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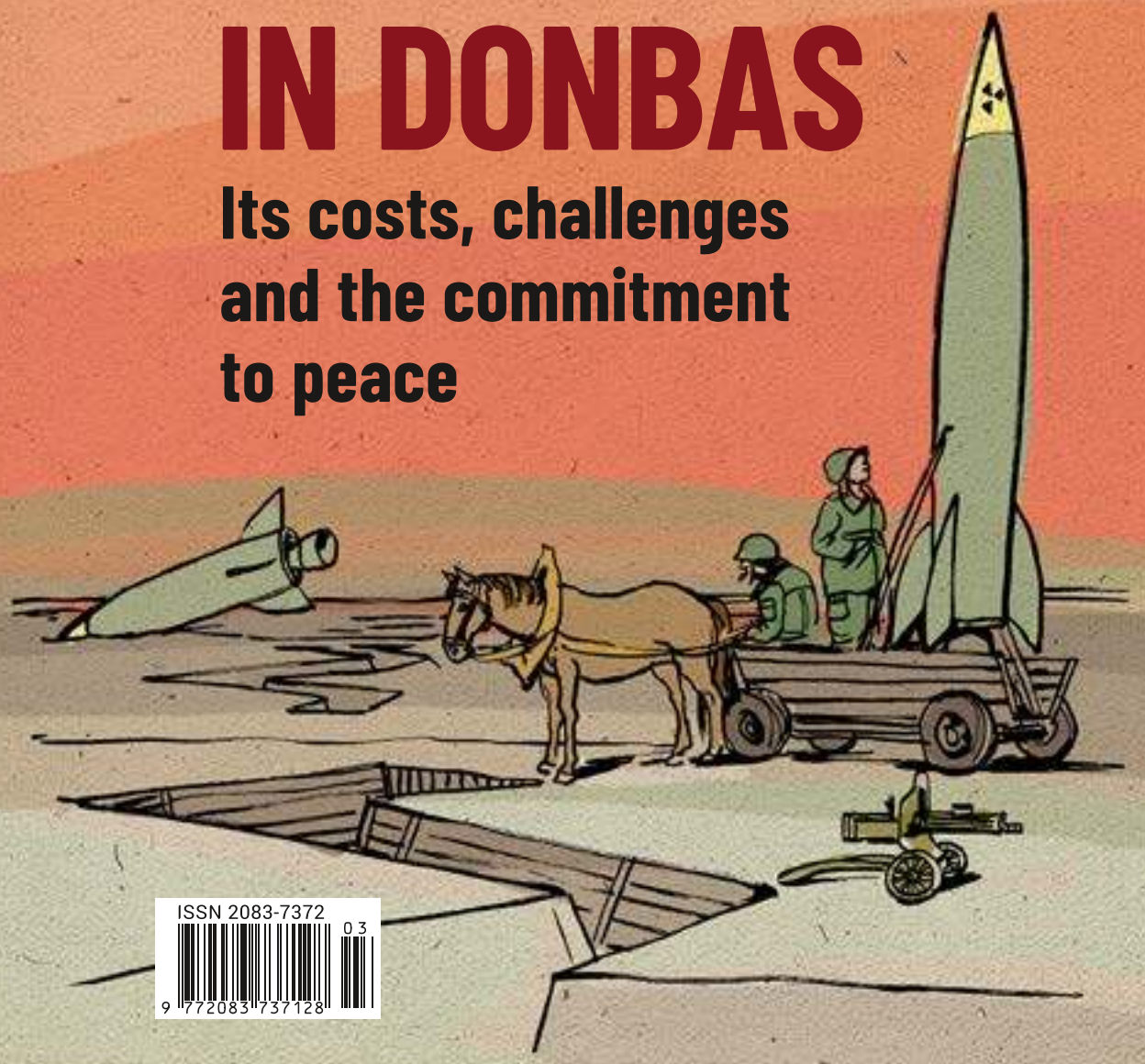
New Eastern Europe

WAR IN DONBAS

Its costs, challenges and the commitment to peace



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DEAR READER,

This issue is being sent to print at a time when the majority of the global community is faced with a new reality and a challenge on how to stop the spread of the COVID-19, also known as the Coronavirus. As worried as we all are about the course and consequences of this pandemic, we can say one thing: we are not in it alone. The virus knows no borders and affects everybody. However, together we will manage to overcome it and recover from the damage.

The same unfortunately cannot be said about the war in Donbas. There, Ukraine is almost alone, which has been the case for the last six years. Therefore, in this spirit of broader human solidarity that we are now experiencing in face of a global humanitarian crisis, we would like you to also reflect on the situation in Donbas. Our authors point to the high costs of the war that the impoverished Ukrainian state continues to face and manage; discuss what Europe can and should do to help; as well as analyse the policies of the new Ukrainian authorities who came to power and received a huge social mandate for their declared commitment to peace. In this light, the words of Rebecca Harms, a former member of the European Parliament, profoundly resonate when she writes: "the fight against the Putin system in Kyiv will be decided by means of successful democratic reforms and the establishment of the rule of law. The correct path has been chosen, but it is a long one and it will not be smooth and easy. It is hampered by the fact that the reform-oriented Association Agreement with the EU has so far been interpreted as an alternative to membership."

In addition, we encourage you to read the section on the memory of the Second World War, as we commemorate the 75th anniversary of the war's end this year. Unfortunately, despite the passage of time we can see how history too can fall victim to truth and confirmed facts.

Since at the time of completing this issue we do not know when it will actually reach your hands, we do encourage you to remain engaged with us at www.neweasterneurope.eu where you can download electronic versions of the magazine, read up-to-date commentary on the latest developments in the region and access our podcast series: *Talk Eastern Europe* and *In Between Europe*.

Don't panic and carry *New Eastern Europe*!

The Editors

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

The Jan Nowak-Jeziorański College of Eastern Europe in Wrocław

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

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EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CENTRE
pl. Solidarności 1
80-863 Gdańsk, Poland
https://ecs.gda.pl/
ecs@ecs.gda.pl

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COVER LAYOUT
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SUBSCRIPTION:
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LAYOUT AND FORMATTING
Małgorzata Chyc | AT Wydawnictwo

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

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How to respond to Putin's undeclared war

REBECCA HARMS

The readiness to view the conflict in Ukraine as a kind of civil war because Russia never openly declared war goes beyond what strategists in Russia had hoped for. In the western part of Europe, a lack of knowledge about our continent's history of the last century clearly plays into the hands of the Kremlin. Six years on, it still needs to be made clear that Putin is waging war against Ukraine.

In late February 2014 the Russian incursion into Ukraine began on the Crimean Peninsula. By February 23rd, then Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych had disappeared from Kyiv. With his flight, Vladimir Putin's man in Ukraine evaded accountability for the lethal use of force against the pro-European protesters on the Maidan during the Revolution of Dignity. The Kremlin's propaganda machine portrayed Yanukovych's escape to Russia and the subsequent instalment of an interim president by the Ukrainian parliament as a fascist coup d'état. As early as the day after his departure, Putin declared that measures would have to be taken to bring the Ukrainian Crimean Peninsula back into the Russian fold. When more and more Russian soldiers began appearing in Crimea during the last days of February, international reports spoke of "little green men".

The absence of national emblems on the soldiers' uniforms initially served the purpose of bolstering the lie that the annexation of the peninsula that ensued soon after the invasion was not an act of coercion, but a democratically determined one. International news coverage spoke of the "little green men" and an anonymous army. Internationally, reporting often used subjunctives regarding the invasion.

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This unintentional co-operation in the Russian masquerade had more than a short-term effect. Even today, six years after the start of the conflict, the impact of the confusion sown by Moscow is still alarmingly palpable in the western public's view.

Devastation

Putin never officially declared the war. His propaganda tale of a fascist coup in Kyiv, of the resulting threat to Russian-speaking Ukrainian citizens who had to defend themselves against the new fascists, still resonates today. This lie is just one pillar of the Kremlin's disinformation campaigns. Systematic misinformation is part of Russia's war strategy and is intended to mislead both Ukrainians and their partners in the European Union, or to at least make them doubt themselves. The reach that Russian television and the new propaganda channels have abroad continues to show how significantly opinion formation is influenced by the lies and half-truths.

Objecting to and pointing out Russian propaganda is still necessary and part of our defence.

The readiness to view the conflict as a kind of civil war because Russia never openly declared war goes beyond what the strategists in Russia had hoped for. In the western part Europe, a lack of knowledge about sizable parts of our continent's history over the last century clearly plays into the hands of the Kremlin. Six years into the war, it still needs to be made clear that Putin is waging war against Ukraine. Objecting to and pointing out Russian propaganda is still necessary and part of our defence. Those who leave the Kremlin's disinformation campaigns and the lies of *Russia Today* or *Sputnik* unchecked will not be able to maintain the consent required for providing robust support to Ukraine, or just keeping the existing sanctions against Russia in place.

Six years after the invasion, which did not take place spontaneously but in a well-prepared manner, the devastation against Ukraine is known. The OSCE, who has been coordinating the observer mission along the front lines in the Donbas region, publishes daily figures on the clashes and the number of dead and wounded among the Ukrainian military personnel and civilian population. Almost 13,000 people have lost their lives on the Ukrainian side since the beginning of the conflict. Casualty figures on the Russian side remain classified. Moreover, a Malaysian aircraft, flight MH17, with 298 people on board, was shot down with a Russian surface-to-air missile, and we know that millions of Ukrainians have fled from Donbas and Crimea. Life for those who have stayed in Donbas is unbearable, particularly during the winter months. The elderly and children are the ones who suffer the

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most. Images from the crossing points on the front line show elderly people from Donbas who undertake arduous journeys on foot to collect their modest pensions and then they have to give a portion of it to corrupt guards. Psychologists working with women and children in the "grey zone" along the front line describe the effects of the experience of violence.

Part of the infrastructure has been completely destroyed. A creeping environmental disaster is also unfolding. In many places, water is no longer drinkable. Nonetheless people often drink the water as there is no alternative. Even hospitals in the grey zone do not have clean running water. The unplanned shutting down of coal mines and insufficient pumping has resulted in contaminated groundwater and sinkholes. In addition, large areas in the war zone have been littered with land mines. In Crimea, the Russian government has resorted to terrorising, torturing, persecuting and detaining Crimean Tatars, as well as those who continue to insist that the Crimean Peninsula is part of Ukraine. The exchange of large groups of prisoners between Russia and Ukraine, which was a huge relief to Ukrainians, has not led to an end of the terror against the Tatars.

Victims of an endless war

Putin's desire to make Russia great again and to derail the Ukrainians' effort to become part of the West and the EU is the cause of this undeclared war with all its victims. Under pressure from Russian aggression since 2014, the Ukrainians have accomplished an enormous feat. At the time of the attack, the Ukrainian army was run-down, weakened by corruption and mismanagement and in no state to defend the country. The nuclear warheads once stationed on Ukrainian territory had been relinquished voluntarily after the collapse of the Soviet Union, as laid down in the Budapest Memorandum signed in 1994. The Ukrainians relied on the United States, the United Kingdom and Russia, who had offered security guarantees to uphold the country's sovereignty.

The weakness of the Ukrainian army, which was well known in Russia, was one assumption of Putin's game plan back in 2014. What the activists on the Maidan had been calling for the winter before the war was a whole host of reforms. Rebuilding the Ukrainian army was not one of the central demands. Six years of war lie between the volunteers, who rushed to their country's defence in February 2014 wearing sneakers and carrying gear fit for camping, and the experienced soldiers in the well-led army of today.

My visits on the front line between early summer of 2014 and 2018 have also allowed me to witness the establishment of an army that Putin did not expect and

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which is a direct result of his undeclared war. I met many young people at the front – men and women, soldiers and volunteers – who had planned something else in their life than to serve in the army. This makes me wish that they would be able to pursue and attain these other goals as well. Their bravery was for the good of their country. When I talk to veterans today, the mission and objectives are called into question even by those who returned to the front line again and again. Because I am one of those who still do not believe Moscow has any intention of making a peace deal, I am convinced something must be done to address these doubts.

The doubts stem from various sources. The sense that it will remain an endless war where soldiers and ordinary Ukrainians, especially in the eastern part of the country, are the losers is a key factor. I, too, was gripped by this feeling on multiple occasions, particularly when I visited the Mechnikov military hospital in Dnipro. Many of those who are praying, crying and holding out in the waiting room day and night are despairing mothers, some of whom are already quite old. They have only one wish – that their son or daughter will survive. This waiting room between life and death is where they pick up their children if they make it. Some of those who survive are unable to walk or see, and sometimes even both. Many are physically unharmed but emerge without any idea how they can go on living after the psychological trauma of the trenches. In the course of the war, the doctors at

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Mechnikov hospital have learned how to perform miracles on the operating table and have been able to save more and more lives. But as we know from other wars and other armies, adequate care for the returnees is lacking in Ukraine. Fighting back the attacker is the sole focus.

Price of peace

The lack of care for the veterans or the bereaved families, however, weighs heavily on the spirit of the fighting men and women. Ukraine cannot afford this. It can be changed and must be changed, given that in spite of troop withdrawals and disengagement, and despite the reconstruction of the Siverskyi Donets bridge, the most severe escalation and attacks in a long time occurred not long after the Normandy meeting last December. Ukraine must keep on relying on its army and should not assume the desire for peace is shared by Putin.

The desire for peace, the longing for a life without the horrors of war, is strong in Ukraine. This will hardly surprise anyone who is familiar with this war. Volodymyr Zelenskyy's success in the Ukrainian presidential elections is a reflection of this longing, apart from many other harboured wishes. However, this should not be misinterpreted. The majority of Ukrainians do not want peace if the price to be paid is submission to Putin's conditions. In Ukraine's western partner states, many politicians and citizens seem incapable of understanding this. One reason for this is the successful lie – and its endless repetition – about a civil war and about Ukraine as a divided nation.

The desire for peace, the longing for a life without the horrors of war, is strong in Ukraine.

Six years after the Russian invasion, Ukraine's friends and partners need a new accord as to what their role should be. The desire for peace cannot lead to much if there only is a Normandy summit every few years and only when there is a new president in Kyiv. Zelenskyy alone cannot fulfil the promise. If the Minsk Agreements are to remain the common basis, then the focus should be on the measures that will improve the situation for people in the war zone and on steps that may be a viable means to end the fighting. A commitment to achieving a lasting armistice must be the priority.

The withdrawal of Russian weapons, soldiers and combatants, and the clearing of the minefields are essential if there is to be any normalisation, let alone elections in those territories held and terrorised by Russia and its army and militias. Disengagement along the line of contact, the withdrawal of weapons and soldiers, as well as the disarming of Ukrainian citizens in Donbas require the most

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stringent international oversight and long-term monitoring. The existing OSCE mission cannot deliver this. At the same time, Ukraine and the West should do more for the welfare of the people in the war zones. It would also be important for Zelenskyy to make the more easily achievable improvements of life in Donbas his concern. The bridge near Sievierodonetsk is a symbol for the fact that defence against Russia does not only mean territory and national sovereignty, but is also about the people. The great collective outpouring of joy over the homecoming of the released prisoners of war shows how important this is.

Long and difficult path

The gnawing doubts about the West that are plaguing not only Ukrainian soldiers, but also civilians in Mariupol, Kramatorsk, Lviv or Uzhhorod, are related to what people perceive as European horse-trading. The periodic flare-ups in the debate over sanctions against Russia reinforce these doubts. The public dispute over whether or not the sanctions are working weakens these sanctions as an effective non-military instrument against Putin, and in equal measure, as a signal of solidarity and support for the Ukrainians. Instead, the escalation in the Azov Sea, the issuing of Russian passports in Donbas or the heavy shelling after the latest Normandy meeting should be met with new sanctions. If a military solution is not an option, the other path must be pursued in a consistent manner. And if the objective is to move Putin to agree to an armistice, then he must not be given signals that the defence of the European peace order is less important than business interests such as Nord Stream 2 or other economic deals. Providing Putin with funding for his rearmament precisely by way of these deals is incompatible with European security interests.

> The fight against the Putin system in Kyiv will be decided by means of successful democratic reforms.

Along with many others, I have often said over the last few years that the fight against the Putin system in Kyiv will be decided by means of successful democratic reforms and the establishment of the rule of law. The correct path has been chosen, but it is a long one and it will not be smooth and easy. It is hampered by the fact that the reform-oriented Association Agreement with the EU has so far been interpreted as an alternative to membership.

After six years of war, I have gained a clearer view of the burden that has been placed on Ukrainian society, and the lead weight of Putin's never-declared war. If Ukraine's European friends want the ideas of the Maidan to come to fruition,

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they must not lose any more precious time and start working tenaciously for an end to the fighting. It is easy and popular to rely on Zelenskyy and his promises of peace, and to encourage him to have faith in the Normandy summits. However, it will not help if instead of receiving robust support in the form of new sanctions, the "Steinmeier formula" (a sequence of steps that involved withdrawing military forces from the line of contact on both sides, holding local elections in the Donbas region under Ukrainian law and OSCE supervision, restoring the Ukrainian government's control over the state border and granting special self-governing status to the Donetsk and Luhansk regions – editor's note.) and Nord Stream 2 are foisted upon him.

There has always been an engrossing desire for peace in the EU that has ruled out a military solution in response to Putin's invasion. Six years on, we are faced with the ever-recurring question of what we are prepared to do and willing to invest on diplomatic and economic levels to defend the European peace order and Ukraine's sovereignty. NEE

Rebecca Harms was a member of the European Parliament for Alliance '90/The Greens from 2004 to 2019. She is former co-president of the Greens/EFA in the European Parliament.

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Does Zelenskyy have a strategy for managing the Donbas conflict?

HANNA SHELEST

The road to peace in Donbas has not appeared smooth and straightforward, as had been expected by President Zelenskyy and his team. The emphasis on humanitarian issues cannot neglect the security situation on the ground nor the unchanged role of the Kremlin.

An attack initiated by representatives of the breakaway territories near Zolote, a town in the Luhansk Oblast, in the early morning of February 18th of this year could dramatically change President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his team's conflict perception. What has been announced as the biggest separatist offense since 2018 naturally clashes with the pacifistic and human-oriented approach of Kyiv's new leader. But further developments and statements have shown that we can expect no real change in either rhetoric or tactics.

In 2019 the Ukrainian state faced three theatres of conflict with Russia – eastern Ukraine, Crimea and the Black and Azov seas. The new president, elected in April 2019, needed to formulate his vision for all of them. If the previous Poroshenko administration saw them as integral parts of one policy, even if reacting with various levels of attention and intensity, the current perception is that different methods and approaches should be created for all three regions. The Black and Azov seas are viewed as de facto responsibilities of the defence ministry and navy. Crimea continues to sit on the backburner of official discourse. Only at the end of February did Tamila Tasheva, the deputy permanent representative of the president of

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Ukraine for Crimea, announce that within a year, a strategy for Crimea's de-occupation would be developed. This process, however, has not yet started. Therefore, the Donbas dimension of the conflict is the only one that really provides enough information to analyse the strategies of the new Ukrainian president.

Old state of affairs

The security situation in Donbas has not changed during the last year. This is despite agreements on a ceasefire and Zelenskyy's hope that he could normalise the situation by enhancing informal negotiations with Russia. Desires for rapid solutions and a quick peace agreement expressed by Zelenskyy during his presidential campaign showed an unrealistic approach and a lack of understanding of the situation on the ground. There are several reasons why his position has been evolving within the last months: first, his increasing understanding of the situation; second, a realisation that the Russian outlook will not change and peace is not one of its goals; and third, the presence of a well-organised minority which has been reacting sharply to dubious or risky propositions for managing the conflict.

"To stop the fighting" was the main slogan used by Zelenskyy during the election campaign. But questions remained as to how this goal could be achieved since no clear plan had been presented. While the general idea of military disengagement eventually prevailed, a new level of nuance had appeared by the time of the controversial Paris meeting of the Normandy Four last December. In February this year, during the Munich Security Conference, Zelenskyy said he wanted to "conduct local elections on the whole territory of Ukraine, including the separate districts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, in October 2020… but to do so without basic security and political conditions, violating the constitution of Ukraine and international standards of the democratic elections is impossible for us." This statement bares a striking resemblance to Poroshenko's idea of "security first" and has clearly shown the difficulty of maintaining a naïve view of the conflict in light of the situation on the ground.

> There is no single strategy that could define a Zelenskyy approach towards the conflict settlement.

Indeed, there is no single strategy that could define a Zelenskyy approach towards the conflict settlement. This is due to the fact that there is no clear understanding of the roots of and reasons for the conflict. Attempts are made to divide the problem into several dimensions and to propose ideas that stand in parallel. This does not, however, create a comprehensive vision. For the first six months of Zelenskyy's presidency, all efforts were simply an assortment of tactics rather than

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actual strategies. It was a search for quick success within three specific dimensions: the humanitarian situation, the security situation on the contact line and relations with Russia. These dimensions dominated both political discourse and the process of developing plans. A human-centric approach is one of the declared approaches. As a result, Kyiv's humanitarian and security concerns are often complementary despite not always correlating with each other.

New ideas?

At the end of October last year, at the Mariupol Unity Forum, Zelenskyy announced a "strategy for Donbas reintegration". According to the plan, reintegration should consist of three stages: a full ceasefire; social reconciliation and a search for consensus; and full reintegration. It should be based on four principles – transparency, consensus, realism and implementation. As of writing, a full document is yet to be presented.

> There is a new emphasis on possible direct dialogue with the uncontrolled territories. But who would be the "representatives" of the other side?

Last year brought a new emphasis on possible direct dialogue with the uncontrolled territories. But identifying who would be the "representatives" of the other side is not easy. "We are convinced that an effective mechanism is achieved via a direct dialogue with the so-called local authorities in the ORDLO (a reference to the temporarily occupied and uncontrolled territories of Ukraine – editor's note). We are ready for dialogue with the civilians of these territories, not with those who are not recognised in terms of international law and therefore cannot represent the local population of Ukraine," Zelenskyy said in Munich this February. Considering that "local administrations" mean the representatives of the occupying/separatist forces or those who supported them, logical questions arise: Who are these "local authorities" that it is supposedly possible to speak with? Who are the "civilians" and who are "those who are not recognised"?

Similarly, it is unclear whom Zelenskyy is referring to in his idea of joint patrols of the uncontrolled territories by Ukrainian law enforcement units, representatives of the temporary occupied territories and OSCE representatives. Observers interpreted this as "representatives of the non-recognised authorities or militia". This perception was supported by Ukrainian foreign minister Vadym Pristayko's statement: "An idea of joint patrols has been discussed since the beginning of the Minsk process. And this topic raises hot discussions – can the militants be involved

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Volodymyr Zelenskyy's visit to the frontlines in May of last year. "To stop the fighting" was the main slogan used by Zelenskyy during the election campaign.

in such patrols?" Three days later, the minister of interior, Arsen Avakov, clarified that these patrols should operate during the election campaign and be composed of "Ukrainian police, international peacekeepers and civilian unarmed representatives of local communities, and in no case would include militants".

Another new idea that has been circulating is the necessity to widen the representation of those who can speak on behalf of the uncontrolled areas and include those who left and chose to live in government controlled territories. This idea was originally expressed before the Paris Normandy meeting last December in London by Andriy Yermak, who is now the head of the presidential administration. Speaking at a conference called "Ukraine: Great expectations", which was jointly organised by the Ukrainian Prism and Chatham House, Yermak emphasised that the "people of Donbas" are represented not only by the so-called "DNR" and "LNR" authorities but also 1.5 million internally displaced persons. In his view, and what has been later proposed, 36 representatives – 18 selected by the Ukrainian side and 18 (one from each district) from the uncontrolled territories – should create a group that would select six people (three from Donetsk and three from Luhansk) to become "representatives of the territories" to work within the Minsk Format.

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Zelenskyy continued with this idea, insisting that the voice of Donbas is not only limited to the current residents of the occupied territories, but includes at least one and a half million displaced people from the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. That is why his team has initiated the creation of a public dialogue platform called "Peace of Donbas", in which the internally displaced would be involved "in consultations within the Minsk platform and actively participate in discussing their future in united Ukraine."

The "Peace of Donbas" platform looks similar to a project that had been announced in November 2019. This was the Platform for Unity and Reconciliation for Donbas Reintegration that was supposed to be organised by the National Security and Defence Council. Its presentation was scheduled for February 19th this year but it was postponed due to the fighting in Zolote. Initially it was stated that the platform would be based on the experiences of Northern Ireland and Bosnia. The choice of these conflicts raised serious questions. On the one hand, both conflicts have a long history of peace-building and reconciliation, so there is definite relevance to the situation in Donbas. On the other hand, both of these conflicts were deeply tied to issues related to faith and ethnicity and were largely internal confrontations where third parties played a minor role in triggering their respective disputes. Using the narrative that the Donbas conflict is an intra-state one is risky – as it goes well with the Russian narrative describing the war as a "civil war". Moreover, a government-created system in both Northern Ireland and Bosnia after the heated stage of the conflict has already shown the hidden risks of re-escalation and the dysfunctionality of governmental institutions.

Serhiy Sivokho, an advisor to the National Security and Defence Council who is behind this project, explained that he expected dialogue to be based "on the language of sport, culture, and business". This seems to mean a return to the basic principles of confidence-building measures that can be effective in the case of a stable ceasefire, guaranteed security, and an understanding of the amnesty principles.

The road to Normandy?

How likely is it that the next Normandy Four meeting will actually take place in April this year? Despite the fact that in Paris last December it was agreed that the next meeting would take place in four months without any preconditions, the situation remains similar to what we saw in the fall of 2019. Back then, the Russians had been calling for new pre-conditions to meet. In the spring of 2019, the Kremlin declared that they were ready to talk to anybody except Poroshenko, so that they would wait for the results of the presidential election. Later, conditions

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such as prisoner exchange (including very controversial figures) and acceptance of the so-called "Steinmeier formula" (a sequence of steps that involved withdrawing military forces from the line of contact on both sides, holding local elections in the Donbas region under Ukrainian law and OSCE supervision, restoring the Ukrainian government's control over the state border and granting special self-governing status to the Donetsk and Luhansk regions – editor's note.) were named as reasons for postponing the meeting until December.

More and more voices from Moscow are now insisting that Ukraine has not been fulfilling the Paris Agreements, thus putting the necessity of the next meeting under question. Among the pre-conditions, the following were specifically outlined: to disengage forces in three new locations; to open new checkpoints; to expend de-mining activities; to exchange prisoners; to include the "Steinmeier formula" in Ukrainian legislations; and to agree to all legal aspects of the Donbas's special status and to guarantee this status's permanency. In Moscow's view, only the prisoner exchange has been achieved. While the Ukrainian side has initiated further military disengagement under the so-called sectoral principle, increased violations of the ceasefire close to previously disengaged locations undermine Zelenskyy's initiatives.

In contrast to the hopes of Zelenskyy and his team, the road to peace has not been smooth or straightforward. The emphasis on humanitarian issues cannot neglect the security situation on the ground and the unchanged position of the Kremlin. While most of Kyiv's new ideas fall within the definition of tactics, with each month and each new round of negotiations, the theoretical question of "tactics vs strategy" is becoming more and more critical. The necessity of solving humanitarian issues, thinking about future reconciliation and separating high politics from the situation on the ground is not an excuse for a lack of vision and conflict management strategy. "To stop the fighting" is a good slogan only when it is backed by a clear strategic appraisal and an understanding of the counterpart's intentions and strategic foresight. NEE

Hanna Shelest is the editor in chief of *Ukraine Analytica* and board member of the Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism".

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The challenge of reintegration

TIM BOHSE AND IGOR MITCHNIK

A secure reintegration policy for Donbas should include two dimensions: de-occupation and strengthening of national cohesion. Every political step that emphasises one dimension of reintegration at the expense of the other jeopardises the security of those involved and thus the foundations for a sustainable political dialogue.

Rebooting the peace process and reuniting Ukraine – these lofty promises are the mainstay of the presidency of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy since his election last year. In this spirit, during the first so-called Unity Forum held on October 30th 2019 in Mariupol, Zelenskyy introduced three crucial steps on how he sees the process of bringing the occupied territories back to Ukraine: ceasefire, reconciliation and safe reintegration.

Yet already before the elections, the term "reintegration" was being discussed even more controversially than the unexpected election of the political newbie Zelenskyy itself. The mere word "reintegration" ignites mistrust and polarises the Ukrainian civil society. Initially, the term reintegration was conceived simply as the social, institutional and territorial integration of the non-government controlled areas (NGCA) into the Ukrainian state and society. Yet different scenarios regarding how this reintegration should take place lead to completely different outcomes regarding the future of the country.

Reintegration vs de-integration

Analysing these different variants in the Ukrainian public and political discourse, experts from the Ukrainian National Platform for Peace and Secure Reintegration

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developed the understanding of the so-called "secure reintegration". Oleh Saakian from the platform says that the key element of this concept is security. In other words, any kind of reintegration policy and all forms of political dialogue can only be conducted in a safe environment, preventing substantial risks in the course of the process – neither for the citizens involved nor for the Ukrainian state as a whole. Saakian sees it as his platform's success that Zelenskyy adopted the political concept of reintegration into his statements.

"Secure reintegration" takes elements from both of the two polarising understandings of reintegration in the Ukrainian discourse. On the one hand, Saakian identifies the discourse of "de-integration" primarily prevalent among the pro-Ukrainian patriotically-minded community. In the view of this group, the Ukrainian state is defending itself successfully – but cannot win this war. Thus, they argue that the non-government controlled areas should be separated from the rest of the country, a wall built around them and the issue of regaining these territories postponed indefinitely. According to a survey by the Razumkov centre from the end of February 2020 around 20 per cent of the Ukrainian society supported this course of action, which problematically entails that control over the territories can be regained only militarily.

According to Saakian this radical position is based on a dichotomous understanding of war. Adherents of this position think merely in two categories: in terms of a complete victory or a complete defeat. The inevitable consequences of such an approach, however, seem not very well thought out. The economic blockade in the east of the country, which has resulted from this position, has led to the loss of economic control over the territories, and by this to the loss of one of the very few opportunities to influence the political and economic developments in those areas.

Moreover, the hostile rhetoric of this group against the inhabitants of the "people's republics" and lumping them together with "separatists" contributed to the alienation of the people living there. Yet recent research illustrates that the simplified stereotypical view that only separatists have remained in the so-called DNR and LNR is twisted. The reality, identities, and political affiliations in these regions remain complex and in constant flux. A study by the Berlin-based research institute Centre for East European and International Studies (ZOiS) revealed in 2019 that around 13 per cent of the people remaining in these territories still identify as Ukrainian citizens mainly. Around one-fourth sees themselves as either only "ethnic Russians" (12 per cent) or as residents of the self-proclaimed Donetsk or Luhansk People's Republics (12 per cent). Moreover, a bit more than half of the survey participants still living in these regions indicated a preference that their region should be part of the Ukrainian state – be it either in the form of a special status (31 per cent) or even under pre-war conditions (24 per cent).

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The second discourse, which, according to Saakian, is dangerous for the societal cohesion and stability of the Ukrainian state, is often built around the obfuscating term "peace" and is pushed by pro-Russian groups in Ukraine and political stakeholders directly controlled by the Kremlin. Their understanding of reintegration seeks to undermine the political sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. This position envisages reintegration without the precondition of restoring Ukrainian control over the non-governmentally controlled territory – in plain language reintegration without de-occupation. Thus, to find a comprehensive definition that avoids existential risks triggered by these positions for both citizens and the Ukrainian state as a whole, while considering the fragile environment in which people live on both sides of the contact line, the platform developed the concept of "secure reintegration".

Security first

A secure reintegration policy should include two dimensions: a process of de-occupation and a strengthening of national cohesion. Every political step that emphasises one of these dimensions at the expense of the other jeopardises the security of those involved and thus the foundations for a sustainable political dialogue. Only if both a process of de-occupation together with the strengthening of the social and political cohesion in Ukraine have positive cumulative results, a space for the Ukrainian government to take political action opens up. Such cohesion presupposes a common vision inside the Ukrainian society about the borders of their state – despite the natural, democratic prevalence of social and political cleavages between different interest groups in the society.

> Enhancing an honest and open dialogue with the aim of mutual understanding between people living across the contact line is essential.

This definition of reintegration should not detract from the claim that the integration of people should come first, instead of sticking to a schematic understanding which focuses only on regaining the territories. Therefore, enhancing an honest and open dialogue with the aim of mutual understanding between people living across the contact line is essential, however bound by the conditions that everyone feels safe to do so.

"In any kind of peace process, particularly under the conditions of ongoing Russian aggression, we need to have basic security ensured as a first priority", says Denys Bihunov, a Sloviansk-based representative of the NGO "Strong Communities". Sloviansk is a city of around 110,000 people located approximately 70 kilometres

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away from the contact line in the Donetsk region. Bihunov works closely with local authorities and civil society to research the socio-economic and demographic situation in frontline cities. Based on the findings, he develops joint action plans and political recommendations to local, regional and central authorities with his NGO.

However, Bihunov does not see any chance that these necessary conditions for a secure reintegration could be provided anytime soon: "The Russian Federation continues the occupation of a part of the territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, and its armed mercenary groups continue active combat operations." According to him, the shelling and offensive operations by the Russian proxies first need to stop, and artillery has to be withdrawn as agreed in the Minsk agreements.

Thus, elections cannot be organised without the complete withdrawal of military units as stated in the Minsk agreements and the restoration of Ukrainian control over the eastern border. According to Bihunov, political dialogue with the inhabitants of the so-called republics would not be possible under the conditions of an ongoing Ukrainian-Russian war, and as long as the "military dictatorships in Luhansk and Donetsk" prevail. It would put the people at risk who are involved and discredit the instrument of dialogue itself.

Civil society snubbed

Despite all the criticism from many corners of the Ukrainian civil society and by both Ukrainian and EU political analysts, the Razumkov Centre named the preservation of the European and Euro-Atlantic course by Ukraine as the key political achievement by the new government for the year 2019. Zelenskyy stayed committed to co-operation with the EU within the Association Agreement and continued the NATO-Ukraine Commission's work.

Yet, Berlin-based Ukraine expert Wilfried Jilge, an associate fellow at the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP), notes that the efforts of the Ukrainian foreign ministry and presidential cabinet to formulate the state's diplomatic strategy towards the conflict do not seem transparent enough to Ukraine's European and transatlantic partners, nor does the Ukrainian diplomatic strategy in general. Thus, attempts by the Ukrainian leadership to negotiate bilaterally with Russia caused concerns not only among foreign policy analysts, but also among Ukraine's political allies in Europe who firmly support the push for sanctions against the Russian politicians and businessmen until they scotch the Kremlin's involvement in East Ukraine.

Saakian goes as far to say that despite the adoption of the concept of reintegration in speeches, the presidential administration seems to lack a political strategy

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on how to mainstream this concept throughout governmental institutions. Jilge, meanwhile, says that the Ukrainian presidential administration seems fairly active behind the scenes and committed to a "secure reintegration". He highlights, however, that Zelenskyy's team fails to consult representatives of Ukrainian civil society into their policy planning processes.

Particularly regarding high-level negotiations on the Donbas conflict, the presidential administration did not communicate a clear strategy with civil society representatives, criticises Alena Lunova, an advocacy manager at the Ukrainian human rights NGO "Zmina". Lunova focuses on the protection of human rights of people living in the conflict region. Civil society representatives like Lunova struggle to find the relevant points of contact in Zelenskyy's cabinet, who are in charge of decisive policies on the Donbas regions. These activists demand way more involvement in political decision-making processes of the current government. This would be relevant in order to reduce the substantial risks accompanying even well-meaning initiatives by the government.

Although it is crucial to establish more dialogue initiatives for people from both sides of the contact line to enable a "secure reintegration", movement across the contact line and thereby people-to-people contacts persist. These contacts did not even stop during the most intense periods of fighting. According to statistics provided by UNHCR and the Ukrainian NGO Right to Protection (R2P), in the month of January 2020 alone more than one million people were crossing the contact line regularly. The same source illustrates that six per cent of the respondents living permanently on the non-government controlled territory indicate that the main reason to cross the five exit/entry points is to see their relatives and to check on their real estate. Other pressing issues are inheritance and issuance of documents to people living in these territories. More than 90 per cent of the residents of the "people's republics" surveyed by the NGO R2P and UNHCR were older than 60. For this cohort, everything related from pensions and social payments to cash withdrawal were the strongest motivations to take the physically and psychologically strenuous journey.

Lawlessness

In terms of social rights particularly of pensioners living in the non-government controlled territories, the Ukrainian state can arguably do better. The United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission demands the Ukrainian state to regulate the payment of pensions by a special law. The law would be a crucial part of the Donbas reintegration policy. Cash payments, however, will not be introduced

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without safe and transparent cash delivery mechanisms. In general, the communication between residents across the contact line of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions remains at the level of individual and family contacts. Any expression of a political opinion not in line with the de-facto authorities can lead to severe punishment. "People who live under occupation are very afraid – they are afraid to speak, afraid to openly express their thoughts, feelings and pain," says Natalya Bondarenko, who is head of the Sloviansk-based foundation for support of elderly people called "the age of happiness".

She considers the people living in these regions as Ukrainian citizens no less than anywhere else in the country – yet stuck in a system of lawlessness. "They live in a system in which armed people arbitrarily decide about fundamental rights and freedoms." And the longer the war continues, "the further away people will get from each other", Bondarenko says. She puts all her trust and hope in the younger generation, in "young people who study at Ukrainian universities and get the opportunity to travel to Europe, who communicate on equal terms with each other, regardless on which side they live." These people could bring their experience back to their families, Bondarenko argues.

But this generation is exposed to the closed propaganda environment like everyone else living in NGCA. As research commissioned by the Berlin-based NGO DRA in 2019 illustrates the younger generation seems deeply anxious about its future and to reach out for contact to the other side. To counter such stereotypical mistrust among people on both sides, Bihunov suggests that the regional authorities in the government-controlled parts of Ukraine should increase their outreach efforts and launch accessible hotlines and other informational campaigns targeting residents beyond the contact line. The people in non-government controlled areas should be informed about plans and programmes that the government creates concerning social protection of internally displaced people and citizens of Ukraine still living in the region.

"Citizens of Ukraine in the occupied territory should see that Ukraine and the region of Donetsk have not forgotten about their existence," Bihunov says. Everything else would be just lofty promises. NEE

Tim Bohse is a Berlin-based political scientist focusing on Poland, Ukraine and Russia. He is a project manager at DRA, heading a programme on civic monitoring in eastern Ukraine and support for civil society on the government-controlled territory.

Igor Mitchnik is the head of the office at Drukarnia-Civil Society Centre Sloviansk in the Donetsk Region of Ukraine. Prior to joining this project in 2019, he worked as a Mercator Fellow on International Affairs at People in Need in their field office in Sloviansk.

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A tale of two collapses

WOJCIECH SIEGIEŃ

Today's Sievierodonetsk reflects wider processes that are taking place in the Donbas region. In the summer of 2014 de-oligarchisation and decommunisation began to progress in parallel. They resulted in two collapses.

Many of us probably do not realise the role that heavy-duty hand cleaning paste has played in the history of the Eastern bloc. In Poland, for instance, this product was called *pasta BHP*, and it was commonly used to remove stains from paint and grease. Its trade allowed one Polish family, the Kulczyks, to become billionaires. In the Soviet republics, that paste was called *Landish* and was popularly used in households as a washing detergent.

Those whose clothes were washed with *Landish* and whose teenage years overlapped with the transformation of the 1990s most likely also played *Nu pogadi* (*Ну, погоди!*). It was the first Soviet portable electronic game where players were catching chicken eggs dropped from a perch. The title of the game was a reference to the popular Soviet cartoon with the same name. If you now wonder what these two things – the heavy-duty hand cleaning paste and the early video game – have in common, you should take a look at the map of Ukraine to find a city called Sievierodonetsk. After Luhansk, this is the second largest city in the Luhansk Oblast and the capital of the chemical industry.

Garden cities

Even though both *Landish*'s characteristic packaging and the simple screen of *Nu pogadi* are the images that are deeply rooted in people's biographic memory, their production site, in Sievierodonetsk, has been wiped out of memory (even in Ukraine). It has returned only after the war broke out in 2014 and the monolithic

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Donbas region was shattered in places like Pisky, Debaltseve, Ilovaisk, Stanytsia Luhanska, Schastia, Horlivka and many others. With the occupation of the separatist forces, and later liberation from them, the name Sievierodonetsk once again entered Ukrainian discourse, finally emerging from its non-existence. No longer perceived as a proud city of the chemical industry, the town is now known as the capital of the war-affected and deeply tarnished Ukrainian Luhansk oblast.

The spirit of the city probably best explains why, from the outset, Sievierodonetsk reflects some wider processes taking place in Donbas. Historically speaking, Sievier, the name that the locals use for Sievierodonetsk, grew out of Liskhimstroi, which was the first settlement for workers of the Lysychansk Nitrogen Fertilizer Plant. It was established on the left bank of the Siverskyi Donets River in 1934. Since then Sievierodonetsk became a typical Soviet industrial city whose life was centred on one large production complex.

Sievierodonetsk is now known as the capital of the war-affected and deeply tarnished Ukrainian Luhansk oblast.

Sievier was called a model Soviet industrial town not only because of the size of its chemical production centre, but because of how its constructors worked and lived. Photographs from the 1940s show wooden barracks that were built on a sandy terrain ploughed by bulldozers. In this desert-like scenario dispersed pine trees look like African baobabs. When looking at old photos, I could not help but think of the famous poem by the Russian poet Vladimir Mayakovsky, titled *A Khrenov's story about Kuznetskstroy and the people of Kuznetsk* (*Рассказ Хренова о Кузнецкстрое и о людях Кузнецка*). In it Mayakovsky portrayed the Siberian city of Novokuznetsk (Kuznetsk) at the centre of the newly developing Kuznetsk Basin which was one of the centres of the Soviet Union in terms of regional coal production, second only to Ukraine's Donets Basin. Mayakovsky, who had never visited the city, was imagining soaked and shivering workers from the Siberian taiga and the heat coming from the open hearth furnaces. With this in mind, he wrote what became a famous line: "In four years' time there will be a Garden City here".

Mayakovsky did not live to see his vision come true, however. He died a year after he wrote that poem. However, the Soviets continued to develop their version of garden cities. After the Second World War one of them was established in Sievierodonetsk, which was to become an ideal socialist town. Similarly, Novokuznetsk was also developed after the Second World War with the aim to embody a vision of an ideal socialist city. It was supposed to illustrate human hegemony over taiga, while Sievierodonetsk was evidence of human hegemony over the steppe.

From even a glimpse at Sievierodonetsk's map you can understand its planners' desire to make it a Soviet version of Ebenezer Howard's garden city. It resembles

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Photo by Wojciech Siegień

From even a glimpse at Sievierodonetsk's map you can understand its planners' desire to make it a Soviet version of Ebenezer Howard's garden city.

a linear city as promoted by the Soviet planner Nikolay Milyutin in the late 1920s. The streets stretch along rivers and a railroad line. The first ring, closest to water, is an industrial area which looks like a labyrinth of chimneys and pipes. This is also where the chemical production centre, Azot, is located. Right next to the factory there is a network of streets which cross the two main avenues, which in turn cut through the wide Central Avenue. This is the area of government offices as well as the cultural institutions and recreational facilities. A large park with a stadium and a lake completes Sievierodonetsk in the north, while the famous Ice Palace, with another lake right behind it, is located in the south.

Firtash

Today's Sievierodonetsk also reflects the wider processes that are taking place in the Donbas region. Since the line of contact was established and Lysychansk became the last point one could travel by rail, Sievierodonetsk can now only be reached by a marshrutka mini-bus or taxi. They both stop near the recently rebuilt Siverskyi Donets bridge. When crossing it by bus last summer, together with other

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participants of the Donbas Studies Summer School, I saw a post-apocalyptic reality ahead. The first thing emerging on the horizon was an electrical power plant with two gigantic chimneys. While passing the industrial complex, the bus driver had to dodge a series of potholes on the road. The murky industrial zone lingers with a plethora of rusty pipes, steel and concrete. One gets a sense of some kind of emptiness here. It was like a scene from the Soviet science fiction film *Stalker* directed by Andrei Tarkovsky. There are barely any people out in the streets. Looking around, two thoughts came to my mind straight away. First, that the scale of the chemical production centre was almost as surreal as the scale of its collapse and decomposition. The latter surely has had an immense impact on the lives and well-being of the locals.

Sievierodonetsk's recent history reveals Ukraine's problems with oligarchisation. Azot had been in private ownership since 2011. Now it belongs to the Ostchem holding, controlled by Dmytro Firtash who is one of Ukraine's richest businessmen and whose life story is a perfect example of the shady career path that is shared by so many of Ukraine's oligarchs. Firtash started out as a fire truck driver who was making a living trading milk and canned food in Chernivtsi during the 1990s. He was arrested for smuggling and took part in some shooting activities. Soon afterwards he became an intermediary in the gas trade with Turkmenistan, and later he established new businesses and intermediary projects in the gas trade between Asia and Ukraine as well as Europe. Among them is the powerful RosUkrEnergo whose shares are split between Firtash and Gazprom. In the early 2000s, Firtash started to heavily invest in the chemical industry and a few years later he became the real monopolist of Ukraine's fertiliser market. Not surprisingly Sievierodonetsk and its chemical complex, Azot, became a gem in the oligarch's empire. Yet it is when you take a deeper look where you can see the results of the turbulences that the oligarchic structure of business in Ukraine generates.

Collapse

In Sievierodonetsk the process of de-oligarchisation and decommunisation started in parallel in the summer of 2014. They resulted in two collapses. The first one took place on July 22nd 2014 when the Russian-backed separatist forces blew up a bridge on the Siverskyi Donets while trying to stop the forces of the Ukrainian National Guard and the Donbas Battalion that were moving from Sievierodonetsk to Lysychansk. The second collapse took place exactly one month later – on August 23rd 2014 – when Lenin's monument was taken down in the city's Peace Square. Russia's aggression into Donbas in 2014 also marked the beginning of Firtash's col-

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lapse even though he supported the pro-Russian Opposition Bloc (political party) and had ties with the Kremlin. A Reuters investigation actually revealed that Firtash had built his empire thanks to the preferential loans he obtained from Gazprombank and the generous discounted rates he got for purchasing gas. Yet the military action in Sievierodonetsk halted production at Azot, which has not resumed since. In addition, in March 2014 Firtash was arrested in Austria where a case was initiated against him and legal proceedings were launched to extradite him to the United States.

> In Sievierodonetsk the process of de-oligarchisation and decommunisation started in parallel in the summer of 2014.

The overall scheme of Fritash's political and business network includes the Russian mafia, Kremlin insiders, Ukraine's former President Petro Poroshenko, the American lobbyist Paul Manaford, as well as prominent lawyers of the US President Donald Trump, including Rudy Giuliani. On the horizon there is also China and its demand for Ukrainian corn, which is cultivated with the use of nitrogen fertilisers.

Ammonia

From the point of view of Sievierodonetsk's inhabitants, none of the above has much meaning. If you ask them what matters the most, you are likely to hear the following: When there is ammonia, everything is okay. The thing is, however, that there is no ammonia and nobody knows when it will come back.

The collapse of the bridge over the Siverskyi Donets River can be viewed as a symbolic cutting Sievierodonetsk off from the previous oligarchic structure. Namely, as a result of the war, the local patron lost his political powerbase and freedom. In his place, a new feudal structure emerged as the state institutions are almost dormant here. You may almost want to say that the city and its residents have become hostage to geopolitics. Indeed, as a result of Firtash's shady practices and the incoherent policies of the Ukrainian government, Azot fell into a debt spiral. In 2017 the company's debt constituted 45 per cent of the overall debt of the entire Luhansk region. The following year Azot was behind on salary payments – company staff were owed around 58 million hryvnas (over two million euro). In 2019 it owed 143 million hryvnas (over five million euro) for electricity expenses. Admittedly, all this was taking place when Ukraine was seeing an increased demand for fertilisers. After his arrest in 2014, Firtash was released on bail, which amounted to 155 million US dollars. This amount illustrates the quasi-feudal social relations in Donbas where, on the one hand, you have a hegemon capable of paying such

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high amount for his release and, on the other hand, there are 130,000 people who are dependent on ammonia.

While walking on Sievierodonetsk's streets in the hot summer, I could not stop thinking that, in this part of Donbas, the irony of fate works differently. When taking the perpendicularly arranged streets, with their characteristic rundown silicate brick buildings, I know that I am in a place that was supposed to be the implementation of the socialist dream of the garden city. However when I get further away from the centre, I am struck by something else. The strong odour of urine comes from the sewers and can be smelled everywhere. This experience teaches me how the rational concept of a garden city can transform into its own caricature as a result of the communist-era attitudes to work, the post-communist corruption and a lack of investment. It becomes an ass city (*город-зад*). Thus, today's reality is better expressed by the contemporary Russian poet, Dmitry Bykov, who, taking an ironic view of Mayakovsky wrote: "There will never be any city or any garden. In four years' time the only thing will be you."

The current geopolitical trap, whose prey includes the city and its residents, translates into the social mood. Thus, as it turned out from the fifth All-Ukrainian Communal Research, which was carried out last year, Sievierodonetsk is on the extreme end when it comes to social satisfaction, compared to 23 other Ukrainian oblasts. Almost 60 per cent of those surveyed in the city negatively assessed the direction of change in Ukraine. This is almost twice as much as in Kyiv, Odesa or Mariupol. The same can be said about the assessment of the development of the city, where the pessimism of Sievierodonetsk's residents was estimated to be much stronger than in the western and central parts of Ukraine.

Separatism

The current situation, aside from the obvious economic issues, has cultural explanations. When the main mechanism of a city with one enterprise collapses, it also impacts the city's economy and identity. While the latter can be harder to grasp, it is, in fact, responsible for the city's cohesion. In Sievierodonetsk this is quite clear. When I asked people who they were, I would often hear "here we are all chemists". This, in fact, is a different way of saying: "when there is ammonia, everything is okay".

There is no doubt that the never-ending post-Soviet transformation, and the war with separatist forces which brought on the economic collapse, have shaken the identity of Donbas. It is thus very likely that the next politician who promises to make Donbas great again will get significant support here.

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Sievierodonetsk was considered the informal capital of Donbas separatism, even before Igor Strelkov's forces attacked Sloviansk. In 2004 and 2008 two separate conventions took place in the Ice Palace. They were called the All-Ukrainian Congress of People's Deputies and Deputies of Local Councils, and gathered participants from all sectors who formulated the concept of Ukraine's federalisation, announcing future separatism and the establishment of autonomous quasi-republics.

The speeches delivered at these two events by the Party of Regions representatives, as well as those published by the pro-Kremlin commentators, included ideas that years later became the official explanation for Russia's annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of war in Donbas. Among other things, one could hear the following arguments: Donbas people need to defend the Russian language and protect the region from "crawling Ukrainianisation", Donbas needs to oppose NATO's entrance into Ukraine and not allow it to rewrite its centuries-long history. Interestingly, the postulates that were aimed at stimulating the separatist imagination among the people in Donbas were made of just a few political references. Instead, they relied heavily on cultural connections, collective identity and memory. Taken together, they clearly show a manipulation of the past, that is, the period where local residents could say "we are all chemists here, there is ammonia here". This sentiment must have had a very broad influence here since the idea of the Russian world would become the main reason explaining the Russian aggression into Ukraine.

Great victory

Let us now return to the second of the earlier mentioned collapses, namely, the fall of the Lenin monument. Overall the *Leninopad* which took place throughout Ukraine was probably one of the unexpected outcomes of the Russian aggression. In Sievierodonetsk, together with the Lenin monument, the monuments of Officer Kliment Voroshilov and Bolshevik Chairman Yakov Sverdlov, were also taken down. Only the statue of the writer Maxim Gorky remained, but the inscription has been removed. Those who now visit the park cannot tell whose statue that is.

The city's main monument is yet to be found at Victory Square where, in 2004, the authorities erected a 14-metre tall granite stele to commemorate the victorious soldiers of the Second World War and the 70th anniversary of the establishment of Sievierodonetsk (even though the city was chartered in 1958). The initiative of the local authorities to erect the monument coincided with Ukraine's breakthrough presidential elections which led to the Orange Revolution. In my view, the history of the Second World War monument reflects an important stage in the evolution

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of Sievierodonetsk's identity. Namely, while the *Leninopad* can be interpreted as a rebuttal of the totalitarian past, many Soviet sentiments have not yet been eradicated. This is especially true for the myth of the Red Army victory in the Second World War, which, to this day, remains a sacred experience for many post-Soviet societies. As such, it has become a very important moment in their history. To put into one phrase what today's Sievierodonetsk is like, you can say that it is caught in a symbolic suspension. On the one hand, liberation from separatist forces brought an end to the Bolshevik idols, but the pedestals on their monuments are still empty. Clearly six years is too short of a time to build a new narrative, both about the city and the Ukrainian Donbas.

The two collapses: the collapse of a bridge and Lenin monuments – or put differently, the collapse of the city's industry and its identity – are forever tied together. Yet while it is much easier to rebuild the city's infrastructure, building a new narrative takes time. For the moment the ideological emptiness is filled with one permanent element – the Red Army's victory in the Second World War. Given that, it is justified to say that the attractiveness of Soviet sentiments, with a lack of any alternatives or a new plan for the Ukrainian Donbas, offers fertile soil for separatism to take root. This risk should not be ignored, especially as none of my interlocutors in Sievierodonetsk excluded the possibility of a repeat of 2014. NEE

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

Wojciech Siegień works at the department of social sciences in the University of Gdańsk. He has researched the countries of the former Eastern Bloc. He is currently doing research in Donbas in Ukraine. His main interests are educational ideologies and the different processes of militarisation in post-Soviet countries.

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Evolution of an identity

VOLODYMYR RAFEENKO

The war has destroyed and continues to devastate Donbas. A majority of the region's residents have no place to work or means to make a living. One way or another, these circumstances are forcing those who can afford it to abandon the region. Yet I know that even now there are many in Donbas who consider themselves Ukrainian. Unfortunately, they cannot openly express their beliefs.

I was born in Donetsk in the late 1960s and have lived here all my life. My views of Donbas and its people have been shaped for over decades and they have not changed much in recent years. However, in the first year of the Russian military aggression into our land I began to understand, for the first time, how difficult it is to explain some of the circumstances of our Donbas life to people from the outside, even tough to us living here these things are quite simple and understandable. With this remark, I would now like start my essay, or rather a discussion, about the self-identification of the people of Donbas during the war.

Soviet policies

The east of Ukraine was shaped in a special way. Its cities grew purely based on industrial principles. Donetsk was built in the middle of the steppe, on the site of existing small settlements. The impulse for its creation did not come from the needs of the local culture, but the economic needs and interests of the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union. The population that arrived to these settle-

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ments consisted of very diverse people. However before the outbreak of the Second World War they were in large part Ukrainian-speakers who identified themselves as Ukrainian. This was true both in rural and urban areas.

When after the Second World War there was no one to repair the destroyed mines and factories in Donbas various specialists, miners, metallurgists, scientists and ordinary workers with their families moved to Donbas to fill this need. They came here from all over the USSR. Most of them settled in the big cities, where the mines and metallurgical and chemical enterprises were located. They needed to be renovated and sometimes completely overhauled. This is when the cities of Donbas started to become Russian-speaking, while the surrounding towns and villages continued to speak Ukrainian.

Evidently, the Soviet ideologically-driven policies were aimed at destroying national identification. The so-called "Soviet man" and "Soviet nation" were carefully and unceasingly constructed. To put it simply, Soviet citizens were to become people with no memory or roots, those who could be easily managed by the authorities and whose efforts could be directed in the right direction. In Donbas, particular attention was paid to the formation of the "Soviet consciousness". The Kremlin needed an industrial region that would work as an apparatus and did not want to have any complications that come with national identification.

In Donbas, particular attention was paid to the formation of the "Soviet consciousness".

Obviously, the huge efforts to destroy the Ukrainian consciousness in the region had borne some fruit. The Soviets succeeded in taking Donbas away from the purely Ukrainian context, making it a kind of industrial reserve where the preservation of national memory, even at the family level, was regarded a crime against official ideology. Yet attempts to convert the residents of Donbas ultimately failed. Although my parents spoke only Russian with me, both my grandmothers remembered that their mother tongue was Ukrainian. Thus, until today I keep in my memory those Ukrainian fairy tales that my grandmother would tell me on the long winter evenings.

Ukrainian, not Russian

At the moment when Ukraine became independent in 1991, the residents of Donbas formed a very peculiar form of self-identity. Let me here point out that in no way is this a form of Russian identity. The people who lived in Donbas, even if they never used Ukrainian in everyday life did not consider themselves Rus-

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sian. The only exception was maybe those who recently came from Russia and for whom it was natural to identify as ethnic Russians. I would say that having lived in Donetsk my whole life I have known only one such person. I am sure there are more of them, but I personally knew only one.

Territorially and culturally, we all felt Ukrainian. This is mainly because of the cultural symbols that pervaded this historically Ukrainian territory. At holiday tables we sang Ukrainian songs, celebrating Christmas and Easter as they are celebrated only in Ukraine. Russian folk traditions have always seemed too extravagant to us. Women's head-dresses, known as *kokoshnik*, and the circle dances and chorus singing *khorovod* were never considered organic here. This fact is very meaningful. If we sang Ukrainian songs during our home feasts, these were usually folk songs that were passed down from generations and were known and loved by everyone. If Russian songs were sung, they were purely literary texts, that is, verses of famous Russian poets over music. Russian folk songs were not sung and no one knew or understood them.

Political nation

Undeniably the policy of de-Ukrainianisation has also borne fruit. First, a difficult fate befell us during the 20th century when regional identity prevailed over Ukrainian identity. While remaining completely alien to the Russian context, Donbas also felt somewhat detached from the Ukrainian one. Even during Ukraine's independence, the card of "regional individuality" was very well used by the local elite in their political games with the national authorities in Kyiv.

> The processes to consolidate our long-suffering country into one single organism has already begun.

The formation of a political nation is never simple nor swift. Ukraine is a very young state and naturally needs a long time for that to happen. However I have also witnessed that the processes to consolidate our long-suffering country into one single organism has already begun. An increasing number of people identify themselves as Ukrainians, turning to their roots and cultural tradition. It already became quite clear in the late 1990s when the process, despite its complexity, started to take a positive form and Ukraine entered the path to renew itself and to finally become a fully independent state.

Here I would like to quote historian Larysa Yakubova who, in her book *The Ethno-National History of Donbas*, stated the following: "According to the All-Ukrainian Census, as of December 5th 2001 the permanent population of Donetsk

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region was 4,825,600 (about 10 per cent of Ukrainian citizens). As many as 90 per cent of the region's total population were residents of 51 cities in the region and only 10 per cent resided in rural areas. They were representatives of more than 130 nationalities, with the Ukrainian majority of 56.9 per cent (2,744,100 people). The first decade of independence was a time of many changes in the ethno-demographic situation, the most notable among which were the following. Compared to 1989, Ukrainians have strengthened their quantitative position (community growth, apparently due to changes in ethnic self-identification, amounted to 1.9 per cent). The proportion of Russians has decreased by 20.4 per cent."

I am convinced that the decrease in the proportion of Russians was primarily caused by the fact that most of Donbas's residents began to feel and identify themselves as Ukrainian. And it is justified to say that things would have definitely continued according to this trend. But what happened is what happened. The Russian aggression and the war descended on Donbas in 2014, destroying everything that had just formed, which was just starting to grow.

I also have to mention another interesting thing. It was this war, namely, Russia's aggression against Ukraine that has led to the awakening of the self-identification of many Ukrainians. The threat to the country's independence became a powerful catalyst for the formation of a civic society and the formation of a political nation.

The new elite

The war has destroyed and continues to devastate Donbas. A majority of the region's residents have no place to work or ways to make a living. Those who can afford it, abandon the region. To the best of my knowledge, there is no reliable data that would illustrate what is happening in Donbas in terms of movement. Of course there are official figures indicating that nearly 1.5 million people have left Crimea and Donbas in 2019, and that only 15–18 per cent of them plan to return in the event of a ceasefire and security guarantees. But it is also true that, during wartime, statistics are rather conditional.

Personally, I am convinced there are many more people who have forsaken their homes forever. They have left everything they and their families had acquired over the years and have gone to seek a different destiny somewhere else in Ukraine or abroad. No one will give any security guarantees to anyone, even in the event of a conditional cessation of hostilities. And that means we have a pretty sad picture. Almost all of the pro-Ukrainian minded people, if health and family circumstances allowed, have left the region; this process continues. In general, there is a feeling that Donbas has returned to the times of the Soviet Union in the worst sense of

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the term. All the negative features of the late USSR period are now present both in terms of the economy and domestic politics.

Yet I know that even now there are many people in Donbas who consider themselves Ukrainian. Unfortunately they cannot openly express their beliefs; they cannot afford to stand against the official ideology when raising children, and this is perhaps the worst thing that is happening. People send their children to schools where they are brainwashed and configured in line with official ideological discourse. What is worse is the fact that people are afraid to tell their children the truth, fearing they will reveal their real beliefs and thus bring great problems upon themselves and their families.

Today, people in Donetsk do not trust each other. There are no discussions about politics, the future of the city and the region, or Russia's role in what is happening, not even among those who have known each other for years. The denunciations are no longer a prerogative of Stalin's time. In present-day Donetsk, denunciations are a matter of daily functioning. Clearly all of this cannot but affect the self-identity of the people who are still forced to live and survive in these harsh conditions.

We should add the fact that the Russians are actively buying homes and apartments in Donetsk. And not just because they are cheap. In fact, the local government appoints ethnic Russians for key positions in the city's most important enterprises. They come here from Russia specifically to take these jobs. In this way, the new elite of the city is being formed. Obviously they usually move here permanently with their families, hence the overall demography is rapidly changing.

Being generally critical of all sorts of positive forecasts, I am absolutely confident the main factor in the self-identification of the residents of Donbas that can change everything, and for the better, are the borders of Ukraine. If the borders with Russia are finally controlled, Donbas will soon become Ukrainian once again. It may even be to a greater extent than before the war. NEE

Translated by Margarita Novikova

Volodymyr Rafeenko is a Ukrainian writer, poet, and translator.
He is the member of the Ukrainian PEN Club.

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Donbas veterans establish their place in Ukrainian society

An interview with Anton Kolumbet, the first deputy minister for veteran affairs in Ukraine. Interviewer: Kateryna Pryshchepa

KATERYNA PRYSHCHEPA: A report recently published by the International Organization for Migration states that Donbas war veterans often face difficulties with access to services and benefits they are formally entitled to. In addition, they also face conflict situations in society. Is it possible to change these tendencies by legal means, or is there a need for information campaigns?

ANTON KOLUMBET: The problem stems from the fact that the current social guarantees and services for war veterans in Ukraine are still regulated by the law adopted in 1992. That law basically replicates the norms of Soviet legislation regarding the Second World War and Afghan war veterans. In the USSR the state was the principal property owner and the manager of social services: under our current free market economic conditions, some of those old benefits simply cannot be offered by the state anymore. Some of the formal benefits are anachronistic – for instance, the offer of wired radio instalments in apartments. Some of the benefits are also too expensive for the present day state budget in Ukraine. The state does not have the means to provide free housing to 400,000 veterans of the current war. Moreover, the state generally does not have the power to implement certain benefits anymore. The local authorities, for example, have become owners of state land and therefore the right to give plots of land to veterans is now dependent on local councils, which complicates the situation. Overall, these factors create a feeling of frustration among some veterans which we still cannot ease.

Also, for the last five years, communication between some of the veterans and state institutions has been maintained in this old paternalistic tone. The state is interested in having citizens serving in the armed forces. But when the service

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ends, the state has much less interest in them. Some citizens think of ways to maximise the benefits and services they can receive from the state after the end of their military service. This is a negative self-interested attitude. But we are not in a position to change it at the moment because any movement towards official reduction of state-offered benefits always leads to a public uproar. However, we will have to do it sooner rather than later because honesty should be the basis of state policy. Thus, as the ministry, we openly declare that the state just cannot pay for all of these benefits. That is why we propose to change the paradigm and introduce a social guarantee instead of benefits for veterans, in order to change the tone of the discussion.

Does "social guarantee" mean that veterans will get assistance based on individual needs?

Not exactly. We are just saying that the very term "benefit" is paternalistic, and its meaning in Ukraine is so denigrated that any tax payer just hates the very notion.

To clarify the term "social guarantee", we know that the majority of war veterans luckily have not been wounded in service and managed to find employment after they returned to civilian life and consequently do not require extensive assistance. Who will be entitled to these social guarantees? Will this guarantee be only for veterans who need special assistance due to injuries or psychological conditions?

Not really. The veterans who need special assistance are covered by different programmes, as they belong to specific categories. The changes that we are introducing aim at changing attitudes. What we say to the public are two things. First, the veterans deserve respect and gratitude for their service at war. Second, as I have already said, we want to change the attitude towards benefits. That is why we are switching to the notion of social guarantees and say to people: "As tax payers we need to provide for the veterans, for their medical and psychological support, their training and employment orientation, because the veterans are the priority reserve for the armed forces."

So basically you are re-branding…

Yes. What we are saying is that all the veterans who were discharged from military service still have an insert in their military ID which states that, when their military unit requests them, they are obliged to report to duty in less than 24 hours and should be treated as such.

But this re-branding will not increase the funding available for veterans.

The availability of funding depends, in part, on public demand.

So you are trying to form the demand?

Precisely. Veterans have not finished their military service for good; they can still be called up in case of serious aggravation. Right now, about 100,000 of the 400,000 Donbas war veterans are

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active military. That is because veterans have not been fully discharged. The other 300,000 are part of the priority reserve of the Ukrainian army in case the situation at war aggravates, or Russia initiates a full-scale attack against Ukraine. Consequently, the state needs to ensure that people in the military reserve are ready for such an occurrence, in terms of training, health, well-being and motivation. This paradigm will be included in new legislation on the status of veterans, which has been drafted in co-operation with veteran organisations and will be soon submitted to parliament.

In addition to that, we need to think of financial support. We cannot just cancel the existing benefits because Ukraine's constitution prevents us from doing so, and there can be resistance if we do so. But given the scarcity of resources, the new draft legislation proposes a new mechanism of support for veterans. For example, instead of totally free housing for veterans, we propose subsidised mortgage programmes and co-financing for housing schemes. In this way, the attitude shall change from consumerism to partnership. Overall, the new legislation aims at developing the social capital of our veterans – it is more modern and based on western models.

Which countries precisely?

The United States and the United Kingdom.

Will these schemes be administered by the ministry for veteran affairs?

No. By the ministry of communities and territories development.

So the different programmes addressed to the veterans will be run by different bodies?

Currently, the programmes are administered based on the sphere of policy and not according to the beneficiary. Therefore, we are negotiating to transfer some of the policies to the ministry for veteran affairs, but we are presently limited by the small size of our staff. In addition, the ministry has been undergoing a very complicated re-organisation. We were once merged with the ministry for occupied territory, but now the decision has been taken to divide the ministries again.

Going back to policies. Do you already have an ideal image of the process of veterans' transition from military service to civilian life? What would it look like?

The transition should already start within the military unit. We are currently implementing a second project with the support of our Norwegian colleagues, which will develop a dedicated protocol on the transition to civilian life. According to the protocol, the preparations should start within the soldier's military unit, about one or two months before the soldier's discharge from the military service. The preparation should include an audit of future needs with questions about possible re-training, employment, rehabilitation or other social needs. The discharged veteran should return to his/

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her hometown where s/he will have to refer to the veterans' space.

What is the veterans' space? Will they be connected with the current enlistment offices?

No, because the enlistment offices are in charge of the needs of the current active military servicemen, when the veteran corps include not only military personnel but also officers of the ministry of interior, state emergency service and so on.

So there will have to be a new public service created to cater for all the veterans' needs?

Yes. This new service should combine the functions of the local offices of the ministry for veterans' affairs and community centres. What we have learnt during the last five years is that the best people to provide services for the veterans are the veterans themselves, and the veteran NGOs should be involved to achieve the best result. The plan is that every discharged serviceman /servicewoman will come to his/her local veteran centre, or space, where s/he will have a manager working with him/her personally to fulfil any needs.

Speaking of the need for psychological assistance, are there any statistics on those needs?

I cannot provide any hard statistics at the moment but the general tendency is that veterans are starting to ask for psychological assistance in greater numbers. Many decide to ask for it months or years after their discharge, due to the fact that asking for psychological assistance was not previously part of our culture. Now, following social campaigns, the number of requests is growing. Veterans can ask for help in different places, including the public health service and civil society. Unfortunately, there is no country in the world which has managed to resolve all the veterans' problems. But we are using all the foreign experience available.

How long will it take to implement these plans?

We have an action plan for the next four years, but given public expectations we need results as soon as this year.

You mentioned veteran NGOs. Does the ministry co-operate with them?

We are open to all forms of contact with veteran organisations. The ministry for veteran affairs was in fact formed in response to requests by veteran NGOs, and with their active participation.

What is the typical request from veteran NGOs or reason to contact the ministry right now?

The two most common are requests for support from the ministry in organising events and proposals on policies or policy amendments.

Is there a regional diversity in the level of veteran NGO activity?

So far the most active veterans' organisations are in central and eastern

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Ukraine. This is directly related to the number of veterans there. A majority of them are from the regions of Dnipro, Kharkiv, and Poltava.

What is the situation of veterans who live in places that are the closest to the line of conflict? According to opinion surveys, the attitudes towards the Ukrainian state there are the least supportive. Can the veterans face problems because of their service?

We do not notice any rise in the number of conflicts with veterans in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. In fact, we cannot say that a majority of residents of those oblasts have a clear unfavourable opinion towards the Ukrainian state. The majority of local residents are mostly concerned about their everyday lives. I myself witnessed a shift in public attitudes which occurred after Russian TV was blocked; it only takes a few weeks for people to return to their normal state of mind. As an example, a Donetsk veteran union holds an annual event dedicated to the liberation of Karachun. It gathers veterans from all over Ukraine. No incidents have been registered so far.

There have been a lot of public speculation and hope regarding the political engagement of the veterans. What is your opinion on veteran's political activities?

There are a lot of highly motivated people among the veterans who feel a connection with the active servicemen. Having served in the war, they naturally follow political developments in Ukraine closely because the war and domestic politics are connected. I believe they will continue to be highly active in public life. NEE

Editor's note: On March 10th Anton Kolumbet posted a statement on his Facebok profile announcing his intention to leave the post as first deputy minister for veteran affairs due the change of government which took place on March 4th. In his statement Kolumbet said "I continue my work for the moment and wait for my successor from the next team to transfer the work and wish him or her success. I shall also prepare the full report on the completed work for the community. My decision has been consulted with the Veteran's Movement of Ukraine. The instruments of public control available at the moment will provide for the continuous work of the ministry."

Anton Kolumbet is a Donbas war veteran who served in the army in 2014 and 2015. At the time of the interview he was the first deputy minister for veteran affairs.

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

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Youtubers, influencers and creative activists are the new vanguard in Central Asia

BARBARA VON OW-FREYTAG

It is a decisive moment for Central Asia. Societies of the region are receptive to the EU's messages of transparency, democracy and rule of law, but they are also under pressure from other regional powers. If the European Union wants its new Central Asia Strategy to have a positive impact, it should reach out to innovative groups and individuals calling for change.

Over the past decade, the European Union has ceded ground in Central Asia, not only to Russia and a newly assertive China, but also to the Gulf states and Turkey, and experts forecast its influence is set to further decline. As EU Special Representative Peter Burian once quipped, "China is coming with an offer nobody can refuse, while the EU is coming with an offer nobody can understand."

If the EU hopes to build a meaningful presence in its neighbourhood beyond the Eastern Partnership in the future, it would do well to heed the rapid changes sweeping Central Asia and adjust its strategy towards the region accordingly. For this, the EU must put civil society, especially the youth and women, at the fore and be bold in addressing sensitive issues other players are shying away from.

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Allies in reform

Central Asia is undergoing momentous social and political change. While poverty and corruption remain endemic, massive population growth, ever younger and more restless societies and important political shifts make the region more volatile than ever. Also, more than the Eastern Partnership region, Central Asian states are engrossed in complex nation-building processes and exposed to intense outside pressure, with a rising number of international actors pulling society in all directions. The failure of the region's kleptocratic governments to provide basic services such as clean water, healthcare and opportunities for their increasingly young populations is resulting in a legitimacy crisis. Civil society, led by a new generation of activists, social entrepreneurs and creatives, is increasingly pushing back to demand change. While regimes systematically marginalise, isolate and criminalise civil society, civic groups are becoming more connected, vibrant and vocal than ever.

The EU should side with this emerging landscape of civic activists to further reform and develop the region. Amid this tumult, the five Central Asian countries could benefit immensely from a deepened relationship with the EU. Civic activists, women and the youth will be indispensable partners in building this relationship which will have to deliver what Central Asians really want: an end to endemic corruption, independent media, educational opportunities provided also in local languages, and socially-minded businesses that boost economies on the ground while caring for local communities and the environment.

At the same time, EU policy-makers should consistently encourage Central Asian governments to view civic groups not as enemies, but as allies for progress and reform. The EU's aim must be to foster an enabling environment for civil society to operate in, taking a clear stance towards regimes that systematically restrict civic space in their countries. In a region with traditionally weak governance, the EU should position itself as a key actor to promote healthier relations between the state and its citizens.

On the ground, the EU should aim to empower civil society and to build its capacity to connect, communicate and campaign effectively. The new magic formula should be to link civic activism to creativity, IT competence and artistic talent in the wider society. The EU is ideally suited to support new forms of "fusion activism", merging civic groups with tech experts, designers, artists and others. With new forms of campaigning, advocacy and storytelling, civil society groups can reach new audiences and draw attention to real problems such as corruption, air pollution, health, and socially stigmatised groups.

Getting the youth on board will be crucial. With the median age just under 27, and nearly a third of the region's population under 15, the EU must act fast to

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counter the threat of a "lost" generation in Central Asia. Thirty years after independence, a critical mass of the population has grown up without a shared Soviet identity. This vacuum is providing a fertile recruiting ground for radical Islam, but also for China's model of prosperous authoritarianism. At the same time, an exciting new generation of activists are using new tools and formats such as Telegram, Instagram, podcasts and YouTube to reach millions, mostly completely new audiences. The EU should cultivate strong relations with young Central Asians who will look to it as a model – socially, economically and politically.

Pioneering steps

Ensuring that women and girls participate in EU projects will also be key. Women drive everyday life in Central Asia and are emerging as a new social vanguard. With many men away as labour migrants, women are responsible for budgeting and day-to-day decision-making in their households. EU programmes for social entrepreneurship and socially-minded businesses should see them as ideal target audiences. Increasingly, women are also challenging societal norms and assuming prominent roles in grassroots activism, art, culture and independent media. Kyrgyz singer Zere Asylbek, with her 2018 hit feminist hymn "Girl", is one example. Others include popular Kyrgyz Youtuber Eldana "Foureyes", Kazakh film director Katerina Suvorova, or the women behind a popular satirical Tajik YouTube channel. Also in Tajikistan, a new format on the online platform "Asia Plus" highlighting professional females underlines the trend toward women's empowerment.

Supporting social entrepreneurship and socially-minded businesses is one of the best ways to build the skill set of young people in the region. The sector is still young, but includes innovative start-ups and portals offering young Central Asians co-working spaces, language training and other opportunities in education, employment and entrepreneurship. Quite often, such initiatives also have a social component, supporting vulnerable groups in local communities. The EU is ideally suited to help develop this emerging trend across the region. As an added bonus, running such programmes would also enhance the EU's unique profile in the region.

Another area for pioneering steps by the EU is language. Like other western donors, it should understand that the influence of the Russian language is on the decline in Central Asia and adjust its programmes to reflect this reality. In Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, the majority of the population speaks Uzbek and Tajik as their first languages. Kazakhstan is progressively moving towards a bilingual society. In Kyrgyzstan Russian is only spoken by Bishkek elites, while the majority speaks only Kyrgyz. Youth culture is increasingly local language-centric as Rus-

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sian is rejected in favour of national languages. In Kazakhstan, for example, popular K-pop group Ninety-One sing only in Kazakh. Kyrgyz feminist pop star Zere Asylbek switched to Kyrgyz to reach her audience. In Uzbekistan, independent media Kun.uz reaches more than eight million readers each month and has over 850,000 Telegram subscribers, all in Uzbek. While Russian remains indispensable for communicating with governments and urban elites, the EU also needs to embrace innovative local language formats to work with civil society, culture and media. In parallel, English language must be promoted across the region, as it offers both a tool for engagement with the wider world and a means for the EU to communicate its messages.

The EU needs to embrace innovative local language formats to work with civil society, culture and media.

The challenge goes beyond language. Thirty years after independence, Central Asian societies are still grappling with their cultural and national identity. This fluid sense of identity creates fertile ground for ideas, ideologies and concepts to take root, and there are both positive and negative seeds being spread. The EU's "Strategy for Central Asia" rightly identifies radical Islam and violent extremism as a region-wide threat. In addition to this, growing right-wing nationalism is finding traction, particularly in Kyrgyzstan where groups such as Kyrk Choro are exploiting the failure of the state to provide basic services and the lack of strong Kyrgyz national identity to recruit discontented youth. More positively, there is space and demand to cultivate healthy national identities. Self-confident feelings of national distinctiveness will be important for countries in the region to resist the pressures of big state neighbours. The EU should capitalise on this demand and, using its own experience as a melting pot of identities, work with governments, civil society, and independent media to promote healthy, positive expressions of national identity and challenge the seemingly easy answers offered by populism and radical religious interpretation.

Role of the media

In this volatile environment, strong independent media is indispensable and the EU must support it as a priority. Indeed, non-state media is under sustained assault throughout Central Asia. Even in Kyrgyzstan, the least repressive country in the region, independent outlets face an increasingly hostile environment. The EU is best positioned to build a robust, region-wide programme to support attractive alternative, non-state voices which can work hand-in-hand and reinforce civic activism. It is also a tool through which to spread positive views of the EU

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and challenge the predominantly anti-western programming of state media. In doing so, the EU should avoid the trap of funding trainings and short-term projects. Long-term core support to existing proven independent media is the only way for outlets to become firmly rooted in increasingly repressive environments.

To reach wider populations, the EU faces a double challenge: it must increase support for quality local language journalism to challenge the dominance of state media outside the capitals. And it should be more flexible in its definition of independent media. Throughout the region, bloggers, vloggers, influencers and social media stars are reaching new, massive audiences: the Kazakh *Find Your B* podcast reaches tens of thousands of young Kazakhs discussing taboo topics; the Uzbek Troll.uz Telegram and Instagram channels attract a combined total of 200,000 subscribers with humorous formats lampooning state ineffectiveness, while popular Tajik YouTuber, Rafael Gulov, has 39,000 subscribers, to name but a few. Selective engagement with successful YouTubers could be a specially interesting and innovative format for the EU.

> Corruption has the potential to undermine all the areas outlined in the EU's Central Asia Strategy.

Finally, the EU must openly confront the endemic corruption in the region. State-initiated anti-corruption campaigns are often politically motivated and have little impact. Corruption has the potential to undermine all the areas outlined in the EU Strategy. Civil society and independent media will be key partners for the EU to ensure the transparency, visibility and effectiveness of its programmes, vital to underline its credibility as a donor. Even in Kyrgyzstan, where civil society and independent media generate outrage over corruption, there has been little success in achieving real change or concrete results.

Again, independent media can be a catalyst for society to demand change. In 2019, for instance, a joint investigation between the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP), RFE/RL's Radio Azattyk and the Bishkek-based independent news outlet, Kloop, exposed money laundering to the tune of 700 million US dollars involving former senior officials and sparking protests in the capital. With journalists regularly facing the risk of threats, fines and trumped up charges or worse, EU representatives must also publicly support the exposure of corruption cases by investigative journalism. Using influencers, local successes, stories of effective anti-corruption campaigns and positive storytelling from Europe and elsewhere, the EU can develop attractive formats to change the mindset that corruption is something people have to live with. Similarly, the EU should spread success stories of reform in other former Soviet countries. From the Baltic states, now EU members, to the deep and meaningful transformation taking place

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in some Eastern Partnership countries like Ukraine, Armenia and Georgia – the EU has a toolkit of credible solutions and proven reform experience pertinent to Central Asia.

The EU, more than anyone, has a state of the art offer rooted in connectivity, prosperity and values that are genuinely attractive to Central Asians. But any meaningful change in the region will require the civil society's active participation. Cooperation with change makers will be essential to meet all the complex challenges facing the region, from promoting human rights, the rule of law and security, to tackling urgent environmental issues, fostering innovation, developing competitive economies and offering perspectives for a youth hungry for opportunities. The EU should rely on the unique soft-power experience it brings to the region. Anchored at the heart of the EU's blueprint for Central Asia, it will be an offer that people in the region will not only understand, but also want to embrace. NEE

Barbara von Ow-Freytag is a Berlin-based journalist, political scientist and advisor to the Prague Civil Society Centre, an international NGO supporting and empowering civil society in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

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Who is behind the plot to topple the Latvian parliament?

RIČARDS UMBRAŠKO

What started as a justifiable reason for protest was quickly hijacked by a handful of individuals looking to profit from the growing polarisation in Latvian society. A proposal by several anti-establishment political groups on November 14th last year called for the dissolution of the national legislature. It was at that point when it became clear that the groups had started a movement that would cause an unprecedented rift in civil society.

There exists a very common misconception in modern-day Latvian politics that all political conundrums can be solved by the most radical expression of civic action one can find within a democracy. However the idea of a movement pushing towards dissolving the national parliament, which is very popular, is flawed to the core and has the potential to stir up domestic and regional politics to an unprecedented level.

Launched by a group of Latvian doctors who felt betrayed by deceitful government policies in late-October last year, the movement was quickly hijacked by pro-Russian groups, the far-right and radical populists – all wishing to topple the Latvian parliament as a stark display of contemporary power dynamics. The exploitation of popular demands by the doctors caused an unprecedented response from all walks of society; a rather peculiar phenomenon in a country that has historically witnessed absurdly low levels of civic engagement in national politics.

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Protest waves

Last October, the Latvian government announced that it will allocate only 3.9 per cent of its GDP to healthcare starting in 2022 – well below the EU's average of 10 per cent (the EU's lowest is currently Romania with 5.2 per cent) – and despite unfulfilled and false promises by the Latvian Prime Minister, Krišjānis Kariņš, to increase salaries for medical professionals. This came as a serious blow to the thousands of doctors in Latvia who are already underpaid and overworked, and whose interests are often overlooked by the government and its inaction when it comes to the deteriorating quality of the healthcare system.

The first wave of protests hit Riga on November 7th. Hundreds of doctors took to the streets in a protest that saw the Speaker of the Latvian Parliament, Ināra Mūrniece, personally apologising to the doctors for the government's inaction. The protesters' key demand was a salary of 4,000 euros per month for doctors, way above the current average salary of 881 euros. At the same time, the first calls for radical action were heard from all sectors of Latvian society. In mid-November, what was previously thought to be impossible became reality. A proposal by several anti-establishment political groups, including the Center Party and the far-right party, Power to the Latvian Nation, was delivered to the Central Election Commission of Latvia on November 14th which allowed citizens to sign in favour of the dissolution of the national legislature. It was at that point when it became clear that the two groups had started a movement that would cause an unprecedented rift in civil society.

Latvians have always heavily scrutinised the work of the national legislature. In 2011 the then Latvian president, Valdis Zatlers, used his constitutional powers to dissolve the parliament, referring to the "privatisation of Latvian democracy" and the unwillingness of the legislature to tackle the problems caused by the rise of oligarchy prior to and during the 2008 economic crisis. The main difference between 2011 and today lies in the fact that eight years ago, the dissolution of parliament was a justified and effective measure to deal with the rapidly deteriorating state of democracy. The act was not usurped by a handful of radical populists and pro-Kremlin factions who are now actively welcoming the subsequent instability that will further polarise Latvian society.

The Democratic Center Party, one of the main initiators of the movement, does not hold any political power in Latvia, but is rather seen as a disruptor of national politics. It has taken part in parliamentary elections in the previous years, albeit unsuccessfully. The party's stance is right-wing (similar to the Law and Justice party in Poland and Fidesz in Hungary) ranging from anti-immigration to being openly anti-LGBT and pro-Russian. During the 2019 European Parliament election, one of its candidates was Waldemar Herdt, a German politician from the far-right AfD

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party and self-proclaimed supporter of conservative Christian values. The Baltic Centre for Investigative Journalism *Re:Baltica* wrote that "the Center Party's line up for the election in 2018 included representatives from radical religious organisations and the 'Night Wolves' – a pro-Russian motorcycle club notorious for its support of Russian President Vladimir Putin and close links to the Kremlin."

The party gained support from certain religious factions in the country as well. Described in the Latvian media as a "sect", *Jaunā paaudze* ("the New Generation" in English) has gained a large following for staging mass sermons and theatrical plays. In the 2019 European Parliament elections, a member of this religious group, Aigars Bitāns, unsuccessfully ran under the Democratic Center Party's ballot.

On January 15th this year, the party submitted another proposal to the Central Election Commission, but this time it called for a reduction in the size of the national legislature from 100 MPs to just 50. As of early March, only slightly more than 3,000 signatures had been collected and it is unlikely that the Democratic Center Party will collect the other 147,000 in time to advance with the proposal any further.

Party bum

Another group, a popular movement eloquently called Power to the Latvian People, works in tandem with the Democratic Center Party, and is perhaps the most visible organisation in this whole ordeal. It is led by a rather diverse body of representatives, such as the Eurosceptic party For an Alternative with similarities to the AfD in Germany. In the 2018 parliamentary election, the party advocated for restoring the death penalty, returning to the lats (the national currency before the adoption of the euro in 2014), as well as dropping all sanctions against Russia after the 2014 annexation of Crimea.

While Power to the Latvian People surprised many with its rather peculiar line up, one of the most prominent figures and chairman of the group, Igors Lukjanovs, is more widely known in Latvia as "Party bomzis" ("bomzis" is a pejorative term for a homeless person in Latvian). Lukjanovs has become known as someone who shows up at private events, receptions and social gatherings unannounced. This has given him a very impressive following on social media which he has successfully exploited while being one of the main faces of the movement seeking to dismiss the parliament. He is also an editor of a small Latvian online publication, *Protesti.lv*, which often publishes pro-Kremlin and far-right views, aligning with the official line of Vladimir Putin in criticising western values and the state of transatlantic relations.

The origins of *Protesti.lv* are by no means surprising. As the researcher Jānis Polis writes: "The website was originally founded by Jānis Cīrulis, a Latvian far-right

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nationalist and member of the Pērkonkrusts – an illegal neo-Nazi paramilitary organization in Latvia". Cīrulis has gained prominence by supporting anti-immigrant sentiments following the 2015 refugee crisis in Europe and by publishing videos portraying the fictional assassination of several Latvian MPs. With Lukjanovs being the editor of *Protesti.lv*, the real aims of the movement are becoming clearer. The website often republishes fake news, and makes profit from ads. Since 2015, Lukjanovs has published more than 3,000 articles on the website that claims itself to be a credible news agency.

Social media are further exacerbating the problem, providing a safe haven where activists can reach the masses.

In just a few weeks, in a coordinated action on a variety of social media platforms, mainly Facebook, the movement collected almost one-third of the required 150,000 signatures to initiate a referendum. *Re:Baltica* writes that "groups promoting the agenda of the prominent Latvian oligarch Aivars Lembergs (who was recently sanctioned by the US Treasury over corruption charges) and anti-5G movement actively shared messages advocating for the dissolution of the parliament". Multiple MPs and Latvian politicians also tuned in. Two members of the KPV LV – a political party that has become notorious prior to the 2018 parliamentary election for attacking journalists and NGOs, bringing cases against prominent investigative journalists to the court, discrediting experts and providing unreasonable populist promises – have expressed their support of the movement.

Not just populists but also members of the largest pro-Russian political party in Latvia, the LKS, have urged their supporters to sign the online petition. *Sputnik*, the Russian government's main mouthpiece in Europe, has published dozens of news articles expressing support for the destabilisation of Latvian democracy by encouraging readers to contribute to the cause.

Persistence

Technology and social media are now further exacerbating the problem, providing a safe haven where these activists can reach out to the masses. The movement's initial success could be attributed to the extensive use of Facebook and other social media platforms that allowed for a rapid spread of disinformation, resulting in over 40,000 signatures in just a few weeks. Dozens of live videos, lengthy posts, skits and cartoons were extensively used by closely-affiliated individuals. One of the most iconic moments during the campaign was a Facebook video in which Sergejs Žuravļovs, a member of For an Alternative, called for the Latvian people to sign in

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favour of dissolving the parliament while holding a bright red phallic figure in his hand which Žuravļovs dubbed "a pen to sign the petition with."

However, a Google Trends data comparison shows that the people's interest in the groups advocating for the dismissal of parliament peaked in mid-November, the same time when the proposal was submitted to the CEC, as evidenced by a vast and previously unseen increase in related Google search results in Latvia. But fast forward just a few days, and the search results reflect a completely different situation: the interest has plummeted to near-zero, a perfect litmus test indicative of the myopic nature of the populist actors.

Even if the movement is able to collect the 150,000 signatures it needs, which is very unlikely given the present circumstances and the rate at which new supporters are now signing the proposal, it still does not have a clear plan of action in case it gets elected to parliament in the following elections. The movement has not established any far-reaching goals, nor does it have a plan for political co-operation with other parties. Thus, it is putting the question of transparent governance at stake – given both movements' ties with pro-Russian and Eurosceptic forces, future prospects under such a government seem bleak.

Acts like these, albeit often ridiculed by the general public, are dangerous and are ultimately putting democracy at risk. A movement that started with justifiable demands but was hijacked by a handful of individuals looking forward to profiting from the rifts within Latvian society can very easily be exploited by those benefiting from the weakening of the state.

The main takeaway is clear: no matter what the German far-right, the pro-Kremlin forces, or the domestic populists do in order to throw liberal democracy under the bus of borderline authoritarianism, Latvians will persist. The dissatisfaction with how slowly and inefficiently laws are legislated into place may be a reflection of the failures of the current government, but it must not, by any means, give an impetus to exploit the interests of the Latvian people in order to satisfy the personal ambitions of a handful of extremists. This is a matter of democratic integrity, not blatant populism.

The ostentatious imagery of populists centralising power in the turbulence of the post-2015 Europe is a cautionary tale for civic societies all across Central and Eastern Europe. But let our own history be a guide for what a democracy should stand for – fairness, openness and accountability. Other than that, it is up to us to uphold the values we once fought so bravely for and fight against those actively trying to do everything to undermine freedom, integrity and the rule of law.

Ričards Umbraško is a writer based in Riga, Latvia. His work has been published in several Latvian publications including *Diena* and *Žurnāls IR*.

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Kaliningrad's first million

MIŁOSZ J. ZIELIŃSKI

Although Russia as a whole suffers from a continuous population decrease, Kaliningrad Oblast keeps attracting newcomers. For the first time in its 75 year-long history, the semi-exclave has exceeded one million inhabitants and continues to grow. Yet only the city and its immediate surroundings benefit from this trend.

The Kaliningrad Oblast, which is located on the Baltic Sea between Poland to the south and Lithuania to the north and east, was built on the ruins of the German province of East Prussia together with its capital city, Königsberg. The majority of its population, mostly ethnic Germans, fled in late 1944 and early 1945 as the Soviet Red Army advanced beyond the borders into pre-war Germany and started to encircle the region. The remaining thousands were resettled by the new authorities at the beginning of the 1950s. The repopulation of the region, now under Soviet control, was gradual and slow. By the beginning of the 1980s, the number of inhabitants in Kaliningrad had reached its pre-war levels.

On the eve of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the region had a population of around 900,000 people. In spite of Russia's constant demographic decline since the early 1990s, the Kaliningrad Oblast continued to grow. Almost 30 years later, for the first time since the end of the Second World War, the number of inhabitants of the Kaliningrad Oblast has exceeded one million. This took place sometime in the autumn of 2018, although the exact date and reasons are still difficult to pinpoint.

Kaleidoscope

At first, the regional authorities seemed to be taken completely aback by the fact that the region had surpassed one million residents. Eventually, they decided

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to use it as a publicity stunt so that they could take credit for the oblast's steady rise in population. A search went underway to find a proper family which would perfectly represent the millionth Kaliningrader. They found Kira Yegortseva, who was born as a second twin just a couple of minutes after her brother Makar (who was counted as the 999,999th). Their parents live in the town of Gusev, in the eastern part of the oblast. Their mother is an engineer at a heating plant while their father is employed in the military. For the honour of bringing into existence the one-millionth Kaliningrader, the family received a brand new car (assembled in the region), 100,000 roubles (some 1,400 euros) and special baby clothes for the twins from Anton Alikhanov, the governor of the oblast.

The governor's move brought attention to perhaps the biggest development challenge of the region. Although Kaliningrad Oblast remains a green island of population growth – countering trends in mainland Russia, as well as the neighbouring Baltic states and Poland – only a small section of the semi-exclave has benefitted. Towns such as Gusev, lying in the centre and east of the oblast, have been struggling with a large-scale outflow of people. This phenomenon is a kaleidoscope of the turbulent processes that the Kaliningrad Oblast has been subject to since 1991. Official statistics say that 482,000 out of a million live in the capital city, Kaliningrad. But in reality this number could be as high as 600,000. Together with the surrounding areas, including the very attractive Baltic Sea coastline where many prominent businessmen and politicians have their residences, it could be as high as 750,000. What is clear is that, over the past decade, the city of Kaliningrad has grown at an astonishing rate – one per cent annually, exceeding the nearby city of Gdańsk in Poland, a country with a much more developed rural landscape.

During the Soviet times, Kaliningrad was considered a medium-sized city which had a limited potential of attracting newcomers as it suffered from poor public services, a lack of living space and the slow pace of removing the visible traces of the Second World War. The city benefitted from the lumber and fishing industries as well as a strong military presence. Other Soviet towns in the region, including Sovetsk and Chernyakhovsk, also grew steadily until the end of the 1980s, although they never became major industrial or administrative hubs.

All in all, the well-being of the region was strictly connected to dependencies functioning across the Soviet Union. When the empire collapsed, the oblast suddenly became separated from the rest of Russia and had to struggle with the subsequent economic downturn. For thousands of people working within bankrupted state-owned factories and farms, Kaliningrad became the only prospect for making ends meet. At the peak of the 1998–99 financial crisis, Kaliningrad reached 430,000 inhabitants.

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Rapid development

The city of Kaliningrad's spatial expansion has favoured suburbanisation. The population of the adjacent Guryevsk district increased from 45,000 in 1999 to almost 70,000 in 2019. Nearby coastal areas have benefitted as well. Successful entrepreneurs and public officials moved outside of the capital to build their residences there. This process coincided with the rapid growth of tourism in the region. Today, towns like Zelenogradsk and Svetlogorsk, officially 10,000–15,000 people, are full of ten-storey high blocks of flats. It is no coincidence that the first expressway route in the oblast led from Kaliningrad to the coast.

The 2018 FIFA World Cup provided another impetus for urban development. Kaliningrad profited greatly from the football stadium, roads and other objects constructed for the tournament. All of these investments required workers who mostly came from Central Asia and, to a lesser extent, the South Caucasus. In 2013 the former represented around 70 per cent of all migrants coming to Kaliningrad Oblast from countries not requiring visas to Russia. Five years later, this number rose to 90 per cent.

> The biggest factor in the population growth of the Kaliningrad Oblast has been the state-sponsored relocation programme.

But the biggest factor in the population growth and development of the Kaliningrad Oblast has been the state-sponsored relocation programme. Since 2007, this programme has allowed ethnic Russians from the post-Soviet area to move to selected regions of Russia while receiving aid and public assistance to do so. Until the end of 2018 approximately 820,000 people benefitted from the programme Russia-wide, out of which 44,000 moved to Kaliningrad Oblast. Thus, the relocation programme accounted for about two-thirds of the region's total demographic gain between 2007 and 2018 – nearly 65,000 people. While during the same period the population of Kaliningrad city grew by 60,000, the rest of the oblast had been steadily losing its population. Why is this?

A large part of the region has still not recuperated since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Breaking economic ties with other parts of the empire, most of all with neighbouring Lithuania, led to many small and medium-sized factories shutting down. When Russia started to gradually open up their market to foreign goods, the remaining companies could not withstand competition. The post-dissolution crisis also hit the agricultural sector in the oblast. Having been fully collectivised after the war, farmers did not have any emotional attachment to the land and left when the state-owned farms went bankrupt. Provisioning was so tragic in the 1990s that the oblast had to receive humanitarian aid from abroad. The Russian financial meltdown in 1998–99 had a huge impact on its ability to recuperate.

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Yet migration to the city of Kaliningrad was considerable after the 2008–09 global economic crisis, which seems to have been the turning point for many inhabitants of the oblast. Many abandoned any illusions about the prospect of steady development and well-paid jobs in their towns and villages. In the last decade, Sovetsk, Chernyakhovsk, Ozyorsk, Slavsk and other municipalities have seen their populations diminish. Only Gusev managed to avoid a similar fate, yet it was mostly because of luck; it is the family town of Nikolay Tsukanov, one of the former governors of the oblast. When Tsukanov was in power, Gusev profited from a steady flow of investment, thus managing to retain economic and social output.

Urban-rural divide

Chernyakhovsk is perhaps the most emblematic example of the disparities between a thriving west and a depopulating and economically handicapped east. The town started to develop quickly at the turn of the 20th century thanks to one of the most important railway junctions in East Prussia (before the war it was the Prussian city of Insterburg – editor's note). Although it suffered greatly during the Second World War, Chernyakhovsk quickly repopulated thanks to the presence of heavy and dairy industries which secured widespread employment. Even in the decade after 1991, Chernyakhovsk's population was still growing and reached over 44,000 in 2002. Since then, the town has been rapidly depopulating. In 2017 only 36,400 people lived there. Despite this, Chernyakhovsk managed to curb its population decrease since it serves as a local administrative and industrial centre.

The town of Ozyorsk (in German Darkehmen), however, suffered worse. Located in one of the most remote parts of the oblast, it had almost no industry before the war. In Soviet times Ozyorsk relied solely on local collective farms. When they were shut down, the town lost 40 per cent of its population, becoming the region's anti-champion.

When discussing the development of tourism in 2019, Andrey Yermak, the regional minister for culture and tourism, indicated that the biggest issues facing the oblast's centre and east were their proximity to Kaliningrad city and the increased quality of roads. It is relatively easy and convenient for visitors to embark on day trips to Chernyakhovsk, Gusev or Sovetsk and return to Kaliningrad the same day. Hence local hotels and restaurants do not fully benefit from the increased number of tourists in the region (which rose from 1.54 million in 2018 to 1.75 million in 2019). Although somewhat oversimplified, this explanation could be extended to other sectors of the economy. The distance of 80 or 100 kilometres from the capital

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city is too big to partake in the development of Kaliningrad, but too small to build independent microeconomic regions.

Attractiveness of Kaliningrad

It is important to note that the Kaliningrad Oblast is certainly not the wealthiest or most dynamic region in Russia. In most rankings on income or the availability of well-paid jobs, it not only lags behind Moscow and St Petersburg but also many other parts of central Russia and Siberia. Nevertheless, the oblast scores well in terms of quality of life and is still an attractive place for Russians to move. There are at least three possible explanations for this and to an extent, they are interconnected.

After the war migrants to Kaliningrad Oblast mostly came from Russia, but also Belarus, Ukraine, the Baltic republics and Central Asia. Interestingly, during the first 15 years of its existence in the Soviet Union, about two thirds of all newcomers left. Although the situation stabilised later on, the local population remained mobile.

The geostrategic importance of the oblast also played a role. By liquidating East Prussia, Stalin hoped to acquire access to warm water from the Baltic Sea. Militarily, the USSR invested in developing not only the Baltic Fleet but also stationing thousands of soldiers on the territory. Many of the soldiers positioned in the Kaliningrad Oblast came from distant parts of the Soviet Union, as was the policy of the Moscow centre to detach recruits from their native lands. After completing their service, many decided to stay. Since the semi-exclave has remained a largely militarised area, these tendencies are still present today.

Finally, the post-1991 inflow of thousands to the Kaliningrad Oblast is possibly best explained by migrant network theory. Those who decide to migrate do not necessarily cut ties with relatives and friends. On the contrary, if they manage to establish themselves, they can convince others to follow their path. It simultaneously makes the lives of "old" migrants more comfortable and facilitates the settling down of "new" ones. It is also beneficial for the state as it reduces the economic and social costs of migration.

Migrant network theory helps us understand why new inhabitants of Kaliningrad come primarily from two regions. One of them is the Russian North, which greatly suffered from the economic crisis of the 1990s. The other is northern Kazakhstan, which is populated by a considerable number of ethnic Russians. Both were hit by cuts in industry. In addition, the people of Arkhangelsk or Murmansk are attracted to Kaliningrad by its favourable climate, whereas Russians from northern Kazakhstan often say they have suffered from the nationalist policies of the new post-Soviet state.

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Climate changes

Population changes have also generated challenges for the development of the Kaliningrad Oblast. As newcomers are mostly in their late thirties and early forties, the region still suffers from an ageing population. Over the last eight years the number of people who reached pension age increased by 40 per cent. Urbanisation in and around Kaliningrad requires a completely new approach in urban planning. It is especially important because the capital suffers from insufficient and obsolete road infrastructure.

> Kaliningrad needs more green areas to mitigate the effects of exceptionally hot days during the summer months.

What is more, the oblast is susceptible to the effects of the climate crisis. One report published at the beginning of 2019 noted an increasing number of storms affecting the Kaliningrad coast. One of the storms destroyed the promenade in Svetlogorsk. Kaliningrad itself needs more green areas to mitigate the effects of exceptionally hot days during the summer months. Paradoxically, the same temperature changes are likely to provide some benefits to the centre and east of the oblast. Increasing temperatures extend the vegetative period and allow for new types of plants to thrive. Kaliningrad is already one of the most fertile regions in Russia, known for grains and corn. It is also becoming a place where experimental plantations are used to establish whether certain plants can be cultivated in other parts of the country.

Regional agriculture is further strengthened by tensions between Russia and the West since the illegal annexation of Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine. The Russian government's policy of replacing goods imported from the West with domestic production has led to a sharp increase of arable area within the Kaliningrad Oblast, which now consists of 271,000 hectares. In 2018 local farmers harvested over 588,000 tonnes of grain and this is expected to increase to 650,000 tonnes in 2019. If predicted accurately, it would be the area's largest harvest in its history under Soviet and Russian rule.

Cross-border lessons

Useful lessons can be drawn from neighbouring regions in Poland. In the 1990s, some regions in Poland suffered from high unemployment and depopulation as people began to search for work in larger cities. In the municipality of Gołdap (in north-east Poland), for instance, 40 per cent of its inhabitants were at one point jobless. Local entrepreneurs were forced to find new ways to attract those seeking

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recreation and healthy food. Over the last 20 years, tourism has increased and local goods have found their way to Polish and European tables. Poland's north-eastern counties also used European Union funds to retrain former factory workers and farmers. All these efforts have helped eradicate poverty and social exclusion.

The transfer of experience and knowledge between the Kaliningrad Oblast and adjacent parts of Poland is already taking place via various projects and bilateral partnerships. One of its pillars has been the Poland-Russia 2014–2020 Cross-Border Co-operation Programme, co-financed by the two governments and the EU. It provides over 62 million euros in four thematic objectives: historical, natural and cultural heritage; clean natural environment; accessible regions and sustainable cross-border transport and communication; and border efficiency and security. The Polish central and municipal authorities also support more local activities aimed at showcasing the transformation/transition experience of both large Polish cities and smaller towns and villages. In one of them, the Association of Polish Communes of Euroregion Baltic has created mechanisms for co-operation between municipalities, NGOs and local entrepreneurs. Their counterparts from the oblast have come to see these developments as an important factor in encouraging social cohesion and the micropillars of economic growth. These are likely to contribute to halting further depopulation.

Interestingly, the demographic situation of the Kaliningrad oblast, which has seen its population become increasingly concentrated in certain areas, in some way reflects that of Russia as a whole. Around 800,000 (or 80 per cent) of the region's population lives on 20 per cent of its territory; whereas the rest of the territory (nearly 12,000 square kilometres) is inhabited by a mere 200,000–250,000 people. Similarly, about 78 per cent of Russia's inhabitants live in the European part of the country, which constitutes roughly one-quarter of its total area. This similarity is also reflected very clearly in the country's urbanisation. About 73 per cent of Russians live in cities. In the Kaliningrad Oblast, this figure is higher by only five percentage points. Perhaps, 75 years after the Second World War, the Kaliningrad Oblast is becoming more and more Russian? NEF

This article was prepared by the author in his personal capacity. The opinions expressed in this article are the author's own and reflect the view of neither the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland nor any other institution that the author is affiliated with.

Miłosz J. Zieliński is a career diplomat, currently serving as Vice-Consul for Political and Economic Affairs at Poland's Consulate General in Kaliningrad. Prior to that, he worked in Brussels, Malta and Warsaw. He holds a PhD in cultural studies.

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The broken promises of Ukraine's police reform

CHRIS G. COLLISON

Gains of reform are threatened amid an exodus of Ukraine's revolutionaries from patrol police. And failure to reform the upper echelons of the police could mean a return to the old corrupt and inefficient practices.

When Ukraine introduced a new and radically reimagined patrol police in 2015, Nazar Franchuk was one of the first to sign up. Franchuk, who spent the winter of 2013–2014 splitting his time between university exams and protesting in Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity, wanted to bring his revolutionary energy to the new law enforcement body which was intended to replace the country's notoriously corrupt police force.

"I know what it's like when the police beat you," Franchuk told me. "I know what it's like when you are standing up against the police. I wanted to change this system. I wanted to change everything and make sure that the police never beat peaceful people who just want to protest."

The introduction of the new patrol police was perhaps the most visible of the reforms proposed by the authorities who came to power following the revolution. Like Franchuk, the new officers were young and full of the idealism that permeated the streets of Kyiv during the heady days that led to the ouster of the corrupt and kleptocratic president, Viktor Yanukovych. But over the last three years, many of the revolutionaries who joined this new police force have quietly left after running up against a law enforcement system that has changed little on the inside and facing a bureaucracy staffed by old figures who remain resistant to reform.

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Pressure from above

Franchuk now works as a computer programmer in Lviv and volunteers for a camp for boys that teaches patriotism and survival skills. He said he did not take the decision to leave the patrol police lightly, but he had earned a reputation as a troublemaker for writing reports on his superiors, especially one who, he said, pressured him to issue large numbers of citations during his shifts.

"I wrote that he gave us orders to write protocols [citations] on everyone who moves – even if it was some small violation of the law, not even a criminal thing but an administrative thing," Franchuk said. "I didn't understand why, so I made reports and he was demoted to just an ordinary police officer because I made a lot of effort to talk with my bosses."

Eventually, the reform's shortcomings and pressure from above became too much. "My boss thought I was the kind of person who wanted to find something bad in the police and make a lot of reports," Franchuk said. "It's good when you are quiet and just do your job."

The number of officers who have quit or were dismissed has steadily increased each year since the introduction of the patrol police. In 2018 the patrol police lost 2,351 officers, more than 12 per cent of the entire force, according to records provided by the Ukrainian government. The number was 1,309 in 2017 and only 601 in 2016.

Like Franchuk, Oleksiy Nikolaevskiy, a digital marketing specialist who spent two years as a patrol police officer in Kyiv, said he also grew frustrated with the police bureaucracy and the limits of reform efforts.

"In general, it is better with the reform than without. That is for sure," Nikolaevskiy said. "But I think it could have been done a lot better. There was a lot of potential. There were people who were ready to work. But they lost that potential. Now people don't join the police." Nikolaevskiy said he also felt pressure from his superiors to issues unnecessary citations.

"In the old police, the leaders would tell the officers that they would need to write up ten protocols on a shift," Nikolaevskiy recalled. "That was known as the 'fingers system.' When the police were established, they said there would be no fingers system. But the way it worked was that if you didn't fill out enough protocols, then you would be the last to get off your shift. The last person would leave one and a half, two hours later. So there was no fingers system, but there was definitely unspoken pressure."

The violent and inhumane treatment of protesters by law enforcement during the 2013–2014 protests brought police reform to the top of the agenda. Immediately following the ouster of Yanukovych, the country's notorious elite riot squad, the

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Berkut, was disbanded and for several days regular police officers all but vanished from the streets of Kyiv out of fear of retaliation by the victorious protesters and interim authorities.

Prior to post-revolutionary reforms, the police were known as the *militsiya*, meaning militia, a name carried over from the Soviet Union. The militia were reviled throughout Ukrainian society for their failure to pursue crimes, gross incompetence and rampant corruption at all levels. Bribery was an endlessly frustrating fact of life for most people, especially drivers who were constantly being flagged down by road police looking for a quick buck. The consensus was that Ukraine was in need of sweeping police reform. Georgia, which enacted radical reform of its police and fired every officer in the country following the 2005 Rose Revolution, was the model that most cited, while the United States, Canada and Japan provided support and training.

Reality check

In late 2014 the Ukrainian parliament passed a law mandating police reform. Tasked with spearheading the reform were Khatia Dekanoidze and Eka Zguladze, two Georgian policymakers who had worked on overhauling Georgia's police force under President Mikheil Saakashvili nearly a decade earlier. The two most visible arms of the former militia – the road inspectors and the patrol force – were to be combined into a single unit, known simply as the patrol police. The new officers would stand in striking contrast with their predecessors. An age limit of 35 was set for recruitment, and applicants had to pass an IQ test and undergo a number of training programmes developed by NGOs and police trainers from the US and Canada.

In the summer of 2015 the new officers began rolling out in sparkling new Toyota Priuses donated by Japan. They were first introduced to the streets of Kyiv and then to other cities throughout the country over the next year. The patrol police were an instant hit. Young, polite and with a notably large proportion of female recruits, they soon became known as the "selfie cops" for posing with Ukrainians for photos to post on social media. Trust in law enforcement rose sharply when the new patrol police were introduced. They responded quickly to calls and took the job seriously.

However, reform efforts began running into reality. The patrol police were only one branch of the newly rebranded National Police of Ukraine. Reformers had called for the replacement of all members of the former militia, but the process proved more difficult than many had anticipated. The ministry of internal affairs, under

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the leadership of Arsen Avakov, launched a process known as attestation that was meant to investigate and review members of the former militia and dismiss or demote those who were found to be corrupt or incompetent. The process was meant to reduce the size of the national police force by about 30 per cent.

Dekanoidze, who headed the National Police, announced in 2016 that 26 percent of the commanders had been sacked. According to National Police figures, nearly 84,000 police went through the attestation process and more than 15,000 did not pass, of whom more than 5,000 were dismissed. However, a court decision in 2017 reinstated nearly half of those who had been dismissed, citing violations in the attestation process. Around that time, the Georgian reformer left.

Reformers had called for the replacement of all members of the former militia, but the process proved more difficult than many had anticipated.

"I think they were more successful in Georgia than in Ukraine because, although the model of reform was the same, Georgia is a much smaller country," admitted Andriy Chernousov, a former police officer and lawyer who investigates police issues for the Kharkiv Institute for Social Research.

Stalled investigations and conflicts of interest

Among the most common criticisms of Ukraine's police and law enforcement over the past two years has been the failure to bring justice to the victims of high-profile crimes and attacks. According to human rights groups, there have been more than 130 attacks against journalists and activists since 2017, and almost all of them have gone unsolved or unpunished. Although suspects are sometimes arrested, the attacks are often classified as "hooliganism", a relatively minor offense compared to a premeditated assault or hate crime.

In November 2018, Kateryna Handzyuk, a civic activist from the southern city of Kherson, died after spending several weeks in the hospital from injuries sustained when an attacker doused her in sulfuric acid. Although several people were arrested, it was clear that none had ordered the attack. Her death sparked outrage among Ukrainian civil society leaders, who launched a campaign called "Who Ordered the Killing of Katya Handzyuk?" to pressure the criminal justice system to follow up on the case. According Vladislav Serdyuk, a former police officer who advised Dekanoidze during the reforms, it was the latest example of impunity by people in power who order such attacks against journalists and activists to sow fear.

"These are active people from society who are trying to change something in Ukraine and really want Ukraine to be a normal, civilised, European country,"

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Serdyuk said. "There is another part of society and members of the authorities who do not want that. They want to live like they did before."

Less high-profile cases also go unpunished. Although patrol police officers can detain those suspected of crimes, the cases are then passed on to investigators in the national police structure. Current and former police officers said they often felt their hands were tied in such cases. "They changed the guys who are on shifts, but the guys who are investigating the crimes are the same," Franchuk said. "And for me it was really hard to co-operate with them, because some of them didn't understand why the Revolution of Dignity happened. When you went on a call, you tried to do something and to investigate and find the guy who did the crime, but you knew that the guy after you who is supposed to investigate would do nothing."

Improved relations with the community

At a patrol police department in Kharkiv, officers said they remained optimistic that the police had changed for the better. Like Franchuk, Vlad Nemanikhin was active during Ukraine's revolution and joined the patrol police in 2015 to have a positive impact on society.

"It's no secret that before, when the militia would arrive on a call, they would ask for money," Nemanikhin said. "They would say, 'Give us some money or we aren't going to do anything.' That was the structure. I joined the police because I wanted to change that."

The department has launched a number of outreach efforts to improve relations with the community, such as going into local schools and holding events to increase trust between Kharkiv residents and police institutions. Police say these efforts have had an effect, but surveys from the Kharkiv Institute of Social Research found that 40 per cent of victims do not notify police about crimes. The large majority said they did not report crimes because they were either disappointed in the effectiveness of the police or believed they were uninterested in such incidents.

Aleksandr Grebenyuk, deputy head of the patrol police department in Kharkiv, disputed the report's findings, saying he believes relations with the community are improving.

"I have to say that I doubt that 40 percent of people don't go to the police, because each year the number is growing," Grebenyuk said. "We have statistics showing that compared to 2015 the number of people who went to the police has doubled. This is not to say there are more crimes, but that more people trust the police and are calling us about different issues."

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Photo by Chris G. Collison

The introduction of the new patrol police was perhaps the most visible of the reforms proposed by the authorities who came to power following the Revolution of Dignity.

It is true that surveys continue to show higher levels of trust in the police, especially the patrol police, than before the reforms took place. That trust is due in large part to the much higher levels of professionalism among patrol police officers, although trust has begun trending downward. Grebenyuk believes many of the negative attitudes towards police are left over from the pre-reform era.

Current and former police emphasise that one of the biggest successes of the police reform has been in the willingness of police officers to respond to calls: "Now police arrive at a call after 10–15 minutes," Franchuk said. "Before the Revolution of Dignity, when you called the police they might not even come. Now they come, they come really fast, so if it's an emergency it can be 10 minutes."

However, while police behaviour has improved, what happens after many police interactions remains mired in problems. This issue is evidenced by the survey, which found that nearly three-quarters of crime victims were unsatisfied with the way that police treated their case.

Old habits die hard when salaries are low

Some patrol officers left after becoming frustrated with what they saw as a slow return of some of the corrupt practices of the former militia. Liana Teremkova,

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who served as a patrol officer in Kharkiv from 2015 to 2018, said that although day-to-day bribery is much lower than it was before the reform, bribes and favours have returned to some parts of the police structure, especially in cases involving road violations.

"When we first started, a lot of people would offer us bribes, and at first everyone declined," Teremkova said. "I think the first bribes started after about half a year. We saw it in cases with drunk drivers. It's not a small fine. They would call us to the court and tell us that we had not correctly filled out protocols. The protocols would get lost somewhere in the administrative department." Teremkova said the first to accept bribes were members of the former militia who worked in the administrative departments. She said that because of the low salary, some officers soon felt pressure to follow suit.

At first, salaries for patrol police were set higher than they were under the militia, an attempt to reduce the temptation to take bribes. But in 2015 Ukraine's currency fell sharply against the dollar while the country faced its highest inflation since the troubled 1990s. Police salaries did not keep up. In Kyiv a job announcement at one of Ukraine's largest supermarket chains last year advertised a security officer position that paid about 435 US dollars per month, slightly more than a cashier, who could make about 415 dollars. In 2018 a patrol police officer in Kyiv made a little under 390 dollars per month. That salary was raised in 2019 to just under 500 per month, while salaries in other cities are lower.

> The first to accept bribes were members of the former militia who worked in the administrative departments.

Nikolaevskiy said that working 12-hour patrols on a salary comparable to a supermarket security officer was demoralising: "There were people in my group who would work for the police during the day and then drive a taxi at night," he said. "It's not okay." Nikolaevskiy said he also noticed a return to bad practices, primarily in the administrative offices, where cases would get lost or resolved informally. He described incidents in which a drunk driver had his license revoked only to see it reinstated after making a deal with the administrators. He said that jumping through bureaucratic loops to properly issue citations only to see the process disrupted took its toll.

"Those incidents are very demoralising because you spend your energy on it, you want to do everything honestly, you find a driver who broke the law, fill out all these forms and collect the evidence, he swears at you while you're doing that, but you follow it through to the end, and in two days you understand that it was all in vain."

Although there have been reports of bribery, levels of everyday corruption appear to be nowhere near pre-reform levels, the low salaries and deteriorating

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morale among rank-and-file officers threaten to bring more of the old practices back to the streets.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has promised to shake up the leadership of Ukraine's ministries, including replacing the country's top prosecutor and implementing judicial reform. However, it is not yet clear how far the new appointees are willing to go to follow through on much-needed reforms. Notably, Avakov, who as interior minister emerged as one of the most powerful government figures in post-revolution Ukraine and who holds control over both the police and the national guard, has remained in his post under the new government, even surviving the government shakeup in early March this year.

According to Chernousov, the top-down structure of the national police means local departments take orders from Kyiv and are not accountable to the needs of their local communities.

"Every police chief and every district police station is appointed by the chair of the national police – by his deputies, by the managers of the local police headquarters and so on," Chernousov said. "We have a vertical structure. It starts and ends in Kyiv at Bohomoltsya 10 [headquarters of the ministry of internal affairs]. That means you can do whatever you want or whatever your manager asks you to do, and they don't care about what people think is important for their security."

He added that failure to reform the upper echelons of the police and follow through on the attestation process meant that a return to old practices was inevitable. "If you take a fresh cucumber and put it in a salted barrel of cucumbers, what happens with the fresh one?" he asked. "It will become salted in a few hours. That is what has happened with the patrol police. We inserted 12,000 rookies into a salted barrel. In a year we got salted cucumbers."

Chris G. Collison was the recipient of a 2018–2019 Fulbright Research fellowship to study the impact of the Revolution of Dignity on civil society and civic culture in Ukraine, where he previously worked as a journalist. He holds an MA in Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies from the University in Washington.

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The price of power

PAVEL USOV

For the last 25 years the Belarusian society has been living under an authoritarian regime led by Alyaksandr Lukashenka. Even though the Belarusian leader is no longer perceived as the "last dictator in Europe", he is the post-Soviet leader who has held onto power the longest.

Many of the post-Soviet countries, especially in Eastern Europe, experienced revolutionary moments after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Some saw them more than once: Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia. Almost all of these states have tried to implement the difficult, and at times dramatic, process of establishing democracy and getting closer to the European Union and other western structures. In Belarus a fossilised conservative system, which impedes its political and economic development, has been preserved, maintaining the republic in Russia's sphere and under its influence.

Integration or incorporation

Since the beginning of Lukashenka's rule his pro-Russian positioning has become one of the main conditions of the stability of Belarus's authoritarian regime. It has also limited the influence of the EU which has been sharing a border with Belarus for 16 years. Non-democratic rule, the destruction of national sectors, and the rebirth of Soviet traditions in social and political life have secured the Kremlin's long-term control over Minsk. In other words, by supporting the authoritarian system in Belarus, Russia is consistently protecting its own interests. As a result of this symbiosis, the Union State, linking the two states together, was established in 1999. This initiative became the Kremlin's first successful integration project in

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the post-Soviet space. It foresees not only intensive economic co-operation, but also strategic integration, for example in the functioning of the regional group of Belarusian and Russian military, or unified anti-aircraft weapons systems.

In the early stages of the Union State, Lukashenka perceived it as a source of income which he could drain from Russia and which would help his regime function. Yet in recent years the authorities backed away from this approach since real integration has become an important element in the Kremlin's imperialistic establishment. In 2019 Moscow started to impose its vision of deeper integration which foresees the establishment of supranational political institutions. This, in fact, would mean the end of Belarus's independent statehood and would turn it into a puppet state, similar to the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic.

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Lukashenka and his close circle has recognised this threat. However it needs to be kept in mind that the priority of the Belarusian president is his own power, even over the country's independence. This explains his reservations and lack of political will to take any systemic steps that would ensure Belarus' security. Such steps would entail engaging in dialogue with the civil society, the social mobilisation of Belarusian citizens, as well as freezing talks with Russia on the integration agenda. Yet taking steps in this direction would, unavoidably, lead to the weakening of Belarus' political system and – as a result – regime transformation. Lukashenka's determination to retain power at all costs explains why Minsk is waiting for Moscow's decisions regarding integration as well as the Belarusian government's repressive actions against mass protests in opposition to integration at the end of last year.

Hybrid society

One would assume that over the almost three decades after independence we would see the emergence of a modern state which is able to consciously articulate its interests, needs and values. Yet implemented for many years now the policies of authorities have led to a political and cultural deconstruction of Belarusian society. Today, we can say that this society is in a hybrid state, which makes it weak and susceptible to external influence. This is a result of a thought out policy of the de-Belarusianisation and re-Sovietisation of Belarusian society.

Even today when Russia's geopolitical goals towards Belarus seem obvious, majority of its public still seem to be immersed in the Russian world. The Russian language continues to dominate in the social sphere and public life. Russian media

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remain an effective source of propaganda. They influence the viewpoint and preferences of the Belarusian public both in regards to events that take place inside the country, as well as the state's foreign policy. As a result, the majority of Belarusians have a positive assessment of Russia.

It is worth pointing out that the Belarusian education system, state media, state ideology, and propaganda are not aimed at enforcing citizens' national identity. Their main role is to build support for the president and his policies. Recently some significant resources have been assigned to the modification of the newest history of Belarus. The essence of this policy is to attribute all merits for building Belarusian statehood and independence around Lukashenka, shaping him not only as a regional leader, but the actual "father of the nation". In this vein, Belarusian state media started a project called "A quarter century of Belarusian statehood", suggesting that Belarus' statehood began with Lukashenka coming to power. Events like this have a practical goal. They are aimed at convincing the Belarusian public that their president is a guarantee of statehood and stability, and undermining his rule would lead to chaos and collapse.

The hybrid-like nature of Belarusian society as well as the neutralisation of its national identity is maintained by the continuation of Soviet traditions and symbols. This tradition is deeply rooted in the consciousness of the ruling elite and has an impact on the country's politics. Belarus probably remains the only state where no attempts were made at de-communisation and de-Sovietisation.

The implementation of these processes is not possible in a system where the president calls himself a "devout Soviet man". There are still around 100 Lenin monuments in the country, and many streets and squares are named after notable communist and Soviet figures – Felix Dzerzhinsky, Karl Marx and Friedrich

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Engels. November 7th, which commemorates the October Revolution, remains a national holiday. The Soviet model is also replicated in youth organisations, such as the Organisation of Pioneers and the Republic's Union of Youth (a counterpart of the Komsomol). These organisations have not only been engaged in ideological exercises with the youth, but also provide support during elections and other political campaigns.

The re-Sovietisation is related to an instinctive understanding by the elite that the rebirth of national awareness will automatically lead to an increase in pro-democratic attitudes and a desire for change. For the political elite "national" and "democratic" are synonymous. Hence, keeping the public indifferent to historical and national factors guarantees its weakness and passivity, and at the same time it ensures the stability of the current system.

Stability above all else

Lukashenka has built a relatively stable authoritarian system which is able to respond to internal and external political challenges. The system is built largely thanks to Moscow's support and the conservative-patriarchal culture of the country, as well as the public's scepticism of democratic reforms and social policies that were introduced elsewhere in the region. All of this has influenced stability in the country. When compared with other post-Soviet states, Belarus looks quite attractive. Indeed, after the events of 2014 in Ukraine the Belarusian authorities gained more internal legitimisation. The narrative has also changed towards Belarus from the outside. The state is no longer called "the latest dictatorship in Europe" and is now often presented as "authoritarianism with a human face".

This however does not change the essence of Lukashenka's government, which is still based on strict political control and obstructing any real political alternative. Every attempt in this direction ends with arrests, showcase trials and severe punishment. Thus, you can see that people in Belarus are tired and often irritated with the government. Within the political system itself there are more and more signs of open nepotism which rewards people not on merit but on loyalty. And even though there are many signs of fatigue, no mechanisms to implement social change have emerged.

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The psychological barriers to social and political mobilisation come from the difficulties that emerged from the reform periods in neighbouring states, the war

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in Ukraine, and the Kremlin's aggressive policies vis-à-vis the EU's weak influence. In the context of economic tensions and a reduced level of social well-being, there are more and more reasons for social flare-ups. Mass protests took place in many Belarusian cities in 2017 against the so-called parasite law, which called for an additional tax on the unemployed.

Lukashenka's main goal is to retain power, even at the cost of Belarus's sovereignty.

Nevertheless, the sources securing Belarus's internal stability are slowly running out and revolutionary responses seem inevitable. The best scenario would be evolutionary socio-economic changes and political reforms initiated by the authorities with the support and co-operation of the public. However this possibility seems very unlikely. Clearly Lukashenka's main goal is to retain power, even at the cost of Belarus's sovereignty and the well-being of its citizens.

While analysing these trends we can conclude that political events in Belarus in the near future will be determined by Lukashenka's aspirations to create the conditions to transfer power to one of his sons. It is quite obvious that the declared changes in Belarus's constitution this year will directly regulate the mechanisms of the transfer of power. That is why the presidential elections, which are planned for August this year, will not only take place in the new "constitutional reality" but also enforce the new power structure. We should also consider that constitutional changes in authoritarian states have not been linked to any decentralisation process, the introduction of political pluralism, the weakening of the executive, or shortening of the term of the head of state. In fact, it is usually the opposite. Changes to the constitution are usually made to strengthen authoritarian tendencies and legitimise the usurpation of power.

Succession

In Belarus the nature of constitutional changes will depend on the age and physical condition of the president himself, as well as his political preferences. Lukashenka, now 65, is aging and so is the Belarusian political system. It has already expended its resources which can be seen in the permanent economic crisis. The geopolitical context has also changed and Belarus is now under permanent pressure from Russia, which increases tensions within society. This year's presidential election is a challenge for the regime which needs a comprehensive mobilisation. That is why, in the name of stability and to reduce political risk, the presidential term may be increased from five to seven years.

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While taking a guess on who could be a potential successor – from hints given in Lukashenka's speeches – the most probable candidate would be Lukashenka's youngest son, Mikalai, who is 15 years old. To "ensure" that he would receive the office of the president, according to the Constitution of Belarus, Lukashenka should remain in power for 20 more years (in Belarus only those who are 35 or older can run for president). But this is very unlikely to happen. That is why there needs to be a succession, and to ensure it Lukashenka needs to introduce changes to the constitution that will lower the age requirement.

Lukashenka's other son, Viktar, also plays an important role in Belarus's system. He co-ordinates the activities of security services. Should Lukashenka senior face any serious health problems, only this son could ensure the continuity of his blueprint. Viktar, however, has no constitutional right to take the seat of the president. According to the constitution, in the case of the president's inability, his prerogatives are transferred – until pre-term elections take place – to the prime minister. That is why in order to eliminate such loopholes in the process of transferring power, a new position of vice president may be introduced.

Lukashenka's policies aimed at preserving the current regime are having a destructive impact on Belarusian society as well as the state. Yet nothing indicates the prospect of economic or political liberalisation anytime soon. NEE

Translated by Maxim Rust and Iwona Reichardt

Pavel Usov is a Belarusian political analyst and expert specialising in the study of authoritarian regimes, their modification and transformation. He is author of the book *The forming, consolidation and functioning of the neo-authoritarian regime in Belarus.*

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Moldova (re)balancing its foreign policy

DENIS CENUSA

For the time being, Machiavellian principles dominate Moldova's foreign policy. With pressure from the European Union targeting the rule of law and the need to find material benefits, the current Moldovan ruling elite is heading to the widest doors.

Since the first days of independence in 1991, the political class in Moldova has chosen to tie the country's foreign policy to a bifurcated East-West orientation. This is reflected in the state's governance as leaders constantly search for quick fixes from the outside. Thus, this geopolitical oscillation has become a modern Moldovan political tradition with the foreign policy dichotomy as a sort of "trademark" used to quickly interpret, not always accurately, public perceptions or the conduct of the political parties by observers both at home and abroad.

Since the enlargement of the European Union in 2004–2007, integration with Europe was seen as the only choice available by many states in Eastern Europe. The pro-EU inclination dominated the foreign policy agenda when the Association Agreement and visa regime with the EU came into force in 2014. However, its effect on influencing the ruling elite towards maintaining this vector was not so obvious.

Russia first

The termination of the oligarchic regime, followed by the eviction of the pro-reform government towards the end of last year, and the installing of a Russian-

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friendly Socialist-led coalition, illustrates how the elite view foreign policy. The oligarchic regime imitated the pro-EU leaning from 2015 until 2019, exploiting in parallel the confrontation with Russia. During the short five months of her time running the government (between June and November 2019), Maia Sandu, who led among others the pro-reform ACUM bloc, restored trust in the EU-Moldova weakened dialogue, but also allowed for an opening in relations with Russia. When the Socialists took control over the legislative and executive bodies in November that year, the rebalancing of foreign policy turned into a major political priority of the new government of Ion Chicu.

In context of 2020 the new government has less of an appetite for geopolitical multi-polarity. According to its approach, Russia, first and foremost, is to enjoy a special place in the constellation of Moldova's foreign policy. Second, European integration should be selective, but not entirely removed, due to the high volume of Moldovan goods heading to the EU and the fact that over 50 per cent of the public still support the EU. Finally, any bilateral relations, starting with its neighbours, must favour Moldovan statehood even at the cost of Russia's increasing influence. Worryingly, the three principles can contradict each other. As a result of this schizophrenic approach to foreign policy, any authentic democratisation process or cross-cutting principles of good governance are losing ground.

Any authentic democratisation process or cross-cutting principles of good governance in Moldova are losing ground.

In terms of economic and institutional deficiencies, the elite have often felt it necessary to exhibit different types of dependency on powerful regional actors (in most cases it is the EU and Russia). Interest in NATO as a defence community for the state remains low with less than 30 per cent public support. Efforts to add a neutrality status into Moldova's constitution have been instrumental in convincing the public against any notion of NATO membership. Russia, too, has explicitly expressed that solving the frozen conflict on Moldova's territory would require an unalterable neutrality status.

What is more, some social segments in Moldova increasingly link the idea of NATO membership with the unification with Romania. This scenario, according to the latest polls, has less than 30 per cent public support. Yet, the worsening demographics, poor governance, and no improvement in everyday living conditions, have put the sustainability of Moldovan statehood into question. But the low level of political mobilisation around "unification" keeps it out of mainstream thinking across the country. At the same time, the Romanian government approaches its relations with Moldova via a separate department within the government responsible for it, while being in line with the EU's strict reform conditionality.

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Photo: President of Russia (CC) http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60598/photos

Moldovan president, Igor Dodon, in a 2019 meeting with the Russian president Vladimir Putin. Dodon has invested considerable political capital in building a strategic dialogue with Russia.

Genuine reforms vs expressive pro-Russianness

It does not take a great deal of time and resources to sweet-talk Russia or the EU. The two players, nevertheless, have begun to take notice of the chameleonic approach of Moldovan politicians. The EU, for instance, has become more cautious and less impressed by pro-EU discourse without action. With a lack of genuine reform, the EU has refused to renew financial support to the central authorities in 2020. In one of her last speeches as the EU's High Representative Federica Mogherini regarded "genuine reforms" by the new government as a prerequisite for securing support in the future. The EU Delegation to Chișinău Peter Michalko frequently notes that "justice and anti-corruption reforms" remain crucial in establishing whether Moldova fulfils its commitments or not. Preferring values over geopolitical loyalty, the EU has decided to gauge whether Moldova is transformable and seriously willing to align with the EU.

Russia, on the other hand, appreciates a combination of praise and unilateral political-diplomatic actions that emanate subordination and respect. This can explain the risky actions of the Moldovan president, Igor Dodon, to please Russian officials. One of his boldest moves was bringing Moldova closer to the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union in 2018, by becoming an "observer" country. By doing

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so, Dodon overstepped his constitutional authorities, bypassing parliament. Dodon is well known for lauding Russia in the highest international forums. During the UN General Assembly in September 2019, he praised Russia for agreeing to destroy weapons stored in the Transdniestria region instead of avoiding a request for their immediate withdrawal. Earlier this year, he emphasised the role of the Russian language in inter-ethnic communication in Moldova. More recently, Dodon advertised the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the Soviet victory in the Second World War. The predilection for a conservation of Soviet memories has a strong presence on the Socialists' political agenda. In 2019 Dodon closed down the Museum of Soviet Occupation, established in 2015 during a brief time of de-Sovietisation. Amid the commemorations, the Socialist mayor, Ion Ceban, elected during the 2019 local elections and bringing a left-wing mayor to the capital for the first time since independence, announced that a new museum that will feature the story of the Leningrad blockade.

Engineering friendships

The mid-2019 political transition was supported by the United States, together with Russia and the EU. The attempt of the previous oligarchic regime to seduce Washington with the relocation of the Moldovan embassy to Jerusalem fell flat. A qualitative change came with Maia Sandu's government, which prioritised two significant aspects in relations with the US. First, the "immobilisation" of fugitive oligarchs came into place and included a strong will to introduce individual sanctions. Second was an exploration of financial assistance which could include Moldova's eligibility to return to the US-run "Compact" aid programme, dedicated to underdeveloped countries and that was operational in Moldova until 2004. Nevertheless, only the first goal materialised – the US introduced visa restrictions on the oligarch Vladimir Plahotniuc and members of his family. The US did not drop the reform agenda towards Moldova, despite the fact that the Socialists Party shut down the pro-reform government of Maia Sandu. On the contrary, the bilateral dialogue on justice and anti-corruption reforms accelerated. That makes the US slightly different from the EU: Brussels shows more reluctance, and "waiting and watching" using strict conditionality.

While the EU keeps a firm hand on strict conditionality, the tenacity of diversifying the sources of Moldova's external dependency has become even more visible. While the government vows full compliance with its commitments with the EU, the unconvincing reforms in critical areas, such as justice, reinforce the impression that European integration is reaching a point of political fatigue with the Socialists.

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The Moldovan government, incapable of earning the trust of the West, has decided to build friendships with other regional powerhouses. Both Russia and Turkey enjoy the openness and respectfulness of the Moldovan ruling political forces towards their authoritarian tendencies. The treatments though display distinguishing traits. The Socialists and the president have invested considerable political capital in building a strategic dialogue with Russia. With that came electoral visibility, political relevance, but also permanent and unpleasant distrust from the public and the West. Both Vladimir Putin and Dodon understand that bilateral relations can offer reciprocal rewards, though massively disproportional ones. Thus the Kremlin is regularly consulted regarding matters of Moldovan national interest. In return, Dodon is invited for high-level talks giving the impression of an elevated status for the country. Such relations rely on personal contact, which is harming formal institutional structures. Therefore, Dodon's unconditional loyalty to Putin, who appears to be manoeuvring to stay in power well beyond 2024, can ultimately jeopardise Moldova-Russia relations.

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In many cases, the superficial appearances are outweighing the de facto accomplishments. For instance, the decrease in gas price in 2020 – from 240 US dollars to 173 dollars per 1000 cubic metres – is related largely to market fluctuations. Yet, Prime Minister Chicu and President Dodon both portrayed this as a sign of Putin's goodwill. Even if Dodon has been playing the Russian card for a long time, Russia's embargoes – engineered since 2013 against the pro-EU advancement of the country – were only slightly softened. That has not discouraged the Moldovan leadership from looking for other benefits from Russia, such as a credit line worth 300 million dollars. This money has a practical meaning, namely, fuelling Dodon's promise to repair the nation's poor road infrastructure ahead of the next presidential election.

The search for allies abroad has also influenced the dynamism of contact with Turkey. The launching of the Turkey-Moldova Security Co-operation Council in late 2019 significantly advanced the political dialogue. The Council includes the objective of expanding the sectoral interaction in some vulnerable areas like the functioning of law enforcement bodies.

As a matter of fact, Turkey is already trying to instrumentalise the strategic partnership in order to seize control of Turkish cultural entities operating in Moldova. The Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, sees the "Orizont" lyceums (in Moldova since 1993) as an extension of the much hunted Gulen movement.

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Under partial international isolation in 2018, the previous regime abducted and extradited seven Turkish teachers who worked for the "Orizont" lyceums, just before Erdoğan's visit to Moldova. After the launch of the bilateral Security Council, Turkey demanded the transfer of the "Orizont" lyceums to the state-controlled foundation Mariff. For the moment, Dodon has claimed to be powerless since the targeted lyceums belong to undisclosed private entities from Romania.

Predilection for "strong men"

In order to have a real stake in this autumn's presidential election, Dodon needs to put aside the controversial issues that can likely re-surface later. Instead, he has diversified trade and investment and avoided the pressure coming from western partners. The prioritisation of relations with Turkey is quickly bringing results. For instance, a leading Turkish company in the scrap metal business, Şahinler, entered the Moldovan market early this year. Another Turkish holding, Yuksel Yildirim, is manifesting a pronounced interest in the country's only international port, situated in Giurgiulesti, opening Moldova to maritime routes in the Black Sea.

So far the engagement with assertive regional autocracies like Russia and Turkey has not created any conflict. That gives more leverage to Dodon. On the one hand, it helps him counterbalance the principled approach of the EU and the pressure from its conditionality policy. The reduced dependence on western aid will be an important development. On the other hand, following the autocratic verticals of power is increasing voters' preference for a "strong man" style of leadership.

An opposition victory in the presidential election in the autumn of this year would bring radical change to the presidential institution – energising more contact with the West and depersonalising relations with the East. Dialogue with Eurasian institutions would be downgraded to correspond with the constitutional procedures and the strategic objectives of European integration. The presidency could then potentially convert into the main fortress of European integration. If Dodon succeeds, however, the Machiavellian principles currently being promoted would become unstoppable, at least until the next parliamentary elections. NEE

Denis Cenusa is a PhD candidate and researcher at the Institute of Political Science at the Giessen University in Germany. He is an associate expert at the "Expert-Grup" think tank in Moldova and a contributor at IPN News Agency in Moldova since 2015.

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Grim reality after a colourful revolution

ALEKSANDRA ZDEB

The left-wing government that came to power in North Macedonia after the 2016 mass protests is facing new challenges. Symbolic politics is significant for showing that the new North Macedonia is indeed a country for all, but it may not be enough. What the citizens want, first and foremost, is a functioning state.

When you use a water pistol filled with paint as a weapon against the government no one takes you seriously. The situation changes, however, when tens of thousands of enraged fellow citizens join you in this fight. This is exactly what happened when Macedonian citizens succeeded in overthrowing the nationalist government that had been in power for a decade. They wanted to put a stop to corruption and the mafia connections but also set up extremely high demands for the Social Democrats who have gained power. The new government brought along a change in the name of the country – now called North Macedonia – and long-awaited freedom, but also many disappointments.

Freedom is important but so is life

"We are free at last. One can feel it in the air. You must have heard from many that nothing has changed, but it is not true. Before the revolution criticising the government was virtually impossible. One day when I was sitting in a cafe with a friend I openly criticised the Skopje 2014 project. A man I didn't know heard that,

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turned around and just stared at me for the next five minutes. In what country can this behaviour be considered normal?" said one woman currently working with the government.

The so-called colourful revolution, which took place in 2016, got its name from protesters who happened to throw paint at government buildings. Mass protests were triggered by a wiretapping scandal and the halting of an investigation into Nikola Gruevski, the former prime minister, and his role in the scandal. The protesters demanded fair elections which eventually led to a change in government. Yet that was almost two years ago, and my interlocutor's position is quite exceptional. She comes from an affluent Albanian family and has never had to worry about having to make ends meet. Most citizens of North Macedonia are not so lucky though. For ordinary people freedom matters, but, while the new prime minister, Zoran Zaev, promised it would take no more than two years for everyone to see their lives improve, poverty has not vanished, the national health service is as inefficient as ever, while public administration remains as corrupt as before.

"Young people who are well-educated and could make a difference are leaving and the government does not know how to stop them", said Srdzjan, an activist working for the Roma community in Skopje, the only administrative unit in Europe managed by the Roma people. "The Roma people who make it out never return. They say they don't want to come back to this ghetto with no prospects for them. Even though it is hard to blame them, we are aware that without them there is no chance for change. We are the only people who can strengthen and rebuild the community. That is why I have returned. I now work for the public sector to prove that it can be done."

Finding employment in the public sector is a dream come true for many as it comes with a fixed salary and job security. Until recently this type of employment was only for those associated with the ruling party. The new government's aim is to introduce changes in this respect and transform the revolutionary call for responsibility, transparency and multiculturalism into its own values and goals. Liberal slogans and modern public relations are even reflected in the latest Freedom House's *Freedom in the World* report where North Macedonia is mentioned as one of a very few countries bucking the trend in the region, avoiding a slow slide into the abyss of authoritarianism and illiberalism.

When the revolutionary dust settles

The victory of the joint forces of the protesters and the largest opposition party, the left-wing SDSM, resulted in free elections in 2016, as well as a technocratic

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Photo of North Macedonia's parliament building (CC): https://www.pxfuel.com/en/free-photo-xsajx

As soon as the revolutionary dust settled, North Macedonians started noticing that while the process of holding the former government accountable for its actions was still far from over, their everyday reality remained the same.

government for the transformation period. There was a feeling that this time the loathed government would be brought to justice. The impeachment procedure for President Gjorge Ivanov and others was initiated; immunity for numerous politicians associated with the ruling party was lifted. Moreover, a decision was taken to restart the Gruevski investigations. Nonetheless, despite being convicted of corruption, he accepted the political asylum offered by his ideological ally, Hungary. The new anti-corruption commission initiated hundreds of other investigations. Yet as soon as the revolutionary dust settled, North Macedonians started noticing that while the process of holding the former government accountable for its actions was still far from over, their everyday reality remained the same.

The new government that was appointed in May 2017 decided to focus on foreign policy, including unblocking the process of accession to the European Union and NATO. This approach brought a good neighbourhood agreement with Bulgaria as well as a ground-breaking deal with Greece over changing the country's name.

"We have been sold. I am not a nationalist, yet I have every right to be proud of my country and my nation. Zaev has deprived me of this. He has robbed the whole nation. How can you change the name of the country just like that?", one of Skopje's guides gets agitated when discussing the issue with me. And he is not the

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only one. While the citizens of Macedonia were given the chance to have a say in a consultative referendum, the opposition called for a boycott and the majority of voters stayed home. The referendum turnout was only 37 per cent. In the end it was a wake-up call for the government, despite 90 per cent of votes embracing the change. It did not stop the authorities, however, from signing an agreement with the Greek government in Prespa. It came into force in June and as its direct effect, North Macedonia engaged in a complex process of changing all public nameplates bearing the name of the country.

Foreign affairs had overshadowed the development of domestic reforms in North Macedonia.

In accordance with the "one step at a time" approach, foreign affairs overshadowed the development of domestic reforms. The government neglected its election promises, including the vital ones regarding restoration of the rule of law, tackling corruption, and improving the economic situation. A reform package, with de-politicisation of the judiciary and the public sector, was to provide for a comprehensive set of changes suggested by the European Commission – also known as the "3–6–9 Plan" – but was never fully implemented.

"People here are struggling and the latest presidential election showed that their patience is beginning to wear thin. When one of the Albanian politicians publicly assured the ruling party that he could guarantee a certain number of votes, many decided not to vote since it would have a minimal influence on the reality", a local activist sums up the situation in the country.

Politics in a multi-ethnic melting pot

Both the referendum and the presidential election last year illustrated that the nationalist party VMRO-DPMNE, now side-lined as the opposition, is not intending to surrender and is still supported by a large number of ethnic Macedonians. Ethnic, because 30 per cent of the citizens of North Macedonia are Albanians and VRMO accuses the Social Democrats of handing power to them. A brawl in the parliament which took place when the first Albanian, Talat Xhaferi, from the ruling Albanian party, was appointed speaker proved that the current opposition would stop at nothing to regain power. The same argument was also used last March when parliament passed a new language law and significantly extended the possibility of using Albanian in the public sphere. In binational North Macedonia, a country which aspires to be perceived as a multinational state, the ethnic division card can easily be played in the current political game.

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Apart from ethnic Albanians, there are also others the opposition blame for the country's problems. One of them is George Soros. If one goes to any post-communist European country and one's interlocutor starts a conversation by blaming Soros for all the evils in that part of the world, one instantly knows who s/he is dealing with. VMRO-DPMNE has made the "de-Sorosisation" of the country a top priority. "The protests took place because Soros had paid people to break the country apart," says a secretary of a party that represents Macedonian Serbs, one of the larger minorities in the country. "This government is a disaster for our economy and foreign policy. They give away everything we own, including our dignity."

Upon reflection, she moves on to attack a "closer" enemy: "What revolution? It was organised and carried out by the Albanians. The ruling Social Democrats are giving them the country in return for their support. If this does not end, the Serbs will be left with nothing but the label of a 'genocidal' nation, ignored in their own country."

A state for its citizens

The way the state treats its most vulnerable citizens and those facing discrimination often faithfully reflects the relations between the government and its citizens. In North Macedonia it is ethnicity in general, and Macedonian-Albanian relations in particular, that dominate the public sphere. Yet there are other divisions. There are a number of small ethnic minorities in the country, the most numerous are Roma and Turks, but there are also Bosnians, Serbs and Vlachs, although the latter group is well integrated into Macedonian society. The peace agreement, which ended the conflict in 2001, ensured all of them participation in the power structures. Even if it is purely symbolic and the minorities feel dominated by the largest minority – Albanians, one can see that their participation matters for the authorities. An interesting example is the Roma people who, according to the 2002 census, make up 2.66 per cent of the population, which translates into 53,879 people. Many organisations claim, however, that this number is much higher.

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"Macedonian Roma people still live in poverty, without jobs, and on the margin of society. Recently social media has waged a hate campaign against a local journalist simply because he was Romani," an activist advocating for Roma people's participation tells me. "However, positive discrimination is gradually improving our

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situation. Despite the massive amount of prejudice in North Macedonian society, since 1996 there have been four primary schools that offer teaching in the Romani language. What is more, the Roma people have access to media in their language. On the other hand, we still lack initiatives for preserving Romani culture and traditions. This is despite the fact that Roma politicians actively participate in the political life of the country. The peace treaty has ensured them a proportionate representation in the public sphere as well as access to education." This means that 2.66 per cent of positions in the public administration should belong to that group. Currently this number is on the rise but it has not reached this level. The same situation applies to the number of students, although the number of Roma people with higher education is growing. They also have several political parties, including two in the governmental coalition, and some positions in the council of ministers and parliament.

All of these measures were also applied during the previous government, but now there is greater hope for change in light of the government's novel and liberal strategy. The strategy, entitled *One society for all*, is to open and transform North Macedonia – in accordance with the example-from-the-top rule the government believes that the document will create a civil society with space for otherness, including those from different ethnic groups.

A society that is opening up?

This inclusion also applies to sexual minorities who have been struggling in North Macedonia for years. It was only the anti-discriminatory law passed last year that made sexual discrimination a crime. Previously, the legal system guaranteed no protection whatsoever. Moreover, the former regime (the previous government is frequently referred to as a regime rather than a government) left behind painful memories of exclusion and violence. However, when Irena, an LGBT activist, moves on to discuss the latest changes, her voice changes. She is eager to talk about the visit of the minister of culture to the opening of an event related to the Pride Week in Skopje. It was a purely symbolic gesture but it made a difference.

"You see, in 2019 the first Pride took place here, but people still remember what it was like a decade ago when we were subjected to threats. At that time we were the underdogs fighting for space for the most excluded ones. The minister who turned up at our event was a tangible example of change and the audience had tears in their eyes. The new government still puts symbolism over expected tangible results, but this is also important. Due to a different atmosphere, people finally begin to report cases of sexual discrimination. While it is obvious that not every

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case has legal consequences, it still means a change in people's mentality. They finally believe in the system. In the state. It no longer has the face of a police officer beating them up but the one who is on their side and for them. This means a lot."

The left-wing government, which was appointed after a wave of protests, is facing a challenge. The symbolic politics is a significant beginning as the SDSM wishes to prove its point, namely, that the new North Macedonia is a country for all, regardless of their ethnicity or sexual orientation. It may not be enough, however. What the citizens want, first and foremost, is a functioning state. They want to "colour" their grey reality. The current government must take into account that with the April election, its entire future is at stake. At the same time, return of the former administration could mean Macedonia re-joining a group of illiberal countries led nowadays, among others, by Poland and Hungary.

Translated by Justyna Chada

Aleksandra Zdeb is a researcher and photographer. Her work concentrates on the post-Yugoslav area, conflict management, democratisation and minorities.

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A crisis in Georgia's politics

MATEUSZ KUBIAK

Georgia's parliamentary elections are scheduled for October this year, and they will be held in the face of great politico-economic instability. The level of social dissatisfaction is at a record high, but there seems to be no easy alternative to the Georgian Dream.

It would be difficult to find a more telling symbol of Georgia's continued political tensions than the green fabric that covers the fence surrounding the square around the Georgian parliament building and which has become a billboard for both anti- and pro-government graffiti. The fence was set up in January this year. Officially, it was explained that the fence was erected because of renovation works which were needed to fix the destroyed sections. Yet it is impossible not to have the impression it was meant to halt the continuation of protests that were taking place in front of the parliament.

As of writing (beginning of March 2020), both the Georgian opposition and the government have agreed on the long disputed issue of the electoral system, providing some hope for the stabilisation of the political situation in the country. However, it does not change the fact that the closer we get to the October elections, the easier it might be for a provocation or economic crisis to cause an escalation of tension.

Broken promise, long awaited agreement

The main issue over which the political opposition (and civil society) and the authorities were in open conflict until March was the plan to change the electoral

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system. Last summer, when mass protests erupted in Georgia, Bidzina Ivanishvili, the founder and chairman of the Georgian Dream party, promised that the 2020 elections would not be run based on the existing mixed electoral system (where half of the mandates are filled with a winner-takes-all system), but on a fully proportional model. Georgian society was taken aback by this decision, but it was accepted by the opposition. However just a few months later (in November 2019) the Georgian Dream backed off from its earlier declarations, abandoning the constitutional changes that were discussed in parliament.

Since then both sides have showed no desire to compromise. And even after a few rounds of negotiations, which were moderated by the European Union and the United States and have been taking place since December, they have brought no tangible results. When one party was presenting its ideas, they were automatically refuted by the other side. This was true both with regards to the idea to introduce the "German model" (which was proposed by the opposition) and to decrease the number of single-member districts from 73 to 50 (which was proposed by the government). Moreover, the talks were even suspended in early February after the Supreme Court decided to issue a warrant of arrest for Giorgi Ugulava, who is one of the leaders of the opposition party, Movement for Freedom – European Georgia, for 38 months. Ugulava was arrested on charges of financial misspending and money laundering during Saakashvili's time, when he was mayor of Tbilisi, however this case remains very controversial and opposition politicians think it was politically motivated.

Ultimately the negotiations have been restarted – albeit informally – after a few weeks due to growing pressure from the side of foreign actors, including the US and the EU. As it turned out, this time the disputing parties managed to reach a consensus. Basing on the presented memorandum of understanding, it seems that the October elections will be held based on the mixed electoral system, however the number of single-member constituencies is to be reduced from 73 to 30 only and the electoral threshold is to decrease to one per cent. The sole condition in that regard is, however, that the changes still have to be accepted by the Georgian Dream-controlled parliament, being included into the constitution.

United opposition

Surely the agreement could have been reached easier, if the price was not the outcome of the parliamentary elections. The truth is that it was thanks to the current election system that the Georgian Dream managed to have a constitutional majority (75 per cent of the mandates) in 2016, even though it only received 48.68

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per cent of the national vote. If the proportional system had been in place in 2016, Ivanishvili's victory would have been much more modest. Similarly today, despite falling support of the Georgian Dream, the mixed system of dividing seats in parliament would still privilege that party, which would probably get a majority.

Putting the question of the election system aside, clearly the main strength of the current government is the weakness of the opposition. Even though it has been eight years since the Georgian Dream came to power, Georgians still cannot break the Saakashvili-Ivanishvili dichotomy. This is true even though the former refuses to take the highest offices in the country, while Saakashvili still lives in exile and is no longer an official representative of the United National Movement party, although – as he himself declares – he is planning to take an active part in the election campaign. Yet considering the negative attitude voters have towards these two politicians, it is not surprising that as many as 20 per cent of those surveyed by the National Democratic Institute declare that there is no party which they could regard as being "the closest to them".

Clearly the main strength of the current government is the weakness of the opposition.

As a matter of fact, throughout the whole period since Saakashvili lost power, none of the new parties – whether the post-Saakashvili European Georgia or Mamuka Khazaradze's movement Lelo – have been able to become the opposition's leader. There is no doubt that a "third force" is what the political system needs. However for the moment no group that could play such a role is to be seen on the horizon. As a result, the only hope is that the opposition finds a way to unite itself, even if it still would be perceived as a Saakashvili-esque.

Shadows

Importantly, even if the Georgian Dream wins this year's election, Georgians will most likely still protest against them. A scenario like this can be foreseen based on statistical data or the experience from last year's "Gavrilov night" which took place in June 2019. At that time, anti-Russian demonstrations rapidly turned into anti-government protests, revealing a deep level of social dissatisfaction.

According to the National Democratic Institute, Georgia had never seen such a high level of pessimism since the Georgian Dream party came to power in 2012–2013 (and in general since 2009, when NDI started to provide us with their opinion polling data). In fact, the most recent data show that as many as 53 per cent believe the country is going in the wrong direction, while 24 per cent claim that nothing

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has changed. Only 19 per cent have a positive view of the dynamics of change in Georgia. Equally important, the level of dissatisfaction has visibly increased over the last 18 months and that it is possible it will continue to increase.

The main reason for the negative assessment is, however, the state of the domestic economy rather than the controversies related to the current government. Despite growing GDP, the Georgian currency, the lari, has weakened significantly against the US dollar and other foreign currencies, which has had a negative effect on businesses and households. The latter, for example, sees higher mortgage rates and over half of mortgages in Georgia are paid in US dollars. In addition, society is negatively affected by problems such as unemployment, low wages and low pensions. According to NDI data, as many as 88 per cent of Georgians have no savings and as many as 61 per cent consider themselves as unemployed.

In the face of political and economic uncertainty, Georgia has become a place that is particularly vulnerable to all kinds of provocations. Such activities are expected to come from the Russian Federation which has all kinds of instruments and can benefit from their application. From the Kremlin's perspective, the weaker and more unstable Georgia is, the more distant is its already uncertain future in Euro-Atlantic structures.

In the face of uncertainty, Georgia has become a place that is particularly vulnerable to all kinds of provocations.

Clearly the situation with the self-proclaimed republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (the Georgian Tskhinvali region), which are under Moscow's protection, is what impedes Georgia's stabilisation the most. The tension between Georgia and the separatists have recently been on the rise, as evidenced by the closing down of some crossing points on the demarcation line. Such was the case of the crossing near Akhalgori, in the Tskhinvali region, which remains closed since September 2019.

In addition, there is also the issue of the "borderisation" policy, that is, the Russian practice of gradually changing the physical barriers around the Tskhinvali region (further into Georgian controlled territory) and consequently an increased militarisation of this territory. Not to mention the recent disappearances of Georgian citizens from the para-states. Just last year there were two well-known such cases: the arrest and imprisonment of a prominent Georgian doctor, Vazha Gaprindashvili, in South Ossetia and the mysterious death of 29-year old Irakli Kvaratskhelia in Abkhazia.

There are also the various provocative statements and activities undertaken by Russian politicians that are not necessarily aimed at the "frozen conflicts" on Georgia's territory. Their potential was seen last year when Russia tried to take advantage of the mass protests that took place at the Georgian parliament last June.

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In reaction, Moscow instituted a ban on flights into Georgia and threatened to stop the import of Georgian wine. But there were also other, less obvious, activities aimed at instigating the already tense atmosphere: like when Vladimir Putin falsely accused Georgians of the genocide of the Ossetians, or when Sergei Gavrilov, the Russian politician who took the place of the speaker in the Georgian parliament was trying to argue that even though the chair he was sitting on was not comfortable, he would happily return to Georgia on a family pilgrimage.

Georgia's future remains largely unknown. It is impossible to tell whether the Georgian Dream will retain power and if so, for how long. It may turn out that some unexpected circumstances – such as a downturn in global markets (especially now, due to coronavirus impact on the tourism and global trade) or some cynically-orchestrated provocation – will effectively set off the already growing social discontent. Should there be no crisis, then Ivanishvili will probably stay in power indefinitely. However the current political model, over the long term, remains at risk of being rejected. That said, it is quite clear that what is going on in Georgia should not stop being of interest to the West. Even, if the US and EU-brokered agreement on the electoral system has been reached.

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

Mateusz Kubiak is an energy analyst with Esperis Consulting and author of the blog *Kaukaz Kaukaz*.

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Poland becomes a convenient target in Putin's memory crusade

An interview with Ernest Wyciszkiewicz, director of the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding. Interviewer: New Eastern Europe

NEW EASTERN EUROPE: On December 20th 2019 Vladimir Putin delivered a speech where he blamed Poland for the outbreak of the Second World War. These remarks caused outrage in Poland. The ministry of foreign affairs issued a statement in which it blamed the Russian leader for undermining joint efforts to find a way to truth and reconciliation in Polish-Russian relations. As director of the Polish-Russian Centre for Dialogue and Understanding in Warsaw, what was your institution's response?

ERNEST WYCISZKIEWICZ: First let me start by saying that I was not outraged because what took place in December 2019 was actually nothing new. In the past ten years Poland has often been under historical – sometimes a bit hysterical – pressure from Russia. Periods of peaceful coexistence were rare and were quickly followed by stormy exchanges. So we have been there before. Yet, what we have been witnessing since Putin's infamous comments in December is a new level of aggressiveness in Russian historical propaganda, as well as the fact that Poland was specifically chosen as enemy number one in this domain. What was more surprising for me was the level of Putin's direct involvement. First, there was a part of Putin's speech during the December 19th press conference dedicated to the topic. This was followed the next day by an unprecedented, hour-long lecture during an informal meeting of leaders of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) held in St Petersburg. I watched it and saw the stunned faces of CIS country leaders – they had no clue what was going on. Then there was Putin's meeting with high level military officials where the topic was raised

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again, as it also was on the next day in a meeting with business leaders. Each time, Putin specifically chose history as the major topic and Poland as enemy number one. This was unprecedented.

However, when it comes to efforts to whitewash the Soviet past, there were earlier activities to which we can also refer. Consider Sergey Naryshkin's article, published last August, just prior to the 80th anniversary of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. Naryshkin is, on the one hand, the head of the Russian Historical Society, but he is also the director of the foreign intelligence service. In his writing the interpretation of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact is positive – that Russia should cherish the deal. He glorified the Soviet decision and assessed it as strategically smart and, in a way, unavoidable. In fact each year we see these kinds of gestures, but the past year was a bit special. This is mainly because Poland was marked out as the main problem, but also because Putin wants to use the upcoming 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War to address his domestic challenges, to legitimise his goals with a "rally around the leader" effect. The response of our centre to all this is to continue providing our audience with the facts. For example, we recently became the publisher of the online journal, *Novaya Polsha* (*New Poland*), which is addressed towards a Russian-speaking audience. Thus, in reaction to Putin's speech, we asked several authors to present to our readers the interpretation of the course of the Second World War as established not just in Poland but western academia in general.

As you said, the Kremlin's historical revisionism is nothing new. But why is Poland the country that is now being targeted and attacked?

Keep in mind that Putin directed his message to several audiences, so he had probably also several purposes. Poland was chosen as the most convenient target for a couple of reasons. First, Poland has become a forerunner in countering Russian historical disinformation in the European Union. Second, we are in a rather long bilateral dispute with Russia regarding the decommunisation of public space. This dispute is centred around the removal of Soviet monuments, the so called "monuments of gratitude", which were erected during the communist era to commemorate the achievements of the Red Army. The Polish efforts to remove them have led to what I would call quasi-religious responses from the Russian authorities, including Sergei Lavrov, the foreign minister, who has accused Poland of blasphemy. As a result, Poland was often presented by Russian media and propaganda outlets as a country that does not respect the blood spilled by the soldiers of the Red Army. This, of course, is a form of manipulation and Poland's critics pretended they did not know the dispute referred only to the monuments which are located in urban areas, not the cemeteries where they are protected by Polish law and their maintenance is publically funded.

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Photo: Jurij Drug

Another issue is Poland's current position in the EU and the tensions it has with some member states and the European Commission. Therefore, Poland was chosen as an instrument to potentially drive a wedge between them and some member states and to exploit the fact there are tensions within the EU. I believe the Russian authorities wanted to amplify this fact and show that Poland also has historical sins. By so doing they would instrumentalise the current situation and show others that Russia is on the side of those who are apprehensive about the current Polish government. In my view this strategy has failed: the reaction of western commentators and ambassadors shows that they do not buy this narrative.

Poland is also problematic since the Kremlin is planning commemorations for the 75th anniversary of the end of the

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war. We are seen as not grateful enough for the ending of the German occupation by the Red Army on May 9th 1945. This is because we do not see the victory day in the same positive light as the Soviets did in the past or the Russian authorities do nowadays. For the Poles, the end of the Second World War was, of course, liberation from Nazi German occupation, but it did not give us freedom. Another problem is that, by reinforcing the importance of the Soviet contribution to the victory over Nazi Germany, the question of the USSR's role at the beginning of the war is glossed over. In other words, pointing to what took place in September 1939 is not the most convenient for Russia. That is why, when it comes to the end of the war, the Kremlin opted for a clear-cut campaign, but regarding its beginning a more blurry picture was created.

When talking about the beginning of the Second World War in the past, especially during the Iron Curtain, the date of September 1st 1939 as the start of the war was not so bad for the Kremlin. But since later the Poles started to refer to the Soviet invasion on September 17th 1939, it became difficult to reinforce the myth of the Red Army as the good guys. The truth is that Poland experienced two occupations: the German occupation of its western territories and the Soviet occupation in the east. Russia decided to water down this inconvenient fact and focus on the 1930s – the co-operation between western powers and Hitler, the 1938 Munich Agreement and Poland's infamous seizing of part of Czechoslovakia. This is an almost Orwellian attempt to transform the victim of the war into the main perpetrator.

Indeed, we have just finished the commemorations of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Nazi concentration camp. Commemorations were also held in Israel, at Yad Vashem, where Putin was invited to speak while the Polish president, Andrzej Duda, was not given an opportunity to speak and decided not to attend. This seems to show that even though we know the generally accepted truth, Putin and the Kremlin are able to make inroads into these commemorations and get their narratives heard. How do you think we should interpret this?

Fortunately Yad Vashem responded accordingly after the event, saying that a distortion of history occurred during this celebration. To me the logic of this event was quite clear. We had a situation where Putin and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's domestic interests coincided, although for different reasons. However for Russia the fact that the Red Army liberated Auschwitz-Birkenau and many other death and labour camps is fundamental for painting the Red Army as a purely heroic entity that almost single-handedly put an end to the Holocaust in Europe. This appears to be the most desirable claim by the Russian authorities, because if you are able to establish this kind of connection, then Poland's effort to remove Red Army monuments can be presented as an indirect

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form of antisemitism that was allegedly part of the Polish mind-set. This is the intention of the Russian propagandists. Perhaps it even works with some people, and indeed we do not question the fact the Red Army liberated the camps, but the problem emerges when you extend this narrative further and create distortions. And this is what happened in Yad Vashem. I watched the celebration and I watched this unfortunate film presenting the history of the Second World War, according to which the German invasion somehow started in 1942, which is complete nonsense to anyone who has attended elementary school. Luckily for all of us, Yad Vashem reacted adequately and sent their apologies for the distortion. What was unfortunate and problematic for me was the fact that we saw a situation where two governments exploited a moment which is very important for the global public opinion to play their own interests – I had a feeling it was not about the victims, the ones who were murdered, and that was very disturbing.

Returning to the Polish case, another hit that was made in December was when Putin quoted the pre-war Polish ambassador to Germany, trying to portray him as an antisemite. The aim was to stress Polish antisemitism, a phenomenon that was obviously present here in the 1930s, as something special and extraordinary, even though hostility towards Jews was then spread throughout the whole continent. Clearly the Russian regime identified this point as a weak element in Poland's historical narrative and decided to exploit clichés about Polish antisemitism. And in doing so, the Kremlin diverts attention away from what is happening in Russia today, where people are feeling the economic stagnation and social inertia.

In the Polish discourse we hear voices which are reassuring that what Putin is doing is a short-term tactic and in the long run, truth will prevail. However, with social media and memory wars, we are less optimistic about this short-term tactic. Do you also see a threat that this might have long-term consequences, or do you think that the European interpretation of the Second World War, its starting point and end, will prevail?

This is not a short-term issue because we have been observing these kinds of steps taken by the Russian authorities for quite some time. What took place in December 2019 was pre-planned and not an accident. Four or five speeches related to history, to Poland and the Second World War – that was something significant. There was certainly no spontaneity in this. Sadly, we are now also noticing a neo-Stalinist interpretation of history starting to enter the mainstream discourse in Russia. Obviously the most respected historians working in prestigious universities do not take part in this, but they are seeing it too. I can recommend to you a very interesting debate among Russian historians, published in the journal *Russia in Global Affairs*, which was conducted by Fyodor Lukyanov among people who as-

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pire to shape Russian historical policy. You can read voices who, despite their criticism of Poland and Polish memory politics, have noticed that Stalin's rehabilitation and the whitewashing of his crimes is counterproductive and will backfire. The Russian authorities, in their view, should stop this process as it is not going to work, especially in the West where sensitivity towards the Second World War is very different and the dispute between Russia and Poland is quite exotic.

If we put history aside and look at memory we can say the most disturbing thing, from today's perspective, is that the interpretation of the 1930s through a Stalinist lens can have a profound effect on how we view contemporary events, such as Russia's aggression against Ukraine or the annexation of Crimea. If the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact and the Soviet invasion of Poland on September 17th 1939 are presented as unavoidable, we are getting close to justifying the use of force as a legitimate form of foreign policy today. This is why this historical debate matters: not only because we should all somehow try and reach the truth, but because it can have practical implications on how the current regional security situation develops. Here is where I am on the side of those who think that, in the long term, Russia's efforts will not work as many will see through the real intentions of the Russian historical policy. However there is a risk some will forget about the political implications of taking the interpretations of the 1930s at face value, which the Kremlin is trying to do today. This is something we should be very serious about.

Your centre has a counterpart in Russia, but for quite some time the missions of the two institutions have not overlapped at all. Yet your organisation also co-operates with other partners in Russia and here is the question: have any of them either issued a statement regarding Putin's words or approached you to somehow work together to counteract them?

The majority of Russians with whom we co-operate on a daily basis, invite to conferences and seminars and with whom we are close, actually support the generally established – not just Polish – understanding of the Second World War. They clearly see how it is being instrumentalised by their government and president. Some of them are, of course, reluctant to say so publicly. It is becoming more and more risky since making public statements related to history can, in some cases, be punished. So, I realise it might be easy for me to criticise them for not doing anything publicly, but if I were in their position, I am not sure what I would have done.

Overall, many of those with whom we co-operate share our thinking about history. Even if some might be critical of the current Polish government, this does not have an impact on their perspective. Some were actually quite open on Facebook and other social media platforms. I was really happy to see a healthy dose of critical thinking. This showed me

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that in Russia there is still some room for manoeuvre and freedom of opinion. Obviously this does not apply to those who are working with, or closely related to, public institutions. They are constrained and know that, at least up until May 9th 2020, any engagement with Poland or Polish institutions might not be well perceived. At the Centre we continue to offer programmes for Russian researchers and activists. As usual we opened our annual competition for Russian scholars to apply for a scholarship in Poland. We also announced another edition of our granting programme for Polish entities and their Russian partners. To our surprise, we have not seen any drop in numbers, we have more submissions than last year. This shows that we should not forget about this active, open-minded minority which, to be sure, is not in power now (and probably will not be for years to come).

We even asked some of the people coming from regions other than Moscow or St Petersburg whether they were afraid of coming to Poland. They told us there might be some meetings with the FSB, but they will somehow manage. So they are cautiously optimistic. I hope they are correct because, as you know, the infamous legislation on foreign agents was modified last year to now include individuals. I am hearing from academics and researchers that this new reality is becoming a severe problem. For practical reasons, we are now trying to work on network-based cooperation instead of some kind of formal institutional arrangements. We try to identify those who are really interested in an honest conversation and are willing to come to Poland to discuss common, both easy and difficult, matters with us, and we also use our friends in Russia to recommend our projects to those interested in open debate. This is what works today. It is better to put the official channels aside. This situation is not normal, of course. Things should work differently but the context is as it is, and the recent dynamics in Russia are not giving us grounds to be optimistic.

Is there anything that makes you optimistic though?

What makes me slightly optimistic, especially after the 2019 Boris Nemtsov Forum that was held in Warsaw, supported by the Centre as one of the partners, is that, yes, there is quite a significant group of Russians who are interested in a real dialogue with Poles, and not necessarily only in finding a compromise or agreement, but also wanting to have an honest dispute or argument. This is what makes me believe there is a small light at the end of the tunnel.

Ernest Wyciszkiewicz is the director of the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding and editor in chief of *Novaya Polsha*.

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Evolution of memory policy in Germany

CHRISTOPH MEISSNER

When it comes to memory of the Second World War, Germany is regarded as the world champion of reprocessing. Yet German memory politics has never been free from controversy. This is especially true for the past few years which saw national-conservative parties questioning the consensuses that had been worked out in the course of the past 75 years.

Prior to Germany's unification in 1990, the official memory of the Second World War developed differently in the two German states. The first period that marked a divergence in memory was that of the Allied occupation which lasted from 1945 to 1949. This was followed by a long period when both states built their own narratives of the Nazi past, and created their own response to the guilt for the committed crimes. With unification came a consensus that is now at risk of being undermined.

Inadequate denazification

With the end of the Second World War in May 1945, the division of Germany into zones of occupation, which had been agreed upon by the Allies a year earlier, became effective. In the Potsdam Agreement of August 2nd 1945 the allied victorious powers of Great Britain, France, the Soviet Union and the United States agreed on the five capital "Ds" – decentralisation, demilitarisation, democratisation, dismantling and denazification. The decisions of the Allies were to be the basis for

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the policy of the Allied Control Council, which was created to implement a common occupation policy in Germany.

The Council's directives no. 10, 24 and 38 were aimed at punishing the violent Nazi criminals and removing the supporters of the National Socialist apparatus from public positions. However the implementation of the directives turned out to be a problem. While it was possible to agree on court trials against 24 main war criminals (these took place from November 1945 to August 1946 and went down in history as the Nuremberg Trials), the punishment of the lower levels as well as the followers was handled differently in all zones. In the western zones, rulings chambers were set up. They released about half of the accused into society with impunity as followers. In the Soviet occupation zone, the officials of the NSDAP and its organisations were removed from offices and some were interned in special Soviet camps. The overall supervision of denazification in the Soviet occupation zone was carried out directly by the USSR's secret service – the NKVD. It was also used by the Stalinist authorities to remove some critics of the new regime, including the Social Democrats, from the public sphere. All said, denazification was inadequately enforced both in the western occupation zones and in the Soviet occupation zone. This was especially true with regards to the actual intention of the policy, which was the removal of those who had worked for the National Socialist system.

The supervision of denazification in the Soviet occupation zone was carried out by the USSR's secret service – the NKVD.

Collective responsibility

The consequences of the insufficient denazification would become apparent in the first years of the two German states which were founded in 1949 – the Federal Republic of Germany (also known as West Germany) and the German Democratic Republic (also known as East Germany). With its founding, the Federal Republic of Germany saw itself as the successor to the National Socialist state, while the German Democratic Republic, as an anti-fascist, socialist state, rejected any connection with the Nazi past. It was thus able to universalise National Socialism as fascism and instrumentally use it in the ideological contest of the Cold War.

Nevertheless, even as a declared anti-fascist state, East Germany also could not start functioning without the co-operation and expertise of former Nazi-affiliated people. Thus, in the central organ of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*: SED) the famous words of the first secretary,

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Walter Ulbricht, were often repeated: "It is not so much what the individual did during the Nazi era that matters, but where he stands today."

The Federal Republic of Germany did not pursue a state-run denazification policy either. Instead it allowed the old elite, especially those who made up the political middle class, to remain in offices and even shape West Germany's memory politics during the 1950s. Characteristic for the Federal Republic were also tendencies to externalise guilt. The trials which took place in Nuremberg had, as it was interpreted, shown that a small group around Hitler was guilty of war crimes. German citizens were also their victims. This thinking became most evident when war activities, such as the bombings of German cities and the expulsions of Germans from Germany's pre-war eastern territories after they had been handed over to present-day Poland, created a sense of victimhood among German society. This was accompanied by the demand for a final stroke to National Socialism.

This popular sentiment got counteracted by the political elite, especially from the Social Democratic camp. However it was Konrad Adenauer, the first Federal Chancellor, who defined the "collective responsibility" of the Germans as the recognition of their guilt and duty to make amends. Adenauer faced massive rejection for this utterance in his own bourgeois-conservative camp, but received support from the Social Democratic opposition. As a result, the political elite in West Germany agreed to take on itself and society the burdens of the past, as if it was a kind of mortgage that had to be paid off but that would be postponed many times.

The East German establishment, on the other hand, even managed to present the GDR as victors in the Second World War, mainly by placing it on the Soviet Union's side. Thereby, the East German state managed to stay out of the joint liability for the Nazi crimes. It established May 8th, the day of the unconditional surrender of the German Army – the Wehrmacht, as the day of liberation, which became an official holiday and, until 1960, was a day free of work. In the Federal Republic of Germany, this recognition of the end of the war as Germany's liberation – and not shame and defeat, as it had often been claimed before – came with the famous 1985 speech of the Federal President, Richard von Weizsäcker, in which he stated that: "May 8th [1945] was a day of liberation. It liberated all of us from the inhumanity and tyranny of the National Socialist regime."

Never again

The resistance to the National Socialism was also viewed through contrasting prisms in the two states. In West Germany the military group, around Claus Graf van Staufenberg, initially regarded as traitors, became the focus of attention in

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memory politics, although with some delay. This was the group that attempted Hitler's assassination on July 20th 1944. They failed, conspirators were convicted and around 200 people were executed. Yet with this focus on military and conservative resistance groups, others such as those involved in the communist resistance or Jewish resistance were removed from the official canon of memory politics in West Germany.

In the GDR the focus was naturally on the communist resistance. Thus the greatest importance was placed on the Buchenwald concentration camp and its so-called self-liberation. Many actual or suspected communists were among the first internees of the camp. Even though on April 11th 1945 the camp had been liberated, jointly by the American troops and resistance groups of the International Camp Committee, the East German state strongly emphasised the moment of the prisoners' self-liberation and played down the role of the US army. There was also no place for the Jewish resistance in the GDR's memory politics. The reason for this was the thinking, that unlike the communist resistance, this group did not fight against the Nazis.

The German victims of terror were made heroes who brought Hitler down. In the GDR's interpretation, the communist resistance, which stood on the Red Army's side, was said to have significantly contributed to the fall of the Nazi regime. Thus the biggest defeat of the workers' movement – the rise of National Socialism – could still be interpreted as having ended in victory. Comparing the two states, the assessment of the actors of resistance could hardly have been more contradictory. However when it comes to the underexposed perception of the Holocaust, there were astonishing parallels.

In the Federal Republic of Germany, the 1979 broadcast of the American miniseries, *Holocaust*, which presented the fate of the fictional Weiss family of German Jews, led to a profound recognition of the fate of victims of Nazi tyranny and the Holocaust. As a result, the mission of West Germany's remembrance policy changed from "Never again war", coined in the 1950s, to "Never again Auschwitz".

The German Democratic Republic was also occasionally confronted with the questions of collective guilt and their official attitude towards the Holocaust and the state of Israel. Seemingly, the East German state was always able to respond to them on a very universalist level. It was only shortly before German reunification that the first freely elected Volkskammer, which was the unicameral legislature of the GDR, recognised German guilt for the Holocaust and asked for forgiveness for the hostilities towards Israel after 1945. The latter was particularly evident in 1975 when the GDR voted in favour of the UN General Assembly Resolution 3379 which determined that "Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination". The above examples provide evidence that, in the post-war period of the so-called

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Cold War, the memory cultures of the two German states used victim narratives and images of their enemy mostly to relieve the burden of responsibility for the Second World War.

Consensus and its discontents

The reunification of the two German states on October 3rd 1990 also brought a change in memory politics. Clearly the communist narrative pursued by the GDR was not compatible with the axiology of the new Federal Republic. However, in the 1990s new interpretations of the National Socialist history started to emerge. This was especially true with regards to some aspects of the German-Soviet war that began on June 22nd 1941, known as the war of annihilation.

This issue was the topic of the 1995 Wehrmacht Exhibition which was prepared by the Hamburg Institute for Social Research to mark the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. Titled *War of Annihilation: Crimes of the Wehrmacht 1941 to 1944*, the exhibit was instrumental in challenging the myth of the upright Wehrmacht in Germany, but it also met strong discontent. As intended by the organisers, it showed that the German army (Wehrmacht) had participated in the Nazi regime's war of annihilation against the Soviet Union, as well as in the Holocaust and the Romani genocide, Porajmos. This meant that the crimes that had been previously attributed to the Schutzstaffel (SS) and high officials of the Nazi regime could now also be attributed to the Wehrmacht and ordinary soldiers.

After a period of consensus, the debate on memory policy in Germany is flaring up again.

After this it became increasingly difficult for those responsible for Germany's memory politics to externalise guilt and to use a victim narrative. The recognition of guilt and "negative remembrance" was reflected in the unveiling of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, which took place in Berlin in 2005. Today, within walking distance of this memory site there are also other memorials that commemorate the victims of Nazi crimes, including murdered homosexuals, murdered Sinti and Romani, as well as victims of the Nazi euthanasia programme. The construction of these memorials was based on a consensus on remembrance policy which recognises various groups that were victims of the Nazi regime and acknowledges German guilt for the crimes it committed.

Recently this consensus has been questioned by Germany's nationalistic and neo-fascist parties. For instance, several MPs from the Alternative for Germany (AfD) spoke out to diminish the level of guilt. The party's co-founder, Alexander

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Gauland, even said that "Hitler and the National Socialists are just a bird's shit in the 1,000 years of successful German history" and suggested that Germans "have the right to be proud of the achievements of the German soldiers in the two world wars". His party colleague, Björn Höcke, a civil servant history teacher, was even more drastic in his statements. While referring to the Memorial to the Murdered Jews in Europe, he said it is a "memorial of shame" in the heart of Berlin and called for a "180-degree turn in [Germany's] memory policy".

The above shows that after a period of consensus, the debate on memory policy in Germany is flaring up again. Indeed, 75 years after the demise of the Nazi regime, the long negotiated narratives have been called into question. To counteract this trend, the Federal President, Frank Walter Steinmeier, poignantly said on the 75th anniversary of the bombing of Dresden that: "whoever tries to talk down German injustice; whoever falsifies historical facts against our better judgment, […] we must contradict loud and clear!" NEE

Christoph Meissner is a German historian who works for the German-Russian Museum Berlin-Karlshorst (Deutsch-Russisches Museum Berlin-Karlshorst) where he curates exhibits related to German-Soviet and German-Russian relations.

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20 years of NATO's flagship Multinational Corps Northeast

An interview with Lieutenant General Sławomir Wojciechowski from NATO's Multinational Corps Northeast. Interviewer: Jakub Bornio

JAKUB BORNIO: Both the status of the Multinational Corps and the international security environment is very different today from when the Corps was created in 1999. How would you assess these changes?

SŁAWOMIR WOJCIECHOWSKI: Preparing for the 20th anniversary of the corps and examining its beginnings, I came across some documents that surprised me. It turned out that even though there has been a changing security dynamic, the unit that I have come to lead (since 2018 – editor's note) has always had objectives that corresponded to the geographical location, being able to function on a defined area. At the time the threats associated with the region were perceived as very unlikely, and objectives outside of our region seemed more likely. The difference today is that we don't speak of the same elements that were on the agenda back then, they have been somewhat erased. Today, we only speak of ensuring security for the region.

Have the expeditionary missions and the supplementary role of the Corps in such missions moved further to the background?

Yes. What was referred to 20 years ago as being "unlikely", has become the most probable and only scenario. Because of the intensity of the threat, we don't consider other options than the regional ones. And we openly declare that we are not moving anywhere. This is because the three countries that make up the basis of the framework – Poland, Denmark and Germany – are all connected to the Baltic Sea region. Furthermore, the events that occurred over the last few years have contradicted the world order that stemmed from the collapse of the

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bipolar system. This is shocking. We've been having problems in understanding what is happening and in reacting quickly. NATO is a consensus driven organisation, which makes it operate slowly. Let's be honest, Russia is a factor influencing the threat perception and this perception isn't just a perspective from capitals 2,000 kilometres away, but also from that who are in Russia's vicinity.

It is Russia's right to have a capable military. What it does within its own borders is an matter of its own sovereignty. Nonetheless, if we analyse how they communicate their doctrine and operations within Europe, as well as on their borders, we notice that the security balance has tipped in favour of Russia. Another trend is a vigorous remilitarisation of how they view security. It is contradicting the processes which we discussed in the context of 1999, where NATO was reducing its headquarters, structures and units. Back then, there was a larger emphasis on the multi-national aspect, interoperability and modularity as a remedy to this downsizing. It is difficult to turn this trend around. We do however know what we have to do this, as weakness is encouragement for hostile action.

This means that we see two dominating processes in the international security environment. First, there is the assertiveness of Russia, and second is that NATO is forced to adjust itself to this assertiveness. What about other global processes that influence regional security?

We are so interconnected that a cough in one place could trigger an avalanche in another. The growing economic power of China is no longer a secret. For China, upholding such dynamics requires a policy of using all means available, including the use of force. The growth of power and increased influence generates potential conflict situations where two spheres of influence could overlap. We have seen this in the neighbourhood of China with the allies of the US, among them Japan, South Korea and the Philippines. A second issue is the political problems in Muslim countries, the Middle East and North Africa. Problems of migration from those areas and the recent activity of ISIS are also issues for Russia, Turkey, NATO member states and the European Union. Another less visible factor is the demographic situation in Africa where the population has fewer opportunities and where there are ties with the former colonial metropoles in Europe. We should also keep in mind that there is a strong confluence between internal and external issues. A federal China is still working to prevent an internal dissolution and Russia continues to use foreign policy in order to provide internal cohesion. These issues overlap and intertwine with almost no one free from their reach.

Do you agree with the understanding that this is the swan song of the unipolar moment in time?

This has been visible over the last few years. The question is rather if the Unit-

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ed States is committed to maintaining its role. The US also has internal problems, such as migration from the south and social stratification. The US may therefore not remain eager in keeping its role in the system – a role that it created itself – but where it is no longer the sole influence and beneficiary. The domination that stems from globalisation at the same time fuelled and backfired at the US. It is a paradox that China has become more interested in upholding this system, as the rules have changed and as they have learnt to function within it. It is obvious that the economic and demographic base of China is incomparable with anything while its technological advances have started to surpass that of its competition. It is thanks to these competitors that they have reached these advances, encouraging investments and incorporating technological advances. It is within this system that they operate across the globe.

Where is Poland's place on this chessboard? What are its strategic goals and what tools does it have to pursue them?

The way we read the constitution and some of the official strategic documents literally, our strategic goal is the existence of the state and the nation itself. And this actually remains the only goal. We don't have broader ones. I have not heard that we had strategic regional goals, although it seems that they have been formulated on an ad hoc basis, and as a state we see ourselves rather as an element of broader strategies, either of NATO or the EU or bilaterally. If we say that our ultimate goal is to provide security for the Polish state and ensuring its development and prosperity, this is being somewhat fulfilled. Our dilemma today is if the decisions and courses of action we take correspond to the situation and changes in our environment. This is very uncertain. In this respect we would have to return to our discussion about the role and place of the US in the world, as well as our place in the EU and the role we would like to play in it, including as a regional leader.

What are the internal and external expectations?

If there aren't any external expectations yet, they are surely probable to materialise. It is likely we would have to adjust, because such a role could be naturally expected of us. The question of how we understand these expectations remains. If we engage more, would it mean higher costs and investments that we would have to cover? If we decide on a small isolation it would be a kind of zone of self-indulgence that we could not necessarily afford. Another question is whether we are mature enough to fulfil this role. We need to be aware of our own ambitions, aspirations and our real capabilities compared with all partners and how far our reach is. This reach seems to be the Baltic and Central European region, with some countries of southern and eastern Europe as well. In other words, we return to the starting point from 300 or 400 years ago.

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Doesn't this forced role correspond with how Poland would want to view itself in this part of Europe? Does Poland have any strategic sovereignty in this respect?

I believe that everyone has strategic sovereignty in some area. One has to accept the consequences of decisions. But no one is sovereign in the pure meaning of the term. The strategic question is how much we want to take part in alliances such as the EU or NATO, and how much we would like to be separate. Both options have their price. Do we want to have a strategic partner who has the same interests as us in the region, with those interests not being permanent? This cannot be done with a decree, but it could turn out that it will just develop naturally because of military and economic potential or demographic and geographic factors. It would require the agreement of all international actors and of ourselves, with choosing the right resources to implement it. The unilateral declaration that "I will be the leader" means nothing, as there are concrete actions needed in order to become the leader. Furthermore, I believe that any of the arrangements we discussed above would lead to Poland having many responsibilities.

How is Russia a challenge for Poland's national security and what tools could be used to threaten Poland's safety?

I personally do not feel any direct fear when it comes to Russia's day to day behaviour. It is rather the potential that Russia has, paired with a defined course of action that gives it a broad playing field. Yet, even a one per cent probability is still a probability. Russia is a large actor that could be motivated, internally or externally, to use one of the many tools in its arsenal. In 1999 we would have siad that something like that would be unlikely. Fifteen years later it turned out that it may be highly likely. It is clear that Russia has global ambitions, this is no secret. Territorially, Russia is the largest country in the world, and it wants to prove that it is a superpower which can broaden its influence. As Thomas Friedman put it: "Our capabilities motivate our intensions". If we have the right capabilities we can reach our goals. In the case of Russia, the potential and course of action, together with Russia's narrative and communication tools that it uses every day, makes it an unpredictable challenge.

The capabilities Russia possesses don't necessarily mean it will be forced to use physical means against neighbouring countries. And there is no need to invade and occupy anyone. It is enough to carry out a cyberattack, a disinformation campaign, influence the political process, disrupt a sector of the economy or in an extreme situation "accidentally" detonate a warhead. What is more, Russia has the decision-making advantage. I believe that Russia's leadership remains pragmatic and rational. But there is no way to be sure that these tools will not find their way to less responsible leaders. In Russia's context this is a historical issue. History plays a significant

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role in this region. We are incapable of removing the issues from the past that obstruct dialogue. The absence of dialogue is always disadvantageous, because when we don't talk we won't resolve our differences.

I understand that you don't notice any immediate existential threat to Poland. What about the Baltic states?

In my view the Baltic states are always under threat.

This is directly related to the security of Poland. We are connected to the Baltic countries by our NATO obligations which means that if we do not react to even small-scale actions against an ally, we automatically lose credibility with the Alliance.

This is an indirect problem. In the Baltic states, we have countries where 30 per cent of the population are Russian speakers still fighting for their identity. These societies are dealing with large emigration of youth. It is a significant problem stemming from historical memory. It is also a problem of geography. These countries are not large areas, something that makes them easily accessible. In this case the internal and external threats converge. There is clearly a large disproportion in the relations. On one side we have a nuclear power, and on the other side small societies organised in sovereign states with few tools to safeguard their sovereignty. That said, I still believe that we are not dealing with an excessive desire to use military might in this part of the world, yet…

At the 2016 NATO Summit in Warsaw, responsibility for defence against hybrid threats was moved to the national level. How likely are these threats today in the Baltic states?

Some claim that we are already experiencing it. Hybrid threats, by their nature, are difficult to recognise. The wide range of instruments that make up hybrid threats aim at creating a crisis or shake up social cohesion. Non-kinetic activities are more likely than military action which would be used if the former are not successful. Thanks to the presence of NATO, the situation is not as obvious as it was five years ago. We are now dealing with an increased preparedness to react. Nevertheless, hybrid activities remain problematic because they exist in a situation where no military action is declared. Therefore, we cannot legally use armed force within the framework of the Alliance. Retaining cohesion is a challenge. Our regional nature and the fact that our Corps Headquarters is close to Vilnius, Tallinn and Stockholm is an advantage.

And also to Moscow…

And also to Moscow. No wonder therefore that Sweden has also changed its perception of reality, in its recent declarations and actions.

Returning to the Multinational Corps. It has gone through significant changes after the situation in Ukraine and since NATO adapted to the changed environment. What has been the character of these changes?

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The Corps has always adapted to the requirements. For five years it was not even a NATO Corps. Later it was declared a unit of lower readiness that would have a supplementary role by sending soldiers to the mission in Afghanistan, after 2001. Soon, it had its preparedness raised and received a certificate of high readiness. Today, the Corps is the highest ranking NATO structure in this region of Europe. It is an unconventional corps, as it is an international military formation and simultaneously an element in NATO's force structure. We face hybrid challenges on a daily basis and do not operate only during war time and crisis. In fact, we are the first who would response in NATO's name in this region.

What is the structural relationship between the Corps and it's two multinational divisions?

This relationship defines our experience and the direction NATO is heading. The region in which we find ourselves has two multinational division headquarters. There is a headquarters in Elbląg (responsible for forces in Poland and Lithuania) and another headquarters being created in Ādaži (responsible for Latvia and Estonia). Their dependence stems from the relationship in our command structure, which explains why we are above them. We give orders that are connected to commitments that have been delegated to us from the Allied Joint Force Command in Brunssum. The relationship between the Corps and the two divisions is a kind of novelty – or rather a return to earlier norms and practices.

Is including Sweden and Finland in the work of the Corps' headquarters only an element of strategic communication?

This issue is not only related to strategic communication, but rather it questions to what degree we can include Sweden and Finland in NATO structures in general. These two countries are independent states that are technically prepared to join NATO at any time, while at the same time they remain undecided politically.

Is this all a consequence of 2014?

Surely 2014 played a part, but there were a number of incidents that followed which somehow confirmed some earlier fears. The war in Donbas was a factor that changed the perception of the entire problem as it was a more aggressive move compared to Crimea – where there was a window of opportunity for Russia. In addition, there is increased Russian activity in the Baltic Sea, development of the Baltic Fleet, increased intensity of combat aircraft flights and military expansion in the Kaliningrad Oblast. These are factors that influence the perception of the threat in Sweden and Finland. Both these countries have increased defence co-operation, which is an exception in their history. They are being perceived as one in terms of defence.

A northern tandem?

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Whatever happens, these two countries will remain within Russia's reach. The countries therefore have a dilemma. Because joining NATO is mostly a political issue. Our common problem is that NATO rarely accepts partners who have a special status (the earlier Russia-NATO relations is another problem). We have soldiers from both Sweden and Finland in our Corps organisation. NATO already works together with Sweden and Finland in many of the exercises and the Swedish army is already present in the Baltic states. I think this is a process that we would want to continue in a low key fashion so there wouldn't be too much tension. We need to keep in mind that many NATO members have bilateral relations with Sweden and Finland, which often have a defence element.

So it may be understood the way that Multinational Corps North East is the only unit that can coordinate the NATO Response Force in the region?

It is the only unit that is already present. The operations of the response force can be organised by other units that reach us. It all depends on the will of member states, who are ultimately responsible for keeping the various forces operational.

The downing of a Russian fighter jet on the Turkish border with Syria proved that tensions can arise in more than one place. Is one NATO Response Force enough?

We are all aware it could be too little. But we have to keep in mind that the purpose of the response force is to act in a crisis environment. Taking into consideration that the crisis situation could erupt in several places at once makes us aspire to raise readiness of all other forces as well. NATO is pushing the concept of having an increased number of squadrons, battalions and ships ready to be deployed regardless of how the response force acts.

What about the direction of the Corps itself?

We aim at retaining two of our capabilities. First, being a regional integrator as a land forces component, while coordinating with the navies, air forces and special forces in the region. At the same time, we have the challenging objective of being able to maintain our potential and capabilities of being a full-scale land force fighting Corps in time of conflict. And in this respect we are still a unique combined force entity and headquarters within NATO.

Translated by Daniel Gleichgewicht

Lieutenant General Sławomir Wojciechowski is the commanding General of Multinational Corps North East.

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

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The Lane Kirkland Scholarship Program

Celebrates its 20th anniversary

The Lane Kirkland Scholarship Program

832 alumni from 11 countries

9 months of the study at Polish Universities

2–4 weeks of internships in public and private institutions

cooperation with 5 best Polish academic centers

For 20 years, the Lane Kirkland Scholarship Program has been providing one-year stays at Polish universities for young professionals from Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Southern Caucasus. Its primary objective is to share Poland's experience of systemic transformation with the citizens of other countries.

The Program was established in 2000 by the Polish-American Freedom Foundation (PAFF), and since 2016 has been administered by the Leaders of Change Foundation. It is financed by PAFF, and co-financed by the National Agency for Academic Exchange (NAWA).

The scholarship is open to individuals who have higher education and have at least two years of professional experience. We are looking for people who are ready to use the knowledge and skills they acquire in Poland to benefit economic development and social change in their own countries. The areas of study open to scholars are law, administration, international relations, economics, and management. We always try to adapt our scholarship offer to the needs of the participants and the changing times, so, in the next academic year we will also be offering studies in the fields of environmental protection, crisis management, and security (including digital security).

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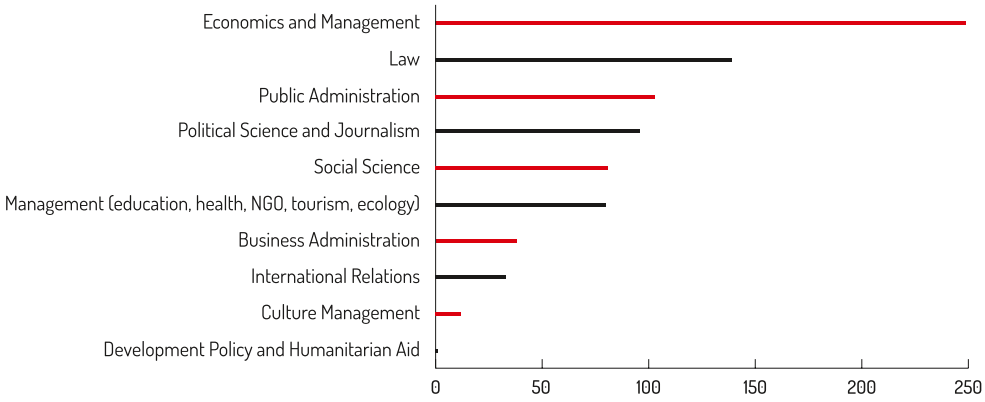
FIELDS OF STUDY OF
THE KIRKLAND PROGRAM ALUMNI
2000-2019



The geographical scope of the Program is also expanding. The first edition was addressed exclusively to candidates from Ukraine, but now the Program hosts citizens from 11 countries. Within the current edition (2019/20), scholars from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan are taking part in the Program. Also among the Program's alumni have been representatives of Slovakia and Lithuania – these two neighboring countries were covered by the Program until Poland joined the European Union.

The scholarship holders conduct their study according to individual scientific programs, under the supervision of a scientific supervisor, in one of five academic centers – Warsaw, Kraków, Wrocław, Poznań, or Lublin. The Program co-operates with a large number of universities in each of these cities. We primarily cooperate with leading universities, but also economic, pedagogical, natural sciences, and technical institutions of higher education. We try to adjust study profiles in a way that best suits the candidates' needs by also establishing co-operation with highly specialised universities. For example, in the 2018/19 edition a scholarship holder who planned to develop a network of volunteer fire brigades in Ukraine studied at the Central School of Fire Service.

> The geographical scope of the program is expanding. It now hosts citizens from 11 countries.

In addition to courses at universities, the scholarship holders carry out internships at central and local government institutions, non-governmental organizations, and research centers. The contacts they make here often result in later joint

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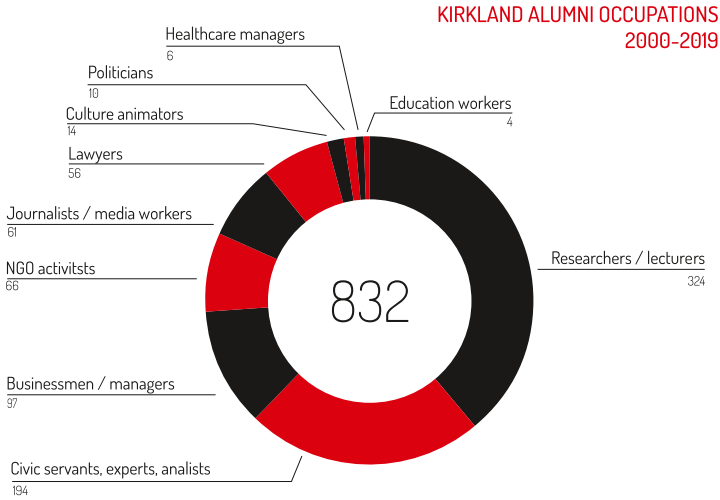

projects. One of these contacts led to a partnership agreement between the scholarship holder's home town of Bashtanka, and the Polish town of Solec Kujawski. As part of their co-operation, a development strategy for Bashtanka, based on Polish experience, was developed, with both sides then jointly supporting other Ukrainian municipalities in preparing their development documents.

We are happy that for many of our scholarship holders, their stay in Poland is not only another step in the development of their personal careers, but also becomes the inspiration for changes in their home communities and countries. Based on his scholarship experience, one of our alumni from Ternopil introduced a waste segregation system in his city; while another of our alumni, a civil servant from Vyshneve, near Kyiv, initiated the launch of an e-administration system in his municipality.

> For many scholarship holders, their stay in Poland becomes an inspiration for change in their home communities.

During the course of the scholarship we pay attention not only to scholarly achievements, but also encourage our participants to become committed, pro-socially oriented people who know Poland and the Polish language, who act to benefit good neighbourly relations based on mutual understanding, and who will be Poland's advocates in their countries of origin. As an example of some of our alumnae demonstrating these qualities, on their initiative a Polish language center was established at the Academy of Agriculture in Poltava.

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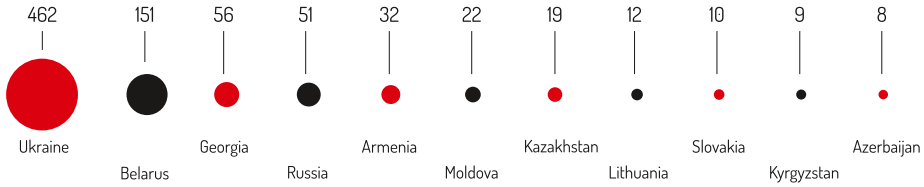
NUMBER OF THE KIRKLAND PROGRAM ALUMNI
FROM DIFFERENT COUNTRIES
2000–2019



Although our alumni return to their own countries we always maintain contact with them. One of the ways we do this is by offering an extensive program of post-study activities, which includes alumni conferences as one of its elements. This year the conference will be part of the Kirkland Program's 20th anniversary. For this occasion, we have also prepared this section of *New Eastern Europe* in which selected Kirkland alumni write about their countries and the changes taking place in them. The section opens with an interview with Andrew Nagorski, who is an American journalist and expert on the region, but also the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Polish-American Freedom Foundation – the founder of the Lane Kirkland Scholarship Program.

We wish you an interesting reading!

The Lane Kirkland Program Team

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The transformation as a learning process

A conversation with Andrew Nagorski, journalist, writer and chairman of the board of directors of the Polish-American Freedom Foundation. Interviewer: Iwona Reichardt

IWONA REICHARDT: Let us start with the memories of a reporter. For many years, you were working for the American press. When was your first encounter with the communist system here in the region?

ANDREW NAGORSKI: My first encounter was as an exchange student at the Jagiellonian University in 1968. After graduating from college and teaching history in the United States, I joined *Newsweek* in 1973. Eventually I ended up being stationed in Moscow from 1981, but after 14 months the Kremlin decided they did not want me and expelled me. At that point I went to Rome where I was covering the Vatican, including Pope John Paul II. As lovely as that assignment was, I really wanted to get back to covering this region. I ended up going to our regional hub in Bonn in 1985 and from there I started going in and out of all the countries of the then Soviet Bloc.

We tend to assign the transition to 1989, but of course it started with *perestroika* and *glasnost*. Nowadays the assessment of Gorbachev's reforms is mixed, especially in Russia. How do you remember this period?

First of all I would say the real changes started even earlier. Poland and 1980 were key, as well as all the failed revolutions before: the Prague Spring, the Hungarian Uprising, and so on. I believe the Solidarity movement was formed from a real pressure to change the system at a time when the system still did not want to be changed. There was the whole philosophy of Václav Havel to build up the power of the powerless, and smaller dissident movements like Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia and the democratic opposition in Hungary. You could see change brewing in this region. I remember coming back to Poland for some time in 1985 after being kicked out of the Soviet Union. I had the chance to do an interview with Zbigniew Bujak, a leader of the underground Solidarity, who at that point was still one of the most wanted men in Poland. I was in-

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structed to show up on such and such a street in Warsaw at six in the evening. So I went out to one of the street corners and somebody showed up, a man whose name I would find out only later – Zbigniew Lewicki. We went to a building on one side through the courtyard, on the other side a car pulled up, we jumped in, drove around and they let us out in front of another building. We then went through the courtyard and undertook another series of manoeuvres to throw off anyone who was following us. By the time we got out to some apartment buildings I was not quite sure where we were. I went up to this apartment and after a couple of minutes this young man with a big beard came in. His face looked familiar: it was Bujak, with a fake beard.

That was 1985, and despite the amount of political repression, the Jaruzelski regime would later try to say that they were "managing the transition". I remember being here during the main strikes in 1988. We had a small *Newsweek* office overlooking Plac Zamkowy, the castle square. I had gotten up at seven in the morning to make some coffee and was looking out of the window, and I saw these buses coming full of plain-clothes men, evidently militia, waiting all day, because they knew there were going to be demonstrations after mass. When the mass ended, people started coming out of the cathedral and some of them started shouting "Solidarność, Solidarność!" You could feel there was something strange about this, some of the people were not part of the crowd. They started beating people and rounding them up in militia cars. In other words, at that point there was still an attempt to completely supress the movement.

Many years later I was interviewing Stanisław Ciosek who was one the leading figures of the Round Table representing the government. He said that during that period it was as if they were flying a plane and supposedly in charge, but suddenly one engine went out, then two engines, three engines, four engines, and at one point they were just trying to land the plane without killing themselves. It was not that they wanted to have this transition, but they knew that something had to change politically and economically, the whole place was imploding.

In 1995 I had the chance to spend a few days with Gorbachev when I was stationed in Moscow again. During his tenure he had satisfied no one: the people who were driving for reform and radical changes felt he was not doing enough, and the people who wanted to maintain the Soviet system felt that he destroyed it. Gorbachev played a huge role in history, but what is remarkable is that I think he never understood it. His idea was that countries like Poland, Czechoslovakia or Hungary could have their own mini-Gorbachevs and their own versions of *glasnost* and *perestroika*. He simply wanted to loosen the system a bit, to make it more humane, to add a little more economic elasticity and ease the repression. What he did not understand was that in this part of Europe, if you withdraw the threat of Soviet tanks,

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people will not stay quiet. This turned out to be true for the Soviet republics as well. To Gorbachev's credit, he did not use force on any massive scale even when he saw the system unravelling. There were individual cases like Vilnius and some other places, but on the whole, he was able to reluctantly accept that things were spinning out of control at a much faster pace than he expected. But again, this was not his intention, and he even told me in 1995 that he could have saved the Soviet Union. Thank God that he had this illusion, because it meant he was not like the old-school who would have just crushed anything by force. It's good to remember that in 1989, while Solidarity elections were taking place here, Tiananmen Square was happening in Beijing. There were a lot of people who thought there might be a similar scenario here.

Once the transformation began, it was viewed with a lot of optimism. Where do you think this came from? How do you assess the "end of history" mentality of the 1990s from today's perspective? Were we naïve at the time, or were all the signs giving us grounds for such optimism?

I think there were grounds for future optimism in the sense that no one expected things to happen so fast, including figures like Havel and a lot of people in Solidarity. Sure enough everyone knew that this system could not last, but you always thought of it as something that would happen sometime in the hazy future. Havel gave a wonderful statement shortly after becoming president where he said that he would not have been surprised to wake up in the morning in a prison cell and it turned out that the past few months had all been a dream, and he would tell his fellow inmates about the dream they would all laugh about how crazy it was. It was almost too good to be true.

The transformation was also psychological. I remember being here just after 1989 and being amazed about how quickly people's mind-sets changed. The same people who had been routinely complaining about how there was nothing in the shops were suddenly complaining about how they couldn't afford what was in the shops. Another thing that shocked me was how quickly young people in the 1990s and early 2000s forgot about such basic things as *kartki*, rationing, things like this became ancient history. The positive things became assumed very quickly, which in turn made the negative things grow larger.

Foreign actors also played a huge role in democracy-building in the region. These included the United States, agencies like USAID, German foundations and so on. Thirty years later their role seems to be criticised more than back then. How do you assess the role of external actors in democracy-building?

There was the famous "Marriott Brigade" of consultants who stayed at this hotel in Warsaw, and that group included people with both good and bad intentions. Whether it was Poland, Ukraine or Iraq there are always people who are

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Photo courtesy of the Kirkland Program / Leaders of Change Foundation

trying to profit from a transition. But I think there was also a lot of very sincere efforts to help. In the very early days some of them were perhaps overly naïve, for example they might send an American graduate who had just finished college to advise the finance ministry. But by and large, I think there were a lot of good efforts in the fields of economics, education and so forth. A huge player early on was Lane Kirkland and the labour movement of the United States.

There were many things that did not need to be invented from scratch such as financial institutions or how to organise a stock market. The key was to adapt these concepts to the local conditions and to see what works and what doesn't. It was not simply about copying everything: there were many dedicated people working here who had respect for their local counterparts and did not try to impose a model. Of course you can be critical of some of the reforms. There are people who say that the Balcerowicz Plan and the economic transformation went too far too fast, while others say it didn't go far enough in certain areas. In

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my opinion, it was a really bold move. Balcerowicz and his team consulted with western economists and financial advisors and then made their own decisions, as it should be.

You mentioned Kirkland, so let us now move on to an even more complex region, the post-Soviet countries. Twenty years ago the Kirkland Scholarship Program was set up by the Polish-American Freedom Foundation to help these societies in their transformation. At that time Poland was perceived as a role model for these societies. Do you think Poland was really advanced enough in its transformation to be a role model? Or maybe being the right role model came from the fact that the transformation was not yet completed…

Lane Kirkland was very dedicated to working with Poland and supporting the Solidarity movement. He saw Solidarity in the 1980s as a natural match for what he, as a labour leader in the US, was trying to achieve. Frankly, labour unions were losing some of their influence in American society at that time. Kirkland was also something of an internationalist, he thought that what we had learnt in America could really help in a society like Poland where they were struggling to get even basic labour rights. Kirkland died in 1999, and in 2000 we started the Lane Kirkland Program. The programme was meant to work in the spirit of the AFL-CIO who helped Solidarity with tools while at the same time leaving it up to them to decide what to do with those tools. Poland was first in its transformation, being the first to get rid of the communist regime and launching major economic reforms which then triggered all sorts of changes in society. Therefore I think Poland worked well as a place to learn for people from post-Soviet countries. The collapse of the Soviet Union only happened in late 1991 and early 1992, so there was a time lag. The reform programmes were nowhere near as bold, and the old *nomenklatura* was still very much in control. A perfect example of this is Ukraine where in theory many of the elements of society and economy were parallel to Poland, but the country was still being kept in a stranglehold by a very corrupt and strong *nomenklatura*. I think our programme has two purposes: one is to learn from the Polish experience which I think is still a very legitimate thing, and second, the participants should learn from each other. Someone from Georgia can compare their experiences with a person from Ukraine, Moldova or Azerbaijan. The participants are scattered around Poland in different institutions and universities, but we make a point to bring them together several times during their stay. The alumni network is also quite active, and from what I gather, they really do maintain contact with each other and compare experiences. We do not necessarily organise this, we just help facilitate it by maintaining this alumni network.

You suggest that Poland still has a role, but that there is also huge potential in the post-Soviet societies and between them.

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Is the focus now on co-operation between them, or is Poland still the primary point of reference?

When I was travelling around this region before 1989, everybody said that the dissidents in each society knew a lot about their foreign counterparts. In Charter 77 people would be extremely curious about Solidarity, and they actually had secret contacts. The movements faced very common problems. But after the transformation each of these countries had their own particular issues, and often they were so preoccupied with them that they were less aware of what was going on abroad. However, there were still a lot of things in common, for instance how to get into the European Union or NATO. I think these are questions which still face post-Soviet republics: how to define relations with Europe, both institutionally and in other ways. Here, they can still learn from Poland because Poland went through that process.

Of course you can say that Poland has done well in certain areas but it is facing problems in others. For example, in politics. It is one thing to have normal competitive democratic processes and another to have a real deep divide in society. But that is not only true of Poland and countries in this region, it is true also of the US right now. In the United States you have people both in the pro-Trump camp and the anti-Trump camp who are convinced that they are completely right, they can't stand to talk to each other. You have this here in Poland and in Ukraine too, and we could all benefit from a bit of standing back. Even if you have plenty of objections to the current politics and current politicians, you should not demonise them because by doing that you hurt society. In fact, you are showing that you have no faith in democratic institutions. I think all of us have to regain that faith here, on both sides, so that we don't see our political opponents as enemies but as political opponents, and recognise their legitimate grounds to fight for what they think the proper boundaries of political, executive and judicial power should be. On balance, the fact that we can even have these debates is a testimony to the success of the transformation.

The US was undoubtedly the point of reference and a role model for the whole transformation, starting from Poland and Central Europe but also for the post-Soviet space. Do you think it still has this soft power position today? Is the country still an ideal for this region even though the US itself is torn by a similar internal conflict as the one we are experiencing in the region?

Of course it is not to the same extent as 30 years ago. However, I would argue that in a way this is healthy too. I remember that before 1989 intellectuals and workers in Poland idealised America. America was everything that Poland was not at that point. It stood for freedom and prosperity, and while that contrast was obvious and legitimate, it also meant that people did not understand that America had always been a

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complex place with both positive and negative sides. I always remember this story about a Solidarity activist who in the early 1980s travelled to America, at a time when the Jaruzelski regime started letting Solidarity activists travel because they just wanted to get them out. Since everything he read in the communist press in Poland about Poland was a lie, he thought that all the articles about the high crime rates in New York City must also be a lie. So he gets there, checks into a hotel and asks: where is one of the highest crime areas in the city? I think they said Bedford–Stuyvesant, which was a pretty rough neighbourhood. So he takes the subway, goes to Bedford–Stuyvesant, gets out of the subway and gets mugged. Right away. He comes back and says: just because everything about Poland was a lie does not mean that everything about US society was a lie too. Nowadays when people from this region visit the US, it is not like they think they are going to the Promised Land. They are going to a society which many people still admire in many ways, but they also see its normal failings and limitations.

How is the Kirkland Program adjusting to all of this? The transition is a complex process, and right now it is probably reaching a turning point. What is the vision for the future?

I think there is certainly still a need for the programme. First of all the Kirkland Program adjusts to the changes in the participating countries. Lithuania, for example, is no longer part of the programme because, clearly, the transition has progressed beyond the objectives of our programme. On the other hand, we have added new countries to the programme such as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan from Central Asia. There is something similar with this and the closing of our permanent *Newsweek* office in Warsaw back in 1995. My Polish friends would ask me how *Newsweek* could do such a thing, how could they close the Warsaw bureau? And I said look, there are a lot of European countries like Spain, Portugal and Belgium where we don't have a full-time office. This is because we consider these to be normal, boring countries. In other words, successful countries. Take that as a compliment, it is not a country in crisis. And so in the same way, if we end the Kirkland Program in one country, it should be taken as a compliment.

But I would say that there are still a lot of places such as Ukraine where this transition is obviously going to go on for quite some time, so there is definitely a need for the programme. Besides, the learning process goes both ways: I think Poles are becoming much more acquainted with their neighbours now thanks to the programme. After 1989 there was this natural period when everyone focussed westwards. They would go to Paris, London, New York and so forth, but what about seeing your neighbours? It is a chance to get to know some really interesting societies with a lot of familiar patterns of behaviour, mental-

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ity and challenges. The Kirkland Program can still play a role in that, which means that it can still continue for quite a while. The fact that Poland is still not a perfect society is clear, but I think that is not necessarily a problem. In a way it is an opportunity, because there are also learning points: once we make certain transitions it does not mean we have solved the problems and can now lean back and say okay, mission accomplished. It is always an ongoing process. And if we as the Polish-American Freedom Foundation, the Kirkland Scholarship Program, the RITA – "Region in Transition" Program and the "Study Tours to Poland" Program can at least contribute in a small way to maintaining these encounters and stimulating these interactions, then I think we are really adding something to the region and offering some positive opportunities.

Andrew Nagorski is a journalist and writer who spent a significant time in the region of Central and Eastern Europe reporting for *Newsweek*. He is also the chairman of the board of directors of the Polish-American Freedom Foundation which administers the Lane Kirkland Scholarship Program. His most recent book is titled *1941: The Year Germany Lost the War*.

Iwona Reichardt is the deputy chief editor of *New Eastern Europe*. She has a PhD in political science from the Jagiellonian University in Kraków.

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Ukraine

Going West despite everything

VOLODYMYR KUZYO

In 2014 Ukraine found itself at a turning point when the government signed the political and (later) economic parts of the Association Agreement with the European Union. Six years later it has become evident that too little time has passed to fully evaluate this period, but one thing is certain: Ukraine is determined to stay on the path to the West.

In the spring of 2014, shortly after the EuroMaidan victory, I attended regular meetings of bank executives from the National Bank of Ukraine to discuss system stabilisation and reform. The smell of burned tyres lingered in the air as a constant reminder. A feeling of hope and expectation was growing within Ukrainian society. However the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas were in their active phases and the Ukrainian economy was in chaos.

As a result of the annexation and war, Ukraine's economy fell by 6.5 per cent in 2014 and by 9.7 per cent the following year, which was accompanied by a significant depreciation of the national currency (the hryvnia) and high inflation. This has become the third deep recession in the last 30 years. The first one took place from 1993 to 1996 and the second occurred during the global crisis in 2009. *The Economist* estimates that Ukraine is one of the poorest countries in Europe with 3,800 US dollars GDP per capita by the beginning of 2020. Together with the thousands killed in the war, this is the price that Ukrainians have paid for choosing a European path after their independence and the unreformed economy in the 1990s.

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Ukrainian time-pendulum

I am inclined to think that the answer to today's challenges for Ukraine should be sought in the transformation of its economic and foreign policy that took place in recent decades. In the early 1990s the transition from a socialist to market economy was much slower than from communism to democracy. And this distinguishes the former Soviet republics from other countries of the socialist camp. The priority of building national institutions in Ukraine was important. At the same time, the communist elite, which stayed in power, slowed the economic transformation to its own advantage. It was beneficial for the existing authorities at the time to avoid "shock" reforms.

The first window of reform opportunity emerged in the mid-1990s, when the introduction of the "Washington consensus" measures was discussed with the IMF in terms of Ukraine: the deregulation of markets, trade, prices, minimisation of budget deficit, introduction of the hryvnia and preparation of the first major privatisation plans in 1996. As a result, the recession of the economy stopped, but the reformers' forces were rather weak and limited in the struggle against the interests of the heads of large state-owned enterprises and entire branches of the post-socialist economy.

In the second half of the 1990s, the emergence of new Ukrainian capitalists and oligarchs as a class finally occurred on the back of the search for economic growth. Hundreds of industrial enterprises were transferred into "private hands" during the large-scale insider privatisation during the 1990s. The economic development models of Ukraine and the countries of Eastern Europe were finally divided at this stage, and foreign policy meant balancing between the West and Russia.

> The first window of opportunity for reform emerged in the mid-1990s, with the introduction of the "Washington consensus".

The Orange Revolution in 2004 opened a second window of opportunity and hope for Ukrainian society. Economic growth of that time was the result of increased trade and consumption due to the financial sector. But the pro-European political coalition had shown its instability, while the structure of the Ukrainian economy, transparency of public sector and complexity of doing business had not changed. Therefore, as a result of the 2009 global crisis, the decline of the domestic economy was rapid and accounted for more than 15 per cent of GDP.

In 2010 the pro-European coalition lost badly and the authorities were changed. Another balancing act of the new kleptocratic Ukrainian regime between the European Union and the new Russian Customs Union project ended with a sharp refusal to sign the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU in No-

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vember 2013. This refusal, along with the desire for democratic institutions, was the start of EuroMaidan, which ended with the dramatic events of 2014: first on Instytutska Street in Kyiv, and later in Crimea and Donbas.

Transformation continues

In the 1990s Ukraine was delicately choosing its geopolitical vector. The Ukrainian authorities were looking more towards Moscow at that time and the European Union was less interested in Ukraine's movement towards the West. It is interesting to consider, however, what it would have been like if Ukraine had signed the Association Agreement with the EU back in 1994–1995? Could we have followed the same path 20 years ago as the Baltic states, Poland, Romania, and many other post-communist countries of Europe? Unfortunately we will never know, but Ukraine found itself at this turning point 20 years later, ready to sign the political and (later) economic part of the Association Agreement with the European Union in March 2014.

Six years later it has become evident that too little time has passed to fully evaluate this period, but certain things can already be observed. First, Ukraine, in cooperation with the IMF and other international organisations, has succeeded in securing macro-stabilisation, reducing inflation and budget deficits, successfully reforming the banking system, and reorienting business entities to alternative markets during these years. Second, Ukraine is continuing its economic transformation after the elections in 2019. The Ukrainian government declares the continuation of the implementation of the Association Agreement with the EU. Dozens of economic and financial bills have been voted on in parliament within a relatively short time period. The anti-money laundering law and the OECD Action Plan on Base Erosion and Profit Shifting, for instance, passed in late 2019. The reform of key markets such as energy, infrastructure, and land were announced. The deregulation and privatisation of hundreds of inefficient state-owned enterprises remains a priority.

Third, the lack of good governance that has affected Ukraine for so long still plays a critical role. This in turn negatively impacts the pace of reforms. It is appropriate to mention the words of American political scientist Francis Fukuyama who has said that effective governments must first ensure the rule of law and public services to its citizens. Only then will the private sector be able to create wealth based on human capital and potential.

It is increasingly difficult for us to retain human capital until the transformation is complete. Competition in the workforce is increasing around the world, and

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The Kirkland Scholars through the lens

Oksana Dufeniuk, 2016-2017 Kirkland Scholar

Photo: Barbara Budniak

The 2008–2009 Kirkland Scholars

Meeting of the 2006–2007 Kirkland Alumni in Tbilisi, October 2016

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Diploma award ceremony in the 2018–2019 academic year. Left: Agata Wierzbowska-Miazga, President of the Leaders of Change Foundation, Professor Anna Fornalczyk, Bohdana Huriy, 2018–2019 Kirkland Scholar, Jerzy Koźmiński, President of the Polish-American Freedom Foundation

The 2018–2019 Kirkland Scholars on a mountain trip

All photos from the Kirkland Program archive

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The Kirkland Scholars during the closing ceremony of the 2010–2011 academic year

Photo from the Kirkland Program archive

The Kirkland Scholars represent 11 countries

The 2010–2011 Kirkland Scholars on a mountain trip

After the diploma award ceremony of the 2014–2015 academic year

The 2017–2018 Kirkland Scholars

All photos from the Kirkland Program archive

The Kirkland Scholars at the Economic Forum in Krynica 2017

Photo from the Kirkland Program archive

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only an increase of direct investments in the domestic economy can keep active Ukrainians in the country. The rules and legislation common to EU members can ensure this. Other transformations, which are equally important, are the social and mental ones. Young Ukrainians born after the independence of Ukraine, having no burden of the Soviet past, are becoming an active part of our new society.

Window of opportunity

It took our western neighbours nine years to become full members of the European Union in 2004 (Romania and Bulgaria became members in 2007). As a result, these countries have experienced economic growth, and have economically and politically integrated into a united Europe. Ukraine is in a different context today. Despite the Donbas factor, we continue to do our homework and implement the EU directives. Most of the requirements of the Association Agreement with the EU shall be fulfilled by the end of 2023. Due to Poland's initiative and Sweden's support, Ukraine became one of the countries of the Eastern Partnership of the European Union in 2008. However this does not mean an automatic prospect of membership.

What is more, it looks as though there is no consensus on Ukraine's EU membership in the EU. But we do not have much time before the Ukrainian pendulum could swing in the other direction. Therefore, at the same time as Ukraine will meet most of the Association Agreement requirements, the EU Member States should revitalise their intellectual discourse and debate on Ukraine's future membership. Moreover, countries like Poland and Lithuania may help open the window of opportunity for Ukraine in five years' time. We will be watching closely as Poland will hold the presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2025, and Lithuania in 2027. Make no mistake, despite everything, Ukrainians still seek to be a part of the West. NEE

Volodymyr Kuzyo is an economist who manages assistance programmes for Ukraine's financial sector in the framework of the USAID Financial Sector Transformation Project in Ukraine. He previously served as the investment director for Ukrainian Railways as well as a member of the management board of Idea Bank Ukraine. He participated in the Lane Kirkland Scholarship Program in 2010–2011.

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Moldova

A captured state that remains captured

DAN NICU

Despite a brief moment of hope at the end of last year, Moldova continues to experience a period of instability which goes back to 2014. The institutions remain weak and are influenced by the politicians. Their autonomy is on paper only, justice is highly politicised and the economy is in poor shape. Unfortunately the outlook remains grim.

The Republic of Moldova has had its fair share of turmoil over the last several years. After a few years of positive developments on the path towards European integration, the trend reversed in 2014 when three of the country's biggest banks had been robbed of about one billion dollars, or about one-eighth of the country's GDP. In a matter of just one month, both the public outrage and the fall of the local currency that followed wiped out the five years of effort that culminated with the association of the Republic of Moldova with the European Union, the signing of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with the EU and the adoption of a visa-free regime for travel to the EU. Moldova's political life has stood under the sign of the events of 2014 ever since.

Two steps back

In the spring of 2015 a protest movement called Dignity and Truth took upon itself a leading role in organising mass protests against the political power which was becoming increasingly controlled by Vladimir Plahotniuc, the chief of the

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Democratic Party and one of the richest men in the country. The public shaming of Plahotniuc, accusing him of being involved in the "theft of the billion", is how the events of 2014 came to be known, and it was the main mobilising factor behind the protests which pushed new political leaders forward. One of them was Maia Sandu, who had been minster of education in the government of Vlad Filat (the former prime minister and leader of the Liberal Democratic party who was imprisoned for corruption). Sandu established a new party called Action and Solidarity (PAS) and soon became the most popular opposition leader in the country. Alongside her was Andrei Năstase and his team from the Dignity and Truth movement, which had transformed into a political party.

Starting in January 2016 when the government, fully controlled by Plahotniuc's Democratic party, came to power, state institutions were beginning to be used to promote an agenda aimed at fortifying Plahotniuc's grasp of power under the guise of the so-called reforms. In March 2016 the constitutional court ruled that the constitutional reform of 2000 was unconstitutional, reverting the procedure for choosing the Moldovan president back to a popular vote (the 2000 reform required a vote in parliament to choose the president). As the presidential term of Nicolae Timofti was ending in March 2016, a new presidential election was declared for October that year. The clear favourite was Igor Dodon, leader of the Socialists, who had the unofficial support of Plahotniuc and the Democratic party. In the runoff, Dodon narrowly defeated Maia Sandu, the leader of PAS. The candidate of the Democratic party, Marian Lupu, had conveniently withdrawn from the election before the first round and Democratic party bosses around the country were unofficially ordered to support Dodon. After the election the united opposition, which had supported Maia Sandu, accused the authorities of rigging the vote.

Upon his election, Igor Dodon co-operated with Vlad Plahotniuc in order to further reform the electoral system.

Upon his election, Dodon and his party co-operated with Plahotniuc in order to further reform the electoral system, introducing a mixed system of vote that maintained proportional representation for half the seats in the parliament while introducing a winner-takes-all system for the other half. Despite criticism from abroad and virtually no public consultations on the reform, the law was voted on and passed in the summer of 2017. This turn of events provoked a significant slowdown in relations between Moldovan authorities and European institutions.

Local elections were held in 2018 in the capital of Chișinău, following the resignation of the former mayor, Dorin Chirtoacă, amid accusations of corruption. In the runoff, Andrei Năstase, the leader of the Dignity and Truth party who enjoyed broad support (including Maia Sandu and her allies), faced Ion Ceban, the

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Socialist candidate. Năstase won with more than 53 per cent of the vote. However a court ruled his victory invalid since he was accused of personally disseminating election materials during the voting day (allegedly breaking the law of election silence). Năstase took his case to European institutions and their reaction was very harsh, in essence leading to a freezing of relations between the EU and Moldova. This put the country's weak financial system, still recovering after the great theft of 2014, at risk. Grants, loans and other forms of assistance from the EU were significantly cut, thus leading to further instability. Romania was the only true western ally Chișinău had at this time, which was still governed by the Social Democratic party and had close ties with the Moldovan Democrats.

Breakthrough

Moldova held its next parliamentary election in February 2019. Despite a robust campaign, the Socialists managed to win, but only secured 35 out of the 101 available seats and were unable to form a majority. The Democratic party, although landing its best ever result, won 30 seats – a similar situation as the Socialists. The members of the opposition camp – which became known as ACUM bloc (Now) – claimed just 26 seats. Finally, the party of the former mayor of Orhei, Ilan Shor, who was connected to the billion dollar theft, secured 11 seats.

More than three months of talks and negotiations in order to form a government among the three top political entities went nowhere. Everyone was strategically avoiding Shor's party due to his shady dealings. Finally, in June 2019, the ACUM bloc and the Socialists announced they had struck a deal. The move came as a surprise for the Democratic party, which had its own arrangements with Dodon. The new governing coalition was widely supported from the West and East, but the previous government of Pavel Filip refused to give up power for over a week, thus putting the country in a dangerous state of affairs. Institutions like the police force, the general prosecutor's office and the constitutional court continued to support the previous government.

The situation was tense and new for Moldova, a country that, despite its political instability, had never experienced a real coup d'etat. The involvement of some western ambassadors, especially the US ambassador, helped de-escalate the situation. After having a 15-minute face-to-face conversation with the US ambassador, Dereck Hogan, Plahotniuc fled the country and the Democratic party announced it was backing down. Filip resigned and made way for the new government.

The new coalition was formed by parties that deeply distrusted each other but felt the necessity to rid Moldova of Plahotniuc (who is now hiding abroad) and his

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cronies. Russia, the main supporter of Dodon, advocated for such a political union through Dmitry Kozak, its special envoy in Moldova. Between June and November 2019, some institutions were stripped of Plahotniuc's influence. Relations with the EU and other international partners improved and the government began taking steps for broad reforms – including that of the general prosecutor's office. Local elections took place in October 2019, with the socialist Ion Ceban being elected to the office of mayor of Chișinău. In the rest of the country, the results mirrored the parliamentary elections held in February, with a few surprises: the Democrats won the largest number of mayors, and the Liberal Democratic party made an unexpected comeback, scoring far better than expected.

Consolidation of power

Encouraged by winning Chișinău, a city that had never been run by a communist or socialist in almost 30 years, Dodon and his people began attacking Sandu and demanded change in the government with more ministerial posts for them. They blocked procedures on naming a new general prosecutor. In response Sandu proposed a law that would allow her to name the new general prosecutor. However an ad hoc coalition of Socialists and Democrats in parliament passed a motion of no confidence in the government and Sandu was forced to resign. The next government was installed shortly afterwards with the prime minister post handed to Ion Chicu, a former finance minister from the Filip government and who was also close to Dodon. A majority of the new ministers were appointed from the ranks of the advisors of the president. Dodon wanted to make it clear that this is his government.

For the first time since being elected president, Dodan is enjoying the taste of real power.

For the first time since being elected president, Dodan is enjoying the taste of real power. However, while the Socialists control most of the country, the fate of the government still depends on the Democratic party in parliament which supports the Chicu cabinet in an unofficial coalition with the Socialists. Should they decide to topple the government in an alliance with the opposition, no one could stop them. This is why Dodon is working on ways to formalise the coalition, especially in anticipation of the next presidential election in November this year. Should the second round be Dodon vs Sandu, a Dodon victory is not guaranteed. This is why he is especially interested in influencing the social policies of the government in order to satisfy certain sections of the public that would vote for him, namely, older voters and pensioners. Dodon has also sought financial assistance from Moscow,

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requesting a credit of 300 million US dollars for strategic investments, but it cannot be said if and when this credit will be received since the Russian side insists on market conditions for the loan, while Dodon is requesting preferential treatment.

The relationship of the Chicu government with the EU remains uncertain. The ousting of the Sandu government was received negatively in Europe. Moreover, as the Social Democratic Party lost power in Romania, the new liberal government of Ludovic Orban has shown distrust towards the authorities in Moldova. Therefore expectations for any significant improvement in relations with the EU are low.

Full takeover

For now, what can be said is that although the Socialists have control over most state institutions, including law enforcement, Moldova is still experiencing a period of instability which dates back to 2014. The institutions remain weak and are influenced by politicians. Their autonomy is on paper only, justice is highly politicised and the economy is in poor shape. There is no stability and predictability concerning the rules of the game that is being played; everything can change overnight according to the wishes of those in charge. The country requires external financing to make ends meet with its own budget, giving the huge deficit it has to finance.

Commentators often describe Moldova as a "captured state" – where the institutions have been put to the service of certain people rather than the public interest. This has been the case for the past number of years, even when the faces in government have changed. Dodon seeks the same kind of power that Plahotniuc enjoyed, and he is preparing a full takeover if he wins the November election. If that happens, Dodon will have the ability to transform Moldova into a political satellite of Russia, with dire consequences for Ukraine and the stability of the entire region. NEE

Dan Nicu is a political analyst and columnist with the *Timpul* newspaper in Moldova.
He participated in the Lane Kirkland Scholarship Program in 2019–2020.

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Georgia

A successful transformation and a challenge to the oligarchs

DIMITRI AVALIANI

Georgia is one of the most successful examples of transformation and reform within the post-Soviet space. However current events – the weakening of democratic institutions and informal ruling – threaten the achievement of modernisation as well as the country's trajectory towards the West.

Starting after independence, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia faced a number of critical challenges. First, a civil war broke out between the supporters and opponents of the first president, Zviad Gamsakhurdia. This was followed by the bloody conflicts in Abkhazia and the South Ossetia/Tskhinvali region. As a result of these events, Georgia lost control over a part of its territory, its industry and infrastructure were destroyed, and its GDP fell by 44 per cent. Under the leadership of President Eduard Shevardnadze from 1995 to 2003, the country experienced relative stability, yet this period was characterised by corruption of the state, criminality, and the inability of the state to cope with its functions. Real changes only began to emerge after the 2003 Rose Revolution, which was led by pro-western leaders under the guidance of the third president, Mikheil Saakashvili. In record time, corruption was virtually eliminated. In 2003 the country was at the very bottom of Transparency International's corruption perception index (127th place), yet by 2012 it rose to 51st place. Reforms carried out concerned many spheres, including the police, public administration, energy, and education.

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Early success and war

Thanks to the economic reforms initiated by Kakha Bendukidze, the minister of economic development and former Russian entrepreneur, taxes were significantly lowered and bureaucratic barriers to business were removed. As a result, Georgia found itself as a country that was now easy to do business in. Georgia went from being ranked 100th in the World Bank Doing Business rating in 2005 to 18th in 2007. This year Georgia is ranked 7th. Nominal GDP per capita grew more than threefold between 2003 and 2008 – from 1,006 US dollars to 3,325. On average from 2004 to 2007 the annual growth rate of GDP amounted to 9.3 per cent.

Beyond economic growth, Georgia became one of the safest countries to live in, which led to growth in investment and tourism. Despite these impressive developments, unemployment remained high, reaching its peak in 2009 with 19 per cent. In 2014 Georgia signed the Association Agreement with the European Union (EU), which also involved the establishment of a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), and in 2017 the EU visa liberalisation for Georgian citizens entered into force. In Georgia these events are perceived as successful achievements and are on a path towards the European integration of the country.

> Georgia's desire to integrate with the EU and NATO is unacceptable for Russia.

Yet the strained Georgia-Russia relations have remained the main challenge for the country. Georgia's orientation towards the West and its desire to integrate with the EU and NATO is unacceptable for Russia. In 2000, as a measure of putting pressure on Georgia, Vladimir Putin introduced a visa regime for citizens of Georgia and soon began to offer Russian citizenship to the citizens of the breakaway Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In 2006 the relations of the two countries entered a critical phase – Russia announced an embargo on Georgian goods and Georgia expelled Russian intelligence officers, after which Moscow closed off all types of transport routes and suspended all visa issuance. However the Georgian economy could not be undermined – economic growth in 2007 was at its highest level.

In August 2008, after a long period of tension and military disturbances around Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgian forces attacked the self-proclaimed South Ossetia in order, as Tbilisi claimed, to both prevent the shelling of civilians and a Russian invasion. After that Russia intervened in the conflict under the pretext of protecting its citizens and brought troops into Georgia. In the end, Moscow recognised the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and placed its military bases in these regions. Georgia declared these territories occupied, which was supported by almost the entire international community.

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Prior to that, in April 2008 at the NATO Summit in Bucharest, Georgia was denied a Membership Action Plan (which would lay out a blueprint for membership – editor's note), but it was announced that Georgia would one day join the Alliance. Despite that, after more than 11 years NATO countries have not fulfilled that promise. This was one of the largest negative consequences of the Russo-Georgian war. NATO representatives often state that no third country has the right to veto the enlargement of the Alliance. But perhaps the main reason for the lack of consensus within NATO about Georgian membership is a reluctance to clash with Russia. In this way, Georgia has not received any hard guarantees of security and defence. Nevertheless, after the Russian aggression, Georgia did not change its political course and the reforms and the massive construction of infrastructure continued. The war and the international economic crisis affected the Georgian economy and its GDP fell by three per cent in 2009. However by 2010 growth returned at six per cent.

The arrival of Ivanishvili

The flipside of Georgia's rapid transformation under the leadership of Saakashvili were problems related to human rights (which, of course, existed under the previous government), the judicial, law enforcement, and penal systems. Practically it was a one-party state with the president at the top and without any significant influence on the opposition. On two occasions, November 7th 2007 and May 26th 2011, the government brutally dispersed opposition rallies; in the latter case, there were some victims.

International organisations and western partners repeatedly criticised Georgian authorities for the lack of independence of the judiciary and the pressure it puts on the media. In 2011 Bidzina Ivanishvili appeared in Georgian politics. Ivanishvili was a businessman and philanthropist, who earned six billion dollars in Russia during the 1990s. Before that he was completely unknown in public life. With his arrival on the scene, Ivanishvili announced that he intends to replace Saakashvili, whom he accused of being authoritarian. He argued that Saakashvili was unable to manage the economic problems of the country and blamed him for damaging relations with Russia. The figure of Ivanishvili and his vast wealth allowed him to unite the formerly weak and fragmented opposition and to create a new coalition called the Georgian Dream.

The videos of violence against prisoners, released a few days before the 2012 parliamentary elections, had an additional effect on voters. Saakashvili's party, which governed for nine years, lost the elections. For the first time since independ-

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photo: Ernests Dinka, Saeimas Kanceleja (CC) www.flickr.com

In 2011 Bidzina Ivanishvili appeared in Georgian politics.
Before that he was completely unknown in public life.

ence, a transfer of power occurred peacefully, through the democratic process, without revolution or mass protest. It seemed like a significant achievement. And it would have been if the new authorities solved a number of key areas such as the independence of the judiciary, the strengthening the multiparty system, and having a free media. Yet Ivanishvili chose a different path. Since the first days after assuming power, the authorities began to use the prosecutor's office and initiated investigations against political opponents. Over the seven years that Ivanishvili was in power – he formally resigned as prime minister in 2013 but managed from the shadows with the help of loyal colleagues – his main pursuit boiled down to the gradual control of all kinds of government institutions, from local governments to the courts.

Regarding the media space, the situation is deteriorating. As a result of many years of litigation, it became possible to change the leadership of the independent TV channel, Rustavi-2, which passed into the hands of a pro-government businessman. A money laundering investigation was launched against the founders of another independent channel, called Pirveli. During the governance of the Geor-

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gian Dream there has been a dramatic rise in crime (57 per cent from 2017 to 2018) and slow economic growth (4.8 per cent in 2018) compared to the Saakashvili period. According to official data, one-fifth of the population lived in absolute poverty in 2018. The national currency, the lari, has also depreciated from 1.8 to 2.9 to the US dollar. Corruption scandals and nepotism in government agencies have become commonplace. The biggest problem of the system, created by Ivanishvili, was that members of the governments and parliament are selected according to the principle of personal loyalty. These are often people from his personal staff (e.g. security guards, lawyers, doctors, etc.) who are not accountable to the people, but to the oligarch.

The Russian factor

One of Ivanishvili's promises was to improve relations with Moscow, but not to the detriment of integration with the EU and NATO. Ivanishvili succeeded in reinstating the export of wine and agricultural products and reopening regular transport routes with Russia. In turn, Tbilisi and Ivanishvili personally softened the rhetoric. Nonetheless, the improvement of economic relations was not followed by a political understanding. Russia continues to insist that Abkhazia and South Ossetia are independent states. Ivanishvili's governance coincided with the so-called borderisation issue, which refers to the construction of barriers on the "state border of South Ossetia" by Russian forces. As a result people living in those areas are left without access to their land, water and churches and some are even deprived of their homes. The ongoing talks between the two sides in Geneva have led to no tangible result. At the same time, pro-Russian organisations that oppose integration with NATO and the EU are gaining traction in Georgia. The participation of Russian delegations in various events in Georgia has become more frequent, one of which has led to a new political crisis last year.

On June 20th 2019 a meeting of the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy took place in the parliament building in Tbilisi (the organisation was little known to anyone in Georgia at that time). Sergei Gavrilov, a member of the Russian Duma who was presiding over the General Assembly, addressed the gathered audience while sitting in the chair of the speaker of the Georgian parliament. At first, this provoked a protest by the parliamentary opposition, and later followed spontaneous demonstrations in front of the parliament. By evening the demonstrations grew into clashes. As a result more than 200 people were injured and several protestors lost their eyes, and due to the crisis, the speaker of Georgia's parliament resigned. Nonetheless the protests continued.

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In response, Ivanishvili agreed to fulfil one of the main demands of the protestors, which was to hold parliamentary elections on a proportional basis. The opposition and civic activists insisted on electoral reform, because the current system, which is half-proportional and half-majoritarian, gives a significant advantage to the ruling party. For example, the Georgian Dream received 48 per cent of votes in 2016, but with the help of majority districts it obtained the constitutional majority. On November 14th 2019 the parliament voted against this electoral reform. In this way, the party broke its own promise and provoked a new wave of political protests. Again, dozens of activists were arrested.

Georgia at the crossroads

During the protests, some members left the ruling party. Practically the whole oppositional political spectrum, including influential non-governmental organisations, rallied around the demand for a proportion-based system. Dissatisfaction with the course of judicial reforms and the refusal to reform the electoral system is already openly expressed by representatives of Georgia's partner countries and the OSCE. Nevertheless, Ivanishvili has no plans to retreat. Talks about a possible compromise, which began with the mediation of western diplomats, have yielded no results. According to recent polls by the National Democratic Institute, only 20 per cent of voters support the ruling party.

The situation in Georgia appears rather unstable as the public and political class have a strong will for change. On the other hand, they are confronted by an oligarch with a great deal of financial and administrative resources who has no reservations about using more authoritarian means in order to retain power. A sizable part of the Georgian society supports integration into the EU and NATO (82 and 74 per cent respectively, according to the last NDI polls). However Georgian pro-western orientation depends not only on a declared political vector, but on the preservation and development of democratic institutions. Ivanishvili's attempts to retain power and the readiness of the authorities to use illegal methods to do so, place these achievements under threat, which may consequently alter Georgia's western path. NEE

Translated by Margarita Novikova

Dimitri Avaliani is an editor of *JAMnews*, an independent online publication focusing on South Caucasus countries. He participated in the Lane Kirkland Scholarship Program in 2015–2016.

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The slow shift of the status quo

ANNA FEDAS

As of the end January 2020, 52 Polish municipalities have adopted a resolution on being "free from LGBT ideology". As a result, the French municipality of Saint-Jean-de-Braye has broken off its partnership with the town of Tuchów in southern Poland and the Central Region – Loire Valley suspended co-operation with Małopolskie Voivodeship.

On September 16th 2019, the city council meeting room in Lębork (a town of about 40,000 people in the north of Poland) is full of media and observers from local civil society organisations. There are also two members of the Polish parliament (one from the ruling party, one from the opposition). The session is being broadcasted on the city's website, but apart from that two television cameras are also recording. What made the Lębork city council meeting so popular was a proposed resolution titled "On the freedom of the Lębork Municipality from LGBT and gender ideology". The project of the resolution was submitted by a group of inhabitants of Lębork under the name "Municipal Freedom Committee from LGBT and gender ideology". The appeal was signed by about 700 town residents.

The resolution declares that: "There is a need to counteract the propaganda of strong sexualisation of a person's life already from early childhood, either openly or in disguise, by the LGBT movement. Discrimination against the voice of parents in the educational process in schools and kindergartens should be prevented. The growing wave of insults towards the religious feelings of Christians should be prevented. Attempts to depreciate the special role of marriage understood as

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a relationship between a man and a woman, and a family built on such a foundation, should be prevented."

Fierce ideology

However, listening to the endless speeches of the resolution's supporters one can notice that there is more to it. They are listing the threats of so-called LGBT ideology in schools and in public life. According to them this narrative can severely damage the Catholic church in Poland. As proof they point to anti-clerical messages from pride parades in Poland, especially in Gdańsk. In their opinion this "ideology" is destroying the traditional Polish family and the innocence of Polish children through sex education programmes that teach children how to masturbate (sic!). Supporters also argue that the resolution is not against the LGBT+ people, but what they call the LGBT ideology. Nevertheless, some worrying sentences have been expressed about "allowing" LGBT+ inhabitants to stay in "our" city providing they won't "manifest their sexual orientation in public" since they can "sow depravation". A few speakers during the meeting suggested that sexual orientation is not motivated by psycho-biological factors but by external factors (such as propaganda), which goes against the World Health Organisation's findings.

Listening to the endless speeches of the resolution's supporters one can notice that there is more to it.

These speeches were delivered in two hours and were heard by the whole audience, also by the LGBT+ people (activists and regular inhabitants) who were participating in the meeting. According to Polish law on municipalities, only those proposing the resolution, and their supporters, can speak at a city council meeting before voting on it. The only speech against it was delivered by Ewa Lieder from the political party Nowoczesna, which is a part of the Civic Coalition, the main opposition in the Polish parliament. She referred to fundamental human rights and noted that LGBT+ people live in their town as their neighbours, children, doctors and salesmen and this kind of legislation can only make them feel unwanted and not accepted in the city.

Anna Strzałkowska, co-president of the Equal Treatment Council in Gdańsk, describes the symbolic power of the resolution: "The resolution divides people into those who are lawful and those from whom freedom should be taken. Legally, the resolution seems to be dead, but symbolically it is a speech of hatred that can transform into acts of hatred. The suicides of teenagers experiencing homophobia in Poland are also the tragic consequences of the increasingly present symbolism

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Photo: Anna Strzałkowska

The City Council in Lębork discussing the creation of a Council for Dialogue on Equal Treatment.

of exclusion in public life. Thus, such resolutions are acts of hatred because they can be easily transformed into concrete cases of violence".

Magdalena Adamowicz, a member of the European Parliament and the widow of Paweł Adamowicz, the former mayor of Gdańsk who was assassinated in January 2019, recorded an official statement where she unequivocally condemned the planned adoption of the resolution in Lębork. In her opinion the aim of these resolutions is to divide Poles into better and worse and sow hate: "Dignity is an inviolable value of every human being, and it is the basis of human rights." She explains her personal motivation to act: "All people are endowed with the same dignity and have the same basic value, regardless of their physical, mental and spiritual condition."

A distinct voice

Apart from the above-discussed resolution, one more was submitted to the Lębork council by the grassroots association called Dialogue. Their representative, Magdalena Sarzyńska-Górska explains why they decided to submit their own pro-

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ject: "Since the city authorities accepted a project of the 'anti-LGBT ideology resolution' for further proceeding, which is formally and ethically unacceptable due to violations of human rights, we as the Dialogue Initiative decided to introduce a policy of equal treatment into the municipal strategy as a socio-economic priority. Representing the local society of dialogue during the session, we proposed the creation of a Council for Dialogue on Equal Treatment as a civic and local grassroots need, since so far such an initiative has not been created in our city. We also took into account the changing society. The inhabitants of Lębork are now more aware of their independence and the possibility of living according to their own needs. Therefore, we decided that the council will respond to these needs."

Thanks to the proposed ordinance submitted by the Dialogue association a different narrative was delivered and its supporters were given a voice in the council chambers as well. Unfortunately these speeches weren't recorded by the regional and national media, but at least the councillors could listen to them. Having a floor before voting on the second resolution Strzałkowska talked about the vision of Lębork as one community: "I asked the question about what kind of community the councillors want to build. Hate and exclusion, or openness and space for free citizens. Each of us may be at risk of exclusion due to age, gender, health condition or disabilities. Each of us also has an LGBT+ person in the family, among friends or neighbours. Exclusion, divisions, quarrels are easy, building relationships and dialogue requires much more energy."

As of the end January 2020, 52 Polish municipalities (among them four voivodeships) have adopted a resolution on "a municipality free from LGBT ideology". Thirty-five municipalities adopted the so-called "Charter of Family Rights", prepared by the Ordo Iuris Institute for Legal Culture which gives a parent the right to sign out their child from participation in any "propaganda" activities outside the school curriculum based on gender ideology, ideological concepts of "cultural" or "social" gender, and sexual identity. As a result of this legislation, the French municipality of Saint-Jean-de-Braye has broken off its partnership with the town of Tuchów in southern Poland and the Central Region – Loire Valley suspended co-operation with Małopolskie Voivodeship.

In December 2019 the European Parliament adopted a resolution on discrimination against LGBT+ people in the European Union. The resolution states that since the beginning of 2019, councils of more than 80 local governments in Poland have passed resolutions in which they define their areas as "free from the so-called LGBT ideology". The European Parliament called on the Polish authorities to condemn these acts and revoke all resolutions attacking LGBT+ rights. Moreover, at the end of 2019, the Ombudsman in Poland issued a statement in which he considered the resolutions of "self-government free from LGBT ideology" as being contrary to

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the constitutional and legal principle that public authorities act on the basis and within the limits of the law. He argued that the resolutions restrict the rights and freedoms of local inhabitants and impede their right to private and family life, freedom of speech, the right to an education, the right to teach and the right to raise children according to their own convictions. Such rights and freedoms are guaranteed in national law and cannot be restricted.

What is it all about?

If the above practices are illegal, then why are these resolutions still being adopted by Polish municipalities? Bartosz Staszewski, a filmmaker and human rights activist, explains that "the reason is deeper than just 'liberals who live in a bubble that lost the skill to talk with regular inhabitants or forgot their ideals'. For several years now we've had a flood of actions against WHO statements, science, etc. Well-organised and well-networked international movements have the task of overturning the current order to restore the supposedly 'natural' and proper one."

"Politicians do it consciously," Adamowicz explains. "According to the research of Professor Milan Svolik, a political scientist – If I hate a politician who represents the other side, and I am a fan of my politician, I am ready to forgive the undemocratic behaviour on my side, even if I personally value democracy. That's why there must be some 'enemy of the nation'. The more they stir up hatred, the more their voters would let them do, even if it undermines the rule of law."

Many Polish activists see similarities in the situation towards LGBT+ people in Poland with the situation in Russia. Is that a fair comparison? "In Poland we now have the level of declarations, in Russia we already have the level of criminal restrictions" Misha Cherniak, a human rights activist, conductor and artistic director of the Voces Gaudii choir explains. "Since 2006 various districts have adopted resolutions against the so-called 'promotion of homosexuality to minors, in 2013 the Russian Parliament (the State Duma) adopted a national resolution. They can't prohibit speaking about LGBT+ at all, but do restrict it with kids." Cherniak argues that what is similar in both countries is a tendency to discredit the EU, which defends human rights, and to present LGBT+ as moral corruption.

"In Kaliningrad Oblast, in the second reading of the law, the phrase "among children under the age of 18 years" was deleted, and the so-called "LGBT propaganda" was prohibited among people of any age," explains Dasha Yakovleva, a human rights activist from the Feminitiv NGO in Kaliningrad. "Propaganda in this law means any reference to LGBT+ in a positive or neutral context. So practically, you can't even talk about yourself in any public place. And we have a lot of issues

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when people get arrested because of posts on social media. This law is especially dangerous for LGBT+ teens because in the small regions of Russia they don't have any support. Also, it stimulates homophobia, actually it legalises it. I think that's why we have a terrible situation with teenage suicide, terrible violence, activists being persecuted – all because of this law."

Seeking civil courage

The session in Lębork concluded with a vote by the city council that rejected both proposals – the one about a city free of LGBT ideology and the one about the establishment of a dialogue council. Yet in the city, only five out of 21 councillors represent the ruling party in Poland, so one could say that the result was already known before the voting. However, similar resolutions have been adopted also in towns where the ruling party councillors were not the majority.

The session in Lębork concluded with a vote by the city council that rejected both proposals.

When it comes to the second resolution the city council decided that they do not need a local anti-discrimination policy in Lębork. "The councillors equated our resolution with that against LGBT-ideology and considered it equally extreme" Sarzyńska-Górska says. "I am afraid that grassroots action to counter all forms of intolerance and discrimination against minority groups will not be so eagerly supported by local authorities for one simple reason – to implement a pro-equality policy, one should start with oneself. The idea of introducing equal treatment policies into the European municipalities' strategies as a mandatory EU regulation will be the subject of my proposal in June this year in the EP Human Rights Committee and at a meeting with MEPs."

"Experience shows that in many cases city councillors have no idea what they are voting on." Staszewski adds. "Often they can't decipher the abbreviation 'LGBT+', just as often they don't want to risk themselves, they lack the civil courage to oppose the majority. That is why I wanted to do something as an artist! Art depicts invisible phenomena."

I ordered a large road sign referring to military zones with information about the "anti-LGBT" resolution adopted by the municipality. Moreover, I photographed LGBT+ people living in these cities/towns next to this sign. In this way I wanted to force the councillors to confront the new policy they voted for. The catalogue of photographs that I placed on Facebook turned out to be a great success. It is of interest to the global media. Recently I have been called by representatives of a

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German city, which is a partner city to a Polish city that has passed the resolution. They wanted to understand what happened because the municipality staff with which they cooperate gave them evasive answers. In my opinion only the interest from abroad can effectively change the current situation where we are now in Poland when it comes to LGBT+ people's rights. European agencies' representatives or foreign delegations on both national and municipal level – they all should keep asking Polish decision-makers on all levels about how they face the challenge of discrimination and human rights crisis taking place in Poland now."

An indifferent discourse

The frozen and at the same time heating up of the discourse on LGBT+ issues in Poland is dividing the society, similarly to the refugee topic a few years ago. "What I also consider as similar between Poland and Russia today is the atmosphere of hatred created by the 'anti-LGBT' and 'Charter of Family Rights' resolution," notes Cherniak. "Any LGBT+ topic is politicised, it cannot be neutral even in the academic discourse at a conference. Any film festival or discussion can be cancelled, any institution can refuse co-operation."

Marian Turski, who together with his family was forced into the Łódź ghetto and later deported to Auschwitz, was one of this year's keynote speakers at the commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi death camp. During his speech, Turski said the Holocaust did not "come out of nowhere" but took hold step by step as society's acceptance of small acts of discrimination eventually led to ghettos and extermination camps. Turski, an Auschwitz survivor, called on people to not remain indifferent when minorities are discriminated against, when history is being changed and when "any authority violates the existing social contract". His maxim: "The 11th commandment is: thou shalt not be indifferent" – cannot be forgotten.

Back in Lębork, city councillors decided that both ideas are too extreme; and were on the same level claiming it is better not to change the so-called "status quo". Yet, referring to the words of Marian Turski – the question is if today, in the context of human rights and discrimination of LGBT+ people, the status quo was and still is in the same place as we subjectively consider it. NEE

Anna Fedas is a human rights activist, member of the Equal Treatment Council in Gdańsk and the coordinator of bilateral and international co-operation with the Stefan Batory Foundation. She participated in the session in Lębork, pointing to the importance of human rights during her speech.

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EASTERN CAFÉ

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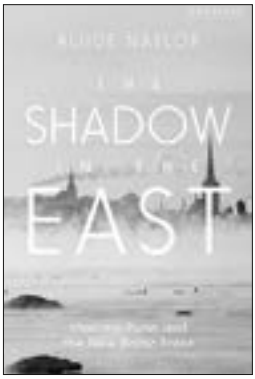
A peek into the shadows of history and the present

ADAM REICHARDT

The Shadow in the East. Vladimir Putin and the New Baltic Front.
By: Aliide Naylor. Publisher: I.B. Tauris, London, 2020.

There has always been a tendency, especially in the West, to group together the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania into one, and treat them as more homogenous than they are in reality. As Andres Kasekamp wrote in his book *The History of the Baltic States*, "'Baltic' is not even a term originally used by the peoples living along the coast of what is now known as the Baltic Sea". It was Adam of Bremen, a German chronicler, writes Kasekamp, who described the sea as *Mare Balticum* – in reference to the Latin word for "belt" (*balteus*). What's more, each country has its own distinct national features including culture, history and language (Lithuanian and Latvian are considered Baltic languages, a branch of Indo-European; while Estonian is Finno-Ugric). Nevertheless, despite their distinctiveness from each other – and despite the fact that, after some successful lobbying, the Baltic states are officially declared by the United Nations as being a part of Northern Europe – history and geography have grouped these three states together, for better or for worse.



What's more, nearly 30 years since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there is one more element that bridges these three states together – and that is the threat from the East. This threat hangs like a shadow over the three Baltic states and is the main topic of the debut book by Aliide Naylor titled *The Shadow in the East. Vladimir Putin and the New Baltic Front.*

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From the darkness

The topic of shadows is one that permeates throughout Naylor's book, which is a social exploration of the various viewpoints on the current situation in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, but also Russia. Through narrative storytelling, backed up by a presentation of research, the author presents fascinating accounts from a variety of interlocutors (she admits that she had conducted around 120–150 interviews for the book) who all have their own perspective. By putting these stories together in one publication the reader gets a better sense of the commonalities and differences that exist between and among the societies. It is a captivating depiction of the relationship between domestic politics, geopolitics, socioeconomic issues and generational differences.

Through narrative storytelling, backed up by a presentation of research, the author presents fascinating accounts from a variety of interlocutors.

Of all the shadows, however, which emerge as themes, probably the most prominent is the shadow of the past. "The memory of the Second World War and beyond is still deeply etched into the fabric of modern society in every single Baltic state," writes Naylor, "in the public space, education and art." This memory revolves around the understanding of the war as a time of two invading and occupying forces. First the Soviets in 1940, then the Nazis in 1941, and then the Soviets again in 1944. The latter in the memory of the locals was treated as an occupation until the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Interestingly, through Naylor's stories we learn of very different interpretations of these invasions and occupations. Her stories highlight the horrors of wartime. The author even briefly investigates gender-based violence during the war, such as rape against locals; a topic we learn has not been widely studied in the region.

From the stories of some of her interlocutors and those from the archives, we learn the Soviet Russian soldiers were the most brutal with their policies. The forced deportation of local populations and the departure of thousands as refugees greatly affected all of the societies (at one point in 1949, 200,000 people from the Baltics were deported over the course of four days). This also created a strong expat community, many of whom settled in the West, waiting patiently for the end of the occupation to be able to return to their beloved homeland so torn apart by the Soviets. But these also created a strong divide between those

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who stayed and those who fled or were forced out.

However the shadow of the war also revealed the taboo of discussing collaboration with the Nazi regime during the Holocaust. This is still a topic which has not been fully resolved in the Baltic states; or rather ignored. Illustratively, Naylor discusses the controversial story of Jonas Noreika – celebrated as a Lithuanian anti-Soviet hero, but more and more evidence point to him as being also a Nazi collaborator. The news shook the foundation of memory politics in Lithuania, forcing many to openly ask questions regarding some of their own family's past.

Indeed, a lot of Baltic memory is related to the trauma and tragedy of the occupation periods. In their respective memory policies, each state has even erected a museum (or museums) to shape the narrative of these times. In Tallinn, Naylor visits the Museum of Occupation (opened in 2003). She then takes us to Latvia and Lithuania's Museum of Occupations (plural, to show both occupations). We understand better why the Baltic societies see both occupations as painful periods in their history and why they have called upon Europe to recognise Soviet crimes on the same level as Nazi crimes (the EU has rejected the proposal).

Fear

The shadow of the memory has even led to conflict, which brings us to the core of the book, namely, the current relations between Russia and the Baltic states. The first wake-up call was in 2007. It was in the wake of Estonia's decision to take down the Bronze Soldier of Tallinn – a Soviet-era memorial dedicated to the Red Army's liberation of the city. The authorities in 2007 decided to relocate it to the military cemetery three kilometres outside the city. This move sparked protest and outcry from the Russian side. Shortly after the relocation, Estonia was a victim of a massive cyberattack. As Naylor writes, "the attacks had broad-reaching consequences and in the aftermath of the Estonia case, people started to realise that an adversary does not necessarily have to have 'boots on the ground' to do wide-scale damage to a state, its institutions, or its people." Lithuania experienced a similar attack in 2008 – with 300 websites shut down. Indeed, many of these tactics were later used in Ukraine in 2014, not surprisingly for many security experts from this region.

Another shadow that emerges in the book is the theme of fear. Metaphorically speaking, we cannot see who or what is lurking in the shadows, waiting to attack when the moment is right. This is certainly the case for the Baltic states which, rightly so, have a lot to fear in terms of the unknown and security in

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the region. Naylor describes the growing nervousness of the societies and some of the actions taken – from erecting fences along the borders with Russia, reinstating conscription for military service to NATO's deterrence policy of enhanced forward presence.

The illegal annexation of Crimea and the ongoing war in Ukraine did nothing but stoke even more fear in the region. Hybrid warfare has become a popular term since then, as we saw misdirection, covert activity, massive disinformation activities and even illegal border changes without a single shot being fired (this was the case in Crimea). This has certainly hit close to home for many in the Baltics, especially since the Russian minority population (in Estonia 24 per cent; Latvia 27 per cent; Lithuania six per cent) has been cited as one of the possible flashpoints in a hybrid operation against a Baltic state. Naylor takes us to Narva, the town in Estonia which borders with Russia and has a Russian population of 73 per cent. She runs into a group of "Russian nationalists" who introduce the topic of stateless citizens in the region – these are the ethnic Russian populations who are officially residents of a country like Estonia or Latvia but do not have citizenship there. It has always been a dividing point exploited by Russia to weaken social cohesion. Naylor concludes that "the number of stateless persons in the Baltics is slowly declining, but weak integration … [ensures] the communities stay ostensibly separate".

Shadow remains

The author uniquely describes not only the perspective from the Baltic states, but from Russia as well, almost taking us to the up-side-down of the Russian reality, and how it perceives the "threat from the West". She briefly recounts Vladimir Putin's rise to power and how he has managed to carefully cultivate his "image of being strong and active, authoritative and firm, highly perceptive yet austere and enigmatic". The desire to pursue some sort of reintegration of the former Soviet Empire is a strong motor of the Putin regime's policy in its self-termed "near abroad". The example of the Baltic states successfully joining Euro-Atlantic structures like NATO and the European Union illustrated to Putin that competition for influence in this region was intensifying. The war in Georgia in 2008 and in Ukraine in 2014 were the Kremlin's attempts at forcefully stopping this spread any further.

But does reintegration of the Soviet Union mean a direct threat to the Baltic states? For some of Naylor's interlocutors the answer is yes. Despite the fact that these states are members of NATO, and with that come security guarantees and the above-mentioned deterrence policies, many locals fear that there would be a

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western reluctance to come to their aid, especially in the case of an ambiguous hybrid operation. Naylor cites a 2016 Rand Corporation study which concluded that "NATO cannot successfully defend the territory of its most exposed members". She also notes the level of anxiety as being relatively high – according to one Baltic-wide survey from 2017, 68 per cent of Lithuanians and 62 per cent of Latvians fear an all-out war (45 per cent for Estonians).

Naylor concludes with a look at the future and an acknowledgement that an invasion or all-out war is unlikely. But she does emphasise one note that has particular relevance for the year 2020 and that is related to how the memory of the past still shapes the present. Unfortunately, as Russia prepares to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second Word War, it seems we are moving away from Naylor's recommendation of developing a "multi-faceted understanding of history". Certainly this means that the shadows which loom over the Baltics will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Yet, by reading Naylor's *The Shadow in the East* we can at least get some context on how to shed light into these dark spots of history, and the present.

Adam Reichardt is the editor in chief of *New Eastern Europe* and the co-host of the *Talk Eastern Europe* podcast.

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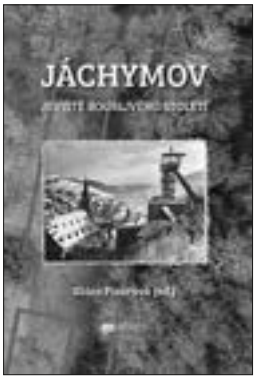
Jáchymov

A little spa town and the horrors of forced labour in communist Czechoslovakia

JOSETTE BAER

A review of *Jáchymov. Jeviště bouřlivého století* (*Jáchymov. A Theatre of the Stormy 20th Century*) By: Klára Pinerová (ed.). Publisher: ABS, Prague, 2019.



There are towns and villages in Central Europe which are forever tied to the horrors of what happened there. Jáchymov is one of them. The labour camp is not as notorious as Auschwitz or Dachau, but it was almost as cruel as the Nazi extermination camps. Nobody was gassed there, but the prisoners suffered from malnutrition, horrible sanitary conditions, exposure to radiation, sadism, and the knowledge that they had been unlawfully arrested and condemned to forced labour because of the regime's paranoia and ruthlessness. The terror the KSČ (Komunistická Strana Československa) unleashed after the "victorious February 25th 1948", could strike anybody, and following its rationale of the class struggle, it hit those with a "bourgeois" background – teachers, doctors, academics, shopkeepers and farmers, anybody who was not a worker – particularly hard.

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Historical approach

Scrutinising the latest publications on Czech 20th century history, one is amazed by the quality of research Czech historians have achieved since the archives were opened after the Velvet Revolution of 1989. The latest volume about the Jáchymov labour camp (St Joachimsthal), where prisoners had to dig out uranium in the Jáchymov mines for the Soviet Union's nuclear weapons programme, is superbly edited by Klára Pinerová. The various authors of this volume enlighten the reader about every aspect of the camp: the organisation, structure, everyday life, social relations and the poor hygienic conditions. Particularly interesting are the aspects of the contested relationship of the Czechs and Germans imprisoned together after the painful recent history of the Nazi protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, and the prisoners' humour as a principal tool of survival. This carefully composed volume is a must-read for everybody interested in Czechoslovak history and the history of Eastern European communism in the 20th century, in particular the cruel period of Stalinisation (1948–1956).

With the adoption of law 247/48 Sb on October 25th 1948, the regime killed two birds with one stone. First, it organised cheap labour for industry, especially coal and uranium mines that were lacking a workforce because of the war and the transfer of the Sudeten Germans to Germany; and second, it got rid of real or imagined political opponents: the first wave or purge of alleged political enemies ended up in these labour camps. Pinerová's study is structured in five chronological parts, which makes perfect sense in view of the town's contested history and the rule of the two totalitarian regimes in the 20th century, that is, the Nazi government of the Protectorate (1939–1945) and the Stalinist regime of early Czechoslovak Communism (1948–1963). Although the focus of the book clearly lies on the Jáchymov labour camp and its uranium mines under communist rule, it is very interesting to learn about the town's past, hence its pre-labour-camp history.

First, in the Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938) Jáchymov was well-known for its spa. It is located to the north of the famous spa town of Karlovy Vary, and until 1947, when the Czechoslovak government expelled the Sudeten Germans, it was mainly inhabited by Germans. The revenue of the spa created the town's wealth, and the local government built impressive architectural sites and buildings in the style of the Secession and Art Deco. Nobel prize laureate Marie Curie visited Jáchymov in the 1920s for research reasons.

The second part focuses on the history of uranium extraction prior to communist rule. Uranium and radioactive substances in general had been very popular around the turn of the 20th century. On a global scale, radioactive substances were believed to have healing qualities,

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and US pharmaceutical companies in particular sold products such as mouthwash, cosmetics and wristwatches with radioactive hands that could tell the time in the dark. In the interwar years, Jáchymov sold its uranium mainly to Germany, since the US had its own resources.

The book is dedicated to the Jáchymov camp and slave labour, which had its beginnings under the Nazi protectorate.

The volume is dedicated to the Jáchymov camp and slave labour which had its beginnings under the Nazi protectorate. People "known" or "condemned" as hostile to the German war effort were imprisoned in Jáchymov, where they had to dig for uranium in the mines. After the end of the war, the mines experienced a political paradox: to keep the industry going, the local government had to keep a thousand Germans in work in Jáchymov, which was in contravention of the decree of President Edvard Beneš regarding the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans (*odsun*). After 1948, a young Czech student of medicine named Oldřich Klobas, who had finished high school in the protectorate in 1940, was arrested a few weeks after the communists had taken over. He was sent to Jáchymov where he was enslaved until his release in 1951. He published his memoirs of the time he spent at the camp just after the 1989 Velvet Revolution.

Who's in charge

Another interesting fact is that the institutions responsible for the rule of Jáchymov changed, mirroring the power of the institutions or their loss of it: from its opening in March 1949 to May 1951, the camp was ruled by the ministry of justice; from June 1951 to October 1954 by the ministry of national security; and from November 1954 to its closure in June 1964, the ministry of the interior was responsible. Yet de facto, Soviet "consultants" held power in the camp that was of principal strategic interest to Stalin's Soviet Union. They were also in Czechoslovakia to oversee Klement Gottwald's first five-year economic plan for Czechoslovakia and to advise the Czech and Slovak comrades on how to organise the show trial of former General Secretary, Rudolf Slánský, which was planned for November 1952.

As the book reveals, the increasing pressure of the Cold War and the vicinity of the border to the class enemy, West Germany (Bavaria), required the infamous StB to take over from 1951 to

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1954, when arrests of political prisoners peaked. In the period from 1949 to 1961, 189 prisoners died, and from 1949 to 1956, 16 prisoners were shot while trying to escape. From 1947 to 1953, 12,313 prisoners were slaving in 15 mines of the Jáchymov complex.

The fourth part of the volume concentrates on humour as a tool of survival. The prisoners coined the terms *mukl* and *muklyně*, contractions of the notion *muži a ženy určený k likvidaci* (men and women earmarked for liquidation). What helped them survive was humour, and since they had nothing to lose, they even dared to make jokes about the overseers to their faces. By making fun of the overseers, who were not exactly the nation's intellectual elite, they risked being imprisoned in an isolation cell, which was fairly brutal because of the cold temperature and the reduced quality of food received, but they could escape for a couple of days from the radiation in the mines. Humour helped them stay sane, preserve their moral integrity and support each other in solidarity of the politically persecuted, who were often tyrannised by the common criminals. The fifth and final part concentrates on Jáchymov as a repository of historical memory, and how former inmates are informing the Czech youth about the nation's past under communist rule.

Even if one is fairly familiar with the name of Jáchymov and what was done there, this volume answers many questions and offers detailed information about the prisoners and their daily life, the camp's organisation, the crucial role of the Soviet overseers, and how many tried to escape. One also learns about the history of the spa town that was like a little brother to the larger, more famous Karlovy Vary. Finally, this volume should be respected as a model example of how to accomplish archival research and write about sensitive issues: that is, professionally undertaken research that is elegantly and rationally explained to the reader. One hopes that an abridged translation of this remarkable study will soon appear in English.

Josette Baer is a lecturer in political theory, with a focus on Eastern Europe, at the University of Zurich, Switzerland.

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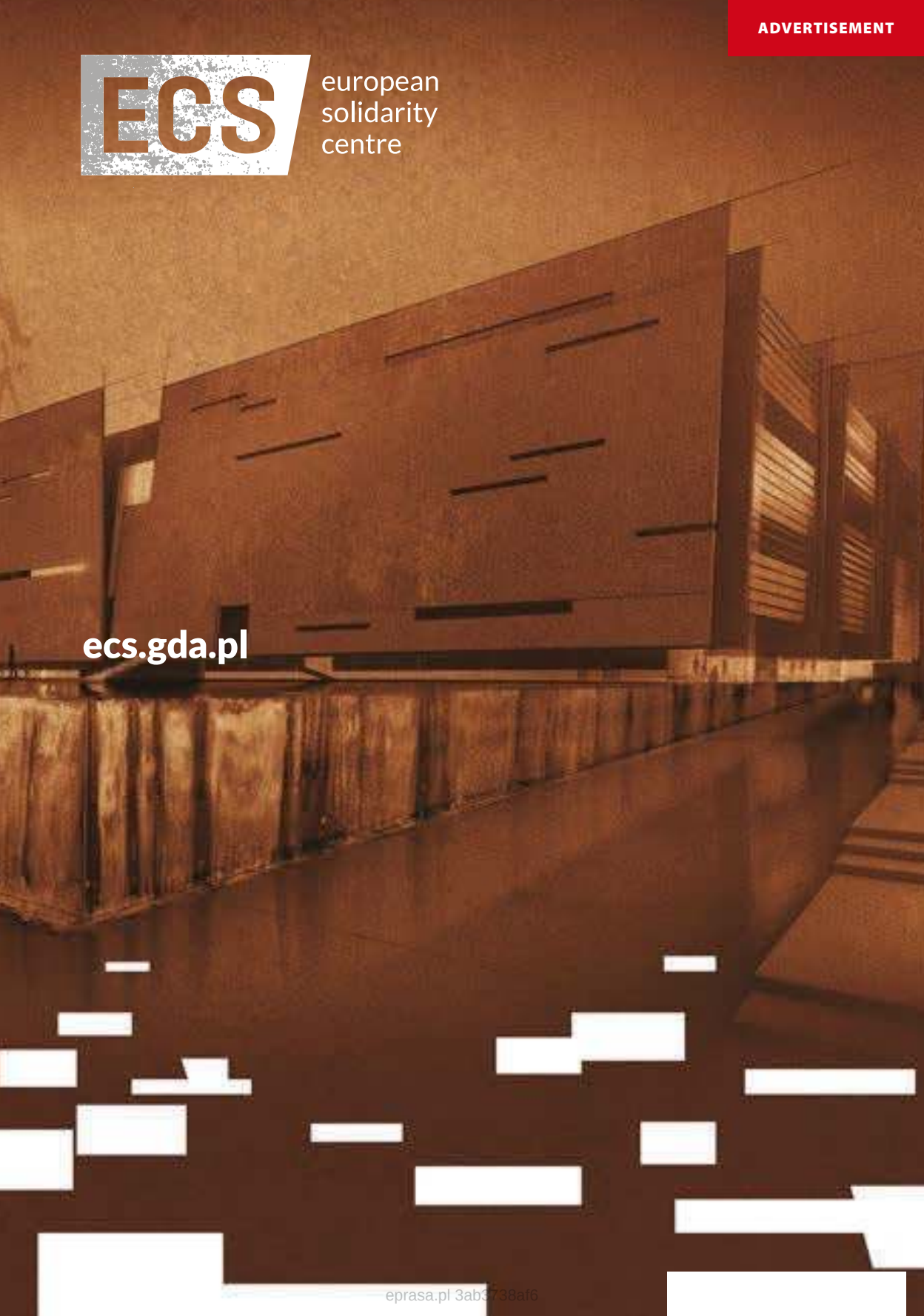

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THE WINNER OF THE 2018 EDITION

The jury of the NEW EUROPE AMBASSADOR award was given to **Dominic Lieven** for his book *Towards the Flame: Empire, war and the end of Tsarist Russia* (in Polish *W pożogę. Imperium, wojna i koniec carskiej Rosji*) translated by Jakub Ozimek and published by Wydawnictwo Akademickie SEDNO.
The official award ceremony took place on January 21st 2020 at the European Solidarity Centre in Gdańsk.

Towards The Flame is a fantastic historical book which depicts the important role that the Tsarist Russia played, as well as other states and nations in Eastern and Central Europe, in the political and social outcome of the end of the First World War. In his book Lieven presents the earlier unknown diplomatic and military sources among which the most important were the Archives of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire in Moscow. Lieven carefully analysed the documents which illustrate the processes and events which led to the Russian decision to announce mobilisation in July 1914 while the perspective of the British author puts a new light on many well-known facts.

The 8th edition of the AMBASADOR OF NEW EUROPE competition for the year 2019 has been announced

The AMBASADOR OF NEW EUROPE award is granted each year for the best publication in the Polish language that, in an innovative way, presents historical or contemporary experiences of Europeans from the level of social relations and civic activities, and which takes place in the fields of culture, education, politics and the economy.

This year edition has so far seen a record number of applications. Over 30 publishers submitted over 75 books which look at the contemporary situation in Europe. The winner will be announced in May 2020.

More information: ecs.gda.pl/Ambasador_Nowej_Europy

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Open Eyes Economy on Tour 2020 at the European Solidarity Centre

SOLIDARITY IN DEVELOPMENT: GDAŃSK - POLAND - EUROPE – WORLD

Congress 29–30 May 2020

Solidarni w rozwoju: Gdańsk - Polska - Europa – Świat (English: Solidarity in Development: Gdańsk – Poland – Europe – World) is the title of a book devoted to the late Mayor Paweł Adamowicz as well as the title of the congress which will take place in Gdańsk at the end of May 2020. The publication was a joint effort of the Fundacja Gospodarki i Administracji Publicznej in Kraków and the City of Gdańsk. The congress will take place between May 29th and 30th 2020 at the European Solidarity Centre in Gdańsk. Participating in the event will include around 600 social activists, representatives of local governments, politicians and academics from around the world. The congress is connected with the movement Open Eyes Economy.

The congress discussions will be organised around three basic topics:

1. Social solidarity
2. Intergenerational and territorial justice
3. Right to quality of life and development

The programme of the Congress will be accompanied by cultural events.

The idea to organise an international congress in Gdańsk, which would be connected with the Open Eyes Economy movement, emerged during a conversation with Paweł Adamowicz. (...) In our conversation we expressed our concern towards what was happening in Poland, Europe and the world. Mayor Adamowicz presented us with his vision of his beloved Gdańsk, his determination to put a strong emphasis on the present and future terms of social cohesion. (...) Adamowicz really wanted that a strong voice would come from Gdańsk, the city of Freedom and Solidarity, demanding rights for the weaker, for solidarity and development.

Professor Jerzy Hausner (introduction to the book *Solidarity in development: Gdańsk-Poland-Europe-World*)

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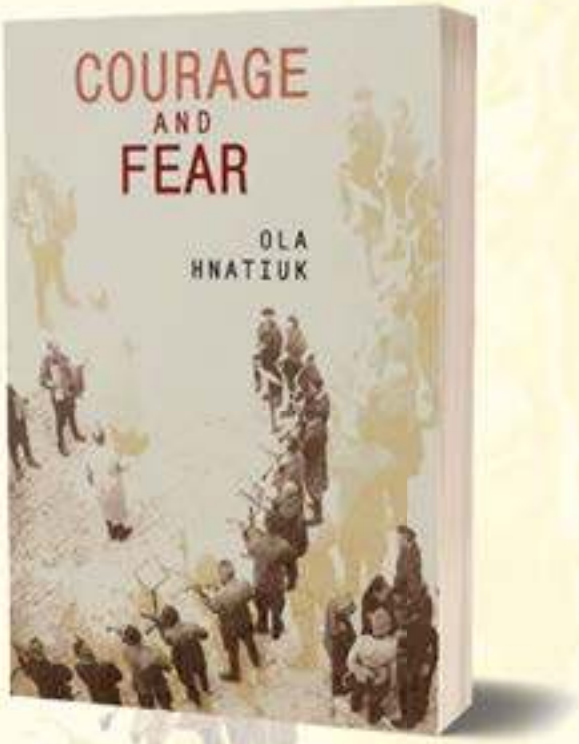
"Considering how painful and not talked-through questions from our very recent history remain for us, it is difficult to overestimate the importance of Ola Hnatiuk's work. It appears that we all, one way or another, will have to answer some very uncomfortable questions in the very near future. Books such as this one will make that a little easier."

— SERHIY ZHADAN

COURAGE AND FEAR is a study of a multicultural city in times when all norms collapse. Ola Hnatiuk presents a meticulously documented portrait of Lviv's ethnically diverse intelligentsia during World War Two. As the Soviet, Nazi, and once again Soviet occupations tear the city's social fabric apart, groups of Polish, Ukrainian, and Jewish doctors, academics, and artists try to survive, struggling to manage complex relationships and to uphold their ethos. As their pre-war lives are violently upended, courage and fear shape their actions. Ola Hnatiuk employs diverse sources in several languages to tell the story of Lviv from a multi-ethnic perspective and to challenge the national narratives dominant in Central and Eastern Europe.



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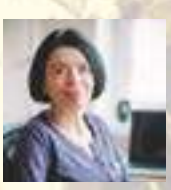

OLA HNATIUK is a professor at the University of Warsaw and at the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. She also served in the Polish diplomatic corps (2006–2010). She is the recipient of numerous awards, including Polonia Restituta (Republic of Poland highest state award). *Courage and Fear* (originally published in Polish in 2015) received awards in Ukraine and in Poland.

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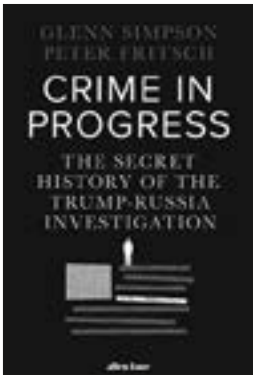
An investigation into Putin's useful idiot

TARAS KUZIO

A review of *Crime in Progress. The Secret History of the Trump-Russia Investigation*. By Glenn Simpson and Peter Fritsch. Publisher: Allen Lane, London, 2019.



To say that Glenn Simpson and Peter Fritsch do not like Donald Trump and do not believe that he has the moral right to be president of the United States would be an understatement. In their latest book, *Crime in Progress: The Secret History of the Trump-Russia Investigation*, they write that the more they dug into Trump's past "the more he appeared to fit the textbook definition of a charlatan". Simpson and Fritsch found Trump's business record to be littered with bankruptcies. Either he was a liar when he claimed to be an astute businessman or a cheat who bankrupted his companies to escape paying back creditors and taxes. In other words, Trump is not as rich as he claims to be, and he is a lousy businessman. Simpson and Fritsch write that Trump is "sensationally reckless and an incompetent real estate developer or a serial fraudster".

The Trump organisation has been in court more times than any other US business and has protested against paying taxes on countless occasions. The Trump organisation would insist its properties barely made a profit and were nearly worthless in order to reduce their tax bills. Trump's myopic world is one where he is desperate to make us believe that he is an amazing businessman (remember the fake front cover of *Time* magazine with his picture) while at the same time pleading insolvency to the US IRS (Internal Revenue Service). This would explain why he is the first US president to not disclose his tax returns.

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Intelligence

During numerous bankruptcies and lawsuits over credit lines and taxes, huge volumes of money flowed through the Trump organisation from undisclosed sources, most of which has its origins in Russia and Eurasia. FL Group based in Ireland with unknown origins of its financial resources poured hundreds of millions of dollars into Trump properties. Russian cash began to inject huge sums from the mid-2000s at a time when no western banks were willing to provide loans to Trump. It was at that time when Deutsche Bank played an important role as the main conduit for Russian money flowing into the Trump organisation.

At the same time, Trump's "foreign policy positions are conveniently aligned with his long-standing business agenda," as the authors point out. It is these Trump-Vladimir Putin connections that kept Simpson and Fritsch up at night tying the knots between Trump and Putin and trying to understand the Kremlin's *kompromat* over the US president. Not everybody was as interested to the degree that they were. Simpson and Fritsch write about how their intelligence was given to senior US politicians and the FBI showing how a "hostile power might have influence over the US president-elect". But for most of the 2016 election campaign nothing was done. Simpson and Fritsch show that not only was the FBI dragging their feet about this intelligence, but also that President Barack Obama did not put his weight behind the investigations into Russian meddling and never forcibly responded to Russia's interference. A report by US intelligence agencies showing Russia's interference in the election campaign was only released in the last days of Obama's presidency.

In this report all US intelligence agencies agreed that Russia, on the orders of Putin, had intervened in the 2016 elections in support of Trump. The list of dubious US characters linked to Russia is long and includes: Paul Manafort, who had worked in the previous decade in Ukraine for the pro-Russian Party of Regions; Rick Gates, Manafort's close ally; Russian oligarch, Oleg Deripaska; as well as Sergei Millian, Carter Page, Michael Cowen, George Papadopoulos and the former head of US military intelligence, Lt General Michael Flynn, who sat next to Putin during the tenth anniversary dinner of the Kremlin's media mouthpiece *RT* (formerly *Russia Today*).

Manafort's ties to Trump did not begin in the 2016 elections but date back to the 1980s when Rick Davis and Manafort formed one of Washington's big lobbying companies. If the Republican Party candidate John McCain had won the 2008 presidential election, Davis would have become his chief of staff. And yet, while Davis's partner Manafort worked for pro-Russian forces in Eurasia, McCain, as head of the IRI (International Republican Institute), was a champion of their arch pro-western opponents and

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the colour revolutions in the region. As the authors point out, Manafort's joining the Trump campaign "magnified the sense that Russia might be making inroads into the Trump campaign". During the election campaign, Trump's programme was secretly altered to remove any plan of giving military support to Ukraine in order to help its fight against Russian military aggression.

Wilful blindness

Trump dismissed the intelligence report into Russian meddling as "fake news," a "witch hunt," and a conspiracy by the Fusion company hired by the Democratic Party, former MI6 officer Christopher Steele, "Never Trumpers," and the US deep state. Fox News and right-wing radio and web sites rehashed the deep state conspiracy while attacking mainstream media as the enemy.

Ultimately this was a product of Trump's narcissism. He could never accept that he won the US elections only with the help of a foreign power and not because of his alleged genius. Bizarrely, Trump believed Putin's assurances that he had not intervened over his own intelligence agencies. To distract from this scandal the Republican Party and Trump began re-hashing Russian disinformation of Ukrainian interference in the 2016 elections. Simpson and Fritsch write that denying the fact Russia intervened to aid Trump's election victory "requires a staggering degree of wilful blindness". Russia had cultivated support for Trump over five years, playing on his personal hatred for Obama.

The authors believe that Putin's *kompromat* on Trump rested on his financial reliance on Russian money and credit. Steele had also allegedly dug up video *kompromat* that the Russians have of Trump with prostitutes and the infamous "golden shower" on the bed used by President Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama in the suite of a Moscow hotel that Trump stayed at during a 2013 beauty contest. Although this defies belief, one source for Steele's intelligence was a hotel staffer who had been on duty at the time.

In the 1980s and 1990s Trump did business with Italian American organised crime and never undertook due diligence on the source of the cash. In the 1990s Russian organised crime and oligarchs also appeared and sought Trump properties. Simpson and Fritsch write that a US politician with such strong ties to organised crime had not been seen since John F. Kennedy. Hundreds of millions of dollars were laundered through Trump SoHo from Kazakhstan via shady Kazakh-Turkish oligarch, Tevfik Arif, and Brighton Beach mafia don, Felix Sater.

The Trump Tower in Panama is an example of how Russian money, and probably drug cartel money, came together in a "rogue's gallery of interna-

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tional criminals". Russian and Ukrainian organised crime from Toronto invested in the property's pre-sales buying many of the condos to mobilise excitement among ordinary American buyers who would eventually be stuck with bad investments. Simpson and Fritsch write that the Panama Trump Tower was a "steamy entrepot famous for money launderers and scoundrels". Panama's leading prosecutor called the project a "vehicle for money laundering".

Lies and hypocrisy

Trump's links to organised crime have already been widely analysed in other books and articles, and this work continues to dig into this well-trodden area. What is surprising, however, is how this facet of Trump and his corruption has never bothered US voters. Whenever dirty money and mafia names are mentioned to Trump, he has a habit of losing his memory despite many photographs of him standing alongside them. When asked about mafioso Sater, who ran Bayrock Group through which hundreds of millions of Russian dollars were laundered in Trump properties, he was "vague and evasive". Trump is also a serial liar; the *Washington Post* collected nearly 17,000 lies and exaggerations he made since the 2016 election campaign.

> Simpson and Fritsch's main focus is to tie Trump's criminality and corruption to Russia and Putin, which they do remarkably well.

Lies and hypocrisy go together as seen in one of Trump's main populist nationalist bug bears, namely, immigration which has been at the forefront of his populist rhetoric. Yet Trump has used illegal immigrants in his construction businesses for all of his business life. As Simpson and Fritsch remark: "Trump hated immigrants…unless they worked for him". Trump does not have a monopoly on lying and hypocrisy, however, as these traits are commonly found among populists.

Trump's approach to business was that of a mogul above the law and this trait is also evident during his presidency – especially after becoming acquitted by the Senate in his impeachment trial. Trump was oblivious to fraud; in fact, systematic fraud was his business model. His approach was to launch a property to great fanfare (as in Panama), showcase the personal involvement of his family, extol interest in early sales (usually by Russian oligarchs and organised crime

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figures), the property would ultimately fail as the sales claims were hype, the investors and partners would sue Trump, and Trump would claim he had never been the developer and only the licensor. After a legal case the property would be sold, and the Trump name would be removed.

Simpson and Fritsch's main focus is to tie Trump's criminality and corruption to Russia and Putin which they do remarkably well. They discuss Trump's interest in the Soviet Union and Russia since his first visit to Moscow in 1987, and his weird admiration for Putin which no one is able to understand: "In project after project, from Florida to Panama to Toronto, Russians with dubious résumés and questionable pasts turned out in great numbers to buy Trump-branded units".

Simpson and Fritsch describe Putin's "army" of oligarchs, his spies and gangsters as having the goal of destabilising western democracies and ensnaring gullible and narcissistic leaders such as Trump with *kompromat*. This was made easier by the Trump organisation's complete disinterest in due diligence and its belief it was above the law.

The book ends on a rather pessimistic note as the Mueller investigation side stepped whether Trump is under Russian influence. Mueller was not allowed to follow the money and there were no investigations of taxes, debts, loans, Deutsche Bank and money laundering. Trump was not held to account by either the Mueller investigation or the Senate impeachment trial.

Simpson and Fritsch have written a remarkable account of Trump's approach to business, his corruption, his ties to Russian money, Putin's *kompromat* over him, and how the Republican Party has been complicit in covering up illegalities and reports by US intelligence agencies. Trump may not be a Russian spy in the traditional sense of an espionage agent, but he is certainly Putin's useful idiot.

Taras Kuzio is a professor in the Department of Political Science at the National University of Kyiv Mohyla Academy, and a non-resident fellow at the Foreign Policy Institute, School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University.

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Stimulating local memory

KINGA ANNA GAJDA

Everyday Life – Politics – Combat Training. Soviet armed forces in germany 1945–1994. An exhibit at the German-Russian Museum, Berlin-Karlshorst, Germany, August 28th 2019 – January 15th 2020.

More than anything else, museums are archives of collective memory. Thus, it is not surprising that as modern institutions, gearing to increasingly more digital audiences, today's museums often depart from their role of solely storing and archiving historical artefacts. As a result, a visit to a museum more and more often takes the form of an experience in which a visitor engages through technologically stimulated interactions with the past.

Equally important as the form with which a museum chooses to retell the story about history and share it with the audience is the authenticity of its work and physical location. Thus there are also many museums where, based on a more modern approach, artefacts are placed in glass cabinets and geared towards the direct participants of the discussed event. This way of presenting history can be equally attractive, especially in those cases when the building or location of the museum is an important witness to history. A good example of this is the German-Russian Museum in the Karlshorst district of what was formerly East Berlin.

Museum witness

Today's premise of the German-Russian Museum in Berlin is the former seat of the Soviet Military Administration where on the night of May 8th

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1945 the high command of the German Army signed the document with its unconditional surrender to the four Allied forces. After the war, the building continued its role as the Red Army's headquarters in Germany until 1949. In 1967 it was changed into a memory site and was opened to the public as the Museum of the Soviet Armed Forces in Germany. Later the institution's name was changed into the Museum of the Unconditional Surrender of Fascist Germany in the Great Patriotic War and as such operated until 1994, which is the year when the last soldiers of the Red Army left Germany.

In May 1995, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War and after restructuring the permanent exhibition, the German-Russian Museum in Berlin-Karlshorst was opened to the public. Its existence is a result of an agreement between Germany and the Soviet Union to jointly recollect the history of the German-Soviet war and the end of Nazi rule. Put simply, having such a museum was one of the conditions for the withdrawal of the Red Army from Germany. In a form of a certain response, the Allied Museum was opened in 1998. It is located in the former American sector of Berlin and naturally provides a different interpretation of the end of Second World War and the post-war period.

The exhibit documents the first four decades of the presence of Soviet troops in East Germany and their withdrawal in the early 1990s.

Karlshorst

Karlshorst, where the German-Russian Museum is located, is a district in the eastern part of Berlin still inhabited by many who remember the post-war years and the Soviet Army stationing in Berlin and East Germany. In a similar way, the objects that are presented at the museum's exhibitions "remind" us of the Wehrmacht's surrender and its aftermath. Not surprisingly, while the biggest military equipment, including the Soviet tanks exposed on the premises, was donated to the museum by the Central Museum of Military Forces in Moscow, many smaller objects including photographs were handed over by members of the local community. The latter also contributed to the creation of the museum's most recent exhibition.

Titled *Everyday Life – Politics – Combat Training. Soviet Armed Forces in Germany 1945–1994* the exhibit pre-

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sents the story of the Red Army stationed in East Germany in the post-war period. The exhibit documents the first four decades of the presence of Soviet troops in East Germany and their withdrawal in the early 1990s. This story has been arranged for public viewing with the help of archival materials and physical artefacts which are presented in chronologically arranged displays, as well as collected personal testimonies, which were gathered by museum staff through an oral history project. The latter, however, were used primarily as background materials and were more of an inspiration for certain parts of the exhibit.

The chronologically arranged presentation of the past, aimed at being free of any interpretative manipulation, should be regarded as the greatest merit of this exhibit. Thanks to being deeply rooted in the local context, the exhibit naturally stimulates many visitors to share their own personal memories of the period. In this sense the building is a part of the local community and its history and certainly puts the museum into the model of what is called a site-specific institution. That is a place where the locality and its community are the institution's main point of reference.

Thus, even if not stated directly, it is clear that the residents of Karlshorst and those who live in other parts of Berlin (or even more broadly former East Germany) and remember the stationing of the Red Army are among the main recipients of the exhibit. It is also for them that the museum staff organises discussions during which they can confront their narratives and memories with those of the curators and other witnesses of historical events. Such meetings are not a classical educational programme, which in many large museums often accompanies the exhibit. The goal of the exhibit and organised discussions is thus not only to teach about the past, but also stimulate the memory of the people who had experienced it. In this way, the exhibit helps them bring back memories and thereby builds relations with its audience.

European interpretation

The museum's deep integration into the local context does not automatically mean its ghettoisation. On the contrary, local history and narration contribute here to a more global perspective and a wider historical narrative. In this way, from the so-called small history a large historical narrative is built. Thanks to that this museum, which prides itself with the exceptionality of the location, is not an isolated institution but one that facilitates an exchange of experiences of history's witnesses and their memories. The museum co-operates with partners in Moscow, Minsk and Kyiv where the Second World War is also one of

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the most important events in collective memory. However, it is important to emphasise that from today's perspective – and the recent controversies surrounding Vladimir Putin's interpretation of the causes of the outbreak of the Second World War – the Berlin museum presents what can be called the European interpretation of the events, thereby it participates in a globally-agreed historical narrative regarding both the outbreak and the end of the war. As a result, it is probably best to call the museum a "glocal" institution.

As stated above, the main topic of the exhibit is the story of the Soviet troops stationed in Karlshorst and other bases in East Germany from 1945 to 1994. The photographs and objects that the museum has gathered allow a visitor to transcend into the isolated world of the Red Army soldiers who were on duty in East Germany and learn about their everyday life. This includes information about their daily plans, hygiene routine, drills, armament, code of conduct, career paths, family relations, etc. The exhibit also shows the location of different bases spread throughout the former GDR as well some political aspects of their presence in the socialist German state. Thus, among the most interesting are the displays with information on the attempts to build the German-Soviet friendship, which was one of the foundations of the GDR's political system, just like it was the case in other countries of the former Eastern bloc. Very informative are the displays about Soviet military tribunals in which Nazi criminals were tried as well as those on the ideological indoctrination of the socialist state system.

The story presented at the exhibit ends with the evacuation of the Red Army from the already reunited Germany. This part of the exhibit also illustrates the soldiers' attempts to stay, which include requests for political asylum. However, there is also the less known story of the establishment of the assistance fund for Soviet soldiers by the federal government as well as its decision to build apartments for these soldiers in Russia. One last lesser known aspect discussed is the damage to the natural environment that the massive departure of Soviet soldiers caused.

Resistance to change

The exhibit is clearly an attempt at creating a historical and cultural narrative. But it also shows a reflection of a very specific memory writing, one that is linked with the recent history of Germany. There is no doubt that the year 1990 and the unification of both German states was a watershed moment in both states' history. For those who lived in the former East Germany it marks the beginning of a new approach to post-war history, one which is of course very dif-

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Photo: German-Russian Museum Berlin-Karlshorst

The exhibit depicts the story of the Soviet troops stationed in Karlshorst and other bases in East Germany from 1945 to 1994. The photographs and objects that allow the visitor to transcend into the isolated world of the Red Army soldiers.

ferent than the historical interpretation that was imposed by the Socialist Unity Party of Germany.

This change in narrative naturally generated strong emotional reactions. Evidently, there were people, especially those who continued living in the united Germany's eastern lands, who refused to accept the modification of the earlier discourse, claiming that reunification was solely the beginning of a new dictatorship. Their discontent clearly shows that an authoritarian and hermetic interpretation of the past, as well as ideological indoctrination, left their traces on the society.

Indeed, for over 40 years the propaganda machine of the socialist state, aimed primarily at youth, worked well and efficiently. As a result, in East Germany, collective memory became subordinate to the state apparatus and not historical facts. The interpretation of the Second World War was here in line with the Soviet narrative, where the Red Army was – first and foremost – the liberator and never an occupant. The attitude towards the Nazi past played a very important educational role. The brutality of Hitler's regime was presented as a negative example, reflecting – in the extreme version – all the evils

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of capitalism and the dictatorship of the West.

German writer, Ralph Giordano, wrote that the GDR's anti-fascist ideology, like the Soviet Union, was completely oblivious to Stalin's hideous crimes. Instead it limited the building of a new reality on the promotion of anti-Nazi rhetoric which presented the workers' movement, communist party and socialist ideology as the victims of pre-war capitalism and the main forces in the resistance against fascism and Nazism. For many people who had been raised with this rhetoric it was difficult to accept the change of narrative that came after the unification. At the same time, the collapse of communism in Central and Eastern Europe offered the societies in the region an opportunity to rethink their collective memory that had been misshaped by the post-war authoritarian systems.

The exhibit in the German-Russian Museum is a perfect example that German institutions have completed this process. The exhibit which talks about a topic that in some post-socialist states is still treated rather emotionally, either because of its glorification (memory of the Second World War in Belarus) or because of its condescension (the attitude to Soviet monuments in today's Poland and Ukraine) is presented in what can be called the most objective way possible. Kudos to the curators for that.

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

Kinga Anna Gajda is an assistant professor at the Institute of European Studies of the Jagiellonian University in Kraków.

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In search of the wow effect

NATALIYA PARSHCHYK

A review of the exhibit *Ukraine WOW Interactive Exhibition*. November 14th 2019 – March 29th 2020, Kyiv Ukraine.

The *Ukraine WOW Interactive Exhibition* was held in a new exhibition space at the Kyiv Central Station. The vast premises had not been used since 2000, but the station's administration decided to give a new life to empty spaces such as this one, highlighting the endless possibilities of modernisation in the city. Indeed, after the conclusion of Ukraine WOW, UkrZaliznytsia (Ukrainian Railways) plans to continue using the space for exhibitions and cultural and artistic events. Ukraine WOW thus became a pioneer for events of its kind. All proceeds from the exhibition ticket sales will go to social projects organised by the railway company.

Ukraine WOW was created in co-operation with Ukrainian Railways and the Gres Todorchuk Agency. It was curated by Yevgeny Stasinevich and Ksenia Malykh, and the design of the exhibition was developed by Banda. Ukraine WOW opened on November 14th 2019 and immediately attracted a great number of visitors, not least because of the numerous partners and effective marketing via social media such as YouTube. At first the exhibition was to run until December 29th, but the closing of the exhibition was postponed twice, eventually ending on March 29th 2020.

Breaking stereotypes

The exhibition amazes by its originality and modernity. In the 21st century, successful art events are characterised by speed, interaction with art objects,

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bright backlights, innovative technologies and a constant effort to astonish the audience. Ukraine WOW certainly followed these contemporary codes. The exhibition also broke stereotypes by successfully involving a state-owned enterprise, Ukrainian Railways, emphasizing the possibilities of such cooperation and proving that state partners need not be indifferent.

Initially, the organizers of the exhibition wanted to tell the story of the Ukrainian railroads, describing how they unite all regions, cities and villages, mountains and seas, and people of all generations and professions. Yet the creative concept was broadened, because the creators realised that presenting the Ukrainian railway required telling the story of Ukraine itself. Starting off on an epic journey through Ukraine WOW, the visitors were instantly immersed with all their senses. The exhibition revived childhood memories, almost turning the visitors back into children. Everything around was made deliberately large and gigantic so that the adults could experience the forgotten perception of being a small carefree child. At the same time, the children were able to encounter a new reality that was twice as big to them. The exhibition included unfamiliar music, astounding vehicles and VR glasses with a variety of themes, where one could fly over the Motherland monument, walk around the restored Nevitske Castle, take a look around a train cabin and see the "Number 9" – the most powerful blast furnace in Europe!

"My deep conviction is that if we want to be interesting to our children, then we must understand that the new generation is absolutely "gadgetised" and your exhibition, whatever it is, will compete with dreams, movies, cafés, meeting with friends, with phones and Instagram. If you want to be attractive, you have to speak to them in their language" – says Yaroslava Gres in a Youtube video released a day before the opening. Authors and experts have written about the necessity of paying careful attention to the museum space of the 21st century: the art, but also the placement of the art pieces is very important in modern exhibitions. The ability to notice the peculiarities of object location provides a truly deep impression of what was seen.

The exhibit was made deliberately large and gigantic so that the adults could experience the forgotten perception of being a small and carefree child.

Ukraine WOW was organised in seven story blocks: At First Sight, Conversation, The Landscape Out of the Window, Dreams, Train station, Collect luggage, and Arrival. Visitors were given a chance to experience breathtaking landscapes, smell the fragrance

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of the steppe and hear the noise of the sea. Visitors could take captivating photos in front of an amber wall, a brilliant installation of anthracite, in the famous Ukrainian tunnel of love and inside an authentic train wagon painted in its entirety with illusory lines. On top of that, George Narbut's unique alphabet was put on display, as well as a recreation of the *mazanka* (traditional Ukrainian village house), where the walls were covered with works of Polina Rayko. One of the most emotional parts of Ukraine WOW was dedicated to Crimea: "We recorded the stories of people who left Crimea due to various circumstances. These drawings and words are very painful. In this zone we want to say that we remember and it is vitally important to keep this in mind and to tell the story, in order to not forget about these people, nor about Crimea, because Crimea is Ukraine," said Yaroslava Gres. Besides the room of recollections, the exhibition also presented a map of Ukraine, where each visitor could leave a yellow or pink sticker for the place they would truly wish to visit. There was not an empty spot on the Crimean part, the whole peninsula was completely filled with stickers.

We are WOW

An interesting reflection can be made about children's perceptions of art depending on their age, which was taken into account by the organisers. For example, children between ages five and seven tend to learn through action. They desire to touch the exhibits and have a tendency to live what they see at exhibits through mimics and movements. Ukraine WOW was designed to be compatible with all types of visitors, and children could thus appreciate the liveliness of the project through movement and sensory games. At ages eight to ten, children tend to immediately capture the mood of an artwork, the author's aspirations and its results. They notice the differences of shapes, colours and shades, and are very observant of minute details. From age eleven to thirteen, children have a more profound understanding of art objects. Older children are also interested to hear the history behind the work, because it helps them to build deeper value to what they observe. Knowing these gradual changes in children's minds, the organisers provided gripping exhibition objects corresponding to each age category.

Ukraine WOW presented comprehensive information about Ukrainian scholars, writers, poets, artists, inventors, renowned architecture, cinematography, first political parties, geographical features, minerals and types of our soil. For instance, there was a possibility to see how samples of black soil differ from each other in Ukraine. The section "Collect luggage" featured a hundred playful puzzles and quizzes. Many show-

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Photo: Nataliya Parshchyk

An interesting reflection can be made about children's perceptions of art depending on their age, which was taken into account by the organisers.

pieces also provided fun facts about the history of railway stations in Ukraine. One such example was the train Number 45/46 "Lysychansk–Uzhhorod" that crosses all of Ukraine in 31 hours covering 1,646 kilometres – the information went alongside a 10 minute accelerated video of the journey.

In the final part, the "Arrival", lights were put together in the shape of a living heart, as if an art prototype of the organ was hanging in the air. The heart starts beating faster as the visitors approach it closer, and the colours of the lights change as well. These effects meant to symbolise the physiological changes experienced with the feelings of affection and love. As the manifesto of the Ukraine WOW exhibition states: "It is through our joint efforts that we change the country, make it worthy of admiration and love. We visualize it. Ukraine is WOW because we are WOW."

The event left an undisputedly holistic impression of cultural satiety. The restoration of abandoned sites for exhibit use and their modernisation through contemporary societal projects entails a visible shift towards a future society. It is true to say that the younger generation is increasingly preoccupied with digital technologies, but that does not mean that children are less capable or gifted than previous generations. It is not useless to speak with children about modern art or any topic, because it all makes sense when the information and images are revealed in a language that is understandable to them. This was the case in this unique and modern exhibition which hopefully paved the way for more to come. NEE

Nataliya Parshchyk is a student of decorative and applied arts at the Lviv National Academy of Arts.

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Valentina Gevorgyan

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