporate ethnically non-Polish territories into a new Polish state (or federated union) was anathema to his political objectives. This political philosophy was to play a major role in the death of Piłsudski's Intermarium following the conclusion of the Polish-Soviet War of 1919–1921. Dmowski controlled the Sejm during the peace negotiations in Riga in March 1921, meaning that his vision for the future of Poland dominated, as any treaty required formal parliamentary approval. Because of this, Poland's diplomats negotiated a peace that they knew would pass muster in parliament. This meant only modest territorial gains eastward to reflect the large Polish communities living in the borderlands between Poland and Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine. It also meant the ceding of Lithuanian, Belarusian and Ukrainian territory to the Soviet sphere of influence, resulting in the total destruction of the nationalist movements in those countries and the establishment of Soviet republics. This peace, which situated Poland between a strengthened USSR and a weakened but eventually revived Germany, was to last until the dual Nazi and Soviet invasions in September 1939.

Strengthening Europe

Today, Poland and other Eastern European states are, once again, suspended between powers to the east and to the west. This suspension has led to growing nationalist fervour, which many pundits lament may be the demise of the liberal European project. In contrast to what many commentators suggest, however, the hope for salvation may rest not in greater integration within the structures of the EU, but rather could lie in reviving Piłsudski's dormant Intermarium and adapting it to the needs of today.

Such a proposal needs to transcend the largely symbolic unity of current regional associations, including the Visegrád Group and the Three Seas Initiative. It would require institutional co-operation on a level akin to the European Union with functional decision-making groups comprised of high-level plenipotentiar-

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ies as well as working groups commissioned specifically to design and implement pan-regional foreign, economic and defence policies. In fact, an initial framework for such an association has already been proposed. In 2014, Marcin Kędzierski, the president of the Jagiellonian Club, a conservative think tank, suggested in an article for *Nowa Konfederacja* ten concrete steps that Eastern European nations could take to strengthen regional association, including coalescing defence and economic policies, funding increased transportation and infrastructure networks and bankrolling new, pan-regional educational initiatives. While this should not serve as the final iteration of a 21st century Intermarium, it provides a strong intellectual backbone from which to begin such discussions.

The bifurcation of European association would, in fact, serve to strengthen pan-European ties. It is precisely the premature enlargement of the European community that has contributed to the various pressures now weighing on Brussels. Nationalist politicians in Eastern Europe push back not on the idea of a united European community per se, but rather on the dominance of Western European economic and political values in that community. Allowing Eastern European nations to construct their own regional political identity and to develop their economies so as to be competitive in the 21st century could ultimately encourage greater European co-operation. As Eastern Europe becomes politically independent, conversations in Brussels in regards to economic, political and defence policies will transition from EU-led lectures to true dialogue, setting the foundation for lasting partnership and true collaboration. This collaboration, in turn, will create stronger and more authentic connections between Europe's east and west than current policies could ever hope to produce, as both leaders and constituents in Eastern Europe will feel like true partners in the European community rather than the liminal step-sibling that they are treated as today.

In contrast to the world in which Piłsudski proposed Intermarium, the political climate today is ripe for regional collaboration.

A united Eastern Europe would also provide the strongest bulwark against Russian aggression. Russia's meddling in European affairs, which occurs largely through its adventurism in the east, relies on weak states, political disunity and the sense of suspension that current EU enlargement strategies have helped create. Robust, thriving economies in Eastern Europe, coupled with a unity in foreign policy that holds regional autonomy as a central tenet, will do more to disrupt Russia's strategic game than any tactic employed by the EU and NATO to date.

In sharp contrast to the world in which Piłsudski originally proposed Intermarium, the political climate today is ripe for regional collaboration. Eastern European nations are now long established and, therefore, unlikely to express the reticence

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that 1920s Lithuania and Ukraine did in returning into union with Poland. Furthermore, while Poland continues to be a trendsetter and leader in the region, it no longer controls the linguistic and cultural dominance that it had during the era of empires, meaning that smaller nations would not have their voices drowned out. Domestically, a strengthened Eastern Europe fits with the current political zeitgeist. Populist nationalists in the region are not, in fact, isolationist; their resistance to globalism rests largely in the desire to preserve some uniquely Eastern European sensibility. An Intermarium would do much to ensconce this sensibility, meaning that nationalists from Poland to Albania should support the idea in principle.

The European Union should also welcome the creation of an Intermarium, as it would relieve enlargement pressure on Brussels while strengthening Europe's eastern edge. Removing all discussion of Eastern European accession to the EU, even if just temporarily, gives space to politicians in Brussels to re-examine their policies towards existing member states without having to continually project growth. This inward reflection is sorely needed, as recent challenges to the EU have proven the necessity of adjusting priorities to meet the demands of a changed world. Politicians in Brussels should also recognise that a strong, independent Eastern Europe is not a threat; on the contrary, it is an immeasurable asset. Again, the elimination of political disunity and fragmentation in the region will considerably damage Russia's ability to meddle in European affairs. And the threat of a strong Eastern Europe aligning en bloc with Russia is slim to none; aside from Belarus and Serbia, no Eastern European country has much of a historical reason to ally with Russia. Alignment with Russia is unlikely from a theoretical perspective, as well, as the very concept of a multi-nation political unity rests largely on principles of Wilsonian liberalism. This intellectual tie provides a thread that connects Eastern Europe with the rest of the transatlantic community, bolstering the knots already formed through economic and cultural association.

Piłsudski's Intermarium failed largely due to a desire among Eastern European leaders to assert their independence. Today, an adaptation of his proposal can succeed for the very same reason. A union of Eastern European nations, born of a Polish idea and midwifed by intellectuals and politicians throughout the region, will be the strongest declaration of independence in Eastern Europe since national polities rose up to overthrow communism in 1989. What is more, it will create a stronger, more resilient European community that is ready to face all of the challenges of the 21st century. NEE

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Preserving the GDR

PHOTOS AND TEXT: IWONA REICHARDT

In Germany there is more than one narrative about its East German past. The official one, which can be seen in the Berlin-based GDR Museum, shows a rather murky picture of oppression in a totalitarian state. This story is complemented by an alternative narrative, which is created by the people who still hold positive memories of their country's socialist past.

I start my journey with Berlin. With dozens of tourists I wait in line to the GDR Museum located on the banks of the Spree River. Opened to the public in 2006 it is one of the main attractions of Germany's capital, advertised all over the city and, as expected, visited by thousands of people a year. They come from all over the world. The visitors, as I gather from the conversations I overhear while waiting in the line for a ticket, differ in age and knowledge of what they are about to see. Clearly, for many the post-war period of German history, even though not that remote, is already abstract. In the line I see British teenagers, Asian tourists, a middle-aged French couple and two Polish ladies who were probably in their late 50s. But there were also many German visitors, of all ages.

Hands-on experience

The permanent exhibit of the Berlin GDR Museum caters to all tastes. Its creators have built an institution that, as they claim, provides visitors a "hands-on experience of history" (*Geshichte zum Anfassen*). The museum goers are able to experience everyday life in the non-existent East German state. They can take a ride through a socialist district in an authentic Trabant – clearly the biggest hit of the exhibit. There are also old TV sets with East German programmes, such as

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Der Augenzeuge, which were short film chronicles produced by the state-owned film studio DEFA. One can see newspapers and magazines of the time, including the popular fashion journal *Sybille*. The hands-on experience continues when visitors peek into numerous East German interiors, including a preschool, or enter different rooms in a typical socialist-style flat. In addition, the museum displays some artefacts from German shops, both the popular retail chain Konsum and the hard currency Intershops which sold imported cigarettes, liquor and appliances, but also quality East German products that were exported and then re-imported.

Indicatively, the guide book that I purchase together with the ticket, describes how the hands-on experience of history "does not just refer to the unique level of interaction, but indicates the direction by it". Therefore, the institution is aimed at provoking questions among the visitors of how they would have acted if they lived under, as the guidebook states, "a constant bombardment of propaganda and the shadow of coercion and servility. Would you have done what was expected? What if things are different between then and now?"

Clearly, these are very difficult questions, especially if asked to someone who has never been put in a situation of limited freedom nor has ever experienced life in a socialist state. My assumption is that this could be said about the majority of the visitors. For that reason their responses, even after a very careful walk through the exhibit, can be merely hypothetical. The exhibit does not provide clear answers. Its goal is to help visitors trace the popular perceptions of the GDR and understand people's responses to the repressive political system. Fair enough.

The Berlin GDR Museum depicts the story of a regime through the prism of how it affected the life of individuals and the society at large.

Based on this approach the exhibit depicts the story of a regime through the prism of how it affected the life of individuals and the society at large. The first room gives the impression that the narrative will be built around the chronology presenting GDR's political development that eventually led to its end and the unification of the two German states in 1991. The tour indeed illustrates the path from oppression to freedom. After finishing one knows which side to choose. And to help with this decision are, among others, such items as the WTSCHE Line Telephone. It was a high frequency, supposedly untappable, telephone line used for communication between GDR's leader Erich Honecker and the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union – Leonid Brezhnev. In the museum you can listen to both leaders talk. The recording is real and gives a foretaste of the geopolitical context of the GDR, which clearly was under Moscow's supervision and control. Coupled with information on Stasi's hideous role in the surveillance of the society,

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it can give you goose bumps. But will it help you trace the popular perceptions of the GDR? Surely there are elements in the exhibit that are aimed at that. They are to be found in the sections that focus on everyday life; working, leisure, sports etc.

Appreciating what I experience here, I still leave the museum with a sense of incompleteness. My intuition tells me that I need to see more to get the full picture of the memory of the GDR, which was more nuanced also in terms of popular perception. For this, I chose to visit two other museums which I found through a Facebook group called "DDR-kennst Du das noch…" (GDR – do you still remember it…) which is administered by Conny Kaden, the founder of a GDR Museum in Pirna. I make arrangements to meet with him first.

Pirna

The train arrives at the station in Pirna, a small town around 30 kilometres south-east of Dresden. As planned Conny was waiting there in an old Lada, which he also uses as a roving advertisement for the museum. It features a picture of Conny's daughter on the back window. She is dressed in a pioneer uniform and invites visitors to the Pirna GDR Museum. The vehicle is one of many that Conny has collected over the years and has on display in front of the museum. Together with an old tram, they mark the external elements of the GDR.

In a conversation that we have in a small garden café where we drink an old style mineral water, Conny tells me that the vanishing of such elements, like cars and buildings, from the public space was one of the reasons why he opened the museum. Here parked under a small roof, these old cars are all well-preserved and maintained. The same cannot be said about the Palace of the Republic, which was the building of the East German parliament – it was shut down to the public in 1990 due to a high level of asbestos discovered in the structure.

Now in his 50s, Conny established the museum in 2002. Today, this institution can pride itself as having one of the largest collections of East German items in the world. Intrigued by the idea of a private collection on such a large scale, I ask where he got the idea in the first place. Conny's answer is indicative and probably quite representative for a larger group of people who are trying to preserve the positive memory of the East German past.

In his youth, Conny served in the GDR army and later worked for a uranium plant which is located near Pirna. Naturally, under the GDR this was a state-owned enterprise, employing a large portion of the city's population. With the change of the political and economic systems and the unification of the two German states, like many people in this part of the country, Conny lost his job and started working

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for a private employer – a logistics company. There, while moving materials from one place to another, he saw how many East German items were still around. Thus, one day when asked to work on a Saturday, without any extra pay, Conny made a quick decision – he will open a GDR museum.

Without much help from the local authorities, at that time controlled by the Christian Democratic Union, Conny set up the first collection in a private flat. Once his landlady found out what was being displayed, she offered him another apartment free of charge. This expanded space had to suffice until 2005 when Conny got a 200-square-metre barn. He moved the collection there, which is located on the opposite side of the premises of the museum today. With time even the barn proved too small. People kept bringing more and more of their stuff to Conny, and the collection had to be moved once again.

Still under CDU rule, the city refused to help, even though Conny informed the authorities that interest in the museum was growing. Help finally came after the army, which had an old empty barracks of over 2,000 square meters available for rent. After taking this offer, Conny moved the exposition there. He managed to buy part of the building in 2009 where the museum now has its permanent location.

Main message

Today the museum is run by three people and hosts between 25,000–35,000 visitors a year. They come from all over Europe, mainly from Holland, but also Scandinavian countries, the United Kingdom, Russia and the nearby Czech Republic. But the majority are Germans of all ages. Conny says that you cannot tell if they come from the former East Germany or whether they are from the West. But it is to the latter that the museum has its main message: "Look our life in the GDR was not as grey and sad as you thought and were told. We had a happy childhood and a happy life." This is what Conny stresses as we continue our talk.

When I ask how he built such a narrative, he explains that unlike the GDR Museum in Berlin which presents the lifestyle of the 1950s and 60s, hence making an impression of an outdated reality that was sad and rusty, his team decided to build the story by presenting mainly the design and interiors of the late East German period – the 1970s and 80s. This is most visible in the displays of well-equipped shops, crowded cafés and modern flats. In the exposition of the latter there are even such technologically advanced items as a dishwasher. Naturally, this was a luxury, available only to the very few.

When building this positive story, Conny also includes his own life and the that of the local area. Behind the window of one of the cabinets, you can thus find

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his old work ID card, while his soldier uniform hangs in a closet of a replica of an army room. The very first room in the museum is a imitation of a police room, which was located in this building and where Conny's brother worked. The local elements include a story of Pirna's dam whose construction was started in 1871 and completed in 1975. It operates until today.

The most interesting room, and one that would be difficult to find elsewhere, is at the end of the hallway of the second level of the building. It is a room devoted to Hartmut Schorsch, the East German photographer of the authorities and celebrities (*Der Fotograf der Mächtigen und Schönen*), as the plaque to his tribute suggests. Indeed, Schrosch was a renowned East German photographer who captured the life of the state and its main figures, working for such magazines as *FF-Dabei* and *Für Dich*. He was not only the private photographer of Hoeneker's wife, but also one documenting GDR's infrastructure constructions in remote Siberia. After the change of the political system, Schrosch wanted to destroy all of his photographs. However, in 2010 he handed his collection over to the museum in Pirna, along with some of his equipment. On display are only some of his photographs, many more are in the warehouse, waiting their turn to be shown to the public.

I leave Pirna with a better understanding of the intentions of those who hold a fond memory of their life in East Germany. In many cases, they do it quietly in their private homes where they store old books, music, or Christmas and Easter decorations. Here, in Pirna, Conny gives them a chance to enjoy it in public. He does not hide that the goal is to build a positive story about the GDR. One of a happy life and prosperous state. For the moment he feels that he has succeeded, but looking into the future, Conny worries about who will continue his work and manage the museum for future generations.

Magdeburg

My next stop towards a greater understanding of the memory of the East German state is in Magdeburg, a town on the Elbe River, 160 kilometres west of Berlin. Here, on a small street in a residential neighbourhood in the city's outskirts, I discover the Small GDR Museum (*Das kleine DDR-Museum*). The museum is run out of the home of Wolfgang Cleve – a man in his late 50s. He welcomes me in a t-shirt with the word "OST" written on it.

Wolfgang inherited the house after his grandfather passed away in 2005. When cleaning its basement, Wolfgang and his wife found numerous objects from the early GDR period, including food tins and household items. This discovery inspired him to start a collection. Once people in the neighbourhood had heard that

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Wolfgang was opening a GDR collection, many brought him stuff from their own basements and attics. In an act of solidarity, Conny Kaden from Pirna also sent him many items. To complete his collection, Wolfgang began buying objects off Ebay. He has become quite an expert in verifying GDR authenticity.

We start our visit with the garden house built by Wolfgang's grandpa which now serves as a mini ice-cream parlour. This exhibit is meant to show the leisure activities of the GDR. Again something that Wolfgang and others of his generation remember fondly. We then move to his grandfather's workshop in which old tools and unopened seed packages are displayed. While showing them to me Wolfgang explains that in the GDR, just like in other states of the socialist bloc, people would do a great amount of DIY activities. His grandfather was no different, he was a jack of all trades.

After the garden tour we enter the house, which clearly has not lost his grandfather's presence. His paintings of local landscapes hang in the front porch which takes us up the stairs to the life in the GDR. On the first floor we enter a grocery shop. Wolfgang's favourite place in the museum, as I quickly learn. Its shelves are stocked with meat tins, oil containers, puddings, and fake cheese and bread. It is a true travel in time.

As we tour the shop, East German music is played in the background making the experience more pleasurable and authentic. We take the stairs to the attic where along the wall are more products. Among them are household cleaning supplies, but also posters and displays of stamps and East German marks. In the attic we pass a "pharmacy" where you can find old pills, cough syrups and band-aides but also cotton wool and basic medical equipment.

Once people in the neighbourhood had heard that Wolfgang was opening a GDR collection, many brought him stuff from their own basements and attics.

Since Wolfgang was a trained electrician, his museum could not exist without an electric room. Its main item is a TV set that is permanently showing old East German programmes, accompanied again by the sounds of East German music. Here, Wolfgang tells me that many of the products are his personal items, which he kept even after unification. He did not want to throw anything away, especially the things he had when he was in *Freie Deutsche Jugend*, which was an East German youth organisation, or when he started school. Hoarding was an East German characteristic, Conny told me back in Pirna. Wolfgang confirms that as we go from room to room in this private museum/house.

The Magdeburg collection is surely smaller than what I saw in Pirna, but it is still made of at least a few thousand objects. When asked if he has a record of

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them, Wolfgang throws up his arms, asking as how to count everything? Indeed, the museum is full of tiny objects such as small cars or matchboxes.

Since its opening, around 4,000 have visited this side-street museum. Among the visitors are groups of elderly who suffer from dementia. They come here as part of their therapy, to retrieve the positive memory of the past. But there are also regular visitors and tourists from such countries as Switzerland and Austria. To all of them the museum is free of charge, which is indicated at the entrance to the house. And yet, Wolfgang complains that the local tax office makes his life difficult. Its controllers did not believe that the museum generates no income and considered donations and in-kind contributions as taxable. The problems disappeared once an article was published in the local newspaper stating that the museum is a private collection.

When asked about the future, Wolfgang appears more optimistic than Conny. He plans to pass over his collection to other institutions. He knows of many that would be interested and mentions that he has heard of some plans for the opening of another GDR museum in Magdeburg. He probably won't visit them, though, as his disability does not allow him to leave the house.

I return to Berlin with a new appreciation for the memory of East Germany. Despite the fact the unification in 1990 erased the GDR from the map, it did not erase it from the memory of the people who lived and experienced it. While to some, the opening of the GDR's dark past came as a terrible shock, leading to suicide in extreme cases, others abandoned their early life and moved west. Yet, some stayed and never forgot or questioned what took place in the past. Even with the knowledge of a less than perfect state, they cannot deny their happy East German times. "I really loved our GDR," a waitress tells me in a small restaurant near Friedrichstraße when I mention the purpose of my trip.

The collections of material goods which Conny and Wolfgang gathered over time also show the bright colours of the GDR. More than anything else, the museums are their own personal stories of a happy life. NEE

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The author would like to thank Dagmar Kriebel for her assistance with translation and invaluable knowledge of life in the GDR.

Material for this text was collected in three cities Berlin-Pirna-Magdeburg – thanks to a grant received from the Foundation for Polish-German Co-operation.

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In the GDR Museum in Berlin visitors can peek into a preschool room in the style of the early GDR period.

The GDR Museum in Berlin displays some artefacts from German shops, including the popular retail chain Konsum.

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Conny Kaden, the founder of the GDR Museum in Pirna, in front of a replica of the army room. In his youth Conny served in the GDR army. His uniform is today on display in the museum.

The building of the old army barracks. Since 2009 a part of the building is the site of the GDR Museum, while the other part is used by a furniture company.

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The vehicle is one of many that the DDR Museum in Pirna has collected over the years. It stands in front of the museum building and is used for marketing purposes around the city.

The first room in the GDR Museum in Pirna is an imitation of a police room, which was located in this building and where the museum founder's brother once worked.

In the exposition, there are even such technologically-advanced items as a GDR dishwasher.

The main message of the museum in Pirna is: "Our life in the GDR was not as grey and sad as you thought and were told."

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The museum in Pirna builds a positive story of the GDR past by presenting mainly the design and interiors of the late East German period – the 1970s and 80s.

Vanishing of such elements, like cars and buildings, from the public space was one of the reasons why the GDR Museum in Pirna was opened. The display includes a miniature of the Palace of the Republic, which was the building of the East German parliament.

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Wolfgang Cleve at his favourite place in his museum – a room which is a replica of a GDR shop.

The museum in Magdeburg is run out of the home of Wolfgang Cleve.

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The visit to the museum in Magdeburg starts with the garden house. It now serves as an ice-cream parlour.

The second stop on the tour of the museum is Wolfgang's grandfather's workshop.

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The replica of the shop is a true travel in time.

Many items in the museum are Wolfang's personal belongings. He did not want to throw anything away, especially the things he had when he was in *Freie Deutsche Jugend* or when he started school.

I write for people who are like me

A conversation with Elena Fanailova, a Russian poet. Interviewer: Elżbieta Żak.

ELŻBIETA ŻAK: I see that in many countries the sphere of poetic expression has become narrower and tends to reflect people's daily life. It has thus become more realistic, while the abstract and more avant-garde poetry tends to be seen as more elitist, although it too, of course, has its admirers. Correct me if I am wrong, but I would call your poetry versed prose. It is not very abstract and unlike the Russian literary tradition which is so attached to "high culture" and less interested in such genres as the reportage…

ELENA FANAILOVA: But in Russia we have no school of reportage, like you have in Poland.

However, this "observation of everyday life" through literature, which has visibly shrank in Russia, is clearly something we can say about your poetry. How do your readers perceive your work? Do they see it as a poetry of different "voices"? Do they want to hear these voices? Do they associate themselves with them? Or would they rather escape from it as they are so tired with their own lives, and for that reason expect something else from poetry?

Actually I have a few answers to these questions. Two days ago a young man messaged me on Facebook saying: "I want to kiss your hands for all that you are doing". He is in his early 20s and interested in literature. So that is one thing. The next thing is that, of course, in their great mass Russians associate poetry with such names as Pushkin. Our classical literature is that of the 19th century, which we call the golden age of Russian poetry. But what about Vladimir Mayakovsky or the futurists? They did not exist? There was no silver age? For those who think like that even Anna Akhmatova was very extravagant. I am saying this to show that there is a very large chasm between people who glorify the golden age and those who are creating contemporary Russian culture. In other words, a relatively small number of people is interested in modern culture

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and the challenges of our modern times. You can compare it to the support for Putin and the annexation of Crimea, which is estimated at around 76–82 per cent. My question is: where are the remaining 18 or 16 per cent?

They do not mark their presence?

They exist. Sociologically speaking, our situation has not changed for the last 20 years. I remember how many people voted for the liberal party 20 years ago and this is the same 18 per cent that is anti-Putin today. Lithuanian philosopher, Tomas Venclova, once explained it in an interview I had with him saying that the problem with Russia, just like Poland and Lithuania, is that in one state there are two countries. In the case of Poland, we have a country of the "borderlands" (*kresy*) and a country of large urban centres, namely, Warsaw, Kraków, Gdańsk, etc. I can say the same about Russia. We have a country of the intelligentsia who live in St Petersburg, Moscow, Yekaterinburg and Novosibirsk (I do not want to say that there is nothing in Siberia and everything is bad there, as there are many people there who are very smart and life is slower than in central Russia); and then there is a country of the so-called "ordinary people" – who support the annexation of Crimea. The same is true about poetry readers. There are those who are interested in modernity, see the challenges of modern times. By modernity I mean our contemporary time which requires constant reactions and brings about constant challenges. And here lies the problem: are people ready to accept that fact and thus read poetry like mine? Are they ready for the avant-garde?

Overall, Russians do not understand what contemporary art is in its essence. Only recently the Russian state has undertaken some activities in this regards. The Museum of Contemporary Art was opened in St Petersburg and Moscow, and later in Yekaterinburg, Kaliningrad and other large urban areas. Contemporary art is not something that many Russians reflect on that much. The educated youth and university students visit the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, which is the largest museum of modern art, and supported by Roman Abramovich. And the contact the youth has with art is through entertainment. It is through fun. And that is good, at least they are learning the language of modern art. This is the language of reflection, but above all, the language of reason and not animal instinct, which is more the characteristic of the classical forms of art. These are the emotions which always have a specific form. Documenting reality through different series is indeed the characteristic of contemporary art, but also literature. And it is true that the problem we are discussing now is partially related to the lack of good school of reportage in Russia, unlike Poland where the school of reportage was always setting up the trends.

Not that long ago I was asked who my readers were. It is a bit uncomfortable for me to admit but I am not very

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interested in that. I write for people who are like me. Some time ago I was teaching marketing and explaining the concept of a target group. This works in cases where you know the group very well and where you have a very precise understanding of its needs. These people will also recommend your stuff to others. Please excuse me for being cynical when I compare poetry to goods, but I am doing this to show the mechanisms of spreading information. I am writing my poems for somebody like me – a person driven by reason, somebody who is educated and open to new information. Somebody who is free from xenophobia and other forms of injustice and supports democracy. I imagine that this person or reader is a woman who holds feministic views. This is my imagined reader. I can picture her.

I am very interested in the issue of social conscience. The conscience of those who are affected by everything that is around them. You once said that Russia has a problem of provincial demonism. Is this your answer to the fact that the project of modernity never fully took off? Why did people not want to, or could not, develop it?

They could not because they had no opportunities. This is not even a question, as much it is a desire. This is a question about power, energy and resources. This is a question about what people can do. Russia has, as we all know, travelled through a difficult path. It experienced a few modernist upsurges. But upsurges are not enough and old problems cannot be overcome by them. What I have in mind are the reforms of Peter the Great and the October Revolution, but also *perestroika* and the fall of the Berlin Wall, which is celebrated in Europe, but is seen as destruction in Russia. That is the case, even if it is not true. I remember in 1991 when everybody was happy that communism had collapsed. At that time, I lived in Voronezh, which compared to Moscow is a small town even though it has a million residents, and people had their windows open and you could hear radio Svoboda in each apartment and everybody was clapping; on the next day, many announced that they did not want the communists in power any more.

In Russia the sociologists are trying to find answers to these questions, and the consensus, more or less, is that people are exhausted from frustration. Regarding the 1990s trauma, there is a conviction that people are tired and disappointed. They were let down. Especially because the economic reforms were brutally implemented by Yegor Gaidar, whom people often compare to Leszek Balcerowicz in Poland. However, while Balcerowicz led Poland to success, Gaidar did not. I do not know a single person who has fond memories of these reforms. People remember this as a terrible time. And the worst thing that has happened in Russia is that now there is a return of the positive image of the Soviet times. People somehow forgot about everything that took place in 1991, and about their own enthusiasm towards the collapse of communism. Now, it is very

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fashionable to show nostalgia towards the Soviet Union, especially the Brezhnev period.

Is this something characteristic of the youth? It would seem plausible that such sentiments are characteristic of a specific generation?

I will share a funny story to answer that. I was recently in Bucharest where I met a young taxi driver who was working for the festival I was attending. As he was driving me and one young Czech poet we engaged in a small talk about the weather, traffic jams, etc. However, as we were passing the Palace of Nations and the huge Nicolae Ceaușescu monument, that young, 25 year old man, said: "I miss him". I was shocked. "Did you know him?" I asked. "No, my parents told me about him". The mechanism of memory – recollections of their youth are transplanted into a young man who has no idea what the Romanian communist system was about, and that it was one of the most repressive in the whole Eastern bloc. People who feel nostalgic towards the Soviet Union in Russia today operate with similar mental constructs. They absorb their parents' fantasies without any understanding of the terribly oppressive machine that the Soviet Union was. Currently, there is a very popular film in Russia, directed by Yury Dud, a talented young blogger who decided to tell his peers what the price of Stalinism was; what took place in Kolyma, what the Gulag was, etc. His film had over six million viewers.

But it was also criticised…

There were some critical voices. I do not want to go too deeply into that as it is all quite funny because Dud could show young people, using their language, what it was all about. This is simply an educational film which should be showed to high school students. For those who have five different electronic devices in their hands and live in virtual reality in a borderless world, it is hard to imagine what life under communism looked like.

Paraphrasing Czesław Miłosz, we can refer to his optimistic phrase: the worse things are, the better it is for the culture. Did you notice this in the last 20 years? Are there any signs of a cultural renewal in Russia?

If we talk about theatre, then I would say that Russian theatre is among the best.

Are you talking about the new wave? Social theatre?

I am talking about both the socially-engaged theatre and the theatre of Kirill Serebrennikov, which is more metaphorical. Of course, the director himself is very distinct, he also works in Europe. I am also talking about our Russian opera and many directors. Russians are masters of artistic creation. Morality might be something we have a problem with, but we catch up in the fine arts.

And in this area, do you see signs of modernism?

Serebrennikov's theatre is idealistic and very sensitive. Of course, my favour-

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Photo courtesy of Kraków's Festival Office.

ite's are Meyerhold Centre, Teatr.doc, Praktika Theatre and a few other institutions where people analyse life as such. In my opinion, the biggest change that took place in Russia during the 2000s was the emergence of doc – cinema doc, theatre doc, poetry doc. We can say doc art overall. We have many interesting video artists in Russia who are engaged and, in my view, this is the most interesting phenomenon in Russia right now.

Is this a universal phenomenon? Or would things be different had there been different political conditions?

Interestingly, this whole movement started to develop a bit earlier. I remember in 2006 when Boris Khersonsky's *Family Archives*, and in 2005 Marina Temkina's *Canto Immigranto* were published, and we can see how these two older generation authors (of the 1950s and 60s) influenced younger generation writers. In 2005, I was at a poetry festival in New York where I heard that thematically speaking whatever is called "urban poetry" is identical, whether it is in Moscow or New York. I simply saw these parallels, aspects and motifs. The fact that Russia itself has become a serious existential challenge is understandable and it is expressed in poetry. But it all happened earlier, not in 2014, not in 2012, but in the mid-2000s. The *zeitgeist*

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created such a need that people started working with documentary art.

If you want me to directly answer, or comment on this thought that the worse life is, the better the art, I would say it is not entirely like that. If we were to analyse the whole Soviet period, we will see that it included Russian avant-garde, art deco and in the 1930s Stalinist classicism suddenly emerged, and all over the world similar processes in art and architecture took place. Under Stalin at least three styles underwent change, not to mention Hitler and his fight with avant-garde artists. I do not see much discrepancy between the works of Polish artists in the early 20th century – Bruno Schultz and Witold Gombrowicz for instance – and that what is taking place today. However I can see that at the end of the 19th century there was a huge anthropological leap, one that has affected us all, and it is only now that we are in one convergent moment. All attempts to artificially break human development, which take the form of wars and political oppression, lead to nothing. Sooner or later, freedom prevails, as a desire to be free is a human characteristic. This is our will and desire to live and leave something for the next generation.

I have been listening to your programme on Radio Svoboda for years now. Once, when listening to it, I heard you say that you are interested in the transformation of social energy and emotions. What is this transformation like in today's Russia?

After seeing the effects of all kinds of hybrid forms of information, the blurring of concepts, and relativism, which has led to an unclear distinction between the good and the bad, I have started to appreciate academic research much more. With the help of my readers, as well as myself, I can better understand what is really going on. I appreciate the younger generation of social science researchers who are affiliated with the Higher School of Economics and who organise fascinating seminars and write publications.

But aren't these groups quite narrow? Or are they expanding now?

Right now they are actually shrinking, mainly because of the very unpleasant political and social changes that have taken place in Russia since the annexation of Crimea. Our society has become deeply divided regarding the assessment of this event. And these divisions are also seen among the artists. In my view, the assessment of Putin's foreign policy is now less an illustration of a man's wisdom as much as it is an illustration of his or her complexes. To put it very harshly: those who support the Kremlin's policies want to belong to something big. Imperial phantoms and hybrid warfare make them say "Putin is great, Crimea is ours". This is what Baudrillard called symulacras. We have a lot of simulation structures – again, to use Baudrillard's term – which exist not only in advertisements and commercials but official propaganda. You could make

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movies about our television, especially the talk shows. The saddest thing is that the viewers of these programmes are not disciples of the school of objective reporting and they just absorb whatever they hear. They believe television tells them the truth and there is no need to verify any facts.

You were once talking about journalism of opinions and not facts.

This is our Russian characteristic, and it is also a reflection of how the modernisation project developed here. It was the work of a few people – Vissarion Belinsky, Nikolay Chernyshevsky, etc. With this different approach, the messianic nature of Russia literature, including journalism, have led us to a situation where a communist is more respected than a reporter. I personally do not like to talk about national stereotypes and question their role, but there are some facts that are related to our national literary and language history, and they justify the statement I have made. We can say that the context and the tradition both determine the quality of our journalism. From a more medical point of view, we can understand stereotypes as a reference to something repetitive. And this kind of repetitive behaviour is our defence mechanism. That is why our Russian psychoanalysts explain that Russian society has not yet freed itself from the series of traumas it experienced in the 20th century. I do not want to say that Poland had a less tragic fate, but this martyrism is certainly a Russian feature. That is why we tend to pride ourselves as a people who had suffered more, and who are more moral, etc.

In Poland, too, we are constantly trying to determine who is moral and who is not…

And for us, that is spirituality. Russians are not the best informed when it comes to morality. This is the feature of Eastern Orthodoxy. In Catholicism, the rational aspect is a bit stronger, that is why it has this heavy emphasis on morality. For us, it is spirituality.

And how is spirituality understood in our time?

Russian spirituality points to a large amount of national egoism. And the truth is that there is no better or worse spirituality. When I am at an international airport I see a lot of people and ask myself: "why are we so different from one another at a time when we all behave the same?" Overall, I can see a biological similarity in what seems to be such highly spiritual and civilised world. And one that is much more technologically developed that I am even surprised we still speak different languages.

But the issue of spirituality is an important one these days. Do we have different narratives?

Naturally spirituality is important. I am convinced that without ethics there is no aesthetics. This is true even though we have a lot of examples of anti-ethics and anti-aesthetics. Despite that, art is always deeply ethical; it deals with

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suffering, death, war and aggression. Freud understood it very well and told us that art is always against aggression and war.

I really like your dismantling of the word "poetics" into "po-ethics" to stress the ethical component of art.

Yes, art is a discipline, and like any profession it has order and law. Just like the title of the American series *Law and Order*. This is true even though many artists say that beauty is our only obligation to the world. This is an excuse made to a larger public that always expects something from the artist.

Translated by Elżbieta Żak and Iwona Reichardt

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Elżbieta Żak works at the Institute of Russian and East European Studies at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland. Her interests include contemporary Russian culture and literature, and post-Soviet society at the moment of transformation and change over the past 30 years.

The interview took place during the 2019 edition of Miłosz Festival which is one of the largest celebration of poetry in Poland and in Central Europe. Since 2014 it has been organised in Kraków by Kraków Festival Office and City of Literature Foundation. New Eastern Europe had the honor of being the media partner of this year's edition.

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A tale of two cities?

Gabriele D'Annunzio in Rijeka and Fiume

JONATHAN BOUSFIELD

To ask whether Gabriele D'Annunzio was a fascist or not is to pose the wrong question.

Much more important is to ask why he marched in 1919 under arms into a contested city, and why did he brazenly insist on the political and cultural superiority of only one of that city's ethnic groups.

In the early morning of Thursday September 12th 2019 a group of young Italian men in black t-shirts unfurled a large Italian flag in front of the former Governor's Palace in the Croatian port city of Rijeka. They took a few group selfies and then quietly disappeared, their photos appearing on news sites throughout Italy and Croatia a few hours later.

Friday's newspapers were full of it. "Neofascists strike at Rijeka," screamed the local daily *Novi list*. The front page of the national paper *Jutarnji list* was, if anything, even more alarming, declaring "Fascists attempt to reach Rijeka in three planes". The planes in question were small private aircraft; 16 people were briefly detained and then sent home.

It was not the first time that Rijeka (which, formerly known as Fiume, was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and then Italy until 1945) had been visited by Italians bearing flags. September 12th was the 100th anniversary of the entry into the city of Gabriele D'Annunzio, the Italian writer, war hero, and national ideologue who ended up ruling over the city for the next 16 months.

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Wounded pride

The 2019 "invasion" of Rijeka went largely unnoticed by the inhabitants of the city itself. There was no sign of extra security on the streets. The opening of *D'Annunzio's Martyr*, an exhibition marking the centenary of the soldier-poet's occupation, was only lightly policed, despite the attendance of the Croatian minister of culture and Rijeka's city mayor. The only openly D'Annunzian fan I caught sight of was a young man in a green *Arditi D'Italia* T-shirt (the Arditi were Italian First World War shock troops, many of whom followed D'Annunzio to Rijeka) who was touring the city's second-hand bookshop in search of titles about the Fiume of yore. As one of the bookshop owners told me, interest in Fiume-related nostalgia had always been lively, and there was not really a great deal left to sell.

If there was a whiff of wounded Rijeka pride in the air it was due to events 80 kilometres northeast in Trieste, where the city's right-of-centre mayor, Roberto Dipiazza, unveiled a statue of Gabriele D'Annunzio on the central Piazza della Borsa. It is unlikely that the statue would have drawn any comment had it been inaugurated on any day other than September 12th. However the highly-charged timing drew an immediate response from Croatia, whose foreign ministry sent a note of protest to the Italian ambassador in Zagreb. Croatian president Kolinda Grabar Kitarović called the statue "unacceptable… a scandalous monument to division".

It is unlikely this diplomatic storm in a teacup will go any further – at least not until the next big anniversary in 2119. However there has always been a great deal of ambiguity surrounding D'Annunzio's Rijeka escapade, and his heritage remains enduringly attractive to those drawn to political flamboyance, robust patriotism, and a disregard for what others might think. Populism, at least in Italy, has a very long history.

Precursors of Italian fascism

Known in Italian as *Impresa di Fiume* (or the Fiume Enterprise), D'Annunzio's occupation of Rijeka in 1919–21 was one of the more unusual episodes in 20th century Europe, a forewarning of the marches, mass politics and forced border changes that seem nowadays to have characterised the build-up to the Second World War. Many of D'Annunzio's innovations – uniformed parades, balcony speeches, patriotic rituals and Roman salutes – were later adopted by Benito Mussolini, leading many to see D'Annunzio as one of the key precursors of Italian fascism. However D'Annunzio also presided over an explosion of libertarianism: thousands of young Italians who came to join him in Rijeka found a city where the restrictive morals of

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mainland Italy did not apply. If you wanted free love, artistic freedom, drugs and a festivalesque sense of flag-waving national community, you were more likely to find it in Rijeka than in Rome.

D'Annunzio's Rijeka Enterprise was, however, underwritten by ethnic nationalist assumptions. Rijeka was a contested city in 1919; its city centre had an Italian-speaking majority while the suburbs were predominantly Croatian. The great powers meeting at the Versailles Peace Conference looked set to award the city to the nascent Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (better known as Yugoslavia), and radical members of Rijeka's Italian community sought to pre-empt this decision by taking control of the city and unilaterally declaring its annexation with Italy. D'Annunzio, the writer and decorated war hero who was also a leading ideologue of Italian expansion in the eastern Adriatic, was the figurehead they chose.

The Italian government disowned the project and D'Annunzio was very much left to his own devices, presiding over a city swelled by an influx of Italian ex-servicemen and idealistic patriots. His administration was a revolving door of nationalist conservatives and radical dreamers; non-Italians were harassed into abandoning their businesses and leaving town. D'Annunzio ignored the results of a December 18th plebiscite that would have ensured his peaceful departure, basing his power instead on the uniformed young men who roved the city and attended his rallies. The city was a social and economic ruin when D'Annunzio was finally forced out by regular Italian troops in January 1921.

One-sided story

It is the idea of D'Annunzio, as political innovator and patriotic rebel, that provided the dominant tone to *Disobbedisco* ("I Disobey"), an exhibition devoted to the Rijeka Enterprise that was held in Trieste's Salone degli Incanti (a magnificent former fish market) between June and November this year. Opening with the gleaming bodywork of a Fiat T-4, the vehicle which the poet entered Rijeka on the morning of September 12th 1919, and continuing with uniforms, firearms and flags, the exhibition was a tour-de-force of narrative history-telling. Accompanying captions described Rijeka under D'Annunzio as an "experiment in revolution", a rebel city that attracted artists, intellectuals, ex-soldiers and non-conformists from all over Italy. However the non-Italian inhabitants of Rijeka were largely absent from the exhibition's narrative, conveying the impression that the whole enterprise was a purely Italian affair, which impinged little on others.

Disobbedisco's claim that D'Annunzio was a radical political innovator rested rather too heavily on its interpretation of the Kvarner Charter (*Carta del Carnaro*),

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the "constitution" co-authored by D'Annunzio and the Italian anarcho-syndicalist, Alceste de Ambris, promising equality regardless of race, sex or religion; it also foresaw a system of democracy based on corporate theory – in which citizens would be organised according to occupation and interest group. However the Charter was never enacted, and the workings of the corporate system were never fully elaborated: it was a PR exercise undertaken by a regime that was losing domestic support and had few external allies.

According to the exhibition's notes, D'Annunzio and his followers introduced "a new way of doing politics, based on the centrality of the commander", involving mass meetings, propaganda, and "the marginalisation of opponents." (Who the opponents were, and how they were marginalised, was never made clear). A flyer given out to visitors at the ticket desk was emblazoned with the words "the Fiume Endeavour was not a Fascist Action", as if to disentangle the radical heritage of D'Annunzio from that of his right-wing contemporaries. The fact that ethnic nationalism, military ritual, and pseudo-democracy can be considered Dannunzian rather than Fascist does not, however, make them any more deserving of our admiration.

The exhibition was curated by Giordano Bruno Guerri, who is also head of the Vittoriale, D'Annunzio's former home on the western shores of Lake Garda. Guerri made full use of the D'Annunzio archives housed at the Vittoriale in his recent book *Disobbedisco: cinquecento giorni di revoluzione* (published in March 2019), which presents a much more detailed, blow-by-blow, account of D'Annunzio's period in Rijeka. However Guerri is careful about which parts of the story he tells, leaving us with a feel-good D'Annunzio who did his best for Italy and left a positive, idealistic legacy.

In the middle of the Disobbedisco exhibition was a video screen showing a 15-minute film, in which Guerri explains D'Annunzio's Enterprise and the inspirational effect it had on young Italian people. The video was on a constant loop; one heard Guerri's voice again and again, echoing off the walls, with the words "D'Annunzio was not a Fascist" repeating themselves like a mantra. It was at that point that one realised that, for Guerri at least, D'Annunzio was a brand, and the exhibition was his commercial.

Bridging narratives

Offering something of a corrective to the carefully massaged story of Disobbedisco is *D'Annunzio's Martyr*, the smaller and rather less celebratory exhibition that opened at Rijeka's Maritime and History Museum on September 12th. The

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exhibition has much less in the way of original artefacts and relies heavily on reproduction pictures mounted on large panels. In many ways the key exhibit is the building itself, the opulent former Governor's Palace in which D'Annunzio held court. A theatrical pile of rubble, placed on the floor of the so-called White Salon, marks the spot where a naval shell landed when the Italian government finally decided to take action against D'Annunzio in December 1920. The exhibition does have a stunning collection of archive pictures, projected onto one of the walls, showing civilians and soldiers as well as the main actors in the D'Annunzio story.

The exhibition pays particular attention to Rijeka's women, providing a social-history perspective that saves it from the great-man approach on offer elsewhere. Rijeka was a relatively liberated city even before D'Annunzio's arrival; there was a large female workforce in the city's factories, and the impact of war sped up the blurring of traditional gender roles. Rijeka's women were involved in nationalist agitation on both the Italian and Croatian sides; and women played a large role in the mass demonstrations that – in the early days of the Enterprise at least – acclaimed D'Annunzio as the city's new ruler. Crucial to the narrative is the diary of Dora Blažić, a young Croatian woman who lived under the D'Annunzio regime and who provides us with an intimate perspective on how hard life was for non-Italians still left in the city. This focus on the female side of history contrasts sharply with the exhibition in Trieste, with its display cases full of medals, pistols, banners, sashes and other paraphernalia of a male elite.

While the Rijeka exhibition is clear in portraying a city abandoned by D'Annunzio, it stays away from any direct national agenda.

While the Rijeka exhibition is clear in portraying a city that was abandoned by D'Annunzio and left in a state of ruin, it steers clear of any direct national agenda. Indeed, the exhibition's great virtue is that it brings the narratives of Fiume and Rijeka back together again, and reminds us that both are in fact the same city.

Reflection of today

As far as D'Annunzio's place in the history of the radical right is concerned, perhaps the best portrayal comes not from the exhibition but the recent historical novel *M*, Antonio Scurati's monumental account of Mussolini's rise to power. The book suggestively sketches the interaction between D'Annunzio and Mussolini, and the way in which the political practice of both leaders emerged from a collection of shared attitudes: Italy won the war and must get its just desserts, parliamentary democracy is rubbish, and the socialists will sell us out to a bunch of foreigners.

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To ask whether D'Annunzio was a fascist or not is, in any case, to pose the wrong question. Not even Mussolini knew what fascism was in 1919, and always steered clear of defining it in terms of a doctrine. Much more important is to ask why D'Annunzio marched under arms into a contested city, and why did he brazenly – indeed shamelessly – insist on the political and cultural superiority of only one of that city's ethnic groups. The Fiume Enterprise belongs to the world of border changes, forced population movements, and pre-emptive strikes. And if D'Annunzio's transgressions can be excused – even praised – then so can any other flouting of the rules: the German solution to the "Austrian Question" in 1938, the creation of an independent Serbian Krajina in Croatia in 1990–91, or Russia foisting war in Donbas in 2014.

The idea that D'Annunzio was a freedom-loving political pirate who ignored the system-politicians in Rome, raised the middle finger to the international order, and simply ignored the aspirations of Slav peoples who in his eyes belonged to a lesser, non-Mediterranean civilisation, makes him something of an ideal hero in our instantly judgmental times. Indeed historical exhibitions frequently tell us as much about the preoccupations of the present age as they do about the subjects they are covering. The main message of Disobbedisco seems to be that the radical right can celebrate their illiberal heritage without having to mention Mussolini. The intimate, inclusive approach of *D'Annunzio's Martyr*, on the other hand, suggests that popular history can still provide the impetus to more thoughtful reflection. NEE

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German-Polish cultural dialogue in former East Prussia – a success?

MARCEL KRUEGER

The fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 allowed new memorial works to begin for both Polish and German population groups in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship in Poland. Today, German heritage is present again, and perceived positively throughout.

My grandmother Cilly never spoke badly about Poland and the Poles. When she spoke about her home in former East Prussia she never specifically mentioned the nationalities there, maybe because she came from a family with a dual identity where both Polish and German languages were spoken. Or maybe it was because nationalities never really played a role in everyday life in the region of Warmia before 1933. Even though she identified as German, her brother Franz felt more Polish and was very active in the cultural life of the Polish minority before 1939 and even became a spy for the Second Polish Republic in 1935, for which he was executed in 1942.

The legacy of the Second World War, the subsequent westerly shift of the Polish border, the flight and expulsion of the local German population followed by the resettlement of Poles from the eastern parts of the former Second Republic are challenging topics to talk about to this day in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship. But what about the multi-ethnic reality of the region before the war? When I began my residency as the official writer-in-residence in Olsztyn, the capital of the voivodeship and thanks to a scholarship by the German Cultural Forum for Eastern and Central Europe, I was interested in finding out how the complex and conflict-

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ed German past is perceived and potentially preserved there, and how other areas in Germany, Poland and all over Eastern Europe might benefit from this example.

Engaging with the past

Upon first glance, the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society, with its large Jewish, Polish, German and Tatar populations, changed radically after 1945 with the arrival of the population exchange between Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine. But the level of (ex)change differed significantly between the different areas of former East Prussia. Whereas in the former Protestant Mazury the German population left in droves, in Warmia, where many people spoke Polish and were Catholic despite identifying as German, it was different. In my own family we have surnames like Pomaska, Nerowski, Schnabach, and many family members stayed here even after the war ended, the last leaving in 1963.

Any attempt of preserving German identity or heritage was ignored or repressed by the communist government. At the same time, there was the influx of new Polish settlers who had to adjust to the situation of forced settlement in a culturally and topographically very different "reconquered" land, as the communist authorities called the newly acquired former German provinces of Silesia, Pomerania and southern East Prussia. They were equally and actively prevented from any open memorial work from the homelands they left. Only the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 allowed this memorial work to begin for both groups. Today, German heritage is present again and perceived positively throughout. There are three levels of engagement: cultural, academic and local grassroots engagement.

Any attempt of preserving German identity or heritage was ignored or repressed by the communist government.

One of the key aspects of the cultural work (which also has a touristic aspect) is its engagement with the aristocratic past of East Prussia. Culturally, this may be best represented by the preservation of places like the former hunter's mansion of the Lehndorff family in Gałkowo, and the family palace of Sztynort in Mazury. They are now owned or administrated by a mix of private and public institutions, like the Marsch-Potocka family who have restored the former mansion and turned it into a restaurant and museum dedicated to Countess Marion von Dönhoff. The Sztynort restoration is financed and supported by shared German-Polish institutions and carried out by groups of dedicated volunteers. They not only carry out the necessary work at the castle, but also organise an annual arts festival in the half-ruined palace, which draws in more visitors and offers local commu-

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nities a change to engage with the place and its history in a playful way. The role of the local communities is important for these activities – theatre groups from nearby Węgorzewo are now participating in the festival for the third year in a row.

No fear of the past

A German-Polish heritage or identity does not play a big role with the younger generation of those living in Warmia and Mazury; but that is not necessary a bad thing. Like many young people around the world, their view is turned outward – they speak English and naturally engage with visitors. Another example of this positive engagement is the local social entrepreneurs of Olsztyn 2.0, a group of young people between 15 and 21 who publish an English-language map of the city for visitors, which proudly displays German celebrities next to Polish artists like Maria Zientara-Malewska. For these young people, the past is nothing to be feared or to be abused for political gain. They are aware of and cherish the cultural contributions of the Germans.

There are the cultural big hitters like the Borussia Foundation in Olsztyn which has been active for almost 30 years now. Not only does it focus on keeping the memory of the German heritage alive through print publications which makes German Warmian literature available in Polish, by preserving the world famous Mendelsohn-House as a centre for cultural dialogue, and by organising international youth group work, they also help preserve the memory of the vanished Jewish life in Olsztyn – crucial for both cultural and academic engagement with German cultural heritage.

Borussia is a group of local writers, artists and teachers founded in 1990 and dedicated to the research of East Prussian heritage and cultural dialogue. The restoration project was realised with the support of EU funds and the building and adjacent cemetery were acquired by the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland. Since March 21st 2013 (the 126th anniversary of Mendelsohn's birth) the building has been used as a centre for intercultural dialogue by the Borussia Foundation and was named the Mendelsohn House (*Dom Mendelsohna*) in memory of Erich. Borussia does not only engage with the German past, but also organises a variety of contemporary cultural activities. The Mendelsohn house is actively used a place of cultural dialogue and hosts readings, concerts, and exhibitions – all free and open to the public. Recently, there was a series of acoustic cross-border concerts featuring musicians from Brittany and Ukraine.

Another series of activities include youth camps which bring together young people from all over Europe for a series of themed workshops, sometimes struc-

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tured around the restoration of old German (Protestant) cemeteries, or German-Russian war cemeteries from the First World War where young people from Ukraine and Russia (often meeting in Poland for the first time) actively encounter the violent past of the region. That, of course, does not mean all is well. Borussia is mostly relying on project funding for its operations which comes from EU programmes, the Goethe Institute and private foundations. The funding coming from the cultural ministry in Warsaw has been significantly reduced in the last number of years.

Advances in research

Academic engagement is represented by the Wojciech Kętrzyński Northern Institute in Olsztyn. Originally set up as a communist institute to explore and create an artificial Polish cultural link to the region in order to symbolise a direct continuation of Polish identity throughout the German times, it has now set out to explore and document the overall history of the region. The original goals of the institute, which is active since 1943 under a variety of names, was research in the field of cultural, social, historical and political relations of Warmia and the Masurian Lake District, as well as running a regional library and regional museum which include German collections that survived the Second World War. Since 2001 the institute is part of the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage.

The headquarters of the institute are located in a building that my granduncle Franz knew well: located on Partyzantów Street in Olsztyn, this building was the headquarters of the Polish authorities during the 1920 East Prussia plebiscite, where both German and Polish inhabitants overwhelmingly voted to remain part of Germany. After that the building was used by the Union of Poles in Germany as a cultural and administrative centre where they organised the work of Polish-language schools across Warmia (which existed until 1939) and organised poetry and singing competitions; it also housed a Polish bank where my granduncle worked.

Today, after restoration in the 1970s, it has a reading room, a library and four research offices. The Centre, together with the Scientific Society of Wojciech Kętrzyński, also established the Wojciech Kętrzyński Award for the best works of young local academics and researchers, and publishes its own academic publications. There are plans to make their vast archive and collections widely available to the public through a series of readings and exhibitions.

Maybe the main disadvantage at the moment is that there is no centralised memorial work in Warmia-Mazury, no central database or even website aimed at visitors or researchers that might give the Polish and German past ample space. Despite that, there are many opportunities to learn about the past of Warmia-

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Mazury. And maybe this decentralised work is actually to the advantage of those, including myself, hoping to engage with the past.

Connecting with the past

An example of the most important engagement with the past, however, can be found in the small village of Łęgajny (formerly known as Lengainen) where both Cilly and Franz were born. In the village, information displays are dotted around; two on the main street around the corner from the local church and school. There is another one in front of the local tomato farm, informing the reader that, in communist times, this used to be state-owned, and a fourth one just down the road in front of the surviving building on the local estate, telling the history of the family that used to live in Gut Lengainen. All those signs have been set up by the local community, who have also established an arboretum and gathering place with barbecue pits, a stage, and a playground by the lake where my ancestors used to swim.

For me, as a member of the generation of grandchildren, this is wonderful. It shows that for the local community there is no real connection to political events anymore; most German families with ties to the region have lost connection to the rural lifestyle, and for the Poles this is now their home, but not one that begins in 1945 or with some artificially constructed Polish heritage prescribed by the government. No, it begins with the celebration of the villages that have existed in the same place for 650 years, and where both Germans and Poles made a living from the rich soil and enjoyed the clear lakes in summer.

As an outsider who was allowed to live and observe this place, it all began with the acceptance of civil partnerships, contemporary and historical ones. There are, of course, many political conflicts, and with the current Polish government showing less interest in supporting an open engagement with the multi-cultural history of Warmia and Mazury – even cutting funding – there is a chance that the activities of organisations like Borussia will be further curtailed in the future. And, of course, many people here in one of the poorest voivodeships of Poland just get on with their life without the need to know about the German past. Those who are interested in it, however, engage with it positively and warmly – to the benefit of Germans and Poles alike. NEE

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Russia's historical amnesia

JOSHUA R. KROEKER

How can we understand how Joseph Stalin, one of history's most notorious dictators, is not only tolerated, but oftentimes defended in present-day Russia? Is this a failure of history? Who or what is fanning the flames of this modern Stalin-cult?

Recent months have witnessed some important anniversaries in the history of the Second World War. On January 27th 2018, the city of St Petersburg, formerly Leningrad, celebrated the 75th anniversary of the end of the Siege of Leningrad. The Nazi siege of the city, which lasted some 900 days, intended to starve the city out of existence. Though ultimately unsuccessful, over one million of the city's residents died as a result, whilst many more experienced over two years of pain and suffering. The anniversary of this event witnessed parades of soldiers throughout the city centre, followed by a massive fireworks display in the evening. Nevskiy Prospekt, the main street in St Petersburg's historical centre, was decorated with large banners, on which were written "1944–2019," "1941–1944," and "900 days, 900 nights". Red flags hung along the sides of the kilometre-long avenue, a constant reminder of the Soviet victory. It was a cause to celebrate, similar to the annual Victory Day celebrations in St Petersburg and Moscow that see comparable decorations, parades and fireworks.

Stalin's victory

These celebrations are part of a long-established tradition of glorifying Soviet Russia's deeds in the Second World War, ignoring the crimes committed by their leaders against their own people. There was no mention of the fact that, throughout much of the St Petersburg siege, Stalin's NKVD, the predecessor to the KGB,

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continued to arrest and imprison starving residents. In fact, rather than undertaking all possible efforts to evacuate Leningraders, many of the city's residents were amongst the 2.5 million Soviet citizens imprisoned in the Soviet Gulag system during the war. Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote in the *Gulag Archipelago* that, on May 9th 1945 when he heard about the Soviet Union's victory over Germany in his prison cell, that "this victory was not for us. It was Stalin's victory."

Solzhenitsyn foresaw the captivity and horrors of the Stalin system, the double-edged sword that the Soviet victory represented: in persistently commemorating and glorifying the victory of the war, Russia, today, is validating a policy of historical amnesia, using an imbalanced narrative of the war for political reasons. Stalin is an ever-reoccurring motive in Russian society. Stalin's image is sold on coffee mugs, playing cards and calendars for tourists and locals. Stalin's legacy, however, is not confined to tourist shops. According to the Lavada Research Centre in Moscow, in 2017, 32 per cent of Russians looked upon Stalin "with respect," four per cent "with admiration," and ten per cent with "sympathetic views"; whereas only 21 per cent disliked or feared the dictator. Twenty-two per cent claimed to be "indifferent."

How can we understand how Stalin, one of history's most notorious dictators, is not only tolerated, but oftentimes defended? Why were his wrongdoings re-written and his memory honoured in present-day Russia? Is this a failure of history? Who or what is fanning the flames of this modern Stalin-cult? Can this really be considered, as some historians have argued, a rehabilitation of Stalinism?

Firstly, in order to understand this phenomenon, it is important to briefly analyse the patterns of Russia's historical memory, both during the Soviet Union and after its collapse, thus allowing us to understand the context in which Stalin remains a highly regarded figure. Secondly, a vital part of the Russian national consciousness has risen from the myth of victory in the Great Patriotic War (the Second World War), in which Stalin has obtained an almost god-like status for defeating Nazi Germany. Further, it is crucial to look at how and why Stalin, as the victor, is embodied in the Russian consciousness, while Stalin as the repressor is not. Lastly, it is necessary to examine how and why the current Putin regime promotes an inaccurate memory of Stalin and Stalinism, thereby shaping the modern national consciousness from the top down, and thus preventing the emergence of a democratically based revision of Stalin and Stalinism in the Russian Federation.

Historical memory

Stalin remains one of the most popular and respected rulers in Russian history, in what historian Dmitry Shlapentokh, who has written a number of books on the

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Soviet Union and Russia, has termed "Stalin-Mania." His measures that led to the repression and murder of millions of people have nearly disappeared from the Russian national consciousness, which is tied to its historical collective memory. Historical memory is the use of real or imagined histories, which, after being bended and shaped to reflect a desired truth, constitute the collective memory and identity of a society. Russia's historical memory has done just that: it has divided the good from the bad, honouring the benefits Stalin brought to Russian/Soviet society, whilst forgetting or re-imagining the trials, tribulations and terror of his regime. The memory of Stalin is no longer the memory of repressions, but rather the victory of the Second World War, the Soviet Union's rapid industrialisation, and making Russia into a major global power. As the Russian sociologist and director of the Levada Centre in Moscow, Lev Gudkov, writes: "the more the memory of Stalinist repression fades, the more public opinion turns in the dictator's favour".

Stalin has not been subject to an historical *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (the process of coming to terms with one's past), in which he and his deeds have been the subject of a truth-oriented discourse among the broader Soviet or Russian society. Nikita Khrushchev's 1958 secret speech was the first attempt in coming to terms with Stalinist terror. However, after Leonid Brezhnev replaced Khrushchev as Soviet leader, any discussion of Stalin's crimes disappeared. It was not until the mid-1980s under Mikhail Gorbachev that Stalinist terror was again discussed. Nevertheless, neither in the Soviet Union nor in post-Soviet Russia has there been any resemblance of truth and reconciliation commissions as seen in other countries where terror has been committed.

Nothing in Russia's history symbolises Stalin's legacy better than the Russian victory in the Second World War. For most Russians the victory was the most important event of the 20th century. According to opinion polls, over three-quarters of those asked agree that the Great Patriotic War has first-rate importance for Russia. The Great Patriotic War, even more than Stalin, is present in Russian daily modern life. This can be seen in the many war films, daily television shows, Victory Day ribbons, parades and, most recently, the 75th anniversary of the end of the Siege of Leningrad. Furthermore, Soviet films, modern television programmes and Russian films dealing with the war consist of six to eight per cent of daily airtime on Russian television today, leading Swiss journalist and political commentator Felix Münger to say that "as a consequence of the current state propaganda and the many war films, which are played from the early morning until late in the night on Russian television, Stalin's crimes fade into the background of many Russian's consciousness. Despite his leadership of the war oftentimes being far from professional, Stalin is regarded by many primarily as a successful commander-in-chief and manager."

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Positive reference point

In a 2003 poll taken just after Vladimir Putin came to power, 87 per cent of people said the Great Patriotic War was the event in history that makes them feel most proud. Russian sociologist Led Gudkov writes that "the victory of 1945 is not simply 'the central semantic knot of Soviet history' spanning from the 1917 October Revolution to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, but, in fact, is 'the only positive reference point for the national consciousness of the post-Soviet society.'" Problematically, this "positive reference point" for Russia's national consciousness ignores much of the negative memories connected to Stalin's terror.

Despite the significant public consensus on the importance of the Great Patriotic War in Russia, there is no agreement whatsoever on the importance, or even the historical factuality, of Stalin's terror before, during and after the war. The destitution of everyday life during the war, the imprisonment and killing of soldiers and citizens, and the untimely evacuation of Leningrad do not belong to the narrative of the war. Today, the memory of the war is only the memory of victory.

Australian historian Maria Tumarkin contends that the "triumphant narrative of the war acts as a smokescreen for other kind of memories of the regime as well as wrapping a protective shield around the figure of Stalin … the more the figure of Stalin is associated with the war the weaker its links appear to be with the history of political terror and mass repressions." There has been governmental pushback in recognising and condemning the Stalinist crimes, such as the persecution of Memorial, a Russian NGO which works to uncover the totalitarian past. Historic truth is irritating for the victorious narrative, writes Carnegie fellow Maria Lipman, as "for all Stalin's mistakes and misdeeds, the most important thing is that under his leadership the Soviet people won the Great Patriotic War." Stalin's crimes are inconvenient for Russia's memory of victory.

Stalin under Putinism

There is also a critical dimension of modern Stalinism yet to be analysed, namely, that of Putin's dissemination and manipulation of Stalinism. Russian-American political scientist Nina Krushcheva views "Russia's current infatuation with Stalinism (and its approval of Putinism)" as "a reflection of post-socialist despair – moral, material, physical". As many historians have argued (including the author of this article), this post-Soviet despair, combined with the turmoil of the 1990s, drove Russians to willingly accept and support a non-democratic, albeit stable, political system. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the loss of one's national

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identity, combined with almost a decade of economic turmoil, it is understandable why many Russians look back to the past with nostalgia. It is within this context that Putin has manipulated the past, rehabilitating a Stalinist-like political system to appease the Russian people while securing his own position at the top of the authoritarian state.

> The regime under Vladimir Putin utilises the memories of the war and of Stalin to fill an identity vacuum.

The regime under Putin utilises the memories of the war and of Stalin to fill an identity vacuum that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. Putin grasps at the positive memories of the war and transforms them into a narrative he can use, changing bottom-up support into top-down political function. The idea of the "Great" – especially that of the Stalin-era – is employed as a form of systematic state politics of memory in which Stalin and Stalinism are returning to modern Russia, but Stalin's role is shaped, manipulated and engineered to build pride.

The memories of the war are also exploited to legitimise a centralised and repressive social order. They give meaning and self-understanding to a society unable to cope with the turbulent societal and economic changes following the collapse of the Soviet Union. In manipulating the memories of victory, unity and greatness – moments of national mobilisation – the Russian authorities are able to unite the society behind these ideas of greatness and, ultimately, the legitimacy of authoritarian rule. Thus, in controlling the historical narrative, Putin is able to further justify his authoritarian and anti-democratic regime.

Dissenting from the official narrative is becoming more difficult and dangerous. In 2014 Putin signed the "anti-Nazi laws" into effect. The law against the rehabilitation of Nazism legally protects the truth of the Soviet Union's deeds during the Second World War, making it possible for courts to punish anyone who spreads "false information" about the Soviet Union during the war, or who desecrates the memory or symbols of the war, such as referring to collaboration or vandalising statues. Those convicted could face fines and even jail time. A singular historical account has become law, while debating the historical facts has become a punishable offense.

In painting Stalin as a successful and honourable leader, Putin has paved the way for the use of Stalin's image and memory as a vehicle for political memory manipulation in modern Russia. Historical fact has little chance against Putin's altered history, which is propagated in nearly all spheres of society: in cinema, the media, the internet, literature, schools, NGOs, museums, the army, national holidays, annual commemorative events, and political demagogy. Contemporary Russia's entire understanding of history has been virtually shaped by ideology, politics and

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propaganda. Whereas Stalin won the war against Nazi Germany, Putin's Russia has won the war against memory.

A nation doomed to forget

Presently, Russia is treading a very dangerous line. The propagation of alternate or softer histories prevents Russia, its people, the victims and their families from properly coming to terms with the past. Reconciliation is impossible without truth. Healing is impossible without reconciliation.

A political system that systematically denies historical truth for its own benefit, that finds its legitimacy in an inaccurate past and that assumes similarities with a Stalinist and/or terror based totalitarian regime is a political system bound to repeat the very same mistakes of the past. Sarah Mendelson and Theodore Gerber, writing in *Foreign Affairs* in 2006 on the relationship between young Russians and their former dictator Joseph Stalin, lamented that as "long as young Russians remain ignorant about or have positive feelings toward a murderous dictator who institutionalised terror throughout their country, they are unlikely to mobilise behind calls for greater justice, human rights, or transparency—factors critical to Russia's transformation into a modern democratic society". In the 13 years since their article, few of those who lived through the Stalin years remain alive today. The memory of Stalin's crimes disappears with them.

The Russian public, especially those who believe in the importance of democratic institutions, must come to understand that honouring Stalin's memory is equal to condoning his actions – actions that are being emulated, or at least endorsed, by Putin today. A political system that promotes militarised spectacles which glorify war is a system that is not likely to accept any recognition or reconciliation of the past. With Putin losing some popularity (according to the Carnegie Moscow Center, Putin's ratings fell to 68 per cent in July 2019, down from the 82 per cent May 2018), and with a number of important Second World War anniversaries on the horizon, this political narrative is likely to become a key tool in reinforcing Putin's domestic image. If the past number of years is any indication, Russia's historical amnesia will ceaselessly provide a usable narrative for Putin and his ever-intensifying authoritarian politics. NEE

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EASTERN CAFÉ

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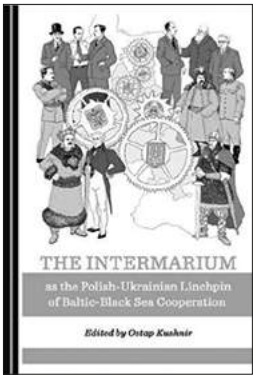
Intermarium

An empty signifier?

MATTHEW KOTT

The Intermarium as the Polish–Ukrainian Linchpin in Baltic–Black Sea Cooperation. Edited by: Ostap Kushnir. Cambridge Scholars, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2019.

In recent years, the idea of some kind of strategic bloc of countries in Central and Eastern Europe (extending from the shores of the Baltic to those of the Black Sea, and, occasionally, out towards the Adriatic) has experienced a sporadic renaissance. As with the Swedish saying that "a beloved child has many names", so, too, are there many different appellations for this project: some with concrete historical and ideological baggage (i.e., the Polish *Międzymorze*) while others signal ambitious visions of the future (like the "Three Seas Initiative"). As a kind of shorthand in an English-language context, it is common to collect these various ideas under the umbrella term "Intermarium", from the Latin for "between the seas".



As suggestions of building Intermarium-style cooperation in the political, security or economic spheres have been brought to the discussion table in various fora, it is both timely and useful that a number of scholars from the region have come together to produce *The Intermarium as the Polish–Ukrainian Linchpin in Baltic–Black Sea Cooperation*, a unique anthology on the topic, edited by Ostap Kushnir and published by UK-based Cambridge Scholars Publishing in 2019.

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Who will lead?

The book's title identifies the perceived basic core for the Intermarium scheme (i.e., the relationship between Poland and Ukraine). These two contiguous countries connect the Baltic Sea region to the wider Black Sea area that interfaces with the strategically important Middle East, and of course they have a certain amount of shared history. Furthermore, since the 1990s, the two countries have experience of a number of different forms and spheres of cooperation. Nevertheless, by necessitating a Polish–Ukrainian motor for any feasible iteration of Intermarium, the volume's contributors also offer a clear tool for analysing the inherent strengths and weakness of the whole idea.

By necessitating a Polish–Ukrainian motor for any feasible iteration of Intermarium, the volume's contributors offer a clear tool for analysing the whole idea.

The book's cover art adequately illustrates several of the main insights of the book. Firstly, while many proponents of Intermarium see it as an integrated system (represented by interlocking gears, one for each country), there is little agreement on just what form this system should take. Secondly, even if Poland and Ukraine are perceived as the natural motor of Intermarium, akin to the Franco–German motor at the heart of the EU, it soon becomes clear that there is no consensus on the conceptualisation of Intermarium between the Polish and Ukrainian sides, nor, indeed, within each of the countries' own discourses. Tellingly, the gear for Belarus does not mesh with the others; then again Belarus does not receive much attention in the book, either.

Daria Nałęcz begins the book with an overview of the historical development of the Intermarium strategy in Poland, with its historical justifications stretching back to the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth and its ideological underpinnings invariably linked to Marshal Józef Piłsudski's interwar geopolitics. This latter aspect makes many neighbours suspicious of Poland's motives for its present-day initiatives, as Piłsudski's schemes clearly assigned Poland the role of regional leader. Volodymyr Poltorak counters this with a narrative of Baltic–Black Sea regionalism in Ukrainian history, which has different foci than the Polish one – both in its greater orientation toward the Black Sea, and its anti-imperial, underdog perspective. Here, Ukraine is the natural leader of the imagined Intermarium bloc.

The contribution by Kateryna Pryshchepa shows how the ideas of a Cold

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War émigré intellectual, Jerzy Giedroyc, shaped, and arguably distorted, Poland's foreign policy towards independent Ukraine up to 2014. While fluctuating over time, the "Giedroyc doctrine" promoted the view that Poland's natural orientation, echoing Piłsudski's Prometheism, was to prevent a resurgence of Russia by fostering the former lands of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth: Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine. This naïve idea continued to hold sway in influential Polish circles long after the trajectories of the three countries diverged radically from each other, and from Poland. Blinkered by echoes of Giedroyc's Cold War thinking, Poland made policy decisions that did not always align with the realities on the ground. Only after 2014 did Poland shake off the vestiges of Giedroyc and take a more pragmatic approach, but also where more recent historical traumas of the Second World War could overshadow older affinities.

Models of co-operation

One example of such a policy is discussed by Maksim Bugriy. His chapter looks at the ups and downs of Polish–Ukrainian co-operation in the sphere of defence and security. This relationship is interesting in that it demonstrates how transfer was not always one-way: while Ukraine certainly benefited greatly from adopting the best practice models that helped Poland's NATO accession, Ukraine supplied Poland with significant armaments. Furthermore, Ukraine's experience of the Donbas conflict offers Poland and other NATO countries valuable information on Russia's capabilities and tactics.

Tomasz M. Napiórkowski examines Ukraine's international economic relations from the standpoint of Intermarium-style regional integration. Here, we clearly see one of the weaknesses of the Intermarium, namely, that it does not have the same kind of deep, cross-sectoral drawing power as competing models of co-operation. While Ukraine certainly trades with its neighbours in the Intermarium region, and there is room for increasing trade, the overall benefits to economic growth are relatively marginal, especially compared to the greater economic integration with the whole EU, whose more varied, complementary markets offer much greater long-term opportunities.

This hearkens back to Ostap Kushnir's main contribution in the middle of the book concerning the inherent ambiguity of the concept of Intermarium. As Kushnir points out, it has become a kind of catch-all term, a *tabula rasa*, upon which different actors freely project their own ideas. In attempting to address this, the idea of a Polish–Ukrainian linchpin is proposed. Nevertheless, looking at how Ukraine has acted over the years in other regional frameworks,

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like the ODED-GUAM group or the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, Kushnir notes that Ukraine has not participated very effectively in these fora for reasons that include an unresolved sense of belonging to any particular geopolitical bloc. As such, Kushnir raises doubt over whether Ukraine, with an indeterminate, liminal identity, could really serve as a solid foundation for any kind of Intermarium bloc in the near future. Having read this book, one is inclined to concur. Furthermore, to build upon the ideas discussed in the historical chapter by Nałęcz, Poland, today, appears divided between a "Piast" identity oriented towards the Baltic and northern and western Europe, and a "Jagiellonian" identity whose continental orientation is more eastwards and southwards; until this polarisation, reflected also in voting patterns, is overcome, it is unlikely that Poland can make a meaningful contribution to a rebooted Intermarium project.

The risk is that Intermarium becomes an empty signifier, or is abandoned to a narrow group of interests who define it in a very particular way. Kushnir, more than once, refers to the warnings previously expressed here on the pages of *New Eastern Europe* that Intermarium could be appropriated by a cross-border alliance of far-right nationalists for their own agenda. Alternatively, it could be promoted by third parties like China as a way to leverage influence in a zone otherwise allied with either the EU or Russia. Although it is vague, the topicality of Intermarium as a concept is likely to continue for some time to come. Despite its hefty price and sometimes stilted language, this book deserves a wider readership beyond the limited circles of academia.

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Europeanisation is more than about the EU

JAMES BARESEL

Russia, The Former Soviet Republics, and Europe Since 1989: Transformation and Tragedy. By: Katherine Graney. Publisher: Oxford University Press, United Kingdom, 2019.

It is always hard to decide whether to praise or to critique a book which combines exhaustive factual information with a deeply flawed analysis of what that information means. Does one commend such a book for its valuable collection of facts or condemn it for its propagation of serious misunderstandings? The answers to those questions will decisively shape any accurate assessment of Katherine Graney's *Russia, The Former Soviet Republics, and Europe Since 1989: Transformation and Tragedy*.

At its most basic level the book is an account of how the lands of the former Soviet Union have, since the fall of the Soviet Union, integrated into the political, economic and security structures and into the cultural life of Europe and how they have in some cases subsequently begun to move away from such integration. Countries once ruled as satellites of the USSR by Moscow-backed puppet governments are analysed only sporadically and for the sake of comparison with those which were formally part of the Soviet Union. Despite this focus, Graney's intent is not to concentrate on the consequences of membership in the Soviet Union and subsequent independence from Russia but, rather, to analyse the Europeanisation of peoples whose historical cultures have, in some sense, been distinct from Western Europe.

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Eastern European confusion

For Graney's purposes "European" or "western" refers to societies, cultures and ethnic groups which were historically either Catholic or Protestant or were strongly influenced by the Renaissance and Baroque periods, or were either hostile to or geographically remote from Russia and, more generally, looked to Western Europe for cultural models. By this standard, former Soviet satellites, such as Poland, Hungary, the former Czechoslovakia and other satellite territories, qualify as "European" or "western". Many were long part of the Holy Roman Empire, or under Habsburg dynastic rule. Poland was joined to the West by its Catholicism, by the close familial ties of its elected kings with ethnically German royalty, and by its close involvement in the international politics of the German world. The western cultural orientation of many Soviet satellites pre-dated the Europeanisation which rapidly accelerated in Russia at the time of Peter the Great, and was generally stronger and more widespread than that which existed among non-elite Russians of the 18th and 19th centuries.

There are obvious shortcomings in using membership of the Soviet Union as a criteria to determine which countries qualify as Eastern European.

Because of this distinction, Graney uses the phrase "Eastern European" in a more narrow sense than is more commonly used. For her the term refers to societies and ethnic groups which historically adhered to Eastern Orthodox Christianity and either belonged to or were culturally oriented towards tsarist Russia, while "eastern" (as distinct from "Eastern European") refers to societies and ethnic groups historically dominated by Islam and which were oriented towards the Mongol, Ottoman and Persian empires.

There are obvious shortcomings in using membership of the Soviet Union as a criteria to determine which countries qualify as Eastern European. Lithuania, for example, was part of the European oriented Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth from the mid-16th century until the late 18th century. When Lithuania was politically incorporated into the Russian Empire, ethnic Lithuanians continued to look West rather than East, as did those Poles who lived in regions which came under Russian rather than Prussian or Austrian control after their country's partition in the late 18th century. Both Poles and Lithuanians are also traditionally Catholic. But, unlike Poland, Lithuania was formally part of the USSR. Serbia, however, presents a contrast. Historically, Eastern Orthodox

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and oriented towards Russia, Serbia was not incorporated into the Soviet Union and is, for that reason, excluded from particular consideration in Graney's book.

In most cases, however, Soviet membership correlates reasonably well with earlier historical orientations towards Russia rather than Western Europe; and while it is easy to find a few obvious exceptions to this general rule, it at least provides an unambiguous criteria in a region of the world where various gradations of "European" and "Eastern European" influences would otherwise make it difficult to determine which category many societies should be placed in.

Cultural Europeanisation?

Considering the central role such historical cultural differences play in Graney's categorisation of countries, they play a surprisingly small role in her consideration of the contemporary Europeanisation of Eastern Europe states – in fact, almost no role at all. This, no doubt, is largely due to the fact that the spread of traditional European culture into the lands of Graney's Eastern Europe is distinctly limited. But it is also due to the fact that she does not understand "cultural Europeanisation" as an embrace of traditional Western European culture. Cultural Europeanisation for her is, rather, an embrace of the social and cultural liberalism which is now dominant in the western world, but which seeks to overthrow much of the Western European tradition. On the basis of this conceptualisation, when the peoples of Eastern Europe (in any sense of the term) defend the traditions and norms once shared by all societies and culture from Lisbon to Moscow against contemporary social and cultural liberalisation, Graney characters this not as a defence of European tradition (which it actually is) but a refusal to Europeanise.

Graney's bizarre use of terms does not, however, negate the quality of the evidence she has amassed to demonstrate the extent to which the former Soviet republics have or have not embraced social and cultural liberalism. She also presents a solid block of evidence demonstrating the extent and limits of Eastern Europe integration into aspects of Western and Central Europe popular culture, such as sport and recreation.

A similar mixture of good factual research with flawed terminology, conceptualisation and interpretation is found in Graney's account of "political Europeanisation". Oddly enough for a book published three years after the Brexit referendum, and at a time when nationalist political parties are on the rise throughout much of Europe, the book treats political Europeanisation as equivalent to alignment with the European Union – with co-operation with the EU, intention to join the EU, and EU membership

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representing increasingly higher degrees of Europeanisation. Although active co-operation with nationalist and anti-EU movements in historically Western European countries represents a form of political participation in Western Europe, Graney would characterise such co-operation as "anti-European". While this might be mere cant when applied to anti-EU movements in Western Europe, in the context of Graney's book it can be considerably more confusing – in other words, seeming to imply opposition to close engagement with Western Europe rather than the European Union as an institution.

Overinterpretation

Graney does give a good factual account of the efforts, successes and failures of both pro- and anti-EU movements in Eastern Europe but, in a fall from her usual high level of scholarship, fails to give sustained attention to the alliance between anti-EU Eastern Europeans and their Western allies. She also engages with the current underestimation of the strength of Western Europe's nationalistic right and the pace they are gaining popularity.

Graney's equation of Europeanisation with liberalisation and support for the EU is closely connected with what might be her greatest inaccuracy of the past 30 years. According to her understanding of history, the fall of the Soviet Union and its satellite governments was linked to a widespread desire to embrace both political liberal values and social and cultural liberalism, and, through doing so, became integrated into the sphere of Western Europe. And she argues that Eastern Europeans of today are turning away from their former embrace of liberal democracy. In reality, however, the attitudes of Eastern Europeans have remained much more consistent over the past three decades than Graney allows while Western Europe has changed dramatically.

As recently as the 1980s, cultural and social liberalism, as we understand it today, was outwardly professed by no more than a small minority. To use just one example: support for the legal sanctioning of same-sex relationships was so small it had no relevance to practical politics. Perhaps a majority of those who favoured legal toleration of those relationships still favoured social and cultural opposition to them. On this and other social and cultural issues, many leftist Western European politicians during the 1980s were considerably more to the right than many professedly conservative politicians of today. Social and cultural traditionalism, to a considerable extent, remained the de facto standard of Western Europe despite the fact it was no longer legally maintained.

The nature of the European Union has also changed over the past three decades. Strictly speaking, the EU did

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not even exist when the USSR fell; it replaced the European Economic Community (EEC) the year after the Soviet Union came to an end. Since that time, what was once a close association of autonomous states has become, in effect, a super-state to which its members have become subordinated.

Changing attitudes

What has changed is not the attitude of Eastern Europeans but those of Western Europeans and the EU. Thirty years ago alignment with the EU meant alignment with an association of states whose societies maintained, at least in comparison to today, a considerable degree of social and cultural traditionalism. Today, preservation of a high degree of state autonomy and social and cultural traditionalism requires, at the very least, support for the scaling back of EU power.

Graney's interpretation of changing Eastern European attitudes towards the EU also makes the mistake of equating circa-1990 Eastern European support for democratic political structures with support for liberal democracy. In fact, however, the practical goals of the Eastern European "democratic" movements of that time were shared by traditionalists, nationalists and liberal democrats. Many of those who supported democratisation were the successors of the traditionalists and nationalists of the early to mid-20th century, and the predecessors of those today. It is true that liberal democratic values influenced Eastern European opposition to the USSR, but that influence occurred within the context of what Americans call "fusionism" – which ranges from a pragmatic alliance of traditionalism and liberal democracy to an attempt to theoretically reconcile elements of traditionalism with elements of classical liberalism.

Looking at Eastern Europe (both in Graney's sense of the term and in the more general sense) what we see are not so much moves towards and away from liberal democracy but changing beliefs about whether or not the liberal democracies of Western Europe are the best allies of traditionalists or nationalists. *Russia, The Former Soviet Republics, and Europe Since 1989* does a first rate job of amassing details of the practical mechanics of various Eastern European countries move towards, and away, from the EU, but it ultimately fails to understand the big picture why these shifts have taken place.

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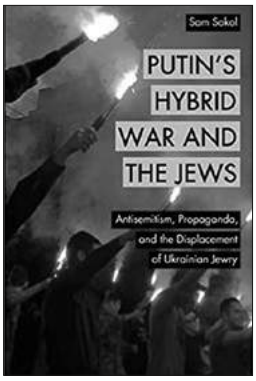
Between the hammer and the anvil

DANIEL GLEICHGEWICHT

Putin's Hybrid War and the Jews: Antisemitism, Propaganda, and the Displacement of Ukrainian Jewry.
By: Sam Sokol. Publisher: ISGAP, New York. 2019



Revolutions, social upheavals and wars have always meant trouble for the Jews of Eastern Europe. A quick look at history and we learn how the slaughter of Jews always accompanied crucial turning points in the region's often brutal story. Be it the Khmelnytsky Cossack uprising against Polish magnates in the 17th century, the widespread pogroms in the Russian Empire at the turn of the 20th century, or the Holocaust itself. The region also has a foul record of state inspired antisemitism. The Russian secret police of the tsarist era was so successful with their dissemination of the antisemitic *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, copies can still be found today at book markets from Tokyo to Dakar.

The Ukrainian Jewish community remains, in spite of the Holocaust, communist repressions and emigration, one of Europe's largest Jewish communities. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine's Jews found themselves in a new reality. Organised communal life and physical structures had to be built up from the very foundations, and contact with the Jewish world could be fully re-established. It was the three decades-long effort of the reborn network of communities that would be put to the test as Ukraine was thrown into turmoil in 2014.

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Our Jews good, their Jews bad

The Revolution of Dignity that took over the Maidan square in Kyiv and ousted President Viktor Yanukovych quickly showcased a division not only between Ukrainian and Russian Jews, but among Ukrainian Jews themselves. This was, after all, an entirely new situation and it was filled with uncertainty. The spike in antisemitic incidents around the country exacerbated this feeling even further. These attacks seemed to play into the Kremlin's narrative of a fascist antisemitic coup in Kyiv. At the same time, Ukrainian right-wing nationalists were visible on both the Maidan and later at the front, after the war broke out in the eastern part of the country with Russian-backed separatists.

Reading Jewish-oriented news on Ukraine from the outside during this time often ended in confusion and shock. There was one story which became especially hard to forget. An ultimatum, which claimed to have been signed by the newly declared pro-Russian separatists in Donetsk and delivered to the Jewish community, called for Jews to report for registration reminiscent of harrowing moments of the Holocaust. It had become clear this was no coincidence, and Jews had involuntarily become caught between the hammer and anvil.

Sam Sokol, in his book *Putin's Hybrid War and the Jews*, goes beyond these news stories and sets out on two simultaneous quests. The first is to organise the experiences of a beleaguered community by creating a timeline and gathering first-hand accounts from across the country. The second is to examine how antisemitism functioned as an element in Russia's hybrid war in Ukraine. The author, a Jerusalem-based journalist, went to great lengths to fulfil both quests, travelling through checkpoints and war zones, tirelessly noting down testimonies. As a result, *Putin's Hybrid War and the Jews* is the most complete account on how Ukrainian Jews fared in post-Maidan Ukraine to date. The book also contains fascinating descriptions of the dilemmas and choices of the various Jewish leaders. We are introduced to Yosyf Zisels, a former Soviet dissident, who would embrace the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity and speak to crowds on the Maidan, and the Chief Rabbi of Russia, Berel Lazar, who seems to jump whenever Putin claps. The information war both leaders and others took part in was just as much intended for the outside as

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it was for the locals. Israel's large community with roots in the former Soviet Union would soon take heed of what was going on in the old country.

Hybrid war, real victims

While Sokol carefully examines the unfolding events and activities of various agencies and institutions, he never loses focus on the human cost. His book concentrates on the experiences of Jewish Ukrainians showing how they faced the same hardships as their non-Jewish compatriots. The stories of indiscriminate rocket fire targeting housing estates and elderly people who were hiding in basements for days with no food or utilities brings to light the tragedy of the last few years of the conflict in eastern Ukraine. The stories of those internally displaced paint a grim picture of what it is like to be a refugee in one's own country while thousands of others prepare for the unknown journey to Israel.

Yet with all this anguish, there seems to be hope. Be it the displaced children chasing each other around Dnipro's menorah shaped Jewish community centre, or the Jewish wedding of two octogenarian refugees from Luhansk. The economic hardship that continues to plague Ukraine has been challenging (especially for the displaced), and this book seems to emphasise that more should be done by both the Jewish world and Israel itself. This comes to attention as Sokol relays a surrealistic scene at Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion airport, where hundreds of Ukrainian Jews have just landed, escaping war and misery, while thousands of religious Jews are in the departure hall en route to Ukraine, ready for a spiritual journey and some leisure time.

The only criticism is that the book abruptly ends. This is hardly the author's fault as he is writing about very recent events and things change fairly quickly. Therefore, it would be interesting if, in a few years' time, Sokol decides to pick up where he left off. Some scholars like Taras Kuzio believe that Ukraine's post-Soviet era has come to an end with the election of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Perhaps it is too early to tell what the popular "Mr Ze" can achieve in Ukraine, but surely his relationship with Ukraine's Jewish community will be scrutinised from all sides. One can only hope that Sokol is the one making notes.

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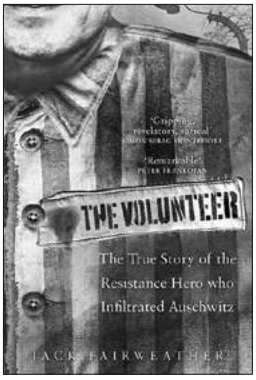
A volunteer's journey to hell and back

MARIA SUCHCITZ

The Volunteer: The True Story of the Resistance Hero Who Infiltrated Auschwitz. By: Jack Fairweather. Publisher: WH Allen / Penguin Random House, London, United Kingdom.

At the end of September this year, the European Parliament voted through a proposal to establish May 25th as the International day of heroes who fought against totalitarianism – this date marks the execution day of Witold Pilecki in 1947 by the communist regime in Poland. Until recently, few outside of Poland had heard of this name. Even within Poland, this man's extraordinary story only really began to be told after 1989 with the fall of communism, and only in recent years has it entered the mainstream Polish historical narrative.



Pilecki was a man who volunteered to become a prisoner at the Nazi-German Auschwitz camp in the quest for the horrific truth of what was taking place there. In September of 1940, 37-year-old Captain Witold Pilecki, a Polish underground resistance fighter, volunteered to be arrested by the Gestapo in order to infiltrate the concentration camp, the place which would later become the centre of the Holocaust. His mission was ambitious: to enter Auschwitz, gather intelligence on the fate of those being interred at the camp, report on the Nazi crimes taking place and form a resistance movement to stage an uprising.

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Uncovering the story

Pilecki spent two and half years as a prisoner at Auschwitz, escaping in April 1943 and taking part in the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, ending up as POW in Murnau. He chose to return to Poland after the war despite advice to emigrate, owing to his involvement with the Polish underground state, which was considered a rival to the Soviet imposed communist government. Continuing his resistance work in the post-war anti-communist underground, Pilecki was arrested by the secret police (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa), put on a public show trial for crimes including espionage for the western powers, forgery of documents and planning an assassination. He was executed in 1947, and to this day his burial place is unknown. Taking into consideration his exceptional war-time activity, it is surprising that it has taken so long for his story to enter the wider narrative of the Second World War. However, he has finally found his narrator in Jack Fairweather – a former war correspondent for the *Washington Post* and *Daily Telegraph*.

> Fairweather presents a detailed account of a man who risked his freedom, family and own life in order to enter the Auschwitz concentration camp, otherwise known as hell on earth.

Fairweather and his team of researchers have left no stone unturned in uncovering the story of this little known, but incredible individual. In his new book *The Volunteer: The True Story of the Resistance Hero who Infiltrated Auschwitz*, Fairweather presents a detailed account of a man who risked his freedom, family and own life in order to enter the Auschwitz concentration camp, otherwise known as hell on earth. Purposefully arrested in Warsaw during an SS-organised round up on September 19th 1940, Pilecki was beginning his mission to gather intelligence on Germany's concentration camp located at Auschwitz in the Polish city of Oświęcim. In 1940, little was known about the precise activities of the camp, and at the suggestion that someone could infiltrate the camp in order to set up a line of communication from the inside, Pilecki put himself forward.

Married with two children, this was not a light decision. Pilecki recognised that in taking on this mission he could potentially never see his family again. He did not tell his wife, Maria, the full details in order to protect her, but she knew that his decision meant he was putting his country first above everything else. Arriving at Auschwitz on the night of September 21st in an over-packed freight car, Pilecki was met with shouting and men with angry dogs and sticks as he and the other prisoners were or-

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dered to vacate the carriages. The reality of the brutal violence and inhumanity which characterised the concentration camp was becoming more apparent, as the SS were shooting those who dared to escape, even if prompted to do so by the guards themselves. In the fear and chaos that was taking place, Pilecki barely realised the barbed wire fencing and the gate under which he was passing upon which included the chilling phrase, *Arbeit macht frei* (Work sets you free). The way to this freedom was soon made apparent to Pilecki at the camp roll call in the coming days when SS Hauptsturmführer, Karl Fritzch, told the prisoners: "Look there at the chimney … This is the crematory. Three thousand degrees of heat. The chimney is your only way to freedom."

Inside Auschwitz

Fairweather succeeds in presenting an extremely detailed and sobering account of Pilecki's two and a half years at Auschwitz. Using a range of material from the Auschwitz archives, recently declassified files, as well as Pilecki's own family papers and unpublished accounts from camp inmates, the extent of the camp's resistance movement, which was set up by Pilecki, unfolds to the reader. In his aim to alert the Polish underground in Warsaw, and subsequently the Allies, about the reality of what was taking place in Auschwitz, Pilecki turned to prisoners destined for early release to smuggle out information. Those who planned their escape from the camp were also entrusted with important information, statistics and in some cases written reports to pass on to underground state officials in Warsaw. Witnessing the horrors of the camp, Pilecki urged the Allies to bomb the camp, as he believed this would give the prisoners the best chance of staging an uprising. He was aware that staging an uprising with no support from the Allies would only end in mass casualties and risked reprisal against all the prisoners. However, these requests were repeatedly ignored and dismissed by the Allies.

Despite the fact that at every moment there was a risk of being beaten by a Kapo or even just killed for the entertainment of an SS officer, Pilecki managed to build up a network of cells across the camp which were able to collate information on the role of the camp in the wider German war plan. This included information on the crematorium death toll, reporting on the arrival and extermination of Soviet prisoners, the beginning of experiments on prisoners, the building of Auschwitz-Birkenau, and the scale of Jewish prisoners to this new section of the camp. Fairweather explains that the numbers were not always accurate in the reports, and a full understanding of the purpose of the camp was not entirely grasped by Pilecki and his men. However what Fairweather does emphasise

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is that Pilecki understood, from a very early stage, that Auschwitz played a key role in Germany's ideology and that it was the site where the Nazi's racism was fully realised.

Another striking aspect of *The Volunteer* is that the reader is able to trace the development of Auschwitz through the eyes of prisoners who were present from the early days when the camp operated as a place for Polish political prisoners, and where the expectation was that those who were not killed immediately would not survive for longer than six weeks. Through Pilecki's eyes, the reader follows the expansion of the camp to include prisoners of other neighbouring nations, and finally becoming the core of the Final Solution. In popular discourse Auschwitz is often associated as the site where the Nazi's enacted the mass extermination of the Jews, and while this is indeed true, Fairweather's book and Pilecki's accounts remind us that the camp also included the mass murder and forced labour of many Poles and those coming from other Central Eastern European countries.

Fairweather is also aware that being a political prisoner, and therefore based in Auschwitz I, meant that it was impossible for Pilecki to fathom the extent of the extermination of the Jews taking place in Auschwitz-Birkenau when the Final Solution began in 1942. Receiving reports from camp resistance members who were forced to build the Birkenau barracks, as well as handling and sorting possessions belonging to the new Jewish arrivals, with time it became more apparent to Pilecki that the systematic killing of Jewish prisoners surpassed any evil he had seen at the camp thus far. This only fuelled his determination to harness the Allies' attention to bomb Auschwitz and support a prisoner uprising.

A man leading a team

What really demonstrates Fairweather's meticulous research is the way he succeeds in realising just how many individuals were involved in Pilecki's underground resistance. In the Polish discourse on Pilecki, he is hailed as a single hero, recognised for his outstanding bravery, dedication and patriotism. While this is true, the popular discourse often forgets that Pilecki could not have achieved so much on his own. Fairweather illustrates this by not just telling Pilecki's story, but also the stories of those who were integral to his mission. The initial idea of a resistance movement within the camp may have been Pilecki's, but it needed a team of dedicated and trustworthy individuals in order to carry out acts of small sabotage, help weaker prisoners survive, as well as smuggle information out of the camp.

The book contains a diagram displaying Pilecki's camp connections from 1942. They include connections ranging

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from the camp hospital, to the SS headquarters, to the Sonderkommando unit which had the closest contact with the horrors taking place in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Moreover, Fairweather finds space to write about the couriers who were integral in getting the information to the necessary people, and smuggling reports out of Poland; much of this information was for the Polish Government in Exile in London and the Allies. The book is thus a testament and a tribute to the power of human co-operation in the face of evil – in a place which sought to strip everybody of their respect to others.

Fairweather's book comes at an important and crucial time. In Poland, the figure of Captain Witold Pilecki is now widely known and recognised; he has become a national hero, and is painted as an example to Polish youth. However under the current Law and Justice government, it also means that his history is vulnerable to politicisation, with him being characterised as one of the main faces of the "Cursed Soldiers", those who were involved in the post-war anti-communist underground movement. While Pilecki continued to work within an underground resistance movement after the war, it is difficult to place him into the same category as those who were part of the anti-communist partisan movements in the late 1940s and early 50s, those who have a more chequered reputation. There is a risk Pilecki's story will become one of historical myth which does not truly reflect his version of events, but one that the government wants to be part of the national narrative. At the same time, a worldwide recognition of Pilecki's role in attempting to inform the Western Allied powers about the reality of Auschwitz is long overdue. This is where Fairweather's book fits perfectly to present Pilecki's story, reflecting an accurate historical account of a man who was not led by the need for recognition and glory, but a quest for truth and fighting evil.

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When Lviv became a city of angels

NATALIYA PARSHCHYK

The revival of angels. An exhibition curated by Pavlo Gudimov. Lviv: June 20th – September 22, 2019

For three months Lviv residents and interested guests had the opportunity to observe the deeply thoughtful and absorbing ambience of interplay between centuries-old cultures and traditions united by a familiar, ethereal creature – the angel. The exhibition was widely praised and warmly welcomed by the audience, as the enormous three-year undertaking was put into effect. The "Angels" exhibition was carried out by the its curator Pavlo Gudimov and his skilled research team of professional art researchers, culturologists, designers and managers. The exhibition was conducted by the Ya Gallery Art Center together with the Borys Voznytsky Lviv National Art Gallery; all this was made possible through co-operation with over 40 cultural institutions across Ukraine.

Despite existing for millennia, the idea of angels continues to be debated within modern society. Throughout history and in nearly every culture, angels have been commonly held and depicted as messengers and protectors which serve as intermediaries between God and humankind. Most are benevolent, but according to some faiths, a few have also contributed to the downfall of humanity. There are also many ranks and types of angels mentioned in lore – seraphims, cherubims, thrones, dominions, virtues and powers, principalities, archangels and many others – but in general angel symbolism provides comfort, inspires belief and promotes the search for higher meaning and understanding.

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Transformation

Angels have been portrayed in various styles of art since ancient times and still capture the contemporary imagination. The "Angels" exhibition recently held in Lviv illustrates this fact. The aim of the project was to represent large divisions throughout the history of angelic transformation. Over 400 exhibits from museums and private collections were gathered into 23 halls of the Lozynsky Palace and Pinsel Museum and included the works of the most outstanding painters and sculptors of miscellaneous periods: Dürer, Schongauer, Rembrandt, Boucher, Vrubel, Malczewski, Klinger, Kulchytska, Primachenko, Novakovskyi to Chagall, Kabakov, Ravsky, Kostyrko, Silvashi and Yaloza. The exhibition has become a remarkable platform of different styles from engravings, temple murals, sculpture and painting to books, cinema and mass culture. Also a large amount of masterpieces were transferred from the Bogdan and Varvara Khanenko Museum of Art, which preserves the most significant and systematic collection of classical foreign art in Ukraine. The vast amount of visual information led to the creation of five fundamental sections in order to segregate and rationalise the plethora of diverse themes: "Winged", "Stories", "Archangels and Hierarchies", "Culture", and "Angels and people".

It is worth noting that the creative curator also transformed the exhibition space by building 400 square metres of additional walls in the gallery, purchasing a customised lighting system which was completely swapped for the entire exposition. A variety of front, side and top lighting successfully emphasised the accents, and the bright blue and yellow walls created an intimate, absorbing background for perceiving the chef-d'oeuvre. In parallel with the exhibition, a number of lectures by cultural and artistic experts were organised that were devoted to a particular piece of work or to specific artistic periods. Gudimov also gave special guided tours around the exhibition. The organisers provided a special programme for children which included an excursion in the form of a quest and an event called "Angel Formation", where everyone, despite their age, could create an angel using diverse techniques and materials. The Lychakiv Cemetery also became part of the exhibition, which included several lectures about local angels.

The main exhibition consisted of two storeys, and in almost every hall visitors could find a combination of ancient and contemporary pieces. Nevertheless the second storey formed a stronger connection with the contemporary period. It was opened by Albina Yaloza's installations, which embody the original interoperations in the structure of angels and the archangel system. Corresponding to the artist's perspective, the kingdom of angels has strict hierarchies, very similar to human societies. In her large-scale 3D installation, the highest celestial power

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is revealed by an above spot of light, and plastic transparent wings of various shapes and colours slowly descend in hierarchical order. Visitors could therefore observe an aesthetically pleasing and emotionally charged visualisation; no wonder it became a favourite with many visitors.

Sights and sounds

Next, was the Colour and Sound Hall, in which Gudimov admits: "Here we are talking about the colour of the angels themselves. Jean Fouquet in the 15th century showed angels in vivid colours of blue and red. In the canonical system, colour is of great importance … But also, what do angels sound like? I asked Svyatoslav Lunyov to make an interpretation for the exhibition that would illustrate angelic sound. Thus, he created the so-called Pink Noise."

Angels have been portrayed in various styles of art since ancient times and still capture contemporary imagination.

The exhibition, in fact, includes two new works by Lunyov – an experimental modern Ukrainian composer. There was a composition at the Pinzel Museum, written on the basis of medieval choral music, and a multi-channel composition at the Lozynsky Palace, which was installed in the halls so that the enfilade would work acoustically. "In our project, music is a separate, full-fledged exhibit that harmoniously co-exists in one space with the works of art, augmenting reality," says one of the organisers of exhibit. Another installation, titled "Wings". by Tiberiy Silvashi (a modern Ukrainian artist) combines the poetic tunes of Lunyov and the offbeat imagination of the artist himself, inasmuch as the wings represent two huge gold-plated rectangles which are floating in air.

A closer look at the whole historical range of angelic themes, however, reveals a number of gaps and shortcomings which is a very interesting phenomenon, insofar as spectators got an opportunity to invoke their own imagination. Moreover, the curator of "Angels" emphasises, in an interview with Ukrainian media, that not all parts of angel differentiations have a literary base: "There were a few topics which we couldn't arrange, for instance, the theme of winged saints (The Winged St. John the Baptist, Winged Christ) or guardian angels. Therefore you touch something you don't even have the faintest idea of what it is. Furthermore, Diana Klochko, who has written a number of articles in this project, aptly named her

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material 'About the angels made up by artists'. Similarly, the main part of the exhibition called 'Culture' reveals the path of the formation of the image of the angel itself and how it was exploited throughout the ages".

Angels everywhere

The final section of the exhibition demonstrates the modern interaction between society and angels. Having said that, here a question should be posed: Are angels such an enduring phenomenon that we should address them again? Obviously, the concept of angels is not restricted to religion, but it also has a strong presence in the secular world. Today, angels are everywhere in popular songs, musicals and novels. Statues of angels can be found in gardens. Tiny angelic figurines appear on jewellery and clothing. In other words, the depiction of angels always mirrors the political and religious changes in people's mind.

Tracing back to the symbolic roots of angels, one sees an outpouring of disobedience. However, after some time the initial angelic idea transformed and led to its simplification as a more decorative form of art (for example, Renaissance and Baroque putti). What is more, contemporary popular culture cannot be imagined without comics. Superheroes and messengers of heaven are a part of our everyday entertainment. We find angels in stories and films – *Faust*, *Wings of Desire*, *Angel-A* or *X-Men*. The last title illustrates the radical changing image of angels to meet the demands of consumer society.

The Lviv exhibition explores it all – from traditional representations of the guardian angel, the shocking Last Judgment through fantastic Angelorium, to the Kaleidoscope of thematic artefacts in the last hall of the exhibition, where the project changes format to that of an interactive game of comparison and investigation. As an artist, I personally had an enormous amount of satisfaction and a fresh appreciation of angelic issues during my visit of the exhibition space. There was something divine about the whole atmosphere of the event, as if people, again, started to believe in fairytales. Thanks to the heavy promotion on the radio, TV and social media the "Angels" made a big sensation as a high-level cultural phenomenon, something that was much needed for the community in Lviv.

Nataliya Parshchyk is a student of art at the Lviv Academy of Art.

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Premiere in Batumi
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Premiere in Legnica
9 November 2019
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‘THE CLASSICAL CO-PRODUCTION’

(directed by Jacek Głomb)
is the result of the first Georgian-Polish stage cooperation, prepared by actors and creators from both countries. The artists worked improvising during rehearsals, trying to explore Georgian-Polish historical connections, to show stereotypes in their looking at themselves and the rest of the world, to get to know similarities and differences in Polish and Georgian world view.

photo Karol Budrewicz

Batumi Ilia Chavchavadze
State Drama Theatre (Georgia)

Modjeska Theatre
in Legnica (Poland)

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THE WESTERN AND NORTHERN TERRITORIES NETWORK

A MUSEUM IN MANY PLACES

The Western and Northern Territories Network cooperation programme is being implemented thanks to the funds and under the auspices of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage by: the Silesian Institute in Opole (Instytut Śląski), Institute for Western Affairs in Poznań (Instytut Zachodni), The National Museum in Szczecin –The Dialogue Centre „Upheavals“ (Muzeum Narodowe w Szczecinie – Centrum Dialogu Przełomy), the Northern Institute of Wojciech Kętrzyński in Olsztyn (Instytut Północny), as well as the „Remembrance and Future” Centre (Ośrodek „Pamięć i Przyszłość”) in Wrocław, which coordinates the Network’s activities.

The Network’s activities are focused on attempts to talk about the post-war history of the lands added to Poland in 1945 in a way that would fill the gap between the anachronistic approach of proving the Polishness of these lands, which were referred to as “Regained” (“Ziemie Odzyskane”), and the excessive emphasis of their German past. The focal point of this complex and multi-faceted story is, therefore, the undisputed phenomenon of reconstruction of Western and Northern Territories from war damage and the construction of new state and social structures. This set of achievements corresponds to the respect for the multicultural legacy of these areas, which was built in the post-war period. It is a story of living historical experience, constructed to a large extent in the conditions of civic debate. This is evidenced both by the social commitment to the ten-year-long debate on the creation of the Museum of Western Territories, as well as by the contribution of individual donors and witnesses to history in the process of creating exhibitions in Wrocław (the main exhibition “Wrocław 1945–2016” in the Depot History Centre), Szczecin (the permanent exhibition of the Dialogue Centre “Upheavals”) and the mobile exhibition (Taking Root. Western and Northern Territories. The Beginning”). It was also evidenced by the readiness of many researchers to conduct and develop research on the complex history of the Western and Northern Territories, starting with the topics of resettlement, reconstruction in the first post-war years, the activities of Cardinal Kominek, crowned with the letter from Polish bishops to their German brothers, leading to anti-communist opposition. The implementation of these multidimensional activities is also possible thanks to the growing resources of oral history archives and the donations of memorabilia, documents and shared memories.

The activities of the Western and Northern Territories Network are focused on four main projects: a research programme (Yearbook of the Polish Western Territories: www.rocznikziemzachodnich.pl), scientific residence scholarship, educational programme and a mobile exhibition.

The Western and Northern Territories Network – “a museum in many places” – is a platform for cooperation, discussion and dialogue. It is a story that is accessible to everyone and is conveyed through exhibitions, as well as scientific and educational activities. That is why it is much more than just a museum.

More information is available at www.szzip.pl

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SCHOLAR-IN-RESIDENCE

The Western and Northern Territories Network Research Scholarship is a scholarship program offering short-term (1–3 months) study visits for young researchers from outside Poland, whose scientific activity is focused on the subject of the Network's research programme. The implementation of scientific projects within the framework of scholarship stays provides for the possibility of using sources and literature available in Polish archives and libraries.

During the scholarship stay, the laureates reside at the Network institutions of their choice, which provide the research infrastructure and substantive support necessary for the implementation of the project.

Contest for the Western and Northern Territories Network Scholarship

The Director of The "Remembrance and Future" Centre (Ośrodek "Pamięć i Przyszłość") wishes to announce a contest for a scholarship offered by the Western and Northern Territories Network Consortium for researchers from abroad.

The scholarship is aimed at people who are conducting research abroad in a topic related to the past and present of those territories attached to Poland in 1945. Residing in one of the cities of the Western and Northern Territories Network will enable the recipient to access documents from the archives in Opole, Olsztyn, Szczecin, Wrocław, and Poznań and also gain familiarity with the state of Polish research in this area. As part of the scholarship, the successful recipient(s) will be able to present their findings at a scholarly seminar.

The contest is addressed at a person who:

- holds a nationality other than Polish,
- is no older than 35 years of age,
- is a graduate in the humanities or social sciences,
- is conducting research abroad in a topic related to the past or the present of the Western and Northern Territories,
- has a communicative knowledge of Polish and is fluent in English or German.

The scholarship can last from one to three months. During their stay at one of the Polish research centres listed in the Rules of the Western and Northern Territories Network Scholarship, the recipient will receive a monthly study grant of PLN 5,400 net.

To enter the contest, a candidate must send to scholar@szzip.pl by 31 January 2020 a completed application with all the necessary attachments according to §6 of the Rules of the Western and Northern Territories Network Scholarship.

The list of scholarship winners will be publicly announced on the website of the Western and Northern Territories Network (www.szzip.pl). The winners will be notified by email.

Detailed information about the rules for applications and fulfilment of the scholarship are included in the Rules of the Western and Northern Territories Network Scholarship.

If you have any questions, please contact us: scholar@szzip.pl

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FROM THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC TO THE OUTBREAK OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Interview with Eric Weitz
A society lacking a consensus is a dangerous place

Rainer Eisfeld
Germany's Weimar Republic: A narrative of ambiguity

Andrzej Zaręba
Hostage to the generals

Birte Förster
Colonialism continued. Versailles and the end of formal German colonial rule

Kinga Anna Gajda
The short-lived Weimar cultural scene

This section has been prepare in co-operation with Deutsch-Russische Austausch

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FÜR EINE EUROPÄISCHE ZIVILGESELLSCHAFT

This section is co-financed by the Foundation of Polish-German Cooperation as part of the programme "1939-1989-2019: history for (re) consideration".
The funding for this project has been transferred through the Foundation for Polish-German Cooperation from the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany.

FUNDACJA WSPÓŁPRACY POLSKO-NIEMIECKIEJ
STIFTUNG FÜR DEUTSCH-POLNISCHE ZUSAMMENARBEIT

Auswärtiges Amt

November 11, 1918
End of First World War

October 31, 1922
Mussolini becomes Prime Minister of Italy

June 28, 1919
Treaty of Versailles signed

January 21, 1924
Vladimir Lenin dies & Stalin starts to consolidate his power

August 11, 1919
The Weimar Republic is created

August 21, 1919
Friedrich Ebert sworn in as president, becoming Germany's first-ever democratically elected head of state

June 1921
Hyperinflation begins

April 16, 1922
The German government normalizes relations with the Soviet Union, erasing all prior war debt.

November 8, 1923
Munich Beer Hall Putsch Hitler and the Nazi party unsuccessfully attempt to overthrow the Bavarian government.

May 12, 1925
Paul von Hindenburg becomes president after Ebert's death.

December 1, 1925
Germany normalizes relations with former Allied powers, leading the way to its membership in the League of Nations.

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October 29, 1929
The Great Depression begins in the United States

1932-1933
The Holodomor occurs in the Soviet Union

August 23, 1939
The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact is signed

September 1, 1939
Germany invades Poland, starting the Second World War.

September 14, 1930
Nazi party enter the Reichstag with 19% of the popular vote.

1930-1932
Chancellor Brünig's policy of deflation & President Hindenburg's rule through emergency decrees

March 23, 1933
Only two months after being appointed Chancellor, Adolf Hitler takes unrestricted legislative power and effectively ending the Weimar Republic.

Marc–July 1933
Nazi party consolidates control through restrictive measures

March 1935
In violation of the Treaty of Versailles, Hitler announces conscription and the expansion of the German army.

November 9-10, 1938
Kristallnacht

A society lacking a consensus is a dangerous place

An interview with Eric Weitz, a professor of history.
Interviewer: Iwona Reichardt

IWONA REICHARDT: The title of your book is *Weimar Germany. Promises and Tragedy*. Let us start with the first part: the promises. What promises did the Weimar republic, which was established in 1918 and whose official name remained *Deutsches Reich* (unchanged since 1871), make to the German society, which was deeply battered after the First World War and burdened with a very heavy sense of loss and humiliation?

ERIC WEITZ: The Revolution of 1918/19 established – and did not only promise – Germany as a democratic state and society. The extent of participation in the government at all levels –federal, state and local – broadened dramatically. Germans had a great range of freedoms to speak out, to publish what they wanted in the press and to organise themselves in parties and civil society. The Weimar Republic enabled the building of public housing that vastly improved the life circumstances of so many people. Jews had more freedom to move in society than under the Kaisers. Yes, Weimar was always tense and conflicted, and the promises of the revolution could not all be fulfilled. But one should not only focus on the sense of humiliation and loss.

The republic's first government, which was formed by Friedrich Ebert on November 11th 1918, introduced policies that were primarily aimed at restoring peace. Under his leadership a number of social reforms were introduced to improve people's lives. Convinced that this was a better way to democracy than revolution, Ebert was yet called a traitor by his contemporaries from the left and heavily criticised by the right. Why did he as chancellor, and later president, become such a controversial figure?

For the right, he was "just" a saddle maker. The right always despised Ebert's working-class origins and thought that

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Photo courtesy of Eric Weitz.

the great nation of Germany needed at least aristocratic if not monarchical rule. Even though the Social Democrats pursued moderate policies that satisfied the right only when it feared a more radical revolution in Germany – something on the order of the Bolshevik Revolution, although that was hardly a real possibility in Germany. The Social Democratic Party's slogan in the winter of 1918–19 was "No Experiments!" The party then pursued a series of deals with elite sectors of society, namely, the army, business and the state bureaucracy. In return for recognition of Ebert's government, the SPD agreed not to dismantle the army officer corps, socialise property and purge the bureaucracy. For that reason, the left correctly criticised the SPD-led governments as much too timid.

You said that unlike other states, such as Russia, Germany did not complete its revolution and much of the elements of the old imperial order remained intact. If that was not the case, would the fate of the republic, as well as its political life, be different?

The republic's fate would have been different, that is for sure, but how it would have turned out one can, of course, never know. Revolutions provide brief openings that allow a radical restructuring of state and society. The Weimar governments in 1918–19 did not pursue those

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openings in a more complete manner and that weakness would come back to haunt the republic in its later years, opening the path to the Nazi seizure of power. Ultimately, those same elites would make their peace with Adolph Hitler and the Nazi Party.

Moving on to the tragedy of the Weimar republic, which is also referenced in the subtitle of your book, the conventional understanding is that its best illustration was Hitler's democratic election victory. And yet in the book you write: "No historical event is predetermined and most certainly not the Nazi victory. The conflict and constraints of the Weimar republic surely helped fuel the Nazi movement, but it is a travesty to see Weimar only as a prelude to the Third Reich." Why?

Although the Nazis won a significant segment of the electorate in free elections in 1932 (roughly one-third), they never won a majority. They were not elected to power. In the end, they were placed in power by a small cabal of powerful people around President Paul von Hindenburg. The republic, until its defeat (or at least until late 1929 and the onset of the world economic crisis), accomplished great things. Germans lived in more democratic conditions than they had ever experienced before. Public health clinics, including sex counselling, improved the health conditions of working-class Germans, especially women. Public housing vastly improved the daily living conditions of many people. "Light, sun, and air" was the motto of the housing settlements built by cooperatives, unions and municipalities. Jews had greater social opportunities than under the Kaisers. Modernist culture flourished in all branches of the arts. For all these reasons, it is a mistake to focus only on the conflicts and tensions and the ultimate defeat of Weimar.

The achievements of liberal democracy were nonetheless challenged and the republic was ultimately destroyed. In the book you state that "politically, the republic had been overthrown well before Hitler came to power". Why couldn't the republic, in the end, be defended?

In the so-called Golden Years of the Weimar Republic (1924–29), there was some movement toward the centre of the political spectrum. One can imagine the possibility that, over time, the deep conflicts and tensions in Weimar might have eased. But then the world economic crisis threw Germany into depression. The political system proved unable to manage the crisis and Weimar's most stalwart supporters were exhausted by years of attacks from the right. The right used the final crisis to destroy the republic, as it had wanted to do from the very beginning. Moreover, all along the strictures of the Versailles Peace Treaty gave the political right unlimited ammunition to attack the republic for betraying the nation.

The Weimar Republic is often presented as a lesson on what can happen when societies get excessively polarised and minori-

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ties become scapegoats for anti-democratic forces. You seem to share this view when you say that "a society lacking consensus is a dangerous place". Who, in that case, bears the greatest responsibility that history does not repeat itself and the lessons of Weimar do not go in vain?

That responsibility lies with all of us. All across the globe we see a surge of right-wing populism, more than I could have imagined in 2007 when the book was first published. The oldest political game is to blame outsiders for whatever problems exist (even when those outsiders may, in fact, be long-standing members of society). Democracy is fragile. It needs to be constantly defended against those who would destroy its institutions from within and especially from those who claim that the members of only one particular nation or race deserve to be rights-bearing citizens.

Eric Weitz is a distinguished professor of history at the City College of New York. He is the author of the book *Weimar Germany. Promise and Tragedy*, which was first published in 2007 by Princeton University Press.

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

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Germany's Weimar Republic

A narrative of ambiguity

RAINER EISFELD

Modernisation appeared to spell economic deprivation for large segments of the Weimar Republic's society. They felt threatened by uncertainties; in fact, hopes and expectations about the future were disrupted. Aggression turned against democratic institutions and minorities who were depicted as scapegoats.

On October 15th 1929, the Fritz Lang film *Woman in the Moon* premiered at the *Ufa-Palast am Zoo* in Berlin. The cinema's façade had been redesigned for the event. Launched from a skyscraper silhouette, a spaceship replica shuttled back and forth to the moon against the backdrop of a starry sky simulated by hundreds of light bulbs. Offering tantalising visions of future technology – not quite unlike *Bauhaus* architecture with its twin promise of functionalist building and re-styled urban life, it conveyed the impression of epitomising a cosmopolitan republic that eagerly embraced modernity.

Or so it seemed. Certainly Albert Einstein attended the premiere as an invited guest. On the other hand, the Nazi tabloid *Der Angriff* (*Attack*) saw reason to applaud the engineers constructing the film's rocket as "eternal seekers from Faustian heritage". Small wonder: The major figures' attitudes and comportment in the film amounted to what Thomas Mann would come to identify as robust technical progressivism combined with dreams of a romanticised past ("people which no longer

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exist put into machines that almost exist already", according to a contemporary film critic). A past imagined as a harmonious premodern community, implying repudiation of modernity's – consequently the republic's – conflict-torn society. "Reactionary modernism", according to Jeffrey Herf's apt depiction of technological advance reconciled with retreat from reason.

Uncertainties and anxieties

Woman in the Moon and the rocket fever accompanying it symbolised the enthusiasm about modern technological achievements that gripped large segments of the Weimar Republic. In contrast, changes in cultural patterns, social standing and professional positions, also products of that rapid modernisation which impacted the republic's society, elicited more ambiguous responses. They triggered uncertainties and anxieties, not least because they coincided with severe economic crises. As the German historian Detlev Peukert wrote, first hyperinflation, subsequently Great Depression worked to "destroy every meaningful biographical perspective for millions of individuals". With its rejection of modernity's rational attributes, reactionary modernism – the ideological appeal to the "upright-musical German soul in modern-mechanical mould" (Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*) – offered ways of consolation and self-deception.

Changes in cultural patterns, social standing and professional positions, products of rapid modernisation which impacted the republic's society, elicited ambiguous responses.

The longing for community combined into a potent mixture with an overemphasis on leadership informed by the Bismarck and Hindenburg myths (the latter dating from the Great War) and building on earlier acquiescence in Imperial Germany's authoritarian system. When the supposedly republican German School of Politics (*Deutsche Hochschule für Politik*) opened its doors in 1920, its operators placed the education of political leaders on par with the goal of contributing to Germany's "struggle for liberation" from the fetters of the Versailles Peace Treaty. During the 1920s, the "leader" ideal came to acquire almost metaphysical significance. Unsurprisingly, it gained momentum after former Field Marshal Hindenburg succeeded Friedrich Ebert as president. Even among republicans, it became intertwined with the destinies of Weimar Germany to such an extent that it did not exclude an anti-democratic backlash.

Cultural and academic ambivalences partly reflected, partly reinforced constitutional and political ambiguities – compromises with the past to the detriment of

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the present. Under the Weimar Republic's mixed parliamentary and presidential system the directly elected president's political legitimacy rivalled that of the Reichstag. The constitutional emergency powers, which he retained, might be used to sustain or to weaken the republic. After the eminently partisan Hindenburg had been voted into office, the president came to be elevated over parliament for only too transparent purposes as the supposed "guardian of the constitution".

The revisionist spirit permeating Weimar Germany's society and politics, essentially wishing to recapture the country's pre-war position of power, created another double-edged situation.

In terms of foreign policy, the revisionist spirit permeating Weimar Germany's society and politics, essentially wishing to recapture the country's pre-war position of power, created another double-edged situation. Even Gustav Stresemann, foreign minister from 1923–29, who has posthumously been judged Weimar Germany's more ablest statesman, was far from a consistent advocate of a politics of conciliation that would have renounced any attempt at restoring German continental hegemony. Realising that Germany would have to come to terms with the victorious French, he pursued a diplomacy of offering security guarantees to France and Belgium. These efforts culminated in the Locarno Treaty by which Germany recognised its western borders drawn in Versailles, followed by Germany's admission to the League of Nations.

The same recognition was not extended, however, to the border with Poland. Germany merely committed itself to peaceful arbitration in its continuing attempt to regain lost territory in Eastern Europe. Moreover, a clandestine system of subsidies channelled to German minorities in Poland aimed at weakening the influence of the Polish state.

Beginning of the end

These strategies merged into renewed plans for an economically and politically dependent *Mitteleuropa*, which first gained currency during the Great War and came to be actively pursued again by the Weimar presidential cabinets, commencing with Brüning's administration. Preferential agreements concluded with Hungary and Romania initiated a shift of German trade to south-eastern Central Europe, prefiguring the economic dependence of that region's agricultural countries on Germany. Unsurprisingly, the French government's 1930 proposal to negotiate a Pan-European confederation, with its implied acceptance of the territorial status quo, was rejected.

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The collapse of the Grand Coalition in early 1930 and subsequent government of the Brüning cabinet on the basis of constitutionally questionable presidential emergency decrees signalled, for all practical purposes, the beginning of the end for the Weimar Republic. Meanwhile, *Woman in the Moon* proved to be the most successful box office hit of the film season 1929/30. While Germany drew nearer to the abyss, tens of thousands flocked to the country's cinemas to witness the romantically coated technical vision of a *German* spaceship flying to the moon.

When Ufa released *Woman in the Moon*, control of the film company had already passed into the hands of the rabidly nationalistic newspaper tycoon Alfred Hugenberg, after the exorbitant production costs of Lang's previous film *Metropolis* had brought Ufa to the brink of bankruptcy. One of the most fatal strands of militant hatred directed at liberalism, democracy, and socialism had originated in 1890 when Hugenberg played a leading role in founding the aggressively imperialist Pan-German League. Employed as Krupp director for a decade, Hugenberg became a key player in several Ruhr-based pressure groups connected to mining companies during the Great War. Funds from heavy industry allowed him to build his own syndicate of newspaper publishing corporations and news distribution agencies. Supplying the regional press with prefabricated moulds to be used as printing plates introduced local editors to the most modern printing methods and established Hugenberg's influence on public opinion.

Joining the radical nationalist German National People's Party (DNVP), Hugenberg remained an intransigent enemy of the republic. His press viciously attacked Chancellor Gustav Stresemann's Locarno politics; later, it would also repudiate Brüning's government. In 1928, his Pan-German allies in the party pushed through Hugenberg's election as DNVP Chair. Subsequently forming the Reich Committee Against the Young (Reparations Payment) Plan, he invited Adolf Hitler to join, providing the Nazis with a national platform. Films with titles such as *The Foreign Fist* and *Burden of Tribute* were produced by Ufa to be used at rallies. In addition to pamphlets and press articles, Hugenberg made use of airplane advertising. However, the seeds sown by his propaganda were reaped by the Nazis. The brown-shirts were more successful in conveying an impression of dynamic modernity. "Hitler over Germany" trumpeted the party, when the Nazi demagogue conducted his 1932 election campaigns by plane, flying from rally to rally.

Printing presses, film screenings, airplanes: Combined with fear-mongering messages, spiteful falsehoods, venomous conspiracy theories, these most advanced technical means available were used to destroy the republic by the uneasy, but destructively effective, Hugenberg-Hitler alliance. Masses of voters responded. Modernisation appeared to spell economic deprivation. Citizens felt threatened by uncertainty – hopes and expectations were severely disrupted. Public aggression

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turned against democratic institutions and minority groups, such as Germany's Jews, which were depicted by both radical nationalists and Nazis, as scapegoats. Landed, military, industrial elites were already bent on destroying the democratic achievements of 1918/19. Eventually, a growing number of voters joined them in abandoning the republic.

Anxieties return

The failure of Germany's first democracy haunted the framers of the country's Western zones' Basic Law after the Second World War. The arrangements which were built into the constitution to enhance the effectiveness of the new political machinery and to avoid another anti-democratic assault included: exemption of fundamental principles from constitutional amendment; power of the Constitutional Court to ban political parties ruled anti-democratic ("militant democracy"); a limited role for an indirectly elected president; and a strengthened chancellor who may only be ousted by "constructive" vote of no confidence, i. e. election of a successor by absolute parliamentary majority. Severely circumscribed governmental emergency powers were added later.

No influential political players emerged indicating they would, even in a rudimentary way, try to pursue the *Mitteleuropa* concept. Neither did an ideological background for such a venture evolve. In the 1970s, a coalition of Social and Free Democrats, led by Willy Brandt and Walter Scheel, concluded treaties with Moscow, Warsaw and Prague which accepted the integrity of existing Eastern borders. Reconciliation with France remained a consistently pursued goal; European (initially West European) unification developed into another aim, from the Coal and Steel Community of the early 1950s through the Common Market to the present problem-ridden European Union.

Americanisation, Europeanisation and "coming to terms" with the Nazi past contributed, over four decades, to gradually shaping a more democratic West German culture. The evolution of catch-all parties (which find themselves presently weakened) and the "economic miracle", both contrasting with the Weimar period, certainly helped. Due, however, to the very different experiences of former GDR citizens, reunification produced a country which remains unified, but not quite united – "one people in two cultures".

The consequences of another wave of modernisation – labelled globalisation – and of the accompanying neoliberal policies, from increased migratory movements to curbs on the scope and quality of social benefits, were more strongly felt in the new East-German states. They triggered a resurgence of nationalism and

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xenophobia strongly reminiscent of the 1920s. Exemplified by PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West) rallies and the electoral successes of the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), these responses, once again, point to a sense of anxious insecurity. In a social environment perceived by many to be increasingly threatening, professional and private futures seem incalculable. There is a dire need, in Germany and every other European country, for politicians, media commentators and educators who, rather than fuelling anxieties by inflammatory rhetoric and hyperbole, assist citizen to make informed choices without anger or fear, but guided by the norms of equity and social justice.

Rainer Eisfeld taught political science at Osnabrück University, Germany, and was a visiting professor at UCLA. For over two decades, he belonged to the Board of Trustees of Concentration Camp Memorials Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora. From 2006 to 2012 he was a member of the International Political Science Association's Executive Committee.

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Hostage to the generals

ANDRZEJ ZARĘBA

Had it not been for the huge effort of the German military who carefully considered the experiences of the First World War and a wide support for Reichswehr military concepts in the Weimar Republic, the Nazi regime would not have transferred into an effective military machine. One that posed a serious threat to Europe's peace.

On November 9th 1918 a republic was established in Germany. It was one of the unintended outcomes of the First World War. The Hohenzollern family, which ruled Germany since 1871, lost power as a result of the war. It is difficult to fully understand the 14-year long history of the interwar German republic without looking at the causes which brought it to life. The same factors, in fact, are the ones which brought it to an end. Had it not been for the madness of Emperor Wilhelm II, Germany would have probably remained one of European constitutional monarchies. The sudden and unexpected abdication of the emperor in 1918, as well as his unexpected call to make peace with the Allied Forces, truly shocked the German public. Its citizens experienced four years of sacrifice to face a disgraceful capitulation in the end.

On the other side, the Allies were deeply hurt and wanted revenge – at any cost. Yet the humiliation that they inflicted on Germany in the aftermath of the war omitted those who were actually responsible for the German national tragedy. Instead it hit, with full force, the new republic.

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Fruitless attacks

The fatal outcome of the first German republic was, just like the republic itself, rooted in the emperor's boyish fascination with war, which he apparently treated as a nourishing activity. This attitude obviously did not take into account that in the industrial era, war had nothing in common with duelling knights. Thus, while deciding on the Clausewitz-like tactic to use military force in 1914, Wilhelm II and his circle of generals showed that they were willing to abandon the old Bismarckian principle of showing some degree of decency in combat. For Germany, the war began with its invasion of Belgium. This horrendous act, planned by Wilhelm II and his military advisors, was immediately condemned by other neutral states and under the leadership of the Belgian king, Albert I, a consolidation of otherwise conflicted ethnic groups in Belgium took place. Britain, which until then remained a passive observer, declared war on Germany which was already experiencing terrible losses trying to take over the Belgian fortresses.

Such was the cost of Wilhelm's rapid decision to enter into war with France, the emperor's illusions about warfare did not pass the reality test and his army was defeated at Marma in September 1914. By late autumn imperial forces were also stuck on the frontlines, which spread from the Baltic seaside to Switzerland's border. Instead of proudly marching in a military parade at Paris's Elysian Fields, where they were supposed to be celebrating German hegemony over the continent, recruits were dying in fruitless attacks against the Brits, French and Belgians.

The war brought about a catastrophe of civilisations. Its brutality left no room for compromise, truce or territorial concessions.

On the battlefields everything was permitted. The war brought about a chronic catastrophe of civilisations. Its brutality left no room for compromise, truce or territorial concessions. Most importantly, the war led to a humanitarian tragedy that was unimaginable to the societies which understood it only from the newspapers. The number of victims was unprecedented.

The desire for absolute victory pushed the Germans onto the path of war crimes. In April 1915, in an attempt to break the western front, the imperial army used the forbidden chlorine gas and without any warning sunk enemy fleets with its submarines. In both cases, international law proved to be useless. By the end of 1915, Turkey (which was Germany's ally at the time) committed genocide against the Armenian population whom it accused of collaborating with Russia. The Austrians in Serbia "avenged" the failure of the Belgrade attack by performing massive executions. The war continued without a strategy on how to end it. With propaganda messages issued by the Allies, Germany was presented as a dark force.

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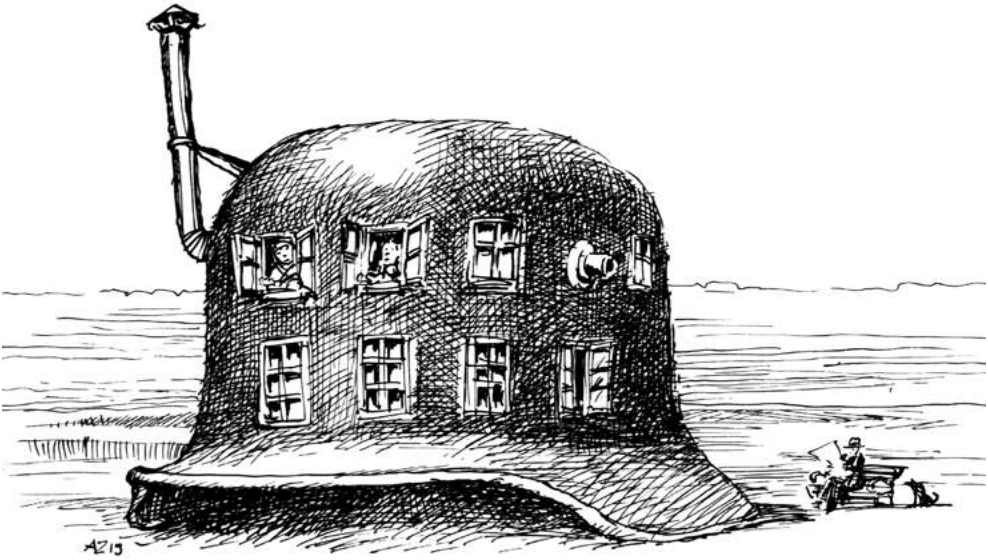

Nothing changed in the first days in the 1916 Battle of Verdun. This confrontation between Germany and enemy forces had been carefully planned by the head of the German army, Erich von Falkenhayn, and assumed Germany's usage of chemical weapons. From this moment, soldiers in the war zone were both at risk of suffocation and burning of their respiratory systems. The new chemical weapons used were popularly known as mustard gas. It had a distinct odour which resembled garlic. Even though it was also used by the Allied forces, it became a stigmatising mark against the German army.

New tactics

In 1917 a new military elite emerged in Germany – the Stormtroopers. Soldiers of this type were unknown before. Their crest was a skull with two bones, which was on the sleeves of the uniforms. As personal weapons, these military men used knives, which were usually found among those engaging in criminal activities, not members of a civilised army.

The imperial air force also made attempts to defeat the enemy, using surreal-looking Zeppelins attacking London by night. However, since the British king, George V, was Wilhelm II's cousin, the hideous activities that Germany were direct-

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ing against Britain can be seen as a continuation of the feudal tradition of inflicting terror on the subjects of another feudal. That is why, in addition to sending in its air fleet, Germany was also using its navy to attack the British coast.

In 1918 the German army made its last attempt to reverse the course of the war. At that time, the Bolsheviks had already come to power in Russia, and with the help of German intelligence settled in St Petersburg. In a gesture of co-operation, German and Austrian soldiers in Russian prisoner camps were allowed to join the fight elsewhere in the West. In February 1918, Germany signed a treaty with Russia in the city of Brest. As Russia was still undergoing a civil war, the imperial German army began its final offensive attempt. Pompously called *Kaiserschlacht*, it was a highly risky move. Its success, had it occurred, would have been attributed to Wilhelm, while failure (which was highly probable) would have only further deteriorated the empire's tarnished image. The sacrifice of the Stormtroopers almost brought the war to the end – the word "almost" is the key here.

In the summer of 1918 the Allied Forces had to face the German infantry again. The Hohenzollern empire was losing the war. On the other side, the US army started to take the military lead against Germany. German generals, under the leadership of Erich Luddendorff, prepared for defeat, although nobody at that time could predict its scale. The Allied forces were accelerating their war machine and a scenario of Berlin's occupation was becoming more realistic. From today's perspective, the plan to survive the disaster, coined by German generals, can probably be seen as Germany's greatest military success. By asking the government to sign the armistice, the military leaders hid the scale of the defeat from the public. It is important to keep in mind that the army at this time was no longer listening to its generals. The rank and file soldiers had already accepted defeat, while German cities and villages were struggling with hunger. The emperor's beloved fleet was taken over by revolutionaries.

The German generals, under the leadership of Erich Luddendorff, prepared for defeat, although nobody at that time could predict its scale.

Dismayed by the army's refusal to pacify Berlin, Wilhelm resigned and found exile in the Netherlands where he moved with his family. A new political system was introduced in Germany, and a democratic government was formed. The courage of its creators to make difficult decisions impressed the army generals who offered the new establishment their assistance. The former, fearing a radical social revolution, had no choice but to agree to the generals' proposal. This precedent, in turn, led to the creation of the myth that assumed a special role of the army in German politics.

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Humiliation

On June 28th 1919 Germany ratified the Treaty of Versailles. The signing of the peace agreement was a moment of great humiliation for the once most powerful empire in Europe – one that held this status since 1870. Overall, the provisions of the treaty were perceived as a death sentence to the now much smaller German state. As a result of the treaty, Germany not only lost some of its provinces (Alsace and Lorraine among others), but also saw a new state emerge on its eastern border – Poland. Internally, Germany was going through a revolution, which, this time around, was led by the extreme right. Irregular volunteer military units, known as Freikorps, were fighting against the Soviet-backed German communists in the east.

Europe, deprived of political role models after the collapse of the three empires, was hungry for saviours.

Thousands of veterans had returned from the frontline. Morally decimated, they had been well-trained killers. Depending on their temperament or worldview, many of them willingly joined radical groups – either the leftish revolutionaries or the rising nationalist movement. The role that was played by the voluntary military units, which were supported by the republic's authorities, led Germany to another disaster. They could be seen as the precursor that gave rise to the Nazi myth of permanent military service. This myth perceived Germany as an ethnic community which fulfilled the dream of heroism on the permanently bleeding eastern border. There the dirty guerrilla war emotionally united its fighters more than the experiences of the regular army.

Europe, deprived of political role models after the collapse of the three empires, was hungry for saviours – men of the moment. It found them with a new generation of orators – self-proclaimed geniuses, cynical technocrats or visionaries of the brave new world. Characteristically, they operated in different areas of contemporary social life.

Dangerous genius

The problematic "treasure" of the new German republic was found in the military which became a guarantor of political security. Such services were provided by professional officers who had survived the First World War. Among them was General Hans von Seeckt who was a man of many talents. His skills included historical analysis and a good intuition of the future. All in all, von Seeckt had all the features of a dangerous genius who found himself in the right place at the right time.

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Most importantly, von Seeckt managed to inflict some hope into the defeated and humiliated German army. He believed in a revival of the German army which would not repeat mistakes of the past should a new war erupt. As the basis of a new military force, he saw the Reichswehr, which in the eyes of the army was a temporary organ, just like the republic. Their ambition was not to have a military that was capable of defending Germany's independence, but to revise the outcome of the First World War. That is why military theoreticians only showed interest in an offensive war.

The winners of the First World War soon lost their gift of foresight. The French may have deprived the Germans of their outdated equipment, but they did not recognise the speed of technological development. At the time, when the Allies were investigating old German airplanes, outdated engines or submarine constructions, right-wing radicals were raising the issue of tarnished German dignity. This was something that was well understood by van Seeckt and his men. We can only imagine their laughter when sweaty French commissionaires were fulfilling their Versailles obligations and announcing the destruction of the old imperial power.

Out of sight

In 1922 the German republic approached the Soviet Union (its ally) with a proposal to establish inter-state relations. At first, the treaty that was signed by both parties in Rapallo did not raise any concerns. The Soviet Union was then entering a stabilisation period and needed a new technological opening. Its leaders knew all too well that peace was just an opium for the masses. Fate thus came to Lenin and he found a new ally in the form of Germany. At that time German engineers had already acquired almost magical skills in constructing state-of-the-art war machinery, something that was really appealing to the Russians. Thus, Russia offered the Germans what they needed the most – a military base that was out of the sight of the French controllers.

A secret air base was created in the city of Lipetsk, which is located in the Don basin. It served as a site for training pilots as well as performing operational and technical experiments with air bombing. The latter included the application of weapons of mass destruction. In this way, Russia and Germany, officially two enemy states, established co-operation in a very sensitive area of offensive warfare. In 1932 this fruitful and far-reaching co-operation ended. Its final moments overlapped with such events as Stalin's dictatorship in the Soviet Union and the collapse of the Weimar Republic, which came to an end upon the failure of the German democrats and the coming to power of Adolf Hitler.

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Unquestionably, the unexpected end of democracy in Germany allowed the Nazi revolution to take place. In its aftermath the new, aggressive regime took control over all state institutions, including the army. Its personnel, pretending to be apolitical, pled their subordination to Hitler. The history of this period shows us that had it not been for the huge effort of the German military, who had carefully considered their defeat in the First World War, the Nazis would not have managed to create an effective military machine, which ultimately destroyed Europe's peace.

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

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Colonialism continued

Versailles and the end of formal German colonial rule

BIRTE FÖRSTER

As a result of the Treaty of Versailles, Germany lost its colonial empire. This, however, only fuelled the idea of German colonialism after the war. Four million Germans signed up for a campaign against the loss of the colonies and the German government actively supported resettling the colonies.

The German colonial empire officially ended with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles on June 28th 1919. Already in the first two years of the First World War, the Allied troops had occupied most of the so-called German protectorates in Africa, Asia and the Pacific; in German East Africa Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck had waged a guerrilla war until 1917, he surrendered only after the armistice on November 25th 1918. In article 119 of the Treaty of Versailles, Germany renounced all overseas possessions. Although the newly elected parliament had voted overwhelmingly in favour of preserving colonial possessions on March 1st, 1919, the Allies quickly agreed that Germany should no longer be allowed to have colonies, for it was (unlike them) incapable of "civilising" and "ruling" colonial peoples. The 1918 *Blue Book* was one of the documents that served to prove this argument: British and South African officials had collected material on the German occupation and rule of Namibia, including statements from Herero and Nama on the violent atrocities against their peoples from 1904 to 1907. However, the "end of German colonial rule did not put an end to colonialism", historian Sebastian Conrad argues in *German Colonialism. A Short History*. This holds true both for the former German colonies as well as for the perception of colonialism within German society.

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Despite the promise of self-determination Woodrow Wilson made in his Fourteen Points, despite his demand of an "impartial adjustment of all colonial claims" in which the "interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight", neither the former German territories nor any colonial territory was granted the right of self-determination in 1919. The fact that the Allies argued that Germany was unfit for colonial rule only fuelled opposition against the so-called *Kolonialschuldlüge* (colonial guilt lie, in analogy to the *Kriegsschuldlüge*) that was shared by nearly all political parties. As a result, colonialism became more popular in Germany than ever before. The German government actively supported resettling in the colonies.

Mandates of the League of Nations

Both Britain and France were eager to incorporate the German territories into their respective colonial empires. They met with rather fierce opposition from the American president who was opposed to imperialism in general. Wilson wanted to place the colonies under the supervision of the League of Nations and thus to initiate a change in colonial politics. Unlike Wilson, the South African Prime Minister Jan Smuts, one of the most important strategists of the British Empire, recognised in the League of Nations a possibility to continue the imperial policy of the past. On his initiative, the mandates were divided into categories corresponding to the "level of development" of the respective territories. Britain, France and Belgium were to become mandatory powers of the African territories on behalf of the League of Nations. In their response to the terms of peace, German diplomats demanded that Germany also become a mandatory power but these claims were denied by the Great Four. Smut's assessment of the mandatory system shows that he wanted to ensure the continued subordination of the African colonies in particular.

According to Smuts, the German colonies both in Africa and in the Pacific were "inhabited by barbarians who would not only be unable to govern themselves, but who would also have no possibility of self-determination". From his point of view this was especially true for German South West Africa, which South Africa wanted to annex. On paper, the peace treaties marked the change from colonial rule to trusteeship.

There were three classes of mandates, A, B and C. Class A included all former Ottoman territories in the Middle East which had already been divided between France and Great Britain in the Sykes-Picot Agreement of May 16th 1916. These territories were supposed to govern themselves, but were also to receive what was described in rather nebulous words as administrative assistance. Class B contained Togoland, Cameroon and Tanganyika, Burundi and Rwanda. These were to

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be administered by their mandatories. The Pacific islands and Namibia were left for Class C. They were defined as incapable of self-government, which played into the hands of Smuts and his government. As a League of Nations mandatory power, South Africa de facto annexed Namibia to its national territory; it was not until 1990 that this former German colony became an independent state – thus also ending the apartheid regime at the same time.

The changes regarding colonial rule were more ideal than concrete. On the one hand, colonial rule was defined as limited in time, even if deadlines for parts of the territories were far away. On the other hand, colonial rule now had to be justified differently, because Article 22 of the League of Nations Statute stated "that the well-being and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilisation and that securities for the performance of this trust should be embodied in this Covenant". Thus, it was now the task of the former colonial masters, who had mutated into mandate holders, to take care of the welfare and development of the indigenous population. They had to report regularly to the mandate commission of the League of Nations.

Four million Germans signed up for a campaign against the loss of the colonies which was initiated, among others, by the German Colonial Society.

Residents of the mandated territories could also send petitions and complaints about grievances to this committee. France and Great Britain responded to this new requirement by forging plans for the economic development of the colonies and by considering energy production, the expansion of transport infrastructure and the reduction and refinement of resources. They now had a contractual responsibility by which to be measured. Nevertheless, the commission had little opportunity to influence the actual government of the mandated areas. When revolts broke out in present-day Namibia in 1922, which were violently crushed by South Africa, neither the Mandate Commission nor the League of Nations Council could even make South Africa admit that it had made mistakes in dealing with the rebellion. Instead, the government representative of South Africa announced that the indigenous population had to be inoculated with "respect for white superiority".

Although the Paris Peace Conference did not succeed in putting the global right of self-determination of peoples on the agenda of world politics, the topic was now a point of reference for the colonised world. The struggle for colonial independence was to become the signature of the coming decades. After 1919, the anti-colonial movement began to network internationally. It appeared as an actor in international politics and articulated demands. Not only the German, but any colonial

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rule was the subject of international negotiations, as was the question of how the colonies could be prepared for self-government. At the women's peace conference in Zürich pacifist activists demanded that the League of Nations should extend the mandate system to all colonial territories. In 1919, however, the colonies were still a long way from their political independence.

Colonial revisionism in Germany

As a result of the Treaty of Versailles, German settlers were dispossessed and had to leave the territories. Only South Africa allowed half of the German population to stay in Namibia. Four million Germans signed up for a campaign against the loss of the colonies which was initiated, among others, by the German Colonial Society. In order to counter the impact of the atrocities documented in the Blue Book, the German diplomats in Versailles tried to spread the myth of a benevolent German colonialism, centred around the figure of the loyal "Askari", as all African Colonial soldiers who had fought in the German army were called after 1919. The alleged loyalty of the Askari was used in colonial revisionist propaganda as proof that Germany was indeed a capable colonial power. Germany's official response to the conditions of peace claimed that German colonial rule had brought "peace and order … The development of the country by roads and railways for international traffic and its trade and the promotion of existing and the introduction of new cultures has given the natives a higher mission."

The colonial lobbyists spun a fairy tale of German colonialism as a "school of the nation" for young adventurers, who also incidentally civilised the "undeveloped races". Although this narrative had nothing in common with reality, the colonial revisionists, according to historian Dirk van Laak, successfully told it again and again. They founded new associations, which joined together in 1922 as the *Koloniale Reichsarbeitsgemeinschaft*. The German Colonial Society alone, led by former governors, had 30,000 members, among its vice presidents was Konrad Adenauer, the mayor of Cologne and future chancellor of West Germany. In order to underpin the German claim to colonies and to keep this idea alive in the public, the society distributed extensive colonial propaganda. Exhibitions and slide shows, rallies and conferences were organised, a youth organisation was established, and memories and aspirations became visible in monuments. The subject also found its way into popular culture with the new medium of film, as well as through memoirs and adventure novels such as Lettow-Vorbeck's bestseller *Heia Safari* and Hans Grimm's *Volk ohne Raum* (*People without Space*), whose title was adopted by the National Socialists as the slogan of their violent claims to expansion. The German

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colonial movement reached its peak only after Germany was no longer an official colonial power.

Although there was a close connection between ultra-nationalists and colonial revisionists – Lettow-Vorbeck was one of the protagonists of the counterrevolutionary Kapp Putsch in 1920 – all parties except the communists supported the colonial claims. The ministry for reconstruction and later the foreign ministry ran colonial departments, in which many former colonial officials worked. The ties between the ministry officials and the colonial revisionist movement were strong. Especially under Chancellor Gustav Stresemann, colonial propaganda was massively supported by the foreign ministry.

Colonialism's long shadow

Dirk van Laak stresses that German imperialism indirectly continued to exist through investments by private companies, the promotion of infrastructure and a foreign cultural policy that advertised Germanism abroad. Also, the colonial women's schools were still in operation until 1945 as in the case of Rendsburg were first founded in 1926. They trained women to be sent to the colonies and were thus also an instrument of indirect German imperialism. In addition, the former German plantations were bought back and generously supported by the ministry of finance from the mid-1920s onwards. Between 1914 and 1930 the German population in Namibia thus doubled to a total of 30,000. Another 4,000 Germans had relocated to the Cameroons, Tanganyika and New Guinea.

Despite the strong revisionism movement, there was also criticism of colonialism in Germany from pacifists like Hans Paasche.

However, there were also shifts in perception and hierarchies. In her book on the German plantations in British Cameroon during the interwar period, Carolin Authaler explains that German colonial rule was reassessed in the course of this private-sector colonialisation. Since the mandate administration could still fall back on forced labour, the German plantation owners paid comparatively better wages and thus made work on these plantations more attractive. At the same time, workers now resisted the violence of white plantation owners by complaining to the official British authorities thus improving their work situation and at the same time unsettling "the power of the white plantation managers and the racist hierarchies on the plantations". Workers from French Cameroon, where forced labour was the order of the day (it was not until 1946 that it was officially abolished in the French Empire), on the other hand, migrated to the British part to work on

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German plantations. This again reshaped the narrative of German colonial rule in the Cameroons as the least bad power of the three in charge.

Despite the strong revisionism movement, there was also criticism of colonialism in Germany, from pacifists like Hans Paasche, but also from people from the colonies who built up the anti-colonial movement from their European places of exile. In the 1920s, Berlin became a hub of this activism which often intermingled with communist demands.

Neither colonialism nor German colonial history ended in 1919. The long shadow of colonial practices of violence reached as far as West German development aid in the 1960s, as Hubertus Büschel proves in his study *Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe*. Historians should take a cue from Ulrike Schaper and aspire not so much to write a German colonial history (and the story of its end) than to look at German history in a post-colonial way. As public debate about the Berlin Humboldt Forum shows, questioning the colonial order within the topics we address has at long last become a matter of first-rate importance for Germans taking account of their past, present and future. NEE

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The short-lived Weimar cultural scene

KINGA ANNA GAJDA

From today's perspective, the Weimar period should not only be seen as a time of vibrant artistic life but also as a warning of what can put democracy at risk. The experience of the Weimar Republic teaches us that democracy's enemies can be found within the system, while politics can help to both stimulate artistic expression and constrain it.

Culturally speaking, the Weimar Republic was an extremely vibrant period in German life. It was a time of new artistic trends which included the works of great artists like Marlena Dietrich, Thomas Mann and Gerhart Hauptmann, to name just a few. This was also the period of the theatre of Max Reinhardt and Bertold Brecht, who's *Threepenny Opera* was enriched by the music of Kurt Weille. In addition, this period saw a rapid development in the visual arts, including film and photography.

A legacy and a warning

As with any other epoch, it is difficult to present a one-sided assessment of Weimar Republic's achievements and legacy. Put simply, we can say that the period of the new German state that was established after the First World War was a bit like the city that gave it its name. Weimar, a town in Thuringia, is located between Erfurt in the west and Jena in the east. It was the place where the first Bauhaus was founded by Walter Gropius, and later turned into a movement that had a profound

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impact on modern German architecture, art and design. But Weimar was also the city of the "first cultural cleansing" performed by Wilhelm Frick in 1930–1931.

The Weimar Republic was certainly a period of accelerated cultural development – one that inclined the German historian, Detlev Peukert, to call it a laboratory of classical modernity. Peter Fritzche, an American researcher analysing Nazism as well as the period that preceded it, stressed the experimental nature of the social and cultural events that took place during the Weimar Republic, indicating that they contributed to the development and promotion of democratic and liberal values. At the same time, there is no question that Weimar was also a period when nationalism and fascism grew in Germany. They, in turn, destroyed the potential for a liberal democracy culture to flourish. This explains why the wonderful legacy of this period's culture is contrasted with the political turmoil and economic crises that accompanied it.

In Weimar Germany, a sense of crisis was omnipresent and affecting all spheres of life, with the exception of one: art.

Finally, the republic saw developments with women emancipation, the spread of liberalism and sexual freedom. Yet, they were also overcome by the anti-democratic, anti-socialist and antisemitic rhetoric of the political right. Even worse, once the rights of the minorities ceased to be widely respected, their representatives started to be excluded from public life. Thus, from today's perspective, the Weimar period should not be only seen as a time of vibrant artistic life and individualism, but also as a warning of what can put democracy at risk. The experience of the Weimar Republic shows us how fragile and unstable democracy can really be. It also teaches us that its enemies can be found within the system, while politics can both help to stimulate artistic expression and constrain it.

Unwanted child of the First World War

The short period of the Weimar Republic, which was often called the unwanted child of the First World War, was the time burdened by the German military defeat in 1918. As a result, morale was low among the German public, which led to a series of problems that were eating the new state from within. The most famous defender of the republic, politician Gustav Stresmann, put it clearly when he said: "Let's not cheat ourselves, our parliamentarianism is in a crisis which is more than a crisis of trust." This sense of crisis was omnipresent and affecting all spheres of life. All with the exception of one: art, which during this period became a seed for social development.

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We can also say that, in a way, the Weimar Republic was a time of a cultural fight, one in which German society was learning greater tolerance. Tolerance was the value that was strongly desired by the social-democratic government that was formed after the First World War with Friedrich Ebert as its head. Even though it is hard to believe that a nation that was so exhausted with the experience of a lost war would become interested in art, it is true that the anti-war, anti-imperialistic and anti-military message of art became an engine in the new reality.

Thus, the direction that artistic expression took reflected its willingness to create something new, and in direct contrast to the conservative culture of the German empire. The German artists of that period were trying to respond to the deeper questions regarding modern human existence and to find answers in art. This art was to transform society. It was oscillating between despair (caused by military defeat and economic crisis) and faith in a brighter future. It was the second time in German history when art became part of the foundation for rebuilding of the nation. In the Romantic period, art was an expression of rebellion and an aspiration for recreating the former glory of the German nation. Similarly, Weimar artists wanted to rebuild society and its faith in Germanness. This time, however, they were not making references to tradition, nor sought inspiration in the medieval period. Instead, they were trying to stimulate a reflection of human experiences.

The German artists were trying to respond to the deeper questions regarding modern human existence and to find answers in art.

Weimar Germans started to postulate the need to rebuild society based on new ideas and references to naturalistic attitudes. The role of the artist was not to be a genius, but an engaged participant of social life – the creator of a new ethic. That is why writers such as Thomas Mann were trying to bring back the German tradition of *Bildung* and, at the same time, put faith in society's ability of self-perfection which could take place through people's encounters with culture and education. Philosophers, such as Heidegger, were concentrating on the creative function of language. Unfortunately, with time Martin Heidegger succumbed to the influence of a different language – namely, the Nazi ideology.

During the Weimar period, many artists and intellectuals were also engaged in politics. However, not many seemed then yet aware of the dangers haunting the European continent in general and the German state in particular. They missed the first signs of extreme nationalism and fascism, while the political activism of some artists who acted against these tendencies did not really appeal to the German public. The bourgeois was the first to show its distance and became attracted to Hitler's views. Before this happened, however, new trends had managed to emerge

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in art. They included the so-called modern German movement, which later took the forms of expressionism, futurism and Dadaism.

These movements – as Jankel Adler, an artist from the Polish city of Łódź, once wrote – wanted to "seek truth in everyday life". Thus they were not only artistic experiments, but voices calling for social reforms. As a result the artists became a modernising force in society, one that not only led it though a revolution, but also shaped new social attitudes. Under the Weimar Republic, art became a tool to promote change – its task was to reach all strata of society. The artists who called themselves spiritual revolutionaries were getting together, as Max Pechstein, an expressionist painter and co-founder of the Die Brücke group said, to "build a united epoch of art".

Women's emancipation

The Weimar Republic was also a period where women started to be active in public life. Observing this new trend, Franz Hessel, a German writer of Jewish origin, described modern women as the embodiment of good style and sophistication. She was active and sporty. She also worked during the day, while in the evening spent time shopping in one of the department stores. She enjoyed city nightlife, paying visits to such places as Haus Vaterland.

The Weimar period is also when the German feminist movement started to emerge and women started voicing their desire to have control over their own bodies and life. While researching this period through many journalistic and literary texts and films, we can read female artists talking about their lives, including the right to have an abortion. They also argued that women's emancipation, and the emancipation of the German nation, was beneficial for one another, and indeed part of the same process.

Yet, not all Germans accepted women's emancipation. Objections were also issued by those who were supporting formal equality of men and women, but who were of the opinion that areas such as home and family were a woman's responsibility. Many on the right argued for women to play the traditional roles of wives and mothers. This attitude shows that German society, despite all the revolutionary changes which took place after the war, was not entirely ready to embrace the values being proposed in artistic and intellectual circles.

Thus, the Weimar Republic was both a time when the notion of a modern woman emerged and a time when women were forced to play a more traditional role in society. And even though the German Constitution guaranteed the equal status of men and women, the German Civil Code subordinated a wife to her hus-

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band, while the Criminal Code stipulated sanctions for performing an abortion. A woman who decided to pursue a professional career would, on average, make 10 to 20 per cent less than the average male. This was the accepted norm, to the point that lower wages for women were included in collective bargaining between the trade unions and employers. Thus, from today's perspective, we can talk about certain important changes that started to take place with rights being granted to large groups that had previously experienced discrimination. Yet, we also have to admit that these new postulates, even when they were received positively, did not always lead to changes in behaviour. For social changes to be rooted, a much longer period was needed.

Bauhaus and Berlin

Walter Gropius, the creator of the German art school Bauhaus, was of the opinion that architects, artists and artisans should all work together to build a new future. He opened the first Bauhaus art school in the city of Weimar with a mission to overcome traditional divisions, abandon snobbism and create functional, modernist buildings. The type of architecture that the Bauhaus proposed rejected traditionalism and promoted art that was functional. As a result, social space was to become an area of activities and the exchange of ideas. Hence, the architects started to examine the relations between urban space and natural landscape. They started to pay attention to the quality of life but also local traditions.

The type of architecture that the Bauhaus school proposed rejected traditionalism and promoted art that was functional.

During the Weimar period, Berlin became a fashionable metropolis and a vivid city of art. Carl Zuckmayer, a playwright who started his career in Berlin then considered the city to be the centre of his professional life, famously wrote: "Who has Berlin, belongs to the world."

The capital of the republic, which had a population of more than four million, was the largest city in Germany. That said there was more to the state than just Berlin. Berlin was a world metropolis at this time, but many Germans living in other parts of the country were not so enthusiastic with the capital's cosmopolitan life. This group also included those who were not really interested in the new Weimar art or modern German philosophy or literature. They might not have known the works of the Bauhaus or the expressionists. Instead, they were probably protesting against the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles and wanted to see a return of the pre-war order.

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Hitler's rise to power brought an end to the cultural life that took place in the Weimar Republic. The Nazis subordinated art to their ideology, and did the same with the artistic groups and institutions. Those perceived as dangerous, or who were accused of communist tendencies, lost their jobs. Expressionism was said to be racially impure and decadent. And even though expressionism and Bauhaus established new trends in modern art, they proved to be too weak to overcome nationalism.

Many artists of the Weimar period, for various reasons, did not continue working after the Second World War. Many of those who did no longer produced works that were considered masterpieces. This happened mostly because some of artists lost their lives, while others escaped. Most never returned to the lives they had before. To paraphrase the famous words of the German philosopher, Theodor Adorno, their art ended with the Holocaust.

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

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