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New Eastern Europe

UNDERSTANDING VALUES IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

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DEAR READER,

If the experience of the year 2020, and indeed the last several years, has taught us anything it is that we surely are living in uncertain times. Our societies are more polarised than ever before, which makes them more susceptible to disinformation, untruth and conspiracy theories. The global pandemic has exposed these cracks even further and more explicitly. As we already explored in the previous edition of *New Eastern Europe*, the ongoing health crisis has in many ways affected our region where many countries have proved unable to fully cope with the challenge on how to protect their citizens, provide healthcare services and honest information. Equally importantly, the economic fallout is certainly another factor creating even more insecurity in these countries.

Hence, when deciding on the main theme for this issue, we agreed in our team that there is a critical need to reflect on the things that bind us and those that divide us; and this can be done by taking an inward look at our values. Certainly, defining values is a very personal endeavour. Yet, we know that as a society or community, we also have shared values, which can change in time due to events or new experiences. As Milton Rokeach writes in *Understanding Human Values*, they are "learned and determined by culture, society, society's institutions, and personal experiences". That is why our authors in this issue ask and explore questions like – how does politics reflect our values? Do European values still matter? And, importantly, what axiological changes are we witnessing as a result of the protests in Belarus?

It is our hope that these provocative essays and analyses provide you some important closing thoughts as we finally put 2020 behind us. We also hope that the more optimistic conclusions will carry with us into the next year. As always, we would like to wish all of our readers a peaceful and safe holiday season and healthy New Year. Please do not forget to join us on social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and feel free to share your thoughts with us at editors@neweasterneurope.eu.

The Editors

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A shining city on a hill

What if anything can American values teach a free Belarus?

GEORGE BLECHER

The United States may not be the best model for a fledgling democracy looking for fresh values. America's values have never been as pure as its rhetoric, and in recent years they have been obscured by bitter partisanship.

I'm writing this essay several weeks before the American presidential election and I am told that it will only appear in print some days afterwards – when most likely there will not be a solid verdict about the winner, or even if there is one, it will only serve as the cue for hordes of lawyers to start fighting in the courts. Unlike a lot of political observers, I think that, in the long run, the outcome of the 2020 election is not as important as the fact that for the last four years a bright light has been shone in the dark corners of American politics and the problems revealed cannot be easily remedied. If nothing else, Donald Trump's term in office has been a grotesque test of the durability of the American system; and what we have learned, if we didn't know it already, is that there are long-standing weaknesses in the American Constitution as well as troubling aspects of our national history and characterological flaws in the American psyche.

Whoever ends up winning the election faces the prospect of a decentralised, inefficient government and a citizenry polarised to the point where people shoot one another in the streets over differing political opinions. With the death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the prospect of a rigidly conservative Supreme Court adds to

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the chaos and threatens to reverse laws that have stood for decades. The fact that many of these problems are systemic leads one to wonder if they are ever solvable in the short or long term.

Cautionary tale

I am not a political philosopher – my area of "expertise" is limited to American politics and mores, a familiarity with Western European democracies after the Second World War, and an abiding admiration for the European welfare state. What I am going to say about American values may not have much relevance to the situation in Eastern Europe, more specifically Belarus. But I am aware that the polarisation of the American electorate is not exactly unique – and maybe the fact that the US cannot be universally regarded anymore as the bastion of democracy can allow its flaws to at least serve as a cautionary tale for other nations.

In one sense, the Trump administration and the Black Lives Matter movement have been in a weird sort of partnership over the last few years, working separately but in tandem to undermine the illusion of American exceptionalism and the US as a land of moral purity – Jonathan Edwards's "city on a hill", which Ronald Reagan with his Hollywood flair amped up to a "shining city on a hill". Like a bull in a china shop, Trump has run rampant, exposing the slow workings of a creaky government while being the banner-bearer for a set of attitudes that have always been implicit in the American psyche. These attitudes are immediate and localised; emotional rather than logical; impervious to reason or analysis. They are not values as much as feelings, emotional certainties, that millions of Americans hold dear – that "freedom" means the right to stick to a narrow set of personal interests and disregard everyone else, that there is a hidden conspiracy constantly working to take away one's personal "liberties", and that the American Dream is only about the accumulation of wealth.

> Like a bull in a china shop, Trump has run rampant, exposing the slow workings of a creaky government.

This is not to say that there are not plenty of people who voted for Trump in 2016 and 2020 for less venal reasons. But the existence of this group – and I would include elitist Democrats whose capacity for altruism is also wafer-thin – has never been as out in the open as it is now, and as eager to flex its muscles.

The Black Lives Matter movement questions American exceptionalism in an even more obvious way. It makes it impossible to ignore the fact that America's history is tainted, and that the economic and psychological effects of slavery have not come close to being resolved. Reporting from the 1619 Project of the *New York*

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Times, inspired by BLM, showed that the US has never been an equal-opportunity haven for immigrants and the pandemic has further demonstrated that everything from income to health is worse for people of colour.

So the US cannot be self-righteous about itself any longer. The real question that the US faces is as basic as it gets: can we rebuild the nation on the ashes of our illusions about ourselves? Come to think of it, one aspect of the cautionary tale inherent in the American story that can be useful to a democratic Belarus – if there is really any chance of one being born – is to remind the Founding Fathers and Mothers of the new Belarus to acknowledge the mistakes of the past if they do not want them to come back and bite them.

Values as an obstacle

Can a new nation be formed on a new set of values? In the case of America, even if it gets past Trump, can it really reinvent itself? The other day I watched a transatlantic discussion between Joseph Stiglitz and Thomas Piketty about the economic effects of the pandemic. In an engaging but weary way, Stiglitz described the problems in the US, while Piketty energetically offered criticism of the EU's response to the virus. He was full of suggestions: a carbon-tax on polluting nations, a wealth tax, regulation of capitalism, changing the EU unanimity rule to a simple majority, and allowing a smaller number of EU nations to have decision-making authority. Perhaps because Piketty is younger, he seemed more optimistic about the possibilities of shifting the values of the EU; or perhaps because he wasn't American, he wasn't as disheartened about the roadblocks in the way. I felt as tired as Stiglitz looked.

Two obstacles stand in the way of change in the US system. The first is the archaic US Constitution, the oldest working constitution in the world. It is outdated and unworkable. The last amendment, an exceedingly minor one about the salaries of the Congress, was ratified 40 years ago and there have been only 26 changes, many of them inconsequential, to the document since 1791. Among the most problematic aspects of the Constitution is the Electoral College, an arcane system of voting indirectly for candidates that gives an unfair advantage to rural states. Electing two senators from each state regardless of the size of its population is a further impediment, and even the concept of direct rather than proportional voting needs to be reconsidered. But we cannot do it. To amend the Constitution requires two-thirds of both Houses and the ratification of three-fourths of the state legislatures. As of this writing, the US Congress cannot even agree on a stimulus package in the midst of the biggest economic crisis since the Great Depression.

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The second obstacle brings us back to values. In the US there has always been a war between two sets of values: on the one hand individualism, on the other a wish to build a society around the notion that "all men are created equal". The Founding Fathers believed that John Locke's concept of "enlightened self-interest" – that self-interest, if tempered by reason, would recognise the need for a support system of other people – would provide a middle position between these poles. Sometimes this worked. Not now. The sides are too far apart.

Not only are the Trumpists intractable, but the "progressive left" couldn't care less about finding common ground with them. The Congress has not passed a major bill in years. Joe Biden may be a centrist, but if he is elected, he will have to contend with voices from both sides that may make it impossible to accomplish much of anything. If people are unwilling to compromise, how can freedom and community be brought together? Or rather, since "freedom" has come to be a synonym for solipsism, and "community" suggests the worst instances of Cold War totalitarianism, how can we even start to re-examine the terms themselves?

Faint hope

At least in the short run, the US is in for some bad years. The death of Justice Ginsburg is a real blow. As of this writing, it looks like Trump will be able to install a third conservative Supreme Court Justice in four years, and even if Biden wins and both Houses go to the Democratic Party, the power of the Court is enormous and laws may be struck down the minute they leave the Congressional chambers. The ability of the internet to marshal large groups together that has facilitated the protest rallies of the last four years may not lead to civil war, but we can expect more fighting and killing in the streets over political differences. The hopes that Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren briefly raised for a more humane and equitable distribution of wealth will fade in the background of more immediate concerns; the powers of American corporate capitalism are not likely to diminish in the foreseeable future.

But all may not be lost in American democracy. The one hope I see – which isn't really a value as much as the relative openness (until recently) of America's borders – is the racial mix and mingling that has been going on in the US in plain sight for decades. The population of California, for instance, is less than 50 per cent white and this will continue to change. Racism notwithstanding, anecdotal evidence suggests that the US may finally be becoming the melting-pot that propagandists always insisted it was – especially among the young people that Sanders said were behind him if only they raised their voices loud enough.

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In the US there has always been a war between two sets of values: on the one hand individualism, on the other a wish to build a society around the notion that "all men are created equal".

This racial diversity is in itself a good thing, and the polls seem to indicate that people of all races, conservative or progressive, are universally fearful of climate change. Isn't it likely then, or at least possible, that this mingling of young people comfortable with one another in terms of race and sexual orientation will become so terrified of their shared future that they will start talking across party lines and that priorities will be re-examined through a new, single lens? Will it aid or hinder the survival of the species? If this happens, new configurations can arise that bring together individualism and community, and finally reveal the wisdom of John Locke's dictum: we need one another to maximise ourselves.

At least I hope so. It is a faint hope and the condition that it is based on – that climate change will become so alarming that it supersedes political differences – is not a pretty prospect.

In the meantime, the US may not be the best model for a fledgling democracy looking for fresh values. America's values have never been as pure as its rhetoric, and in recent years they have been obscured by bitter partisanship. A free Belarus might better look to the Scandinavian blend of social welfare and private-public partnerships as a helpful guide to the future. And whatever Constitution they come up with, they had better make sure that it can be updated whenever it needs to be.

George Blecher is a former professor with the City University of New York. He is a writer, journalist and translator. His articles appear in, among others, the *New York Times*, *Eurozine*, *New Republic*, *Christian Science Monitor*, as well as the Danish daily *Information*.

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Do European values still matter in Ukraine?

VOLODYMYR YERMOLENKO

Politics in Ukraine is still not driven by ideas or ideologies, but rather by personalities and money. While on the pro-western flank there are at least signs of demarcation between more liberal forces and more patriotic/identity politics, the pro-Russian flank is still characterised by a chaotic mixture of ideas.

When Volodymyr Zelenskyy won the 2019 presidential election in Ukraine, Ukrainian philosopher Vakhtang Kebuladze called his phenomenon a "non-Maidan". I repeated this expression in my interview for *New Eastern Europe* published in May this year. Kebuladze meant that Zelenskyy's election undermined the 2013–2014 confrontation between the pro-European "Maidan" and the pro-Russian "anti-Maidan", and his political project – Servant of the People – intuitively or consciously sought a different approach: more inclusive, but also more vague, a comprehensive platform attracting voters with different origins and values.

At that time, I called the Zelenskyy phenomenon "populism 2.0". During the election campaign, Zelenskyy was not proposing ideas, values or even slogans. He was proposing *himself*, his (real or imagined) character. The major emotion behind this character was the emotion of belonging: "I am one of you", he tried to say, "I am not a politician, not a part of 'them'". Contrary to other politicians, he moved from political slogans ("vote for us, and we will give you justice/peace/security/welfare/order") to political memes: funny play of words mocking current politicians or corrupt civil servants, but not proposing anything like a plan or goal. He mobilised his voters with a suggestion to laugh and to reject, but with little understanding of where to go.

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Current constellation of players

This emptiness was Zelenskyy's key drawback – but also his key force. The ideology of the Servant of the People was unclear but also sufficiently comprehensive to attract different people and different expectations. This inclusiveness gradually made Servant of the People a key centrist force in the Ukrainian political landscape. It also helped crystalize two oppositions to the Zelenskyy party: the patriotic pro-western opposition embodied by Poroshenko's European Solidarity and the pro-Russian, anti-western opposition embodied by Viktor Medvedchuk's Opposition Platform for Life (OPSZ). Two lesser political forces are worth mentioning here as well: the liberal (and probably the most pro-western) Holos, led by rock singer Sviatoslav Vakarchuk, and the aggressively anti-western party of video blogger Shariy (the Shariy Party). The difference is that Holos is gradually dying out, "squeezed" between centre-right Poroshenko and centrist Zelenskyy, while Shariy is gaining popularity, especially among younger audiences in the east and south. Shariy is increasingly acting as a younger and anti-systemic ally of the Opposition Platform for Life.

Another important Ukrainian political player, Yulia Tymoshenko, one of the leaders of the Orange Revolution (2004–2005), is drifting more towards the influence of oligarch Ihor Kolomoiskyy and is increasingly playing an anti-western card, pushed by him and his entourage. Add to this a bunch of local parties which were born as fruits of decentralisation reform; some new oligarchic political projects – and you will see the usual complicated character of the Ukrainian politics. It would be very tempting to present this constellation in a European-style ideological matrix: centre-right European Solidarity (a bit similar to the German Christian Democrats); the "centrist" Servant of the People; the liberal Holos; the centre-left Tymoshenko party; the pro-Russian "left" of OPSZ; the radical far-right Ukrainian nationalists (balancing between 2–3 per cent), and the "far-left" Shariy.

> Familiar adjectives like right, left, centrist, liberal, nationalist or socialist are hardly applicable to Ukrainian politics.

But all these familiar adjectives – "right", "left", "centrist", "liberal", "nationalist", "socialist" – are hardly applicable as such to Ukrainian politics. Politics in Ukraine is still not driven by ideas or ideologies, but rather by personalities and money. And while on the pro-western flank there are at least signs of demarcation between more liberal forces and more patriotic/identity politics, the pro-Russian flank is still characterized by a chaotic mixture of ideas. Therefore, when I use the adjective "left" with regard to Medvedchuk and Shariy, I use it as a metaphor, rather than an exact description. They are trying to attract

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Photo: Review News / Shutterstock

Activists protest outside the Constitutional Court of Ukraine after its decision to cancel the electronic declaration by officials in October 2020.

the attention of the European "left", arguing that they are the key force opposing Ukrainian "nationalists". But their "leftism" is illusory and has nothing to do with a genuine European left; it is not about a welfare state or social redistribution, but about pro-Soviet nostalgia and pro-Russian rhetoric, acute anti-western rhetoric, and pathetic claims that they are fighting against "nationalists". There is also, quite probably, Kremlin financial support. They often show nostalgia about the Soviet industrial, authoritarian and imperial past.

Second, Zelenskyy's "centrism" is rather wishful thinking. Its "inclusiveness" is often a synonym of its emptiness. While it was rather empty at the beginning and it is becoming increasingly empty in the making: the 2020 local elections are poor, even in terms of political campaigning, compared to 2019 election.

Third, there is no balance in this system. Currently the "patriotic" and "pro-western" flanks (Poroshenko, Holos and pro-western MPs of the Servant of the People) are losing popularity and losing resources, being targets of a huge anti-western information campaign, which we study thoroughly at UkraineWorld.org. Instead, the "anti-western" flank (Medvedchuk, Shariy, Kolomoyskyy's close politicians from Servant of the People and new parties like the Kolomoyskyy-linked For the Future) are gaining popularity – primarily because of the huge financial and media resources they have behind them.

What does this trend mean for Ukrainian values? Nothing positive, that is certain.

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Liberal-patriotic alliance

The liberal-patriotic alliance was a key for the emergence of modern Ukraine. It was a significant factor in the Ukrainian dissident movement in the Soviet Union of the 1970s-1980s which tried to combine the liberal discourse of human rights and the patriotic values of community rights and identity. The Ukrainian Helsinki Group, which emerged in 1976 in protest against the Soviet Union's neglect to the Helsinki Final Act (eventually the USSR signed it), was a symptom of this. The opposition to Soviet totalitarianism, which was suppressing both individual rights and national/political identities of its "republics", demanded a unified front of liberals and patriots.

Throughout the 1990s, this liberal-patriotic alliance was dominating the intellectual discourse. However, it had little understanding and support with the general public. The majority of Ukrainian society in the early 1990s was made up of the post-Soviet elite and ordinary citizens who had not taken the competition of ideas seriously and were focusing on material concerns. Some were able to earn a lot of money through corrupt rent-seeking schemes or other successful business, while others were focused on economic survival during the harsh 1990s and the everyday fight to ensure minimal welfare of themselves and their families.

During the two Maidans (the Orange Revolution of 2004–2005 and the Revolution of Dignity of 2013–2014), this liberal-patriotic discourse, stressing the importance of both human rights and the rights of the Ukrainian political community (against Russian expansionism, for example), was able to mobilise citizens and provide them with ideas that inspired action of resistance and even a readiness to sacrifice themselves. What is more, this liberal-patriotic alliance was not unique for Ukraine. In a way, it was dominant throughout the western world, which took hold in the late 1970s – from Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan – through the late 1990s in a liberal-conservative consensus. This consensus replaced the liberal-socialist alliance of the 1940s-1960s, which created a European social model and welfare state balancing the values of freedom and equality. Contrary to the liberal-socialist consensus, the liberal-conservative alliance of the 1980s-1990s rejected the role of equality as a key value and stressed the role of the rule of law, in addition to the liberal idea of freedom.

Today, this liberal-conservative alliance has collapsed throughout the world. Former allies are turning into bitter enemies. Both liberalism and conservatism are becoming increasingly radical and intransigent with regards to each other. Ukraine, in this sense, is not an exception. Several trends put the former liberal-patriotic alliance into question. First, "liberals" and "patriots" are increasingly in opposition towards each other. Russian aggression in Crimea and Donbas made patriotic dis-

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course more radical, with many representatives of it doubting that liberal values of human rights can be applied to the enemy, in a country at war. "Liberals", on the contrary, argue that radicalising patriotic, security and identity discourse is beneficial to Russia which presents Ukraine as a "fascist state" and is turning Ukraine into a mirror of its enemy. The collapse of the liberal-patriotic consensus endangers the very resilience of the Ukrainian political project, facing increasing threats from Russia, not only from the outside but also from within the country.

The warrior vs. the bourgeois

The clash between liberalism and patriotism/conservatism is a mirror of a fundamental axiological clash which we see around the world, including in Ukraine: a controversy between the "warrior ethos" and the "bourgeois ethos". By the warrior ethos, I understand a set of values valorising the ideals of victory on a battlefield, glory, honour and pride. By the bourgeois ethos, I understand values valorising the ideals of exchange, mutual respect, and of a positive-sum game.

The clash between liberalism and patriotism/conservatism is a mirror of a fundamental axiological clash which we see around the world, including in Ukraine.

The warrior ethos has been a long-lasting foundation of European ethical doctrines. It has been the ethical basis of the European antiquity, primarily the Ancient Greek city states and the foundation of western democracy. It is based upon the idea that a true "virtue" is won on the battlefield, on an *agon*. The ideal citizen is supposed to be able to fight, to win and to earn glory. The warrior ethos stresses the values of fight for national sovereignty and identity, of sacrifice, of heroism and victory in war.

The bourgeois ethos, on the contrary, came about in European modernity, with the rise of capitalism and the subsequent invention of political liberalism. It can be attributed to philosophers like John Locke, David Hume and broadly 17th-18th century Britain. Contrary to the values of sacrifice, victory and glory, it puts an emphasis on mutual exchange and recognition. It stressed the values of a positive-sum game and compromise. It believed that the best metaphor to describe human society is not *agon* but *agora* – or, in other words, the meeting point, the market.

In my recent essay titled "Ukraine, Europe and dignity", I argued that the combination of the warrior ethos and bourgeois ethos is key for the development of the idea of dignity (*dignitas*). *Dignitas* is important for both European Union values ("dignity" comes first in the list of values of Article 2 of the Treaty on the European

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Union) and for Ukraine's recent history, whose EuroMaidan was called, from the very beginning, the Revolution of Dignity.

In a way, a united Europe was the result of an alliance of these two sets of values: A Europe of glory and a Europe of exchange; a Europe of victory and a Europe of compromise – both needed each other. *Dignitas* is unthinkable when there is no mutual respect and equality, which comes from the bourgeois ethos; but it is also unthinkable when everything is subject to exchange and when there are no red lines for compromise. These red lines come primarily from the warrior ethos and its emphasis on the value of honour.

For Ukraine's recent history, both played a significant role. The bourgeois ethos helped many citizens to overcome their Soviet past, to become more individualistic and less dependent on the state, and more valorising horizontal relations, mutuality and trust. But the warrior ethos was also key for Ukraine's defence against foreign aggression. The value of sacrifice was acutely present both during EuroMaidan and during the war. It is remarkable how the word "warrior", *voin*, has returned to the Ukrainian language.

The importance of the warrior ethos is the reason of scepticism many Ukrainians have with regards to Europe's policy towards Russia – which is considered by many as too soft, too compromising, and too unwilling to confront danger (i.e. too bourgeois). Today, however, these two sets of values are also entering a confrontation within societies – as it has become one of the lines of conflict between liberalism and patriotism. Moreover, both are also facing attack from a third player – the Kremlin. Putinist Russia is perfect at imitating European values but turning them into its benefit – and it is skilfully playing on the controversy between liberalism and conservatism, helping radical conservatives when it needs, or imitating liberal discourse on "freedom of speech" when it needs.

Zoopolitical ethos

In Ukraine, the Kremlin is also promoting what I call a "zoopolitical ethos". By zoopolitics, I understand a specific worldview, in which politics – or the political as such – is understood not as a warriors *agon* or as the merchants' market, but as a big jungle where animals fight for survival. Zoopolitics valorises aggression, force, expansion – i.e. the values of social Darwinism which flourished in the western world in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; and finally led to the age of right-wing and left-wing totalitarianisms of the 20th century. Social Darwinism argued that human beings are neither warriors on the battleground, valuing their honour, nor are they merchants meeting on the market, valuing their mutual revenues.

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Instead, they are but animals fighting for survival, with no mercy towards each other. According to the zoopoolitical ethos, political competition is one big fight among big animals (nations, states, empires) trying to acquire more living space.

The zoopolitical discourse, typical for today's Russia, is also exported into Ukraine and other European countries, promoting the triumph of the cynical mind, which assesses the situation only on the basis of survival instincts and an aggressive capacity to destroy others. When I refer to zoopolitical (or social Darwinist) discourse in Ukraine, I mean primarily the abovementioned pro-Russian and anti-western forces – represented by Medvedchuk's OPSZ, Shariy's party, Kolomoyskyy-aligned political actors, both within the Servant of the People and outside it. They are characterised by an excessive use of hate speech, political incorrectness, a rejection of both liberal (human rights) and identity (community rights) discourse. Openly or latently, they express their support for *Russkiy Mir* (the so-called Russian World) – a Russian imperial idea attempting to re-establish its zone of influence and furthermore to re-establish its political empire.

Interestingly, the zoopolitical ethos is mimicking both the bourgeois ethos and the warrior ethos. It is using the liberal discourse against the democratic world. It argues that the western world promotes "liberal fundamentalism" and that the Russian-backed discourse – on RT, *Sputnik*, Medvedchuk's channels in Ukraine, etc. – actually provide the true alternative, genuine critical thinking and therefore should be defended according to the democratic principle of free speech. The truth is, however, that its goal is to use information not to inform, but as a tool to harm – i.e. to extend imperial power, not human knowledge.

It also mimics the warrior ethos as it argues that *Russkiy mir* is endangered, encircled by its enemies, while the Russian people are the fighters who shall oppose the western attempt to weaken it. The truth is, however, that the European warrior ethos has been rooted in the Greek polis, and was citizen-focused, not empire-focused. It was initially much more anti-imperial than imperial. It was born much more as an ethos of the defender than that of the occupier – and therefore is much more applicable to the current anti-imperial Ukraine than to imperial Russia.

Compromise?

The Ukrainian liberal-patriotic alliance has been the key driver of Ukraine's way towards European values of dignity. Today, however, it is not in the best of shape. But it certainly can be reborn again. The problem is whether we can still find a universalist vocabulary to describe what is going on in today's world, or even what is going on among our neighbours. Take the Belarus protests, for example.

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Belarus's uprising against Alyaksandr Lukashenka and Ukraine's EuroMaidan in 2013–2014 have much in common. The true mobilising force behind both of them was a response to direct police violence. It was this moment that provided the moral motivation to protest against the violence and surpassed the civic motivation to protect citizens' votes from fraud or the country's geopolitical direction.

Yet, many see it important to not stress the similarities of the Belarus and Ukraine protests, but their differences. Some see Belarus's lack of identity politics (for better or for worse); others see the Belarus protests as less violent (the beginning the EuroMaidan was non-violent as well); while others complain that even Belarus's opposition is too soft on Russia. All these differences seem to be less important to me than the things which unite them – and despite this we find it difficult to find a common narrative.

Yet, the lack of a common narrative that goes beyond any particular state makes the very discourse of values senseless. Contrary to postmodern scepticism about grand narratives, I believe that our inability to embrace them makes us weaker, not stronger. In this sense, the split between liberal and conservative values in the world, the split between liberal and patriotic values in Ukraine – or in other countries – and radicalisation of opposing discourses drives us away from the idea of "European values" as such.

"European values", with their focus on dignity, is a compromise between what I call the warrior ethos and the bourgeois ethos. And it is increasingly falling victim to the neo-authoritarian zoopolitical ethos, intransigent in its wish to survive. This zoopolitical ethos has only one motivation: destruction as a tool of survival. As one famous French writer put it, "destroy, she says".

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A country of grumblers?

Hungarian values and how to misunderstand them

RÉKA KINGA PAPP

Are Hungarians ill-fated and determined to be incapable of overcoming their historical baggage? Some seem to think so, including some sociologists. Yet, it is worth remembering that political trajectories do not follow pre-drawn patterns, so we should look at the circumstances which can hold societies back in their democratisation.

Something is rotten in Hungary and the international media coverage seems quite keen on pointing this out. However, it offers very little explanation for why it is happening. International interest in Hungarian politics has increased, especially since the Brexit vote and Donald Trump's election in 2016 – which illustrated how serious the far-right shift of mainstream politics has become. Yet, Hungary had already been under the illiberal supermajority for six years, and by then it was well past all the major battles in which its democratic institutions had faced.

An expedited march through the institutions

Shortly after Viktor Orbán's political party, Fidesz, come to power in 2010, the 1990 constitution was replaced by a Basic Law that was consulted with no living soul. The electoral system was redesigned to gerrymander districts, fragment the already weak opposition and benefit the largest winner. A new media law instated an authority directly appointed and controlled by the government, paving the way

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for Fidesz's current overwhelming dominance of the national media. The labour code was gutted to match international investors' interests and the social safety net, there to support the have nots, was transformed into a 21st century workhouse system that allows the perpetual exploitation of the jobless poor.

By 2016 Hungary had seen its biggest mass protests since the fall of the Soviet era and rising tensions on the European Union level, but Fidesz managed to renew its supermajority in 2014, and Orbán started to gradually shed his old guard, replacing the founding generation of his party with those he trusted to have no autonomous will. The ridiculously named Regime of National Co-operation (Nemzeti Együttműködés Rendszere, NER) was thickening like cement in the summer sun.

Fidesz had fixed the race and made sure to undercut any contender who may rise to challenge them, legally and economically. However, it is hard to ignore the fact that they still do secure over 40 per cent of the votes cast in national elections, which, in such a disproportionate and unfair electoral system, provides them with over two-thirds of mandates in parliament. Even after acknowledging all the voter suppression and the unfair allocation of decisive power, their ability to mobilise such a proportion of the electorate poses the question: do Hungarians actually like what Orbán is doing?

According to several sources conducting research on values in Hungary, it would seem otherwise. While the self-proclaimed illiberals are practicing textbook neoliberalism, research suggests that the public preference in economic matters is overwhelmingly social democratic: Hungarian voters long for a strong welfare state. This was true even almost a decade into Fidesz's rule, with most major sectors of care and support collapsing, from public education to health care. In a 2016 survey, for instance, a majority of participants agreed that it should be the state's responsibility to tackle inequality; most supported a wealth tax and progressive taxation. Ninety per cent refuse dismantling universal health care and 86 per cent believe that the gender pay gap needs to be closed (even among 80 per cent of Fidesz voters).

Cultural pessimism

The countries of the former Eastern Bloc are often alleged to be under a communist curse, carrying authoritarian baggage, which justifies their democratic failures. Such defeatism is not only culturalist, but also evaluates these states with a different lens than their western counterparts, who now also seem to have produced their own painful fiascos. So much so that illiberals like Orbán use those examples to justify their own rule.

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The Curse of Kádár* is still often quoted as an explanation for Hungarians' striking political disengagement and their insistence of state assistance. Zoltán Pogátsa, a Hungarian political economist, rightfully points out that earlier research materials themselves often bear the marks of strong ideological stances, where the scholars evaluating the results identify basic demands for a welfare state as favouring statism and as a lacking culture of self-sufficiency. However, it has never been realistic to demand that a society "grow up" to meet the democratic ideals of western states with public welfare being consistently cut and inequalities steeply rising, leaving eight out of ten Hungarians without any savings and four out of ten under the poverty line, Pogátsa argues.

So, what keeps Fidesz in power if Hungarians overwhelmingly want a welfare state? Well, xenophobia and racism are a good place to start. In a 2018 research, participants largely support welfare measures, yet blame the poor for their own poverty, and the vast majority do not want incoming migration and believe the Roma will never be properly integrated. However, the research found that half of participants would not be ashamed to have a gay relative – a recent development in LGBTQ+ acceptance, despite violent homophobic rhetoric on the rise in public discourse. There are certain ambivalences towards authority as well: eight out of ten believe the main goals of parenting are discipline and the authority – a quite disheartening result. Only a third would refuse to hit their kids, and over a half would support the return of capital punishment.

It may be surprising that 77 per cent think every authority can be questioned. The latter may be less of a freedom loving statement than a survival strategy in a culture where rules are set without public involvement or consultation. When it comes to following norms, one should take into consideration the heritage of the odd intermarriage between the Habsburg Monarchy's establishment straight from Kafka's nightmares, and the folktale inspiringly cruel meanderings of the Soviet style administration. Hungarian bureaucracy often even leaves my Austrian colleagues bewildered.

Vox populi

Being a Hungarian, I decided to ask my neighbours on the matter since one should never fully trust the wise folks with their charts and spectacles. I posed the following question on social media: What are the most typical values of Hungari-

* A colloquial term for the political and cultural legacy of János Kádár, the de facto leader of Communist Hungary after beating down the 1956 revolution until his death in 1989.

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ans. Of course, this is nowhere near a representative focus group, but still helped map some topoi. The conversation became all the more fruitful by the imprecise wording: "*a magyarok legjellemzőbb értékei*" – both the most typical values of Hungarians, but also their treasures, or the things they value. Among the one-word responses, *pálinka* (Schnapps) was the absolute winner – also referring to Orbán's renowned "freedom fight" against the EU for tax-free home distilling. On a related note, many raised our legendary alcohol consumption, placing us among the top alcoholic nations in the EU. But the good part of almost 400 comments and private messages drew an image well beyond this spiritual health hazard.

Hungarian is often believed to be an isolated language, but in reality, it proudly bears the marks of our geography and history.

Our language seemed to be a shared platform for a lot of commenters. Multiple translators and writers brought up our gender-neutral pronouns; despite German-inspired 19th century initiatives, gender signifiers have not found a grip on our grammar. Others mentioned our famous vocabulary for verbal aggression, especially the long and intricately interwoven curses which can incorporate any number of relatives, contemplations of morals, mating and mortality as well as agricultural maxims, depending on demand.

Hungarian is often believed to be an isolated language "within a sea of Slavs" with no other Finno-Ugric relatives within thousands of miles, but in reality, it proudly bears the marks of our geography and history. The overwhelming majority of the loan-words in the Hungarian lexicon are borrowed from neighbouring Slavic languages, but Turkish, German and Latin contributions are significant as well, with even many old Iranian traces.

Compulsory bitter undertones

Although I do not wish to descend down the slippery slope of national characteristics, what Hungarians mention about themselves is intriguing – and occasionally saddening. Since conservative and far-right politics have monopolised national sentiment, many who do not identify with them find it hard to even consider themselves part of the nation or society – pretty much as the political tactics intended. The respondents were Hungarian, both from within the country's borders and beyond, yet many talked about "them" and fewer about "us".

Many traits mentioned can be paired up, and most have bitter tones: sarcasm-cynicism, defiance-stubbornness, resilience-cunning, ambition-antagonism, and adaptivity-avoidance. These characteristics are coded in the culture and can guide

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one's moral compass or put it to sleep, depending on individual choice. The same context that urges one to innovate can lead the other to make questionable compromises.

As the saying goes: "the Hungarian makes merry by weeping". The literary canon doubles down on this with the national anthem written in the 19th century by an unsuccessful progressive national politician and ever-so-gloomy poet Ferenc Kölcsey; and its twin poem, the *Szózat* (*Appeal*, by Mihály Vörösmarty) enlisting all the suffering and injustice this nation has had to muddle through and sketching the possibility of its potential diminishing.

Are Hungarians, then, ill-fated and determined to be incapable of overcoming their historical baggage? Well, some of them seem to think so. Some researchers who were terrified to see Hungary on a value map, neighbouring Bulgaria and Moldova, did not even bother to hide their prejudices against other eastern countries. They were often surprised by the fact that "Hungary is more secular than its development would deem reasonable, and more closed than the median values of western culture".

Political trajectories do not follow pre-drawn patterns, even though modernist theorists liked to think so.

Yet, it is worth remembering that political trajectories do not follow pre-drawn patterns, even though modernist theorists liked to think so. At this point there is no evidence for the existence of national fate, so we may as well look at the circumstances which can hold societies back in their democratisation. Pogátsa draws attention to the ever-diminishing social safety net which has sent the large parts of society on a downward spiral toward impoverishment and extreme economic polarisation which, by now, shows its effects in political choices and capacities. This is to a large extent the result of the post-Soviet economic shock therapy and decades of dogmatic neoliberalism, which cut down on the very circumstances which should enable societies to develop their democratic norms and values.

Changing course

And yet, the more open political repression has become in the past decade, the more deliberate resistance has grown. At the moment of writing this piece, members of the University of Theatre and Film in Budapest have been occupying their institution for almost two months to keep the new government-appointed leadership from taking over. After the biggest online news site, *Index.hu*, fell this summer to political pressure, the staff members who quit in unison have already launched

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a new medium – *Telex* – with the support of private donations, in a country where this level of popular support was hard to imagine a few years ago. Joke party representatives are digging up corruption cases in municipalities; politician turned journalists are using their investigative skills as new majors. Orbán's opposition is still extremely fragmented and clearly incapable of turning Fidesz's unfair supermajority for now, but innovation in politics and the media are on the rise and minds, will and mighty determination* are enlisted in a struggle for a fairer society.

What is missing, then? Well, trust, above all. The variable that all relevant research, and the people who bothered to comment on my question, agree on, is a lack of trust, both in institutions and with each other. When asking where the ideals and values of pre-1990 dissent went, it is worth noting that some figureheads of these dissidents became political leaders in the rising, young democracy. Many of them either forced an anti-social, neoliberal agenda, hoping for some miracle cure for a struggling society. Others openly betrayed their old ideals and are now maintaining an openly repressive regime. Those who still have moral credibility are often side-lined or deliberately maligned. The vision of Ottilia Solt and her peers for a social reckoning and a welfare state, which focuses on equality and equity, was delegated to the NGO sphere and is still in a desperate search of political representation. Hungarians may unequivocally want a social democracy, but they do not see these values represented in national institutional politics.

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* The iconic line from Mihály Vörösmarty's abovementioned Szózat: "*Az nem lehet, hogy ész, erő, / És oly szent akarat / Hiába sorvadozzanak / Egy átoksúly alatt.*" (It cannot be that mind and strength / and consecrated will / are wasted in a hopeless cause /beneath a curse of ill).

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A timeline, interrupted

MATEUSZ MAZZINI

The politics of today's populist leaders is nearly always the eternal return to the past. 1989, however, represents a normative stop they would prefer to skip.

The past does not exist. It is what one makes of it. From a purely axiological point of view, every one of us is constructed of different pasts and we have different memories at our disposal. The non-existence of the past as a tangible point of reference is a subject of individual or collective creation and interpretation; it is the founding assumption of any sociological research devoted to mnemonic subjects. That is the case because, put simply, we all have a past – and it does not matter how that past came about in our minds. It has been somehow socially constructed. It is a result of much more than a mere sum of our individual memories.

As observed by all the great theoreticians of collective memory – ranging from the early writings of Emile Durkheim to our contemporary Jeffrey Olick – memory is inherently plural and inherently social. Collectivities, argues Olick, have memories just like they have identities. The relation between the two is of mutual intertwining – they construct each other and they are mutually complementary. What makes the content of both is, however, beyond the control of an individual, especially if the past employed in the process is a past which we have no direct recollection of.

Thick and thin

References to historical events, instances of their reconstruction through faithful or imagined visions of the past and political arguments based on normative links between previous statesmen and contemporary leaders became a leitmotif of populist policymaking in Central and Eastern Europe over the last decade. For

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purposes of conceptual clarity, populism is understood here as a "thin" ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups: the pure people and the corrupt elite. It argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonte generale* of the people.

It is thin, drawing on Michael Freeden's framework of thick and thin ideologies, because it has the potential to attach itself to more powerful ideological concepts. Hence it is not a definitional mistake to name populist politicians who started out on the extreme left or extreme right. Populism can appear in both and co-exist with nationalism inasmuch as with Marxism. Hungary's Viktor Orbán is a populist, but so is Jeremy Corbyn (the former leader of the British Labour party) – they differ in postulates, norms and values. Their worldview is, however, dichotomous, even though the sides of that dichotomy can take on different labels.

Cas Mudde, the political scientist whose definition of populism I presented above, specifies that its variations differ because of thickening agents: context-dependent phenomena that make the populist message sharper, more vigorous, fitting and ultimately more effective in a given society. Mudde singles out two such concepts. The first is authoritarianism, or "the belief in a strictly ordered society in which infringements are to be punished severely", paired with disregard for the democratic process. Second is nativism, which Mudde defines as "an ideology that holds that scares should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (the nation) and that non-native (or alien) elements whether persons or ideas, are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state".

Jan Kubik and Marta Kotwas, in turn, point out that the thickening of populism can also take place in symbolic dimensions. When a society operates with a limited number of symbols and rather simple connotations between them, populists find it hard to use those as tools of separating the people from the elite. However, when new symbols are added, with narrow modes of interpretation offered by their authors – politicians, cultural or religious leaders – the symbolic realm of a given collectivity thickens. As Kubik and Kotwas put it: "The resulting thick symbolic system offers a narrower definition of collective identity and thus attracts a narrower group of people." Consequently, it contributes to the ultimate aim of populism, which is strengthening the binary divide of reality.

Empirical research from Central and Eastern Europe, however, points to another possible thickening agent of populism – memory, and its usage in politics. From a mnemonic perspective, illiberal populist regimes do not just bow to historical reconstructions. They are historical reconstructions themselves. Marcin Napiórkowski, a Polish researcher on symbols, rightly refers to populist politics as a cult of the past which evolves into its compulsive repetition and re-enactment. Populist leaders all over the world, not just in Europe, refer to the past as a safe

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haven, an imagined place that harbours the true visions of the nation and the true values by which it should conduct itself.

This could be said of Donald Trump in the United States, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil and Nigel Farage in the Leave campaign ahead of the Brexit referendum. Napiórkowski calls it the "politics of eternal return". Anne Applebaum defines it as "elegiac nostalgia". In more practical terms, it is a simple manifestation of historical revisionism. A selective application of historical events to the process of creating collective narratives often based on non-cognitive principles. The aim of such fabricated misrepresentation of the past is simple – to manifest an imagined greatness rooted in a previous time period of which current strongmen claim to be heirs. Most importantly, it refers to greatness forged in battle with an existential enemy. We were once great, they say, but our greatness faded away when we moved away from our origins, a milieu where the true nation resides. We adopted principles that dilute our identities, but we did not do that upon our own volition – they were imposed on us by new enemies and new threats to the survival of the nation.

Selective memory

Populists, curiously enough, never set a specific date or a point in history where past greatness peaked. The reason for this is simple. The past does not exist – it is what they make of it. Thus it is easy to shape along partisan lines. In Central and Eastern Europe, however, there is a time cut-off they all share. The changes that happened in 1989, and the democratic transitions that followed, all represent a moment that contemporary populist leaders despise. Politically, it might even match their agenda. The victory over a foreign-imposed totalitarianism, usually paired with the reestablishment of patriotic symbols and the spotlight position of the Church, it all plays well into the dichotomous vision of eternal freedom fighters restoring their nations' greatness.

Axiologically, however, it was a disaster. A triumph of the universality of human rights, the rule of law, the dominance of institutions, and the unpredictability of the democratic process all stand in direct contrast to the vision of the populists. There, the law is inferior to the *volonte generale*, and so are institutions, deprived of any durability or stability. Equality is not a must, nor is it a given. Not everyone has to have an equal chance in the democratic race, and not everyone has to enjoy equal protection from the state. But why would they – if they do not belong to the true people, they simply do not merit such privileges. That is why, in the populist trip down memory lane, 1989 is a stop erased from the timeline.

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Revisionist collective memory narratives thicken populism, because they are selective. They encompass only those events from the past which fit the binary representation of reality. Moreover, in constructing them, populists employ a tactic referred to as memory layering. It imposes a linear, consequential interpretation of historically distant events, even if they do not stem from one another or have minimal chronological commonalities. In other words, in populist memory there is no place for anyone to have multiple identities or to change them. A communist or a fascist will always remain one, just like a freedom fighter or democratic activist will forever occupy the right side of history. Ideological makeshifts are not allowed, divisions remain sharp forever. Again, here lies the incompatibility of 1989 with the populist zeitgeist. The democratic transitions were consensual and led to a compromise, for populists an outcome perennially inferior to constant struggle.

For that simple reason, this period of time falls short of useful historical and mnemonic inspiration. 1989 does not thicken their populism. For some, it does not constitute a remotely important moment in time. As Orbán himself, or his prominent acolytes – such as the historian Mária Schmidt, director of Budapest-based House of Terror Museum and the leading apostle of Hungary's current historical revisionism – claim, there is no point talking about those transitions. "What transitions?", they would say. No real change was introduced at the turn of the 1990s, other than a change of labels and slogans. Old enemies replaced their crude totalitarian postures with tailored-made slim suit jackets and continued their servitude to foreign-imposed regimes. Whether the command centre was moved from Moscow to Brussels or Berlin is largely secondary. What matters are that is does not lie in the hands of the *volonté generale* of the nation's true people.

Ahistorical parallels

Populist politicians prefer to draw inspiration from much simpler events from a much more distant time. The Cold War and the wartime occupation are easier to re-enact under populism because they constitute the blueprint for the reality populists strive to create. A binary, dichotomous world in which there is moral clarity. Compromise, negotiation, peaceful settlements under institutional supervision were not values to embrace. And nor should they be today, populists would argue. After all, we are under siege again. Existential threats to the nation – not the state as it is a materialisation of rotten, dehumanised and elitist institutions – hide behind every corner.

Liberal democracy and all its principles, ranging from the rule of law to citizens' equality before it, are not homegrown solutions. The same can be said about

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the primacy of procedures and institutional independence. There is no time for lengthy deliberations when the future of the people is at stake. That is why so many of Central and Eastern Europe's parliaments have become mere rubber-stamping bodies for laws proposed by the strongmen themselves, written in haste and incompatible with national constitutions. Populists, heirs to the freedom fighters of the past, see no problem with this. Previous generations did not fight the enemy with democratic procedures; they will not do so either.

Ahistorical parallels between today's nostalgia-filled populists and monumental figures from the past are plentiful in Central and Eastern Europe. Both Viktor Orbán and Jarosław Kaczyński declared their respective countries the final frontiers of Christendom in Europe, religious frontiers under siege by liberalism and cosmopolitan moral sleaze. The Polish Catholic community has considerable support from prominent figures in national politics and sponsorship on behalf of state-controlled enterprises. In 2017 it organised a literal embodiment of that belief – a social event entitled "The Rosary to the Borders", in which groups of believers gathered to pray with their rosaries alongside the physical borders of the Polish state. Gathering over a million participants in October 2017, it was meant to create some kind of holy protection of the Polish nation from anti-Christian forces.

This belief that Poland, Hungary or other nations of the region constitute a final, yet unbreakable, barrier in defence of Christianity is obviously grounded in history. In past centuries, they did defend themselves from an Islamic invasion of the Ottoman Empire. Needless to say this is not the case today, as no invaders are on the country's doorstep. The Ottoman soldiers of the 16th and 17th centuries are modern-day refugees, as well as progressives and liberals – all whose actions and values are incompatible with traditional Christian values. The "Rosary to the Borders" event is a perfect example of both the symbolic and mnemonic thickening of populism. Through reproducing a binary historical reality – good Christians against morally corrupt invaders – and reinforcing it with powerful symbolism, such as the rosary prayer, the ultimate aim of populists is readily achievable. The world becomes black and white, the social postures and their moral consequences are clearly defined, and there is no room for interpretation and ambiguity.

Redemption

Such a high saturation of everyday politics with mnemonic and symbolic thickening has, however, consequences for both sides of the dichotomous reality of populism. If today's populist strongmen are heirs to medieval knights, wartime resistance and anti-communist activists, then identical measure has to be applied to

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their ideological rivals. Those, in turn, become an extension of all the evils from the past. Current ideological enemies are, therefore, mere continuators of Islamic invaders, Nazi occupants and communist oppressors. As such, they do not deserve the full scope of human rights. They are not equal participants of the democratic process. After all, why should they? They are the enemies of the nation and the people.

The fact that political conditions are now radically different than in 1989 is taken as relativised opinion, not as historiography.

Be that as it may, pushing the values of the 1989 transitions on the margins of normative heritage and historical policy is not only on the populists. Illiberal politicians advance with their revisionist agenda without being met with any resistance. Liberals and progressives stood by, watching – initially not noticing that the version of history gradually introduced to the mainstream was not the history they remembered or took part in. Mnemonically, they acted as abnegators, or actors who deem historical policy irrelevant for party politics and state governance. Why? Because history was supposed to have ended in 1989. It has run its course. Linear timelines were, ironically, a thing of the past. It was not just simple for policy-making, it was liberating for consciousness.

Thomas Bagger, a German diplomat and ministerial director, identifies this within Germany's post-1989 politics, but his assumption could be easily extended to all post-transitional governments. What made Francis Fukuyama's end of history so attractive to Europeans, writes Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes in commentary to Bagger's works, was the ultimate freedom, from both the burden of the past and the uncertainty of the future. Everything was said and done and everyone was finally on the right side of history. 1989 brought freedom, but also redemption.

Both, however, proved to be ephemeral. The past has not only caught up with the present – they merged into one. Old symbolic and axiological categories were restored as measures for contemporary conflicts. Historical policy returned atop the everyday policy-making agenda. The fact that political conditions are now radically different than in 1989 is taken as relativised opinion, not as historiography. The past is applied selectivity as the building block of the present.

Can this process be stopped? Most certainly. Can it be reversed? Absolutely. How? Through mnemonic counteraction. What is the reason for such optimism? It is, bluntly speaking, our past. After all, it does not exist. It is what one makes of it.

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We took our victories for granted

An interview with Vladimir Tismaneanu, a political scientist at the University of Maryland, College Park. Interviewer: Simona Merkinaite.

SIMONA MERKINAITE: Hannah Arendt in her book *On Revolution* (inspired by the events in Hungary in 1956), differentiated between political and social revolution. The former is concerned with forms of governance and political freedom, while the latter is driven by mobilised, unsatisfied masses, demanding dignified social and economic and lives. Arendt went as far as to argue that even the fight for civil rights is not necessarily political, as they allow each to possess their individual rights instead of practicing it with others in the public realm. As such it cannot guarantee of long-term freedom, as people will engage in the public realm as long as their living conditions are unsatisfactory and will withdraw from politics as soon as they are satisfied. Would it be fair to call what happened in 1989 a political revolution? Is it fair to dissect those two elements in 1989 and can the "social" element explain the lack of political solidarity and dialogue? Or was 1989 something entirely different?

VLADIMIR TISMANEANU: I think that Arendt would have looked into the disintegration (political, economic, and social) of the previous regime and would have delineated a more comprehensive approach than the one put forward in *On Revolution*. I mean one that would have included the moral component, the revolt of the plebeians, the defiance of the totalitarian Leviathan by the rising community of those whom Jan Patocka called the "shaken ones". As a matter of fact, Agnes Heller, the Hungarian philosopher, pointed out in her seminal writings on 1989 that those revolutions meant a re-appropriation by the citizens of national and popular sovereignty. In this regard, they resumed and rehabilitated the legacies that Arendt call the lost treasure of previous civic upheavals. Let's remember that the title of Simon Schama's masterful book about the French Revolution is *Citizens*. More clearly, under absolutist

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regimes, the individual is reduced to the condition of obedient subjects, devoid of autonomous subjectivity. These revolutions meant the recovery of the civic dimension by making human rights their first commandment.

You once called 1989 a quest for the reinvention of politics. Do you think that this reinvention happened?

If I may engage in a self-criticism of sorts, I would say that those of us who emphasised the civic component of *annus mirabilis*, 1989 did underestimate the power of ethno-religious and other illiberal passions. Timothy Garton Ash, Leonidas Donskis, Václav Havel, Agnes Heller, Tony Judt, Leszek Kołakowski, Jacek Kuroń, Adam Michnik, Karol Modzelewski, to name a few of the influential thinkers and democratic activists, noticed the rise of these forces, but until 2010 or so the consensus was moderately optimistic. The European Union and NATO expanded, liberal values and institutions seemed secure. Then the story turned increasingly dark. By 2015, Viktor Orbán turned the clock back to an authoritarian nationalism of Horthyist persuasion. Building walls against refugees became the most visible and disturbing expression of this ethnocentric politics of exclusion. Donald Trump and his chauvinist histrionics have further aggravated the situation. Unfortunately, many of my rather pessimistic predictions from my 1998 book, *Fantasies of Salvation: Democracy, Nationalism, and Myth in Post-Communist Europe*,

Photo courtesy of Vladimir Tismaneanu.

have seemed to come true. This seems to be the time of the right-wing Jacobins. The authoritarian backslide was and is not inevitable. It is the result of several causes, among which the dissatisfaction with political elites regarded as alienated from the "true popular values". Political artisans turned into oracular rabble-rousers know how to exploit widespread feeling of anxiety and rage.

What are the key lessons for the democracies in the region we failed and what still needs to be taken from the dissident movement?

Three words, three values, three ideals: Trust, truth, and tolerance. Truth is not a plastic entity, definable and redefinable to accommodate partisan interests. It is a value based on verities of fact. Truth is precisely the opposite of

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the Bolshevik *partiinost'*, the conviction that there are "progressive" versus "reactionary" truths. The confrontation with the past continues, and so does the need to affirm inclusive diversity as a fundamental value. We took our victories for granted and have discovered how resilient the authoritarian legacies can be. The dissident tradition spoke about anti-politics, but the issue is how to instil the needed vital energy into our liberal project. How can we articulate, especially under the ongoing cultural battles, with the counter-Enlightenment turning increasingly virulent, a re-Enlightenment strategy?

Memory has become part of the political battleground (including the memory of 1989), with different political and identity groups fighting over ownership of memory and the public spaces of memory. While the region is unique due to proximity of tragic and traumatic events over the past century, the fight over memory and its relation to the public seems to be accompanying the crisis of democracy globally. Why do you think that is? And how do we move forward from this polarisation, when some people are clearly resilient towards truth and differentiate between the political significance of memory and history?

The politicisation of memory is a global phenomenon. From the oceans of historical facts, people select those that seem to justify self-serving narratives. Old political myths do not simply vanish, they keep haunting collective and individual memories. But this is not a universal fatality: we can use critical reasoning, verifiable epistemic points of reference to avoid the pitfalls of narcissistic stories of unique suffering and martyrdom. The quality we need to cultivate when we engage in this often painful undertaking od *Vergagenheitsbewaltigung* (coming to terms with the past) is empathy, and the work of mourning as one of truth-telling.

Is there a lesson from 1989 for the current generation and to the wider world beyond the region, where the rollback in democracy is happening, and what can help us preserve the future of democracies?

I have in mind two elements which Karl Popper, Ernest Gellner and Ralf Dahrendorf regarded as the conditions of liberty. First, there is no ironclad determinism in history, there is always room for preserving our humanity. This is the lesson of Camus in *The Plague* and Ionesco in *The Rhynoceros*. Second, their weapon is the lie. Ours is the truth. Historically, as Arendt accurately thought, it may take some time, but truth turns out to be more powerful than its opposite. This will occur in China, too, I have no doubt. I can even imagine, one day, people flying to and from the "Liu Xiaobo International Airport" in Beijing.

In your seminal book, *The Devil in History*, you argue that while totalitarianism – as in communism and fascism – were rooted in radically different ideologies, the methods and the results are similar, namely, alienation, domination, control and extermination. Do

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you see those methods making a return to the current moment? There are numerous efforts to argue for the return of fascism. What is your take on it?

The other day I watched a segment of an online conversation with Raymond Aron conducted by two French political scientists in 1980–81. The great sociologist referred to his 1955 book, *The Opium of the Intellectuals*, and explained why he still regarded the utopian passions of the radical left (communism) as dangerous as those of the far right (fascism). In my own writings, to a great extent indebted to Aron, I identify the Stalino-Fascist baroque as a self-styled ideological and political construct of our times. Think of Putin and Putinism, Orbán and Orbánism, Bolsonaro, Maduro, Trump; plus Duda and PiS. Not to speak about the eternal (God forbid!) Lukashenka.

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Our common heritage

JACEK HAJDUK

The region of today's Central and Eastern Europe was mostly part of the eastern half of the Roman Empire. Its religion, writings, customs and traditions came from Byzantium rather than Rome. One exception is Poland, which was baptised in the western style and not by Cyril and Methodius. This fact, however, could be interpreted as the main cause of Poland's great tragedy.

The world we came to live in today should not have come to us as a big surprise. Neither should the internal problems of the European Union, which, the late Polish science fiction writer, Stanisław Lem, even predicted some time ago. Earlier events such as the Arab Spring, or the weakening position of the United States, and Russia's imperial aspirations should not have shocked us either. And neither should have the emergence of centres of wealth influence in Asia: China, which is soon to be followed by India and Vietnam, and perhaps Japan and South Korea. Indeed, these and other countries may not be the subjects of our dinner conversations, but the truth is they are getting richer, more powerful and populous.

Naturally, all these changes were predicted and foretold in the previous century. They were expressed in the language of social sciences, fictional prose and film. Just as predicted and foretold were such things as the development of technology, digitalisation and global pandemics.

The borders of antiquity

The world has expanded. That is why, when we reduce our thinking to local matters, without paying attention to what is happening in other regions and dif-

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ferent cultures, we learn little, if anything, about the current situation in world affairs. Like the fact that Europe, which now resembles scattered and hardly matching jigsaw puzzle pieces, has lost its prior importance.

This, however, does not mean that the dear old continent has lost all its value and has no future in sight. Yet taking on a new role requires some re-evaluation. Thus, if Europe still wants to have a role to play in the next chapter of the opus called "world history", it can do so only as a consolidated and unified community. One that is well aware of its heritage, which cannot be limited to one nation or group, but common to all. This heritage clearly does not only derive from Christianity but is also of ancient Greek and Roman provenance. Being aware of this can help Europe simultaneously face the old and new world powers as well as cope with the challenges of the 21st century. If it misses that opportunity, there might not be another one.

The ancient world of the Greeks and the Romans is our shared heritage. This fact is well known in China, for example, where extensive translation projects from ancient languages into Mandarin Chinese are now taking place. These works are a combined effort of brilliant minds and teams of distinguished scholars, who happen to be classical philologists. As a result of their co-operation, all available Greek and Roman written records, one author after another, one era after another, are being translated into Chinese successively. These include the works of Homer, the tragic poets and historians, Ovid, Virgil and others. Indicatively, the Chinese are well aware of the significance of the old traditions and hence presume, rightly so, that if one wishes to learn more about us (i.e. westerners), they must first learn about the things that made us and shaped us.

Here, let us ask ourselves if we even know to whom this Greek and Roman heritage really belongs? And what is the actual meaning behind these two terms – Greece and Rome?

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The truth is that culture, which we tend to call "ours", came to us from the East. Even more, it did not take place through one single act, but through a process and numerous events. One of them was the so-called Dorian invasion, which is depicted in Greek mythology as "the return of the Heracleidae" (this is how the descendants of Heracles were named). This invasion apparently took place less than a century after the Trojan war, which was one of the stages of our never-ending internal conflict. The fact that it was, and still remains, an internal conflict for us is evidenced by Homer and his Greek and Trojan genealogy which shows that both in Europe and the Middle East we are descendants from the same ancestors. Consequently, centuries before Troy, and centuries after it, the culture which we have

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named *western*, was in fact shaped by fires and clashes which took place on the territory of today's Turkey, Iran and Syria.

Evidently, early Greek philosophy is the philosophy of the East. This is true not only because of the organic connections (still probably not researched enough) that the Greeks had with the Persian, Hindu or Buddhist thinkers, but also because of the more literal, geographic ties. Illustratively, such Greek thinkers as Tales, Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Anaximander, Anaximenes and Democritus were all born, lived and worked, east of Athens. The latter became the centre of philosophy only thanks to Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.

Historical Ionia, which is the birthplace of Greek and consequently European philosophy, is also located on the west coast of Turkey. Troy, known as Ilion, which was the most famous battlefield in the history of our armed conflicts and the place where Achilles fought with Hector, is located in Turkey, too. Things were no different at the later stage of antiquity which also saw both Greek and Roman ideas travel to the Far East. They reached this region first with the warriors of the Persian wars, then with Alexander the Great and Roman conquers. All these facts are recorded both in the scarce literary records and archaeological studies that are now being carried out in China.

It is now certain that the concepts of Greek and Roman civilisations reached beyond the borders of India, getting into China.

Thanks to them, it is now certain that the concepts of Greek and Roman civilisations reached beyond the borders of India, getting into China. Some artefacts that were found near Xi'an, the country's historical capital, clearly certify the presence of Christian communes of the Nestorian "rite". We can only hope that the numerous Chinese chronicles, even though still mostly in traditional Chinese, and hence accessible to few, will one day provide also us, Europeans, with answers to questions regarding these early encounters and the intermingling of cultures.

A Greek Europe

The Greek and Roman world has always been composed of two distinct forms. This was even the case at the time of the mighty Roman Empire, whose mantra of Rome being the eternal city clearly aimed at the unification of the whole "West". Simply attributing the heritage of ancient Greece to today's country of the same name (which was, to a great degree, also shaped by centuries of Turkish presence) not only imposes an unbearable burden on its shoulders, but also does not speak the truth. The latter is that the ancient Hellas (at a later stage powered by Roman

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influences) radiated like the sun in all directions, and that radiation was indeed powerful. It affected not only present-day Greece and the Balkans, but also the Middle East, North Africa, Western Europe (and indirectly North America) as well as Russia and Central and Eastern Europe.

When the Roman Empire grew to a point that it could no longer be managed by one person stationed in Rome, an administrative and formal division of its territory was introduced. As a result, the state, once thought to be everlasting, broke into two halves: eastern and western. After their centres, Rome and Constantinople (called the Second Rome), ceased to have common interests or even common enemies, a drift began and both the West and the East first started looking and then moving in different directions. A dispute between them over the right to ancient heritage, that is, who has a greater mandate to call itself the heir to the Greeks and Romans, lasted for a long time – until the Middle Ages. This explains why the Carolingian state was still officially called the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation while the Byzantine Empire was named the Eastern Roman Empire.

Evidently, the region of today's Central and Eastern Europe was part of the eastern half of the Roman Empire. Its religion, writings, customs and traditions came from Byzantium rather than Rome. And it took the form of the Greek, rather than Roman, rite. One exception is Poland which was baptised in the western style and not by Cyril and Methodius. This fact, however, could be interpreted as the main cause of Poland's great tragedy. Being ethnically eastern and culturally western, Poland remains at a crossroads. It feels that it belongs to both worlds but does not feel at home in either.

To experience this dilemma, you should go on a trip along the south-eastern border of Poland. There, when you get off the beaten track and venture to small villages to follow the wooden architecture trails, you will understand how deeply the Hellas and the Byzantine Christianity echo sounds. It carries through the old woodlands, regardless of the state administrative borders. This experience may also help you realise that the current process of the coming together of the post-Roman West and the post-Greek East, and the next stage of Europe's unification in the face of rapid globalisation, Poland could (and should) take the lead.

The wind from Colchis

There are many stories in Greek mythology which point to the eastern origins of what we call – albeit little roughly – western culture. A good example of the above is the Argonauts' quest for the Golden Fleece in Colchis, which is present-day Georgia. The story of this expedition is, culturally speaking, very important. It

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is almost certain that a now lost poem, depicting the adventures of Jason and his companions, inspired Homer in his writing of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

This remote land also inspired the imagination of the late Polish poet and writer, Czesław Miłosz. As a historian of Polish literature, Miłosz argued that it was "the wind from Colchis" that influenced the works of two prominent Polish essayists – Stanisław Vincenz and Jerzy Stempowski – who were known for combining Greek and Roman traditions with Slavic influences.

The former came from the border area between Ukraine and Poland, the so-called Hutsul region. This mythical land was said to have been home to old Greek culture, traditions, music and myths which had reached there through oral testimonies. Thus, the school and university education Vincenz received as a young man, while Latin in spirit, were already the second layer of the so-called lining of this area's ancient heritage.

Vincenz wanted to do for his region what Homer did for Greece. He wanted to present it in an epic story and turn it into myth. When working on his collection titled *In the high mountain pasture* he dressed up as a wondering folk bard, an ancient *aoidos*, who sang songs, not as much about heroes and their heroic deeds but rather about the memory of a certain community.

Matter-of-factly, "the wind from Colchis" were childhood night stories not only for Vincenz and Stempowski, but also many other prominent translators who, in the 20th century, translated Homer into Polish. Among them were Jan Parandowski, who translated *The Odyssey*, and Ignacy Wieniewski who translated *The Iliad*. These two gentlemen were classmates in a gymnasium they attended in Kolomyia, a city located on the Prut river, in today's western Ukraine. A third translator was Józef Wittlin who spent his whole life translating *The Odyssey*, which was published in his translations three times. There were also many other researchers of antiquity and writers who were born beyond today's eastern borders of Poland, in cities such as Lviv or Vilnius. And many who had their first encounters with Greek and Roman culture in Kolomyia! Would any of them ever daresay that they belonged to either Eastern or Western Europe? Isn't Europe just one?

The tombs of Ovid

The Polish romantic poet Cyprian Kamil Norwid named Ovid, the Roman poet known for such works as *Transformations* and *Sorrows*, "the first Sarmatian poet", which assumed his relation with the legendary invaders of Slavic lands in antiquity.

Indeed, Ovid's adventure with today's Eastern Europe started with *a song* and *a mistake*. It happened overnight that Publius Ovidius Naso, who was at the time the

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most prominent Roman poet, fell out of favour with Caesar Augustus. Yet, while his life was spared, he was banished from the Eternal City. His culpability was a poem that Augustus, "the restorer of the fatherland", did not like, and perhaps some sort of carelessness on Ovid's behalf – maybe he saw something he wasn't supposed to see, or his possible engagement in flirtations with the wrong person. This is unknown and may remain so forever. In any case, Ovid, a celebrity writer, became a persona non grata in Rome. There was nothing left for him there. He packed his few belongings and set off east to the remote corners of the empire.

Ovid arrived in Tomis, which is present-day Constanța in Romania. There he wrote his sad elegies in which he both cursed his enemies and begged for forgiveness to return home. Yet, the Caesar remained indifferent to those pleas and Ovid died far from his beloved Rome. Little is known about the poet's last years as even the researchers who study his last days in Rome do not know the length of his life and his whereabouts in exile. Did Ovid, as the Romanian legend has it, pass away in Tomis at the Black Sea? Or maybe in some other Central or Eastern European country, like Hungary, Ukraine or Poland?

Jerzy Stempowski spent many years of his life working on a book about Ovid and the Sarmatian legend that was built for centuries around his life in exile, which

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apparently ended in an even more remote location than Tomis. Although the book was never completed, Stempowski's scattered papers show the remnants of this fascinating project. It is quite clear that he succeeded in shelling out some Ovidian traces which had been hidden in history.

We may wonder whether the almost legendary chase for freedom of the residents of post-Soviet states isn't Greek in nature.

Stempowski was not the only 20th century writer to enthusiastically undertake this non-academic topic. In 1920 Professor Gustaw Przychocki, a serious Polish scholar and classical philologist, published an important piece of work entitled *The Tomb of Ovid in Poland*. In a similar way, Professor Jan Zieliński is currently working on a publication about Ovid's alleged tomb in the area of Pinsk, which is today's Belarus. Thus, seemingly, another country can be added to the list of the last homelands of this Roman poet.

Regardless of the real facts, the old Sarmatian legend of Ovid's last journey can stimulate everyone's imagination. Just think about a great Roman poet who abandons his exile in Tomis, a place which was clearly under ancient Greek and Roman influence, to ask a Slavic king for asylum. He then leaves for the unknown and becomes a poetry tutor.

The third Rome

In 1510 Philotheus of Pskov, a Russian monk, wrote the following words to Vasili III of Russia, the Grand Prince of Moscow: "Listen and remember, your Orthodox majesty, two Romes have fallen, the third one is standing and there will be no fourth one since your Christian kingdom shall not be replaced with any other." This letter gave rise to the ideology of the first Muskovy and then the Russian empire. Today it is probably well known to the ideologists of new Russian imperialism. The Italian Rome fell in 476 AD whereas the Second Rome, Constantinople, fell a thousand years later, in 1453. The third Rome is obviously Moscow.

Russia has inherited, or perhaps wishes to be perceived this way, both the Greek essence (directly) and the Roman imperial structure (indirectly). Theoretically speaking, its mandate to ancient heritage is stronger than that of any other state. This of course is just a theory because neither the Roman element nor (or perhaps especially) the Greek one, with its strong freedom-oriented component, takes a prominent place in Kremlin's domestic or foreign policy.

At the same time, however, we may wonder whether the almost legendary chase for freedom of the residents of other post-Soviet states isn't Greek in nature. Un-

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fortunately, because of Russia's position with its earlier described legitimacy and roots, it puts them in the role of provinces, whether near or far, peaceful or rebellious, but always under Moscow's sphere of influence. This division of roles is still reflected in literature – especially what was written in the 19th century – which identifies the tsar with the Roman emperor, while Poles fighting for their right to self-determination with the first Christians.

Yet today we need to find a new way to decipher the old code and to leave behind the vicious circle of thinking through allegories. Neither Russia is the heir to the Roman empire nor are the smaller states of the former Soviet bloc its conquered and forever transformed territories. Only the ancient Greek and Roman heritage, although subject to numerous transformations, is omnipresent. It can be found in the forgotten world of post-Lemko settlements in south-east Poland and huge metropolises in many parts of the world, regardless of political borders. It is alive in languages and literature, in customs and traditions, in architecture and urban structure, in music and the sound of the wind "from Colchis". It is present in all other elements that make up our common traditions, which we are all entitled to cherish – no matter whether we live in the East or in the West. Antiquity is our common heritage.

Translated by Justyna Chada

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On Russia and resignation

NATASHA BLUTH

In Russia, it remains unclear whether the current discontent will coalesce into a lasting challenge to the Kremlin. Both journalists and analysts tend to hastily predict Putin's downfall when protests mount. But at the very least, the all-encompassing nature of the coronavirus has provided citizens with a moment of heightened consciousness about their relationship to power.

Liberal-leaning Russians like to remind us that the most common last surname in their country is Smirnov. It is also the name of a well-known vodka brand, Smirnov, etymologically rooted in *smirenie*, often translated as submission or resignation. Reasons behind the surname's popularity vary. Some versions claim that peasants, relieved at the birth of a quiet son, would christen him "Smirna." Others argue that the most pacified subjects of the Russian empire were more likely to procreate, so Smirnovs multiplied faster than Ivanovs or even Petrovs.

The Russian linguist Vladimir Nikonov believed that the surname originated among the "subdued" Merya people, who inhabited what is now the Kirov region. Church tithes in Vladimir mention Stepan the *smirny* son of Kuchuk – fast forward to the 20th century and you can watch famed actor Aleksey Smirnov in more than 50 Soviet films. Today, there are an estimated 70,000 Smirnovs residing in Moscow alone. The quip, then, is that with the abundance of Smirnovs in Russia, resignation must be a national character trait.

Stages of denial

From serfdom in Imperial Russia to forced collectivisation under Stalin, the lives sacrificed in the Chernobyl accident to the hundreds of unaccounted soldiers

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in the Chechen Wars, Russian and Soviet history features a series of human catastrophes traversing tsarist absolutism, communist dictatorship and post-socialist autocracy. In early March, watching the coronavirus pandemic unfold in the US, as I approached my seventh month of research in Yaroslavl, a city of 620,000 just northeast of Moscow, I wondered how the trope of the strong-arm state and the repressed masses would play out once the latest calamity hit Russia.

As new epicentres cropped up across the US and Europe, Yaroslavl – and Russia more broadly – remained cavalier. Aside from one expat friend, I was the only person in my social circle actually talking about the virus and began to interpret my own disquietude as distinctly American. At my homestay, news of my compatriots hoarding toilet paper tickled my 54-year-old Russian host. Americans did not understand what it was like to live through the shortages of the 1980s or the economic turbulence that followed, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Despite her apartment's three refrigerators bursting with frozen food, Russians "are not afraid of economic instability", she insisted. "They just do not want Yaroslavl to be ruled by bandits again."

While formative, these experiences would not stymie the course of a global health crisis. By the end of the month, although it had ballooned into a pandemic, official state reports continued to document exceptionally low penetration of the virus into Russia. Measured against signs of full-blown panic in the US, what explained the dispassionate attitude towards COVID-19 in my Russian community? Growing up in New England, the mere possibility of a blizzard would clear the grocery store of milk and sliced bread. Meanwhile, the advancing coronavirus left friends and colleagues in Yaroslavl unperturbed. A Moscow-based immunologist quelled fears after a televised appearance in which he recommended eating one clove of garlic each morning to stave off infection; others appealed to the virus's foreignness (the mainstream press still called it "the Chinese plague"), reinforcing the idea that COVID-19 happened "elsewhere".

Russian and Soviet history features a series of human catastrophes traversing tsarist absolutism, communist dictatorship and post-socialist autocracy.

State-run Russian media peddled a variety of theories that politicised the pandemic, substantiating official foreign policy talking points while rhetorically fencing the virus out of national borders. In one week, broadcasters labelled COVID-19 a conspiracy, then a form of biological warfare from China, and finally a form of biological warfare from the US targeting China. Ultimately, these postulations heightened suspicions about my own presence in Yaroslavl, which culminated in a visit from three N95-masked representatives from the Federal Service for

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the Oversight of Consumer Protection and Welfare who pronounced me a "hooligan" for "breaking" a quarantine order no one had imposed.

Once Russia's COVID-19 count reached double digits and the federal government shuttered schools and universities, my host partially conceded the reality and arrived home brandishing six cans of *tushonka*, a braised meat and a favourite from the Second World War. While the toilet paper stockpiled in the US lingered on Russian shelves, *grechka*, a buckwheat kasha porridge, sold out of grocery stores. Yet, despite the accumulation of non-perishables, the Yaroslavl region's first official COVID-19 case – a woman who had recently travelled to the Dominican Republic – failed to raise alarm precisely because she did not contract the disease within her hometown. After the state-run statistics agency Rosstat reported a 37 per cent increase in the number of pneumonia cases across Russia from January 2019 to 2020, few speculated about any connection with the proliferating respiratory illness.

By mid-April, the number of cases in Russia had already surpassed the number of Smirnovs residing in Moscow. Still, according to the Levada Center, an independent sociological research organisation, that same month public concern about the coronavirus was "growing, but not as quickly as might be expected" – a peak 40 per cent of Russians supported a lockdown in March, only to fall as time wore on. Conversations I had at the time indicated that, relative to the litany of upheavals survived by Russians in past decades, COVID-19 lost a good deal of shock value. Detachment could be a sign that the call from the head of Russia's coronavirus task force "not to panic" had effectively quelled anxiety, or the outcome of years of institutional distrust. Perhaps this attitude was in fact a familiar method of self-preservation or resilience in the face of an unstoppable threat. Others chalked it up to the enduring religious undercurrent that had outlived state atheism: Live according to God's will. As my Russian teacher in Yaroslavl asserted, "We are sitting patiently at home, which is quite reasonable given the circumstances, and also does not particularly contradict the Russian mentality." I too was forced to surrender to my fate in late March, booking one of the last flights before Russia closed its borders once it became clear that the US State Department would no longer allow me to remain abroad.

Introduced measures

With more Russians homebound during the month-long federal non-working holiday that ensued, officials passed a series of decrees aimed at maintaining law and order. In Moscow, Mayor Sergey Sobyanin, known for outfitting the city with

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facial recognition technology, debuted Russia's first QR-code pass system in mid-April to curb unnecessary movement around the capital. To track COVID-19 patients in quarantine, the municipal government also launched an app that accessed geolocation, in addition to network information, storage, calls and other cell data. By May, when Russia had the second-highest rate of new infections in the world, the Moscow police had issued 30,000 fines to violators of the city's lockdown – Muscovites were only allowed to leave home to receive emergency medical care, travel to work, shop for groceries, go to the pharmacy, or walk their dogs within 100 metres of their place of residence.

It was easy to call Sobyanin's programmes repressive from the US, where infringements on privacy and significantly milder restrictions on movement provoked not only verbal backlash but also protests of several hundred in some cities. Globally, uneven public responses to lockdown orders and other COVID-related measures demonstrated varying levels of pushback against authority, but their effects also challenged the idea that following commands during a global health crisis would ensure protection. New Zealand, which received praise for enforcing a strict quarantine, did so without a culture of obedience to the state and ultimately declared itself virus-free in June, only to see a new surge in late summer. Likewise, the Swedish government was lauded for seeing positive results from its laissez-faire COVID-19 policy grounded in mutual trust and voluntary quarantine, which kept its economy running but failed to avert high fatality rates. Pegged as robust democracies, political freedoms and civil liberties could not barricade the virus out. In turn, Moscow's digital monitoring apparatus, which Sobyanin initially suggested expanding to all Russian regions, raised the question: If authoritarian rule successfully suppressed a community's exposure to COVID-19, did it matter so much how it got there?

Authoritarian tactics

Tracking similar patterns of COVID-19 responses in other authoritarian-type countries, journalists Bill Hayton and Tro Ly Ngheo point out that, "the structures that control epidemics are the same ones that control public expressions of dissent." Now that a digital pass system and other surveillance technology is embedded in Moscow's security infrastructure, there is no guarantee that it won't be employed in the future to stifle freedom of movement or speech, long after the current crisis is over. Similarly, the pandemic provides a window of opportunity for Russian President Vladimir Putin, alongside Alyaksandr Lukashenka in Belarus, Viktor Orbán in Hungary, and other autocratic leaders to consolidate power.

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In April, the emerging virus blocked a Russian plebiscite on a number of constitutional amendments that would, among other changes, elongate Putin's possible tenure to 2036. Capitalising on the unique circumstances, Putin praised Russia for "forcing" the epidemic to recede and launched lavish anniversary celebrations in honour of the Soviet Army's victory in the Second World War before holding a weeklong voting period in June. More than 77 per cent of voters expressed their support for the reform package. Crucially, the major protests planned in the run-up to the referendum against the proposed amendments and the lack of pandemic-related social protections were thwarted by a COVID-related decree prohibiting gatherings of more than 50 individuals.

Additionally, though the Kremlin largely outsourced Russia's pandemic response to the country's regional governors, a number have resigned since the spring because of inadequate performance – shakeups considered by some political analysts to be premeditated. In Russia's Far East, the Investigative Committee and Federal Security Service also detained Sergei Furgal, the popularly elected governor of Khabarovsk, accusing him of murdering several businessmen. Perhaps most brazenly, the prominent anti-corruption activist Alexei Navalny lay in a medically induced coma for more than two weeks after being poisoned with the nerve agent Novichok this past summer, a claim that the Russian foreign ministry denied.

Putin's withdrawn role from crisis management, coupled with local government incompetence, is likely to present new challenges as long as the virus continues to pose a threat.

Beyond these high-profile incidents, Putin's withdrawn role from crisis management, coupled with local government incompetence, is likely to present new challenges as long as the virus continues to pose a threat. Operating without a "trust cushion" like New Zealand's, the Kremlin may need to rely on increasingly authoritarian tactics for social control in future political crises and coronavirus surges (at the time of writing in October, Moscow is seeing a second spike in cases, though Sobyanin has yet to impose a lockdown). In a city like Yaroslavl, which, unlike the majority of other regions, never enacted a lockdown for anyone but pensioners, a feeling of resignation could grow into something more forceful. In April, Putin's approval rating fell to 59 per cent – its lowest since 2000. Though dissent against the referendum could not materialise in the form of in-person protests, they continued online. In fact, the very decision to hold a referendum in an ongoing pandemic suggests that the political elite has declining confidence in the administration's durability and seeks to reinforce its legitimacy before a potentially narrow window of opportunity closes.

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Paradoxically, by continuing to reassure the public that the virus is in retreat and lifting COVID-19 lockdown measures, the Kremlin has fuelled new ripples of dissent. After the head of the Doctors Alliance, an independent labour union with support from some of Russia's opposition leaders, was detained for decrying the Kremlin's pandemic response, greater attention has turned to gaps in the country's health care infrastructure. Three doctors critical of poor working conditions also fell from hospital windows in May in apparent suicides, further exposing a state that tends to its priorities at the expense of the interests of its citizens. In the spring, mass protests also ruptured in the Far East city of Khabarovsk in response to the governor's detainment, which continued well into late summer. More recently, two hastily approved Russian coronavirus vaccines – serving as a geopolitical PR stunt more than they signal a regard for preserving Russian lives and livelihoods – received flak from Russian doctors and educators concerned about safety.

Contradictions of the pandemic

Neither ineptitude on the part of the authorities nor increasingly visible discontent among affected communities is restricted to Russian territory. Conflicts are intensifying in the US with the Black Lives Matter movement against racist police brutality, in Lebanon after the explosion in Beirut, and in Belarus, where protesters have gathered for months to condemn the widely unrecognised re-election of Alyaksandr Lukashenka, in power since 1994. Although issues tied to today's civil unrest largely predate the coronavirus, their sustained growth since the spring and summer suggests that COVID-19 expedited many communities to their inevitable breaking point. As Belarusian comedian Ivan Usovich posited in an interview with the popular Russian video blogger Yuri Dud, heinous advice by Lukashenka to heal the virus with *banyas* (hot steam baths) and tractors ultimately roused citizens to demonstrate against their long-term autocratic leader.

Lukashenka's comments reminded me of a chain message that a Russian friend forwarded after Yaroslavl's perfunctory lockdown in late March:

1. Leaving your home is impossible, but if it's necessary, allowed.
2. Masks do not help at all, but must be worn.
3. It's useless to go to a hospital if you have the virus, but you must go regardless.
4. This virus is deadly, but in principle, not terrible.
5. The virus doesn't affect children, but children are at risk.
6. There are many symptoms tied to this virus, but you can get over it without any symptoms.

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7. It is best to get fresh air, but going outside is not allowed.
8. It is not permissible to visit the elderly, but you can bring them groceries and medicine.
9. Patients with coronavirus cannot leave their homes, but they can go to the pharmacy and grocery stores.
10. There is no house arrest, but no one is allowed to go out.
11. Personal data is protected by law, but you must hand it over at a moment's notice to a surveillance programme that will not protect it in any way.
12. Only individuals of Asian descent get sick, but more Europeans have died than anyone else.
13. The virus lives on various surfaces for two hours – no, four. No, six. No, 17 days.

Living out the contradictions of a pandemic, how can we not all feel a degree of *smirenie*? In Russia, it's not clear whether the current discontent will coalesce into a lasting challenge to the Kremlin. Both journalists and analysts, particularly those based in the West, also tend to hastily predict Putin's downfall when protests mount. But at the very least, the all-encompassing nature of the coronavirus provides citizens with a moment of heightened consciousness about their relationship to power. In Russia, frontline health workers have a choice: to fear the government or to fear COVID-19 – and fear of the latter is proving more immediate.

Back in Yaroslavl, one doctor criticised the government's inefficient distribution of testing kits. Then, as if surprised at his own candour, he said: "What should I be afraid of? I'm telling the absolute truth. If they fire me, that will mean [the authorities] are afraid and that what I'm saying really is true."

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A Belarusian clash of civilizations

MAXIM RUST

It can already be seen that in regards to today's Belarusians the political and state identity dominates over an ethnic and national identity. The political nation is more adapted to the challenges that have emerged both in Belarus's near region and around the world. This year's protests show that for the common cause Belarusians can unite. Unquestionably, this unity is a new quality.

The protests that have been taking place in Belarus for over three months have now become widely covered by international media. Unfortunately, western media reports, in many cases, are not very specific and somewhat biased. Their publishers may opt for nice photographs of demonstrators carrying banners praising freedom and democracy, but do they capture the real changes taking place within Belarusian society? While the attention of many in the West is now directed towards the protests, as well as their inspiring leaders, very few reflect on the values that have been driving Belarusians to protest against the authorities in this unusual time.

The fight for values

The title of this article – "a Belarusian clash of civilizations" – is neither a journalistic cliché nor a simple reference to Samuel Huntington's pivotal work, *The Clash of Civilizations*. It is a description of reality; one that was inevitable, even

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though nobody predicted it would happen this year. Evidently, it took Belarusians almost three decades to reach this point now unfolding in front of our eyes. As a result of this lengthy process, the current clash of identities and values is not that of one Belarusian nation, but several such "nations" that have co-existed in Belarus. In other words, over the last number of decades the Belarusian people have split into groups of different civilisations, although they continued to share one state.

> What we are seeing in Belarus is not an ordinary social uprising, nor is it a typical political protest.

The first group are those who belong to the post-Soviet, later seen as pro-Russian, civilisation. These are mostly the elderly who are nostalgic for the USSR. Most had been supporters of Alyaksandr Lukashenka and his political course. The second group consists of supporters of the broadly understood western civilisation. They adhere to European values and want Belarus to be an integral part of a united Europe, and the EU later.

Needless to say, the division within Belarusian society, as presented here, is an oversimplification and slightly misleading. It does not adequately represent the full picture. Each of these groups have different values, to be sure, but there are differences of opinions within the groups. Thus, it cannot be said that there are no democratic liberals and technocrats among those labelled as proponents of pro-Russian "eastern" values. In the same way, the large group of democratic and pro-European Belarusians is not homogeneous. It also includes, for example, social conservatives.

Most importantly, there is the so-called third Belarusian "nation within the nation", or "locals". This includes the majority of Belarusians who, until now, were alien to politics. They were not interested in geopolitics, were rather apolitical and did not reflect much on their national identity. They looked at the world through the prism of everyday life. This year's protests have demonstrated that all three of these groups are intermingled. This explains what we are seeing in Belarus since August is not an ordinary social uprising, nor is it a typical political protest. It is an axiological fight.

Protest values

From the outset, the protests that erupted in reaction to the forgeries in this August's presidential election have been neither pro-Russian nor pro-western. Their message has been primarily pro-Belarusian. It is reasonable to say that the lack of slogans directly referring to Russia, the European Union or NATO attracted the

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masses to the streets and prevented provocations from Russia. Yet the fact that there were no EU flags present does not mean the demonstrators do not demand change or believe in European values. In fact, just the opposite. Belarusians want freedom, democracy, respect for basic human rights and civil liberties.

The lack of explicit pro-western slogans should not be misread in any way. It is quite evident that, regardless of the messages on protest flags and how the protests will further develop, integration with the EU is a vague, long-term perspective for Belarus. The slogans of human dignity and equal rights for all citizens, which drive the protests, are not only important in Belarus. They are universal. Thus, what is most valuable now is that the protests are of a pro-Belarusian character.

Thanks to this, various groups and communities have joined the movement. Thus, in addition to such actions as the Women's Marches, which have become one of the main symbols of this year's protest, demonstrations organised by various professional and social groups have been held. Among them are students of different universities, medical staff or retirees. The protest of the employees of state-owned organisations was especially important. Strikes and demonstrations organised by workers from different sectors of industry are very symbolic – this group has been one of the most important components of the ruling elite's hard electorate. Representatives of various religious organisations have also come out to protest. Obviously, each of these groups has its own interests and demands. Yet, there is a strong value in their unification in the resistance.

The issue of Belarusian identity, both in political and nation-building terms, has played a very important role in these protests. As mentioned above, it would be a simplification to say that there is only one Belarusian state and one Belarusian national identity. Conversely, the identity of contemporary Belarusians is fluid and multi-dimensional. Understanding its complexity is important for understanding the country and the consolidation processes that are taking place. Clearly, each side – that is, the authorities and civil society – propose their own vision of a state identity, although none of them got rooted deeply into society.

Hence, the low level of awareness of Belarusians is regarded as a significant obstacle to the formulation of their state identity. A change in this regard is necessary, as many scholars argue that a national identity should first be established, later to be followed by a state identity. However, the dynamics of the 2020 protests indicate that in Belarus the order is reversed. Consequently, it remains very difficult to draft any forecasts of the further shaping of state identity. Considering recent social trends and processes, especially the events this year, it can be said that the formation of a Belarusian state identity now taking place is not at an ethnic level, but at a civic and political level. Such a complicated and ambiguous identity has its pros and cons.

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It can already be seen that a political and state identity dominates over the ethnic and national identity. The political nation is more adapted to the challenges that have emerged both in Belarus's near region and around the world. Again, this year's protests proved that, for a common cause, Belarusians can unite. This is evident in their use of flags (the official red-green and the historical white-red-white) and their use of both Belarusian and Russian languages. Unquestionably, this unity is a new standard. Prior to this, state symbols and languages were the things that differentiated Belarusians and divided them.

Unexpected values

The 2020 protests are not only political and social in nature, despite the fact that freedom and democracy are their main demands. In addition, the protesters are not afraid to postulate some claims which have proved problematic even in some EU countries. These include the rule of law, judicial independence and free speech. Increasingly, the Belarusian protests have made open calls for equality for marginal groups, including the LGBT+ community, and those advocating for equal rights for women.

Actions of solidarity and the – Women's Marches are of particular importance. Worldwide, we have seen images of hundreds of Belarusian women dressed in white linens on the streets carrying banners calling for an end to violence against women. Chains of solidarity became more frequent and demonstrations held by women became one of the main symbols of the 2020 protests; to the point that some claim that, in parallel to the national Belarusian revolution, the first feminist revolution is taking place in the country. If this view is to be justified, however, it has to be properly interpreted in the Belarusian context. The demonstrations of women, of all ages, are making references to an historical narrative that is well-known and close to the hearts of the majority of Belarusians. This narrative does not overlap with western feminist traditions (Belarus is still a relatively patriarchal country), but it draws from the symbols of the Second World War (in post-Soviet states known as the Great Patriotic War). It builds on the image of women who joined the resistance movement after most men had been killed or sent to fight on the front.

This war-time allegory still resonates among the public and can be seen in the symbols and rhetoric of this year's protests. Only the oppressors are different this time around: this year they are security services and the police. Most importantly, the women's chain of solidarity has contributed to an increase in public support for the protesters and has built a greater sense of solidarity among the so-called

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"ordinary Belarusians". Recent sociological analyses speak in favour of the changes taking place in the area of women's leadership. For example, over half of female respondents to opinion polls say that women are not adequately represented in politics. This is an extremely important shift in a country where earlier polls pointed out that the majority of Lukashenka's hard electorate were women. Surely the president's misogynistic statements, and the use of violence against peaceful protesters, eliminated the remaining support and lowered Belarusian women's trust in the system under his leadership. The message of the Women's Marches also indicates that this protest links and complements various values within Belarusian society.

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Illustratively, Belarusian human rights and LGBT+ organisations joined this year's electoral campaign as well as the post-election protests. These groups came to the demonstrations with an agenda that was shared by all the democratic forces: they demanded democratisation which was not limited to the interests of one community, but was put in a broader context. During the campaign the main goal of these organisations was to activate the public to participate in elections, while their main claims were fair elections and an end to the violence against protesters. Despite the risks of open protesting and the often hostile attitude conveyed by church representatives, LGBT+ organisations have remained active participants in the protests. Images of the rainbow flag alongside the white-red-white one, waved at the demonstrations, are a sign of the beginning of change taking place in the minds of many Belarusians.

Is *Homo sovieticus* gone for good?

Three years ago, on the pages of this magazine, I wrote about Belarusian society from the perspective of *Homo post-sovieticus*. Among the most important features of this category I distinguished: collectivism, subservience, opportunism, adaptability, the lack of respect for the rule of law, a monistic world view, and an instrumentalist approach to religion. Back then, the category of *Homo sovieticus*, in regards to Belarus, was justified. I presented some of the remnants of the features of the Belarusian *Homo sovieticus* not as a disadvantage, but as challenge and a potential advantage: subservience and passivity as potential openness; collectivism as a chance to build a civil society; adaptability and opportunism as resourcefulness, and the multi-layered identity as an expression of a modern civil nation. Back then, Belarus was in a state of social and political anomy, which made it a completely different place than Belarus today.

> Today's situation is a result of the fact that the Belarusian society has undergone a generational change.

Now, it can be argued that the Belarusian *Homo sovieticus* is leaving the country for good. Neither the authorities nor the opposition have managed to use and "develop" the above-mentioned features, which I then considered an opportunity. Today's situation is also a result of the fact that Belarusian society has undergone a generational change. It has taken place in the last decade and has a profound effect on the present. This generational change happened in an organic, although unnoticeable, way. As a result, today's Belarusian millennials – those born between 1981 and 1996 – have the same needs and worldviews to their counterparts in the

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"developed West". They use the same new technologies (sic! they often create them first – Belarus is one of the most important suppliers of the global IT industry) and watch the same programmes on Netflix or HBO. Before the pandemic many were travelling in Europe and around the world.

This generation has completely different expectations from the state and from politicians than previous generations. However the parents of Belarusian millennials are also now starting to have a different perception of the world. In this way, the Belarusian *Homo sovieticus* is now losing the battle over the country's future. As the protests have showed, Lukashenka's crude rhetoric, which is based on Soviet values and nostalgia, has become alien, incomprehensible and worthless for both the Belarusian youth and a majority of those who are now in their 30s and 40s. Indeed, it is the younger people who have made the values of protest available to everyone. The digital sphere is the natural environment for this generation, while for the authorities it remains a strange and unexplored territory. That is why we see the latest protests as colourful and creative mass events.

The first signal that something was broken did not come after the elections when thousands of peaceful demonstrators came to the streets. It came about in the spring when Belarusian social media started revealing that something was changing. More precisely, the users of social media channels, who had been completely apolitical and socially passive before, stopped posting photos from trendy cafés and music concerts. Instead their Facebook, Instagram or TitTok accounts became filled with images of police brutality or video streams from rallies of opposition candidates. This, together with the dynamics of the protests in the recent months, shows that change was already taking place, and now this trend is becoming irreversible. NEE

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Revolution in Belarus

Surprisingly female?

OLGA DRYNDOVA

The unexpected female dimension of the Belarusian opposition has made it fresh, emotional and empowering. The three women who did not give up after the most popular candidates were eliminated from the election race gave people "a last hope for change". These women were authentic, they told personal stories, talked about love and asked people to believe in themselves.

Inspiring images of the Belarusian revolutionary female trio of Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, Maria Kalesnikava and Veranika Tsapkala as well as the numerous images of women peacefully protesting after the falsified August election, seem to have reached every corner of the globe. International audiences admired their strength, courage and wholesomeness. The high visibility and important role of women in the mass protests is not unique to Belarus, however. We can observe it in Latin America, the United States and during the Arab Spring. There is also a global trend showing that women protests tend to be less violent, larger in scale and more diverse.

Yet, what exactly stands behind these actions? Can we call it a feminist revolution in Belarus? Are these consequences of a long-lasting tendency? Or is it a totally unpredictable phenomenon, even for the Belarusians?

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Women in power

Statistically speaking, Belarus does well when it comes to gender equality. For instance, it ranks 27 out of 189 in the Gender Inequality Index-2019 (which is the same as the UK, and higher than Russia and the US). The Global Gender Gap Report 2020 places Belarus at 29th position (out of 153), while in the section titled "economic participation and opportunity" for women, Belarus performs better than all European states, except for Iceland. Its rankings in women's political empowerment, however, are below the world average (position 81).

In 2018 the share of seats occupied in Belarusian parliament by women was 33 per cent and has not changed much over time – this was twice as high as Russia and higher than Germany, the UK and the US. Also, a 30 per cent representation quota for female MPs was declared by Alyaksandr Lukashenka back in 2004. Obviously, the Belarusian parliament cannot be treated in the same way this institution is treated in democratic systems, but the truth is that Belarusian women are represented in politics, at least in theory. Furthermore, the Belarusian National Report on Sustainable Development for the period until 2030 mentions that 70 per cent of civil servants and 68 per cent of judiciary sector employees are women.

The picture changes abruptly when we look at high government positions where only one woman is currently in charge of the 24 ministries in Belarus. The position of Natallya Kachanava, who is the head of the presidential administration, is rather an exception. Neither have women had the chance to build an independent political group with their own agenda in Belarus. On the opposition side, however, there have been quite a few female politicians. Back in 2016, out of 110 candidates, two independents – Hanna Kanapackaya and Alena Anisim – unexpectedly entered the House of Representatives (the lower chamber of the Belarusian parliament). The authorities allowed them to be "elected" so that the West could see a degree of liberalisation taking place in Belarus. However, these women did not gain much popularity among the public.

One female candidate who became truly popular during the 2015 election was Tatsiana Karatkevich, the first female presidential candidate in Belarus. She was the co-head of the Tell the Truth movement and, according to independent polls, received about 20 per cent of the vote (about one million votes). In her campaign Karatkevich emphasised the peaceful nature of change and gained popularity by travelling to regions and talking to people about their problems. Most importantly, her popularity contradicted the popular belief that Belarusians are not ready for a female leader.

Such messages are yet commonly expressed by state authorities. Lidziya Yarmoshyna, who is the head of the Central Election Commission, is known to have

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said that she did not see a place for women in politics, despite herself holding a high position for over 20 years. She is someone who, in the past, said: "women would be better off cooking soup then going to protests" (2010); "women are not as creative as men and thus cannot make unexpected and brave decisions" (2015); and "women are apolitical by their nature" (2016).

Lukashenka, in turn, often praised women as "the great creation of nature", "the beautiful half of humanity" and "custodians of family values". In his view, "a woman's vocation is to decorate the world, while a man's is to protect the world and women". However, his two statements where he said that the "Belarusian constitution is not written for a woman" and "if this burden (of power) is placed on a woman, she will collapse, poor thing" were truly scandalous. These words, uttered in May this year, generated huge anger among many Belarusian women who filed complaints to the prosecutor's office against the president.

Even though it is clear that the views of the president have not changed, it is likely that the Belarusian society has. In 2011 similar remarks made by the president did not generate much reaction. He was able, with ease, to say things like: "I would not give up the presidential chair to a representative of the 'weaker sex'". Yet patriarchal hierarchies and sexism – in public spaces, workplaces and at home – are still present in Belarus. Women who are successful in their professional careers often face inequality in their families. As a result, women continue to be subject to gender-based stereotyping and discrimination. At the same time, Belarusian women seemed to have less patriarchal views than men: research by IPM (2018) showed that women disagreed more than men with the assumption that men are better political leaders, directors and businessmen than women. However, before the last presidential election these issues were on the margins of debate, where as much as 70 per cent of Belarusians did not know that the phrase "gender inequality" existed or did not understand what it meant. The same research, conducted by Pact in 2019, showed that only 3.9 per cent of men and 6.9 per cent of women admitted having experienced gender inequality personally. Such low figures suggest that gender issues were not mainstreamed in Belarus.

Political reality show

What was named by many as a "female revolution", was not originally planned as such. All women of the revolutionary "female trio" were, in a certain way, representing three non-registered male presidential candidates: YouTube blogger Siarhei Tsikhanouski, the ex-head of the High-Tech Park, Valery Tsapkala, and the ex-head of Belgazprombank, Viktar Babaryka. The question that appears is how

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Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, a housewife who spent the last years taking care of her children, turned out to be the only registered "candidate of hope" among the five candidates?

Her decision in May to submit documents for registration of an initiative group to gather signatures, after her husband was arrested, was a spontaneous decision. It was an act of despair and solidarity with her husband. Unexpectedly, the following weeks turned into a kind of political "reality show" with thousands of people, from different social backgrounds, lining up in long queues to voice their support for "anybody but Lukashenka". This was the case both in the Belarusian capital and regions. The massive support for Tsikhanouskaya, even though people did not always know her name or profession, was evident. Despite arrests of members of her initiative and anonymous personal threats, she managed to gather the needed 100,000 signatures in her support and was registered as a presidential candidate. This act is evidence that, once again, the authorities did not recognise her potential as they were calmed by the fact that popular male figures were either deprived of registration and/or arrested.

The authorities did not recognise Tsikhanouskaya's potential, they were calmed by the fact that male figures were unregistered and/or arrested.

Allegedly it took only 15 minutes for the team of the three women, representing the non-registered male candidates, to agree on a united front, showing that "women can agree faster than men". During their first press conference, they talked not about their political ambitions but the common good of the society. The main points of their campaign included: the release of political prisoners and the organisation of free and fair elections after a possible victory of Tsikhanouskaya.

The spontaneous symbol of their election campaign – a heart (Babaryka), a fist (Tsikhanouskaya) and a victory-sign (Tsapkala) – went viral and inspired women rights advocates in Belarus and around the world. It is, however, more interesting to see how these women presented themselves in the campaign as their self-image and public statements combined messages of traditional values and female leadership.

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya primarily focused on family values. In her speeches, she always referred to her husband's arrest as the main reason for her political activity. With time, she stood not only for his freedom, but for the freedom of all Belarusians. She saw herself as a weak and "plain" woman, who got stronger after meeting thousands of people during the three weeks of pre-election rallies. As a registered candidate, she admitted not being interested in continuing her political career, even after her victory. Her views did not change much even after the elec-

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tion when she was forced to leave Belarus and became an internationally known opposition figure.

Maria Kalesnikava looked like an opposite to Tsikhanouskaya. She saw herself as a free global citizen and talked about feminism in her interviews. Kalesnikava made a successful career in the arts and worked as a musician and art director before the election. Born in Belarus, she lived and worked in Germany and other European countries for a long time and learned the values of democracy and freedom. She became visible while being a part of Babaryka's team. Her empowering and empathetic messages ("We are legitimate!", "Belarusians, you are incredible!") reached the broader public. Out of the three women, she was the only one who stayed in Belarus after the election and even tore up her passport during an attempt by the security services to transport her outside of Belarus, which led to her arrest.

Veranika Tsapkala was somehow a combination of both Tsikhanouskaya and Kalesnikava: a self-confident successful manager working for Microsoft and a loving wife and mother. During their first press conference, she made it clear that the Belarusian constitution was written for women as well (opposing the words of Lukashenka) and that the women of Belarus are equal to men. At the same time, she supported Tsikhanouskaya as a mother and wife – that was what "women's solidarity" meant for her. Finally, during interviews she stressed that "there is only one politician in our family, and that is my husband". She said these words despite being an excellent public speaker. After the election, when she joined her husband and children abroad, she accompanied him during political meetings rather as a wife, although she was actually among those who contributed to the popular uprising.

Last hope for change

These three women had just three weeks to reach voters before election day. In an unprecedented way, and against the overwhelming time pressure, they became extremely popular both in Belarus and abroad. In fact, none of the presidential candidates in Belarus has ever gotten so much international attention before. Thus, the story of the "three women fighting against the dictator" turned out to be a perfect political strategy. During the campaign, they visited 13 cities in three weeks and attracted up to five per cent of locals to their rallies in the regions. This was remarkable for the traditionally passive Belarusian electorate. They were being treated like rock stars.

How was this all possible? It would be incorrect to say that the fact the candidates were females was the only thing that mobilised the public. Belarusians were

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already politicised before the election. The economic stagnation, inadequate state reactions to the pandemic, and a tiredness of the same face for 26 years radicalised people and united them against Lukashenka. In this sense the public turned into a protest electorate which was ready to vote for any strong figure opposing the incumbent president.

Still, the unexpected female dimension made the campaign very fresh, emotional and empowering. The reasons behind it were, first, the fact that the three women did not give up after the most popular candidates were eliminated from the election and thus gave people a "last hope for change". Their campaign was very emotional. They were authentic, they told personal stories, they talked about love and asked people to believe in themselves. As a result, the traditional slogan of the opposition "We believe – We can – We will win" was exchanged into a female version: "We love – We can – We will win".

Second, they mobilised people for election observation and election participation. The results of that were massive queues outside polling stations on election day and thousands deprived the right to observe the counting of votes. Electoral fraud thus became a prevalent issue. Additionally, 500,000 Belarusians sent pictures of their voting ballots to a newly developed online platform which made it easier to identify falsifications. Even their "appeals of consciousness" addressed to members of election commissions worked in about 100 polling stations: votes were counted there, protocols showing the victory of Tsikhanouskaya were made public (something like this never happened in Belarus before).

> The combination of traditional and feminist values played a crucial role for the women's popularity among the broader public.

To be fair, one has to admit that both strategies (empathy and mobilisation) came originally from Babaryka's team. The heart was the symbol of his campaign. As opinion polls showed, Belarusians did not believe their actions would result in any change. Babaryka's team addressed this issue and changed the narrative from "authorities are bad" to "people are good". After his arrest, Kalesnikava went on to push this message further.

Finally, the combination of traditional and feminist values in the women's speeches seems to have played a crucial role for their popularity among the broader public. Feministic and empowering messages of Kalesnikava and Tsapkala got admiratio n by adherents of women's power, while the shy and loving Tsikhanouskaya was a perfect prototype for the traditional part of Belarusian society, which is significant. According to the IPM research (2018), nothing was more important than motherhood (84.8 per cent) and fatherhood (77.4 per cent) for a vast majority of Belarusians. The fact that Tsikhanouskaya did not want to stay in power for long

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persuaded also those who were still not ready to vote for a housewife. Their percentage should have been considerable – even local well-known male experts reacted sharply on the female trio. "What can three beautiful women do?", "The political part of the campaign is over now" – to give just a few examples of the first reactions.

The popular trust put into Tsikhanouskaya, who became a kind of a "political Cinderella", was unbeatably high. People supported her out of solidarity, compassion and admiration for her courage. Reports of independent election observers suggest she could have even gotten the electoral majority. For many voters, supporting her meant supporting new fair elections. Despite her statements about lacking political ambitions, she turned out to be an extremely important political actor.

Female face of the protests

A second wave of women's activities started two days after the election, or on the fourth day of protests against electoral fraud. The scale of repressions was shocking. The police used stun grenades and rubber bullets against protesters. Information about the first deaths and the hundreds of others injured or tortured quickly reached the public. Clashes with the police took place mostly in the evenings or at night. On August 12th and 13th several hundred women built solidarity chains in Minsk in protest against police violence. The first group was wearing white clothes and holding flowers, while the second group was dressed in white, barefoot and sang the Belarusian lullaby "Kalyhanka". Within hours, reports about these "white women chains" spread across the country and other cities joined in. The main cause for these actions was the inhumane violence carried out by riot police – women wanted to show this was not a "Belarusian way" of transformation. The message of non-violence was sent to Belarusians in contrast to the pictures of night battles with "terrorists" on state television.

Another aim of the protests was to make them appealing to large numbers of people, especially women. In other words, solidarity chains, which were organised during the daytime, were viewed as safer civic actions than night confrontations with the police. Men also joined the chains which were then followed by solidarity chains and rallies of other social and professional groups: doctors, students and the elderly. Consequently, new forms of non-violent protest were introduced where they found fertile ground. Through these protest chains, women also wanted to express their solidarity with those protesting at night. Finally, many called for the release of political prisoners, the prosecution of those responsible for election fraud and violence, as well as new elections.

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Interestingly, the first initiatives in Minsk did not have a political centre. Women organised themselves through their own contacts and social networks (especially Telegram-chats). They were not connected to other groups, but surprisingly came with a similar protest idea that used the colour white as a symbol. Similar actions, which were later organised nationwide, were grassroots, spontaneous and decentralised. They often were thinking outside of the box. One of the first women's actions was conceptualised and organised by an event-manager without any political experience: she perceived the opposition as customers and a political action as an event.

Women were not only led by women politicians; they started to self-organise for political purposes. With time they even discovered new female heroes.

The peaceful female "white protests" had a number of very important functions: they stressed the non-violent nature of protesters and as such saved people's motivation for protest (the post-election rallies were peaceful initially, but when the women came out, it became even more obvious); they made protests accessible to broader social groups; they introduced new protest forms; they made the movement highly visible in Belarus and abroad; they helped stop police violence for some time; they decentralised the movement; and, of course, they added a new dynamic to the female dimension of the election campaign. Women were thus not only led by women politicians, but started to self-organise for political purposes. With time they even discovered new female heroes, such as the 73-year-old Nina Bahinskaya, who has become famous for her own personal protests against Lukashenka which she has been doing for over 20 years.

Without any doubt, the "white protests" added a whole new dimension to the protest movement, which generated the largest political rallies in the history of independent Belarus. They began on August 16th and continue to take place every following Sunday. Additionally, women's marches have been organised every Saturday since August 29th through September 26th. The female protesters later changed their tactics to avoid mass detentions, which were becoming increasingly more common and chose not to gather in large crowds.

The five big Saturday women's marches in Minsk, with up to 10,000 participants of all ages, were very diverse in their messages and had both feminine and women empowerment components. The white colour and flowers helped build an image of innocent, fragile and loving women, which fit well with the traditional perception of women in Belarusian society. Many women went out on the streets to protect their husbands and sons, which was also expressed on their banners and posters. This femininity has become a new female "soft-power". Consider here the

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poster depicting Tsikhanouskaya as "Motherland" (Russian: *Rodina Mat*) which was based on the image of a woman during the Second World War used to mobilise the Soviet people. Indeed, during this year's protest, women literally protected men from the police during protests.

At the same time, a lot of poster messages came as a creative and humorous reaction to the sexist statements of the president and emphasised that women were political subjects: "Fight like a (Belarusian) girl"; "Patriarchy, you are fucked up"; "I am not afraid – I was in labour"; "Make way for a woman"; "Belarus is female, I voted for a woman", "Sasha, NO means NO" and "Your beloved one does not want you" (both to Lukashenka, as a reaction to his statement: "Belarus is a beloved one, and you do not give your beloved one to anybody").

Humour, openness and a positive attitude were some of the most significant features of these marches. Their participants tried to start conversations with the police, smiled at them, giving them flowers, singing songs and dancing. They would spontaneously change the rallies' routes or scream loudly when the police approached them. There was a certain confidence, or hope, that the police would not be violent towards them. Beating women can, of course, cause a negative reaction from society. Seemingly this logic prevailed for several weeks until the authorities realised that these women have become a political force.

Final straw

Women for a long time have been Lukashenka's core electorate. However, after many years in power and the lack of independent research available, he lost his political scent and was also losing his personal charisma. The 2020 election year was not the most women-friendly on the part of the administration. The president showed arrogance and a lack of empathy during the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic which led to concern among women about the health and lives of their families. In addition, female employees dominate the health and education sectors, which were hit the hardest. Finally, the brutal repressions which took place after the election proved to be the final straw. Lukashenka, who totally underestimated women and their power, has accidentally contributed to the development of feminism in Belarus, just like he has contributed to the unity of Belarusians who have rallied against him. Patriarchal values seem to have become archaic to a large section of the Belarusian public.

Lukashenka totally underestimated women and has accidentally contributed to the development of feminism in Belarus.

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"Sasha, sexism has destroyed you" – was written on one of the women's posters during a rally.

The political crisis in Belarus is still underway. It is difficult to make any long-term forecasts on how it will further unveil. Nevertheless, it is already clear that we are seeing a qualitatively different public picture of the role of women in Belarus. Until summer 2020, feminism and political participation seemed to be incompatible with femininity and vulnerability – now women's political participation is becoming fashionable. "Belarusian women explore themselves and their strength anew, without any background knowledge about feministic theories," said one of the participants of the first women's chains.

We are now probably witnessing an overcoming of stereotypes and clichés that are associated with women in politics and society which will further develop in the oncoming years. For the moment, this stage has already been achieved in other countries where the first association with "Belarusian women" is no longer an attractive or sexy female, but a brave and responsible citizen.

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In Belarus, national solidarity, not nationalism, leads the day

CHRISTIAN GIBBONS

What unites the protestors in Belarus is not a devotion to the purity or glory of their "people". Rather, it is their common attachment to ideals of popular sovereignty and fundamental rights shared by all citizens. What is happening in Belarus is very much a legacy of the French Revolution, which placed the figure of the oppressed citizen at the heart of the struggle against tyranny.

Protestors raise their nation's historical red-and-white flag in the streets. Op-eds exult in Belarusian national poetry and history. And everywhere in this tiny ex-Soviet republic, there seems to be a surge of national feeling. For many westerners, who have become accustomed to reading about increasing nationalism in Europe and beyond, it may be tempting to assume that these are the gestures of yet another nationalist movement.

But this would be a mistake. Nationalism is no more a driving force of the protests in Belarus than any other ideology. Instead, what is driving them is something which other countries could actually learn from: national solidarity. Decades of economic stagnation, electoral fraud, and human rights abuses – as well as Alyaksandr Lukashenka's failure to properly handle the coronavirus pandem-

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ic – have politicised Belarusians and empowered them as emerging civic actors. And this, in turn, has catalysed them into forming a broad-based movement that transcends the divisions of the country's old nationalist opposition.

A new opposition

All of this contrasts strikingly with earlier efforts to rally around a Belarusian national identity, which focused on more exclusive ethno-linguistic criteria. During most of the Soviet period, Belarus was one of the most "de-nationalised" and Russified countries in the USSR. But in 1988 a group of Belarusian intellectuals and political figures, headed by the archaeologist Zianon Pazniak, created a nationalist organisation called the Belarusian Popular Front in Vilnius, Lithuania. The resulting BPF Party called for the revival of Belarusian culture and language, and was historically one of the major players of Belarus's early pro-democracy movement.

Because of the country's troubled past and complex demography, national identity in Belarus is a complicated issue.

After first being elected in 1994, Lukashenka, Belarus's current president, replaced crucial national symbols such as Belarus's historical white-red-white flag with ones which were reminiscent of the Soviet era. He also made Russian Belarus's second official language, moved the newly independent state back into Russia's orbit and began to roll back support for the Belarusian language in many of the country's institutions. Lukashenka had various reasons for implementing these policies, but they were all effectively anti-nationalist.

Because of the country's troubled past and complex demography, national identity in Belarus is a complicated issue. But Lukashenka's appeal to Belarus's Soviet past also proved more politically popular than the BPF's anti-Russian vision. When the former began to move the country towards authoritarianism in the mid-1990s, Pazniak and other BPF leaders went into exile, fearing arrest. Belarus seemed set to become a dictatorial state-nation, not a democratic nation-state.

Subsequent years saw the BPF put on the backburner, Volha Biziukova, an anthropologist at the University of Vienna, told me. Since the early 2000s, nationalist parties like the BPF – which split into a more radical and a more moderate wing after Pazniak's exile – have remained marginal. With the rest of the opposition fragmented, Lukashenka has accordingly ceased to see it as a threat.

National consciousness is now finally back on the rise. Yet, the current protests have virtually no ethno-cultural orientation. Already over two months long and

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hundreds of thousands strong, the protests have instead focused on removing Lukashenka, now 26 years in power, from the presidency.

While it is possible to find nationalist themes in the protests, Biziukova said, it is the "relative weakness" of ethnonationalism that makes them truly remarkable. Unlike the 2014 revolution in neighbouring Ukraine, this "new opposition" is intended to be non-ideological. The individual political programmes of past candidates have been set aside for another day, when a free and fair election can truly take place. In the run-up to the election, established opposition groups in Belarus remained weak and divided. Now, many are even more marginalised. Unlike in the past – such as in 2010 – these groups have not played an important role in organising protests. Instead of vertical, centralised leadership, there has been a surge of diffuse horizontal ties within Belarusian society, as the political analyst Artyom Shraibman explained to me. And as the protests continue, Belarusian society is becoming "much less atomised" and "much more connected", creating a "true, authentic, grassroots civil society".

Division can wait

To be sure, it remains unclear whether Belarus's different parties, activists and opposition groups can remain united in spite of their differences, but sceptics of the national solidarity movement may underestimate just how much progress it has already made. After the government prevented leading presidential hopefuls like Viktar Babaryka, Valeriy Tsepkala, and Siarhei Tsikhanouski from registering as candidates in June, Tsikhanouski's wife, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, joined forces with Babaryka's campaign manager, Maria Kalesnikava, and Tsepkala's wife, Veronika Tsepkala, to form one united campaign. The unifying rhetoric of the United Headquarters was a central element of their appeal, allowing them to mobilise unprecedented numbers of people in advance of the election.

> The centrality of women and striking workers in the protests is quite unusual for the post-Soviet world.

When I spoke by phone with Veronika Tsepkala two months ago, she added that Tsikhanouskaya's team had come together around two central principles. First of all, they all agreed that if Tsikhanouskaya won the election, she would only serve as an "interim" president. Second, they resolved to call for the release of all current political prisoners, including those who had served as candidates in past electoral cycles. "Sviatlana's main objective was to announce a new presidential campaign in six months," Tsepkala explained.

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"Then the people of Belarus would decide which political programme they wanted the most."

Additionally, Belarusians themselves have changed, as Kalesnikava told me in a telephone interview two months ago (she is now being detained by the Belarusian authorities). "It is the first time in our history, perhaps in the last hundred years, that we feel ourselves to be a union – as one strong and free nation."

If the success of the protests is any indication, she may be right. To date, the protests do not seem to be limited by any discernible divides. They have not been restricted to urban areas, where most of Belarus's population resides, but neither do they only involve the young, the upwardly-mobile, or the university-educated. In fact, the centrality of women and striking workers in the protests is quite unusual for the post-Soviet world. And although there have been some expressions of discontent from the left, this has not visibly weakened the protests, either.

Additionally, the national solidarity movement is both transnational and transgenerational. Since early August, the Belarusian diaspora have been engaging with stakeholders, raising and donating funds, and even mass-translating news from Belarus for journalists, as Veronika Laputska, a Polish-Belarusian sociologist at the German Marshall Fund, explained to me. Since the protests in Belarus began, Laputska has also been participating in various solidarity marches in East-Central Europe, and recently met with Tsikhanouskaya and Veronika Tsepkala in Warsaw.

Importantly, this has all helped to sustain the protests. Although the situation in Belarus now increasingly favours the government, Tsepkala at least believed that the protests could last much longer thanks to these efforts. When asked about how long workers could afford to remain on strike, she told me that other Belarusians in the diaspora would try to support them.

Long live Belarus!

If new elections were organised, the old anti-Russian nationalism of the BPF could possibly make a return. However, experts agree that this would only happen if little green men end up in the country, trying to save Lukashenka. Nationalist politicians would also need to be careful not to be perceived as exclusionary or extreme. As the philosopher Olga Shparaga recently argued, most Belarusians seem to prefer a vision of a new Belarus founded upon social inclusion and democratic fairness.

The protests in Belarus therefore show a rejection of both the neo-Soviet tutelage of Lukashenka and the nationalism which characterised his early opponents. In this way, they have not only seemingly bucked a trend which has persistently

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dogged Eastern Europe, but also one which is increasingly worrisome to the world as a whole. By creating a form of national solidarity without nationalism, Belarusians have shown the continuing power of civic conceptions of national identity, at a time when ethnic chauvinism seems ascendant across the globe.

What unites the protestors is not a devotion to the purity or glory of their "people"; rather, it is their common attachment to ideals of popular sovereignty and fundamental rights shared by all citizens. Like the Monday demonstrations in East Germany, or the current protests in Lebanon and Iraq, what is now happening in Belarus is very much a legacy of the French Revolution, which placed the figure of the oppressed citizen at the heart of the struggle against tyranny. It could not be farther from the nationalism of leaders like Hungary's Viktor Orbán or India's Narendra Modi.

Aside from this, the protests in Belarus show that it is possible to build a powerful political movement based on these precepts. And this too is relevant: just earlier this month, a political commentator in the United States, where democracy was more under threat than ever before, called for the same. For this reason, Kalesnikava believes that others can draw inspiration from Belarusians. "The Belarusian people are powerful when they are together," she told me. "I think it's a good example for everyone else who needs changes." NEE

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What happens to Belarus after Lukashenka falls?

ANDREAS UMLAND

The current Belarusian transformation looks as if it could be having results similar to those of the 2018 Velvet Revolution in Armenia rather than of the 2013–2014 Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine. Yet, the pathological relationship of Moscow's imperialism towards Russia's Eastern Slavic "brotherly nations" can mean that Belarus's future may, in the end, become more similar to Ukraine's rather than Armenia's present.

Ukraine and Belarus are two of the culturally and geographically closest nations of Europe. Their Eastern Slavic languages, major Christian-Orthodox churches and peculiar locations between Russia, on the one side, and the European Union (as well as NATO), on the other, are comparable and intertwined. Both are, on one level, very close to the also largely Orthodox and Eastern Slavic Russians. Yet, Ukrainians and Belarusians are, as post-colonial people, on another level, fundamentally different from post- and neo-imperial Russians whose international ambitions are partly more similar to those of today's Turks and Chinese.

While some Ukrainian fringe groups harbour irredentist dreams towards southern Russia's Kuban region, hegemonic trans-border pretences can be found neither in Ukrainian nor in Belarusian mainstream political discourses. Ukrainians and Belarusians are – unlike many Russians, Hungarians or Serbs – territorially saturated people. In spite of these and other substantive and structural resemblances between Belarus and Ukraine, most commentators – whether western, Russian, Belarusian or Ukrainian – today emphasise the differences rather than

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similarities between the two fraternal nations. "Belarus is NOT Ukraine!" is the core message of many politicians' and experts' recent comments on the ongoing electoral uprising in Minsk.

Geopolitical mirages

Indeed, Belarusians have a pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet history that is distinct from their Ukrainian peers. Belarusian nationalism during the tsarist period was already then much weaker than Ukrainian liberationism and ethno-centrism – an important dissimilarity still relevant today. The Belarusian diaspora during the Cold War was less organised and active than the far more visible Ukrainian émigré communities of Western Europe and North America. Last but not least, the new Belarusian state has – unlike the Ukrainian one – participated in several of Russia's various neo-imperial organisational schemes since 1991.

Above all, Belarus was one of the co-founders of the two principal organisations holding together Moscow's hegemonic realm on the territory of the former tsarist and Soviet empires today. Minsk stood at the roots of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), a Russia-dominated sort of "Warsaw Pact 2.0". It was no accident that the CSTO was founded on the occasion Putin's 50th birthday, in then communist party-ruled Moldova, on October 7th 2002. Belarus has also been a founding member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) whose initial tri-lateral treaty was signed by Moscow, Minsk and Astana in the midst of the Kremlin's escalation of its hybrid war against Ukraine on May 29th 2014. A Moscow-directed pseudo-copy of the EU, the EEU has taken over considerable national prerogatives, in such fields as trade and production regulation, from its member states.

> Belarusians have a pre-Soviet, Soviet and post-Soviet history that is distinct from their Ukrainian peers.

The EEU is today the major vehicle for the Kremlin's promotion of Russia as an independent and allegedly strong global "pole" in a supposedly multi-polar world. Belarus is important for the Kremlin's geopolitical mirage as it is the only country that provides the EEU with an exclusively European element, in terms of geography (Armenia is culturally European, yet geographically Asian). On March 27th 2014, Belarus was – along with Russia and Armenia – the only properly European country that voted in the UN General Assembly against resolution 68/262 condemning the Russian annexation of Crimea; the other supporters of Moscow being, in this historic vote, Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua, North Korea, Sudan, Syria, Venezuela and Zimbabwe.

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Moreover, on December 8th 1999 – exactly eight years after conclusion of the Belavezha Accords that had dissolved the USSR – Belarus signed the Treaty on the Foundation of a Union State with Russia. Soon this historic document was fully ratified by both countries. Yet the Union Treaty has paradoxically not led to the emergence of a new political union so far. In spite of the appearance of certain institutional trappings and a small joint budget, the Russian-Belarusian Union State exists primarily on paper.

Nothing even remotely similar has ever been the official policy of Kyiv. Contrary to frequent misperception, Kyiv has been more or less pro-European under almost all of its leaders since 1991 – and not merely under its loudly pro-western Presidents Viktor Yushchenko (2005–2010) and Petro Poroshenko (2014–2019). Kyiv declared full membership of Ukraine in the EU as an official aim already with a presidential decree in 1998. The Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine's unicameral parliament, wrote the aim of accession to the EU and NATO into Ukraine's National Security Law in 2003 and into the Ukrainian Constitution in 2019. The conclusion of an especially large Association Agreement with Brussels in 2014 is seen, in Kyiv, as a fundamentally insufficient arrangement. The Association Agreement is understood by many Ukrainians as being merely a step towards their country's eventually full membership in the EU.

Similar but different paths

These are some of the facets that mark Ukraine and Belarus as different geopolitical entities in Eastern Europe. Perhaps the closest post-Soviet equivalent to Belarus's case appears to be thus not Ukraine, but Armenia which looks similar in terms of its links to Russia. Like Belarus, Armenia is a member of the CSTO and EEU as well economically tied to Russia. While Minsk is Moscow's closest partner in Central and Eastern Europe, Armenia is the most pro-Russian country in the Southern Caucasus. Moreover, in 2018, Armenia experienced an electoral uprising that is not dissimilar to Belarus's in 2020. The Armenian Velvet Revolution had, like the recent protests in Belarus, no geopolitical dimensions and led merely to the replacement of an old-style politician with a new reformist leader. The ousted Armenian leader Serzh Sargsyan is almost of the same age as Alyaksandr Lukashenka who was born two months after Sargsyan. The new Armenian leadership under Nikol Pashinyan has been following, since 2018, an internally reformist and externally conservative course.

Pashinyan's combination of domestic reforms with foreign continuity is reminiscent of the current discourse in and around Belarus. Preserving Minsk's close

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ties to Moscow while resetting Belarus's petrified political system is what is expected from, and intended by, the Coordination Council of Belarus's opposition. The relatively stable development in Armenia since the change of power in Yerevan in 2018 also appears to be Belarus's way to go after Lukashenka's departure. What many observers foresee, prefer and advise today with regard to Belarus is, in a way, a repetition of Armenia's rather than Ukraine's post-revolutionary path.

Yet things may not be as easy as it seems for the future of the Belarusian regime-change. Not only is the 2020 ouster of Lukashenka turning out to be far more challenging than the relatively quick and peaceful disposal of his peer Sargsyan in 2018. The stance of Russian imperialism vis-à-vis Belarusian nationalism is more complicated than Moscow's relatively simple hegemon-client relationship with Yerevan. Armenia could conduct a Velvet Revolution under slogans of national pride, dignity and freedom without stirring up larger emotions in Moscow, as long as Yerevan had no plans to leave the EEU and CSTO.

The 2020 use of ethno-national symbols and rhetoric in Belarus, in contrast, is more irritating for imperial nationalists in Russia than Armenians' celebrations of their nationhood had been in 2018. Belarusian nationalism has a more pronounced European dimension and is geographically closer to the core of Europe than Armenian nationalism. A citizen of Belarus who identifies her- or himself as an ethnic or political Belarusian, rather than in pan-national Eastern Slavic terms, will tend to see the people of Belarus as, above all, belonging to Europe. That could, in principle, be unproblematic vis-à-vis Moscow as long as Russians too define themselves, first and foremost, as Europeans.

The Eurasian dilemma

The name that Moscow chose, however, for the transnational realm that it claims to be the centre of (or even the continent that it is located on) is "Eurasia" – rather than merely Eastern Europe. One wonders how much Belarusians will be willing to follow the Kremlin in this demarcation of a unique civilisational realm distinct from the EU and the West. If the Kremlin insists on being Eurasian rather than European, that can be an unproblematic formula, perhaps for some Armenians who, given their geographical location, may be willing to embrace such a mixed definition of their identity. Yet, a nationally aware Belarusian may have a problem with – as Moscow proposes to Minsk – belonging to a larger cultural collective which is some kind of cryptic "Eurasian" rather than the familiar European civilisation.

Moreover, the geopolitical ambition of the Kremlin with regards to Eastern Slavic nations is different than that concerning the Southern Caucasus – a lesson that

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Ukrainians have bitterly learnt since 2014. Moscow seems content with Yerevan's continuance in the EEU and CSTO. Yet with regards to Russia's western border, many in Moscow are still dreaming of a Belarusian-Russian political unification (as well as of various expansionist forays into Ukraine). To be sure, this pan-Slavic vision of Russian imperialists has been also surprisingly popular within Belarus until recently. Yet the current celebration of Belarusian nationhood, people's power and individual freedoms that the anti-Lukashenka protests have triggered are changing public perceptions of state-society relations in Belarus, day by day.

The liberationist pathos of the 2020 protests is posing a double conceptual problem for a future realisation of the Belarusian-Russian union. On the structural level, it is clear to everybody, and not least to Belarusians themselves, that a Russian-Belarusian union will not be a merger of equals. Belarus's official population of approximately 9.5 million is smaller than the number of inhabitants of the city of Moscow (about 12.5 million residents) and about half the size of the population of the Moscow Metropolitan Area, estimated to be around 20 million.

The protesters today insist on the popular sovereignty of the Belarusian political nation. They express this among others with a national flag which is not the state's official banner. Today's protesters in Belarus are thus, in some ways, more radical than the Ukrainian 2004 and 2013–2014 revolutionaries who used the official Ukrainian national flag (apart from numerous party banners) as the main non-partisan visual marker symbolising their fight for popular sovereignty. Will Belarusians agree to belong to a union state with a different banner, and with its power centre in Moscow rather than Minsk?

Today's protesters in Belarus are, in some ways, more radical than the Ukrainian 2004 and 2013–2014 revolutionaries.

The second conceptual problem lies in the similarities of Lukashenka's and Putin's political regimes and economies. Many Belarusians may be happy, in principal, to enter a union with Russia. But a Russia that is ruled by another long-term president, who is even older than the hated Lukashenka and has a political system rather similar to Lukashenka's, may not be so attractive, even for Belarusian Russophiles. That problem will be amplified if Russia's economy remains hampered by deep structural problems and accumulating foreign sanctions.

Armenians may also have second thoughts about their economy's integration with Russia's. Yet in the first place, Yerevan's alliance with Moscow is more geopolitical than geo-economic. It is Yerevan's engagement in a risky territorial conflict with Baku over Azerbaijan's Nagorno-Karabakh that is the main element holding the Armenian-Russian alliance together. There is – at least, on the surface – no comparable geostrategic imperative making Minsk dependent on Moscow. In-

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stead, Belarus's economic orientation on Russia's markets and energy have been the prime movers of integration between the two countries. What happens, however, if Russian markets for Belarusian commodities continue to shrink and if the world price for carbon-based energy resources remains low?

Many questions remain

Certainly, Belarus is not Ukraine. But it is also not Armenia. Such assertions may sound trivial or even ridiculous. However, the latter fact's practical implications have grave repercussions for the geopolitics of Eastern Europe. If Belarus cannot easily follow Armenia's post-revolutionary conciliatory path, what way is it going to go? If the modern Belarusian nation emerging from the protests is defining itself as European rather than Eurasian, then what implications will this have for Belarus's continuance in the Eurasian Economic Union?

If post-revolutionary Belarusian nationalism is unsuitable for submission to a Russian-Belarusian union state, what will the Kremlin's view on such a problem be? The presumed real winner of the August 2020 Belarusian presidential elections, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, has said in an interview that Crimea belongs legally to Ukraine. She has thereby manifestly violated Putin's new 2020 constitution that explicitly forbids any questioning of the integrity of Russia's territory to which, according to the Russian Constitution, Crimea belongs. How will this and many other ideological differences between the modern outlook of the Belarusian opposition and the neo-imperial worldview of Russia's current leadership be reconciled? And what will Moscow decide to do, if it comes to the conclusion that these contradictions cannot be diplomatically resolved?

From the Kremlin's viewpoint, post-revolutionary Belarus may have to submit to a Russia-dominated union state and to accept its belonging to Eurasia rather than Europe.

In the worst case, Belarus's fate may become more similar to Ukraine's than many expect today. As long as irredentism and revanchism remain major determinants of Russian foreign policy, the principal distinctions between Ukrainian and Belarusian national self-identification and foreign orientation may be too small to make a notable difference for Moscow. Post-revolutionary Belarus may have, from the Kremlin's viewpoint, to submit to a Russia-dominated union state and to accept its belonging to Eurasia rather than Europe. If not, the greater moderation of Belarusian protesters, in comparison to Ukrainian revolutionaries, may be of little consequence for Moscow.

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The continuing friendliness of Belarusians towards Russia, during and after the protests, may be insufficient to compensate for their dangerously growing lack of submissiveness. Unless Russia itself – and especially its foreign outlook – changes soon, Russian-Belarusian relations may be heading for a showdown. Perhaps, the best chance for a post-Lukashenka Belarus to avoid a fate similar to that of post-Yanukovych Ukraine is a major political transition in Russia. Such a Russian transformation would not merely have to replace Putin, but the Putinist domestic regime and foreign doctrine. Should it ever happen, a principal international reorientation in Moscow and a Russian retreat from neo-imperialist projects could, however, paradoxically also mean that Belarus's future will eventually acquire more and more similarities to Ukraine's present. If allowed to follow its own geopolitical path, Minsk will likely also turn to the West rather than continue its traditional pro-Russian course. NEE

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Moldova's oligarch mayors go global

CRISTIAN CANTIR

The experience of Moldova reveals that in Central and Eastern Europe's highly politicised and oligarchised environment, city diplomacy can be an easy tool for wealthy politicians suspected of corruption to gain more popularity and shield themselves from the judicial system. Ilan Șor and Renato Usatîi have been particularly adept in this realm.

Orhei, a medium-sized city about an hour north of Chișinău, is an unlikely rival to Monaco. Yet mayor Ilan Șor – one of the country's oligarchs – promised in 2018 that Orhei's residents would "live as they do" in the European principality. Farther north, in Bălți, mayor Renato Usatîi – yet another oligarch – claimed to have started a revolution in the city's contacts with the world. Such bombast is common from the two wealthy businessmen and political leaders, who have carved out independent centres of power in Orhei and Bălți and have remained popular there, frequently digging into their own pockets to entertain residents with a deluge of concerts and festivities. Both run political parties – the Șor Party and Our Party – and both have used charitable public events to enhance their profile. But in the pursuit of their ultimate goal of taking control over central institutions, bread and circuses have been merely one front.

The mayors have availed themselves of command over the mayoral seat in order to manipulate their cities' existing international networks and fashion new ones in the European Union and Russia. These diplomatic actions cement and broaden domestic political support, amplify narratives of political persecution in international forums, and advertise alternative foreign policy relationships as purportedly

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preferable to that of the central government, all to serve their ultimate goals of securing more political power at the centre and of avoiding criminal punishment.

Alternative sites of power

Normally, city diplomacy is a rather benign phenomenon. Mayors and city councils sign sister-city agreements that focus on economic and cultural exchanges and pursue investors. Central authorities often encourage or are tolerant of such initiatives, which rarely run afoul of major foreign policy choices or national security. Șor and Usatîi have themselves engaged in these pedestrian foreign associations; for instance, an Orhei delegation went to China in 2015 to sign a co-operation arrangement with the Shuangliu region and Usatîi met with an OSCE delegation in the city to present his perspective on issues like the Transnistrian conflict.

However, Moldova's experience reveals that in Central and Eastern Europe's highly politicised and oligarchised environment, city diplomacy may be an easy tool for wealthy politicians suspected of corruption to institutionalise international channels to gain more popularity and shield themselves from the judicial system. Șor and Usatîi have been particularly adept in this realm. Their main foreign policy endeavours have involved independent diaspora networks, city identity-building and branding events to claim an international position that rivals Chișinău's and therefore creates alternative sites of power, and, most importantly, visibility and access to foreign entities, including the Russian State Duma and the European Parliament.

Moldova's substantial diaspora has always been a source of political contention and competition in the country in light of the availability of hundreds of thousands of Moldovan votes abroad that could alter the balance of power in parliament and the presidency. Both Șor and Usatîi saw an opportunity in these untapped votes and used their cities as springboards to establish and fortify ties with diaspora Moldovans. In 2017 Ilan Șor announced the opening of Orhei's "first office abroad" in Bologna, which encouraged Moldovans living in Italy to return to the city by circulating information about jobs and living conditions in Orhei and, at one point in 2018, by extending a 500 euro bonus to those returning home. Its opening ceremony was also attended by Bologna city hall representatives, which lent further legitimacy to the venture. Attendance by these European officials was later used by the party and the mayoralty to advance a narrative of support for and popularity of Ilan Șor in the EU. Bologna soon became a centre for concerts and celebrations affiliated with the Orhei mayoralty and with the Șor Party; during one event, party activists organised a lottery of roundtrip plane tickets to Moldova. Șor lat-

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er claimed that, by April 2019, he had brought back about 100 families to Orhei, most of them from Italy, Israel and Russia.

Șor's explicit use of Orhei as a base for diaspora networks has been the more sophisticated approach of the two. Usatîi's networks have relied less on systematising Bălți's ties with Moldovans abroad. The Bălți mayor used similar tactics in 2020 when he announced that he had paid for a flight from Paris for members of the Moldovan diaspora stranded in the city because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, he has primarily congregated in person or online with the Moldovan diaspora in Russia, where he has sought to portray himself as a viable pro-Russian rival to the more powerful Party of Socialists.

New global identity

It is difficult to assess how successful these efforts have been, but the strategies seem to have been one of the many pillars used to improve the standing of these political leaders and their parties, both in the diaspora and inside the country. Moldovan authorities have been unable to interfere with the emerging diaspora networks established abroad because both Șor and Usatîi are not doing anything explicitly illegal, including the use of the city (in Șor's case) as a base for diaspora policies that are not coordinated at the level of the central government.

At home, the mayors have struggled to build a new global identity for their cities, branding both Orhei and Bălți as potential international hubs whose increasing attractiveness and modernisation is tethered to the names of their mayors. Rivalry with Chișinău – the dominant economic and political power in the country where Șor and Usatîi are rather marginal figures – looms large in these undertakings. Representations of invigorating ties with Russia have been the cornerstone of Renato Usatîi's city branding. In meetings with Russian officials, the mayor has pointed routinely to Bălți as a bridge for Russian businesses into the European Union. Speaking to officials from St Petersburg, Usatîi has voiced parallels between the status as "northern capitals" that both cities enjoy in their countries. Usatîi has also promised to turn Bălți into the country's first "smart city", competing with Chișinău over innovation and the adoption of international good practices. In 2016 Usatîi said Bălți would be a good venue for international sports events and, in 2017, organised an international investment forum meant, in his interpretation, to copy the feats Bălți had already recorded with Moscow, St Petersburg and Nizhny Novgorod. The city's increasing international presence would, as Usatîi has argued, bring more prosperity and attention to the city and away from Chișinău. And this presence would, inevitably, be tied with Usatîi's name.

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Șor's characterisations have been adamant about the city's "infrastructure revolution" and modernisation, which has been connected to Orhei's international appeal. City hall claimed at one point to have turned Orhei into Moldova's "summer capital" because of its bustling entertainment infrastructure and the party's and the mayor's websites have been plastered with pictures of brand-new roads and venues for socialisation. In light of this celebrated modernisation, in 2018 the small city hosted a "Liberty Summit" – touting its affiliation with the Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists in Europe (ACRE), with which the Șor Party announced a partnership. The mayor used the event to announce Orhei's transformation into a "city of international relations" and city hall hinted at the slow recovery of an erstwhile medieval grandeur. The mayor has taken credit for any form of development or modernisation, framing the city's identity as an antithesis to both the chaotic urban development of Chișinău and the inability of central authorities to provide reasonable quality of life. The Central Moldovan authorities have rarely reacted to these international liaisons since the incipient projects are not inherently antagonistic. Cities build identities and branding all the time. In the hands of oligarchs, however, these networks contribute to the amassing of power mayors seek locally and nationally and solidify regional urban identities in a way that could have long-term political effects and establish local fiefdoms that will be difficult to dismantle.

Autonomous platform with Moscow

By far, the most visible city diplomatic activities have involved Șor and Usatîi forging direct relationships with foreign representatives of cities, countries and international fora. These relationships have promoted the desired portrayal of recurring legal investigations as unfounded and politically motivated since the ambitious politicians have both had a variety of legal headaches. Ilan Șor is appealing a 7.5-year prison sentence related to his involvement in the infamous plundering of the Moldovan banking system in 2014. Renato Usatîi spent a sizable portion of his first mayoral term in Russia to avoid detention by Moldovan authorities, who have accused him of crimes like the alleged assassination of a businessman. Furthermore, city diplomacy has strengthened the oligarchs' claims of furnishing national-level foreign policy superior to the central government's.

Usatîi has been especially skilled at using the Bălți mayoralty to set up networks with major Russian cities. While in power, the mayor signed co-operation and sister-city agreements with Nizhny Novgorod, the Pushkin raion of St Petersburg and Moscow's western okrug, and met repeatedly with officials from the cit-

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Photo: Flick profile (CC) of the Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists in Europe (now European Conservatives and Reformists)

Ilan Șor hosting the 2018 Liberty Summit in Orhei Moldova.

ies, including Moscow mayor Sergey Sobyanin. The deals sought to enable Bălți to open trade offices in the Russian cities and offered scholarships in Russian colleges to students from Bălți. Throughout, Usatîi's extensive Russian dealings – hyped on Bălți's website and press and social media associated with the mayor – stood in stark contrast with the sparse interchanges that the ostensibly pro-western central authorities had with the Kremlin during the same period. The country's ruling coalition during Usatîi's first mayoral term (2015–2018) was itself dominated by another oligarch – Vlad Plahotniuc – but maintained somewhat close ties with Romania and the European Union and experienced a falling-out with the Kremlin. The mayor could therefore claim to have a better relationship with Russian authorities than Chișinău. Usatîi could also portray himself as the solver of long-standing problems that Chișinău could not untangle: in 2015, Usatîi visited the deputy director of Russia's Federal Service for Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance (Rosselhoznadzor) and criticised Moldova's Agricultural Ministry for failing to secure access to Russian markets, later announcing that fruit producers whose interests he pushed had been allowed in.

Usatîi's networks have expanded into broader political links: the mayor's Our Party signed an agreement with Vladimir Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) in 2017. Although the bond was along party lines, Usatîi took advantage of his double role as party leader and mayor to frame his accomplishments in Bălți as being part of a grander project to rejuvenate kinship with Russia, and to

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criticise the state authorities for fabricating criminal investigations to undermine that project. During a meeting with Zhirinovsky, Usatîi bemoaned the collapse of the Soviet Union and explained that his actions as mayor, including Bălți's agreements with Russian cities, revived some of the connections after independence. Furthermore, the alliance with the Russian party amplified Usatîi's claims of persecution: in the State Duma, LDPR verbalised Our Party assertions about the incompetence and anti-Kremlin bias of authorities in Chișinău and the hounding of Our Party activists, including mayor Usatîi. Despite LDPR's secondary role in Russian politics, Usatîi's networks in the country grant him an autonomous platform with Moscow, which continues to have significant influence at the top levels of Moldovan politics. Usatîi himself has claimed that any legal trouble that he has experienced recently in Russia itself have been at the behest of pro-Russian President Igor Dodon, who has his own connections in Russia.

Breaking the monopoly on relations with Europe

Șor's use of his mayoral position has echoed Usatîi's ventures, but the Orhei mayor has looked more towards the EU. In 2017, while Ilan Șor was under investigation, Șor Party representatives and, eventually, the mayor himself, visited the European Parliament to criticise Moldovan authorities for what they defined as political persecution. Șor's meetings often veered into discussions about his reforms as mayor, coupling alleged harassment by Moldovan law enforcement against him to his achievements as mayor. In 2018, for example, Șor organised a roundtable on the enactment of European practices at the local level and about reforms in Orhei, which was attended by five Members of the European Parliament from the European People's Party. Another MEP, Alberto Cirio, was a guest in Orhei in 2017, in a story publicised widely by the Șor Party, which emphasised the high praise the official had for reforms in the city.

The Șor Party also promoted its partnership with the European Conservatives and Reformists Party (ECR Party). Several MEPs, including Richard Milsom and Barbara Kappel, openly supported the Șor Party's run in the 2019 legislative elections. In 2018, the Șor Party's website trumpeted the fact that MEP Fulvio Martusciello doubted the findings of a report implicating the mayor in the aforementioned plundering of the banking system, which fit party narratives that the mayor's legal quandaries were rooted in political persecution. As a rule, the broadcasting of these complaints was accompanied by arguments that reforms in Orhei were at the forefront of the country's modernisation and that Șor's popularity was getting too uncomfortable for central authorities.

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While Usatîi's use of co-operation agreements with Russian cities sought to build his image as a leader who could revive ties with Russia, Șor's strategy was to establish – and tout – networks with European officials to challenge what he said was the monopoly claimed by some parties in Chișinău over relations with Brussels. A press release about the "Liberty Summit" emphasised that the Șor Party was affiliated with the third-largest European political family and quoted ACRE head Jan Zahradil's praise for "constructions, jobs, and fixed-up streets and roads" in Orhei. The paramount goal, therefore, was to break the impression that only a few parties in Chișinău could draw the support of – and impress – Europeans. Șor insisted that, contrary to accusations by pro-European forces that Brussels was suspicious of the Orhei mayor, he was garnering support for his reforms in the city.

Ultimately, these strategies have contributed to the transformation of the mayors into national figures. Ilan Șor won the Orhei single-member district during the 2019 legislative election and is now a deputy in the parliament. He fled the country in 2019, but continues to run the party from abroad, which remains very popular in Orhei and is growing nationally. Renato Usatîi won another term as mayor in 2019 after he returned to Moldova and has announced a run for president this November; he has systematically placed third or fourth in recent polls and is seen as the major pro-Russian rival to incumbent Igor Dodon. Neither of them has been subject to thorough legal proceedings regarding accusations lodged against them. It is difficult to imagine these feats without taking into account the international activities of these mayors.

The economic power and political influence of oligarchs has complicated the consolidation of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe. Nationally, wealthy businesspeople have joined legislatures and executives, and have occasionally taken the reins of power themselves. The cases of Șor and Usatîi reveal another dimension of the oligarch's political war chest in the pursuit of national-level power: city diplomacy.

In some ways, near-complete control over local institutions, especially mayoral offices, has given the leaders more freedom to forge global links and generate narratives about their global influence and popularity. Under normal circumstances, most of these diplomatic activities are legal and are in fact encouraged or supported by the national government as they can usher in investments and better governance practices. In a region tattered by weak institutions, where city diplomacy is hijacked by individuals who seek, above all else, self-serving political power and impunity, it can become a means to a more nefarious end. NEE

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China's footprint in Ukraine

A breathing space between Russia and the West

ANTHONY RINNA

With so much of Ukraine's foreign policy dominated by the theme of pursuing a multi-vector balance between Russia and the West, China's rise as a player in Eastern Europe has not been without implications for Kyiv. The Ukrainian government has inked agreements with Beijing in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative, yet has been reluctant to fully endorse China's far-reaching economic activities.

Rising among Ukraine's top foreign policy priorities is the geographically-distant People's Republic of China – a country with which Ukraine's relationship has grown by leaps and bounds in recent years. For Ukraine, China is a valuable source of investment as well as a third-party actor in a foreign policy landscape traditionally dominated by the Euro-Atlantic community and the Russian Federation.

Beijing, for its part, views Ukraine as a nexus between the European Union and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Under the BRI, Beijing has developed relations with Central and Eastern European members of the EU via the so-called "17+1" format, which facilitates Beijing's economic penetration into the European Union market as a whole. Although not a member of the 17+1, Ukraine still comprises an important geographic entry point into the European continent, as exemplified by the launching of a freight train line running from Wuhan to Kyiv in June this year.

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Regional hedging

Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, in particular has expressed positive sentiments on China's increasingly-salient place in Ukrainian foreign policy. Zelenskyy has stated, for example, that he intends to pay a state visit to China once the current global health crisis subsides. Indeed, even as countries have tended towards restricting the movement of non-citizens into their borders throughout 2020, Ukraine has taken a different approach by allowing Chinese citizens visa-free access to Ukraine for 30-day periods within a six-month time frame starting from August 1st of this year.

The loosening of travel restrictions for citizens of China wishing to enter Ukraine, in part a bid to boost tourism, corresponds to a significant rise in bilateral trade between the two countries. In the years immediately prior to Zelenskyy's presidential victory, Ukraine's economic relations with China grew significantly, particularly in light of a decline in Ukraine's economic relations with Russia. The volume of Ukraine's imports and exports to China, in fact, have comprised one of the sharpest increases in Ukraine's external trade in the past few years. The dollar amount of Ukrainian exports to China rose by nearly two billion US dollars between 2018–2019, while Ukrainian imports of Chinese goods increased by nearly four billion dollars between 2017 and 2019, according to figures made available by the Ukrainian Think Tanks Liaison Office in Brussels.

> Volodymyr Zelenskyy has expressed positive sentiments on China's increasingly-salient place in Ukrainian foreign policy.

Yet in spite of the mutual benefits that China and Ukraine derive from their partnership, Beijing's most important strategic partner – the Russian Federation – has proven to be a vexing factor in China and Ukraine's pursuit of their mutual bilateral interests in recent years. Russia's annexation of Crimea and its conduct of hybrid warfare in eastern Ukraine have had negative implications for Beijing-Kyiv ties, as well as other aspects of Chinese foreign and even domestic policy. Furthermore, China's rise as an increasingly important player in Ukrainian foreign policy may impede the Kremlin's ability to exert influence in a country it sees as being part of its own strategic neighbourhood.

To be sure, one of the overarching goals Beijing and Moscow have come to share in the development of their strategic partnership over the past two decades is undermining the US-led unipolar global order. Given the West's collective negative reaction toward Russia in light of the Crimea annexation, it may seem intuitive that China would support the Kremlin in its standoff with the West. The 2014 annexation of Crimea and the West's subsequent reaction against Russia, in

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fact, has been frequently, albeit simplistically, held up as a watershed moment for the development of the much-touted Sino-Russian strategic partnership. Nevertheless, the Kremlin's policies toward Ukraine have actually caused frustration for Beijing's interests toward Kyiv. Indeed, as Alexander Korolev of the University of New South Wales has noted, even while Beijing and Moscow's policies are largely compatible on a global level, the China and Russia engage in a great deal of hedging at the regional and sub-regional levels of global affairs. While a large portion of the Sino-Russian regional hedging occurs in Central Asia, and to a much lesser extent in East Asia, a significant deepening of Beijing-Kyiv ties means that China and Russia will potentially find their interests in Eastern Europe increasingly at odds.

Ukraine, for its part, welcomes increased Chinese participation in a diplomatic and geopolitical space sandwiched between Russia and the West. According to Serhiy Korsunskiy, head of Ukraine's Hennady Udovenko Diplomatic Academy, China's interest in Ukraine as a geographic nexus between the Belt and Road Initiative and participating European states has prompted China's interest in a peaceful and stable Ukraine, a goal that contrasts with Russia's aggressive activities in Ukraine. The Kremlin's annexation of Crimea in 2014, to be sure, was greeted largely with silence on China's part at the official level. Yet even while Beijing largely refrained from overtly criticising Russian activities in Ukraine, based on views expressed in media outlets affiliated with the Chinese state, Beijing may have actually been frustrated by Russia's annexation of Crimea and its hybrid warfare activities in Donetsk and Luhansk. Indeed, in light of the Crimea annexation and subsequent instability in eastern Ukraine, China cancelled several economic projects with Ukraine, in what was perhaps the first sign that political instability in Eastern Europe would negatively affect Beijing's economic interests vis-à-vis the BRI and the European continent. Among the most recent insinuations that China has been less than pleased with Russian activities in Ukraine are reports that during a meeting between Ukrainian Deputy Foreign Minister, Emine Dzhaparova, and officials from the Chinese embassy in Kyiv in this August , Dzhaparova briefed Chinese officials on the current situation on the Crimea peninsula while expressing gratitude to the Chinese government for its position on the Crimea crisis.

Diplomatic dilemmas

Aside from the negative economic implications the Crimea annexation and continued instability in eastern Ukraine have had for China, developments in Ukraine over the past six years have also placed broader Chinese foreign policy interests and principles under stress. Russia's actions in Ukraine have forced China to bal-

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ance between standing by its Russian strategic partner while maintaining its professed policy of respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other countries (and demanding that other states refrain from involving themselves in China's internal affairs). The explicit violation of Ukraine's territorial sovereignty – any historic and linguistic connection between Crimea and the Russian Federation notwithstanding – not only stands in contrast to China's professed respect for the sovereignty of other states, but also had indirect implications for its own territorial sovereignty. In particular, the annexation of Crimea, as Bloomsburg University scholar Sheng Ding noted in a 2014 report for the East West Center, raised questions over what implications the Kremlin's territorial acquisition would have for Beijing's claim to an inviolable grip on areas such as Tibet and Xinjiang.

For China to explicitly call on its Russian partner to abide by peaceful norms in conflict resolution demonstrates a difference in views over Ukraine.

From the outset, Beijing has urged all parties to pursue a diplomatic, non-military solution to armed conflict in Donbass and Luhansk. For China to explicitly call on its Russian partner to abide by peaceful norms in conflict resolution demonstrates a difference in views over Ukraine that, while certainly not indicative of any major fissure in Sino-Russian ties, are hard to ignore in the context of both China-Ukraine ties and the Sino-Russian relationship. To be sure, even as Beijing has taken up a more active mantle regarding conflict and diplomacy in Eastern Europe, Ukraine will likely remain firmly divided between the Euro-Atlantic and Russian spheres of influence. With limited influence in Eastern Europe, China will likely remain, to a large extent, in the background of overt geopolitical tensions, while Moscow's undertakings in Ukraine are hardly enough to place significant stress on the Sino-Russian strategic partnership. Nevertheless, China's pursuit of its interests in Ukraine is an issue that the Kremlin cannot afford to ignore, particularly as Kyiv strives to sidle up to Beijing more so as to create some breathing space for itself between Brussels and Moscow. Awareness of how the Kremlin's actions in Ukraine affect Beijing's interests adds extra dimensions of understanding not only to the dynamics of the Sino-Russian strategic partnership, but also the wider international (as opposed to merely regional) implications of the Crimea annexation and the continued conflict in Ukraine's easternmost regions.

Whereas China's position on Russian activities in Ukraine has caused complications for Beijing in terms of its strategic partnership with Russia as well as other aspects of Chinese foreign and domestic policies, Kyiv's desire to shore up ties with China has also presented its own unique set of obstacles in light of Ukraine's

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perpetual need to balance between opposing poles. With so much of Ukraine's foreign policy dominated by the theme of pursuing a multi-vector balance between Russia and the West, China's rise as a player in Eastern Europe, modest as it is, has not been without implications for Kyiv's political orientation. The Ukrainian government has, for example, inked agreements with Beijing in the context of the BRI, yet has been reluctant to fully endorse China's far-reaching economic initiative, in no small part due to uncertainty over how full-fledged Ukrainian participation in the BRI would affect Kyiv's relations with the West.

Delicate approach

Moscow, for its part, is eying the trajectory of China-Ukraine ties with interest, especially in terms of how a more prominent Chinese position in Ukrainian foreign policy would affect the Russian Federation's ability to exert influence in Ukraine. Despite a shared desire to undermine the western-led unipolar global order between China and Russia, Beijing is not entirely disposed to a Ukraine that takes an overtly pro-Russian orientation at the expense of closer ties with the West. Rather, it is more likely to be in Beijing's best interests that Ukraine maintains a relatively neutral position between Russia and the West, in no small part due to the geopolitical instability that stems from constant wrangling for Ukraine's geopolitical orientation.

> It is in Beijing's best interests that Ukraine maintains a relatively neutral position between Russia and the West.

Aside from the fact that a Ukraine that maintains balance between Moscow and the West while developing closer ties with China directly contradicts the Kremlin's interests in a staunchly pro-Russian Ukraine, any significant rise in Beijing's influence in Ukraine would constitute a potential Chinese encroachment in Russia's strategic neighbourhood. Both Beijing and Moscow have diligently sought to avoid situations in their bilateral relationship whereby one party has been seen as violating the other's strategic space, be it the Sino-Russian tango in Central Asia or Moscow's caution about stepping on Beijing's toes in the South China Sea. Nevertheless, the Kremlin has come to perceive the development of stronger relations with Ukraine as a sufficiently significant threat so as to warrant attempts to undermine the China-Ukraine partnership. As Sergiy Gerasymchuk and Yurii Poita have noted in a 2018 report for the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, the Russian government has actively attempted to discredit Ukraine as a stable and reliable partner for China by, among other things, engaging in information activities in the Chinese media space aimed at undermining China Ukraine ties.

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Though China-Ukraine relations were slow to take off following the establishment of official ties between Beijing and Kyiv in the early 1990's, China's bid to connect the better part of the entire Eurasian landmass under its economic vision has brought Ukraine into the fold of Chinese interests. It remains doubtful, however, to what extent Kyiv can rely on Beijing as a source of diplomatic and geopolitical breathing space between the European and Russian spheres of influence. Nevertheless, developments over the past six years underscore the fact that China is a rising player in Ukraine's foreign policy interests. For policymakers in Kyiv, the greatest challenge will be maintaining Chinese interest in Ukraine to the extent that China continues to serve as a stable and consistent source of investment while remaining cognisant of the effects that growing closer to China will have on Kyiv's relations with the West as well as the Russian Federation. In a similar vein, China will certainly find itself in continual need of treading carefully in its Ukraine policy so as to not be seen as disrupting Moscow's interests.

While it is unlikely that Beijing's pursuit of its interests in Ukraine would raise significant tensions in the Sino-Russian strategic partnership, there is no denying that Russian activities in Ukraine have highlighted differences between Moscow and Beijing at the regional level in Eastern Europe. Aside from mutual economic interests, the need to monitor how Russia perceives – and reacts towards – the rise in China-Ukraine ties is perhaps one of the most salient diplomatic issues that Beijing and Kyiv have in common.

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The Eastern Partnership enters a new decade

PAVEL HAVLÍČEK

Despite all the input from numerous stakeholders, much remains to be seen in the future of the Eastern Partnership. The region has seen less than an ideal start to the new decade due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its multi-level implications for the EU and EaP countries.

If 2019 was dedicated to the tenth anniversary of the European Union's Eastern Partnership (or EaP), 2020 has an intriguing question at its core: where to go next? This question loomed over the EU and decision-makers, state officials. The policy details of this question will stay with us until at least the next EaP summit in March 2021. While the 2019 celebrations concluded on a note that the Eastern Partnership had been a success, bringing numerous benefits to all six countries and the EU, there was also a general agreement on the need for strategic reflection and new ways forward beyond 2020.

This need was further highlighted by the crisis in Belarus, which caused additional problems for the EU's goals in the Eastern neighbourhood and somehow also undermined the Eastern Partnership. Unfortunately, to find common ground and a sufficient compromise that would suit not only the EU27, but also the eastern partners, proved to be even more complicated than originally expected.

Looking for a new agenda

During the summer and autumn of 2019, the EU's Eastern policy went through a complex reflection and revision process organised by the European Commission

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which allowed all stakeholders to brainstorm about the future of the EaP beyond 2020. This was not due to the change of power in Brussels after the 2019 European Parliament elections, but mainly because the EaP's reform agenda of 20 points for 2020 was soon to expire. Apart from that, 2020 represented another milestone for the associated countries and their bilateral relations with the EU and reflected the moment when mutual obligations, as part of the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (AA/DCFTA), should be delivered and updated. This is particularly the case for Ukraine, but also to some degree for Georgia and Moldova.

Several months of collecting feedback and determining the consensus among the EU member states, partner countries, EU institutions, as well as the expert community and civil society, talks finally concluded in the spring of this year. On March 19th the European Commission presented its vision titled "Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all". In addition to a strong emphasis on the economy and concrete benefits for the citizens of Eastern Europe, the Commission also set out new priorities for digitalisation and combating climate change. The EU's executive also came up with a new approach for promoting societal resilience in six Eastern European countries that should be better prepared to resist domestic and external shocks in the future. On the other hand, it acknowledged weak progress on the rule of law, the fight against corruption and good governance, which it promised to amend by closer monitoring and the incentivisation of reform implementation in these challenging areas.

At the same time, the Commission refused to engage in a highly political debate regarding closer political association or any kind of comprehensive vision for the region in the future due to a lack of consensus on the membership of Eastern European countries in the EU. It also did not acknowledge efforts to further differentiate between the EaP countries and gave strong preferential treatment to the three associated countries of the EU: Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova. These issues were left for the European Parliament, the EU members and the EaP countries themselves to negotiate and decide before the next high-level summit of the EaP, which was supposed to take place in mid-June 2020 at the very end of the Croatian presidency of the European Council.

Due to the lack of response to some of the fundamental questions related to the future of the EaP, some actors shared their criticism of the Commission's approach. This was particularly the case given the low emphasis on the fundamentals of co-operation and European values, which constituted the overall framework in the past. In the Commission's communication, the principles of democracy and human rights, the rule of law and the fight against corruption, the support for independent media, and civil society were mixed in between finance and banking

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operations, or in the new domain of public health protection, without significant hierarchy on the list of Commission's priorities. This might not come as a complete surprise, given the Commission's emphasis on pragmatism in international relations based on the 2016 EU's Global Strategy, but it became a subject of criticism from some member states anyway. Others, particularly members of the European Parliament, lambasted the Commission's unwillingness to promote further differentiation and move relations with three associated countries to a higher level, as Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova requested.

The European Parliament, on its own, took time to reflect on the future of the EaP, but then resolutely supported both of the contested issues of deeper economic integration and closer political association. Referring to Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union, it called for proper guidance and further steps for the associated countries and their reform processes and proposed inclusion for observers from the associated countries in the activities of the Commission and the Council, as well as an emphasis on the core values of the EU in mutual relations or security concerns. It recommended the inclusion of the associated countries in selected EU agencies and intra-EU programmes and initiatives, as well as sectoral integration in the Energy Union, Transport Community, and the Digital Single Market.

Resilience to current challenges

When assessing the current state of the Eastern Partnership and the individual countries, it is useful to apply the logic of resilience, which the EU sees "in the areas of democracy, society, economy, energy, security, cyber, media, environment, health, notably in the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic, and human security". The crisis of public health caused by COVID-19 has exposed numerous vulnerabilities in partner countries (and the EU) to domestic and external threats. The region has seen many old problems to become more exposed and worsened by the emergency.

In Azerbaijan and Belarus, for example, local regimes cracked down on political opposition, as well as civil society and independent media who were blamed for causing the pandemic. Dozens were jailed in administrative detentions, repressed financially or by other means. This authoritarian tendency was further bolstered after the August 9th presidential election in Belarus, when Alyaksandr Lukashenka's regime cracked down on the peaceful demonstrators and suppressed the democratic and fundamental rights of its citizens. Other countries, such as Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine, have a higher degree of social cohesion and co-operation between the state and its citizens, including civil society. Yet even there, local elites

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could not miss the opportunity to strengthen their positions and power over citizens, as well as take the credit for economic redistribution and providing their citizens with basic means of protection.

This was especially true in four out of the six Eastern European states which are supposed to hold presidential or parliamentary (in Ukraine, local) elections over the next several months. Moldova has recorded a high level of societal tension and polarisation before the crucial presidential election, not least due to miscommunication and chaos in society. Moldova alone has witnessed an escalation in relations with medical personnel – who have criticised the government for a lack of preparedness to face the crisis – as well as other conflicts surrounding freedom of speech and the government's negotiations for a loan from Russia.

To further add to the pile of domestic challenges, EaP countries continue to face problems with separatism and parastates which are not operating under the jurisdiction of the six partner countries. While the situation of the self-proclaimed people's republics in Donetsk and Luhansk proved immensely complicated, the relative isolation of Crimea made the spread of the disease in the peninsula also hard to tackle. In Nagorno-Karabakh, we have first witnessed a complete isolation of the local population and a lack of support from the international community. Later, since the end of September 2020, there was the complete breakdown of the ceasefire and the largest level of hostilities during the full-fledge war between Armenia and Azerbaijan since 1994. On the other hand, experts have identified Georgia's approach to Abkhazia as exemplary, since it allowed the local population to enjoy the benefits of co-operation with international organisations such as the World Health Organisation. The consequences of disinformation surrounding the pandemic, further exacerbated by Russian propaganda, presented another regional challenge as they continue to sow social mistrust and increase the divide between the state, its institutions and citizens.

The economic crisis hit EaP countries with small, open economies (except for Ukraine) particularly hard. Georgia had been the most affected of the six countries, with a 10.2 per cent decline in GDP, according to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Georgia has paid a high price for its early and efficient start of the pandemic, which protected many lives but crippled the economy. Armenia, Ukraine and Moldova reported around eight per cent decrease in GDP, while Belarus and Azerbaijan reported a 6.2 and 5.4 per cent decrease respectively.

On the other hand, citizens showed immense resilience towards these domestic and external shocks and could mediate the most severe implications of the pandemic. In Armenia, citizens managed to raise a significant amount of money for state authorities to implement the necessary measures and to provide protection to the most vulnerable groups in society. In Ukraine, the co-operation between

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civil society and the local business community managed to mobilise resources, provide medical equipment and help the elderly and sick. Belarusian civil society has for its part completely supplemented the state in raising public awareness, mobilising resources, as well as buying and creating personal protection equipment, including face masks.

Armenian and Georgian civil societies also delivered assistance to their citizens and offered their expertise to the state to confront the pandemic. While the region has seen a mix of positive and negative practices and responses from the partner countries, these generally reflected a long-term trend in the behaviour of state authorities and their interactions with citizens and civil society.

Looking to the future

Despite all the input from numerous state and non-state stakeholders, much remains to be seen about the future of the Eastern Partnership beyond 2020. The EaP will, in any case, have a less than ideal start to the new decade due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its multi-level implications for the EU and EaP countries. Nonetheless, while many things remain unpredictable, there are reasons to remain hopeful and to believe that the Eastern Partnership will remain a priority for the EU and its foreign policy. For that, the EU needs to meet several conditions.

First and foremost, the EU must realise that, except for the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership is the second most important and closest region in the world, in which the EU should take action – as it promised when the new European Commission called itself "geopolitical". It might also be the geopolitical and geoeconomic approach, which the Commission started using in Southeastern Europe, that might ultimately win the hearts and minds in Eastern Europe. This could get local citizens and elites on the side of the EU by pursuing closer economic and political integration, while at the same time decreasing the influence of third parties, such as Russia and China.

The EU's promised economic aid and macro-financial assistance to respond to the pandemic, while bringing in economic recovery in a mid- and long-term horizon, might present the right approach. Apart from that, the EU also needs to apply "smart conditionality" to push for pro-democratic and pro-market reforms, which could move EaP countries closer to the EU. At the same time, it is essential to carefully manage mutual expectations and support local pro-reform circles, including politicians, civil society or business, by sufficient financial and technical means. It has to be clear to EaP countries that the prospect of EU membership is realistically off the table for the foreseeable future.

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Photo: European Commission (CC)

On March 19th the European Commission presented its vision titled "Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all". In addition to a strong emphasis on the economy and concrete benefits for the citizens of Eastern Europe, the Commission also set out new priorities for digitalisation and combating climate change.

Before the next Eastern Partnership summit in March 2021, there should be more clarity on the political narrative and a serious offer to develop relations with the Eastern partners over the next decade. It is obvious that the European Parliament and several EU member states, especially from Central and Eastern Europe, are interested in keeping the EaP high on the EU's agenda and deepen the mutual relations not only on economic matters but also on political ones. However, it is crucial to convince the rest of the EU that this investment will pay off in the future and bring prosperity and stabilisation to the Eastern Neighbourhood, not only in Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova, but to all the EU member states. If the EU stands united, despite the challenges of COVID-19 and differing priorities, at the end of this decade we might see an Eastern Europe that is well-prepared for deeper political integration with the EU.

For the Eastern Partnership, the Belarusian crisis has posed a challenge on multiple levels. While nobody predicted a democratic and smooth transition of power, the brutality of Lukashenka's regime against protesters has surprised many. To a large extent, it has caught both the EU and Russia off guard. Even if the EU had been swift and firm in its reaction and rejection of the presidential election of August 9th 2020, it failed at pushing through a strong and credible sanction mechanism.

The EU's Eastern Partnership has been rather side-lined in the policy response to the crisis and offered only a limited response to the current situation. The same, however, cannot be said about the elites of EaP countries, among which is Armenia's Nikol Pashinyan, who has been among the first leaders to congratulate Lukashenka on his "victory". On the other hand, Ukraine sided with the EU's tone. The Belarusian crisis has therefore split the EaP countries and their societies along geopolitical fault lines.

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Furthermore, the situation in Belarus has demonstrated the limited capacity of the EU to face and counter Russian meddling in countries of its shared neighbourhood. Even if the EU's sanctions against Russia have been discussed, they have not yet materialised. It is clear that the EU still needs time to look for a credible and sufficient response to pressing foreign policy issues and it can be easily paralysed by the particular interests of its member states.

Czech and V4 contributions

During 2019–20, Czech diplomacy continued to be among the most active and reputable players on the Eastern Partnership front. After two high-level conferences in 2019, hosted by ministries of foreign affairs and industry and trade, Czechia came up with its influential non-paper showcasing resilience as the future framework of the EaP which was circulated among EU member states and finally endorsed by more than ten of them, including the Visegrad Group. After a public consultation in the summer and autumn of 2019, to which Czechia and the V4 countries also contributed, this approach was adopted by the European Commission as a new meta-narrative for the future of EaP beyond 2020.

The Czech V4 presidency in 2019–20 also had the EU's Eastern policy at its core. This was the case both at the level of state officials and their coordination meetings, as well as in high-level consultations among foreign ministries. The latter in April 2020 presented a Visegrad Joint Statement on the future of the EaP beyond 2020 and established the new programme *V4EastSolidarity* to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic in Eastern Europe, as part of the International Visegrad Fund. A ministerial conference of the V4 and EaP was only cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The high-level Eastern Partnership summit, planned for June this year, had to be rescheduled for March 2021, despite opposition from Czechia, the remaining Visegrad countries and other EU member states. While at least the meeting of Eastern Partnership leaders took place in mid-June 2020, there is still an urgent need to adopt a future agenda for the policy since the "20 Deliverables for 2020" are about to expire at the end of the year. This might provide additional opportunities for Czechia and the Polish V4 Presidency to shape the agenda and push for their interests regarding the content of the future EU's Eastern policy.

Even if the new long-term priorities, leading up to 2030, remain unclear, they will certainly reflect the new EU's focus areas of digital and green agendas, as well as resilience as a new framework for future political and economic relations. What is important from the Czech and V4 perspectives is that the newly formed basis

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for co-operation provides an opportunity to move relations with Eastern partners to a higher level. The Czechs should also place a strong emphasis on the basic values of the EaP and the deepening of the Euro-Atlantic orientation, especially with the associated countries of Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova.

The main challenge for Czech and Visegrad diplomacy will be to not only motivate partner countries to implement complex reforms and deal with security-related issues, but also to fulfil mutual relations with sufficiently ambitious content, especially if Czechia is to host the next EaP summit during its EU presidency in the second half of 2022 in Prague. The Czech government should keep this option on the table despite the recent changes caused by the COVID-19, but also turn this opportunity into a foreign policy success and create another Czech footprint, with new elements to its long-term priority. The V4 format of co-operation and the Polish V4 Presidency will certainly be a good ally and platform for such negotiations and coordination with other European partners.

Lacking consensus

The last year of the Eastern Partnership brought not only a strategic reflection on the future of the EU's Eastern policy but, more importantly, some concrete policy proposals for development over the next decade. Thanks to the complex and inclusive approach of the European Commission and the involvement of many European and Eastern Partnership stakeholders, including think tanks, the expert community and civil society, the public consultation process produced many new ideas. Some of them, such as the new overarching framework of resilience, to which Czech diplomacy actively contributed, are steps in the right direction. However, a consensus on the future of policy is still missing and its contested political narrative should motivate EU leaders to further debate this crucial component of the Eastern Partnership.

Another big task over the upcoming months will be the preparation of a new set of deliverables and the new framework that will be discussed among EU member states, the partner countries, and civil society. It will be necessary to determine concrete benchmarks and increase the EU's capacity to measure the progress of individual countries on the ground. Due to these difficult challenges, it might be beneficial to have the next high-level summit of the Eastern Partnership only in March 2021, when it becomes clear how and where to go next over the next decade. NEE

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Clan war instead of fighting coronavirus and corruption

LUDWIKA WŁODEK

Chaos is probably the most accurate word to describe what has been happening recently in Kyrgyzstan. Political pluralism in this Central Asian state is so advanced that the Kyrgyz people find it difficult to understand who is currently seeing eye-to-eye with whom, who is against whom, and who calls the shots.

Nearly a month has passed since the October 4th parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan, but it remains unclear who is actually holding power in the country. There were as many as three individuals claiming the prime minister's seat. President Sooronbay Jeenbekov announced that "as soon as the situation stabilises" he would be ready to step down. After the resignation of subsequent Supreme Council speakers, two of the deputies argued which one had the right to preside over the Supreme Council (the country's parliament). At the same time, the council was forced to assemble in a hotel, since on the first night after the election the actual parliament building was looted and set ablaze by rioters.

As Jeenbekov finally resigned, the council nominated Sadyr Zaparov to be the new prime minister. It was his third nomination, but the previous two were not accepted by most MPs. The president himself took his time to accept it. In the end it took place on October 14th when the Supreme Council, led by Kanatbek Isaev, the new speaker chosen the day before, voted on the cabinet with a quorum. Howev-

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er, the state of emergency has not been lifted in sunny Bishkek and the demonstrations have not ceased – in a country with six million confused citizens and where a second wave of the coronavirus is still taking place.

Loss of control

Chaos is probably the most accurate word to describe what has been happening for the last few weeks in the smallest Central Asian republic. It is the only republic where political pluralism not only exists but is so advanced that the Kyrgyz people find it difficult to understand who is currently seeing eye-to-eye with whom, who is against whom, and who calls the shots. The recent weeks were full of twists and turns and it turned out that nothing was what it seemed. Let's start with the chronology of events.

On October 4th an election to the unicameral 120-seat Supreme Council called *Jogorku Kenesh* took place in Kyrgyzstan. According to the Central Election Committee, two pro-government parties won the election. These were Birimdik (Unity) with 24.9 per cent of the votes, followed very closely by Mekenim Kyrgyzstan (Kyrgyzstan my fatherland) which received 24.3 per cent. Two other parties, the social-nationalist Kyrgyzstan (8.9 per cent) and the nationalist Butun Kyrgyzstan (United Kyrgyzstan 7.3 per cent), also crossed the seven per cent election threshold. None of the liberal opposition parties won a seat. In response to the results, concerned residents of Bishkek organised a rally in the main city square.

The official election results showed that the effort the new intelligentsia put into change went down the drain. They stated, however, that they would not give up without a fight. The example of Belarus was an additional incentive for the protests. Alyaksandr Lukashenka's regime is very widely hated among the pro-democratic Kygryz people since it is in Minsk that Kurmanbek Bakiyev, the ousted president, found refuge in 2010.

Initially it was mainly young, well-educated and peaceful capital city residents who attended the rally on Monday October 5th. Within a few hours the atmosphere changed. By nightfall various political groups sent their supporters to Bishkek and the rally turned violent. Several hundred people were hurt in clashes with law enforcement officers and with each other. A 19-year-old man lost his life.

During the night, crowds stormed the so-called White House, the seat of the Kyrgyz Supreme Council and the presidential administration. A fire broke out in the building. Some groups associated with the opposition, not necessarily the liberal or democratic ones, made their way to various prisons in the capital in order to free political allies. This is common practice in Kyrgyzstan: in times of politi-

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cal unrest, politicians who were imprisoned during the rule of the ousted government are freed. This time a dozen or so were released, including two key figures: Almazbek Atambayev, the previous president who was sentenced to 11 years for corruption in July; and Sadyr Zaparov, who over the next few days could potentially be the next prime minister of Kyrgyzstan.

Competing for the top seat

Zaparov was sent to prison for the 2013 "kidnapping" of the governor of Issyk-kulskaya Oblasti (a province). Zaparov co-organised a protest over the Kumtor gold mine located in the mountains on the southern bank of Lake Issyk-Kul. A Canadian company deals with its exploration. The demonstrators demanded more civil participation in its operation and took the regional governor hostage. The court decided it was Zaparov who was in charge of the kidnapping.

Zaparov had been an advisor to the notorious Bakiyev, so it was easy to blame him for everything. As soon as the indictment popped up, Zaparov fled the country. He took refuge in Cyprus, among other places, and soon after he returned in 2017, he was placed behind bars. The day after his release, Zaparov became the number one choice for taking power in the country from the then prime minister who had resigned. The weakness of the central authorities was becoming overwhelming. On Tuesday nobody knew about the president's whereabouts and the election commission declared the election invalid, but they did not announce a date for a new one (it remains unknown when or if the election will be held).

> Initially it was mainly young, well-educated and peaceful capital city residents who attended the rally on Monday October 5th.

A number of MPs gathered in Hotel Dostyk. As the then chairman had been dismissed, the proceedings were chaired by Myktybek Abdyldayev, a politician from BirBol (Together), a small party regarded as liberal. He resigned three days later. Despite the lack of quorum (fewer than 50 MPs present), the Supreme Council nominated Zaparov as prime minister. Soon afterwards the liberal parties of the opposition announced that the young politician Tilek Toktogaziyev would become the new PM while the freed former president, Atambayev, pushed Ömürbek Babanov, the former rival of Jeenbekov in the presidential campaign and the wealthiest man in the country, for this position.

On October 9th the president declared a state of emergency in the capital where another rally had been planned, this time against organised crime and its impact on politics. Nevertheless, the demonstration took place. Speeches were made by

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Atambayev and Toktogaziyev, who was injured onstage after being hit with a stone thrown from the crowd. The politician was covered in blood and was taken to hospital. Zaparov's supporters gathered nearby and burst into the rally.

Who is behind Zaparov?

In his speech Zaparov declared himself prime minister and assured everyone that he strongly cared about the stabilisation of the situation in the country. He went as far as to claim that Raimbek Matraimov belongs in jail. Matraimov is the former boss of the Kyrgyz customs services and is believed to be one of the most corrupt public officials in the country, and for that reason he has been nicknamed Raimbek Million. Zaparov's critics claim, however, that it was only for show since it was actually Matraimov's clan's support that helped him become the front runner for power.

On October 10th the Supreme Council held another sitting, this time in the government residence, Ala Arcza. Facing the resignation of another *Toraga* (i.e. chairman), two of his deputies, Mirlan Bakirov from Mekenim Kyrgyzstan and Ida Kasymaliyeva from Birimdik, disagreed about who would fulfil this role. In the end, Kasymaliyeva left the residence claiming there were people putting pressure on her and other MPs who were sceptical about Zaparov. Bakirov was presiding over the debate. His party also believed to have close ties with the Matraimov clan. During the proceedings, Zaparov's appointment for prime minister was officially confirmed. There was an immediate reaction from both the lawyers and absent MPs. They claimed the decision was taken in violation of the law since there was no quorum. It remains unknown how many MPs were actually present. We only know that the number was far from 120, the total number of MPs in parliament. Despite that, after the proceedings Zaparov began acting as if he was the fully-fledged prime minster and the government press service started labelling him that soon afterward.

> Dozens of young protesters were on the streets demonstrating against behind-the-scenes agreements and the close ties between often shady business and politics.

The same day Atambayev was, once again, taken to prison. This time he was accused of organising mass riots. President Jeenbekov also became more active. Over the weekend he met with a number of politicians, including the former president, Roza Otunbayeva. It was still unknown, however, whether he would support Zaparov as prime minister since he did not sign any nominations. In accordance

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with the Kyrgyzstan constitution, if the president takes no action within three days from the vote, the nominee's mandate takes effect. On the other hand, it does not provide any solutions to the case of dubious nominations.

There were dozens of young protesters on the streets, many with some foreign education. They demonstrated against behind-the-scenes agreements and the close ties between often shady business and politics. Their main slogan was keeping the most corrupt players away from public affairs. During the rallies and on social media, they called to drive Kyrgyz politics away from regional and clan-related animosities.

Clan wars

What happened during the days that followed also played out in accordance with previous events. Atambayev noted this in his prison correspondence passed through his attorneys that were posted on his Facebook profile. He mentioned the first Kyrgyz revolution in 2005, the so-called Tulip Revolution: "As a result of the hatred to the family-clan style of governing under Akayev, Bakiyev, the new president, promised that he would not let his relatives run the country. Yet, by the time he settled down as president, the whole country was taken over by the Bakiyev clam."

Atambayev discreetly omitted the period after Bakiyev's ousting when, following the short interim presidency of Otunbayeva, he ruled independently. Instead, he jumped to 2017 when Jeenbekov, whom he supported at that time, succeeded him. "He also, similarly to Bakiyev, swore to the entire nation that he would not allow for family-clan ruling and would keep his relatives at arm's length and fight corruption. Not a year passed that the country saw the Jeenbekov and Matraimov clans strengthen their position."

It would be difficult to disagree with Atambayev apart from one tiny detail: during his term things were not any better. Kyrgyzstan has only witnessed different political groups exchanging power. Once Askar Akayev and then Atambayev were in power, northern clans held the reigns. The southern clans took over when Bakiyev and then Jeenbekov were in charge. Politicians who prioritised qualifications and education were like meteors in Kyrgyz politics. But they do not last long either.

The Reform party was born out of a desire for change. It gained the support of many young and well-educated people before the election. The party is currently led by Klara Sooronkulova, a former judge of the Constitutional Court, who during Atambayev's rule openly called the law introducing biometric documents illegal. Her reasoning was due to the fact that the new law immediately deprived those who did not manage to get the new documents issued before the election the right

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to vote. She was removed from the Constitutional Court for allegedly breaking the regulations (she spoke about the issue) and the law was passed anyway.

Sooronkulova and her supporters are now calling for the breaking of ties between the clans and politics and they are advocating for a more transparent system. The problem is that they are not entirely free from suspicion either. Before becoming the leader of Reform, Sooronkolova co-operated with Melis Myrzakmatov, the mayor of Osh, the country's second-largest city, accused of inciting ethnic hatred between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks from the region. This could be forgiven especially since she cut herself off from her former employer. However, her secret pre-election meeting with Raim Million raises concerns whether it is even possible to conduct clean and transparent politics in Kyrgyzstan.

It matters not that progressive ideas are widely supported by young and well-educated urban dwellers – graduates of the American University of Central Asia and beneficiaries of European grant programmes – since whenever it comes to measuring forces everyone calls their regional buddies for help. Big city intelligentsia, once it is cut off from power, is left alone with their beautiful ideas.

"The boy who died during the demonstration was called Umudbek," says Elmira Nogoibayeva, one of the young protesters. "*Umud* means hope in Kyrgyz. Some believe his death may be a symbol. They say that hope has died again."

Translated by Justyna Chada

Ludwika Włodek is a sociologist and a reporter. She works as an assistant professor in the Centre for East European Studies at the University of Warsaw where she heads the Central Asian division.

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Prisoner's Voice – Oleh Sentsov

INTERVIEWER: TETIANA MATYCHAK

This interview was conducted as part of the #PrisonersVoice project of Internews Ukraine. The project aims at drawing global attention to Ukrainian political prisoners who were or are still being kept in Russian prisons. Download the free #PrisonersVoice application for your mobile or tablet on AppStore or GooglePlay to learn more.

TETIANA MATYCHAK: What, in your view, do the Ukrainian authorities and civil society still have to do to make more people around the world aware about Ukrainian political prisoners in the Russian Federation and the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts?

OLEH SENTSOV: They need to speak more. And we need a strategy for fighting Vladimir Putin and replacing his regime with a more democratic one instead of wasting time on negotiations with Putin about returning Crimea and Donbas. This is simply impossible. Those who believe in that, are naïve. I am not naïve. I do not think that we can come to an agreement with Putin on anything. We could enter into negotiations with him about the ceasefire in order to stop the killings of our soldiers. This is a "yes" and could be good. Also about the return of prisoners – that is a "yes" too. But believing that Putin will return Donbas – no. He does not want to return the so-called republics, the LNR and the DNR, to Ukraine. Instead, he wants to incorporate Ukraine into them. These are different things. And we have to understand that.

Do you keep in touch with other former Ukrainian political prisoners?

I keep in touch with almost all of the 11 political prisoners who were released within the framework of our exchange. We get together. I went to visit Edem Bekirov who lives in the south and it was great. What a wonderful pilaf he cooked for us! Of course, we also meet on September 7th, which is the anniversary of our release. This is our common celebration. We have good relations.

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We talk, call one another, and do things together.

Do you also communicate with former Ukrainian political prisoners from the occupied territories?

I talked to them and met with them, but I wouldn't differentiate or divide them. They all are hostages held by the Kremlin – either directly in the Russian Federation or through their subordinates in the LNR or DNR. Yet, I have more contacts with those whom I know because we were on the same plane which was flying us back to Ukraine. Now we are in the same information space. It has just happened that way.

When you talk to the media these days do you talk more about your work as a film director or do you rather discuss the problems of the Ukrainian political prisoners?

I devoted a larger part of my life to the country's public life than my creative activities. After the decision made by the State Cinema Council, though, I am again switching to the cinema sphere, and in the next months I will be immersed in it. Nonetheless, I will be following the developments of the situation of our political prisoners, supporting this issue and speaking up, if there is anything important.

The Old Lion Publishing House published several of your books. Among them are the collections of stories *Zhyznia* and *Marketer* and a novel titled *The Second One Is Worth Buying, Too*. On September 7th 2020 a two-volume book which includes your hunger strike diaries and stories from prison were also released. Why did you work with this publishing house? And how did they manage to persuade you to work with them?

Photo: (CC) European Parliament

Oleh Sentsov receiving the 2018 Sakharov prize in the European Parliament.

I felt comfortable communicating with these people, and they are very professional in their work. They also offered good financial conditions which was important because at the moment my only income is from books, and I can live off of that. I will also have films, which means some royalties as well. Yet, the reasons was not money, but good communication and co-operation with them.

On March 1st 2020, Ukraine launched a television channel called *Dim* for the Ukrain-

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ian territories occupied by Russia. Do you have ideas for some other ways to reach the Ukrainian population who lives in the occupied territories and Crimea?

The *Dim* TV channel will not be able to overwhelm the multibillion dollar Russian propaganda industry. This is simply waving your slippers against an army of cockroaches. We will not be able to overpower this. The point is not that I don't believe that this kind of activities should be done. In my opinion, they simply had to reshape the *Suspilne* TV channel (Ukraine's public broadcaster) and create a department that would broadcast in Russian for these people. And that would be enough. I do not quite understand why all this rebranding was necessary.

I think our public television should only get developed to be more powerful. Right now we are still faced with oligarchic control. There is a huge problem of influence of pro-Russian oligarchs who dictate their agenda to us through their media. We still do not have our own independent Ukrainian channel. What we have looks like a poor relative, and this is not right. Take the British BBC which is a powerful, independent and state-managed channel. It is paid by taxpayers. But why not? Why can't we introduce a similar scheme here? And create a television that would work and overpower the impact of Russian propaganda?

Dim is a very weak project. I believe that in the first place we have to fight for the occupied territories. In Crimea people say: "Oh, the Russian authorities came – good, we will come here. When Ukrainian authorities come – okay, we will go there". The same is in Donbas where there are some people who are aggressive towards Ukraine. In parallel, there are people who believe they live under the occupation and there is a "swamp" in the middle – when a new flag comes, they will support it. Those who want, will go for Russia. And that's it. You can launch 100 channels, but you will not get back Donbas. This is a wrong strategy, a wrong approach.

If we get these territories back physically, can we also get these people in our world of information?

Yes. This is a plan that can lead us to victory. For now we are just simulating the fighting. NEE

Oleh Sentsov is a Ukrainian filmmaker, writer and activist. In 2014 he was captured in Crimea and sentenced to 20 years imprisonment by the Russian Federation. He was released in September 2019 as part of a prisoner exchange agreement. In 2018, he received the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, awarded by the European Parliament.

Tetiana Matychak is a Ukrainian journalist, a media expert at Internews Ukraine and co-founder of Stopfake.org.

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Prisoner's voice – Oleksandr Kolchenko

INTERVIEWER: TETIANA MATYCHAK

This interview was conducted as part of the #PrisonersVoice project of Internews Ukraine. The project aims at drawing global attention to Ukrainian political prisoners who were or are still being kept in Russian prisons. Download the free #PrisonersVoice application for your mobile or tablet on AppStore or GooglePlay to learn more.

TETIANA METYCHAK: You lost ten kilograms in a week when you went on a hunger strike in support of Oleh Sentsov in prison. How did you manage to endure it?

OLEKSANDR KOLCHENKO: Before I started the hunger strike, I sent a letter to Vladimir Putin asking him to intervene. I did this because I knew what kind of person Oleh is, and I knew that he would go to the end. Yet, time went by and nothing happened so I had to take action. I decided to support Oleh in this way. However, I was not able to last more than a week. Police investigators said they would take me to hospital and feed me by force. So, I had no choice but to end it.

In one of your interviews you said that you did not need psychological assistance. Where do you find strength to preserve mental resilience after everything you have been through?

First, there is outside support, correspondences. I got to know a lot of people. There were books, and they also gave me strength. In prison, I tried to communicate with as many people as possible, while still keeping my distance.

No one could be trusted completely?

Absolutely not! But, perhaps, all these things helped.

Who supported you? People from Ukraine, Europe, the United States?

People from all over the world! When I was still in Moscow, my sister wrote: "We were living in a one-room apartment, and someone was staying with us for the whole time. Even strangers at the request of mutual acquaintances."

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And she wrote to me: "Half of the USSR has stayed at our place, and now they all support you."

Did you live in Moscow for a while?

Well yes, a year and one month. In Lefortovo [prison]. We can say this is a real estate almost in the city center! [*smiles*]

What books did you read when you were there?

I read more books when I was behind the bars than when I was free. Yet, I read less than I was able to because I was too lazy. In prison I read *The Adventures of the Good Soldier Švejk*. This book is great help for surviving in these kind of conditions. And I read a lot of other books as well – non-fiction and fiction literature, books on economics and so on…

Do you monitor the social mood in Crimea? How has it changed over the past six years? Do you still know people who live there? As we do not have any reliable survey results we can only rely on the stories told by people we know.

Some people I know are still there, but it looks like since 2014 people in Crimea have become more closed and atomised. Noone speaks openly about political issues. Even if someone is now disappointed with the choice they made in 2014, people find it difficult to recognise and admit their mistakes.

Do you still know any pro-Ukrainian people in Crimea?

Yes.

What would you recommend to them? Should they fight, speak openly? Or, just the opposite, hide?

It is difficult to recommend anything, everyone knows their own circumstances best.

There are many Crimean Tatars currently imprisoned in Russia. Ukraine is doing its best to set them free. Do you participate in this process in any way? Do you help or follow this process?

I follow it but I cannot help, unfortunately. I do not have such an opportunity.

You are not involved directly?

No. However, there is the Association of Relatives of Political Prisoners [of the Kremlin], and they are trying to make this process more open and transparent so that family members know what is happening.

Are people from other countries interested in knowing the conditions of Ukrainian and Russian political prisoners in Russia?

They are. But I heard from many people that in 2014 and in 2015 envoys of Borotba, the so-called "left-wing" organisation [Borotba is a Ukrainian communist organisation, supported pro-Russian separatists and Russia in 2014], were travelling around Europe telling people about the "atrocities" taking place in Ukraine, and that the so-called "fascist junta" had come to power in Kyiv. Therefore, some people who support the left-wing in Europe have a

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distorted vision of Ukraine, Crimea and developments in Donbas.

Was the influence of Kremlin propaganda at play here as well?

Yes, through their envoys. That is why we still have to explain everything that happens in reality here.

What would you like to see the most? More moral support from the Ukrainians, from the West?

There is enough moral support. Now the issue is collecting money to support those who are still imprisoned on the Russian side of the border.

Do you raise money?

Right now I do not have much of my own money. My savings are nearly finished. That is why I am trying to master a new profession – I am learning to draw with [Adobe] Illustrator in order to earn money. And when I had an opportunity to gather something, when I went to Europe and had money remaining from my per diems, I gave it to a person I know in Russia. It is Vladimir Akimenkov. He raises money both for Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia, and for Russian political prisoners as well.

You are known for your anarchistic views. Not that long ago the whole world was following the Black Lives Matter movement in the United States…

Supporters of the Maidan wanted to distance themselves from parallels with US protests, but these parallels exist anyway because this protest is really vast. People with many various beliefs are taking part in protests, just like was the case in Maidan in Ukraine. In the US people have also come out to protest against the arbitrary actions of the police, just like we did on the Maidan in Ukraine. They are trying to re-think their colonial heritage, overcome it – just like Ukraine is trying to do. This process is underway, but it has not been completed. For instance, in Odesa there is still a monument to Catherine the Great, who destroyed the Zaporozhian Sich. Yet, the monuments are not the most important thing; it is the colonial heritage which still exists in people's minds.

Who supports this colonial heritage in Ukraine?

This is Russia's influence. So agents of Russian interests, of pro-Russian parties and movements.

Oleksandr Kolchenko is a Ukrainian activistwho was convicted of terrorism by the Russian administration of Crimea in 2014. He was released in September 2019 as part of a prisoner exchange agreement with the Russian Federation.

Tetiana Matychak is a Ukrainian journalist, a media expert at Internews Ukraine and co-founder of Stopfake.org.

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The power of Ukrainian youth

NATALIA DOLGOPOLOVA, KINGA ANNA GAJDA,
ALINA MEKHEDA, HANNA SURKOVA

Young Ukrainians tend to put the values that are related to their lives first. These include family, health, well-being and love. They also value clear conscious, service to the homeland and having open debates on social issues. Over half declare that they feel responsible for the future of their state and want to contribute to it.

The first 25 years of independent Ukraine is already behind us. In attempts to help understand the changes that have occurred over this time, there are countless political, economic and social analyses, commentaries, recommendations and prognoses. The vast majority of them have referred to this period as one of wasted opportunities. In our research, which we have been carrying out in this regards, we focus on the role the youth has played in the democratic transformation and its future potential. By focusing on the younger generation of Ukrainians we want to show that we are not solely interested in political and economic development, but primarily the country's human and social capital. We have opted for this approach to better understand how, in the last number of years, young Ukrainians were shaped by experiencing life in a new Ukraine. Have they adopted a stronger sense of national identity, have they become more European? Are they closer to the European Union or Russia? These are the questions we sought to answer.

New national and civic education

Since the early 1990s Ukraine, undergoing a system transformation, has been going through a process of a national awaking. Yet, a lot of research into the dynamics of the public's attitude towards independence, which overlapped with eco-

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nomic change, military activity, and, of course, the Kremlin's aggressive foreign policy, show that Ukrainians are still in the process of building their sense of national and civic identity. In other words, they are still determining the directions of these changes.

It should be remembered that Ukraine is a multi-ethnic and very diverse state, which does not help in the process of creating one common national or European identity. The future of the development of the Ukrainian nation will depend on the readiness of society to self-organise. Young people will be an important element in this development by participating in the process of state-building and developing relations with the neighbours from the East and West.

It is also important to recall that the proclamation of Ukraine's independence in 1991 led to many reforms, including in education. While analysing this process, the authors of the report titled "Society and culture: A quarter century of changes (1991–2016)" wrote: "The process of establishing a new system of education [was] subordinate to the idea of building a civil society and closely linked with the implementation of European standards in the area of the protection of human rights and liberties." Indeed, this new Ukrainian education system was meant to shape young people's national identity and worldviews, and prepare them for active and creative life as well as self-fulfilment and civic responsibility.

Consequently, the ideas of democratic and humanistic education became popular slogans. To introduce these new ideas, it was necessary to establish new forms of teaching and teacher trainings, also in informal methods. In the view of many scholars, these goals have not been fully realised, and the authors of the abovementioned report stress that such goals are only practically true, as the so-called Revolution of Dignity saw thousands of people come to the streets and the majority were born and educated in independent Ukraine. These people are fully aware of their civic responsibility, know the price of freedom and want to take matters into their own hands. They also understand their historical role and how to act for the greater good of the state.

The views and attitudes of the Ukrainian youth have also been influenced during the All-Ukrainian Children and Youth Festival. This cultural event was established in 1996 with the goal of the socialisation of its participants. Initially, it was a small, local event, which in the 25 years of its existence has turned into a mainstream social project, whose aim is not only the promotion of artistic development of talented children, but – above all – the promotion of moral values and a platform where young people can discuss important topics. As a result, it has become a place for dialogue with the country's youth.

While looking at the festival's 25-year history, we can also see the changes that have taken place among young Ukrainians. Just as the formula of this event has

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been changing over the years, young Ukrainians youth has been changing, too. In the 1990s and early 2000s the cornerstone of the programme was Ukrainian folk traditions and their presentation to younger generations. These early editions aimed to increase a sense of patriotism among the youth, teaching them love towards the motherland as well as friendship and co-operation between different ethnic groups. Lastly, the festival focused on the rebirth of peaceful youth groups and the promotion of universal values, including tolerance, and children's rights.

Larger community

Year after year, the youth showed more interest in the topics that the festival was trying to promote. In time the participants became more active in discussions and more open in expressing their views on what constitutes modern Ukrainian identity. They were more interested in contemporary matters and trying to solve the most pressing issues through art. They were drawing, singing, performing onstage and dancing.

Since 2005 the goal of the festival has been to show young Ukrainians that they, too, can be members of the larger community: Europe. Thus, the theme of the 10th edition of the festival was European integration. It was titled "Europe is our common house". The European Union was also an important theme in subsequent editions: it was the leading theme of the 11th edition – which was titled "My homeland on Europe's map" – and the 12th edition – titled "We are Europeans". Clearly, the festival's organisers wanted their event to reflect the direction of Ukrainian foreign policy, which was aimed at European integration. That is why, young people who attended the event in those years focused on questions as: What does it mean to be European? What is European education all about? And what is the path to the future?

In the years 2008–2015 festival topics focused on the environment and the well-being of the planet. Additionally, they also touched upon the role youth plays in today's world. Through that angle, the organisers wanted to draw attention not only to the environment, but also issues of social responsibility. As we found out through our research, the intention of the organisers was not only to draw the participants' attention to the then rising authoritarianism in Ukraine, but also to the need of greater democratisation in decision-making processes.

When the festival started to focus more on young people's problems, the outbreak of the EuroMaidan and the Revolution of Dignity (winter of 2013 and 2014) made other topics seem more relevant. These events as well as the annexation of Crimea, the war in eastern Ukraine, the mass display of patriotism and courage of

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the Ukrainian people, inspired the organisers to opt for "Ukraine is my country" as the motto of the festival from 2016 till 2020.

In this way, the themes of the festival corresponded with the events actually happening. The 21st edition focused on what constitutes the Ukrainian nation, the topic of the 22nd edition was the traditional Ukrainian family, while the 23rd edition in 2018 focussed on civic activism among contemporary Ukrainian artists. The 24th edition concentrated on bullying among children, the inclusion of the disabled, and intercultural dialogue. Reflecting on this, one of our interviewees, Tatiana Gladchenko, who is the head of the Chair of Folk Art, stressed that: "If we analyse the work of all participants, from all of Ukraine, in the last 25 years, we can see changes. The pride of Ukraine, which was born during the Orange Revolution and the Revolution of Dignity is on the rise, as well as is the pain of the price that is being paid in war-torn eastern Ukraine. There is joy from Jamala's victory in the 2016 Eurovision Song Contest and concern for the future of the country. Young artists feel, through their soul and artistic means of expression, the presence and pass on their life experiences to others".

The 2020 edition of the festival was organised online. It gathered 500 participants from 13 regions of Ukraine. Its participants discussed topics such as e-government, ethical leadership, and fighting corruption in Ukraine. During the discussions young people also referred to the results of research on public opinion which was carried out among the Ukrainian youth in 2017 by the New Europe Centre and Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung in co-operation with GfK Ukraine. It was titled "Ukrainian generation Z: values and directives". The findings indicate that today's Ukrainian youth feel disoriented, but not lost. They also show that Ukrainian's youth is politically apathetic, which indicatively is not only a Ukrainian feature. Interestingly, young Ukrainians, if they are interested in politics, focus on the relations between Ukraine and the European Union or Russia. They are not as interested in domestic politics as much as they are about its relations with the outside world.

Europe is not a wall

The research we have conducted with participants of the last festival show that Ukrainian's youth in all regions are more pro-European than older generations. This finding, to be sure, comes as no surprise. Pro-EU attitudes among young people (age 15 to 24) have certainly been detected in recent years. Research from 2017 showed that 60 per cent of young respondents believed Ukraine should join the European Union. This is possibly related to an idealistic image of the European community that they hold. We could clearly see it in the submissions which were

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awarded by the EU Representation to Ukraine in the competition it organised in 2015 titled "Being a European". These artistic works show that for young Ukrainians, the EU is a community ("Europe is not a wall" was one of the slogans used) where everyone is treated equal, with dignity, equality and justice. Everyone has a right to express themselves and independently define and manifest their identity. This vision, however, does not translate into broad trust for European structures. Only one-third of young Ukrainians trust the EU, for example.

Young people in Ukraine have become more courageous and are no longer afraid to speak up and defend their views.

In our view, it is difficult to use these attitudes of young Ukrainians for the thesis that they have become European citizens. However, young people certainly favour Ukraine becoming more pro-EU. As many as 71 per cent of the respondents in our research think that Ukraine should aim to become a member of the EU, and its citizens should actively support this process. Young people believe that the public should contribute to the development of the country and should want to be a part of the state-building process.

Young people have also become more courageous and are no longer afraid to speak up and defend their views. In this way, they feel responsible for the future of the state. As one of our interviewees, Larisa Sivokon (head of the Organisational and Mass Work division and the director of the Earth Day Festival), said: "After 26 years of celebrating the Earth Day we can say that only at the first glance the youth has not changed and, no matter what decade, when they are at the same age they are interested in similar problems, regardless of which part of Ukraine they come from. They have also similar ideas as how to solve today's problems. Having said that, I also want to add that today's youth are different and they have become quite different. They have been changed by these extreme transformation years as a result of which they are more brave and do not hesitate to say what they really think. What is more, these words are followed by actions – I think that, thanks to this change, their work in different fields is more interesting, original and courageous."

Their vigour can be seen not only in their statements, but also in their art. Of a similar opinion is Halina Chaykovska, the head choreographer of the Earth Day Festival, who said that "the qualitative changes have become quite visible over the years of the festival … the topics discussed have become deeper and with more meaning, while the selection of words and movement techniques more complex and expressive … At the moment, the choreographic compositions of the groups show diverse borrowings, combinations of different styles and schools of dance art and their brave, but successful combinations – and this is indeed very spectacular, clear and exciting."

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Responsible for the future

Overall, young Ukrainians tend to put the values related to their lives at the centre. These include family, health, well-being and love. They also value clear conscious, service to the homeland, and debates on current social topics. Over half declare that they feel responsible for the future of the state and want to contribute to it. They are aware that their positions and that today's choices will have an impact on the future of the planet. Younger respondents feel the need to express their thoughts and fears regarding the future through different creative means, as in this way they have a chance to show the truth that is dear to their hearts. The generational change has been taking place among the festival's participants. We can see how the selection of groups participating has changed and the Ukrainian-language content has increased. In addition, the patriotically-oriented activities, prepared by the adults, have become replaced by the sincere patriotic activities of the youth themselves. Young people are no longer interested in simple forms of art. They want to metaphorically express themselves and depart from realism. They are attracted to philosophical debates related to searching the meaning of life.

Young Ukrainians, who are aware of their own identity and the impact they can have on the world, cannot be called *Homo sovieticus*. Nor even *Homo post-sovieticus*, in the meaning of the term that was assigned by the Russian philosopher Alexander Zinoviev. They feel they are responsible and unique. They are willing to manifest their individuality and feel no entitlement to a better world. Instead, they want to create it anew. They are not indifferent to social problems, but want to undertake discussions about them. These are sensitive and independent individuals, and courageous in expressing their views.

Russian sociologist, Yuri Levada, claimed that more than one generation needs to pass for *Homo sovieticus* to go into oblivion. If we put aside the desire to have social safety nets or some other provisions from the state, we can say that, in Ukraine, only one generation was needed for that change to take place. This was caused not only by a natural demographic generational change, but by the introduction of civil liberties, consent to individualism and its artistic expression. NEE

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

Natalia Dolgopolova is the main director of the festival; Anna Surkova is the director of the regional centre for children and youth, which is the organiser and initiator of the festival. Kinga Anna Gajda and Alina Meheda were experts involved in the project research.

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Armenian Syrians

From one war to another

MAGDELENA CHODOWNIK

Syrian refugees, who left their homes because of the war, are risking their lives trying to get into countries neighbouring Syria, as well as to Europe. More than 20,000 went to Armenia – the vast majority as descendants of Armenians who fled the massacres at the beginning of the century in today's Turkey. They lived there peacefully until another conflict re-erupted.

Today, Yerevan is full of new flavours and fragrances. While walking along its streets, one cannot help but notice Middle Eastern smells coming from the new restaurants and bars. In the urban landscape more and more Arabic-language signs can be observed: "Aleppo shop"; "Syrian cuisine" (next to the usual ones in Armenian or Russian). This Caucasian capital has been increasingly permeated by Middle Eastern influences caused by the complicated history of the Armenians nation, and wars.

Armenia is a small country of three million people, but it is estimated that around eight million Armenians live abroad. One of them is Izabelle Khloyan, whose ancestors lived in Western Armenia (today's Turkey) and fled the territory during the massacres of Armenians by the Ottoman Turks. Her family found safe asylum in Aleppo, Syria, just like many other Western Armenians. They lived there until the war broke out. In 2013, Izabelle and her two sons decided to move to Yerevan. Today, she works in what is unofficially known as "the best shawarma in Yerevan". Just as the new Middle Eastern flavours have been welcomed and adapted in Caucasian Armenia, so has Izabelle's family – her words and memo-

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ries are full of nostalgia when she recalls her life in Syria: "I miss my home and my social life there – my family, my friends, and the way we lived in our community. Now, they are spread all over the world," she admits. "I wish I can go back to Syria, but I know it is unrealistic. The situation is not going to change anytime soon. But I hope there will be peace one day."

Differences

Izabelle's sons decided to leave when the war was already in full swing. They were about to face compulsory conscription to the army. The family did not want them to join the military forces. Therefore, leaving the country was the only option they had to keep themselves away from the frontlines. Izabelle joined them shortly after. It took them some time to adapt to their new environment. "Now, we live here. My sons are here. There is no sense of going back," she tells me. "All we need is to go back to Aleppo to sell the house we still own there. And buy a new one in Yerevan."

Caucasian and Middle Eastern Armenians, despite their common features, religion and history, have been for generations under very different influences related to the very different places they have lived. While Caucasian Armenians were experiencing life under the Soviet Union – learning Russian and incorporating Soviet customs – those living in the Middle East communed with completely different cultures and habits. Therefore, when they began coming to Yerevan, both sides were forced to learn about each other.

Over 20,000 Armenians from Syria suddenly appeared in the country. "They were warmly welcomed, but everyone had to get used to them," says Anna Kamay, who helped the new arrivals to settle in Armenia. "Even their language was not the same as the one we use here, in Armenia. They had to face a lot of challenges, in addition to what they had already experienced."

Most of the newcomers came with Syrian passports – they did not have Armenian documents. While women, kids and the elderly applied for Armenian documents, most young men decided not to. "They would be obligated to go to the Armenian army," Kamay adds. "And they did not want to serve. This is what they were fleeing from in Syria."

However, a few of them, mostly farmers, went to live in Nagorno Karabakh, the disputed territory between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which has been the centre of a war for over 30 years, seeing new outbreaks this autumn. Some of those who settled in the unrecognised territory inhabited by Armenians would argue that "Syria was not and is not their war, but the war for the lands of Nagorno-Kara-

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Photo: Magdalena Chodownik

While walking along the streets of Yerevan, one cannot help but notice Middle Eastern smells coming from the new restaurants and bars.

bakh is." They expressed a willingness to protect the borders of their motherland and this included the small mountainous parastate; especially since several of them lived in a very sensitive but strategic place – the Lachin corridor (the corridor that connects Nagorno-Karabakh, officially within the borders of Azerbaijan, with the Azerbaijani enclave, Nakhchivan).

Several years have passed since Armenians from Syria started to arrive. Many asylum seekers continued their journey onwards – to Europe or even beyond. Some decided to return to Syria, especially in the regions of Latakia or Kessab, where the Armenian diaspora is still doing relatively well. The Armenian community never rebelled against Assad. Under his and his father's rule, Catholic Armenians were treated fairly well in Syria. But they were also a part of the regime's propaganda that needed to show how tolerant and open it was. Latakia, however, is known as "the bastion of Assad" – the city and its neighbourhood today is under control, but safe. In the end, out of all those who arrived from Syria, only about half (around 10,000 people) stayed.

Pride and patriotism

A few years later, when the conflict-weary Armenians from Syria settled in Armenia, finding peace and safety, another war escalated. Heavy fighting began on the border with Azerbaijan and, what is claimed by the other side to be Armenian

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land, Nagorno Karabakh. Everything since then has been about war. The mobilisation of men into the army began. Armenian politicians started playing the old card recalling the darkest pages of the nation's history – the massacres in Western Armenia – claiming that Azerbaijan, along with allied Turkey, are seeking ethnic cleansing.

Many men, with pride and patriotism, went to war to defend the borders of their Armenian homes. They reached for guns and rode to the front lines. Evacuated civilians, mostly women and children, went in the opposite direction, to the neighbouring and allied Armenia. They stayed in hotels they came across along their way. That is where their paths were crossing with that of the soldiers. Those who stayed by their homes were hiding in cellars and bunkers, trying to escape the bombing.

Life in Nagorno-Karabakh has come to a standstill. There was only one restaurant in Stepanakert, Samra, run by an Armenian family from Syria that tried to withstand the conflict. The owners, Hovik and his wife, sent their children to Armenia and stayed to support the army by baking bread for the soldiers, by feeding people who stayed. While everything closed down due to the bombings, this is the longest open restaurant in Stepanakert. Its kitchen closes only sometimes and only during the heaviest bombings on the Nagorno Karabakh's capital.

The war mobilised not only those Armenians who already lived in the Caucasus. Many of them from all over the world came to defend their homeland – from France and Lebanon, for example, where many descendants of the West Armenia massacre survivors also live. One of them was Tony, an Armenian-Lebanese, who has always dreamt of visiting his mother's land. He arrived to Nagorno Karabakh to join the army as a volunteer.

"The Armenian genocide will not be déjà vu," he said, also claiming that what Azerbaijan, with its ally Turkey is planning, is to kill Armenians. The national memory and the numerous tragedies they experience seem to connect successive generations in the struggle. And this memory, nurtured for decades, created a cross-geographic bond.

Vazgen der-Davidian is an antiquarian. He comes to the market in Yerevan with his stand to sell findings he came across in the Middle East and on the territory of the former Western Armenia. He, like many others, arrived in Armenia from Aleppo, when the war in Syria broke out. "All I sell here is my own collection. I know I am selling it for less than what it is worth, but I am happy anyway." he explains to me. "Here is a bracelet from the Urartian Kingdom. Our Western Armenia", he adds sentimentally. NEE

Magdelena Chodownik is a freelance journalist, photographer and producer.

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The fleeting memory of December 1970

PIOTR LESZCZYŃSKI

In December 1970 violent riots broke out in the Polish cities of Szczecin and Gdynia, while in Gdańsk strikers surrounded the seat of the Polish United Workers' Party. Clashes with militia erupted and the central committee of the communist party decided to brutally quell the rebellion. These events became an important founding myth for the struggle against the communist authorities. Fifty years later, how are these events remembered?

In December 1970, 14 years had passed since Wiesław Gomułka became the first secretary of the communist party in the People's Republic of Poland. At that time, both the thaw of 1956, which allowed Gomułka to return to power, and hope for reforms that he promised (the so-called Polish way to socialism) were already a fading memory. It was not the right moment for a nostalgic journey to the past. And with Christmas just around the corner, everyone was busy stockpiling goods that were hard to come by.

Unrest

Brushing aside the deteriorating social mood, the authorities decided to raise food prices, which, in a communist state, were regulated. Poles had feared these increases, especially the price of meat. When the price of bread went up, tongue-in-cheek comments were made that at least "locomotives were still getting cheaper".

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These brutal "price regulations" – as the communists called them – as well as their timing in the pre-Christmas season, led to an unrestrained outburst of an already growing public discontent. The latter was a clear result of declining living standards under Gomułka's rule. Once the bad news was shared with the public by official media outlets, unrest started to brew in northern Poland. This region, which is located along the Baltic Sea coast, was home to many state-owned enterprises, including the huge shipyards where temporary breaks at work were introduced by the workers. The workers also set up strike committees to enter into talks with the authorities. Clearly, they were driven by the belief that dialogue would either lead to a suspension of the planned price increases or bring about a rise in the workers' pay. On the side of the communist authorities, however, there was no will to talk or concede.

As a result, violent riots broke out in the cities of Szczecin and Gdynia, while in Gdańsk strikers surrounded the headquarters of the Provincial Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party. Clashes with militia erupted, the building was burned down and the streets became scenes of violent fighting. The communist authorities, still headed by Gomułka, called the protests an anti-socialist revolt and the central committee of the communist party decided to quell the rebellion immediately. They were joined by official radio and television stations which started calling the workers to end the strikes and return to work.

In parallel, the army divisions arrived to the region with an order to pacify the strikers and re-establish law and order. The shipyard workers, who were the largest labour group in the region, obeyed the orders and returned to work. However, when they arrived at the premises they were faced by military cordons sent there to separate the workers from the shipyard. Shots were fired and some of the workers were injured or killed. With as many as 45 workers killed in Szczecin, Gdynia, Gdańsk and Elbląg, this was the most tragic event in the region's contemporary history, and the bloodiest one since Second World War.

Shattered hope

The strikers were punished with reprisals. Many lost their jobs and hundreds were detained. Gomułka was also pushed aside and eventually lost power. He was replaced by Edward Gierek who became the new leader of the communist party. Over the next couple of months, the mood became calmer, which allowed the public to, once again, put trust in the communist authorities. With Gierek a new era began with more economic prosperity, which was financed largely by funds borrowed from the West.

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Evidently, the experience of December 1970 shattered any hope that the Polish public placed in communism. The bloody clashes with workers, albeit not the first ones in post-war history (in 1956 similar events, supposedly ignited by party dignitaries, took place in Poznań), left the society with no illusions. The reality was a far cry from what they expected after 25 years of building communism. In addition to the fatalities, several thousands were injured or badly beaten by the militia. This experience was so widespread that almost every family living in the region knew someone, be it a cousin or a neighbour, who was either injured or beaten up.

December 1970 became an important founding myth for this part of Poland. This was especially true for Szczecin, which was previously devoid of its own history. After the war and the establishment of Poland's new borders, the city became home to many newcomers. They arrived from different parts of the country as well as from the territories of former Poland's borderlands (*Kresy*). Early on they could not associate with their new place of residence. The only experience they shared together was the strenuous rebuilding of the ruined city. Yet this myth got blurred during the depressing 1960s. Consequently, Szczecin remained somewhat detached from the rest of the country. Residents, when going on holiday to other parts of the country, often said they were going to Poland (sic!). In many oral history testimonies from that period, you can hear expressions such as "the Republic of Szczecin", which shows that the residents finally started to feel the city was their home.

Impact and faith

In other cities the situation was no different and the experience of this extremely difficult time was rooted in the memory of the people living in Gdynia or Gdańsk. The unrest turned into one of the main topics of dinner conversations, while the story of the shipyard workers and the fate of their families were secretly passed down to younger generations. Despite being virtually non-existent in official media discourse, the legend of the workers' rebellion continued to grow and affect the next generation of leaders. Among them was Donald Tusk, the former prime minister of Poland and a democratic opposition activist in the 1980s. In one interview, he admitted that, at the time of the riots, he was still a young boy, and on his way home from school he witnessed scenes that he could not forget for the rest of his life. Evidently, anyone capable of telling right from wrong did not have any doubts about which side to support. Many of these people forever remained under the influence of those events.

The memory of the December 1970 riots remained alive throughout the whole communist period. Despite the ban imposed by the party, illegal celebrations were

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organised to commemorate the victims. People were demanding the truth about the repressions. Year after year the number of people participating at the rallies was getting bigger and bigger. It showed how significant the memory of the workers' protests was to the people.

The largest rally took place in 1979. It was organised on the ninth anniversary of the riots, and around 5,000 people assembled beside the shipyard gate in Gdańsk. Thanks to this massive gathering, the democratic opposition gained faith in its power, which was further reinforced by the election of a Polish cardinal, Karol Wojtyła, as the new pope. His first papal visit, as John Paul II, was to Poland and in the summer of 1979. His words: "Be not afraid!" provided a huge boost to both the opposition and society at large. They entered Polish history books as a breakthrough moment.

By the end of summer 1980, a new series of strikes broke out in Poland, along the Baltic coast. Once again, like ten years earlier, they were caused by the worsening economic situation. Strike committees were established again, yet, unlike December 1970, the shipyard workers did not come out on the streets. This time they stayed in the shipyards where they did a sit-in strike. The brilliant film by the Oscar-winning Polish director, Andrzej Wajda, titled *Man of Iron* is probably the best artistic expression of the atmosphere of this time.

The monument and today's conflict

On August 17th 1980 a list of demands were issued by the Inter-factory Strike Committee to the communist authorities. It included 21 postulates – the first one being the right to establish free trade unions. One of the other demands was for a monument to be built for the fallen shipyard workers. It was constructed, in the form of three gigantic crosses, which were erected in the centre of the square to symbolize the first three fallen shipyard workers. Polish poet and Nobel Laureate in Literature, Czesław Miłosz, prepared a special dedication. It reads:

You who wronged a simple man,
Bursting into laughter at the crime,
Do not feel safe. The poet remembers.
You can kill one, but another is born.
The words are written down, the deed, the date. […]

[Translated by Richard Lourie]

The monument immediately became an integral part of Gdańsk's landscape and remains so today. It is seen as a symbol of the fight for dignity and freedom. During the ceremony of its unveiling in December 1980, which was attended by a

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crowd of over one hundred thousand people, Lech Wałęsa, the leader of the trade union Solidarność and the whole democratic movement, said the following words: "It was a year ago that here, in this very place, I promised you that on the 10th anniversary of the December riots we would see a monument. If not in a different way, then we shall all fetch rocks and gather them here for the monument to stand".

Later, the monument became a landmark on Gdańsk's tourist map. But it has also remained a location where new demonstrations would be organised. It is also here that, in 1987, during his first visit to Gdańsk, Pope John Paul II prayed in complete solitude as cordons of militia set up barricades to block ordinary people from attending.

The new building of the European Solidarity Centre, an institution that was created based on the idea of the former opposition leaders of the Solidarity movement, was opened here in 2014. Its goal is not only to commemorate the historic events that happened in Gdańsk's shipyard and on the city's streets in 1970 and 1980, but to show the value and uniqueness of the non-violent transition to democracy that was initiated by Poland in 1989. The establishment of this museum and public institution, a certain kind of modern agora, would not have been possible had it not been for the determination and dedication of the late mayor of Gdańsk, Paweł Adamowicz. Today, six years after its opening and one year after Adamowicz's murder during a public charity event, the centre remains a popular destination for visitors and researchers from all over the world.

The monument to the fallen shipyard works is seen as a symbol of the fight for dignity and freedom.

Whose memory?

What remains of the memory of December 1970 today? Without a doubt, the current interpretation and memory of these events, which took place half a century ago, are now victim to the deep political conflicts that have been dividing Poles in recent years. The division of the former democratic opposition movement into a liberal and a national fraction has dominated not only Polish political life in the last thirty years, but has also impacted the assessment of historical events.

Historical policy has proved an effective weapon in political fights. As a result, parallel anniversary celebrations have now become the new normal. We now see former activists of the Solidarity trade union associated with the Law and Justice party, standing far away from those who are against the current government and support the parliamentary opposition. Also, the loneliness of Lech Wałęsa, the leg-

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endary Solidarity hero of both 1970 and 1980, has become a very powerful sign of our time. As a die-hard revolutionary, and probably still the most recognisable Pole in the world, Wałęsa is now all by himself when he lays a flower wreath at the foot of the monument to the fallen shipyard workers.

The current interpretation and memory of these events are now victim to the deep political conflicts that have been dividing Poles in recent years.

Evidently, the young Poles do not want to be a part of their parents' and grandparents' conflict. They refuse to participate in the dispute, which they see as both confusing and fruitless. This is understandable. For them, the year 1970 or 1980 seems as distant as the French Revolution or the outbreak of the Second World War. They were born in a free and democratic country and are unable to understand what statutory price regulations, goods shortages, empty shops, or the general dullness of the Polish People's Republic was like. They have no memory of censorship, or fear of the authorities and the militia. In this way, one of the crowning moments in Poland's recent history may be relegated to memory and lost forever.

Translated by Justyna Chada

Piotr Leszczyński is the publisher and editor of *Przegląd Polityczny* (*Political Review*), based in Gdańsk.

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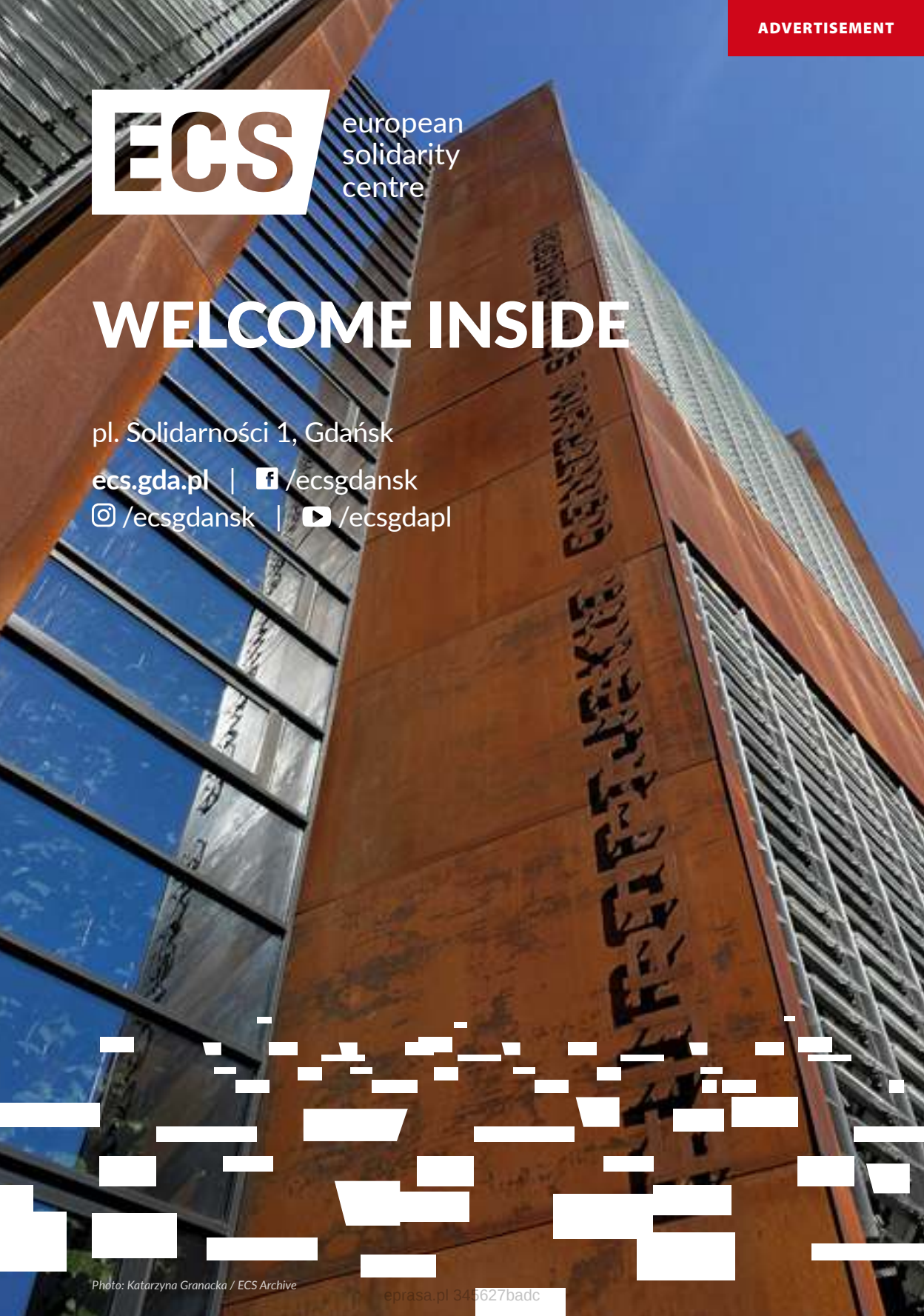

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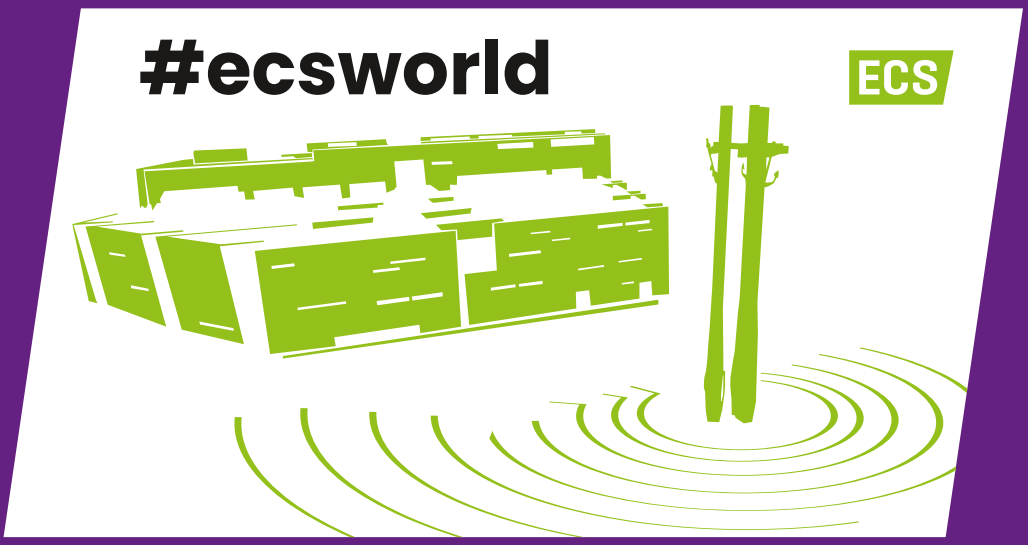

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EASTERN CAFÉ

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The line between politics and friendship

SIMONA MERKINAITE

Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism and *Twilight of Democracy. The Failure of Politics and the Parting of Friends*. By Anne Applebaum. Publisher: Penguin/ Allen Lane, London, 2020.

The story behind the title of Anne Applebaum's latest book is a peculiar one. It is sold under two different subtitles: *Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism* and *Twilight of Democracy: The Failure of Politics and the Parting of Friends*, since the publishers apparently could not agree on what the book is about. The later, in my view, is a more accurate subtitle and captures well what is unique about the book and

makes it stand out in the growing amount of works on the crisis of democracy. Applebaum, a celebrated journalist and historian, puts aside all her scholarly expertise and exposes the effect of democratic turmoil on a personal level. Her book challenges us to ask whether the looming democratic crisis can be understood through personal experiences, such as friendship, and if it can be salvaged by friendship?

Friendships that overcome political divides

The book opens with a scene from December 31st 1999, somewhere in the Polish countryside, where a large party takes place to celebrate the begin-

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ning of the new millennium. It involves a colourful mix of people from different countries, backgrounds and political positions. The New Year's fireworks are the echo of the story that goes back at least 10 years to 1989. The scene of the party portrays a strong sense of optimism of the good things to come: life in a newly renovated house and new, unexpected friendships among people previously separated by imposed ideological divides. The space of the renovated house is a metaphor for a new, shared public environment where all kinds of people belong, and an anticipation of a better future.

On the margins of this story about encounters among friends, spread through the first part of the book, is a looming question about the parallels between political and private, democracy and friendship. Friendships rely on a certain level of trust. We trust our friends to be truthful with us and accept a certain degree of honesty, even if it feels uncomfortable or hurtful. Socrates, by far is the most famous example in the history of western politics as he tried to make friends out of Athens's citizenry. We learn that the democratic space of common dialogue disintegrates, like friendships, when people keep things from one other. It becomes primitive and depersonalised as the joys of sharing a conversation, an experience or a grievance is impaired. It is no surprise then, that in politics, the dismantling of trust – in science, in media, in fellow citizens – is (and always was) one of the main strategies of authoritarians.

Dialogue disintegrates, like friendships, when people keep things from one other. It becomes primitive and depersonalised as the joys of sharing a conversation, an experience or a grievance is impaired.

Partition of friends

The question that preoccupies Applebaum is what happened. Like with any breakup, the question of "is it me, or is it them?" arises. Politically, this question can be asked as, "why has politics become (again) a force capable of breaking up friendships and why people, who merely 20–30 years ago together courageously defended freedom and human rights and spoke truth to power, now display resentment towards democratic inclusivity, are blindly spreading lies and actively dismantling independent institutions and the media?"

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The question itself requires us to critically reflect upon one's own circumstances and convictions. What made friends in the past 20–30 years, in Applebaum's words, was the common value of democracy over authoritarianism, political freedom and human rights over dictatorship. Since the author still finds herself on the side of democratic conduct, the answer seems to lean towards "it is them".

However, friendships imply a certain degree of honesty – in this case the authentic belief in and value of democracy, pluralism and rights. Thus, maybe this partition shows us the lack of authenticity when it comes to political values and, in Ivan Krastev's words, an imitation of progress towards the democratic way of life. The political changes brought about by 1989 were met by some as a force of history moving on, leaving you with no choice but to adapt, and prompting resentment towards cultural, intellectual and political elites that emerged from the struggles of Soviet disintegration and democratic transformation. The book provides a compelling overview of reasons and motives as to why people change their political stances, making them deeply personal (such as unfulfilled political and personal ambitions, resentment towards the success of others, the feeling of being left behind and misunderstood, or struggling to find a place in the new order of things).

History serves as an example of friendships that sparked in the most unexpected of places. At the time of great political divides, and against all odds, it could be among perpetrators and victims, or among those divided by faith, race or nationality. It seems natural to assume that once these odds were removed in the post-1989 world, friendships would flourish (and, as Applebaum shows, for at least a decade they did). Yet if we look at friendship from the perspective of the German legal theorist Carl Schmitt, the opposite was bound to happen. Schmitt formed the distinction between friends and enemies as the *raison d'etre* of politics. The common goal of dismantling the Soviet empire made some unlikely friendships and even when they were authentic, political friendships could not last much longer past 1989. The aims which brought about unlikely friendships the post-Soviet space, including accession to the European Union and NATO were reached, new lines of division were bound to appear. The polarisation that we are now witnessing may be viewed as a struggle of redrawing the lines between political friends and enemies.

New dividing lines

Applebaum, in her book, does a great job conveying the global effects of 1989 and the democratic transition across post-communist countries. It is made

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clear that for people like John O'Sullivan, the *National Review* editor-at-large, or Laura Ingraham, a passionate supporter of Trump, liberal principles were valued for solely instrumental reasons – they were useful for asserting the superiority of US power. This superiority is now reframed as white power of pro-Christian America, drawing new enemy lines.

Today's leaders play into these new lines of division, taunting racism, antisemitism and homophobia, and moulding prejudices into political projects. The democratic process of dialogue and conversation is the exception, while politics features more nepotism, dishonesty, promoted fictions and corruption in the struggle for power. In addition, people like Boris Johnson, whom we first come upon during his days as the Brussels correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph*, felt exuberance in reintroducing elements of excitement to politics, by capitalising on conflict between faceless, bureaucratic Europe and the authentic spirit of Britons. It brings a level of urgency and excitement to politics, the kind Applebaum recalls, from 1980s and 90s as countries in transition attracted all sorts of people – writers, scholars, artists – exactly because politics was exciting, with public and private conversations filled with paramount questions to do with morality, humanity, and the best form of governance.

It was Schmitt who cautioned against the entanglement of personal and political friends and enemies, which can be an important reminder while reading Applebaum's book. In his essay, "My last meeting with Heidegger in Rome, 1936" philosopher Karl Lowith recalls his meeting with Martin Heidegger. Lowith, who was forced to leave Germany due to the implementation of a law removing Jewish academics and civil servants, notes that during the meeting it obviously did not occur to Heidegger that his swastika was out of place while spending the day with Lowith (who, during his time at Freiburg, not only studies under Heiddeger, but also looked after Heiddeger's children, signalling a close past relationship between the two). Pride while wearing the party insignia on one's lapel illustrates a kind of personal detachment, the separation between personal friendship and political enemies, which Lowith summarises as a burden and a sign of an intellectual who is "radical when it comes to ideas and indifferent in practical fact".

Today's leaders play into these new lines of division, taunting racism, antisemitism and homophobia, and moulding prejudices into political projects.

Political engagement through personal detachment seems to also explain the partition of those who were connect-

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ed by ideas. The case of Maria Schmidt, who, despite being the director of the House of Terror museum in Budapest, an institution that is supposed to explore the horrors of tyranny, imitates the divisive language and promotes conspiracies. It explains how family, like brothers Jarosław and Jacek Kurski (the former is the deputy editor of the liberal *Gazeta Wyborcza* while the latter is the head of Polish state-run television) end up on opposing sides of the current political regime in Poland. Or how mothers of gay children join anti-LGBTQ+ rights campaigns; how qualified people get fired not based on incompetence, but for political opinions they hold; or how smear campaigns against friends are orchestrated.

What is identified as hypocrisy in the book may indeed be understood as a form of detachment from personal relationships. Yet, in the end, Applebaum's book is a reminder that the kind of political justifications come at deeply personal costs. As such it highlights, through a rather gentle style, a much bigger challenge ahead: how to re-examine the relationship between the personal and the political, and its impact and consequences for the democratic way of life.

Simona Merkinaite is a Rethinking Europe programme expert with the Open Lithuania Foundation and is doing a PhD at Vilnius University.

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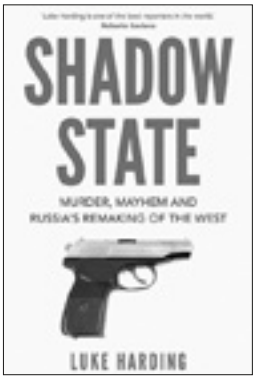
Spies not like us

ADAM REICHARDT

Shadow State. Murder, Mayhem and Russia's Remaking of the West. By: Luke Harding. Publisher: Guardian Faber, London, 2020.

On August 20th this year, news broke that Alexei Navalny, the de facto leader of the opposition against Vladimir Putin in Russia, had fallen seriously ill while on a flight from Tomsk to Moscow. Videos of Navalny screaming and howling in pain quickly, and suspiciously, found their way on to social media. Navalny's flight made an emergency landing in Omsk, in southwestern Siberia, where he was rushed to the hospital for treatment and ultimately put in a medically-induced coma.



For many observers, there was little doubt as to what happened to Navalny. An outspoken critic of the Putin regime and an active anti-corruption campaigner in Russia, Navalny essentially put a target on his back. After some negotiations, Navalny was airlifted to Berlin for emergency treatment and has since made a partial recovery. It was later determined that he was poisoned by *novichok* – a chemical nerve agent that was developed and created by a military lab in the Soviet Union.

Deadly mission

The attack on Navalny was another illustration on how the "shadow state" operates – as described by Luke Harding in his latest book titled *Shadow State. Murder, Mayhem and Russia's Remaking of the West*. Harding's book is a masterpiece of stories and accounts on how this process of security organisations, secret agents, deceptions, manipulations and high-level assassinations characterise

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one of the dark sides of Vladimir Putin's regime.

Harding opens *Shadow State* with another account of *novichok* – in fact it is the one on how the world first learnt of this killer nerve agent. It takes place in Salisbury, United Kingdom in 2018. Piecing together all the evidence from investigations, Harding tells the story of the attempted poisoning of Sergei Skripal – a former Russian intelligence double agent who made his way to Britain thanks to a US-brokered spy swap. Two colonels with the GRU (Russian military intelligence), Anatoliy Chepiga and Alexander Mishkin, arrived to the UK with a mission that spring: to slip into Salisbury, poison Skripal (the traitor) and disappear before anyone even knew what happened. The two more or less succeed; they cover the doorknob of Skripal's house with the deadly chemical and are on a plane back before anyone was able to put two and two together.

It is a horrifying thought even today – one that seems to be more out of a Hollywood script than real life. Russian intelligence agents are roaming freely in Europe (and around the world), carrying out secret missions which include spying, hacking and even killing. Each mission is meant to also send a wider message. With the Skripal attempt (thankfully, Skripal and his daughter survived, but sadly Dawn Sturgess, an innocent bystander who stumbled upon the bottle with *novichok*, died), Harding notes: "the ultimate audience for this deed was the Russian elite, and any Russian in the GRU or elsewhere, thinking of co-operating with the special prosecutor Mueller, the CIA or western intelligence generally. Decoded: Skripal was poisoned to pre-empt further treason." What's more, these were not the actions of rogue agents.

We learn later, thanks in part to the ace online sleuthing of organisations like Bellingcat, which used data from social media and other sources (including databases achieved through less formal means) pieced together every move of the would-be assassins, revealing their identity and outing the GRU in the process. The state, for its part, tried to cover up this narrative, even interviewing the two colonels on Russian television. Their claim was that they were mere tourists who came to visit Salisbury. It was hardly believable (and in fact became more of a joke). In the end, the whole affair revealed a sloppy and even lazy approach, instead of seamless, villainous spy craft.

Bungled operations

The Skripal attempt was only one side to the story of the "shadow state". Harding's accounts highlight other elements of it as well. He takes us back to 2016 and how the GRU used primitive hacking techniques to orchestrate a massive dis-

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information and interference campaign into United States' presidential election. The evidence presented by the author, gathered from sources including the Robert Mueller investigation, a meeting with Christopher Steele (who wrote the infamous Trump *dossier*) as well as personal experience and interviews, leaves little doubt on the attempts to hack the election. We can argue whether it is 100 per cent conclusive if these activities swayed the election towards Trump – but we know for sure that Russia's shadow state was involved.

Throughout the book, Harding takes us on the trail of more GRU agents responsible for hacking western institutions, organizations and individuals. We learn of efforts to discredit members of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) after it was revealed that Russia had a secretive systematic doping programme for its athletes competing in the Olympics. The result of the revelation led to Russian athletes being banned from competing in major international sporting events. Yet, revenge is one of the motivations behind the shadow state, so it sent secret agents to hack officials of international organisations, including the International Olympic Committee.

We also learn the story of how hacking attempts were made to disrupt the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). This time, however, the culprits were caught red-handed. Again, the agents' overconfidence and sloppy work ethic gave western intelligence agencies a treasure trove of information. This scoop put a serious damper on future operations and certainly set the GRU back several steps in its fight against the West. In the end we are asked to wonder about the level of competence of this super secret spy agency. As Harding concludes following the OPCW affair: "An agency known for its ruthlessness and professionalism during the Cold War now gave the impression that it was incompetent and bungling, a shambling golem, lethal and dopey."

Lessons

The fascinating tales, which at times read like a gripping spy novel, reveal that the main character in the book is the shadow state itself – which Harding defines as "the machinery of government used for private benefit and personal enrichment". The Kremlin's shadow state's aim is to perpetuate its existence by any means possible. Often motivated by revenge or pure spite, the shadow state sends its agents on missions to assassinate traitors, hack western institutions, discredit democracy and of course sow discontent in western societies – not necessarily in an attempt to generate any sympathy towards the Russian regime. In fact, this is the ultimate retaliation for the fall of the Soviet Un-

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ion – considered by the shadow state's chief commander, Vladimir Putin, as the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century.

There are many lessons to be learnt in the stories told in *Shadow State*. The author highlights the importance of investigative journalism, online sleuthing and how openly available data can be used in the fight against the secret agents. We also learn that Russian bureaucracy is a key weakness in the shadow state, with multiple agencies involved in shadow operations (e.g. GRU, FSB, SVR) and they do not always communicate well with each other. Most importantly, Harding dissects and reveals the methods that were quite successful in the past. Having this knowledge now, however, makes it much more difficult for future operations to be as effective. Most western intelligence agencies know this now, but thanks to Harding we, too, can and should have a better grip (not to mention the book being a good reminder of the importance of securing our own personal information).

> The fascinating tales, which at times read like a gripping spy novel, reveal that the main character in the book is the shadow state itself.

Nevertheless, the shadow state continues its operations. In Mid-October, reporting by the *Guardian*, including Harding, revealed that security agencies in the West have privately concluded that the FSB was the Russian agency behind the poisoning of Navalny, "in effect, pointing the finger at the Kremlin for ordering the attack". This is just another example of how the shadow state works. The challenge now is how to stop it from happening again.

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

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Belarus at sea

TOMASZ KAMUSELLA

Апошняя кніга пана А. (Mr A.'s Last Book).
By: Alhierd Bacharevič. Publisher: Januškievič Publishing House, Minsk, Belarus, 2020.

The year 2020 started inauspiciously with the coronavirus epidemic still far away in China. Yet soon, before Easter, this ugly reality hit closer to home, in Belarus and across Europe. Present-day Belarus's most inventive and innovative writer, Alhierd Bacharevič, finished his new book in February. With his sensitive antennae, the author, who lives in the here and now, interwove into the narrative the theme of a plague as a premonition of the end of the world, long before the World Health Organisation actually declared this outbreak a pandemic in March. One of the very few independent Belarusian-language publishers, Januškievič swiftly brought out this pleasingly crafted volume in June, or at the plateauing end of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Europe. It was published just in time for readers to ponder on what the future may bring; again, well before the mass protests that followed the rigged presidential election of August 2020.

Stories within stories

Eros and Thanatos constitute the axis of Bacharevič's thinking about the world, the tension of his prose is strung between these two extremes: love and death. The novel's setting is the present-day Belarusian capital of Minsk with some forays to the countryside. Mr A, or "Mr Author", as Bacharevič likes to spell out this initial, is a relatively sought-after writer who almost stopped writing.

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Instead, he likes mixing with the elite to demonstrate his self-importance. He finds a publisher's ear attuned to his stories and views. The publisher's respect for the nameless writer emboldens the latter to ask for a 10,000 dollars loan to buy a wooden house with a garden in a distant rural-like quarter of the Belarusian capital. The writer promises to repay this loan in a year's time, but never does, due to an unexpected economic downturn that starves him of pecuniarily gainful gigs.

The publisher is silently enraged when he learns about the situation. True to his character, the publisher remains well-mannered and soft-spoken. Yet, he proposes that the writer – whom from now on he dubs "Culprit" and "Malefactor" – repay the loan by delivering a fairy tale to the publisher's family and servants after dinner every day for the next month.

The formal device of an overarching meta-narrative as a platform for this daily story telling goes back to *One Thousand and One Nights*, or even more fittingly, given the ongoing pandemic, to Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron*. In the context of the Polish-Lithuanian origins of Belarusian culture and literature, the obvious indigenous inspiration is also Jan Potocki's *The Manuscript Found in Saragossa*, a sprawling novel replete with intertwined stories, and stories within stories. Bacharevič began his writing career with short stories and by translating the fairy tales from the early 19th-century novelist and poet Wilhelm Hauff into Belarusian.

Unusual, fantastic and cruel events, found in these tales, also became a hallmark of Bacharevič's own fiction. His 2017 blockbuster *Sabaki Eŭropy* (Dogs of Europe) is composed from six almost novel-length "long stories". Yet, in every successive book, the writer aspires to try out and excel at a new genre or writing technique. In the novel under review, the daily stories, along the spanning narrative, add up to 31 tales, each with a gripping plot of its own, crowned with an unexpected twist (a device perfected by the Canadian Nobel laureate, Alice Munro). Like Hauff, who drew at the realities and legends of his native Kingdom of Württemberg, Bacharevič is weaving elements of today's Belarus into his stories, its urban legends and the country's recent past (and even future).

Modern fairy tale

One of my favourites is the tale devoted to an old third-degree grandfather, or maybe even a great-great-grandpa. An aspiring student of Belarusian language and literature from a distant province is about to enter the Belarusian State University in Minsk. The main problem is accommodation and how much it may cost. The half-forgotten semi-grandfather with his priceless three-room apart-

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ment in the city centre appears to be an obvious a solution. The family wonders whether he is still alive, since according to what they remember, he is at least 80, or maybe even 120.

The not so fair fairy tale commences in earnest. They ring the grandfather up. He agrees to offer a room to his young relative. But on two conditions. First, the student would never ask for money from the grandad. And second, he would not dare, under any circumstances, enter the grandfather's own room. However, one day the grandad is taken to hospital and apparently passes away. The student thinks nothing about any funeral and just takes over the apartment without completing the required paperwork. The youngster neglects his university studies and lets his artist girlfriend move in and converts one of the rooms into a painting studio. Obviously, they invade the grandad's room and empty it of dusty old-style NKVD files which were records of culprits sentenced to death.

One night, three NKVD officers in interwar Soviet uniforms, including the grandfather, knock at the door and take the disobedient grandson and his wayward girlfriend to the forest. The sentence for their crimes is capital punishment. The grandad, as the leading investigative officer, takes and adds the executed grandson's lifetime of 19 years to his own and apportions the girlfriend's lifetime to his two underlings, nine years to each. One of these underlings complains, so the grandad shoots him right away. The other is overjoyed. He and the grandfather shake hands and look forward to working on another case, when it surfaces, as they always do. NKVD officers as undead vampires? What a stunning modern fairy tale, like Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, but more succinct and with lots more panache.

NKVD officers as undead vampires? What a stunning modern fairy tale, like Seth Grahame-Smith's *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, but more succinct and with lots more panache.

Hypnotic prose

Midway through, the daily tales, written and read out by Culprit, begin merging with the actual events in the capital and the publisher's sprawling mansion. At first, like US President Donald Trump or Belarusian strongman Alyaksandr Lukashenka, the publisher makes light of the fast-spreading virus. According

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to him, his task is to bring out books, while the public at large should enjoy life more by reading them. Thanks to the "hallowed law and order" that keeps things running smooth on the island. But the mass media remain silent on the ocean that devours ports and coastal cities in one disaster after another. Disgruntled protesters set up camp at the publisher's mansion and then violently besiege it. The end is neigh. (Could it be seen as a portent of what may happen to Lukashenka?)

While the crowd is invading the mansion, it turns out that the publisher's son is an extra-terrestrial on a mission. His superior civilisation knew beforehand that the ocean would soon engulf the island-world. Rescuers were sent to preserve the best specimens of each human profession, including the best writer. Culprit (Mr A) refuses to leave, preferring his newly-found love and swiftly approaching death foretold to the sad survival in a dusty extra-terrestrial museum. Instead, the spaceship, hidden in the house's structure, takes off with a drunken macho interloper writing testosterone-laden stodgy fiction. Apocalypse now. The redeemed Culprit will not write another book. But Bacharevič shall. I am sure he has an entire reserve of ideas for new volumes full of surprises.

The book with its almost hypnotic prose is a great read. It is teeming with historical, mythological and cultural subtexts, should one care to look for them. For a lover of all things Belarusian, the novel's island-world with Belarusian as its sole and leading language and culture is a nationally-heartening vision. The oft-invoked and praised "law and order" can be interpreted as Lukashenka's dictatorship of a quarter of a century and counting, including the spread of authoritarian tendencies to neighbouring Poland and farther afield to Hungary, Slovakia, Serbia or Bulgaria.

The book's multiplying and increasingly violent protesters may even be seen as a premonition of the now ongoing mass demonstrations against Lukashenka's regime, which erupted immediately after the rigged presidential election in August 2020, which Lukashenka claims he "won". Otherwise, a non-Belarusian reader can think about the angry crowds as climate protesters or participants of the Black Lives Matter marches. But above all, the reader is able to just enjoy the novel.

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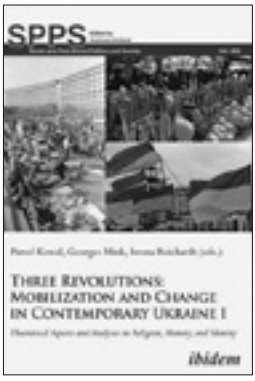
Ukraine's "learning" revolutions of 1990, 2004/05 and 2013/14

OSTAP KUSHNIR

Three Revolutions: Mobilization and Change in Contemporary Ukraine, Volume one. Edited by: Paweł Kowal, Georges Mink and Iwona Reichardt. Ibidem Verlag, Stuttgart, Germany, 2019.



The year 2014, in many ways, was unique for Ukraine. The events of the EuroMaidan and the war in Donbas placed the state at the centre of global attention. However, this attention brought a few vexing side-effects. First, Ukraine started getting researched for the sake of getting something published, as opposed to publishing something that was relevant. Scholars and journalists often decided to ride the wave of public interest and build their reputations and fortunes on "quick" inquiries of somewhat dubious quality. Second, former Russian experts and Sovietologists, as well as graduates of "generic" Eastern European or Slavic studies, became protagonists in researching Ukraine. Albeit some of these people produced comparatively well-rounded articles, they sometimes "distorted" Ukraine. The latter was not perceived as a unique state-in-the-making, but one more entity in a basket of post-communist republics lost in the "grey zone" of Russia's "privileged interests". Thirdly, the methodologies used to examine Ukraine were often western-originated and western-tuned. Their direct application, so productive in explaining social mobilisation in America and Europe, might have

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provided incomplete results in respect to Ukraine.

The upgrade and regional adjustment of these methodologies were often needed, but not always enacted. Western scholars often lacked empirical data to conduct a thorough analysis of Ukraine's events. To collect this data, one should have invested much time and effort, which was not always the case. Therefore, several articles and essays included sweeping generalisations whenever well founded evidence was unavailable.

Deeper assessment

Such was the discourse in which the first volume of *Three Revolutions: Mobilization and Change in Contemporary Ukraine* appeared. This volume, thankfully, evaded the above-mentioned criticisms. To begin with, it is not the product of hasty research. The idea came about in 2016 and developed throughout numerous stages of international collaboration. Secondly, the volume's editors are renowned scholars. Georges Mink, a leading researcher of post-communist transformations, Iwona Reichardt, a specialist in regional media, journalism and policy analysis, and Paweł Kowal, a representative of academic and policy-making spheres, combined their efforts to make this volume credible, diverse and balanced.

In turn, the volume's contributors are among the world's best scholars on Ukraine from North America, Western Europe, Poland, Ukraine and Russia. The sheer size, 22 chapters stretched over almost 800 pages, serves as additional evidence of the quality of the research produced. Moreover, the methodologies here were fine-tuned for Ukraine. Its contributors are aware of the local peculiarities and approached Ukraine's revolutions, nation-building and statecraft appropriately. Finally, speaking of collecting data and evidence, the volume's sources illustrate its high value, including unique archival information, specific sociological surveys and interviews with major decision-makers, including former Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski, former Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko, former French President François Hollande, former Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk, the Archbishop of the Catholic Church of the Byzantine-Ukrainian rite Sviatoslav Shevchuk, and many others.

The value of the volume also draws from the fact that it became an epitome of a fundamental research project conducted with the framework of the Three Ukrainian Revolutions (3R) Project at the College of Europe in Natolin (Warsaw), led by its European Civilization Chair. One of the major objectives of the 3R Project was to scrutinise the recent Ukrainian revolutions – the

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Revolution on Granite (1990), The Orange Revolution (2004/05) and the EuroMaidan (2013/14) – as pivotal manifestations of the development of the Ukrainian political nation and not "isolated" events in space-time. This allowed for a deeper assessment of the peculiarities of social mobilisation of Ukrainians. This also helped to "determine what has emerged/is emerging in the continuation of the social protests in modern Ukraine, and which elements of those protests appeared during the new protests as original ones". Finally, the volume allows for other researchers to better understand the unique logic of Ukraine's protests, as well as outline the political programme behind each of them.

Themes

The volume consists of three major thematic blocks. The first outlines the methodological backbone for the entire project; it raises and answers the question of how to study the reoccurring protests in Ukraine. The second part scrutinises the recent revolutions, tracing the connections between them, as well as noting some discrepancies in the logic of their development. The last, and the shortest, block examines the impact of religion, collective memory and identity of Ukraine's revolutions, which is particularly helpful in explaining the unique nature of the latter.

Speaking in more detail, the first block discusses the essence of revolutions in the contemporary world and compares Ukrainian events to that theoretical benchmark. Here we find reflections on the values constituting Ukrainian identity and their fluctuations throughout the past 30 years (such as the chapter by Mykola Riabchuk); the feeling of patriotism and nationhood which moves from West to East (Taras Kuzio); the people's right to rebel against illegitimate hybrid regimes (Andrew Wilson); Cossack patterns of self-organisation in the Ukrainian revolutions (Adam Balcer); and factors of discontent which fuel Ukraine's protests and restrain the expansionist Kremlin's actions (Marcel Van Herpen). The conclusion drawn is that the phenomenon of Ukraine's social mobilisation can be best defined

The volume allows for other researchers to better understand the unique logic of Ukraine's protests, as well as outline the political programme behind each of them.

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as a "learning" revolution: each subsequent protest utilises the legacies of the previous one, but adjusts to the specific historical context. Moreover, Ukraine's revolutions are examples of postmodern ones, which are highly improvisational and best manifested online. However, they still require actual rallying on the streets.

The second thematic block on the socio-political uniqueness of each of three revolutions scrutinises their resonance in Ukrainian governance and the behaviour of external actors. In particular, the section addresses the legacies and nature of the Revolution on Granite (Olga Onuch, Paulina Codogni); the Orange Revolution (Jacek Kluczkowski); and the EuroMaidan (Taras Vozniak). It looks at the activities of the EU (Maciej Olchawa); Poland (Andrzej Szeptycki); and Russia (Tomasz Stępniewski, Igor Gretskiy) throughout the past 30 years, as well as discusses the evolution of Ukraine's foreign policy objectives (Ola Hnatiuk, Kataryna Wolczuk). This part also tracks changes in the *modi operandi* of Maidan activists and less engaged citizens of Ukraine through 2004–14, which also demonstrated that revolutions were a "learning" process (Nataliia Pohorila, Andriy Bova, Hryhorii Perepelytsia).

Deep academic insights and theories are intertwined with new facts and illustrations, which makes it an interesting read for experts, scholars and members of the general public.

The final block touches upon religion and old and new elements of collective memory. The chapters of this block discuss Christian values and spirituality in times of protest (Myroslav Marynovych); religious nationalist narratives of the EuroMaidan (Katarina Novikova); and compares the values of the Maidan to those of a secular Europe (Mychajlo Dymyd). This block also outlines the processes of post-2014 decommunisation in Ukraine (Oleksandr Hrytsenko) and the misused potential of "civic awakening" by both the EU and domestic actors (Jennifer L. Smith).

It is worth noting that the volume contains a lot of illustrations related to Ukraine's revolutions. These are promotional posters, flyers, communiques, newspaper articles and other elements. The differences in their designs convey the spirit of the epochs and thus make the volume look even more eye-catching. Some of these elements are unique, such as the scan of telegrams to the students' tent camp in Kyiv, sent on October 13th 1990, by the leaders of the Donetsk Coal Miners' Strike Commit-

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tee. The miners then declared support for the students' hunger strike during the Revolution on Granite.

Overall, the volume gives the impression of being profound in both its content and appearance. Deep academic insights and theories are intertwined with new facts and illustrations, which makes it an interesting read for experts, scholars, and members of the general public. The reader will occasionally encounter the same points reiterated in different parts of the volume. This feeling of *déjà vu* probably illustrates that the chapters are better suited to be read as separate essays rather than as a unified thesis. Also, it is worth nothing that some chapters do not neatly fit into the thematic blocks. These weak points, however, make a little impact on the generally positive impression from this 800 pages-long artefact.

This volume opens the series of pivotal publications of the 3R Project. The second volume, which has already been published, includes selected testimonies and entries of oral history, as well as records of the historical workshops conducted during the events of 3R Project. However, to do justice to the contents of the second volume, a separate review would be needed. Finally, the forthcoming third volume will contain unpublished historical and archival documents on contemporary Ukrainian history.

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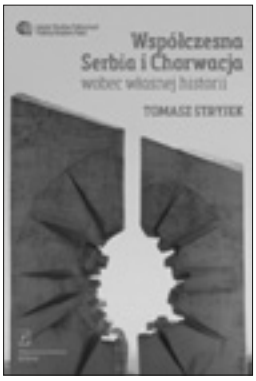
Serbia's and Croatia's struggles with the past

GRZEGORZ SKRUKWA

A review of *Współczesna Serbia i Chorwacja wobec własnej historii* (*Contemporary Serbia and Croatia facing their own past*) By: Tomasz Stryjek. Publisher: Scholar, Warsaw, Poland, 2020.



Serbia and Croatia are two states that are "symmetrical" and comparable in many ways, but deeply conflicted in the sphere of historical memory. This is the area where they differ greatly. Historically speaking, together with Slovenians, Croats and Serbs were the "founding nations" of the "first Yugoslavia". This is how their state (at that time kingdom), established in 1918, came into existence. In the post-war period, during the "second (aka Tito's) Yugoslavia", Serbia and Croatia were the core republics.

Additional historic parallels between the two states can be traced back to their experiences during the Second World War. In the years 1941–1945 the following political groups recorded activity: 1) the collaborationists, who established fascist organisations which in Croatia took the form of the Independent State led by the Ustaša, while in Serbia that of Milan Nedić's government with formations established by Dmitrije Ljotić; 2) the revolutionaries, which, in both states, took the form of a National Liberation Movement led by the communists and; 3) the "survival-oriented" group that included those switching between resistance, collaboration and passive waiting – in Serbia it was Draža Mihailović's Chetniks, in Croatia it was the Croatian Peasant Party and the Catholic Church.

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Return to the past

With this context in the background, Polish historian and political scientist, Tomasz Stryjek, has written a new book titled *Współczesna Serbia i Chorwacja wobec własnej historii* (*Contemporary Serbia and Croatia facing their own past*). He argues that the tensions between Serbian and Croatian memory – especially their interpretation of the Second World War – were one of the most important factors that led to the violent disintegration of the second Yugoslavia. As such, memory politics have become one of the most important aspects of these two states' political life since the breakthrough which took place there in 1999/2000. That is to say, the historical policy determined post-Milošević Serbia and post-Tuđman Croatia.

Stryjek's book, as mentioned before, focuses on Serbia's and Croatia's struggles with the past. It is addressed to the general reader, not only academics. In the first part, the author presents places of memory that have impacted Serbian and Croatian identities, especially in the 19th and 20th century, when they were becoming nations. Interestingly, Stryjek finds that these two past centuries are the source of today's identity of political parties in both states. In the second part, he analyses concepts such as "revision of history" and "historical revisionism". The former, in his view, is the change of perception which community should be the main subject of the historical process.

In the countries of the former Yugoslavia, the revision of history took a certain turn ("return") from the perspective of the internationalist class to the national perspective. Naturally, in cases where revision is civic-oriented, and in line with inclusive understanding of the nation (and not based on ethnic and exclusive understandings), it does not lead to conflict. The term "revisionism", as Stryjek interprets it here, is a shift towards an ethnic and exclusive definition of the nation. Consequently, the revisionist perspective treats the national community as an absolute value. It insists on a heroic and impeccable image of the nation-state and the national movement. In the area of historiography, revisionism can be biased and deceitful.

Historians and academic institutions

Stryjek analyses the crisis and decline of Yugoslavia's socialist and federalist ideology, as they began in the 1960s. He looks at the debates in Serbian and Croatian historiography, pointing to the social roles historians and academic institutions have played in both states. He presents their positions

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through a typology which he divides into three groups, depending on their representatives' attitude towards revisionism. The first group is the "official" position.

In the former Yugoslavia the revision of history, from the international to the national paradigm, already occurred in the 1960s.

Its representatives support a revision from the international to the national context, but do not opt for revisionism. The second group gathers those who are "critical". In other words, they adhere to universal and transnational values. The third group includes those who represent a revisionist position. In Serbia, the division between the "official" and revisionist group, on one side of the spectrum, and the "critical," on the opposite side, overlaps the socio-cultural division between the "first Serbia" (those who are "traditionalists and nationalistic") and the "second Serbia" (those who are "modernisers and cosmopolitans"). A similar trend can be seen in Croatia. Stryjek examines these positions in historiography by analysing the following cases: the Serbian and Croatian narratives on Tito, the National Liberation Movement and the second Yugoslavia, the Serbian narrative on Draža Mihailović, the Chetniks (the Yugoslav Army in Homeland) and the restoration of monarchy, as well as the Croatian narrative on Ante Pavelić, the Ustaša and the Independent State. He complements this research with the parallel analysis, presented in the last chapters of the book, of memory politics in Serbia and Croatia from 1990/1991 to 2018. This period includes the presidencies of Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović and Aleksandar Vučić.

Based on his research Stryjek concludes that in the states of Central and Eastern Europe, the revocation to history was necessary for their internal and external legitimisation, as well as their transition to democracy and obtaining membership in the European Union. In the former Yugoslavia the revision of history, from the international to the national paradigm, already occurred in the 1960s, before the communists lost power and before they transformed to socialists. Importantly, at that time there were no alternative sources of memory to those that were related to national history before 1945.

Original sin

When analysing Franjo Tuđman and Slobodan Milošević's rule, Stryjek sees errors in their refusal to establish memory policies, pointing out that instead

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they abused the national dimension of the transformation. Overall, the challenges that Serbia and Croatia faced in the transformation included building a democratic and pluralist political system, which – according to the academic and journalist, Taras Kuzio – is the first dimension of the transformation; the second dimension is building a market economy and the third is building state institutions.

However, unlike in other transformation cases – such as Ukraine or Belarus, Macedonia or Bosnia – in Serbia and Croatia a coherent and wide-reaching national identity was formed long before 1991. In Stryjek's view, during the 1990s the Croatian and Serbian ruling elite abused the fourth national dimension and revoked an ethnic concept of the nation. They did so not because they had to focus on nation-building, but because they needed political legitimacy for their rule. Also, while since the collapse of the reformist leaders in 1971–1972 ("Croatian Spring" and "Serbian liberalism"), communism became idle and ossified, and the intellectual elite in both republics "returned" to the national concept of history. Milošević and Tuđman followed them in believing that national history is a useful source to legitimise political power.

In this regard, one of the main tools they could use was to stimulate competition between Serbia and Croatia for the status of the most heroic, most impeccable and most suffering nation in the years 1941–1945. This led to a division in "official" and "critical" streams in their historiographies, where representatives of the former also opened doors for revisionist ideas in the public discourse. In Stryjek's view, this was the "the original sin" of transformation in these two states. Even when their governments have turned towards European values since the turn of the millennium, they could not free themselves from a very difficult situation.

Overall, in my view, Stryjek's book not only provides a deep analysis of historiography and politics of memory in Serbia and Croatia, but is also a contribution to their modern political history. The work is based on a wide range of sources, including Serbian and Croatian academic and history texts. Stryjek applies adequate methodological tools and approaches. Thus, his book provides, on the one hand, a coherent and synthetic perspective of the researched topic, and on the other hand, a detailed catalogue of actors, themes and institutions which are involved in these two states in memory politics.

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