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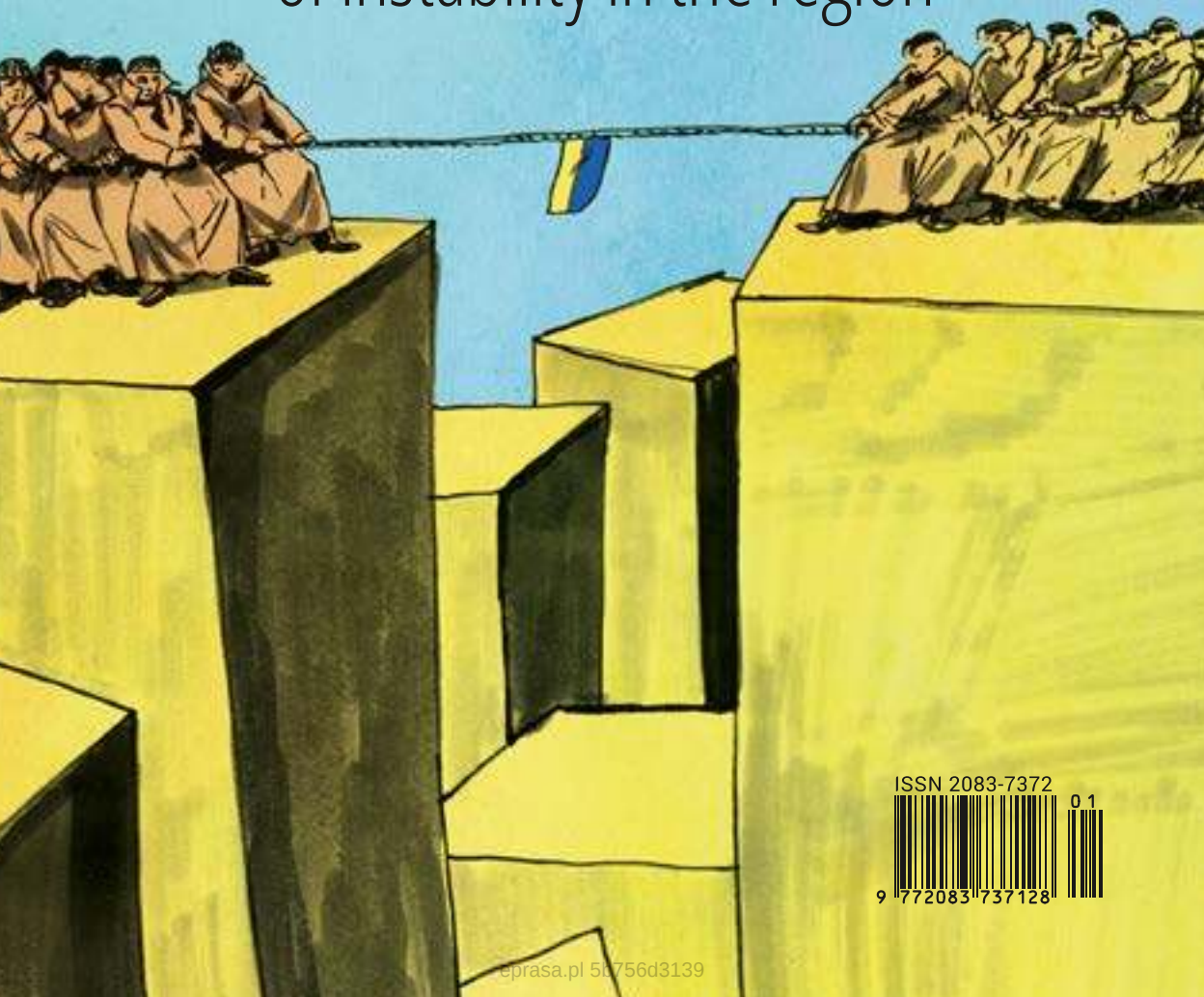
New Eastern Europe

TUG OF WAR?

Addressing the challenge of instability in the region



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DEAR READER,

As we prepare this issue for print, media reports and think tank analyses have all indicated a build-up of Russian military on the borders with Ukraine. Many commentators and political leaders in the West have claimed that a full-scale Russian invasion is just a few weeks away. There is no doubt that the situation is serious. The Kremlin has demanded that the United States and NATO provide specific guarantees which have already been rebuked by the West. However, there is still hope that diplomacy will win over calls for escalation and war.

Nevertheless, it is clear that there is a high level of instability in our region. While certainly security and geopolitics is right now at the top of the agenda, other types of instability also remain, including political, economic and social. In this issue, our authors help us get to the core of this instability and in some cases offer solutions for overcoming it. James Sherr opens the issue with his essay on how the Eastern Partnership, while not a hard power instrument, can still be a positive force for transformation. Paweł Kowal and Agnieszka Bryc discuss the other side of the coin – Kremlin aspirations for rebuilding old spheres of influence. Valery Karbalevich analyses the West's actions towards the regime in Belarus since 2020; and asks if it is ready to go to the next level. Hanna Hopko and Shota Kakabadze give us perspectives from Ukraine and Georgia respectively, while Tiziano Marino points to new geopolitical players who are making appearances in the South Caucasus. Finally, a much-needed discussion on German policy towards the region is facilitated by Andreas Umland and Iris Kempe.

All of these essays can and should be put into the context of what is happening around us and help us reflect on the course of events in the coming months and year. Should war escalate again in Ukraine, how will the instability further deteriorate? And how far is the Kremlin willing to go in order to achieve its aims?

We close this issue with a special dispatch from Donbas by Iwona Reichardt, our deputy chief editor, who spent a week in eastern Ukraine on a study tour for international journalists. She reminds us that despite the fact that international media is warning of a new war, for those who live there on the front lines, the war has never really ended.

Lastly, we invite you to stay up to date by visiting our website and listening to our podcast – Talk Eastern Europe. As always, please feel free to share your thoughts with us on social media or by email: editors@neweasterneurope.eu. And don't forget to subscribe or renew your subscription to NEE. We are grateful for your support of our publication.

The Editors

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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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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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The promise of the Eastern Partnership is not dead yet

JAMES SHERR

In the context of the current crisis with Russia, can the European Union's Eastern Partnership be able to recover some of the promise it had at the time of its founding? To what extent can it change without change inside the EU itself? Certainly, what the EU needs is not hard power but a hard edge.

In the midst of the greatest security crisis to engulf Europe since the height of the Cold War, the sixth summit of the EU's Eastern Partnership on December 15th last year might easily be dismissed as a non-event. Whilst relations between Russia and the six members are a matter of high drama across Europe, the partnership attracts no more attention than a non-speaking part in a play. Provocative and discordant on most subjects, the international commentariat has no difficulty agreeing on one thing: the partnership's irrelevance.

The truth is appreciably different, but this probably is the worst time to make that case. However the current crisis develops, we find ourselves approaching a moment where, in Hobbes's words, "clubs are trumps". This is a new reality, but it is not entirely new. For the greater part of its history, Russia's *schéma* of security has been predicated on the insecurity of others. When the then foreign ministers of Poland and Sweden, Radosław Sikorski and Carl Bildt, respectively, tabled their initiative to establish what became the Eastern Partnership, they knew this perfectly well. They also judged, correctly at the time, that the "instruments" provided

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by the partnership had the potential to make Russia's European neighbours less vulnerable, more self-confident and more tightly bound to Europe.

Russian suspicions

For Russia, the launch of the Eastern Partnership in 2009 was the climactic point in a re-evaluation of the EU that had been underway since the EU's 1997 Luxembourg Council. By the turn of the century, Moscow understood that the EU was not constructing a counterpoise to the United States, but a normative jurisdiction at cross purposes to that which was emerging in Russia. The EU enlargement of 2004 – which fatefully coincided with Ukraine's Orange Revolution – therefore persuaded Vladimir Putin that the EU was determined to export its "civilisational model" to Russia's "zone of historic interest".

The establishment of the Eastern Partnership and its analogues, the Association Agreements and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas, removed all doubt. Far from being a foil to NATO, the EU in Russian eyes had emerged as its other half: the soft, civilisational component to the hard expansion of US and western power. One cannot state too often that the Russia-Ukraine crisis of 2013–2014 did not arise over NATO enlargement but over the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement.

> The EU enlargement of 2004 persuaded Vladimir Putin that the EU was determined to export its "civilizational model".

What Russia feared was the mirror image of what several partnership countries hoped: that, like NATO's Partnership for Peace, the Eastern Partnership would become the preparatory school for EU membership. But the European Union never set itself that expectation, and the founding goals of the project of "increasing the stability, prosperity and resilience of the EU's neighbours in line with the EU policies" fall well short of them. Nevertheless, the point so often obscured by the focus on membership is that these goals are both ambitious in their own right and highly relevant to national security.

Consider the case of Ukraine in 2014. The conventional wisdom is that Russia's "hybrid war" in Donbas was facilitated by the Russophile sentiments of the population. But this widely shared premise is flawed on two counts. After 1991 it was never the case that a majority of inhabitants in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts supported either independence or secession – though pluralities did support one or another form of "federalism" or autonomy. According to the Pew Research Centre, following the victory of the Maidan protesters, dissatisfaction with Kyiv in the

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east rose to 67 per cent; nevertheless, Pew recorded only 27 per cent support for secession in eastern oblasts in May 2014.

The other side of the coin is that majorities also had an abiding distrust of the authorities in Kyiv; rarely, however, did they trust their own local authorities, their institutional emanations (notably courts and police) or regarded the term "rule of law" with anything other than derision. In these conditions, it was all too easy for Russian special services, Russian businesses and their local allies in politics, business and organised crime to penetrate and sabotage structures of power. For months before Viktor Yanukovych's ouster, the salaries of local law enforcement and security officials were covertly subsidised by Russian entities through the Russian banking system, and not even Yanukovych's people knew about it.* In a well governed state, these signature enablers of hybrid war would readily be discovered. In Finland, they would not exist.

Security gap

This is where the security gap in the Eastern Partnership countries lay in 2009 and 2014, as it does to a significant extent today. The gap can be found in the nexus between politics, business and crime, in the scale of the shadow economy, in the prevalence of concealed ownership structures, the opacity of economic transactions, in convoluted and sclerotic modes of administration, the venality of judicial authorities, in the petty repression of civil society and in salaries for police and public officials that make corruption inevitable. This gap did not arise yesterday. It was described clinically but clearly in Ukraine's first National Security Concept (1997).

What was done between 1997 and 2014 to address this gap? As many have documented, far too little. Thus, the goals defined by the Eastern Partnership are not abstractions; nor are they remote from the lives of ordinary people. But they cannot possibly achieve their purpose if articulated in incomprehensible language and pursued by technocratic and formulaic methods.

If the trump of clubs is played, the Eastern Partnership and its relatively soft tools will provide limited defence. But let us make the heroic assumption that the danger of war recedes. Could the Eastern Partnership be able to recover some of the promise it had at the time of its founding? To what extent can it change without change inside the EU itself? What will not change is the fact that the EU is not

* Based on confidential discussions with Ukrainian oligarchs and officials. For a full discussion see James Sherr, "A War of Narratives and Arms" (pp 23–32) in Chatham House Report, *The Russian Challenge*, June 2015.

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Photo: Dati Bendo / European Union

Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission with Charles Michel, President of the European Council, during the Eastern Partnership Summit on December 15th 2021.

NATO. It is not a hard power animal, and for reasons that fall outside the scope of this discussion, there is no harm in this. What the EU needs is not hard power but a hard edge.

Despite repeated demonstrations by Russia of the ability of military force to change political facts, the greater part of the EU regards "military solutions" with impotent disapproval. Even after the territorial fragmentation of Georgia, the annexation and invasion of Ukrainian territory and the subversion of democracy in Moldova and Armenia, the "isolation" and "provoking" of Russia continues to arouse principled apprehension. The EU has every reason to regard with lament its exclusion from the top negotiating tables – the US-Russia bilateral talks; the NATO-Russia Council; and the OSCE meetings of 10–13 January – but it should neither be indignant nor surprised. If the EU cannot rise to the challenges we face, it would be far-fetched to suppose that the Eastern Partnership can do so.

Towards a new approach

Nevertheless, even without an intellectual revolution on the EU's part, it ought to be possible for us to change the conversation and raise our game. If this is to

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occur, then, as Gwendolyn Sasse has argued, the Eastern Partnership will have to be recognised as an "EU-wide priority" and resourced accordingly. Second, it will need to be reinforced by a corps of experts with extensive in-country experience. These experts should be encouraged to "go native" to the extent that they earn the respect of local civil society as well as government and provide a counterpoise to headquarters cultures remote from field conditions and unaccustomed to intellectual challenge. Third, bureaucratic answers to bureaucratic problems should be distrusted. Introducing class distinctions in the partnership, as some propose – e.g. distinguishing between the Association Trio and the others – will only repackage existing problems and create fresh resentments on top of them. What is needed is not a new set of categories, but a country-specific approach. As a case in point, how can Armenia, with its Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement – but also a member of the Eurasian Economic Union as well as the CSTO – be put into a category when its predicaments and expectations are so very specific?

Finally, professionals who work inside the Eastern Partnership, and the EU itself, must learn to become constructively adversarial in an adversarial world. In the relatively benign setting of 2004, the authoritative Russian adviser and commentator, Dmitry Trenin, described Russia's aim in its neighbourhood as: "long-term and painstaking work to create and promote … groups of influence orientated towards Moscow and a gradual weakening and neutralisation of pro-Western circles."

At that time, the EU faced more favourable conditions. "Groups of influence", indeed large constituencies supporting the European trajectory existed, though "long-term and painstaking work" was (and remains) required to overcome deeply entrenched forces that oppose it.

Today, the challenge is more stark and more dangerous. In the words of a younger but increasingly influential expert, Dmitry Suslov: "It is necessary to declare forthrightly and openly that Russia and NATO are adversaries and will remain so for a long time, whilst attempts to establish a partnership with the "Greater Europe" … in the near future are moot; hence, post-Cold War principles and institutions must be consigned to the past." If the Eastern Partnership cannot confront that challenge, it will lose its relevance and its purpose. NEE

James Sherr is a senior fellow with the Estonian Foreign Policy Institute at the International Centre for Defence and Security in Tallinn. He is also an associate fellow of the Russia and Eurasia Programme at Chatham House.

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Imperial mania

The road to the third empire

PAWEŁ KOWAL

Growing Sino-American rivalry has directly influenced Vladimir Putin's plans to restore Russia's sphere of influence in our part of Europe. In order to create the country's third empire, Putin needs to concentrate on three states: Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Of the three of these countries, the most important is Ukraine.

US President Joe Biden has continued to pursue a China-focused foreign policy ever since his election victory in 2020. This pivot to Asia is clearly not the only legacy from the previous Donald Trump administration. During the first decades of the 21st century, America's increasing focus on China and the challenge of a potential war in South-East Asia influenced US foreign policy in other regions of the world, including Central Asia and Central and Eastern Europe. This policy has been pursued in order to encourage Russia to either stay neutral or take the US side in the event of a conflict. As a result, there are now more and more voices saying that it is high time to pursue the so-called "reverse Kissinger" policy, as it was cleverly termed by Robert Zoellick. Similar to the 1970s when Henry Kissinger discouraged Chinese support for the USSR, it is now believed that the US would benefit from the reverse, namely a policy that would hinder Russia's support of China. The US obsession in this regard has been clearly noted by the Kremlin.

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Putin's greatest dream

In response to this development, advisors to Vladimir Putin quickly drew up a new plan to save their boss and his authority, which has clearly been tarnished by recent domestic failures. This is ultimately what accelerated plans regarding Putin's greatest dream: the reconstruction of the Russian empire. For the relatively weak Russian Federation, a new window of opportunity emerged to place this previously unrealistic idea on the political agenda. The first Russian empire was ruled by the Romanovs, a dynasty that came to an end in 1917. The second was the Soviet empire, which collapsed in 1991. Now, 30 years later, there has been plenty of time to analyse the consequences of this event. The recreation of Moscow's empire has clearly been on Putin's mind since 2000. For this reason, he has both revived the memory of Soviet era heroes within Russian public life and made multiple references to the imperial history of the Romanov times.

Russian imperial thinking places a great emphasis on the issue of territory and its relationship with "strategic depth".

Russian imperial thinking today places a great emphasis on the issue of territory and its relationship with "strategic depth". In other words, a focus on the maximum distance between the enemy potentially crossing the border and Moscow. For the last few decades, Russia did not see much possibility of regaining large swathes of territory that it had lost in the early 1990s. Thus, the process of bringing back the regions of the former empire was slow and not very effective. Every day of independence for countries like Ukraine worked to their advantage and pushed these states further away from the spectre of reintegration.

Various signs of weakness among western bodies, such as NATO and the EU, ultimately proved to be a key catalyst for modern Russia's foreign policy. At the same time, the spectre of a potential Chinese-American conflict perhaps influenced this policy even more. The uncertain energy policies of many European states, including Germany's agreement to implement the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, only further encouraged the Kremlin's imperial mania.

A paradox is clear here, as the West (largely the US and the EU) is much stronger than either it or Russia thinks. Simultaneously, the Kremlin clearly overestimates its potential to influence global affairs. Regardless, the Kremlin's clear obsession with building a third empire is increasingly pushing the world towards the next war. Due to these naïve dreams of securing Russian support in the conflict with China, the West did not say "no" to the Kremlin at the right time. The authorities in Moscow look at this mistake as an acceptance of their neo-imperial policies and activities in their "sphere of influence".

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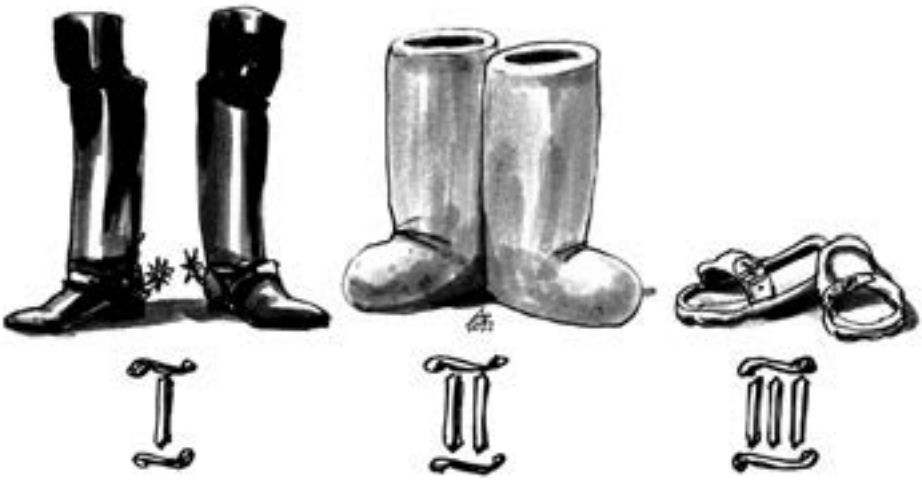

As a result, the last year and a half has seen Putin put his neo-imperial plans into action. For example, he managed to practically regain full control over Belarus. Now, Russia not only controls the country in military and economic terms but also oversees its propaganda messages. The key to the Kremlin's rule in Central Asia was to regain its position in Kazakhstan. In this case, the main problem was actually the country's autocratic leader, Nursultan Nazarbayev, who guaranteed Kazakhstan's independence from Moscow for many decades. His foreign policy was marked by attempts to balance between Russian, Chinese and American influences.

Serious consequences

The Kremlin achieved its goals in Kazakhstan in early January 2022 with relatively little effort. In response to mass demonstrations caused by a rise in energy prices, the Kazakh authorities (the president of the country was one of Nazarbayev's close associates) invited Russian forces into the country under the pretext of CSTO support. Of course, Russia remains the de facto leader and decision maker within this body. The outcomes of this *blitzkrieg* operation are important for both the Kremlin and a global system increasingly dominated by Sino-American rivalry. Russia not only removed Nazarbayev from Kazakh politics after 30 years but also increased its chances of gaining control over the country's natural resources. This could result in increased control over deliveries of natural resources to the West. Moscow was able to show both the US and China that Kazakhstan remains firmly in Russia's hands and is not an independent player. Lastly, Russia has gained

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renewed influence over the situation across post-Soviet Central Asia, which also includes countries such as Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Perhaps most importantly, however, the situation in Kazakhstan has encouraged a renewed Brezhnev doctrine in Moscow. This doctrine was formulated by Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev in 1968 in response to attempted reforms in Czechoslovakia. The idea stressed that the members of the Warsaw Pact "had the right" to intervene in other countries where the communist system was in danger. Today, the CSTO is essentially the new Warsaw Pact. Russia's intervention in Kazakhstan, concealed as international support, was motivated by a desire to protect a friendly government against a large number of protesters.

In other parts of the former empire, Russia is also making progress in bringing back the imperial order. In the South Caucasus, it has managed to increase its influence in Armenia. Nikol Pashinyan, the country's prime minister who not that long ago came to power as a result of election protests, supported Russia's intervention in Kazakhstan. The only problem for Russia in this region is Georgia, which is trying to maintain its pro-western course.

As a result, the key to Russian domination in the region lies in Ukraine. According to Russia's strategic thinking, Ukraine is (along with Belarus and Russia itself) one of the three territories essential to rebuilding Moscow's empire. It is also the country that now is the hardest to gain control over. The revolutions that took place here in 1990, 2004–05 and 2013–14 proved that Ukrainian society is fully aware of its distinctiveness from Russia. Russia's experience in Ukraine (intervention in Donbas and annexation of Crimea in 2014) shows that it is incapable of creating an occupational system of power. The Kremlin subsequently had to opt for military pressure, which is only strengthened by ongoing energy conflicts. From the Russian perspective, however, this strategy is not enough. It ultimately needs a friendly government in Kyiv that will be willing to work with the Kremlin.

Associated Trio

Alongside its resurgence in Belarus and Central Asia, Russia recently forced the pro-western Moldovan government to agree to extend a key gas agreement. Among the post-Soviet states, the majority are now fully or partly controlled by Moscow. The three small Baltic republics (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) thankfully remain outside of this sphere of influence. This is only because they are members of the EU and NATO.

Azerbaijan is also a difficult case for Russia, as the potential replacement of President Ilham Aliyev with somebody more pro-Russian would undoubtedly generate

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a negative reaction in Turkey. This is because Ankara now treats Azerbaijan as a key part of its own sphere of influence. Putin cannot yet open up another frontline.

In order to create Russia's third empire, Putin needs to concentrate on three states: Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. These three countries have become closer to the EU in recent years and they all now demonstrate a pro-western orientation in their foreign policy. Of the three of these states, however, the most important is again Ukraine. If Kyiv is dominated by pro-Russian elements, the whole idea of western co-operation with the former Soviet republics will collapse.

When looked at as a whole, we can see that all three of these countries share several things in common. They are all pro-western and overall interested in joining the EU and NATO. They have all been member states of the EU's Eastern Partnership programme, which was established in 2009. Within the framework of this programme they signed the three key agreements with the EU: the Association Agreement, the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement and visa liberalisation agreement. In addition, Ukraine and Georgia are active partners of NATO and since 2008 have been waiting for their invitation to become members of the Alliance. We can even argue that in legal and economic terms, these three countries, often called the Associated Trio, are partial EU member states. Indeed, no other states outside the EU have built such close relations with the community as Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

The ongoing Sino-American rivalry is influencing the implementation of Putin's plans regarding these countries. However, recent Russian policy in the wider context of Sino-American relations shows that in the short term the game is not only about Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The fate of these countries is now directly related to the position of the US (and more broadly of the whole West) in its competition with China. The Kremlin could simply implement its plans and end the naïve western dreams of Russian support against Beijing. As a result, America's bargaining position will become weaker.

Tough reaction

Apart from the Associated Trio, all of Moscow's other strategic dilemmas have already been resolved to its benefit. The reconstruction of the empire is a deadly threat to Poland and Central European states. Perhaps Hungary, which is pursuing an openly pro-Russian foreign policy, is an exception here. Yet, for countries such as Poland or Romania and Slovakia, having borders with the new empire will mean a great increase in military spending and propaganda pressure from Russia. This will include growing Kremlin support for pro-Russian parties in these coun-

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tries and changes in their power structures. It will also result in a change of societal attitudes regarding the West, as well as increased economic corruption. Of course, there will be greater Russian influence in political life and energy policy. Issues surrounding energy will encourage economic blackmail regarding the transit, export and import of natural resources.

We have been able to observe a variety of great changes in Eastern Europe over the past 30 years. At the same time, these changes have sometimes been very dangerous for the security of Central Europe. The region's foreign policy experts, journalists and general public were naturally appalled by the words of Vice Admiral Kay-Achim Schönbach, commander of the German Navy, who during a speech in India said that "Crimea is gone and will never come back".

As expected, he paid the price for these words and had to resign. Yet we all know that the statement that he made illustrates the thinking of many members of the political elite in Germany, as well as other western states. Russia's audacious demands towards the US and NATO, which it put forward before the talks in Geneva, have been "refuted". But let us ask ourselves, could things be any different? In reaction to Russia's *blitzkrieg*, we need to act, not make declarations. Signs of western submission regarding Russia's foreign policy is neither a new *Ostpolitik*, nor is it a new realism. It is fear of Russia's aggressive foreign policy.

Right now, Russia can only be stopped if it gets a clear signal that the EU will enlarge should our Eastern partners wish it. The same should also be said about NATO. It is not Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova's political elites but their societies that should receive reassurances that their sacrifices in reforming their countries have not been in vain. For the last three decades, time was overall working against the idea of rebuilding Moscow's empire. In the last two years, things have changed dramatically. Yet, the West has a chance to stop this project from going any further. NEE

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

Paweł Kowal is a member of the Polish parliament (Sejm) and deputy chairman of the Sejm's Commission on Foreign Affairs. He is also an adjunct professor at the Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy and a member of *New Eastern Europe*'s editorial board.

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Is today's Russia a "USSR 2.0"?

Putin wants us to think so

AGNIESZKA BRYC

The West's lack of inner cohesion, slow reactions and a preference for dialogue provide the Kremlin with a chance to effectively play its own game. Putin surely discovered a long time ago that bluffing and good brinkmanship are enough for the West to do everything to prevent conflict. There is only one condition: it must believe that Putin's Russia is a "USSR 2.0".

"I think that's right," said US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on January 9th when asked by CNN if he agreed that Russian President Vladimir Putin seeks to restore the Soviet Union. "I think that's one of President Putin's objectives, and it is to re-exert a sphere of influence over countries that previously were part of the Soviet Union." This is exactly what the Russian president would like the West to believe. Whilst the head of US diplomacy was making this statement, Russian-American negotiations were about to start in Geneva. The officials met for a preliminary dinner to begin high-stakes talks about Russia's threats to Ukraine. The next day, a three-track dialogue with Russia started. It was crucial from the Kremlin's perspective that the talks resembled those surrounding the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. As a result, Sergei Ryabkov, Russia's deputy foreign minister, commented that the escalating tensions over Ukraine could lead to a crisis similar to this standoff, in which the world stood on the brink of a nuclear war.

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Russian demands

The truth is, however, that the only common feature shared by these events is their use of militarisation as a diplomatic tactic ahead of talks. Moreover, the Cuban standoff was far less complicated. Nevertheless, by reviving the Cold War atmosphere, Moscow was supposed to gain worldwide attention, at least for the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The talks started amid Russia's high military build-up along the Ukrainian border. Russian troops were also sent into Belarus for military exercises. Meanwhile, six naval ships appeared in the Black Sea. This massive military posture was clearly a signal that Moscow was prepared to use force if diplomacy failed. Ahead of the talks in Geneva, Ryabkov laid out Moscow's demands in the style of Andrei Gromyko, the most famous head of Soviet diplomacy who is often known as "Mr. Nyet". Three of these demands are viewed by Moscow as non-negotiable. First, Ryabkov stressed that there should be no eastward NATO expansion, literally understood as "hands off Ukraine!" (and Georgia). Second, no offensive systems should be based in areas bordering Russia, such as Poland, the Baltics and the Black Sea basin near Crimea, which was illegally annexed eight years ago. Third, NATO troops should be pulled back from countries that joined the alliance after 1997. The head of the Russian delegation in Geneva went on to put these demands even more frankly: "NATO should pack up its stuff and withdraw to the lines of 1997."

The massive military posture was clearly a signal that Moscow was prepared to use force if diplomacy failed.

If accepted, this would mean that every current NATO member in Central and Eastern Europe would once again find themselves in a geopolitical grey zone. This would make them vulnerable to the Kremlin's desire to reconstruct its historical sphere of influence.

To increase its position during the bilateral talks with the United States, Russia turned to various Cold War style tricks: tense atmosphere, mutual accusations and a belligerent tone. Whilst Ryabkov headed the Russian delegation, US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman was in charge of America's negotiating team. Ryabkov is believed to be the planned successor to the current foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov. At the same time, Sherman is known for negotiating with the toughest of regimes, such as North Korea and Iran. They were both accompanied by some of their countries' top military generals in the form of Alexander Fomin and James Mingus. Both sides quickly realised that the first round had already set up a long-lasting diplomatic process that will push military brinkmanship to the background of talks.

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Window of opportunity

The timing of the Russia crisis is by no means coincidental. The most immediate prelude was the escalation in spring last year, which followed a similar scenario and was designed to test possible western reactions. The current window of opportunity came about due to several circumstances. First, the post-election situation in Germany, where the coalition still has no clear position on Russia. Second, the image debacle following the Biden administration's withdrawal from Afghanistan. Third, Moscow currently enjoys a political scene free of opponents. Whilst Alexei Navalny was sent to a penal colony in January 2021, media outlets critical of the Kremlin have increasingly found themselves labelled as "foreign agents". The legendary NGO Memorial was even made illegal in December. Finally, the wider stalemate over Ukraine has also encouraged this crisis. Kyiv's army, now regularly rearmed and trained by the West, has been increasing its defensive capabilities. This window of opportunity will close for Russia by 2024, when new presidential elections will take place and the Kremlin will be fully concentrated on domestic issues.

Overall, Putin has no chance to get his ratings back above 80 per cent, as they were after the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Indeed, the Crimea card has been exhausted since then, and the Kremlin does not have many cards left to play. The intervention in Syria turned out to be less than spectacular. The associated Astana process organised under the auspices of the Russian foreign ministry has already had 17 rounds and is not likely to end anytime soon. Meanwhile, the expectations of Russians raised by the dream of "collecting Russian lands" continue to collide with ubiquitous state corruption, ongoing COVID-19 problems and strong restrictions that not only affect political opponents.

> Re-establishing control over the post-Soviet space has become not only a matter of geopolitics but survival for the Kremlin.

According to Maria Domańska, an expert at the Warsaw-based Centre for Eastern Studies (OWS), Russian opposition and civic movements have been gradually moving to Vilnius, Kyiv and Tbilisi. Re-establishing control over the post-Soviet space has therefore become not only a matter of geopolitics but survival for the Kremlin regime. Moscow's problem, however, is that many post-Soviet states over the last three decades have managed to learn how to organise a sovereign foreign policy, gain non-Russian partners and, above all, rediscover their own national identity.

Essentially, any Russian intervention in the former Soviet space is not favourable for Moscow, as the message has always been the same: "Today Tbilisi or Crimea,

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tomorrow Russian troops or little green men may enter any post-Soviet republic". It is therefore understandable why Belarus's Alyaksandr Lukashenka was for years pursuing a policy of balancing between Russia and the West. The annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas made him afraid of such a scenario in his country. He therefore got involved in the Minsk process. At the end of the day, however, the country's 2020 fraudulent elections only condemned him to seek help from the stronger partner in Moscow.

The cost of leaving Russia's grip

It is increasingly difficult for the Kremlin to maintain its influence in the post-Soviet space. Russia's limited options are causing it to turn more and more to forceful solutions. Moscow has attempted to stop several countries from leaving Russia's "near abroad" via Soviet-style methods. This is exemplified by Georgia and Ukraine, which experienced these methods first-hand in 2008 and 2014 respectively. The most common method, however, is the carrot and stick policy. Whilst Lukashenka is now especially aware of his dependence on Putin's will, this situation ultimately allows him to access a small amount of loans from the country.

Generally, a gas tap used to be Russia's most convenient means of bringing unruly post-Soviet clients back into the fold. Allies are supplied with gas at attractive prices as long as they do not challenge Russia's interests. Not so long ago, Moldova's new pro-democracy government led by Maia Sandu clashed with Gazprom. Ever since Moldova's contract expired last autumn, the gas giant has raised prices dramatically. The crisis turned out to be critical for Moldova, as it is completely dependent on Russian supplies. This event undermined public confidence in the new pro-western authorities. Although a compromise was finally reached and a five-year contract signed, the country will have to deal with more expensive gas and a delay to energy market reforms. The Kremlin above all wanted to send a message that leaving Russia's grip will be neither easy nor cheap.

President Putin is afraid not only of being deprived of power but of any instability in the post-Soviet republics. At his annual December press conference he made this clear: "Our enemies have been trying for centuries to defeat Russia, but what they can do is only to destroy it from within".

Putin subsequently had his explanation ready as soon as Kazakhs came out to protest at the very beginning of the year. "These are Maidan technologies", he commented during a meeting of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO). He added that "Organised and well-managed militant groups, whose actions should be considered an attack on Kazakhstan, were prepared in terrorist camps abroad."

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Immediately, Putin revived the largely defunct CSTO alliance, which was envisaged as the post-Soviet equivalent of NATO. Officially, a request for "brotherly" assistance was made by Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev on January 5th. One day later, the first *mirotvorcy* (peacemakers) appeared in Kazakhstan, supported by troops from Belarus, Armenia, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Overall, it made no difference whether the protests were spontaneous, or were pushed by Tokayev in order to purge Kazakh politics of the influence of his predecessor, Nursultan Nazarbayev. What mattered the most was the demonstration that Russia is the guarantor of security and order in the former Soviet space. Indeed, Russia's influence in Central Asia has been consistently challenged by China for many years now.

Much like his Armenian colleague, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Putin is caught between more powerful players. In Russia's case these are the West and the rapidly rising power of China. Too weak to engage in a real confrontation, Russia must talk a good game and play on the weaknesses of others. Beijing is unlikely to have any such deficiencies, whereas the West has multiple. Its lack of inner cohesion, slow reactions and a preference for dialogue provide the Kremlin with a vital chance to play the game effectively. Putin knows that raising the geopolitical stakes is enough for the West, scared of escalation, to do everything to prevent conflict. In order to succeed, Putin must simply convince the West that today's Russia is the "USSR 2.0".

Miscalculated risks?

There are definitely a few risks in the Kremlin's calculations. The Russian strategy of convincing the West that it is the reincarnation of the USSR seems to be the only effective approach. The aggressive policies of meddling in the internal affairs of the US (presidential elections of 2016 and 2020), or European countries such as the United Kingdom and the Czech Republic, have caused these states to make a U-turn on their relations with Moscow. It has taken the British a long time to learn their lesson regarding Russia, especially after its influence campaign during the Brexit referendum. Moscow is also believed to have been involved in the assassination of Alexander Litvinenko and the poisoning of Sergei Skripal, both on British territory. As a result, London now regularly supports Ukraine with arms supplies to build its defence capabilities. The Czech Republic, in turn, went from being a lenient country towards Russia to its fervent opponent, with the state expelling most of the staff of the Russian embassy in April 2021. Prague's defence minister, Jana Černochová, stated in January that the Czech Republic was ready to consider sending a small contingent to Ukraine if so requested by the authori-

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ties in Kyiv. Germany's stance towards Russia is also slowly changing. In contrast to its *Russlandversteher* (Russia understander) approach before 2014, Berlin is increasingly recognising that Moscow is not a reliable partner but rather a threat to the security of its European neighbours.

Furthermore, Moscow is risking the chance that the West will stop being so kind, a trait viewed by the Russians as a weakness. Russia has to remember the American soldiers that killed many Russian mercenaries from the Wagner Group during the 2018 Battle of Khasham in Syria. For Moscow, this was such a painful slap in the face that so far it has not admitted to this defeat.

The final risk, however, is that Washington is far more determined to achieve success than the Russians assume. Biden has been struggling not so much for re-election but to keep the Democrats in the White House. Restraining Russia may simply be easier to achieve than confronting China. What if the West one day recognises that Russia is not necessarily essential to containing China? This is exactly what the influential British think tank Chatham House argues in its May 2021 report "Myths and misconceptions in the debate on Russia. How they affect Western policy, and what can be done".

The dismissal of German Vice Admiral Kay-Achim Schoenbach is symbolic of the Kremlin's success in influencing western leaders. During a visit to India, the now former vice admiral shared his pro-Russia outlook, saying that Ukraine would never regain the Crimean peninsula. He also stated that "it is easy to accord [Putin] the respect he wants, and which he also probably deserves".

Agnieszka Bryc is an assistant professor at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland. She is a former member of the board of the Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW). She specialises in Russian foreign policy and Israeli security.

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Ukrainian democracy in action

Why a successful strategy to counter authoritarianism includes Ukraine's membership in the EU and NATO

HANNA HOPKO

Whilst Ukraine continues to struggle with various internal issues, its ongoing reforms have sent a clear message regarding its desires for western integration. The EU and NATO must now recognise Kyiv's ambitions and respond in an equally enthusiastic manner.

Ukraine's geopolitical relevance is only growing given the increasing hybrid attacks launched by authoritarian regimes against the West. In the 30 years since the country's restoration of statehood and independence, Ukraine has become a reliable contributor to European security. Kyiv even gave up the world's third largest nuclear arsenal in 1994 following the collapse of the Soviet Union. As a result, it can be argued that Ukraine truly represents democracy in action. This is especially clear in relation to neighbouring Belarus and especially Vladimir Putin's Russia, which are increasingly experiencing a transition to totalitarianism.

A successful democratic Ukraine means a stronger and more resilient Europe. The country has paid the highest price in pursuit of this common success, especially during and after the EuroMaidan or the Revolution of Dignity. Of course, Europe itself is faced with many pressing problems and contradictions. At the same time,

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the West as a whole is often not ready to act pre-emptively against new threats. It is certain, nevertheless, that Europe has a reliable partner in Ukraine, which may well become a powerful ally in the near future.

A historical issue

"The fate of Europe will depend on the solution of the Ukrainian problem", stated Lancelot Lawton in the British House of Commons before the Second World War. In his opinion, it was necessary for the British policy in the East to include Ukraine in the system of Western Europe. After all, "an independent and autonomous Ukraine is necessary for European economic progress and world peace".

More than eight years of Russian armed aggression has confirmed the ability of Ukrainians to defend their state to the extent that they will never return to Moscow's sphere of influence. However, the dreams of millions, who for centuries have fought for statehood and believed in Ukraine's special importance regarding the fate of Europe, will only come true when Kyiv becomes a full member of the European family of nations and NATO. From a pragmatic point of view, such a move is in the collective interest of the West, which should show greater readiness and political courage regarding Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic ambitions. As one of the initiators of the Verkhovna Rada's 2019 "Resolution on the Protection of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of the Russian Federation", I believe that Ukraine's current position will ultimately help transform Russia and curb the expansion of authoritarian regimes. After all, Ukraine has borne the brunt of various international issues Europe has been facing for centuries. The future of the continent subsequently lies in Ukraine. From fighting off invasions to curbing authoritarian regimes in the 21st century, Ukraine's position on the European continent has remained the same. However, it is unclear if Europe truly understands these experiences.

Exactly 400 years ago, pivotal events for Europe took place in Ukraine. Near the fortress of Khotyn, brave Cossacks repelled an invasion of thousands of Ottoman troops. The future of the entire continent depended on the result of that battle. Losing that battle would have opened the way to Warsaw to the Ottoman Empire.

Ukraine continues to find itself in a similar situation today. The country has successfully defended Europe from an uninvited guest for eight years. In this regard, the recent decision of the European Union Council to provide assistance to the Ukrainian military under the European Union's "Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace" (IcSP) deserves respect. I am also grateful to those EU member states who have helped Ukraine by providing weapons to defend its sovereignty in light of the large concentration of Russian troops on the border. Despite this, we

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It is important for Ukraine that the NATO 2030 plan includes not only statements on the alliance's open door policy, but also clear mechanisms regarding Ukraine's progress towards membership.

also want to believe that the number of such friendly and courageous acts will only grow in the years to come. Ukraine naturally hopes for fewer events such as the recent veto on weapons supplies. After all, Putin continues to engage in blackmail and issue threats against western organisations such as NATO and the EU. This situation only encourages the Kremlin to take further action, such as the build-up of troops near the border.

In fact, Putin is making money by threatening to invade Ukraine. In addition to their meeting in Geneva, Putin and the US President Joe Biden have pursued telephone conversations on numerous occasions. During these talks, the Russian leader has bargained for favourable conditions for himself and his circle at the expense of those living in Russia. Putin is now faced with record low approval ratings. As for Ukraine, we must understand that the West's line is currently quite tough but only on a superficial level. If Putin launches a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, it is said that he will face even stronger sanctions. But why are there currently no sanctions designed to stop such a move in the first place? At the same time, it remains wildly unclear why Nord Stream 2 was allowed to continue. Russia's armed aggression in Ukraine has lasted for more than eight years, during which more than 14,000

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people have died. Putin has not fulfilled even the first clauses of the Minsk agreements. Instead, we are seeing a growing number of attacks on the West.

Gradual change

Instead of withdrawing troops from the occupied territories of Ukraine, Putin is moving more military equipment and troops near the Ukrainian borders. Putin is using blackmail and threats to destabilise the situation in Europe. He is trying to undermine the unity of NATO and the EU by completing and launching Nord Stream 2. Therefore, we do not need to wait for Putin's next invasion of Ukraine to impose sanctions.

Ukrainians have come to certain conclusions about the situation. They will resist and will not allow the government to make "painful compromises", as one Ukrainian oligarch once suggested in a *Wall Street Journal* essay. After all, we have the truth and a strong army with unique experience behind us. In fact, primarily thanks to civil society, volunteers, and the help of the West, we have one of the largest and most capable armies in Europe. A peaceful sky over a secure Europe rests on the shoulders of Ukraine's military, which protects our common values, peace and security. Its actions ensure the safety of countries even beyond Warsaw and the Baltic states.

Next year will mark ten years since Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity. In the West, this event is better known as the EuroMaidan, as it was sparked by Viktor Yanukovych's failure to sign the Association Agreement with the EU. Participants went to the streets and squares in the name of values and not for the sake of their own interests. Moreover, many protesters sacrificed their lives for the dream of Europe. This is worth remembering in Berlin or Paris, in Budapest or Rome.

The revolution gave Ukraine a chance to reform institutions that would protect citizens from corrupt officials. These changes strengthened the resilience of the Ukrainian society, which started to resist not only Russia's external hybrid war but also the negative influence of oligarchs. The transformation of Ukraine into an institutional state is a marathon, not a sprint. It is important to carefully introduce reforms and ensure that they can stand up to various challenges. In particular, the decentralisation reform should become the foundation of democratic governance and a source of the formation of the new political elite. Whilst the reform of the public service is currently under way, it has not yet resulted in too many changes. The same can be said about judicial reforms. Ukraine still has serious problems with corruption, the rule of law, and the domination of oligarchs. However, an honest assessment of the situation will ultimately allow for an active solution.

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The Ukrainian society is still prone to choosing political projects that lack real programme, team and content during elections. Yet, I believe that our citizens are slowly embracing the path of change. Even in advanced democracies, it is clear that democratic advantages cannot be taken for granted. With each new generation and government, we must ensure that democratic principles are protected in the country. My conclusion is that Ukraine's transformation through reforms will not work without Christian values. As a moral authority, dissident Yevhen Sverstyuk once wrote: "Civilization has grown. The man has shrunk." The sacrifices made by many citizens during the Orange Revolution and the Revolution of Dignity were challenged by those who backed Leonid Kuchma's then corrupt oligarchic clan system. This system has stolen our historical chances on many occasions.

Demand for integration

After the turbulent and bloody events of 2013–14, Ukraine signed the political and economic portions of its Association Agreement with the EU. On July 11th 2017 the EU Council made the final decision and concluded the Association Agreement on behalf of the EU. Since then, Ukraine has not become any less close to Europe, and Ukrainians have not lost their faith in it.

The country's course to the West is now unchanging and irreversible. The citizens growing support for the Euro-Atlantic path shows that development is going in the right direction. The New Europe Center, a foreign policy think tank based in Kyiv, recently commissioned its second nationwide poll on Ukrainian society's expectations on foreign policy. Ukrainians are overwhelmingly in favour of continuing the country's integration with the EU and NATO. According to the study, 60.7 per cent of respondents believe that Ukraine should become a member of the EU. At the same time, 52.7 per cent believe that Ukraine should become a member of NATO (last year the reported figure was 48.4 per cent). A characteristic feature of this year is that the level of support for the EU has decreased, while more people are now in favour of NATO integration.

According to another poll by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, the vast majority of respondents would support Ukraine's accession to the European Union in the event of a referendum. Indeed, 67.1 per cent of all respondents would vote "yes" in such a vote. In the case of a referendum on joining NATO, 59.2 per cent of all respondents would vote "yes" and 28.1 per cent would vote "no".

We must now ask our western partners if they are ready to see Ukraine not just as a contributor to European security but also as an integrated part of it. Do they understand the consequences of the political weakness shown in Bucharest in 2008,

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when there was no political will to give Ukraine and Georgia a Membership Action Plan? At the same time, how would the prospects of membership contribute to Ukraine's democratic transformation?

It is important for Ukraine that the NATO 2030 plan includes not only statements on the alliance's open door policy, but also clear mechanisms regarding Ukraine's progress towards membership. It is necessary to develop and present an optimal route with a roadmap for the key reforms, as was the case with visa-free travel with the EU. Learning the lessons from not admitting Ukraine and Georgia to NATO should provide more arguments for the alliance to change the approaches.

Generational change offers new hope

The youth of Ukraine offers another guarantee that the country's current course will be maintained in relation to both the government and its western partners. This was made clear by the implementation of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly Youth Model project, launched by the "ANTS" National Interests Advocacy Network with the support of the NATO Information and Documentation Centre. As a result of the project, 215 university students participated in lectures on NATO's creation, priorities and challenges. Furthermore, 85 students took part in a session of the NATO Youth Model Parliamentary Assembly. The speaker of the Verkhovna Rada (Ukraine's parliament), the deputy prime minister and members of the Verkhovna Rada also participated in this event.

> In today's strong and resilient Europe, there should be no place for appeasement.

In anticipation of a truly historic session of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, which will take place in Ukraine in May 2022, the project organisers are creating a network of young leaders in the country. These young people will learn about the key democratic decision-making mechanism of NATO in a multi-national environment, as well as specific committees and activities of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

At the same time, calls for appeasement regarding Russia are still sometimes heard in European capitals. The issue with this approach was clearly seen during Josep Borrell's visit to Moscow in 2021. Following this, the head of the EU diplomacy was forced to admit that Moscow "did not live up to expectations for the establishment of a modern democracy". If Brussels had listened more to Ukraine, Borrell might not have faced humiliation in the Russian capital. In today's strong and resilient Europe, there should be no place for an appeasement approach advocated by figures such as former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder.

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Defending and improving links with Europe

Human rights continue to be systematically violated in Russian-occupied Crimea. At the same time, the demographic situation in the area is changing and any dissent is being suppressed. Since the occupation of the Crimean peninsula in 2014, the Kremlin has imprisoned 130 Ukrainian citizens, including journalists. Sevastopol journalist Oleksiy Bessarabov, deputy editor-in-chief of the Black Sea Security Journal, was sentenced to 14 years in prison for his pro-western views and activities. He has been imprisoned for six years. His colleague Dmytro Shtyblykov was due to be released last year after five years in prison, but a new case has been filed against him. He now faces an additional 12 to 20 years in prison. Vladyslav Yesypenko, a freelancer of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, was arrested and tortured last year.

Ukraine is quickly becoming a regional leader in many areas, such as countering disinformation, hybrid warfare and cyber-attacks.

More than half of these prisoners are Crimean Tatars. In the families of Kremlin's Ukrainian political prisoners, 207 children were left without parental care. The occupying authorities still attempt to accuse such figures of extremism, terrorism, sabotage and espionage. September marked two years since the last time Russian authorities released political prisoners. Since then, none have returned to their families.

Through this article, I would like to promote the second annual international "Democracy in Action" conference on June 6th and 7th 2022 (https://uadia.org/), the first high-level initiative in Ukraine that does not take money from oligarchs. The general theme of this year's discussion is "Resilience vs hybrid threats". Senior officials and international experts will discuss potential solutions to various hybrid threats to democracy, such as strategic corruption, disinformation, legal warfare and climate change.

Ukraine offers many solutions to the challenges of modern democracy. The state is quickly becoming a regional leader in many areas, such as countering disinformation, hybrid warfare and cyber-attacks. It is very important for us that Ukraine's voice, experiences and proposals are heard and perceived as assets with which it can become a respected part of the club of western democracies.

Since Ukraine is an example of democracy in action, it is worth pursuing support not only in the security and defence sphere. Certainly, the country must also seek economic co-operation, such as joint investments into production sites with key strategic partners. This would integrate Ukraine into production chains involving the export, extraction and processing of critical raw materials for high-tech

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products. It is also worth pursuing the creation of new manufacturing plants that will focus on new technologies such as electric cars.

To be competitive, we also need to be at the forefront of global innovation trends in the IT sector. It is worth remembering that in July 2021, Ukraine signed a memorandum on a strategic partnership with the EU in the field of critical raw materials, such as titanium, cobalt and lithium. These resources also present Ukraine with additional opportunities. It is critical for the EU to have access to such raw materials in order to remain competitive and not be reliant on China. A relationship with Beijing involves various geopolitical risks and high costs due to logistics. At the same time, it is important for us not to allow Ukraine to simply become an exporter of raw materials but to become a key partner in strategic areas such as space and engineering. For 30 years we have struggled with perceptions that Ukraine is simply a buffer zone rich in raw materials.

Ukraine is Europe

We must build a country on the foundation of Christian values and morals if we are to realise Ukraine's dreams of joining the EU and NATO, and recovering Donbas and Crimea. Robert Schuman, an officially recognised "Father of Europe", believed that the continent's future depended on the revival of Christian values. These would further shape Europe's political and economic realities. Ukraine also has a special mission to revive these values in Europe.

My dream is to one day visit Moscow and take part in the unveiling of monuments to the victims of Holodomor and Putin's regime. I believe that Lenin will finally be buried and that the monuments to Stalin will be demolished, following the example of Ukraine's own decommunisation. By moving closer to Europe, Ukraine is helping Europe become closer to itself. As a state, we have decisively chosen the path of returning to the European home. We now need to protect the common security and peace of the continent and not only from the Russian aggressor.

Ukraine is Europe. Ukraine is defending Europe. It is time for the EU to choose Ukraine as a reliable partner and member of its family. NEE

Translated by Margarita Novikova

Hanna Hopko is a foreign policy expert, a chairman of the board at the Network for the Protection of National Interests "ANTS", and a former chair of the Ukrainian parliament committee on foreign affairs from 2014 to 2019.

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Is the West ready to accept the challenge from Lukashenka?

VALERY KARBALEVICH

Is the West ready to raise the stakes when dealing with the regime in Minsk? The answer to this question is not so clear. In fact, western states seem rather confused on how to act while the Belarusian regime continues to issue challenges.

Both Belarusian and Russian officials view the 2020 protests in Belarus as a western attempt to instigate a "colour revolution". They see the events ultimately as a special EU and American operation in which the Belarusian people did not participate at all. Apparently, the ultimate goal of these protests was to overthrow the Russian authorities rather than simply those in Minsk.

In truth, the 2020 protests in Belarus came as a complete surprise for the West. Before the presidential elections, relations between the Belarusian authorities and the West were entering a period of normalisation. After the West committed to co-operation with Alyaksandr Lukashenka's regime, its support for the Belarusian opposition and civil society rapidly decreased. The undemocratic presidential elections were not supposed to reverse this commitment. Both the US and the EU took the position that Lukashenka's enduring regime simply does not provide the opposition with any chances to change the situation. For them, it was paramount that the inevitable protests caused by the elections would not result in people being murdered or imprisoned for political reasons. The OSCE election observation mission was supposed to suggest, as usual, that the elections were not held in com-

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pliance with democratic standards. This was meant to be the end of the story. The western powers could then continue to increase co-operation with Lukashenka's regime much like before.

Yet the scale of the protests, as well as the subsequent repressions instigated by the Belarusian authorities, made this policy impossible. The realisation of this new reality in the country happened very slowly in the West. The more the US was distracted by the dramatic presidential election campaign, the less attention it gave to Belarusians.

Effects of the migrant crisis

Minsk had two objectives when it decided to bring migrants from the Middle East to its borders with Poland, Lithuania and Latvia last summer. The regime at the very least intended to exact revenge on its European neighbours for their criticism of the Belarusian domestic political crisis. At the same time, optimists in Minsk thought that the situation would force the EU to negotiate on the terms of the Belarusian authorities. The EU aimed to both discuss Belarus's domestic problems (repressions, freedom for political prisoners) and facilitate negotiations between the authorities and the opposition via new elections. Lukashenka intended to change this agenda by organising a migrant crisis that would only end once the West's economic sanctions were lifted. Having started the conflict, Lukashenka stuck to his image of a strongman leader. He escalated the confrontation and is afraid to seem weak both at home and abroad. This has always been his political style, and this migration crisis is no exemption, especially since he had nothing to lose.

> After the migrant crisis, the EU and US began to view the Belarusian authorities as a threat to international security.

The shift in relations between Belarus, the EU and the US was made permanent following the forced landing of Ryanair Flight 4978 in Minsk (to abduct opposition journalist Roman Protasevich) and the subsequent artificial migrant crisis. Until then, the West had treated the situation in Belarus as a domestic humanitarian issue. After the Ryanair incident and migrant crisis, both the EU and US began to view the Belarusian authorities as a threat to international security. In other words, domestic Belarusian unrest transformed into a regional crisis. Belarus's actions were destabilising the situation in Europe and beyond.

The states in the Middle East found themselves involved in this migrant crisis as well. Transit between the West and the East was endangered as Lukashenka promised to cut off Russian gas supplies to Europe. Trucks heading to Poland,

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Migrants gathered near a logistics center on the Belarusian side of the border with Poland last November. Even if the migrant crisis on the border has slowed down, it can be resumed at any moment.

Lithuania and Latvia formed queues on the Belarusian side of the border. Even if the migrant crisis on the border is brought to an end, it can be resumed at any moment. This is because its roots can be traced back to Lukashenka's regime and Belarus's ongoing domestic political crisis. Moreover, Lukashenka has threatened to start a war if the world does not recognise him as the country's leader. A "black hole" of uncertainty has now been formed in the middle of the European continent.

The West was given a choice

Is the West ready to raise the stakes? The answer to this question is not obvious. We see that the western states are slightly confused as to how to act. In the middle of the migration crisis, several telephone calls took place. First, former German Chancellor Angela Merkel spoke with Lukashenka. Then, Belarusian foreign minister Vladimir Makei talked with Josep Borrell, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Lukashenka was undoubtedly satisfied with these conversations. In fact, his moves forced the EU to engage in a dialogue with him against its own will. This is paramount for a politician enjoying international

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isolation. Moreover, these brief conversations were unfolding according to an agenda suggested by Minsk. This agenda assumed that discussions would only concern a possible resolution to the migrant crisis on the EU borders. The question of issues concerning the refugees did not lead to discussions regarding Belarusian political prisoners. The EU risks leaving Lukashenka convinced that this migration blackmail is effective and can be used in the future.

In response to the situation in Belarus, the EU introduced five packages of sanctions against Minsk. Canada, the UK and the US have all introduced three similar packages. It is complicated to calculate how much the Belarusian economy has lost as a result of the sanctions. Roman Golovchenko, the prime minister of Belarus, argued that the country has lost not more than 2.9 per cent of its GDP. Independent experts believe that the numbers may vary from seven to 14 per cent. Different methodologies explain such a gap in calculations. While some evaluate only direct losses, others consider consequential ones too. This second kind of losses includes extra costs for bypass schemes and the loss of potential contracts and foreign partners, as companies avoid dealing with groups on the sanctions list. If the sanctions prove effective, Belarus may lose up to 15 per cent of its exports. This includes 25 per cent of its petroleum exports and ten per cent of potash exports (which go to the European Union).

Belarusian society is now very fractured, traumatised and much more politicised than it was a few years ago.

However, the sanctions' effectiveness will only become clear in the long term. It should be remembered that they are a tool of political, moral and psychological influence focused on both the elite and the masses. They are an attempt to pressure the political elite through the economy, which has an accumulative socio-political and psychological effect as time goes on. A consolidated society that does not question the legitimacy of the authorities can resist external threats. Yet, Belarusian society is now very fractured, traumatised and much more politicised than it was compared to only a few years ago. The political crisis continues and the government enjoys very little trust from the population as it expresses discontent with the current situation. The authorities have lost the monopoly over the media and will struggle to blame the West for the sanctions and growing opposition.

Against this backdrop, sanctions could potentially trigger a process that harms the current Belarusian social model. At the same time, society's high level of politicisation would only encourage the people to blame the government for any new problems. The worse the socio-economic situation, the more obvious it would get even for Lukashenka's supporters and politically disengaged people that he is the source of the country's troubles. But no one can say when that would happen.

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Why sanctions do not work

However, several obstacles prevent the international sanctions from being truly effective and achieving their aim. First, the government's authoritarian nature means that economic problems are less likely to actively influence political processes. Also, it remains unclear to what extent Russia would be willing to assist Belarus in bypassing western sanctions. Russian companies, for example, may want to mediate between Belarusian producers and western consumers.

American sanctions towards Belarus are still not as strict as those imposed on Cuba, North Korea or Iran.

Nevertheless, the key issue remains the fact that the sanctions have not come into full effect. Most have been postponed, as the West does not want to harm the commercial interests of its own businesses. Paradoxically, the Belarusian economy has been experiencing anything but a decline since the EU introduced the fifth package of sanctions. For example, it doubled its export of goods to the EU over nine months in 2021. Whilst Belarusian exports to the Netherlands increased fivefold, deliveries to Germany increased by 105 per cent. In Latvia, exports increased by 92 per cent. It is also a similar story in Lithuania (41 per cent) and Poland (74 per cent). From January to September 2021, the supply of goods from Belarus to the United States tripled in spite of these sanctions.

According to Deputy Prime Minister Nikolay Snopkov, the equivalent of up to ten million US dollars connected with Belarus was detained by foreign banks during the first ten months of 2021. This equates to around 0.01 per cent of the foreign economic monthly turnover of Belarus. This is ultimately how the sanctions "work". It should not come as a surprise that Belarusian politicians speak disparagingly about them.

American sanctions towards Belarus are still not as strict as the regimes imposed on Cuba, North Korea or Iran. According to official US documents, imposing secondary sanctions is possible. Transactions to bypass the sanctions are banned. However, this sounds more like a warning than something that will be followed by an actual punishment.

The authorities in Minsk have also succeeded in organising various "grey" schemes to bypass the sanctions. While oligarchs on sanction lists sign their assets over to their children, some legal entities change their names and continue to trade with the EU. For example, Belarusian transport cargo to Estonia increased 6.4 times over the first ten months of 2021 when compared to the same period during 2020. When asked about this situation by journalists, the Estonian foreign ministry responded that the sanctions do not ban the transport of goods as "the

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transport companies checked if the goods comply with the sanctions list and did not reveal any violations."

This is why so much depends on how consistently and rigorously the EU and the US monitor the implementations of the sanctions. Increased pressure on the states that maintain good relations with Belarus could be effective. Nonetheless, it is paramount to remember that Lukashenka regards the western leaders who have unsuccessfully challenged him over the last 25 years as "weak". This policy of ineffective sanctions will only further convince him that he is right.

Translated by Anna Efimova

Valery Karbalevich is a Belarusian political scientist and the author of many works on Lukashenka and his regime, including the 2010 book *Alexander Lukashenko: A Political Portrait*.

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EU resilience in the Eastern Partnership

What does the case of Georgia's political crisis tell us?

SHOTA KAKABADZE

The Eastern Partnership faces an uncertain future as the European Union cannot offer any viable alternative for the group's best performers. EU resilience in the region is now under strain. Given the increasing global dominance of China and Russia's aggressive foreign policy, will Brussels manage to remain a credible actor in the region?

The year 2021 was full of challenges for Georgia's democratic future and its relations with its western partners. After the parliamentary elections in October 2020, Georgia entered a deep and protracted crisis that, as of writing, still haunts the country's politics. Disagreements over the results of the elections led to deadlock in February 2021, when the police raided the headquarters of the largest opposition party to arrest its leader. Naturally, this raised concerns among local human rights advocates and democracy watchdogs.

The European Union decided to get involved and help the parties find a resolution to this political impasse between Georgia's major players. It was vital for Brussels to mitigate this difficult situation and facilitate dialogue between the parties, as the EU's eastern frontier has faced crisis after crisis over the last several years. Along with the aforementioned problems in Tbilisi, Europe's eastern frontier has witnessed a military conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan and a great amount

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of Russian hybrid warfare. This includes Moscow's potential invasion of Ukraine in the near future. The bloc is also facing a democratic backslide in many Eastern European countries, especially in Hungary and Poland. For Brussels, therefore, involvement in Georgia was a matter of showing its credibility and resilience. Whilst the EU put a lot of effort into brokering an agreement, it has failed to keep the signatory parties committed to it. This failure has raised questions regarding whether or not the Association Agreement's incentives have exhausted themselves. Is the EU losing its normative influence over the region?

The EU's failure to find a breakthrough

The main Georgian parties' disagreement over the 2020 parliamentary election results escalated into a protracted political crisis, with the majority of the opposition boycotting the parliament. It quickly became clear that the only credible actors left in this "Mexican standoff" were the country's western partners. The EU first got involved through its representative in the country. However, the President of the European Council Charles Michel soon became personally involved in the mediation process. On April 19th 2021, the agreement titled "A Way Ahead for Georgia" was signed by the parties. This outlined several important reforms needed to increase trust in future elections. More importantly, it also established a one-time threshold (43 per cent) that the ruling party needed to meet in the 2021 local elections in order to avoid a snap parliamentary election.

> The disagreement over the 2020 parliamentary election results escalated into a protracted political crisis.

Despite some ambitious goals and proposed reforms regarding the electoral system and judiciary, the document was ultimately unworkable from the very beginning. One of the largest opposition parties – the United National Movement – refused to sign it, a fact that was later used by the ruling Georgian Dream party to withdraw its own signature and declare the agreement "annulled". Appointments to the supreme court, which were supposed to be on hold according to the agreement, still went ahead despite criticism from western partners. This resulted in the EU refusing to provide financial assistance to Georgia.

The US ambassador to Georgia, who was personally involved in the mediation process, described these developments as "going against the spirit" of the April 19th agreement. This was a surprising turn, especially considering the levels of support and trust that the West has enjoyed in Georgia over the years. High support for Georgia's EU membership suggests that the organisation's appeal remains

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strong even in the face of these recent setbacks. The next couple of years will certainly prove decisive for the EU's role in the region. Brussels will need to engage more with countries that have signed an Association Agreement and offer more incentives than just funding. The EU will also need to shift the focus of its resilience strategy from governments to civil society and the population as a whole.

The Associated Trio

On July 19th 2021 the heads of Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia signed a declaration at the Petra Fortress near Batumi in Georgia. The purpose of this agreement was to reaffirm the signatory countries' commitment to European integration, a foreign policy choice that no third country could influence. Most importantly, the declaration pledged that the three associated countries would cooperate with the EU to counter hybrid threats, disinformation and other common challenges. While the document focuses on the Associated Trio (the three countries of the Eastern Partnership that have signed the Association Agreement with the EU: Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia – editor's note), it also reiterates its support for the Eastern Partnership. The signatory parties also pledged to work together to ensure that the partnership develops even further.

The Associated Trio has slowly gained prominence among policymakers and politicians within both the Eastern Partnership and the EU.

Since its formal establishment, the Associated Trio has slowly gained prominence in high-level discourse among policymakers and politicians within both the Eastern Partnership and the EU. During a joint press conference with the three countries' foreign ministers, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell emphasised that the most crucial part of the Eastern Partnership was cooperation within the region. These more coordinated actions, as well as the establishment of a formal framework between the three associated countries, are especially relevant in the context of the recent 2.3 billion euro package allocated for the Eastern Partnership. Borrell remarked that the project remains at the top of the EU's agenda.

It has been suggested that the Associated Trio is modelled after the Berlin Process, a German initiative that supports the integration of the Western Balkan countries. However, these two projects have one key difference: the Eastern partners' membership prospects remain rather vague. The so-called discussion papers submitted to the European Commission by France in 2019 and 2020 stated that

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while the Eastern Partnership was about economic and political co-operation, it did not imply any mechanisms or prospects for future EU membership.

In contrast, the Western Balkan countries were promised membership already back in 2003. Both Albania and North Macedonia are on the verge of starting accession talks with the EU (Bulgaria is currently blocking progress due to its dispute with North Macedonia over history and language), while Serbia is expected to complete the process by 2025. In other words, while the Western Balkan countries have a goal towards which their partnership with Brussels is heading, the Eastern partners still lack that clarity. The institutional and policy framework that the Associated Trio platform potentially holds for the signatory countries, on the other hand, could provide that destination for the best performers.

Nothing left to offer

Questions surrounding where the Eastern Partnership is heading and whether it is still able to address the EU neighbourhood's challenges have become especially relevant given recent regional developments. As aforementioned, the last couple of years have seen Brussels attempt to deal with events such as the Second Karabakh War between Armenia and Azerbaijan. This dramatically shifted the geopolitical balance in the region. It is also worth remembering the alarming situation in Belarus that ended with Minsk declaring its intent to suspend participation in the Eastern Partnership and recall its envoy from Brussels. At the same time, the looming Russian intervention in Ukraine also continues to cause anxiety in the region.

Against the backdrop of these events, Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova are trying to further push their European agenda and coordinate their approach towards Brussels. This is all the more impressive given recent challenges to democracy in the region. These three remain the last glimmer of hope for the EU's resilience and transformative power in the region. Yet, the most recent developments in Georgia, along with the violent attacks on journalists in the streets of Tbilisi in July 2021, have become a matter of great concern for the EU.

Consequently, the Eastern Partnership faces an uncertain future, as the European Union cannot offer any viable incentives to the best performers in this neighbourhood beyond more funding. Some scholars claim the EU has exhausted its ability to keep prospective members committed to democratisation, since there is not much left to offer beyond visa liberalisation and access to the Single Market. EU resilience in the region is now clearly facing many challenges. In the context of China's growing global influence and Russia's resurgent foreign policy, it is uncertain if Brussels will manage to remain a credible actor in the region. Ques-

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tions must be asked as to what kind of format could help the Eastern Partnership's best performers remain on the path of democratisation and reform amid today's challenges.

The Association Agreement has indeed helped the signatory countries from the Eastern Partnership quickly catch up with their Western Balkan counterparts. Yet, with no prospects for membership in the foreseeable future, the EU needs to take bolder actions to keep Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova on track. As a result, further support for the Associated Trio could be an important way of stopping, and probably even reversing, these alarming developments in Georgia-EU relations. This format has the potential, at least for the time being, to take Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine's long and bumpy European journey one step further.

Shota Kakabadze is a junior policy analyst at the Georgian Institute of Politics.

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German Ostpolitik in the shadow of Russia's imperial revenge

ANDREAS UMLAND

The strange tragedy of Angela Merkel's *Ostpolitik* in 2005–2021 was that the highly intelligent and committed chancellor showed herself incapable of departing from the wrong track in Germany's Russia policy that Berlin had already taken before she took office. It is symptomatic that none of the early German mistakes vis-à-vis Moscow was directly related to Ukraine, yet the conflict surrounding Ukraine since 2014 has been marking the fiasco of Germany's *Ostpolitik* in the new century.

Berlin made a momentous blunder long before Angela Merkel came to power and early in the succession of Vladimir Putin's reigns of, so far, two premierships and four presidencies. In September 2001, the Federal Republic's government invited Russia's newly minted second president, Vladimir Putin, to address the assembled Bundestag. No other Russian head of government or state has ever received such an honour. This was true for Mikhail Gorbachev as indirectly elected USSR President of 1990–1991 as well as for Boris Yeltsin as the first Russian elected head of state from 1991 to 1999 or for Dmitry Medvedev who was Putin's liberal stooge in the presidential office in 2008–2012. Considering their world views, these three presidents would have all been more worthy speakers to the German parliament than Putin. At least Gorbachev spoke, as a private citizen, in the Bundestag in 1999 – long after his departure from politics.

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The problem of Putin's appearance

Taken on its own, Putin's relatively pro-western 2001 Bundestag speech, delivered in German, was largely uncontroversial to be sure. But the circumstances surrounding his effective performance in Germany's national parliament were dubious. The Bundestag reacted with ovations to the courtship of a Russian politician who, as a KGB officer in Dresden, only a few years earlier had been part of Moscow's occupation machinery in Eastern Europe.

Even more worrisome was that Putin had gotten an invitation to speak and was celebrated in Berlin at a time when Russian forces stood uninvited in another country. Russian troops were stationed in the Transnistrian region of Moldova during Putin's 2001 visit to Berlin. They had been there since the disappearance of the USSR in 1991. Until today, a small Russian unit remains in Transnistria against the Moldovan government's will. In 1994 Moscow agreed to withdraw its military from Transnistria in a bilateral treaty with Chișinău after it had, in 1992, unlawfully intervened in an internal Moldovan conflict. At a November 1999 OSCE summit, Moscow committed itself once more, in the multilateral so-called "Istanbul Document," to withdraw its remaining troops from Transnistria. At that moment Putin was, as Russia's newly appointed prime-minister, already de facto ruling Russia.

The troops had not been fully withdrawn from Moldova, however, by the time Putin gave his speech to the Bundestag in 2001. Nor was there any indication that Moscow would any time soon fulfil its bi- and multilateral obligations vis-à-vis the non-aligned Moldovan state. Merkel attempted to reach a solution to the Transnistrian problem with then-President Medvedev in 2010–2011 as part of the so-called Meseberg Process. However, Merkel's considerable efforts were unsuccessful. That was because Putin – and not the relatively pro-western Medvedev – continued to hold the reins of power in Moscow, as Russia's prime-minister during 2008–2012.

The considerable domestic and foreign policy regressions under Putin, already visible by September 2001, were not a topic of his visit to Germany, to be sure. This omission constituted the problem of Putin's appearance in the Bundestag and his talks in Berlin at the time. The invitation of the German parliament as well as the reaction of the MPs to Putin's speech sent a bad signal to Moscow. Ongoing violations of international and human rights, so it seemed, are of secondary importance when it comes to the relationship between the two largest nations of Europe. The chemistry between Moscow and Berlin is more important than the principles laid down in such documents as the 1975 Helsinki Final Act or 1990 Charter of Paris. At least that is how many Russian politicians and diplomats have seemingly understood Berlin's loud silence on Transnistria and Chechnya in 2001. East-West trade,

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good personal relations, and fair-weather rhetoric take precedence over western values, international law and European security.

Berlin's destructive pipeline policy

A second fateful decision by Berlin that predetermined the eastern policy of Merkel's chancellorship was made in 2005, around the time she took office. In the final weeks before the end of Gerhard Schröder's term as Federal Chancellor as well as in the months that followed, the first Nord Stream project was initiated. Schröder's subsequent employment by Gazprom (and later Rosneft) and the, since then, massive propaganda of Europe's allegedly dire need for Russian undersea pipelines set the course for Merkel's future *Ostpolitik*. These developments created legal, informal and discursive frameworks at the beginning of Merkel's reign that had a lasting impact on her approach to Russia. The serious repercussions of these early decisions continue to shape the German foreign economic and policy debate as well as Berlin's relationship with Moscow as well as Warsaw, Kyiv or Vilnius until today.

Massive propaganda of Europe's allegedly dire need for Russian undersea pipelines set the course for Merkel's *Ostpolitik*.

The underwater pipeline projects initiated by outgoing Chancellor Schröder in 2005 and subsequently promoted by him in his function as chairman of the supervisory boards of Nord Stream and Nord Stream 2 were resolutely implemented despite their economic redundancy. In the apologetic narratives, the projects are presented partly as purely commercial, partly as clever geo-economic, and partly even as smart security policy initiatives. Such stories had and have broad appeal, even though the ridiculous overcapacity for transferring Siberian natural gas to Europe and the serious geopolitical consequences of the new pipelines are now readily apparent.

Reducing Moscow's crippling dependence on the Ukrainian gas pipeline system by commissioning the first two Nord Stream lines in 2011–2012 was from the outset more than a new Russian foreign trade strategy. As misleading as the thesis of an alleged need for the Nord Stream projects for European energy security was and is, as real was and is the need for the Kremlin to reduce Ukraine's role as a transit country for Siberian and Central Asian gas flowing into the European Union. Only the partial achievement of this goal with the full start of operation of the first Nord Stream pipeline in October 2012 made it possible to continue in Ukraine the Russian revenge by force for the collapse of the USSR. This project which had been previously already implemented in Moldova and Georgia.

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Gazprom's alternative, available from late 2012, of bypassing Ukraine for much of its export to the EU was not a sufficient condition, but a necessary one, for the subsequent increase in Russian aggressiveness towards Ukraine. The Kremlin's new intransigence manifested itself even before the EuroMaidan Revolution began. Over the course of the last peace year of 2013, there were a number of belligerent signals and actions by Moscow vis-à-vis Kyiv. For example, in August 2013, the Kremlin imposed a complete blockade of all trade between Ukraine and Russia that lasted several days. Moscow's escalating rhetoric and sanctions policy led to rising tensions in Russian-Ukrainian relations before the Kyiv protests began in late 2013. This occurred even though Ukraine was still under an explicitly pro-Russian leadership with the then-President Viktor Yanukovych and Prime Minister Mykola Azarov. Their imminent loss of power was not yet in sight. Moreover, the pro-Russian president was removed from office not by the Maidan revolutionaries, as it is often collocated. After the street fighting had ended, Yanukovych was, on February 22nd 2014, removed by the Ukrainian parliament which until then had been loyal to him.

Repetitive behaviour

In response to Yanukovych's ouster, Moscow shifted its Ukraine policy to the strategy it had pursued years earlier vis-à-vis Moldova and Georgia. Following years of rhetorical, political and economic attacks on Kyiv, Moscow began a partly military, partly paramilitary intervention and occupation of Ukraine in February 2014 in Crimea; and in March 2014 in the Donets Basin, as it had done earlier in Transnistria, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. To this day many western interpreters of Putin fail to recognise the regularity in the Kremlin's behaviour. Despite the older examples of Moldova and Georgia, some commentators known as experts on Eastern Europe, insist on an alleged exceptionality of the Ukraine case as well as a key role of wrong EU policies for the escalation in Eastern Europe in 2014.

Long before Russia's attack on its western-oriented brother state, the republics of Moldova and Georgia did not need to be parts of Eastern Slavic culture or to be involved in association negotiations with Brussels for a receipt of military punishment by the Kremlin. The two post-Soviet republics had lost control of larger portions of their state territories already in the 1990s than Ukraine did in 2014. Chișinău and Tbilisi met their sad fate earlier than Ukraine which, in 2014, was allegedly incited by radical nationalism and western stupidity.

The well-known German formula of "*Annäherung durch Verflechtung*" ("rapprochement through entanglement") took on a meaning beyond the metaphor-

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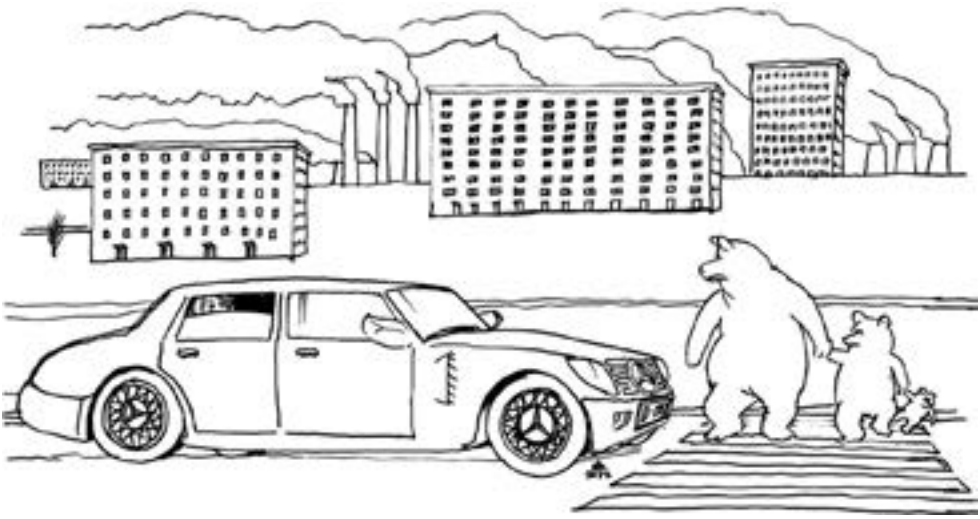

ical. Germany and Russia-controlled territory have since moved closer together not only economically and politically, but also geographically. The almost fateful correctness of Berlin's popular interdependence formula is confirmed by the fact that not only economically intertwined countries are moving closer together. As practice shows, the reverse conclusion of this law of international relations is also true. The new gas volumes which since 2011 – via the Baltic Sea – have brought Germans and Russians ever closer together, have correspondingly been lacking for the maintenance of Russian-Ukrainian proximity.

As both interdependence theory and the entanglement formula predict, not only does the development of economic connections lead to more peaceful relationships between the countries involved. A parallel reduction of economic ties with third countries may mean less peace for them. As a result of Germany's increasingly deep energy interdependence with Russia since 2005, the transit states for Siberian gas flows that have become disentangled from economic exchange with Russia suffered a reciprocal alienation from Moscow. In particular, Ukraine's economic untying from the Russian Federation after the completion of the first Nord Stream pipeline in late 2012 led to an increase of tensions between the two countries during 2013. Ultimately, this escalation resulted in Moscow's occupation of first southern and then eastern territories of the Ukrainian state in 2014.

The relative gain in national security from the Nord Stream projects is small for Germany which is a NATO state located far away from Russia. In contrast, the equivalent reduction of Russia's dependence on its former colony and neighbour state Ukraine proved to be fatal for the integrity of the latter. The all-European loss of stability due to Moscow's annexation of Crimea and the intervention in Donbas

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in spring 2014 far exceeds the marginal security gains for the EU from the completion of the first Nord Stream pipeline. While Merkel bears little responsibility for the ill-fated Bundestag invitation to Putin in 2001, she is partly to blame for the Nord Stream projects and their consequences. Merkel may have been no longer able to prevent the completion of the first Nord Stream pipeline in 2012, if she to wanted to do that. But the start of construction of Nord Stream 2 in 2015 is a puzzle and creates an impression of cognitive dissonance in Berlin. Had the Kremlin not made its intentions sufficiently clear regarding Ukraine in 2014?

The double error with Georgia in 2008

In 2008 Berlin made two further mistakes that – in contrast to the two Nord Stream projects – have been hardly discussed in Germany. German signals sent to Moscow at that time were to have far-reaching consequences for Russia's Ukraine policy, as had been the case with the Bundestag invitation to Putin in 2001 and the signing of the Nord Stream contract in 2005. Germany's double snub of Tbilisi within one year added to the impression already created in Moscow that Berlin tacitly respects Russian hegemony in most of the post-Soviet space.

When Georgia and Ukraine jointly applied for NATO membership in early 2008, they were in different starting positions. In Georgia, more than two-thirds of the population at the time supported the country's entry into the alliance. At the same time, in Ukraine, nearly two-thirds still opposed NATO membership – a Ukrainian attitude that turned into its opposite only after the Russian attack in 2014.

Also, unlike Ukraine at the time, Georgia had not been a fully sovereign state for some time in 2008 and had sustained troubled relations with Russia. In the regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali – also known as "South Ossetia" – Moscow had already installed separatist satellite regimes in the 1990s that controlled approximately 20 per cent of Georgian state territory. The Ukrainian territories that came under official or de facto Russian control in 2014 are larger in area than the corresponding Georgian parts of the country; however, they account for only about seven per cent of Ukrainian state territory in total.

Preparations for NATO membership in Georgia were already advanced in early 2008. They had begun the usual process of reforming a country before joining the Alliance. Against this background, the NATO Summit in Bucharest marked another unfortunate milestone in western policies towards the post-Soviet area which was largely due to Berlin's influence in the alliance. During the controversial internal Western deliberations on the alliance's reaction to the two membership applications in the Romanian capital, Berlin could have proposed a differen-

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tiated treatment of Georgia's membership application as well as that of Ukraine as a compromise. Instead, Germany insisted on a de facto rejection not only of Kyiv's membership application but also of Tbilisi's. The alliance stated, to be sure, that Georgia and Ukraine "will become members". However, there was no indication of when or how the officially announced entry of the two post-Soviet states into the alliance would occur. It remained unclear on what conditions the accession processes of Georgia as well as Ukraine would depend and whether they would proceed in a package or separately. The middle ground the alliance found in 2008 was ultimately worse than an outright and official rejection of Georgia's and Ukraine's applications. The membership pledges distracted Kyiv and Tbilisi from pursuing other security-enhancing strategies and created a sense of urgency in Moscow.

The Kremlin intensified both its Georgia and Ukraine policies in response to the Bucharest NATO summit. While Moscow still had sufficient levers of domestic political influence in Ukraine at the time, Georgian domestic politics was already happening largely autonomously. Therefore, in early summer 2008, Putin thawed the frozen conflict in the Tskhinvali region thereby provoking a hasty response from then President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili and the Russian-Georgian Five-Day War. The Russian invasion of Georgia was ended by the so-called Sarkozy Plan. In the EU-brokered cease-fire agreement, Russia committed in mid-August 2008 to withdraw its regular troops that it had stationed in the Tskhinvali and Abkhaz regions during previous week. However, in the following weeks, months and eventually years, the Kremlin repeated its older, above-described pattern of behaviour. As in the case of the bilateral and multilateral documents signed by Russia regarding Transnistria in the 1990s, Moscow did not implement the Sarkozy Plan of 2008. In violation of the treaty, Russia left its troops on Georgian territory.

Moreover, the Kremlin transformed the two Georgian separatist regions into the pseudo-states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Unlike the so-called "Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic" (and later the "Luhansk" and "Donetsk People's Republics"), Russia even recognised its two satellite regimes on Georgian territory as independent countries. With Moscow's official confirmation of the statehood of the Russian artificial entities in northern Georgia, the Kremlin went beyond its previous neighbourhood policy and entered new territory in its foreign policy and interpretation of international law.

NATO – largely at the instigation of Berlin – sent a risky signal to the Kremlin in April 2008. According to the German implicit message, even elementary security interests of Russia's neighbours who are pro-western but not integrated with the West are secondary to the Kremlin's preferences. With its Georgia policy in 2008, Merkel's government reaffirmed an impression that Berlin had already left on Moscow in 2001 under Schröder with its neglect of Moldovan security inter-

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ests. For the Kremiln, it can be assumed, this established a pattern of reassuring continuity in Germany's eastern policy behaviour under different governments.

Worse, Moscow's manifest violation of the Sarkozy plan and military dismemberment of Georgia into three states officially recognised by Russia remained inconsequential for the Kremlin. Brussels ended the already minimal European sanctions imposed to punish Russia for the war in the Caucasus. The EU continued its negotiations of a new co-operation treaty with Russia, which had been interrupted in August 2008.

Germany went even further at the Eighth St Petersburg Dialogue conference from September 30th to October 3th 2008. Just a few weeks after the Russian-Georgian war and shortly after Moscow's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, a "Joint Declaration of the Petersburg Dialogue on Shaping the Partnership for Modernisation" was signed by the Chairman of the German Steering Committee of this bilateral organization, Lothar de Maizière, and by the Deputy Chairwoman, Liudmila Verbitskaia, the Rector of St Petersburg University, i.e. Putin's alma mater. In 2010 the German project of the so-called modernisation partnership with Russia was elevated to the European level and adopted by both the EU and subsequently many member states.

Curiously, after Russia's invasion, bombing and dismemberment of Georgia, relations between Berlin and Brussels, on the one hand, and Moscow, on the other, did not cool down but warmed up. Of course, the German and other Western European advances towards the Kremlin did not contain any explicitly affirmative signals regarding Russia's violations of international law and human rights in Moldova, Chechnya or Georgia. On the contrary, both Berlin's and the EU's so-called Strategic and Modernisation Partnerships with Moscow officially aimed to bring Russia closer to Europe in normative terms by means of positive political spill over-effects of an economic rapprochement.

In 2010, the German project of the so-called modernisation partnership with Russia was elevated to the European level.

However, Berlin's noble intentions and strategic calculations were misguided, as we now know. From the outset, they could not compensate for the high costs of Germany's rapprochement and interdependence strategy vis-à-vis Russia. The tacit neglect of elementary interests of small successor states of the USSR, such as Moldova and Georgia, and implicit acquiescence to the Kremlin's continuous undermining of principles of international law in the post-Soviet space could not have ended well. German and European forbearance toward Russia's behaviour on the Nistru and in the North as well as South Caucasus have borne no fruit in either domestic or foreign policy terms. While Berlin apparently thought to promote a pro-western

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change of direction in Moscow with its undiminished willingness to co-operate, the opposite has been the result.

Ukraine as an aftermath

Russia's annexation of Crimea and the intervention in eastern Ukraine in 2014 appear to many observers as unprecedented aberrations in East European geopolitics after the end of the Cold War. In fact, these developments were mere continuations of older trends. In some respects, they were logical outcomes of earlier domestic political dynamics within Russia, their repercussion for Moscow's foreign affairs and inappropriate western responses to them. With Merkel's assumption of the chancellorship in 2005, Germany had, what seemed at the time, an ideal occupant in its highest office of government to respond adequately to the new challenges in Eastern Europe after Putin had come to power in 1999.

As it gradually became clear, however, the new chancellor was unwilling or unable to abandon the wrong track Germany had taken in its Russia policy under Gerhard Schröder. Merkel's diplomatic engagement in Eastern Europe did increase and was particularly notable in 2014–2015. It may be thanks to Merkel that Putin did not push deeper into Ukrainian territory at that time. However, the need for a paradigm shift in Germany's Russia policy, which became obvious in 2014, failed to materialise – a sad fact that became manifest with the start of the Nord Stream 2 project in 2015.

That Merkel, despite her high level of competence and obvious disappointment with Putin, was unable or unwilling to make the long overdue shift in German *Ostpolitik* away from Schröder's approach is depressing. Instead, Berlin's mode of behaviour toward Russia's authoritarian regime remained and remains characterised by fateful decisions of a man who is a political friend of Putin and has been an official employee of the Russian state since 2005. Perhaps, the Eastern European and Caucasian blood toll will have to further rise, in order for Berlin to turn away from this position. NEE

Andreas Umland is an analyst at the Stockholm Center for Eastern European Studies (SCEEUS) of the Swedish Institute of International Affairs, an associate professor of Political Science at the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and the general editor of the book series "Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society" published by ibidem-Verlag Stuttgart.

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Ostpolitik after the German election

IRIS KEMPE

The low priority of foreign policy generally, and Eastern policy particularly, could be observed during the debates shaping the recent German election. The new government will have a chance to prove its position on *Ostpolitik* amid multiple conflicts in Eastern Europe that threaten peace and co-operation. One thing is certain, the old *Ostpolitik* does not provide European solutions to the challenges faced in the region today.

Between 1969 and 1989, the foreign policy of the Federal Republic of Germany aimed to reach a mutual settlement with the Soviet Union and its satellites. This policy began with the government of Willy Brandt and quickly became known as *Ostpolitik*. It superseded the "Hallstein Doctrine" implemented under Konrad Adenauer. The previous approach regarded any diplomatic recognition of the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) as an unfriendly act. *Ostpolitik* was also greatly influenced by Egon Bahr, whose 1963 speech at the Protestant Academy of Tutzing is often viewed as the doctrine's founding moment. The new approach outlined, in part, a policy of mutual understanding and the implementation of the "change through rapprochement" political principle.

Increasing conflicts in Eastern Europe

Brandt's vision would eventually influence both the revolutions of 1989 and the Soviet collapse of 1991 that transformed Central and Eastern Europe. Many of the

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newly independent countries of the region are now full partners in key joint institutions, such as NATO and the European Union. Most of the other states also have close western relations and aspirations to join these bodies. Whilst many historical problems have been solved, other issues have started appearing in the region. In the 2000s regional development was guided by a paradigm of reconciliation and partnership-based relations between East and West. The Russian leadership chose to challenge these arrangements, resulting in elements of the Russian state pursuing conflict that often involves military action. Russia has pioneered a new means of conflict, leading to the new term "hybrid warfare". Such measures include infiltrating civil society using government-organised non-governmental organisations (GONGOs) and manipulating migration and human trafficking for state purposes. Older elements of state propaganda have been put to new use. For example, pro-Kremlin Russian-language media in European countries now target large contingents of people whose primary language is Russian. Moscow has also attempted to use deliveries of natural gas for political ends.

Whilst many historical problems have been solved, other issues have started appearing in the region.

Recent regional conflicts include the ongoing divide between Belarus's democratic opposition and the country's state apparatus headed by Lukashenka. In the South Caucasus, the simmering territorial dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020 ultimately turned into the Second Karabakh War. Ukraine has been a site of armed conflict at varying levels since Russia seized Crimea in early 2014. In many cases, the Russian government has been actively involved in such conflicts, building its influence under a president who has expressed interest in rebuilding the Soviet Union. Putin certainly made it clear in 2007 that he viewed the end of the Soviet Union as the biggest disaster of the 20th century.

Developing a new *Ostpolitik*

Finding a way out of the current deadlock clearly requires a new Eastern policy that will eventually establish a new form of *Ostpolitik*. The new policy will open chances for political dialogue and economic co-operation. A new *Ostpolitik* should consider the region's various problems and crises and ultimately aspire to become a European strategy. The Eastern neighbourhood countries should not be seen through the prism of the former Soviet Union but rather as independent, reforming European countries. In light of increasing pressure to act in the region, this issue became an important part of Germany's recent troika presidency in the Coun-

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During last year's elections in Germany, international affairs were not on the top of the debate agenda for both the voters and political parties.

cil of the European Union. The 18-month programme was prepared by Germany, Portugal and Slovenia during the first half of 2021. Responding to growing European pressure to act, the German foreign ministry and various international affairs experts started debating and planning a new European *Ostpolitik*. The main priorities of the approach included security, economic co-operation and understanding.

The global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic overshadowed Berlin's EU presidency. Like every other European country, Germany had no alternative but to make the pandemic its top priority. Even as conflicts in and with Eastern Europe were increasing, *Ostpolitik* was not viewed as an appropriate focus for both national and European budgets. In Germany, the issue was certainly debated in the run-up to the September elections. However, dialogue strategies dedicated to conflict resolution and global peace were generally a non-issue during the election campaign.

A new *Ostpolitik* during the German election

Winning sympathy from the population is more based on solutions for national problems and less on problems of international affairs. The 2021 German election fits this model. Real priorities can be seen in the programmes and plans of the most

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important political parties. The Christian Democratic Party, after 16 years of guidance by Angela Merkel, has not yet developed a post-Merkel agenda. Merkel was famously a European contact for Vladimir Putin as well as for the heads of other European countries in the eastern neighbourhood. In this regard, she was known for frequent meetings and telephone calls. After the election, when Merkel was still caretaker Chancellor, Belarus and Russia were using migration from the greater Middle East as an instrument for creating a European conflict.

Merkel's strategic task was to use her knowledge and European profile to develop a successful reconsolidation agenda. In this regard, Merkel held telephone conversations with Alyaksandr Lukashenka, who remains in power in Belarus. Even if this was not much desired by other European heads of state, due to the illegitimacy of the dictator, Merkel attempted to establish a channel of communication during the migration crisis. Because of the missing European strategy, the effort had limited success through late November 2021. The whole world was talking about the pictures across the Belarusian-Polish border while Lukashenka continued his authoritarian repressions in Belarus unhindered. Belarus became a North Korea in Europe.

In this way, a European *Ostpolitik* is needed to prevent such situations through dialogue. Another example was the Minsk I and II peace process to limit armed conflict in Ukraine guided by Merkel and the French president at the time, François Hollande, along with the presidents of Russia and Ukraine. Since the beginning of the conflict in 2014, the involved participants were trying to negotiate peace and stability in the region. Although Merkel was an important contact point for the peace talk, years of talks in implementing peace and cooperation in the conflict zones of eastern Ukraine and Crimea did not go beyond personal contact. Putin continues to assert Russian influence in the region while, on the other side, Ukraine has been trying to protect its territorial integrity while pursuing transformation toward European and democratic values. Completing its integration in European institutions remains a goal for Ukraine. Yet the European *Ostpolitik* has met with limited success – just as the process guided by Willy Brandt 50 years ago had limited success for quite some time. Progress towards this goal would have been a priority during the German EU presidency in 2021 but it was overshadowed by the pandemic. Since Merkel failed to put the Minsk peace talks in institutional terms, an Eastern policy from the CDU did not enjoy success beyond personal networks, and it became difficult to continue during the election or as a part of a potential new coalition.

The Christian Democratic Party, after 16 years of guidance by Angela Merkel, has not yet developed a post-Merkel agenda.

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Traditional Eastern policy is an agenda of the social democrats (SPD), who can draw on the tradition of key actors such as Willy Brandt. During the last decades, SPD Eastern policy was run by Gernot Erler, a member of the parliament between 1987 and 2017. Erler served as the German government's coordinator for Inter-Societal Co-operation with Russia, Central Asia, and the Eastern Partnership Countries at the Federal Foreign Office. From 2015 to 2016, he assumed the position of the Special Representative of Germany for the country's chairmanship of the OSCE. Since Erler's departure from both these roles and the parliament, the SPD lost a position for running German Eastern policy, and now nobody is implementing an Eastern agenda.

The problems of hybrid warfare

Central and Eastern Europe was not a priority during the election for the Free Democrats (Germany's liberal party) and the Greens. Whilst the liberals concentrated on their core issues of trade and finance, the Greens focused on climate change to the extent that it became a national priority. As a result of voters' low interest in foreign affairs, the election programmes of these political parties did not mention Eastern policy.

Soon after the election, a consensus emerged around building what is known as an "Ampel coalition" (traffic light coalition) between the Social Democrats (red), Free Democrats (yellow) and the Greens. Setting of priorities started right after the election as all three parties attempted to build a coalition and agree on each group's political role. In the meantime, talks regarding Eastern policy once again appeared in the country. For instance, the aforementioned migration crisis on the border between Belarus and Poland occurred around this time. Berlin's regional policy once again remained without a broader political framework.

> As a result of low voter interest in foreign affairs, the programmes of Germany's political parties did not mention Eastern policy.

The low priority of foreign policy generally, and Eastern policy particularly, could be seen during debate shaping the election. In this regard, foreign affairs questions appeared in the information the parties distributed, but they were not a major part of discussions. One example is the *Wahlomat* (Elect-o-meter) run by the publically-financed federal Agency for Civic Education. It is an online series of questions designed to show which party's positions are most closely aligned with the participants. The *Wahlomat* has existed since 2002 and has established itself as a consistent source of information in the

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run-up to elections: in total, it was used over 100 million times in the pre-election period. The *Wahlomat* was based on political party programmes. Foreign affairs were mostly limited to the question of whether Germany should leave the European Union, a far-fetched notion that effectively plays no role in German policy discourse.

Various campaign elements, such as TV debates and the parties' election programmes, reflect the limited importance of foreign affairs during the election for both voters and the parties. Even if *Ostpolitik* was not named as a priority during the vote, various issues connected with Eastern policy were being debated, particularly in relation to its political and economic effects. This is exemplified by Gazprom gas pipeline Nord Stream 2, which could potentially allow Russia to directly provide Germany with energy. Of course, this project is an instrumental part of Russia's plan to offer gas more directly to the West. The SPD's Norbert Walter-Borjans was in favour of commissioning the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, emphasising that Germany can rarely choose suppliers based on political sympathies. The deputy leader of the Free Democrats, Alexander Graf Lambsdorff, also discussed the pipeline's benefits, stressing that the exact route through which Germany's energy travels is not an especially important issue. The Christian Democrats' position has traditionally differentiated between economic needs and Russia's ongoing challenge to democratic development in the European neighbourhood. In contrast, the Greens have recently spoken out against an operating permit. Nord Stream 2 became an issue dividing political and economic interests between the political parties during the election campaign without shaping a new Eastern policy. Meanwhile Belarus was using migrants as an instrument to further develop its European influence.

Positive developments in German-Polish relations continued through the 16 years of Angela Merkel's chancellorship. Even if the Polish stance changed to a more complicated issue, the legacy of co-operation would continue. Germany supports Poland in the EU framework. Germany is an advocate of Poland for European relations as well. In this regard, the election will not change much. That also means not overreacting to the latest regional challenge.

European Eastern policy and the new German government

To sum up, there is an imbalance between problems of relations between the countries of the Eastern neighbourhood, the Russian government, and the members of the European Union. Problems of hybrid warfare caused by the Russian government are related to illegal migration to Poland and Lithuania and require a

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strategy for a European *Ostpolitik*. Germany, guided by the dialogue-first approach of Angela Merkel, was an important actor. The new government, based on a traffic-light coalition of liberals, Greens and social democrats, is to be carefully observed for its stance on *Ostpolitik* amid multiple conflicts in Eastern Europe that threaten peace and co-operation. The old *Ostpolitik* does not provide European solutions and should be developed further to solve European problems.

Concerns have now been raised about Russian troop movements on the Ukrainian border. This development could lead to various actions, such as simple intimidation or even a limited operation in Donbas. Putin could soon consolidate his grip on the pro-Russian satellite republics in the region and further destabilise Ukraine as a whole. Hence, a European *Ostpolitik* should be a strategic answer to the hybrid problems challenging Eastern and Western actors and institutions. Europe after the German election should react accordingly. NEE

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

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The Eurasian Dream

In the pursuit of splendour

GRZEGORZ SZYMBORSKI

Throughout the last 500 years, Russia has looked for different concepts with which it can strengthen its greatness and image of prestige. The ideology of Eurasianism is a relatively modern example of just one of these inspiring concepts, with the belief directly influenced by various intellectual and political legacies throughout the country's history.

The history of Russia, apart from being the story of a nation, is by no means simply a tale of intriguing people desperately seeking greatness above all. However, striving for exceptionality remains a key feature of many national outlooks. As a Pole, I am at least partially aware of how often my fellow countrymen praise Polish history and its significance, exaggerating our achievements and showing off before the rest of the world. I believe such grand rhetoric is at least partly based on a nation's genuine struggle for its place and identity. Understandably enough, the idea of uniqueness always seems to concern a good leadership. In fact, such ideals constitute the goal that every nation strives for in the long run. Surely enough, no one would ever publish a manifesto about a country being average rather than great.

This greatness is something for which Russia has truly sought throughout the ages, at least since Philotheus and his idea of the Third Rome. Throughout the last 500 years, the Kremlin has looked for different ideas to strengthen the country in its pursuit of greatness. Benefitting from various intellectual and political legacies, the concept of Eurasianism is just one such idea today.

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Sparks of inspiration

Imperial status, overconfidence in relation to the West, and interest in Asia all influenced Russia throughout the 19th century. Specific elements of the future Eurasian worldview subsequently emerged at this time, as the thoughts of particular intellectuals and movements introduced new themes during pivotal political moments. Certainly, "Slavophilia" must be mentioned as the main predecessor to Eurasianism. This movement was based upon a strong opposition to the West, the rejection of individuality and advocacy in favour of Slavic unity under the command of the Tsardom. The idea first emerged in the 1830s among some thinkers in Russia who naturally found themselves in opposition to the development model supported by the Tsar Peter the Great. According to Matthew J. Schmidt, a professor of national security at the University of New Haven, Eurasianism was a variant of Slavophilia. In the late 19th century, philosopher Vladimir Solovyov argued that the movement's linguistic nationalism narrowed the scope of potential expansion. This is why the idea was reshaped and became more inclusive later on.

Another reason for many Russian intellectuals to "drift away" from the West was the Russian defeat in the Crimean War of 1853–56. Although Russia belonged to the "Concert of Europe", this conflict highlighted much of the external opposition to Tsarist aspirations. This encouraged domestic debate about the West and the role it should play in Russian politics. Nikolai Danilevsky's *Russia and Europe* published in 1869 was one of the most recognisable and influential volumes in this regard. He was the first to use the term Eurasia, which was viewed as a landmass separated from Europe and Asia by various mountain ranges covered with steppe and plains. He called for the tribes and peoples of this area to unite under the Russian banner. When he was not writing novels, Fyodor Dostoevsky also discussed the rebirth of his motherland, the Orthodox Church and promoted the "Rotting West" cliché.

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Aversion towards Europe had to be accompanied by some alternatives. In 1833, Mikhail Magnitsky's article "The Fate of Russia" claimed that the Tatar invasion of Rus' ultimately saved the country from Latinisation. At the end of the 19th century, Asian studies were quite advanced in the Russian Empire, which had seized substantial territory in Central Asia and the Caucasus between 1847 and 1896. Józef Sękowski, Sergey Uvarov and Mikhail Pogodin were the pioneers of this increasing interest in the East. Both Uvarov and Pogodin were very influential. They chaired the country's education ministry and called for redirecting imperial expansion towards the

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East. The interest in that direction was another message conveyed by Dostoevsky. He called for rediscovering Asia as the cradle of Russian spiritual values.

Shortly before the official emergence of the Eurasian movement, Eastern affairs once again attracted much attention in St Petersburg. This was especially true during and after the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–05. More and more books and publications in the Tsardom treated Asia as a truly advanced culture that should no longer be perceived simply as inferior to Europe.

The interwar period

Eurasianism was officially conceptualised in the 1920s and became yet another embodiment of the glorious anti-western dream. The ideology emerged following the defeat of the White Russian movement during the country's civil war (1917–1922). With the Tsardom shrinking, the old regime replaced and the Orthodox Church undermined, many intellectuals fled the state. These figures settled in various European cities, which quickly became centres for new thought on the future of the supposedly doomed homeland. According to historian Irina Kandrova, the idea attracted great attention as it expressed the wishful thinking of thousands of émigrés who left the motherland after the October Revolution. The concept quickly ignited discussion concerning Russia's failure in the First World War, as well as the communists' eventual success. The Tatar rule of Rus, the era of Peter the Great, and the First World War remained these émigrés' main historical fields of interest. The original idea's popularity was surprisingly short-lived. Yet, shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War Eurasianism was just shadow of its former self.

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Many Russian outcasts were clearly disappointed with the country's alliance with England and France during the First World War. These countries were naturally associated with Russia's recent predicaments and the rise of Bolshevism. At the same time, many émigrés ended up in countries like Czechoslovakia or Germany, which influenced the prevailing thoughts of this group. During this period, the Russian philosopher and linguist Nikolay Trubetskoy published *Europe and Mankind* in Sofia, Bulgaria. Although by accident, this work would ultimately inspire the fledgling Eurasian movement.

The book discussed the author's views on Europe's true identity and how Russians should approach the West. Trubetskoy offered few solutions or political di-

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rection regarding this supposed divide. However, the author still tried to promote a new direction for the country in a conservative manner, following the example of the Slavophiles. He wished for Russia to follow a path wholly different to the ideas of Europe. For him, Soviet rule was yet another western experiment in Russia, similar to the seemingly troubled reforms under the reign of Peter the Great. According to Trubetskoy, that era marked the beginning of the country's Europeanisation, which only inevitably led to the Bolshevik Revolution. The father of the Eurasianists criticised the various secular reforms undertaken by both Peter, Catherine the Great and the Bolsheviks. As for Trubetskoy, all these actions resulted in the weakening of the Orthodox Church, which was deemed an essential institution by the Eurasianists.

Referring to the title of the book, it is Russia that represents "Mankind" – the mass of people whose fate could be decided by a more advanced western civilization. Trubetskoy subsequently argued against a world dominated by one culture. As a result, societies should remain somehow isolated in order to develop naturally without foreign intervention. For him, Romano-Germanic influence was a threat against which other cultures had to unite. Whilst he could not work out how to properly challenge Europe, he believed that its superiority would not last forever.

Prague became the leading centre for Eurasian studies. The movement operated in many distant cities, including Berlin, Belgrade and Paris.

One may say that Trubetskoy's book is about Russian complexes and a need for comparison with Europe. Despite this, it found many supporters. A reviewer of the book, Pyotr Savitsky, approved of Trubetskoy's thoughts and become one of the fathers of Eurasianism. He later named his publishing house "Eurasianism" and forged a new movement that announced its manifesto and programme in 1921. The community advocated for the renewal of "Russia-Eurasia" as an entity different from Europe and Asia due to its mix of European, Byzantine and the so-called Turanian (associated with Central Asia) cultures. The first and most iconic books and leaflets were published in the early 1920s in Sofia. However, soon enough, Prague became the leading centre for Eurasian studies. The movement operated in many distant cities, including Berlin, Belgrade and Paris.

Until 1925, all the authors of the popular movement peacefully coexisted and inspired one another. Everyone could add their intellectual insights as long as they were anti-western and oriented towards patriotism. But soon enough, differences between particular authors emerged, with various understandings of communism eventually leading to a breakdown in unity. Trubetskoy and Savitsky believed

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that there could be no compromise with Bolsheviks, who were perceived as barbarians (still the lesser evil regarding Russia's fate, compared to classic western influence). Some others were ready to negotiate, including one of the movement's founders, Lev Karsavin.

In 1927 the Eurasianists tried to unite and organise a political party. A programme called "Eurasianism" was issued but its inner structures proved to be underdeveloped. Grigoryi Florkovsky, an initial supporter of the movement, admitted that too many Eurasianists' assumptions relied on emotions. He also came to believe that condemning Peter the Great's legacy was a mistake.

The first summit of the Eurasianists took place only in 1932, too late for the movement to truly become a formidable force. Indeed, the idea had already lost much of its popularity. With Trubetskoy's death in 1938, Eurasianism would almost be forgotten until after the fall of communism. Still, much like every reactionary movement, it was a threat to the Soviet Union. Many Eurasianists were subsequently persecuted by the authorities. In 1945, with the liberation of Prague, Pyotr Savitsky was arrested and put in the Gulag by the Soviets. Lev Karsavin shared the same fate. He was jailed in 1949 and sent to the Gulag for membership in the White Russian organisation "Eurasia", which apparently aimed to overthrow the communists.

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Inventing uniqueness

Classic Eurasianism is remembered as yet another Russian approach with regards to its imperial status, which was to be anti-western in nature and supportive of the country's supposedly unique heritage. The last aspect turned out to be particularly important, as Eurasianists believe that their culture's achievements should be spread and promoted across the region. Overall, Eurasia was deemed to be a distinct part of the world with Russia as its geographical heart.

As aforementioned, Eurasian culture, rather than Slavic heritage, was the cornerstone of the Eurasianists' outlook. Konstantin Leontiev openly spoke of Russian society as not purely Slavic but affected both by Byzantine and Turanian elements. For Florkovsky, the core of the Russian spirit was Asian, with a European layout applied at the time of Peter the Great and his successors. This mixed culture was nonetheless substantially strengthened by the Orthodox Church, "the living organism" distinct from the Catholic Church disregarded as too rational by nature. This spiritual heritage was the crucial element of Eurasianism and its "mission" to expand beyond Eurasia and to the West in order to promote true Christendom.

Muslims were perceived as allies to the Eurasian cause as their mentality was considered closer to Eastern Christianity.

Muslims were perceived as allies to the Eurasian cause as their mentality was meant to be closer to Eastern Christianity comparing to Catholic or Protestant outlooks. After all, it was Sunni Islam that inspired the Russian Orthodox Church to glorify secular authority as sanctified and ceded by God himself. As a result, both religions served as a tool for absolute monarchs. It was Eurasianism that showed the positive bond between Russians and Tatars, rehabilitating an often troubled past. Overthinking history led to surprising but inspiring claims by some Eurasianists. Namely, that the 16th century Tsardom of Muscovy was more an heir to the Golden Horde's legacy than that of Kyivan Rus's. Trubetskoy noticed that the latter covered just a small portion of the 19th century Russian Empire, while the Golden Horde almost overlapped this territory. This is why Genghis Khan was praised as somewhat of a father of Eurasian uniqueness.

It should be noted that Eurasianism faced many contradictions in this regard. On the one hand, it bolstered isolationism as a means of cultural preservation. At the same time, it advocated for intervention elsewhere, since Eurasianists wished to spread the true Orthodox message abroad. Whilst some believed that the Orthodox Church should have a leading role in Eurasia, others supported religious equality. Although Eurasia theoretically consisted of equal tribes and cultures, Russia was

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granted the title of "first among equals". According to political scientist Iwona Massaka, these contradictions show the theoretical vagueness of the Eurasian project.

It is about history, but not about the past

As vague as it is, Eurasianism survived throughout the Soviet era and re-emerged nowadays thanks to Soviet historian Lev Gumilyov, who had studied this subject since the 1970s. He believed that Russia must establish a Eurasian empire if the country was to be reborn. The downfall of the USSR led to the rebirth of Eurasianism in the security vacuum of the 1990s. The interwar worldview filled this gap for many nationalists in Russia, who viewed it as an alternate road to imperial success.

Today, "neo-Eurasianism" is an even more diverse movement than its predecessor before the war. Whilst the ideology continues to influence contemporary Russian politics, it is by no means the official ideology of the state. Nowadays, Aleksandr Dugin appears to be the chief ideologue of this dogmatic neo-Eurasianism, which is more oriented towards geopolitics and conquest than the cultural and philosophical concerns of Eurasianism. However, Dugin still supports the claim that the Tatar invasion of Rus' turned to be benefitial for the nation. He supports traditional Russian values – orthodoxy, monarchy and nationalism – which reflect Sergei Uvarov's classic Tsarist motto. At the same time, he openly speaks of rivalry with the US and the necessity of the conquest of Europe.

Given the current relations between Moscow and the West, Eurasianism has proven to be a useful tool for the Kremlin. Indeed, Putin's establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union as a challenger to the European Union in 2015 showcases the continued influence of the ideology. Despite this, the bloc has not lived up to Moscow's hopes. The project's focus was narrowed down to economic co-operation due to resistance from other member states concerned about their sovereignty.

The academic Nadezhda Arbatova often criticises the Eurasian tendencies of the Kremlin. According to her, "the three faces of Russian neo-Eurasianism are reactionary ideology, imperial expansionism and economic integration; but as the first two grow stronger, the third becomes increasingly less likely." She further believes that Moscow largely inherited from the Tatars the negative "horde system", namely backwardness, poor governance and bureaucratic uncertainty. In this sense, what Eurasianists and neo-Eurasianists praise is actually a burden that prevents Russia from proper development. The true legacy, but burden.

In 2013 Professor Vladimer Papava claimed that since the collapse of the Soviet Union Kremlin decision-makers had been unable to find a new role for their country. Although these words were written almost a decade ago, all of Moscow's

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actions undertaken since 2013 prove that this issue remains an important topic. This is especially true given Putin's recent nostalgic comments made on the 30th anniversary of the fall of the USSR. As long as Russia drifts away from Europe, the imperial dream becomes more seductive. According to geographer and economist Aleksandr Druzhinin, Moscow's "return to the East" (*разворот на восток*) is a necessary development. Russia supposedly faces a geopolitical choice given its ongoing crisis with the West and rivalry with China. For him, this situation is more of an opportunity than a danger. The country should subsequently prepare itself to take advantage of these circumstances in the upcoming years. Perhaps such a move will allow Moscow to face the future and finally grant the country the proper place in the world it so desperately seeks. NEE

Grzegorz Szymborski is a graduate at the College of Europe in Natolin (Poland), a graduate from the Faculty of Law and Administration at the University of Warsaw and author of the books: *Wolność niejedno ma imię* (2013), *Wyprawa Fryderyka Augusta I do Inflant w latach 1700 – 1701 w świetle wojny domowej na Litwie* (2015) and *Działania zbrojne w Rzeczypospolitej podczas intwerwencji rosyjskiej 1764 roku* (2020).

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Belarusians find precarious protection in Tbilisi

MACKENZIE BALDINGER

Georgia remains one of the few countries in the region that has not imposed a travel ban on Belarusian airlines. These continued flights have made Tbilisi an ideal destination for Belarusians who have come to Georgia for political or humanitarian reasons. However, is the government ready and able to guarantee their safety?

In recent years, Georgia's vibrant capital Tbilisi has been lauded as a top destination for fledgling startups and digital nomads in search of a low cost of living and close connections to Europe. However, since the highly disputed Belarusian presidential elections of 2020 and the onslaught of political persecution following widespread protests in the country, Georgia's largest city has also become an attractive destination for those fleeing Belarus.

At first glance, Tbilisi offers a seemingly safe destination for the various activists, opposition figures and journalists who have left Belarus in droves following harsh crackdowns under Alyaksandr Lukashenka. Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations and strained post-Soviet relationship with Russia frame it a haven for those fleeing an authoritarian regime closely allied to Moscow.

Ideal destination?

Among those who have settled in Georgia is human rights activist "Ana". She initially came to Tbilisi in April 2021 for an extended visit and decided to stay.

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"Around that time, the situation started escalating in Belarus," Ana says. "The home of our organisation's co-founder was searched … and then the Ryanair incident took place in May. At that point, I was not sure if I went back that I would be able to leave again, so I decided to stay in Tbilisi."

Ana, who speaks on the condition of anonymity, says that in addition to Georgia's low cost of living, its ease of accessibility for Belarusians is one of the primary reasons for its popularity. Following the forced diversion of a Ryanair passenger flight to Minsk in May 2021, which resulted in the arrest of opposition journalist Roman Pratasevich, many European countries issued sanctions and effective travel bans against Belarus. As EU-based airlines were prohibited from entering Belarusian airspace and Belarusian airlines were banned from flying within the European Union, the country's access to its European neighbours essentially ended overnight.

Georgia, however, remains one of the few countries in the region that has not imposed a travel ban on Belarusian airlines. These continued flights, as well as the one-year visa-free stay automatically granted to citizens of Belarus when they enter Georgia, have made Tbilisi an ideal destination for the estimated 100 Belarusians that have come to the country for political reasons, as well as human rights activists like Ana who has sought to find a new base to carry out her work remotely after a large number of NGOs were dissolved by Belarusian authorities in July.

While the Georgian government's lack of restrictive measures towards Lukashenka's regime has provided an important passageway for those Belarusians seeking refuge, it has also provided a precarious sense of safety. What initially seemed to be a soft stance on human rights violations in Belarus became a concerning sign of co-operation in August 2021, when an agreement between the State Security Services of Georgia (SUS) and the State Security Committee of Belarus (KGB) entered into force. This caused Belarusians in Tbilisi to ask questions regarding their supposed haven's safety.

New opportunity to target Belarusians abroad

Days before the first anniversary of Belarus's fraudulent presidential election, news emerged that Georgia's SUS had exchanged diplomatic notes with the Belarusian KGB and brought into force a security agreement signed five years prior. The agreement, originally signed in 2016 when Belarus enjoyed warmer relations with the European Union, aims to "strengthen friendly relations and future co-operation" between Georgia and Belarus through "co-operation in the field of state security". It includes provisions that allow the exchange of personal data and information related to terrorism, illegal arms trafficking, transnational organised

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crime, and "crimes against the constitutional order, sovereignty, and territorial integrity" of either state.

SUS representatives have attempted to assure those that are critical of the agreement that Article 5.6 allows either side to deny information requests on the grounds that "the request could infringe on human rights", "endanger national interests", or violate "domestic law" and "international obligations". However, human rights defenders have expressed concern that the agreement could become a vehicle for the Belarusian authorities to target activists and journalists living in Georgia.

In a letter to the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya cautioned that Belarusian authorities had previously used "anti-terrorist legislation" to politically persecute opponents. She further argued that the only way to guarantee Belarusians' safety in Georgia would be through "complete termination of the agreement".

In the August statement, Amnesty International warned that the "vaguely formulated clause" of Article 5.6 does not include any "legal process or safeguards against potential human rights violations". This gives the two states' security services full discretion in enforcing the agreement. Whilst the United States has decided to specifically sanction the Belarusian KGB for its role in "targeting the opposition in the aftermath of the fraudulent 2020 election", Georgia's SUS also holds an unfavourable reputation when it comes to respecting human rights.

Georgia's lack of restrictive measures towards the Lukashenka regime has provided a passageway for those Belarusians seeking refuge.

Notorious for its continued use of Soviet-style mass surveillance, Georgia's SUS triggered public outrage in September 2021 when thousands of leaked documents revealed a surveillance system that extended to the clergy, NGOs, journalists, government officials and foreign diplomats. Condemned by the Georgian Public Defender's office as a "gross violation of human rights" that "illegally interfered" in citizens' private lives, this recent scandal is only the latest in a series of leaks that have prompted political demonstrations in front of SUS headquarters and increased animosity and distrust towards the security service.

In addition to the widespread doubt that the security service would deter potential human rights violations when implementing the agreement, many also feel that the Georgian government's record on human rights has increasingly deteriorated in recent years. Natia Tavberidze is a project coordinator at Human Rights House Tbilisi, an umbrella organisation that houses five civil society organisations and works to support Belarusian human rights activists as they settle in Georgia.

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She says that the government has done little to assuage the anxiety of Belarusians living in the country.

"While the government has not openly targeted Belarusians coming to Georgia, it has also done nothing to support them. From a human rights-based approach, the Georgian government massively failed to protect human rights this year. There were violations of freedom of expression and attacks against the Tbilisi pride activists by far-right nationalists, and the state did nothing. Because of this, we cannot trust or expect that this government will do anything to protect the human rights of Belarusians here."

Many human rights defenders have criticised the Georgian government for failing to prosecute various far-right and religious figures responsible for planning these aforementioned attacks against journalists and pride activists in July. This is despite the plethora of open-source evidence that prompted the Public Defender's office to recommend charges to be brought against a prominent clergyman and the head of far-right ultranationalist media entity Alt-Info.

Activists also note that Georgia's reputation for protecting political exiles was irrevocably damaged following the 2017 arrest of Azerbaijani journalist Afgan Mukhtarli. The political exile, who was living in Georgia at the time, was allegedly abducted and sent back to Azerbaijan with the assistance of Georgian authorities. He was then sentenced on spurious charges for his critical assessments of the Azeri government.

Another misstep on the path to Euro-Atlantic co-operation?

In addition to a rocky human rights record in 2021, the signing of the agreement between Georgia and Belarus comes at a time when Tbilisi is facing strained relations with some of its closest allies. The timing of the agreement came in the midst of an important election season for Georgia, seen by many in the country as a referendum on the ruling Georgian Dream party. Only days before the bilateral co-operation became public knowledge, the ruling party announced that it would be withdrawing from the EU-brokered agreement of April 19th 2021, which ended months of political deadlock. The document stipulated that early parliamentary elections should be held if the ruling party failed to procure 43 per cent of the proportional vote in the 2021 municipal elections.

The withdrawal from the agreement was seen as a show of bad faith by the ruling party towards future co-operation with the opposition. It was also perceived as a rebuke of the EU involvement in Georgian domestic affairs, an issue that was further exacerbated throughout the autumn months. At the beginning of Septem-

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ber, Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili announced that the country "would not accept" EU macrofinancial assistance after it became evident that the country had failed to implement the judicial reforms required to obtain the loan. Tension further increased throughout October and November as the arrest of former President Mikheil Saakashvili prompted criticism from the EU and US representatives regarding his treatment and the political nature of the charges against him.

As analysts warn of democratic backsliding and western detachment in Georgia, former US Ambassador to Georgia Ian Kelly has claimed that the signing of the new security agreement amounted to the abandonment of the liberal values that have bound the country to its western allies for years. "You withdraw from an agreement brokered by the EU and double down on this agreement. Prove to us you have not cast your lot with bloody authoritarian regimes," he challenged in an August 16th Tweet.

Kelly's assessment echoes the feelings of human rights activists, who have warned that the Georgian Dream government has made democratic development and human rights protections secondary considerations in its pursuit of power. While Tbilisi's reputation as a refuge for oppressed dissidents from Belarus (and increasingly Russia) remains intact, its own democratic identity crisis and increasingly ambiguous relationship with the West is casting a shadow over its allure. For the Belarusian exiles that have found safety in Georgia, this realisation has caused a worrying sense of uncertainty in their new home. NEE

Mackenzie Baldinger is a contributing editor with *New Eastern Europe* and a political analyst focusing on political extremism and populism in Central and Eastern Europe. She holds a master's degree in International Relations from Central European University and a Master of Arts in European Politics from Leiden University.

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Lukashenka's non-reforms

KATHRIN YAROMICH

After a year of waiting for Belarus's constitutional reform amendments, the authorities have unveiled a draft document. For those still with some hope for political transformation, the proposed changes suggest that there will not be any real transition of power.

The first mention of new constitutional reform occurred during Alyaksandr Lukashenka's address to the Belarusian people a few days before the 2020 elections. The Belarusian president declared then that "All reforms must start with the constitution. Not from street unrest, but from the basic law." During Lukashenka's visit to a factory amid the August 2020 protests, he offered to amend the constitution and reduce his presidential powers. This took place while he was being heckled by the factory's workers. Amidst this turmoil, the Belarusian authorities began putting together new amendments to the constitution. These were recently published by the state-run news agency BelTA.

The most significant thing to come out of these proposed amendments is the fact that they would allow Lukashenka to further secure his grip on power. The changes have specified that an individual can only serve two terms as president, each for five years. However, these restrictions would only apply going forward. This means that Lukashenka could rule until 2035 (when he would be 81 years old). The amendments also suggest legal immunity for the former president.

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Peculiar institution

The proposed changes also appear to weaken the parliament – an institution already often referred to as the government's "fifth wheel". They also call for a stronger role for the All-Belarus People's Assembly, which consists of a periodic gathering of loyalists that currently has no legal status. With wide-ranging powers to approve foreign, security and economic policy, the assembly would function as a parallel structure next to the parliament. It would also be given the power to propose changes to the constitution, draft laws and select top court judges and members of the country's Central Election Commission. A sitting president would automatically become a delegate of the 1200-seat assembly and may act as chair if elected by the other delegates.

The All-Belarus People's Assembly is a peculiar institution formed not by a simple popular vote, but by the authorities (legislative, executive and judicial branches) and "proper" public organisations. Made up of 1200 people, members will participate in the country's decision-making processes only very occasionally. Their primary responsibilities will face little disruption. Yet, the assembly will have significant influence with regards to decision-making. It reserves the right to impeach the president, to impose a state of emergency and even to determine the legitimacy of elections. It would also determine the direction of domestic and foreign policy, develop the concept of national security and propose changes to the constitution.

For Lukashenka, these amendments open two possibilities for him to stay in power. He can either be re-elected as president until 2035, or at some point become the chair of the All-Belarusian People's Assembly. In case he decides to leave his current post, his successor's power will be very tightly controlled by the assembly and, more importantly, its chairman. However, Lukashenka has reserved his decision until 2025. In the meantime, he could use this ambiguity to his advantage during negotiations with Moscow.

> The new constitutional amendments leave two possibilities open for Lukashenka to stay in power.

For those willing to run for the presidency, the requirements have been tightened in the updated constitution. The minimum age has risen from 35 to 40. The person must have lived in Belarus before the elections for at least 20 years (it used to be ten) and must not have had citizenship, or even a residence permit, of any other country. It also states that a person must not own any other document of a foreign state giving certain benefits. Under this definition, Poland's *Karta Polaka* (Pole's card) – a document confirming a person's Polish nationality – would also prevent someone from running in Belarusian elections. These changes appear to

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The most significant thing to come out of the proposed amendments to the Belarusian constitution is the fact that they would allow Lukashenka to further secure his grip on power.

be aimed directly at opposition members, many of whom were forced into exile to avoid political persecution.

Presidential powers

According to the proposed amendments, the president's powers have been noticeably thinned out. The head of state will be deprived of the right to appoint six members of the Central Election Commission, the head of the State Control Committee, and the chairmen and members of the country's highest courts. The president can be impeached not only by the All-Belarus People's Assembly but also by the electorate, given they collect 150,000 signatures. However, whether or not the president has committed a "serious offence" to warrant such a move will be decided by the country's Constitutional Court. The assembly will only be able to confirm this decision.

Despite the assembly's power to reject any of the president's decisions based on national security concerns, the president's influence will remain substantial. The president would continue to control the security forces and the executive branch,

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making it hypothetically possible for the leader to withstand the "checks and balances" of the All-Belarus People's Assembly.

Some of the amendments seem to be vague and cosmetic in nature. One clause mentions "the preservation of national identity and sovereignty", as well as "cultural and spiritual traditions".

Another clause provides that "everyone should show social responsibility, make a feasible contribution to the development of society and the state." Meanwhile, Minsk must ensure "the preservation of the historical truth and memory of the heroic deed of the Belarusian people during the Great Patriotic War". The changes also note that "the manifestation of patriotism and the preservation of the historical memory of the heroic past of the Belarusian people are the duty of every citizen." The proposed amendments specifically clarify marriage as "a union of a woman and a man" and suggest that "family, motherhood, fatherhood and childhood are under the protection of the state."

The new constitution would omit the clause that bans Belarusian servicemen from participating in missions abroad.

The new constitution would also omit the clause that bans Belarusian servicemen from participating in missions abroad. This law has proven to be very useful for Lukashenka. In 2019 the Belarusian president refused to send troops to Syria by referring to the constitution. The new amendments, however, state that military operations abroad "to participate in ensuring collective security and activities to maintain international peace and security" can be initiated at the president's suggestion.

Where once documents talked of Belarus being a "nuclear-free" and "neutral" state, the new draft of the constitution simply states that the country "excludes military aggression from its territory against other states". The removal of the old clause is especially worrying, as Lukashenka recently expressed his readiness to host Russian nuclear weapons if NATO moves US bombs from Germany to Eastern Europe. At the same time, this might have been done to simply get on Moscow's good side.

A new referendum

The issue of a future constitutional referendum in Belarus was likely an important point of discussion during negotiations between Vladimir Putin and Lukashenka in St Petersburg on December 29th 2021 – just two days after the publication of the draft amendments. Belarusian political analyst Valery Karbalevich

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believes that the constitutional referendum project was started following pressure from the Kremlin. In September 2020 Lukashenka promised Putin that he would begin a transition of power. This happened after Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov gave Belarus an ultimatum: Russia's support can only continue if Lukashenka resigns.

Instead, Lukashenka has been trying to find ways to maintain power. Certainly, a lot has changed since the country faced widespread unrest in 2020. Firstly, Lukashenka now has the domestic situation under control and protests have been fully suppressed. Secondly, Russia's own relations with the West have greatly deteriorated. Lukashenka's readiness to support Putin and provoke the European Union and the United States only plays into the hands of Moscow. Karbalevich believes that Russia is keen to see the referendum in Belarus happen given the current conditions.

> Lukashenka's readiness to support Putin and provoke the European Union only plays into the hands of Moscow.

The amendments were criticised by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, whose team also proposed draft constitutional amendments at the beginning of 2021. "The regime's draft constitution doesn't give Belarusians a real choice. It will let the dictator secure power, control the situation through the artificial All-Belarusian People's Assembly and avoid prosecution. A new presidential election is the only solution to the crisis," she wrote on Twitter. She also wrote on her Telegram channel that Belarusians are being given "a choice between Lukashenka or Lukashenka".

Belarus's democratic parties refused to entertain the idea of conducting a joint campaign to observe the constitutional referendum. A key issue driving this decision was the persecution of observers and party members during the 2020 presidential elections. The EU has "taken note" of the published draft amendments. However, a European Commission representative recently stated that "national dialogue and fair presidential elections" remain the organisation's key priorities.

During his 27-year rule, Lukashenka has held three referenda. These involved abolishing limits on presidential terms, amending the constitution, and bringing back Soviet-style state symbols. Last year, he passed a package of repressive laws to further restrict civil rights and the free flow of information in the country.

What is next?

The amendments will be subject to a referendum that is scheduled to take place on February 27th 2022. They will be approved if more than 50 per cent of vot-

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ers support them. It should be noted that there is also a turnout threshold of 50 per cent. Tsikhanouskaya's office, as well as Pavel Latushko's National Anti-Crisis Management organisation, are urging Belarusians to boycott the referendum by crossing out all the answers on their ballots.

History has shown that even controlled "power transitions" can easily get out of hand. The recent mass unrest in Kazakhstan is a prime example. Whilst people might have seemingly taken to the streets to protest against a drastic fuel price hike, the true reasons are much deeper. Indeed, the protesters were responding to larger issues such as inequality and the country's political system. Chanting "Old man out", many Kazakhs were furious with the 81-year-old former president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, who continued to exert significant influence as "leader of the nation" and head of the country's security council. The current president of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, forced Nazarbayev to give up his supposedly life-long position within this organisation.

For Lukashenka, these developments might now be encouraging him to think again about any "power transition" in Belarus. Fearing a fate similar to Nazarbayev, Lukashenka might simply want to hold onto the president's chair. Even now, there is no reason to believe that he will yield even a share of his powers to a successor. A failed "tandemocracy" in Kazakhstan serves as a strong motivation for Belarus's authoritarian leader to further cement his grip on power.

The significance of Belarus's proposed constitutional reforms must not be overestimated. This is especially true as the rule of law in Belarusian society faces a great number of challenges. While any kind of structural change can bring an element of shock to the system, the proposed amendments scarcely offer any hope for a real transition of presidential power. NEE

Kathrin Yaromich is a freelance journalist focusing on social issues, human rights, politics and investigative reporting. Her work has appeared in RFE/RL, Bellingcat and Transitions Online.

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The future of the Crimea Platform

OLEKSANDR KRAIEV

The Crimea Platform launched by Kyiv last year attracted great media attention across the globe. Despite this, practical steps must be taken to keep the issue of Crimea's sovereignty on the international agenda.

Launched last August, Ukraine's Crimea Platform has become a new international format aimed at countering Russia's attempt to illegally annex Crimea. This move called into question the basic tenets of the international legal order established following the end of the Cold War. As a result, the issue of restoring Ukrainian sovereignty over Crimea is not only of interest to Ukrainian policy, but is also an important task for those countries that wish to re-establish the "strength of law" rather than the "law of strength".

Against a backdrop of increasing Russian aggression, whatever form it may take, the question of a coordinated and unanimous international response is becoming increasingly important. Although much of Russia's aggression is currently concentrated on Ukraine's eastern borders, Crimea remains an important issue in the wider conflict. Attempts by the Kremlin to eliminate the problem of Crimea's illegal annexation at the international level have not met with success. Indeed, the illegal annexation is still not recognised by the majority of free countries in the world. Ukraine and its partner countries are closely monitoring the build-up of military forces on the occupied peninsula, further human rights abuses, and persecution against the indigenous Crimean Tatar population. The platform has been running for almost five months, so it is now possible to analyse the project's success and where it may go in the future.

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Where we started

The promising platform was first presented by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in autumn 2020. Addressing parliament with his annual message, the president said that the creation of the Crimea Platform would return the issue of the peninsula's occupation to the international agenda. Kyiv officials then discussed this topic at the highest level with partners from the United Kingdom, Canada, Turkey and the EU.

The first forum was then held on August 23rd 2021. The Crimean Declaration was signed in the presence of representatives from 47 states and international organisations. This ultimately laid the foundations for future fora. In addition to the main meeting and programme speeches, the forum also included a series of behind-the-scenes talks that involved various regional associations and interest groups. This exemplifies the effectiveness of the summit, as it was able to expand discussions to numerous topics despite its narrow agenda and become a practical tool for Ukraine's partners.

At the inaugural event, four dimensions were presented in which the platform will operate. These dimensions include heads of state and government, foreign affairs ministries, parliaments and experts.

Of course, the Kremlin was furious that the event went ahead. From Moscow's point of view, the new initiative amounted to an "attack" on Russia's national interests and even its territorial integrity. Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova published a statement in March 2021 criticising the initiative: "All Kyiv's efforts to return Crimea to Ukraine are illegitimate and cannot be perceived as anything other than a threat of aggression against two regions of the Russian Federation." Moreover, the country's foreign ministry also declared that Moscow would consider participation "as an unfriendly move with regard to the Russian Federation and as a direct encroachment upon its territorial integrity." Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov went even further, comparing the summit to a "sabbath" held by witches.

Zelenskyy hopes the Crimea Platform will return the issue of the peninsula's occupation to the international agenda.

Although Russia clearly remains opposed to the platform, it had in some cases altered its approach. Moscow initially took the position that "it would not rule out participating" in future meetings. According to Maria Zakharova, Russia may participate if the agenda includes the resumption of water and electricity supplies from mainland Ukraine to Crimea and the unblocking of transportation routes to the peninsula. It is diffi-

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cult to say whether Moscow's involvement in the format would be effective or destructive. However, such "peaceful" statements promoted by Russia did not result in any real change.

Expert network: a way around everything

Even before the official start of the project, an expert network was already building a community of international experts interested in a wide range of issues concerning Crimea. In addition to a series of presentations and roundtables, the international group of more than 180 experts created a large information database. This encyclopedia of expertise contains analytical materials collected from Ukrainian civil society concerning all eight years of occupation.

On August 6th, the expert network was able to hold a presentation forum and officially start its work. Of course, the event itself appeared rather modest compared to the key event that took place at the end of August. However, the group was not intended to compete with this higher level of discussions. A large number of embassies and international organisations expressed immediate interest in the network following its creation. Overall, it appears that this group may become the most inclusive part of the whole project.

> The expert network should become the "brain" of the Crimea Platform, with all decisions made at the highest level influenced by the group's analysis and work.

What should the expert network do? In an ideal scenario, it will become the "brain" of the Crimea Platform, with all decisions made at the highest level influenced by the group's analysis and work. As the network will be international in nature, its proposals and analysis will be based on global experience and include the interests of all stakeholders. In addition, foreign experts will be able to directly influence their own governments with the proposed analysis. This will only strengthen coordination and co-operation on a number of complex issues at the initiative's higher levels.

Currently, the Crimea Platform Expert Network continues to build its own geographical network of co-operation. All work within the network is carried out in several key thematic areas, such as sanctions and non-recognition policy, human rights, cultural and historical heritage, economic and environmental problems, and humanitarian issues. Each of these areas is made up of a dedicated working group of Ukrainian and foreign experts.

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Photo: Adam Reichardt

President Zelenskyy addressing journalists after the first Crimea Platform Summit in Kyiv in August 2021.

Plans for the future

The summit overall proved to be a success and further press and expert interest has helped the platform remain in the spotlight for some time. However, you must keep working after such success in order to produce results and prove your worth. The first difficulties related to the forum appeared soon after the end of the first meeting. Activity is currently visible only in two of the Crimea Platform's four dimenions (ministerial and expert). The Crimea Platform quickly became more of an idea than an actual instrument. Naturally, this runs contrary to the forum's original purposes and goals.

The format should continue to grow with new content. Yes, the summit was extremely successful and Ukraine has managed to recruit an unprecedented number of partner countries in its attempt to return the issue of Crimea to the international agenda. But this success must be maintained well after the summit.

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However, it should be understood that Ukraine is ultimately playing the long game. Kyiv knows that it is unlikely to see quick results in this format. Diplomatic manoeuvring and real long-term strategies involving all dimensions of the platform will likely result in success in the medium term. Though what strategy should Ukraine pursue in the long run?

Ultimately, the Crimea Platform should seek to transform itself into a more formal organisation. The forum must become an established group, complete with a statute, executive bodies and advisory functions connected with partner governments and organisations.

From this author's point of view, this strengthening of the Crimea Platform's independent role as an international forum for joint statements, projects and initiatives is the best way forward for the body at this time. It should not be limited by the framework of any international organisation and its rules, thus maintaining flexibility and adaptability with regards to the region's uncertain circumstances.

Oleksandr Kraiev is an expert on international relations
with the Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism".

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Asian powers entering the South Caucasus

Opportunity or threat?

TIZIANO MARINO

While China struggles to consolidate its economic position in the South Caucasus, Pakistan has cemented its strategic alliance with Azerbaijan. Simultaneously, India has entered a new phase of relations with Armenia. Even though the presence of Asian powers in the region represents an opportunity for economic development, it may also entail some risks.

Asian powers have recently shown increasing interest in the South Caucasus. In particular, Pakistan and India have stepped into the region, joining and partially balancing China's strong presence. Several factors have contributed to the entrance of these new Asian players and this is particularly true regarding the new balance of power established by the 2020 war between Armenia and Azerbaijan. At the same time, the European Union and United States' lack of engagement with the region has left more room for action by other external powers. It is also worth noting the economic weakness of the main foreign players traditionally involved in the region, as well as the unfulfilled expectations of Chinese development projects.

As a result, China's struggles to strengthen its market influence have allowed Pakistan and India to forge close relationships with Azerbaijan and Armenia respectively. Even though the presence of these new powers in the region represents an opportunity for economic growth, it may also involve various risks. In-

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deed, the three powers could use the South Caucasus as a proxy battleground for their own disputes. Of course, this would only contribute to an already high level of regional tension.

The Pakistan-Azerbaijan axis

Pakistan's interests in the South Caucasus are mainly focused on strategic and military issues and this is embodied in its long-standing alliance with Azerbaijan. Good relations between Islamabad and Baku date back to 1991, when Pakistan was one of the first countries in the world, along with Turkey, to recognise Azerbaijan's independence. Bilateral relations were then strengthened by the signing of major defence and military co-operation agreements between 2003 and 2014, which included sending Azerbaijani troops to Pakistan for training. Since then, such issues have proven to be essential elements of the agreements more recently concluded between Baku and Islamabad.

Yet relations between Pakistan and Azerbaijan involve more than a mere bilateral dimension. Certainly, the Islamabad-Baku axis is part of a broader political-military alliance of which Turkey is a key pivot. For years, the three actors have supported each other on the main issues affecting their national interests, namely Nagorno-Karabakh, Kashmir and Northern Cyprus. Notably, Azerbaijan's support for Pakistan on the thorny issue of Kashmir was reciprocated by Islamabad's non-recognition of Armenia as a sovereign state.

> the Islamabad-Baku axis is part of a broader political-military alliance of which Turkey is a key pivot.

The 2020 war was a defining moment for Pakistani-Azerbaijani relations. In fact, after the victorious offensive launched by Baku (supported by Islamabad and Ankara), the three allies attempted to develop an alliance that extended beyond the military dimension. Following official meetings held last year, Pakistan, Azerbaijan and Turkey issued several joint statements aimed at promoting trade and economic co-operation, condemning Islamophobia and countering the ongoing global pandemic.

Despite the announcements, however, relations between the three do not amount to much beyond military affairs. In fact, while Turkey's trade with Pakistan is low, Azerbaijan's economic links with the country are essentially non-existent. Paradoxically, Baku's economic and trade relations with India were much more developed than those with Pakistan as recently as 2019. This was mainly due to Baku's important role in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) project,

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a multimodal transport network that aims to connect the Indian Ocean to Russia. However, strategic imperatives have forced Ilham Aliyev's regime to strengthen relations with Pakistan. This move not only risks Baku's general relations with India but also its role in New Delhi's regional connectivity plans.

The trilateral military alliance was formalised in September 2021, when special forces from the three countries participated in a joint military exercise called "Three Brothers 2021". On that occasion, Baku once again stressed its interest in Pakistani weapon systems and especially its Pakistani-Chinese-made JF-17 fighter jets. Despite this, the Pakistani defence industry is unlikely to meet Baku's needs due to structural weaknesses and defence cuts imposed by the IMF in relation to an associated loan. As a result, beyond a 2017 agreement for the purchase of ten Pakistani Super Mushshak training aircraft, bilateral trade in this area is very limited. Seen in the broader regional context, the alliance with Pakistan is very useful for the Azerbaijani government and its attempts to pursue its agenda in a more forceful manner. Moreover, the trilateral alliance forms a cohesive bloc that is strongly hostile to Armenia and could create long-term problems for the regional interests of other players such as Russia, Iran and India.

India eyes Armenia

India's new focus on the South Caucasus should be understood in relation to the two fundamental needs that drive it. On the one hand, New Delhi wants to balance the growing influence of Islamabad and Beijing in the region and more generally in Central Asia. On the other, it needs to open up new routes that allow it to operate in a westward direction. Despite its relative size, India remains closed off to the north and west by China and Pakistan. New Delhi therefore sees the South Caucasus as an unavoidable route for its goods to and from countries to its west.

Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar's visit to Armenia last October is only understandable in this context. The trip marked the first time that an Indian foreign minister has visited Yerevan since the country gained its independence in 1991. Various bilateral meetings during the visit were focused on (re)launching political, trade and cultural relations. Although Armenia is the only state in the South Caucasus to have formalised its relations with India through a Friendship and Co-operation Treaty in 1995, trade between the two countries is still very low. In 2019 less than two per cent of Armenia's total imports came from India, while Armenian exports have not fared much better in the Indian market. Defence cooperation is also essentially non-existent, not least because the 1995 treaty did not provide for arms supplies. However, since 2017 the two states have tried to move

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Photo courtesy of the Prime Minister's Office of Armenia

Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan meets with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The relationship between India and Armenia has great potential for expansion, especially in the areas of trade and connectivity.

beyond this approach and there is now a growing relationship between the countries' respective defence ministries. Nevertheless, whilst Armenia would be interested in diversifying its military purchases, there seems to be no immediate prospect of developing relations. This is largely due to the structural deficiencies of the Indian industry and the constraints imposed by the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) on its members regarding the purchase of non-Russian arms.

Despite these difficulties, the relationship between India and Armenia has great potential for expansion, especially in the areas of trade and connectivity. Yerevan and New Delhi, in fact, share the same need to open new trade routes and both depend on Iran to achieve this goal. Jaishankar's visit revived the possibility of creating an Armenian-Iranian route within the framework of the INSTC project, of which both countries are members. These plans place great importance on the Iranian port of Chabahar, as its location offers the perfect hub for transporting Indian goods. Armenia aims to connect the new route to the Persian Gulf-Black Sea corridor. However, Yerevan will first have to complete several strategic infrastructure projects in order to make this route a reality. Various external factors could favour the realisation of Armenia's projects, such as the possible conclusion of a free trade agreement between India and the Eurasian Economic Union and successful

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negotiations regarding the Iranian nuclear issue. In addition to its economic potential, the partnership with India offers Armenia a political advantage in uncertain times. Indeed, while India has always maintained a neutral stance on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, it supports the OSCE Minsk Group as the only forum capable of resolving territorial tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

In essence, India seems to offer Armenia and the region in general renewed prospects for connectivity through various projects. However, New Delhi continues to voice its opposition to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project and the commercial activities of the Pakistani port of Gwadar. Given the strong regional tensions that prevent the countries of the South Caucasus from taking joint decisions, it appears that major external powers will once again determine the timing and manner of any infrastructural development that could bring the region out of isolation.

Beijing's flawed strategy

For China's global ambitions, the South Caucasus is a strategic region. Indeed, Beijing views it as the gateway to the European markets, which are the final destination for Chinese products. As a result, the region has been included in the BRI. Since its entry into the South Caucasus, China has developed very close relations with Georgia which, due to its geographical position, represents the ideal destination for Chinese goods. A strong bilateral relationship was secured through the adoption in 2017 of a free trade agreement that remains unique in the region. Aware of the important role Georgia can play in its "race to Europe", China has made significant economic and diplomatic efforts to foster good relations. This resulted in the country becoming the largest market for Georgian exports in 2020. Significant Chinese investment in the country has focused primarily on infrastructure and has been facilitated by the fact that Georgia, as well as Azerbaijan, is a member of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

Yet, despite excellent results, the Beijing-Tbilisi partnership has not always lived up to expectations. Georgia, in fact, had hoped that China would offer support on the sensitive issue of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Despite this, China has sent delegations to evaluate possible investments in these areas, thus irritating its fledgling partner.

Tensions and missed expectations are so far not present in relations between China and Azerbaijan. Notably, Baku has managed to establish itself as Beijing's main economic and trade partner in the South Caucasus by promoting its geographical location and good level of economic development. Chinese-Azerbaijani

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relations have always been based on a mutually beneficial exchange of oil for money and investment. This has allowed China to strengthen its position to the point that it is now Baku's sixth-largest export market.

In addition to excellent trade relations, Baku and Beijing also share similar political views. For instance, Aliyev recently reiterated his full support for China with regards to issues involving Taiwan, Hong Kong and Xinjiang. Due to this, Baku and Beijing have pursued defence and security co-operation since 2019. This has mainly involved Azerbaijan purchasing armaments that feature technologies or components from China and various third-party states such as Belarus and Turkey.

While Beijing's presence in the region has undoubtedly had a positive effect on the economies of Georgia and Azerbaijan, it has been less positive in the case of Armenia. Certainly, it could be argued that Yerevan is the weak link in China's regional strategy. Although Beijing represents an important market for Armenian exports, it has not been able to solve Armenia's exclusion from the BRI's main trade routes. Beijing has also tried to support Armenia's defence sector through military assistance agreements aimed at restoring the balance of power in the region. These projects, however, have enjoyed little success.

Against this background, Armenian dissatisfaction offered India the perfect opportunity to respond to Pakistan's engagement with the region. New Delhi has therefore been clever in exploiting the space left by China by offering alternative solutions to Armenia's existing connectivity problems and providing support for its political demands. In doing so, India is challenging Chinese influence and counterbalancing Pakistan by re-establishing, at least tentatively, a balanced if precarious situation in the area. Even though the Chinese and Indian approaches do not appear to be in conflict, there is a risk that the two states will trigger a protracted trade war of attrition in the South Caucasus. This would subsequently result in the international community wasting yet another good opportunity to promote trade and development in the region and beyond. NEE

Tiziano Marino is a political analyst and researcher specialising in international security and geo-economics. He is a graduate of the College of Europe in Natolin and Roma Tre University. His research interests include the EU Neighbourhood, the South Caucasus and South Asia.

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The more things change in the Southern Caucasus, the more they stay the same

SVENJA PETERSEN, RAZE BAZIANI

There are some problems in politics that simply do not have good solutions. Relations between Armenia and Turkey are certainly one of these issues. Yet, for the first time since 2009, a move towards the normalisation of political relations now seems to be within reach.

Following over a decade of diplomatic silence on the matter, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan recently broached the issue of normalising relations with Armenia in August last year. The president stated that he would be ready to take all the necessary steps to resume relations with Ankara's neighbour. This proposition from the Turkish side was echoed a few days later by Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. Surprisingly, the Armenian parliament immediately adopted a five-year action plan that would see the country normalise its relations with Turkey. In light of these developments, it seems that the two countries may finally understand that relations do not work without the involvement of both sides.

One fundamental motivation

When taking a closer look at these developments, it is clear that they are far from simple. Some may claim that the idea of a stable state of affairs in the Caucasus, in which the potential of the region's historical and cultural wealth can be ful-

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ly exploited, is a wholly romantic notion. Certainly, the reasons for Armenia and Turkey's strained relations today are multifaceted and complex. However, for Turkey, which closed its border with Armenia in 1993 in solidarity with Azerbaijan during the First Nagorno-Karabakh War, this move is part of a wider strategy. The geopolitical game in the South Caucasus has changed significantly since Azerbaijan's victory in the 44-day war over the disputed region in 2020. Following its extensive support for Baku, Turkey emerged as a clear winner and can now lead the way in negotiations over diplomatic relations with Armenia.

Fighting broke out between Armenians and Azerbaijanis over the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh (referred to in Armenia as Artsakh) as early as the *perestroika* era. This disputed area has been traditionally populated by an Armenian majority. However, the region was made de jure a part of the Azerbaijani Soviet Republic by the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party in 1921, and then de facto handed over to Baku under Stalin. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of Armenia and Azerbaijan, the self-proclaimed Republic of Artsakh declared itself independent with Yerevan's help on September 3rd 1991. These developments were followed by countless wars and military conflicts between Azerbaijan on the one side and Armenia and the self-proclaimed republic on the other. Armenia was able to hold onto the territories in and around Nagorno-Karabakh until November 2020, when the Azerbaijani army conquered large parts of the disputed territory with Ankara's help. This forced Armenia to its knees with a peace treaty signed under Russian auspices. Under the new treaty, Armenia surrendered all of the Nagorno-Karabakh territories except for a small core area.

A peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan is a precondition for Ankara to resume diplomatic relations with Yerevan.

A peace agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan has always been a precondition for Turkey with regards to resuming diplomatic relations with Yerevan. Since a peace agreement is now seemingly in place, nothing should stand in the way of a rapprochement between the two neighbours. At least, one would think that this would be the case.

Two months after his proposal for diplomatic normalisation, the Turkish president surprisingly set new conditions for the Armenian side. On October 28th, Erdoğan stated during a visit to the recently captured city of Zangilan (Kovsakan in Armenian) that only "if [Armenia] shows goodwill towards Azerbaijan, then there will be no obstacles to the normalisation of relations between Turkey and Armenia". He has yet to define what exactly he means by "goodwill towards Azerbaijan".

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However, it seems that Ankara is likely to add even more preconditions regarding diplomatic normalisation.

Asymmetric power relations

The Armenian-Turkish border was unilaterally closed by Ankara, which immediately informed Armenia as to the conditions in which it would reopen it again. Even though Armenia has urged Turkey to finally recognise the Armenian Genocide and compensate its victims, the country has not made this a precondition for normalisation. Pashinyan thus follows the narrative of his predecessors and does not impose any conditions on Turkey. This exemplifies the unequal positions of Armenia and Turkey in ongoing negotiations. At the same time, this decision can be seen as a practical political one. After all, negotiations and demands require a relationship in the first place. Perhaps it is true that different and often difficult topics need to be negotiated at different tables. Other aspects, especially economics and strategic concerns, seem to be the driving force of the negotiations.

At the moment, both Azerbaijan and Turkey continue to maintain closed borders with Armenia and have subjected the country to an economic blockade. Armenia has open borders only with Georgia to the north and Iran to the south. Of course, Tehran faces its own problems with economic isolation. One tangible way for Armenia to move on from this isolation and end the blockade is to accept the conditions set by Turkey. On the other hand, Ankara is a regional power with a growing military and a more stable economy. Due to this, it has much less to fear if it decides to hold onto the border closure and blockade against Armenia. This inequality between the negotiating parties is also reflected in the Armenian parliament's five-year action plan to reinstate diplomatic relations with Turkey. The action plan shows that Armenia is under no illusion regarding relations, as it has been named "For the sake of stability, security and the economic development of the region". It is not a matter of establishing truly friendly relations with Turkey but rather pragmatically securing Armenia's economic growth and stability.

The Armenian side is well aware that Turkey has more leverage in this situation. Armenia needs normalisation with Turkey to develop and diversify its economic sectors and increase trade. New routes and access to the Black Sea and Mediterranean may boost trade and tourism. This would greatly benefit an economy and population suffering from widespread poverty and unemployment. For the Turkish side, an open border with Armenia would not, at first glance, bring about any decisive changes. One of the few advantages for Turkey would be the use of Armenian airspace and land routes for trade with Azerbaijan and Central Asia.

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However, an open border could also entail risks for Yerevan. Could domestic products compete with cheap imports from Turkey? What about the future of various economic sectors? The country has already ceded much of its energy industry to Russia and hence cannot afford to lose control over other important supply sectors. In addition, there are serious national security concerns. After Ankara's extensive involvement in the recent Nagorno-Karabakh war, levels of trust in their Turkish neighbour are now even lower among Armenians. It is likely that Turkey could sooner or later find itself paying a price for its actions.

In the event of another clash between Armenia and Azerbaijan, an open border with Turkey would immediately be seen as a threat by Yerevan. This is one of the reasons why Armenia has entered ongoing talks with Moscow to open up another military base in the country. Even though trust in Russia has declined dramatically in Armenia since the November 2020 peace treaty, the country still sees the Kremlin as its only remaining ally. From this point of view, the possible creation of a new Russian military base is hardly surprising. Several locations in southern Armenia, a narrow territory that separates Azerbaijan from its Nakhchivan exclave, are currently under discussion. Armenia's geostrategic moves therefore always seem to be linked to the interests of surrounding nations, which, for their part, are striving to (re)consolidate their influence in the Caucasus. The country is located at a critical geographic point and could easily become the scene of further power struggles between Russia and Turkey.

Ideological regional integration?

While an unstable political landscape in this region naturally creates an incentive for Turkish involvement, support for pan-Turkism in Central Asia and the Caucasus adds another layer of complexity. On the Armenian side, the ideology of pan-Turkism and its prevalence is perceived as a threat by most in the country. The Christian Armenian nation does not identify with this ideology in any way and has suffered as a result of it. This was made clear by the long history of pogroms against Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, which culminated in the Armenian Genocide in 1915 and 1916.

The ideology of pan-Turkism is by no means a new idea. Its origins go far back to the mid-19th century and included campaigns to unite the so-called Turkic peoples from the Balkans to China. Proponents of pan-Turkism promoted a key slogan: "Where there are Turks, there is Turkey". Despite this, pan-Turkism seemed to lose its significance in the 20th century. This all changed with the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, when new opportunities arose for

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Turkey to co-operate with various newly independent Turkic republics. This has led to a number of collaborations in various fields, such as education and culture. Over the past decades, these moves have raised Turkey's profile in the Caucasus and Central Asia and created new links with regional elites.

It would appear that Turkey is now promoting itself as a fraternal alternative to various European powers and Russia in the Caucasus and Central Asia. As a result, Ankara can use this feeling of commonality as a means of staying one step ahead of its rivals. The ideology of pan-Turkism therefore appears to be a key part of the country's soft power. Erdoğan appears happy to play the ideology card, be it pan-Turkism or pan-Islamism, whenever it fits his agenda. It is very unlikely that such ideologies could subvert Armenian society, as the state is very much conscious of its cultural and ethnic identity. Ideological ties can be the driver of regional integration, and Armenia will remain an outsider in this regard.

The position of civil society

Both parties are also not on an equal footing when it comes to the domestic political consequences of any potential diplomatic normalisation. In fact, civil society has hardly been involved in this process. It is currently only the politicians who are publicly communicating with each other on this issue. Within Turkish society, reconciliation with Armenia would in the worst case scenario be met with indifference. At best, people may express enthusiasm for Erdoğan as a "peacemaker". This outcome would allow the government to maintain the historical illusion of the supposedly exemplary Young Turks, who often serve as a template for Erdoğan's rule.

Overall, it will be difficult for Yerevan to justify the establishment of diplomatic ties with Turkey given that the country still does not recognise the Armenian Genocide and has imposed a harmful blockade on the country. The trauma of the genocide still plays a crucial role in Armenian society and represents a focal point for many people's sense of identity. In light of this historical issue and Turkey's support for Azerbaijan, the normalisation of relations at the societal level could prove to be a particular challenge.

History has taught us that it takes more than simple political declarations to reconcile peoples with each other. Indeed, neighbourly relations begin with recognition and honest respect for mutual interests. But how can the parties in question meet on equal ground? It would be difficult for any Armenian government to communicate the normalisation of relations with Turkey to its population. The country's current political crisis would deepen even more and further mass protests could be expected. An Armenian government that agrees to an unconditional re-

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lationship with Turkey is risking its very survival. Yet Armenia needs stable, functioning politicians trusted by the population. Many institutional issues remain in Yerevan to this day. This has only caused societal division and provided a breeding ground for populism in Armenia.

Socio-economic difficulties make dissatisfied citizens impressionable and amenable to mobilisation. Pressure from the Armenian diaspora abroad also weighs heavily and not always for the better. During the previous negotiations, it was the Armenian diaspora that demanded an end to the diplomatic rapprochement due to the conditions Turkey imposed on the country. At the same time, it should be remembered that this group is not at the mercy of existential economic and political questions while living abroad.

But it was not only the Armenian diaspora that put an end to the talks between Armenia and Turkey in 2009. Above all, Azerbaijan effectively torpedoed the talks as it saw them as a threat to itself and its position in Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan could once again move to stop today's talks. Simultaneously, new conditions could also be imposed on Armenia by Baku and Ankara. The latest round of fighting on Armenia's sovereign territory around the localities of Kut and Verin Shorzha shows how fragile the peace treaty is between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The French saying *"plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose"* (the more things change, the more they stay the same) probably best describes the current situation in the South Caucasus. It is clear that traditional powers continue to dominate politics in the region. Talks on normalising relations between Armenia and Turkey are likely to face a long and rocky road. National, geopolitical and security interests continue to overlap and influence each other in the area. While Turkish strategy is guided by ambitions of forging a great empire, it is up to Armenia not to simply move from one dependency to another. NEE

Svenja Petersen studied Political Science, European Affairs and Political Economy at Sciences Po Paris, the Free University of Berlin and the London School of Economics. In June 2021, she graduated from the College of Europe in Natolin, where she specialised in the EU's Eastern Partnership and EU-Russia relations.

Raze Baziani studied Law at the University of Bonn and Politics and Law at the University of Münster, Germany. She specialises in the International Law of Economic Relations, with a special focus on the Caucasus and the Middle East.

The authors met during a summer school at Brusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences in Yerevan, Armenia.

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Following this lead, Mayor Aleksandra Dulkiewicz from Gdańsk developed for the Committee of the Regions - a kind of EU parliament of local governments - an opinion entitled "European action plan for democracy". A pretty sad conclusion of this work is the observation that many phenomena undermining our European communities can be identified in countries of our region.

For example, just as Mayor Dulkiewicz's opinion was gaining the official acceptance by the Committee of Regions, the Polish parliament initiated work on the so-called "media law", aiming at limiting the rights of private broadcasters, thus monopolizing the media market by state-owned television. And, as we know, where free media weaken, democracy is not doing well.

It is also worth mentioning that the new Mayor Paweł Adamowicz Award was established upon the initiative of the European Committee of Regions, ICORN (the International Cities of Refuge Network) and the City of Gdańsk. By design, this distinction recognizes organizations and individuals who support local integration, the promotion of equal opportunities, respect for human rights, civil liberties, and combating prejudice and xenophobia.

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Revisiting the 2008 Russo-Georgian War can offer lessons for today

An interview with Ekaterina Tkeshelashvili, Georgia's former minister of foreign affairs, deputy prime minister and state minister for reintegration. Interviewer: Jakub Bornio

JAKUB BORNIO: I would like to start with the NATO Summits in Bucharest (2008) and Strasbourg/Kehl (2009). Back then, the Membership Action Plan (MAP) for Georgia and Ukraine was rejected. At the same time, both countries were promised that they could become members of the Alliance at some point in the future. Do you interpret these events as a success or rather a failure?

EKATERINA TKESHELASHVILI: Bucharest was a crossroads. The decisions made at Bucharest were not simple ones and have to be looked at from various perspectives. A coin always has two sides. Two aspects are particularly important. First is timing. This was the first time when, in a consolidated way, the government of the United States really pushed for a Membership Action Plan for both Georgia and Ukraine. This generated and strengthened support from the allies. However, this was not true for all, particularly those concerned with the deterioration of relations with Russia. It can be argued that the fact that the George W. Bush administration in the US was reaching its end could have had an impact on the outcome. Second was the fact that the Bucharest decision set Georgia and Ukraine on a firm path towards membership. Some had argued that the decision meant more than the MAP, since it affirmed both Georgia and Ukraine's membership in the future. Yet, the decision, and even more so the preceding discussions, showed that the Alliance was not ready to commit to Georgia and Ukraine. The group had to consider the concerns of some members regarding relations with Russia.

It needs to be noted that Georgia, at that time, had very active diplomatic relations with all members of the Alliance. We had successful bilateral negotiations

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with the US and, at the same time, ongoing negotiations on a very active basis with all NATO members. The plan was not solely focused on the US, or any view that this leading actor could have made the decision for the whole Alliance. We never had that perception and we never acted with that idea in mind. We did have an understanding, however, of which countries had negative perceptions of the MAP for Georgia. The reasons were mostly connected with Russia and its presence in Georgia in the two regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This is in contrast to anything related to Georgia's internal situation, or its commitment to make even more progress when it comes to the membership requirements of the Alliance.

The way we see it, the Bucharest Summit was a watershed moment regarding Russia, as it revealed its claim for influence in the region. This went as far as questioning the statehood of Ukraine. Of course, it was also no secret to anybody that Russia was adamantly against Georgia's MAP. Our assessment was that Moscow took this decision as a sign that the Alliance was not yet ready to make any commitment to the security and future of Georgia and Ukraine, but that this moment would eventually come. The promise of membership was made as such and the chance was still there. Russia took this as a window of opportunity, to act on the weakness – or indecisiveness – of the West and claim its sphere of influence. We all know what happened after this. Unfortunately, this led to the Russian war against Georgia in 2008.

Would you say that if a Membership Action Plan was granted, Russia would have behaved differently?

I am convinced that the MAP would have sent a signal to Russia that NATO had ultimately reached a consensus on the importance of Georgia and Ukraine to its security. The agreement would have offered clarity on their membership and sealed it through a concrete pathway. I am convinced that a clear commitment to Georgia and Ukraine's security would have altered Russia's calculations. This would have shown NATO's determination not to accept Russia's claim on an exclusive sphere of influence in its neighbourhood. I must make it clear that the decision on the MAP would not have meant that NATO forces were ready to go to war with Russia for actions affecting non-member states. However, it would have been a strong enough move to showcase that such actions would have consequences.

Radosław Sikorski, then foreign minister of Poland, revealed some of the context to talks behind the scenes in his recently published book. He wrote that Germany was the greatest opponent of the MAP for Ukraine and Georgia. He also believes that Germany already promised Russia that a MAP would not be granted prior to the summit. Why do you think Germany was so tough when it comes to Georgia and Ukraine's co-operation with NATO?

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I do not have any evidence or information on whether or not such a promise was made to Russia. However, it would not surprise me. It is no secret that Germany was the strongest opponent, maybe the only real strong opponent, that made the decision on the MAP impossible. France could have agreed to the plan if Germany did, but that didn't happen. I do not want to speculate about the different layers of German reasoning, but as we see now with the ongoing debacle with Nord Stream 2, it is a reflection of Berlin's strategic short-sightedness vis-à-vis Russia.

You said that the US was one of the greatest supporters of NATO's co-operation with Georgia. Back then your military co-operation was intense, with joint exercises and even some US forces deployed in Georgia. Did this have any impact on your self-perception and your role in international relations? Or to put it in other words, did it improve your self-confidence?

Well, when it comes to co-operation with the US and NATO – not solely the US – it was developing very strongly throughout those years. We were participating in joint operations in Iraq and then in Afghanistan. Georgian troops per capita represented the largest non-member state presence in Afghanistan. We had our troops participating with no caveats in the operation and in the most dangerous areas like Helmand. Our co-operation was not ad hoc. It was very systematic when it came to our troops' interoperability and the development of our military forces in line with NATO standards.

Such a pro-western orientation was obviously not in line with Russian interests. Shortly before the war, Russia was undertaking actions that I believe must have concerned you, such as military manoeuvres, infrastructural developments, and the deployment of soldiers under the umbrella of peacekeeping missions, just to name a few. How did you interpret these developments?

These developments were very systematic and aligned with Russia's clear strategic vision. Moscow never acts in a hasty manner, unprepared or spontaneously. It calculates, tests the ground, analyses results and acts accordingly. Russia violates a number of pink lines before violating the red ones. In that regard, the country persistently pushes the boundaries. Most of the time this is done right at the limits of international law, as Russia seizes opportunities as they emerge by capitalising on the weakness and vulnerabilities of its adversaries. In other words, huge offensive actions, like in 2008 and 2014, never happen out of the blue. There are prior actions that pave the way for such decisive offensives. We were very proactive and transparent in sharing information with our partners and the international community in general. By documenting and analysing Russia's actions preceding the war, its early large-scale military operations never went unnoticed. The problem was that no solution was ever offered that could actually deter Russian

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Photo: OSCE

advancement. While we were waiting for our partners to propose a new negotiating plan, Moscow continued to build up a framework for military operations. The result of the renewed negotiating process was the so-called Steinmeier plan, since the Germans took a leading role in shaping this proposal. The plan was not ideal. It had several concerning elements, but we were extremely committed to de-escalation and to reversing the potential for military operations. So we agreed to participate in negotiations in Berlin with the Russian delegation. However, Russia ultimately said "no" to another negotiating round.

What happened shortly before the operation, and what was your policy in the days preceding the war?

What preceded the operations were large-scale military provocations in the South Ossetia region, where we did not have a clear line of separation. These incidents were properly recorded, and we communicated them to the OSCE monitoring mission. We organised numerous "tours" for foreign representatives to the region so that they could observe the results of the bombings. In many of these incidents we published diplomatic statements. Yet, there were no real consequences for Russia. At the end of the day, Russia knew that it had to use this window of opportunity in 2008 given the outgoing administration in the US and the momentum that it had on the ground.

Did you expect Russia to pursue such a large-scale offensive against Georgia?

We always knew that Russia would not allow us to be free, and that was clear. Russia interfered in our internal politics continuously while we were building our democracy. We knew how the situation was escalating on the ground. We tried adamantly to de-escalate the situation, including direct negotiations with the Russians that many forget about. When President Dmitry Medvedev was elected we immediately organised meetings and presented new proposals even if

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they were politically very risky for us. The plan was to start de-escalation step by step and to rebuild the communities on the ground. Nothing was acceptable for Russia and it was clear that they were not even faking interest in the process of direct negotiations.

When it comes to expectations, we always had the fear and expectation that Russia would go to the extreme. But to be honest, at some point even for us it was very hard to believe that Russia would actually start a full-scale war. We did not believe this until the end of July and the beginning of August, when we witnessed the constant shelling of Georgian villages and the Roki Tunnel was filled with advancing Russian tanks. So the invasion started well before August 8th.

I have asked you whether you expected large-scale Russian engagement because I'm trying to understand the reasoning behind your further steps…

Prior to these days leading up to the war, we announced a unilateral ceasefire. Yet, the Russians started to withdraw their own civilians because they were preparing for military operations. So if you have the impression that we ordered something and then Russia interfered after that, that's not correct. When we declared the end of the unilateral ceasefire – Russia continued shelling throughout that time – we pursued defensive actions as we had to defend our citizens. Russian troops were en masse coming through the Roki Tunnel. That was the moment when hope was gone.

Was there any attempt to open a communication channel with Moscow?

Constantly.

And what was the reaction from the Russian side?

The Russian foreign affairs ministry was completely closed. One of our deputy foreign ministers was personally assigned to that task because I was active on other fronts. All the attempts that we made to speak at the presidential and ministerial levels were futile.

Did you ask for any external assistance, including military assistance from other partners and NATO, when the war erupted?

We never asked for any military assistance and we would have never asked because we knew that it would be futile. After the war started, we asked for an expedited permit for our troops in Iraq – 2500 of our best soldiers – so they could come back home. They arrived when the war was almost over. So we couldn't even count on our best division since they were in Iraq.

Did you try to engage other countries in the region regarding a "conflict resolution"?

When you have a conflict with Russia, it is very hard to have any expectation that you can ask your neighbours to share the burden of finding a resolution to the conflict. This is especially true regarding Armenia and Azerbaijan, which have their own conflict. We interacted with them continuously at different strategic levels, including infor-

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mation sharing. As you very well know, Georgia has good relations and strategic partnerships with all of our neighbours, except for Russia.

You talk about Germany's role in the Steinmeier peace talks, which you expected to take place in Berlin. But so far, we haven't discussed France's role in the conflict, and President Nicolas Sarkozy's contribution was quite important…

Just to clarify, the Steinmeier plan was named after the German foreign minister. It doesn't mean that it was a German plan… the initiative was the work of the whole Friends of Georgia UN group…

Did you have any influence on Sarkozy and his position during his mission to Moscow?

When it comes to his mission, it came at a critical time. We were raising the question of whether or not the statehood of Georgia would be maintained. Russian troops were advancing. They had already passed Gori, so it was quite clear that they were determined to get to the capital as well. We prepared for guerrilla warfare. The country was split in two. The biggest highway connecting western and eastern Georgia was already cut off. Western Georgia was largely occupied by Russian forces. We managed to hold the ground up to the moment of these negotiations. The ceasefire agreement that was reached by Sarkozy wasn't perfect. It was a short and ad hoc ceasefire rather than a peace resolution. Russia planned to introduce two very dangerous components into the agreement. They were related mostly to the status of the breakaway regions, which we stressed we would not agree to and we didn't. In that sense, the French delegation was forced to negotiate those with the Russians and then the provisions were taken out. So yes, with our diplomatic position in negotiating this agreement, we were able to remove the provisions that were the most dangerous for us.

How do you evaluate this agreement?

Did this agreement propose a conflict resolution? No, because the conflict resolution required much more action. And that never actually took place. What we have now is a ceasefire agreement that is still not observed. The war is not in an active phase. But there was no withdrawal of Russian troops as called for in the ceasefire agreement. Russia recognised both regions (South Ossetia and Abkhazia) in order to create the fictitious premise that it did not have a military presence on the ground. In my opinion, it was not the problem of the agreement. Instead, it was the problem of what happened in terms of not setting any consequences for Russia's actions. Russia understood that no matter what it did there would be no consequences. So why would Russia implement the full agreement? The same could be seen with the Budapest Memorandum, which Ukraine signed in 1994. It is quite clear that the territorial sovereignty of Ukraine should have been guaranteed. However,

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nothing was done when Russia violated Ukraine's territory.

Bearing in mind all that happened in 2008, how did you react to the famous reset in relations between Russia and the US under the Barack Obama administration?

With fear and not with hope…

I understand this move myself through the prism of a wider geopolitical context, with the rising power of China being its most crucial element…

I understand that, but if there is a focus on Europe, Russia is a huge component of that. In other words, how much of a threat is Russia for the whole of Europe as a continent? It cannot be downplayed as a minor actor in this case. If relations are reset, it needs to be clear what the carrots and sticks are. If one makes positive steps, that results in positive developments. But if any positive developments are challenged, what are the consequences? The problem with the reset was that it bet almost entirely on the Kremlin's readiness to build more stable and constructive relations with the West. This disregarded Russia's actions, which should have prompted the preparation of a Plan B in order to deter Russian revisionism. Moscow understood that and used it to its advantage. I hope, however, that history will show that this was a short-term gain. Russia will hopefully lose strategically in the long run by not being able to fragment and weaken what otherwise should be a "Europe whole and free" that includes Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus. NEE

Ekaterina Tkeshelashvili is a Georgian politician and lawyer. She has seved in public office as as the minister of justice, secretary of the national security council, deputy prime minister and state minister for reintegration of Georgia. In 2008, under President Mikheil Saakashvili, she was the minister of foreign affairs.

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

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Crimea has returned to the heart of Ukraine, now it must return to its body

An interview with Anton Korynevych, Permanent Representative of the President of Ukraine in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and Head of the Office of the Crimea Platform. Interviewer: Tomasz Lachowski

TOMASZ LACHOWSKI: Some time has already passed since the inaugural summit of the Crimea Platform, which took place on August 23rd 2021 in Kyiv. This initiative can be interpreted as a new mechanism of international co-operation designed to return the issue of the Russian occupation of Crimea to the international agenda and, hopefully to create in the future a framework for the de-occupation and reintegration of the Crimean peninsula into Ukraine. What is your interpretation of this event?

ANTON KORYNEVYCH: I am really pleased with the course of the summit of the Crimea Platform and its direct results. However, at the same time, I fully understand that this was only the first step, which, needless to say, took a lot of time and many efforts on the part of the Ukrainian authorities. It should be emphasised that the summit gathered an unprecedented number of representatives of various states and institutions. Precisely, to remind our readers, 46 international partners took part in this event.

There has never been an international summit of a similar scale held in Ukraine before. The most important thing for us is that all participants confirmed their disagreement with the constant violation of the territorial integrity of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, stressing that Crimea is an integral part of the Ukrainian state. It is also very important that all states and international organisations that took part in the inaugural summit of the Crimea Plat-

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form managed to adopt a joint declaration, which in fact fixed all the key issues related to the temporary occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea.

Eventually, the August summit confirmed that the activity of Ukrainian diplomacy on this issue is on the right path. This began in 2014, which means at the beginning of the Russian aggression against Ukraine that resulted in the temporary occupation of Crimea.

You underlined the overall success of Ukrainian diplomacy. Nevertheless, many commentators point out that this is primarily the political success of President Zelenskyy.

Undoubtedly, the Crimea Platform is a very important initiative for President Zelenskyy. He has taken personal responsibility for this project, as it lies within his formal competence as well as that of the agencies that work with him. One of the concrete outcomes of this initiative is the establishment of a dedicated office for the Crimea Platform in the centre of Kyiv. It is being managed by a newly established structure, which is institutionally a part of the Permanent Representative of the President of Ukraine in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. It is worth adding here that this office is located close to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, the Cabinet of Ministers and the Office of the President. This is extremely important, both in practical and symbolic terms. In other words, Crimea is not pushed to the "outskirts" and has returned to the heart of our state. Its representatives are in the government district of the capital city. Crimea is where crucial decisions are made.

Returning to the topic of the inaugural summit of the Crimea Platform, I wonder whether it was disappointing for Ukraine that some of its most important partners – such as the United States and Germany – did not send their representatives in the highest rank to the August summit?

Let me note here that personally I am not responsible for foreign policy, but the internal component related to the functioning of the office of the Crimea Platform. Nevertheless, I do believe that the rank of the representatives of the United States and Germany, as well as all other countries, was sufficiently high. We shall also understand that in each and every state different issues are on the political agenda at any given moment. What we would certainly like to improve in the future is our ability to convince the states in other regions of the globe to be more active in different activities related to Crimea.

I perceive this summit, first of all, as a great victory for the Crimean issue. Let us emphasise it very clearly that such an event took place in the eighth year of the occupation of Crimea by the Russian Federation.

Why has it taken so long for Crimea to return to the international agenda? For example, this issue has been absent in the so-called Normandy Format, which involves talks over the hostilities taking place in Donbas.

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This is obviously a key question, which we also often try to address. There seems to be only one correct answer: Ukraine should be the initiator of such formats. Without a doubt, one may say that initiatives, such as the Crimea Platform, should have been put forward already in 2017, 2018 or even 2014 – right after Russia's aggression against Ukraine. I do not want to criticise now events that did not happen, but focus on what could be done in the future. Since 2014 Ukraine has adopted a policy of increased activity in different international organisations, which – it is worth stressing – has resulted in a number of resolutions condemning the illegal annexation of Crimea and the occupation by Russia. They also pointed out constant violations of international law and human rights by the Kremlin.

Thus, the Crimea Platform is meant to be a step forward. Its goal is not only to react to Russia's activities but to also be proactive. One of these proactive actions is the creation of a group of experts working on Crimea in Ukraine and also in other countries. In this way, we can expand the number of states supporting our efforts to de-occupy Crimea. We see a network of analysts as a key to success in this endeavour.

As we can gather from your words, the Crimea Platform is designed to strengthen and accelerate efforts regarding the preparation and implementation of a strategy, which is specifically concerned with the de-occupation and reintegration of the Crimean peninsula with Ukraine. What are the most important points of this strategy?

In fact, the exact text of this strategy that you are referring to is available on the website of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine. Matter of fact, it was prepared as a political document six months prior to the Crimea Platform summit, which as we said before was held in August 2021. On the website, you can read about the position of the Ukrainian state, as well as the activities that are planned once the temporary Russian occupation of Crimea is over. It is important for us that our international partners are aware of how Ukraine sees the future of the peninsula.

What needs to be stressed is that this strategy of de-occupation and reintegration of the Crimean peninsula was signed by President Zelenskyy as a decree, which means that it is a binding document for all state agencies. Consequently, they no longer can take a different position on this matter. The strategy is based on the following pillars – humanitarian, economic, information and legal. This, for example, means that Ukraine does not recognise any of the consequences of Russia's forced campaign to impose Russian citizenship on Crimea's residents.

Finally, I would like to stress that this strategy should not be analysed in isolation from other normative acts that have been enacted by our parliament – the Verkhovna Rada. They include the Law on the Indigenous Peoples of Ukraine (it recognises Crimean Tatars, Karaites

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and Krymchaks) or the repeal of the disgraceful Law on the Free Economic Zone "Crimea". The second law was passed in August 2014 to enable some Ukrainian oligarchs to do business on the Russian-occupied peninsula. It is good that it is no longer a binding legislation.

Does the strategy also include elements of a transitional justice toolkit as part of wider efforts aimed at the de-occupation and reintegration of Crimea?

Yes, transitional justice remains an important part of the strategy. Moreover, the Permanent Representative of the President of Ukraine in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea also has a mandate to propose specific legal solutions that fit into the concept of post-conflict and transformative justice. It has already been stipulated that Ukraine shall constantly document all instances of human rights violations conducted by the Russian Federation, as well as gather evidence for future prosecutions of its representatives and members of the occupation administration in Crimea for any crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Since 2016 the Prosecutor's Office of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol began to bring the attention of the international community to the crimes committed in Crimea. Activities in this regard include co-operation with foreign experts, which is also an example of how transitional justice works in practice. It should also be added that in 2019 a special department was established within the structure of the

Photo: Office of the President of Ukraine (CC) commons.wikimedia.org

Prosecutor General's Office of Ukraine to deal with crimes committed during the international armed conflict in Crimea and Donbas.

Certainly, one of the most significant and, at the same time, controversial issues is the situation of the people who were relocated to Crimea by Russian authorities. Will they be able to stay in Ukraine once the peninsula is reintegrated into the Ukrainian state? If yes, then on what terms?

Let me start by saying Russia officially talks about nearly 200,000 people

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who have been relocated to Crimea. In Ukraine we do not believe this number.

Why?

First, because as a principle we cannot believe what the Kremlin tells us, and second, because the data do not include employees of many special state agencies, including the military, who have also been relocated to Crimea. According to our estimates, there are now at least 500,000 relocated Russians in Crimea. However, the estimates of the representatives of the Crimean Tatars, who stayed in Crimea and live under the Russian occupation there, point to between 600,000 to one million people who have been transferred by the Kremlin to the Crimean peninsula since 2014. Considering these numbers, you can now understand why our strategy regarding Russian policies towards Crimea are viewed as examples of war crimes committed by an occupant. This is in line with the language of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

We have no doubt that Russia's main aim is to change the demographic structure of the population living in Crimea by resettling Russians in the peninsula and simultaneously displacing Ukrainian citizens loyal to Kyiv, including Crimean Tatars. However, once Crimea is again reintegrated with Ukraine, these "settlers" who moved there illegally will probably be forced to leave. Having said that, I do not exclude some exceptions that possibly will be created for the people who will fully recognise the territorial integrity of Ukraine and its domestic legislation.

Do these planned integration activities include mechanisms of dialogue, truth-seeking and truth-telling? For instance, have you thought of establishing a truth and reconciliation commission?

I would like to make it clear that one of the pillars of our concept is the right to truth. In other words, we believe that the public needs to have knowledge about the course of the armed conflict, the occupation, etc. We are also obtaining such knowledge through activities aimed at reconciliation. However, we do not try to hide the fact that it is not our aim to "reconcile" with the aggressors. Nonetheless, our work will for sure include all citizens from Crimea and Donbas, because our vision of reintegration does not separate these two areas. We see them together as part of the same international armed conflict, which has been taking place on Ukraine's territory since 2014. However, whether the reintegration of these territories will take place under a truth and reconciliation commission or some other similar body is a question of time.

You have talked mainly about the people who live in Crimea. However, I would also like to ask about what will happen to the people who work for occupation structures? Will they have to undergo vetting procedures, if they wish to stay in Ukraine?

For them, we are thinking about the possibility of lustration as it is regulated

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in the framework of transitional justice and protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms. This has been prepared by the Working Group on the Reintegration of the Temporarily Occupied Territories, which forms part of the Legal Reform Commission under the President of Ukraine. It assumes that, for example, people who worked for the structures of the occupation administration will not be able to work for Ukraine's state agencies. Certainly, these issues require further work and their subsequent inclusion into specific normative acts in the future. However, it is worth emphasising that we believe that the most efficient way to pursue transitional justice is through presidential decrees, supplemented by sectoral laws enacted by the Ukrainian parliament.

So far, a legal bill has been prepared to establish the framework for a transitional period. It was prepared by Oleksii Reznikov, who until recently was the Minister for Temporarily Occupied Territories (he is now the minister of defence). This proposal also envisages amendments to specific laws, including the country's criminal code. Reznikov's proposal should not yet be seen as some kind of rivalry to the work of our office or the entire Crimea Platform. On the contrary, we have worked in close co-operation with colleagues from other state agencies, such as the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry for the Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories, and many others (e.g. the Prosecutor's Office). It is necessary to bring up, for example, the excellent work of the Ministry of Justice, thanks to which the European Court of Human Rights has confirmed in its recent decision that Russia has been effectively in control of Crimea since at least February 27th 2014. This was a few weeks before the so-called "referendum" that was held there. This ruling thus destroyed the Kremlin's myth of the so-called "self-determination of the people of Crimea". Such a judgment is certainly very beneficial from the perspective of the functioning and further development of the Crimea Platform.

It seems that one of the greatest difficulties regarding the future de-occupation and reintegration of Crimea is overcoming Russia's information power. Clearly, in both areas, eastern Ukraine and Crimea, many people still function under the so-called information umbrella put there by Moscow. What are your plans to change this?

Above all, our task is to overcome the main Russian propaganda myth that the so-called "people of Crimea" supported the annexation of the peninsula and its further incorporation into the Russian Federation. It is simply not true. The Crimean Tatars opposed Russia's occupation of Crimea. As a result, they are still victims of Russia's illegal activities, in particular unlawful searches and arrests.

We are in constant contact with our fellow citizens who stayed in Crimea after its temporary occupation, and what I can definitely say is that they too are waiting to become part of Ukraine again.

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Of course, it is difficult to break through Russian propaganda, but we are trying to do so.

It is important that during different Ukrainian state holidays the president continues to grant state decorations, awards or orders to people who are still in Crimea, or who have become political prisoners because of their strong pro-Ukrainian position and activities. These things are not only documents signed by the head of state, but also symbols that Ukraine does not forget about its people. This is something that gives them strength. Let me mention here individuals such as Server Mustafayev, a defender of Crimean Tatar rights and coordinator of the initiative "Crimean Solidarity", who is now jailed in Russia. We should also remember Archbishop Kliment, Metropolitan of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in Crimea, a denomination which in fact is now on the verge of annihilation. Last but not least, it is worth mentioning Nariman Jeljal, deputy chairman of the Mejlis of the Crimean Tatars. Of course, there are also many others.

Let us talk for a moment about Nariman Jeljal. On September 4th 2021 he was arrested by Russian secret services. Later, the occupation court in Simferopol ordered his detainment for two months. Shall we understand such acts, which clearly are violations of human rights, as Russia's reaction to the Crimea Platform?

Without a doubt. Nariman Jeljal is a key figure who permanently lives in Crimea. All free people who live there unite around him. These are not only Crimean Tatars, but also all other people who are still living on the peninsula and who do not agree with Russia's occupation of Crimea. For all these years in the aftermath of Russia's aggression, Jeljal stayed in Crimea, helping human rights defenders, activists or families of political prisoners. He has been awarded a medal for distinguished services to the Ukrainian nation, which he received from President Zelenskyy in 2020. Jeljal also openly participated in the Crimea Platform summit. Additionally, he took part in the opening of our Crimea Platform office and delivered a beautiful speech in the presence of the president. That is why it is clear that his arrest by representatives of the occupation administration in Crimea was Russia's reaction to these activities. Having said that, I want to stress that accusing Jeljal of "sabotage" is completely absurd and unlawful.

While giving his closing remarks at the August summit in Kyiv, President Zelenskyy invited Russia to join the initiative. This move would eventually result in a summit in Yalta, during which control over Crimea will be restored to Ukraine. This idea was criticised as absurd and inappropriate. Russia, after all, is an aggressor and an occupant. Nonetheless, I wonder whether this speech was just skilful rhetoric or Zelenskyy's real political plan?

Before answering this question, we have to first say that I am very grateful to President Zelenskyy for accepting

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a significant part of our proposals on Crimea and implementing them as the head of state. Without a doubt, President Zelenskyy is very involved in working on the Crimean issue and takes personal responsibility for the success of the Crimea Platform. His position on Russia as an aggressor and occupant is very firm and unchanging. He emphasised it very clearly at the August summit. For this reason, I do not see any justification to criticise the words that you mentioned.

What should be remembered though, is that, as a principle, de-occupation can be done in two ways – peacefully or militarily. Clearly, for us the only path is a peaceful resolution to the conflict (enhanced by sanctions, political pressure, etc.). We have to be ready for the day when Russia will return control over Crimea to Ukraine. We must have everything documented by then (in particular, all crimes committed and violations of human rights) and estimate future compensation that we will demand from the Kremlin. If Russia joins the table of negotiations and participates in the process of Crimea's de-occupation, the reintegration route will certainly be faster and more effective. The question is not whether Ukraine will return its flag to Crimea, but when it will happen.

Anton Korynevych is Permanent Representative of the President of Ukraine in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the Head of the Office of the Crimea Platform, and associate professor of international law at the Institute of International Relations of the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv.

Tomasz Lachowski is a legal scholar and Associate Professor and Chair of International Law and International Relations at the University of Łódź. He conducts research on the application of transitional justice mechanisms in post-Maidan Ukraine relating to the ongoing Russian aggression. He is editor of the Polish online magazine *Obserwator Międzynarodowy* (*International Observer*).

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Between nationalist propaganda and recognition of minority victims

The Russian interpretation of the Second World War

A conversation with Sergey Lukashevsky, director of the Sakharov Center in Moscow. Interviewer: Kristina Smolijaninovaitė

KRISTINA SMOLIJANINOVAITĖ: The Sakharov Center as we know deals with the history of Soviet totalitarianism as part of its mission to promote freedom, democracy and human rights. It once held the exhibition "Different Wars" by the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum, which concerned conflicting memories of the Second World War across different parts of Europe. That war often serves as a focal point for collective memory on fascism or imperialism and is therefore a key reference point for defining national and regional identities. It also helps to remind people of the ideals of peace and respect for human lives. So how relevant is the remembrance of the Second World War in your country today? One underlying question also concerns the choice of narrative, with the specific ideals of the Great Patriotic War contrasting with the more general Second World War.

SERGEY LUKASHEVSKY: I do not think that there is generally any real remembrance of the Second World War, but rather of the Great Patriotic War. Basically, one can describe it in just four sentences: 1) The Great Patriotic War was fought by the Soviet Union against Nazi Germany; 2) this conflict was the bloodiest and most destructive episode of the Second World War; 3) the Soviet Union triumphed over Nazi Germany, in a war that left millions of people dead, wounded or crippled, with major destruction in all parts of the Soviet Union where the war took place; and

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4) due to this, remembrance is considered relevant nationwide.

When we start talking about the war as a whole, in its early period the Soviet Union was practically an ally of Nazi Germany. This historical moment is certainly difficult for all Russians to grasp. It is not just that our country was not on its best behaviour, as the problem lies within the contradiction itself. How is it that we were allies with somebody who later came to be such a bloody, dreadful enemy of our country? This definitely does not mesh well with the nation's memory. On the one hand, the remembrance of the war – the Great Patriotic War – certainly is an important part of Russian national memory, simply on account of the horror and scale of this event. On the other hand, it is important to remember how guilty those generations felt, the ones who lived through and fought in the war. This is not simply the memory of shared horror, hardship, and victory, but also of terrifying events taking place after the previous awful decades of the civil war and repression. Following that, the now fragmented Russian society, which the communist government controlled through massive repression, terror and indoctrination, was finally somewhat united in a sense. Of course, to some extent in the Soviet Union friendship existed between peoples, with notable exceptions including the breakout of various bloody conflicts in the 1980s. During the war, this friendship was all based on frontline brotherhood. Initially, it was a brotherhood of truly different nationalities and people who fought together: Tatars, Uzbeks, Tajiks, Russians and Ukrainians. This could include almost anyone in the country, with some understandable exceptions. Both the Soviet government and Russian authorities have used the memory of the Second World War as an ideological principle. I think the Soviet government did this intuitively and truly relied on the fact that it was a living memory shared and celebrated by living people. However, I think the current Russian government is doing it based on a concept first laid out by French theologian and philosopher Jean-Luc Marion. Ultimately, Marion believed that a shared tragedy must occur in order to locate a nation's identity. It seems to me that this is a completely conscious political move in Russia. These ideas are not something based on empty values but rather real memories and events. I see this as a completely consistent activity. Subsequently, the problem with the remembrance of the Second World War, the Great Patriotic War in Russia, is that the government carefully guards this short, yet dominant narrative. It absolutely denies other narratives, even those that are not in direct contradiction, but only seeking to refine it in parts.

As you say, for the Russian government it is imperative to have a cult of victory for building the nation's identity. At the same time, I believe we need to remember that the Second World War was a very compli-

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cated conflict with a lot of historical contradictions and experiences. Is there some hope for alternative narratives to prevail and encourage a more complex debate in Russia?

Inevitably, there are other alternative narratives. The Russian government dismisses these narratives because they are determined to make the remembrance of the conflict into a cult of war and victory. A cult as such perpetuates itself by an essentially religious adherence to precepts, not simply memories. It also does not tolerate any contradictions. A cult should have one singular voice, whereas any additional narratives would raise unnecessary questions. Those who are fixated on the particular importance of one narrative may end up shifting the subject from the victors and soldiers to the victims of the war.

It is interesting that among monuments, there were different types dedicated to the Second World War and Great Patriotic War in Soviet times. For example, in the village of Saltykovka – where I grew up – there was a monument installed in the 1980s that featured the figure of a crying woman. But now, all the monuments being installed are only of soldiers, who are always depicted as victorious. In Soviet times, it was different. There were monuments of sorrow, and then they somehow included soldiers among them as well. The monument I am talking about, with the central figure of a crying woman, also depicted soldiers running into combat. It is like there was this balance between remembrance of sorrow and victory. In fact, the main official song of the Soviet times, which would mark the tearful celebration of *"Den Pobedi"* or "Victory Day", also expressed this idea of these two themes. Today, since the remembrance of victory and war is being constituted into more of a cult, the sorrow narrative has been reduced. It may not be completely missing or absent, but it is now small.

So how would narratives of the war under such a cult accommodate perspectives of minority identities within Russia and beyond? When is it possible to have more open discussion about different views or interpretations of the war in your country?

By extension of our discussion, one might consider historical perspectives on the division of Poland by the Soviet Union and Germany, as well as other specific topics on Crimean Tatars, Chechens, Ingush, and so on. It is clear that there is a range of other different situations. In Chechnya, the memory of deportation is still preserved, though there was a recent story about how a historical monument dedicated to victims of deportation was moved to a new location, becoming smaller and less central than before. Nevertheless, national memory is respected there. If we look at the narrative of Crimean Tatars, we will see a much more complex and sad story, where myths are resurrected once again about them being collaborators with the Nazi occupiers as a means of justifying the deportation.

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The most complex and troubled narrative concerns Soviet society during the period of the Great Patriotic War, especially in terms of the degree of anger towards the Soviet government. I am not talking about the Baltic ethnic groups or the western parts of Ukraine, which were annexed right before the war, but about a large part of the populations of Belarus, Ukraine and even parts of Russia. There was active or passive support for the occupiers during the period of the Great Patriotic War and naturally, for Vlasov's army too (Interviewer's note: this army was a collaborationist formation, primarily composed of Russians, that fought under German command during the war). These topics are an absolute taboo today and difficult to comprehend. Another theme related to this is repression, along with the crimes committed by the Soviet government and military personnel. These involved the army's barrier squads, the activities of SMERSH (counter-intelligence fighting "anti-Soviet elements" in the Red Army), and violence in the occupied territories of Germany and the satellite states. Just like the theme of collaborationism, this is also taboo for people in Russia today. The position of the central cult forces the government to consider these and other narratives unacceptable. As a result, these ideas are generally criminalised and cast aside. In the best case scenario, such ideas might be absorbed as part of the larger narrative. Generally, there is a great difficulty with regards to the theme of collaborationism. Technically, you could talk about it in abstract terms, but asking any provocative questions is almost impossible. Certainly, you can still discuss the deportation of the peoples of the Caucasus, and probably the Crimean Tatars. Some time ago in the Sakharov Center, we opened an exhibition by an Ingush artist, who painted a series of paintings on this topic. Events dedicated to the memory of these deportations are not only happening in Moscow but in the actual regions themselves. The memory is kept alive there with events every year.

Photo courtesy of Sergey Lukashevsky

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In Gdańsk, Poland, the Museum of the Second World War became a platform for the political radicalisation of history by the ruling party that was elected in 2015. In Germany, we see another pattern regarding how narratives in museums evolve. For example, the government and politicians enable commemoration culture but commemoration itself is designed by well-informed experts who understand the content and can implement it creatively. We observed this during recent debate surrounding the government's decision to erect a memorial in Berlin for Polish war victims. How is the war represented in the museums of Russia? Are perspectives of different minorities represented, or is the official narrative omnipresent in the museums?

In Moscow, there is a Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center. Naturally, its main exposition focuses on the history of Judaism and specifically Russian Judaism. A major part is also related to the history of the Holocaust. At the same time, however, there is a full-sized T-34 tank located in a special hall, a dedicated and fairly large space. The hall also offers information about battles in tribute to the governmental narrative when this is not exactly essential for such a museum. So even in museums dedicated to other aspects of the Second World War, remembrance of the war remains the official narrative. The museum itself is designed in a very modern way. It is not a collection of artefacts arranged to tell a story. Yet, you move from one narrative to another, from one space of memory to another. Stylistically, they are also completely different. One concerns the innocent and non-combatant victims of the war, while the other involves war and victory.

How may one begin then to deal with conflicting perspectives in commemoration in the future?

I think that in Russia there is no real or serious conflict of remembrance. There are political conflicts that exist between people who are loyal to the idea that the government should play an important role in everything, and those who think that all decisions made by the government or individual state representatives are disappointing mistakes, sometimes even crimes. Yet if you were to ask these groups whether the Great Patriotic War was the bloodiest and most horrible war and whether the Soviet Union won it, the answer would always be the same. Observers have noted an increase in interest related to historical memories at the family level. It is fairly natural and normal that family memory concerns those who were killed or those who survived the frontline. The important part is that it is a private memory. I will draw a parallel here too, using results from a survey led by the Levada Center, which shows a gradual increase in the distance between the people and government. The government is increasingly becoming a separate entity that people are no longer relying on. Undoubtedly, the people and government's different projections of history constitute the most powerful aspect of this self-awareness.

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I think that people feel more distant now from the actual past itself and the psychological trauma associated with various historical cataclysms such as the collapse of the Soviet Union. At some point in time, conversation about these events will certainly resume. At such a point, it will also be possible to talk openly and publicly about the government itself, with all its mistakes, abuse, and crimes. We will be able to come back to these discussions only when political issues become part of the normalised social process. In my opinion, it is conflict, which truly does not have deep roots. There are certainly other conflicts with opposing societal narratives: Russian and Ukrainian, Russian and Baltic, Russian and Polish… These are more complex conflicts because they involve a variety of issues that reach across borders. This includes the annexation of Crimea and the particular situations faced by different societies in Eastern and Central Europe. It is also difficult for them to discuss various topics and people associated with the history of the Second World War. In Poland, we can see how historical memory is also being manipulated and becoming increasingly a part of state politics.

There are societies like Ukraine, where internally, the process of constructing nationalism and a common national narrative is very difficult. Actually, I would say that clear fault lines or stress zones exist between the narratives of the Russian-speaking parts of Eastern Ukraine and Central Ukraine. This issue existed in the past and it still exists today. To be truthful, I do not know in detail what is going on there lately, but it was clear during and after Euromaidan that these problems really existed. Russia provoked and escalated the conflict in Crimea and Donbas and without a doubt made use of this pre-existing tension. To be clear, the Russian government did not create these issues. They just used them for their own politics. Since these are clearly very painful issues, creating a dialogue will be difficult but generally required. This is not a very historical belief, but I think that growing up is required from all societies in Central and Eastern Europe.

You have mentioned the Levada survey poll. How shall we perceive these various social surveys, which show overwhelming support for the government, its practices, ideas and narratives?

Lately, in the intellectual circles of Russian society, there is heated debate on how to perceive these various social surveys that show support for the government. Many are talking about a spiral of silence, meaning that people recognise the repressive actions of the government and react to this unconsciously by simply supporting majority opinion. If all of this official propaganda disappeared and left a void, we might surprisingly discover that Russian society is not stagnant but open to a variety of thoughts. A few years ago, in the Sakharov Center, we hosted a discussion with the members of the "Free Histor-

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ical Society". A lot was said about how there are points of conflict in the public space regarding political repression, attitudes towards Stalin and revolution, and so on. It was really scary to see people willing to fight over the topic, given the freedom to do so. However, when we get to the level of the very root of remembrance – local memory – then we find that there really is no conflict. People are ready to listen to one another and peacefully reconcile different narratives. I think, in Russia, this is primarily the political challenge. The narratives are ultimately the heart of society.

Sergey Lukashevsky is the director of the Sakharov Center in Moscow and a member of the Moscow Helsinki Group.

Kristina Smolijaninovaitė is the deputy director of the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum in Berlin. She also leads the forum's "Confronting Memories" programme. The programme explores the phenomenon of historical memory and currently works with history teachers from Belarus, Germany, Poland, Russia and Ukraine.

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The LGBTQ+ community, just like the army, is a part of society

An interview with Viktor Pylypenko, Ukrainian army soldier and head of the country's LGBT Military Equal Rights Association. Interviewer: Vitalii Mazurenko

VITALII MAZURENKO: What is your opinion on tolerance towards the LGBTQ+ community in Ukraine?

VIKTOR PYLYPENKO: Ukrainian society has been changing in front of our eyes. Maybe some time ago it looked like we were behind other countries with regards to this issue. But now things are different. When it comes to the country's social transformation, equal rights education and human rights, including those of the LGBTQ+ community, we are moving forward. We can see this, for example, in the number of participants at the Kyiv Pride Parades. While in 2015 its participants (very few in number) were attacked by right-wing radicals, these events now not only attract larger numbers of participants but are also organised in smaller towns and localities. Here, I also have to mention my organisation, the LGBT Military Equal Rights Association, which is the first initiative of this kind in the post-Soviet space. It gathers together Ukrainian servicemen and women who are becoming more and more open about their sexual orientation. Thus, I can say that Ukraine has been experiencing positive social changes.

To me, it seems that this is also the first organisation of this kind in all of Eastern Europe. What are your goals and work methods?

We are registered in the official state register of organisations. However, we were twice refused this status by a clerk who turned out to be religious and homophobic. She even called us nasty names and hindered our registration by bureaucratic means. We managed to get

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around these issues and first registered in Kramatorsk. We plan to eventually re-register the organisation in Kyiv. We co-operate with Tergo, which is a support group for the parents of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people. They invite us to meetings with teachers and school psychologists, for whom we offer our own personal experiences. Our projects have been supported by the Canadian, Dutch and American embassies, as well as the Freedom House. We have made a series of short documentaries about openly gay and lesbian soldiers and we showed it at the Ukrainian Film Festival in Warsaw. We also organised roundtable discussions in which our members and non-LGBTQ+ veterans and politicians participated.

Another activity we conduct is supporting LGBTQ+ soldiers. We organised meetings with psychologists for over one hundred soldiers who needed help not only with their post-traumatic stress disorder or physical injuries but also with accepting their own sexual orientation. In this regard, we co-operate with a group called "peer to peer", which is run by open lesbian war veteran Nastia Konfederat. Today, this organisation has more than 100 members. Our main goal is education. We want to show our society that there are LGBTQ+ soldiers. The truth is that if we move out of large cities and go to small towns and villages – the places where the majority of our soldiers come from – not many people will know about it. In Mariupol, we were invited onto regional television – this was an interesting experience. We later found out that the viewers' opinions about what we said were overall positive. We are trying to break away from the Soviet thinking about non-heteronormative people and the army.

Considering that not every soldier can come out, what is your communication strategy?

After I came out, it became clear to me that I will face harassment and that is why I decided to create a Facebook group. An exhibition with photos of LGBTQ+ soldiers also included my photograph, and it was shown to the public by the media. I asked them to share the link to our group in their programmes and it worked out. Many people started to join. I also created closed groups within this community. Those who wanted to join were asked whether they were servicemen or women. If yes, they were asked if they were "friends of Dorothy" (this is a slang question about sexual orientation) or just supporters? Only "friends of Dorothy" were allowed to join the closed groups. From time to time, we would also see blank profiles. Most of them are servicemen who are a bit older, 45+. We call them "fathers".

Did you ultimately come out for your brothers in arms?

No, I did not do it for them. My mother, my stepfather and my brother all knew. My friends who served with me, they found out earlier too. They accepted my sexual orientation, saying that they had

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suspected for some time. They treat it as something normal, sometimes they joke about it. But I do not get offended because I trust them. In the military, I keep it to myself because I try to avoid negative reactions on the part of my supervisors. They could claim that I did not comply with regulations, harass me or even kick me out of the service. This is indirect bullying.

Do you know of such cases?

Yes. My friend was kicked out of the army for "service incompliance". I do not remember the phrase exactly, but it was something along this line. I know a few gay men who served with me, but they are all afraid.

Did you organise the group? Do you support each other?

Overall, there are many of us in the army. And that is why it hurts me to hear that gay men are not fighting and they opt to stay home. It even happened that many of us knew each other prior to our military service and then we met again in the army.

Is there more homophobia in the army than within society at large?

I think there is less of it, but I cannot assess it properly since people can be different. However, I did not encounter a huge amount of homophobia and that is why I do not know how to answer this. I would rather say that there is more verbal homophobia and that it is observed among those who have not met a gay person yet. I could also see this change among my friends, some of whom were once homophobic.

Don't you think that with the lack of a right-left divide, especially in Ukrainian media, the LGBTQ+ community is not perceived as solely a left-wing movement? Could this actually mean that in the future this community will be present in all parts of the political spectrum?

This certainly is a positive thing. I can see what is going on in other European countries. There, the LGBTQ+ community is at a disadvantage because of its political engagement. In Ukraine, we have managed to avoid this. There were attempts to play this card, but we had a feeling that this division was instigated from the outside, suggesting that there are right-wingers and left-wingers and that they need to fight each other.

Exactly. Clearly, nationalistic organisations do not touch this topic at all…

I would say that it even goes beyond that. In our organisation we have members of these groups you are talking about. For example, we have three soldiers from the Azov Battalion. We should note that support for this group is very, very small. Even if all nationalistic organisations were united, they would not get more than two per cent of the vote. This is unlike the German AfD or Marine Le Pen in France.

I would argue with this comparison, as much of France's right wing is the result of

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Photo courtesy of Viktor Pylypenko

the state's secularisation policy and has been present in public life since Charles de Gaulle, while the AfD is rather a Putin project…

Marine Le Pen also receives money from Russia. In Ukraine, we have a similar project called "Tradition and Order". They showed pro-Russian tendencies when they came out to protest and support Viktor Medvedchuk's TV channels, all the while talking about the violation of their freedom of speech. Russia instigates populist movements in every country as they seem to be in social demand, as it was with antisemitism some time ago. The populists do not need to create anything new. They just take an issue and exploit it. The same was true for anti-immigrant movements or Cambridge Analytica, which was financed by Lukoil. On the other hand, we also need to see that in Ukraine these movements, despite their small social support, have good financing. They quickly go through the state registration procedure and avoid fines for non-compliance. The police often do not react to their activities. It seems to me that the former Minister of Internal Affairs Arsen Avakov divided these groups into right and left wing in order to control the dynamics of street protests. This is also to the advantage of pro-Russian politicians. In Ukraine, radical right-wing movements are very artificial. To illustrate, let me tell you what they often look like. First, some teenagers are seemingly looked after by adults who are in fact implementing their own interests. Then, these kids are "thrown" into activities that are aimed against the LGBTQ+ community.

It also seems to me that the Ukrainian LGBTQ+ community has been under the influence of Russian culture, and especially Russian pop culture. Think about the drag queen artists who follow the example of their counterparts in Moscow…

Let me say that the LGBTQ+ community, just like the army, is a part of the society. That is why it is easy to refute the statement that we are a kind of political element or that we all share the same party line and ideology. The truth

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is that our community is very diverse. I know many people who have very different views. There are nationalists and those who are pro-Russian. There is also the older generation that has been traumatised by the Soviet experience. That is why our organisation tries to keep its distance from ideological and political disputes. On my Ukrainian flag during the Pride Parade I wrote the military oath that we give to the Ukrainian nation and the constitution. I carried this flag together with my lesbian friend. And this is our greatest value. We are not driven by any political or ideological preferences. As soldiers we are defending all citizens of Ukraine.

I would, however, like to hear more about culture…

The Ukrainian LGBTQ+ community is quite closed in itself. That is why, we – the LGBTQ+ soldiers – place an emphasis on encouraging people to come out. We are doing it on purpose, not just to make noise. The Razumkov Centre estimates that the most trusted institution in Ukraine is the army. However, it is clear that if many pop stars or cultural icons came out, then that process would accelerate even more. I hope they will take the lead in the future. This would really help the cause. It would lead to the emergence of a Ukrainian culture of acceptance. That is why we are waiting for these stars to be brave and come out. In public discourse, we already talk about such historical figures as Vasyl Vyshyvani (Wilhelm von Habsburg) or Ahatanhel Krymsky. Solomiia Pavlychko wrote about Krymsky in a book titled *Nationalism, orientalism and sexuality*. There have also been discussions about the platonic love between Lesia Ukrainka and Olga Kobylyanska. This means that in our history we have examples that are worth sharing. Right now, the LGBTQ+ military community has been encouraging the larger LGBTQ+ community to start talking more about themselves.

When it comes to Russia using its culture as a tool of influence, yes they are doing it effectively. This culture is quite simple, easy to absorb and consumerist. That is why millions of people are addicted to its content. It is difficult to counteract. That is why it is good that we have quotas on Ukrainian language content in our media and that we have a law that regulates that. As an activist, I have supported this law as much as I could. What's the most important is that we have managed to break through the resistance of those who were convinced that such regulation was not necessary and that it was enough to keep the old system. How can you change things when the whole established machinery is against you?

When talking about the laws, article 161 of Ukraine's Criminal Code states that any form of discrimination because of race, nationality, religion and other reasons, including being a part of the LGBTQ+ community, is forbidden. Is there then a need for a separate regulation of the situation of

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the LGBTQ+ community or is it more of an issue of law enforcement?

Indeed this is a problem of law enforcement. Even article 161 of the Criminal Code could be effective if Ukrainian courts and the police were properly reformed. I have recently faced a postponement in a court hearing in the case of an attack against me. It is being done so the case reaches the statute of limitations. This is happening because the judge is not interested in pursuing justice. She herself avoided lustration, even though she was judging activists involved in the Revolution of Dignity. The Ukrainian justice system simply does not work. That is why I have been working with my attorney to file my case with the European Court of Human Rights. At the same time, it was quite surprising to see the bill on counteracting discrimination due to sexual orientation. It is good that we have it but it came out of nowhere. The Cabinet of Ministers registered it one day, but without conducting any social consultations. To me, it looks like they are just putting on a good show for western partners. However, I have some doubts; I know that even if it is passed as a law as it will not deliver much change so long the courts are not reformed.

After the Revolution of Dignity, the position of religious communities increased significantly. How tangible is this change and how tempting is it for the authorities to co-operate with them?

Ukraine's geographic centre and eastern regions are quite indifferent when it comes to religion. The west of Ukraine is much more religious. However, homophobic attitudes are mostly instigated by the Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate. But, we have also heard some negative comments from representatives of the Orthodox Church of Kyiv Patriarchate, including its head – Metropolitan Epiphanius. According to a Bellingcat investigation, even American conservatives are investing in movements such as "Love against homosexuality" and members of the Verkhovna Rada, Ukraine's parliament. These representatives include Sviatoslav Yurash, who created a parliamentary group called "Values. Dignity. Family" that even took part in the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington DC. At the same time, the All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organisations unites numerous religious communities based on financial interests and corruption. Members of this organisation have access to the highest levels of our government and are thus able to block anti-discrimination initiatives. They use the term "gender ideology" to cover their corruption schemes. The so-called ordinary people are not too homophobic, in fact. They live by some myths that can ultimately be overcome. I live in a village near Kyiv and I face no problems when I go to the gym, for example. There is also a gay couple that lives in my village. They were first discriminated against in school but later were accepted. This shows that ordinary people will accept you and have normal reac-

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tions to you, as long as you communicate with them.

And what are relations like with the military priests?

I am not Christian. I feel closer to pagan Vedic religion. Many people indeed try to discriminate against me because of my religious views. They tell me that I should be a Christian because this is the religion of my ancestors. But before Christianity, the Rus' was inhabited by pagans and I feel closer to them.

How hard is it for someone who is gay to maintain a relationship when doing military service?

I am currently not in a relationship and I do not think I will be until I personally decide to properly date. But I know that there are couples who have waited for each other. And I am jealous of that, but also happy for them. I am in touch online with many people, but I think we still need to meet in person, as things are usually quite different when you are far away.

And what are your political views?

I am for Ukraine. I love my homeland and I am against pro-Russian parties. I support democracy with a touch of socialism. The power has to be that of the people and there has to be justice and equality.

What is the goal of this war?

To bring back Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its borders. But also for Crimea to come back. And receive reparations from Russia. In the end, law and order should be introduced on the whole territory of Ukraine.

Translated by Vitalii Mazurenko and Iwona Reichardt

Viktor Pylypenko is a Ukrainian serviceman and founder of an NGO dedicated to supporting LGBTQ+ people serving in the Ukrainian armed forces.

Vitalii Mazurenko is the deputy editor in chief of the portal *International Observer* (*Obserwator Międzynarodowy*), a lawyer (human rigts, international public and Ukrainian constitutional law), and a journalist (Ukrainian and Eastern Europien politics, religion, LGBTQ+). He is based in Odesa and Łódź.

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Georgia

The cradle of viticulture

NATALIA MOSASHVILI

Georgia has over 525 indigenous grape varieties, which is roughly 1/6th of the world's total grape species. Approximately 40 varieties are officially grown for commercial viticulture production. While Georgian wine has been known locally for centuries, its global consumption is a relatively recent phenomenon.

Georgia lies in the oldest wine-producing region in the world, with Georgian viticulture tracing back to over 8,000 years of grape cultivation and winemaking. While excavating a Neolithic village just 50 kilometres south of Tbilisi in the south-eastern region called Kvemo Kartli, archaeologists found prehistoric winemaking artefacts, specifically, clay vessel pieces containing residues of the world's oldest wine dating back to the 6th millennium BC. The famous clay vessels, called "kvevris", are used for the fermentation, storage and aging of traditional Georgian wine. They resemble large amphorae and are buried in the ground of wine cellars. This provides a chance to maintain a stable temperature throughout the year especially during hot temperatures, without needing to use preservatives.

The size of a kvevri wine vessel ranges from 20 to 10,000 litres, yet the most popular ones are between 1,000–1,500 litres. The artisanal hand-crafted work and the quality of the clay chosen plays a crucial role. The kvevris are made from clay from specific areas which are rich in minerals, which significantly impacts the mineral content and aromatic richness of the wine. Kvevris are made only in a few villages of Georgia. For millennia, artisanal families carefully passed down the traditional art of handcrafting kvevri from generation to generation.

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The process

The process of Georgian vinification involves crushing grapes and placing the grape juice, along with the grape skins, stems, and pips (collectively known as chacha), into clean kvevris lined with beeswax, which is then sealed. The entire winemaking process takes place within the kvevri. The juice is left to ferment into wine for at least five to six months before being decanted and bottled. The pomace – a mash of pips, skins and stalks – which remains is called chacha and is distilled into brandy, which is also called "chacha". The empty kvevri is then washed, sterilised and re-used for the upcoming harvest.

In 2013 the kvevri and the traditional Georgian method of winemaking were inscribed by UNESCO to the list of the world's intangible cultural heritage. Georgian wine is deeply embedded in its culture and considered a part of Georgian identity and customs. Alongside cultivating vines and creating unique winemaking technology, Georgians also developed a great love towards the "divine-liquid" by including it in every feast and celebration, both happy or sad. Together with a tradition of toasting, the wine has become an inseparable and very core part of the Georgian "supra" (a traditional Georgian feast).

In 2013 the traditional Georgian method of winemaking was added to the UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage.

This fond admiration for wine can be found everywhere – in art, architecture, polyphonic singing, ceremonies, traditions and even church façades which are often adorned with curling vine scrolls, arabesques and foliate motifs. Many gold, silver and bronze artefacts from the third and second millennia BC also have imprints of the vine. Numerous ornamented wine cups have been found in ancient Georgian tombs. The state museum collection also holds a bronze statue from the seventh century BC which was discovered during an archaeological excavation in the city of Vani, the statue is called "Tamada" and symbolises the oldest "Toast Master", this very tradition continues until today and is presented during every feast. That is also why many etymologists consider the modern generic word "wine" to be derived from the ancient Georgian equivalent – "Gvino".

From ancient to modern times

Throughout the centuries world-famous personas and travellers were charmed and fascinated by the taste of distinctive Georgian wine, among them were Marco Polo, Alexander Dumas and John Steinbeck. One of the first is considered Apol-

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lonius of Rhodes – the ancient Greek author who in his epic poem *Argonautica* (written around 295 BC and which tells the story of the mythical of the voyage of Jason and the Argonauts to retrieve the Golden Fleece from the remote Kingdom of Colchis – present-day western Georgia) praises Georgia's tradition of vine growing and wine drinking.

Dozens of Georgian wine companies have won gold, silver, and bronze medals at the International Wine Challenge.

During the last decade, Georgia has become a distinctively attractive destination for oenophiles, sommeliers, wine-makers, and simply for wine lovers from all over the world. People come here to explore local wineries, vineyards, traditional winemaking technology and most importantly to taste the characteristics and spectrum of Georgian wines. In other words, they come to simply immerse themselves in authentic local wine culture. Visitors explore both relatively smaller family-owned wine cellars, as well as bigger "chateaus" or wine factories which utilise both Georgian and European winemaking techniques. With a continuous and uninterrupted tradition of viticulture and winemaking, Georgia has gained the status of "the cradle of wine" and recent worldwide fame, which was quite difficult and challenging to achieve.

Georgia has over 525 indigenous grape varieties, which is roughly 1/6th of the world's total grape species. Approximately 40 varieties are officially grown for commercial viticulture production. Although, Georgian wines have always been the well-known and in demand in the Soviet space, the period of transition after the independence of the country was not an easy one; especially in the spring of 2006 when Russia imposed an embargo on Georgian wine, mineral waters and agriculture products. At that time Russia was the largest export market for Georgian wine (this ban was lifted six years later in 2012). As a result, the country was forced to diversify its target markets and promote Georgian wines globally.

Distinctive Georgian wine characteristics lead some Georgian wines to worldwide recognition in international expositions. Dozens of Georgian wine companies have won gold, silver, and bronze medals at the International Wine Challenge, the world's most influential wine competition. Georgian wines were on display at major world fora and exhibitions. Therefore, the interests and demand have significantly increased during the last decade, thanks in part to these diversification efforts.

Today, Georgia competes with leading wine-making countries in Europe and the world, which imposes different challenges to local winemakers and producers. Many of them are recovering unique and rare species of Georgian grape varieties, or cultivating well-known endemic varieties, making them into wine with the traditional method. Some have adopted classic European technology and try to produce new types of wines which are characterised by a distinctive flavour and texture.

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An ancient Georigan kvevri vessel from the 6th millennium BC.

Photo courtesy of the Tbilisi Wine Museum

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Ancient Georgian drinking vessels from the first millennia BC.

Photo courtesy of the Tbilisi Wine Museum

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A drinking vessel unearthed in near Samtavro. Most likely from the 8th-7th centuries BC.

Photo courtesy of the Tbilisi Wine Museum

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The kvevris are made from clay from specific areas in Georgia which are rich in minerals, which significantly impacts the mineral content and aromatic richness of the wine.

Photo: Natalia Mosashvili

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Between January and November 2021, 96,150,065 bottles of Georgian wine were exported, which is a historical record high since the independence of Georgia in 1991.

Photo: Natalia Mosashvili

According to the National Wine Agency of Georgia, 421 Georgian companies exported a record high rate of wine to 62 countries around the world. Between January and November 2021 as many as 96,150,065 bottles were exported, which is a historical record high since the independence of Georgia in 1991. The amount of exported wine has increased by 14 per cent compared to the same period last year and the revenue from the exported wine reached 222 million US dollars, four per cent more than the same period of the last year. All trends indicate the Georgian wine is now a global export competitor, which means one does not necessarily need to go to Georgia to taste its wine – however it is always better to visit and see the place where it is made.

Natalia Mosashvili is a freelance writer, researcher and cultural guide. She has worked on various social and humanitarian projects, including projects with IDPs in a post-conflict zone, the "Tbilisi Migrants Stories" project and a reintegration programme for emigrants returning to Georgia.

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EASTERN CAFÉ

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Alexei Navalny and the collective portrait of Russia

MARIA DOMAŃSKA

A book review of *Navalny: Putin's Nemesis, Russia's Future?*
By: Jan Matti Dollbaum, Morvan Lallouet, Ben Noble.
Publisher: C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd, 2021.

This timely story written by three researchers of Russian activism about "Putin's enemy" takes the reader on a fascinating journey. Whilst the book possesses the narrative flow of a gripping detective novel, *Navalny: Putin's Nemesis, Russia's Future?* offers insightful analysis into the socio-political realities of Putin's Russia. Overall, it is a tribute to both Navalny himself and Russian civil society at large.

This comprehensive, must-read political biography paints a vivid portrait of a man who so often evokes conflicting emotions. It is very much a "everything you wanted to know about Navalny but didn't have the chance to ask" story.

A hero or bad guy?

Navalny seduces and repels both in real life and in the book. Whilst he is a hero for many, others downplay his influence on Russian politics or even demonise him as an "autocrat". The majority of Russians see him as an ambiguous, or even suspicious figure, while the ritualistic narratives of Kremlin-sponsored propaganda depict him as everything from an enemy of the nation to a for-

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eign agent and extremist. The authors do not hide their affinity for Navalny and everything he has managed to achieve against the repressive machinery of the Russian state. Nevertheless, their approach is quite well-balanced and their positive emotional engagement does not cover up the darker shades of Navalny's political biography.

The authors skilfully dive into various nuances. Aiming to deconstruct the myths and controversies surrounding Navalny's political identity, they repeatedly give voice to the man himself. Is he a revolutionary dreaming of barricades, a hard-line nationalist, or even a racist, as many of his critics fear? Others have claimed that he is a Great-Russian imperialist that should never be trusted, as well as a dictator disguised as a democrat. His populism also suggests that he may well be an opportunist, seeking plaudits wherever he can. Some of these labels are successfully debunked in the book, which, among other things, offers a convincing explanation as to why Navalny's coalitions with other democrats proved to be so short-lived. While not trying to whitewash Navalny's nationalist past and dominant style of leadership, the authors offer a pinch of sober criticism of the old-guard liberal-democratic leaders, who face numerous political challenges. However, the authors do not pretend that they know everything about Navalny's real convictions and plans. This leaves some of the doubts and misgivings to the judgment of the readers.

And still, the greatest value of this book is that Navalny's individual evolution and career remain organically embedded in a broader context of Russian political developments over the last decade. Navalny finally turns out to be just one face in the collective portrait of Russians living under the authoritarian regime. Nothing is black and white there and many things cannot be measured with western yardsticks.

A person or a movement?

The authors tell us the story of "how the man became an institution". They start from Navalny's early years as a small entrepreneur and minority shareholder of state companies. They then analyse the reasons for his civic-political awakening as an anti-corruption activist, who turned into one of the leaders of the anti-regime protest movement in 2011–12. Finally, they paint a broader picture of his achievements as a mature politician, a man who managed to create a vast network of grassroots organisations across Russia and engage in both anti-corruption investigations and anti-Kremlin electoral campaigns. It is made clear that he is an oppositionist, able to inspire mass demonstrations throughout Putin's subsequent terms in office. These events have drawn tens of thou-

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sands of participants who were not necessarily fans of Navalny but "fans of the rule of law". Navalny owes his successes to a group of close associates, each of them a strong personality and political figure in their own right.

Navalny's movement has been an example of optimistic civic-political activism, believing in national success when there are more and more reasons for deep pessimism. Since his social background and carefully built political image correspond with the mentality of many ordinary Russians, his support base has expanded well beyond the urban middle class.

In recent years, Navalny's movement developed into a potential political alternative to the Kremlin. However, Russian rulers have always been merciless when it comes to those who defy them. Navalny was first poisoned and then imprisoned, while the organisations he had built were banned as "extremist". Nevertheless, he still remains an agenda-setter for Russia's domestic politics, even if he does it from behind bars.

A virus in the system

The book provides the readers with a solid understanding of Russia's kleptocratic authoritarianism. The authors show deep understanding of how the state tries to manage the nation, as well as how complex the moods and attitudes of the wider public can be. They brilliantly capture the nature of the slow, difficult process of building civic awareness under growing repression. By doing so, they break stereotypes about the "dormancy" of Russian society, showing that there is great demand for an opposition agenda and political alternative.

"Navalny's aim has not just been to succeed in an unfair system, but to highlight the system's very unfairness." For years he has been doing a lot to empower citizens who still suffer from the syndrome of *Homo sovieticus*. His mission to challenge Putin did not boil down to scorning the president's alpha-male political image and ridiculing him as a petty corrupt *chinovnik* (bureaucrat). In the first place, he kept reviving public politics, something the authorities have long tried to supress. We do not know

The authors show deep understanding of how the state tries to manage the nation, as well as how complex the moods and attitudes of the wider public can be.

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whether this "thorn in Putin's side" will ever become the president of the Russian Federation. However, in some way he has already become a virus, potentially challenging the authoritarian system from within for years to come.

Is Navalny Russia's future?

After the September 2021 parliamentary election, Putin's regime entered the long phase of preparations for presidential succession. Anti-government public opinions are on the rise. According to the opinion polls conducted by the independent Levada Center in late September 2021, Navalny's political party, if it was registered, would have a chance to win seats in the parliament. Explaining the phenomenon of Alexei Navalny in the broader sociopolitical perspective is exactly what is needed now to better understand where Russia may be heading in the coming years.

"Is Navalny Russia's future? The Kremlin clearly doesn't want him to be. But Navalny, his team, and his movement have been fighting for another possibility: that it's for the Russian people themselves to decide."

The real nemesis of the dictatorial regime is the Russian nation. There is no doubt that this story is far from over, with or without Navalny. Stay tuned.

Maria Domańska is a senior fellow at the Warsaw-based Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW). She specialises in Russian domestic politics.

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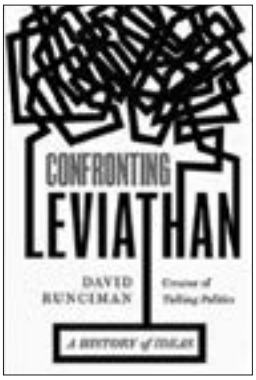
The origins of modern political thinking

SIMONA MERKINAITE

A review of *Confronting Leviathan: A History of Ideas.*
By: David Runciman. Publisher: Profile Books, London, 2021.

Can history help us make sense of what is happening in the world today? Discussion about history often centres around questions of its repetition. This is especially true regarding the lessons we can extract from the autocratic and totalitarian turn of the 20th century. While looking at history, we rarely ask how much of our thinking about politics is actually historical in nature. Understanding how we think about politics is paramount in understanding the predicaments of our times. Yet, such discussion surrounding the history of ideas generally takes place inside philosophy and humanities departments and does not enjoy as much attention in wider society. This problem is perhaps what makes David Runciman's new book *Confronting Leviathan: A History of Ideas* so interesting, as it makes ideas accessible, relative and urgent.



The author presents his ideas though the perspective of a man preoccupied not with intellectual pursuits but attempts to understand and navigate the world in which we live. Following the path of the history of ideas, the author invites us to see familiarity in things we think are new. He also attempts to uproot some of our older familiarities and deconstruct various deeply held convictions and prejudices.

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In search of the origin of power

The book, based on the *History of Ideas* podcast series by *Talking Politics*, explores some of the most important modern thinkers. This includes Thomas Hobbes, Benjamin Constant, Alexis de Tocqueville, Karl Marx, Max Weber, Friedrich Hayek, Hannah Arendt, and others. The 12 essays are compiled in a way that helps promote the diversity of canon within modern political thought. For example, there are at least several women among these figures. Along with Arendt, we find Mary Wollstonecraft and Catharine MacKinnon. Simultaneously, authors with non-western heritage are also present, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Frantz Fanon and Francis Fukuyama.

Runciman begins the story of modern man with Thomas Hobbes. Why not with someone else, say Machiavelli? After all, it was the Italian diplomat and philosopher who popularised the idea that politics is no holy business, but a game of thrones. *The Prince* represents the modern politician – cunning, plotting, willing to do whatever it takes. This is what makes Machiavelli's writing feel relevant and modern. The division of power among different branches of governance in a modern state, the multiplication of sources of power, and tools of oversight including elections are ultimately meant to keep the corrupt princes' power in check.

As Runciman argues, the key shift comes in the understanding of the origins of power. Machiavelli still thought that the origins of power lie either with republican rule or principalities. This means that politics is a choice of whether one person or many may rule over us. Hobbes, in contrast, foresaw the key shift from pre-modern to modern political man through the obliteration of this choice. Life outside the state, as Hobbes defines it, is "nasty, brutish and short". Humans long for stability and safety, hence make the ultimate, yet unavoidable compromise – to give up our absolute freedom and consent to rules of conduct. That is how the state, or the *Leviathan*, ultimately comes into being.

The power of the state depends on our consent and yet this is an authority we cannot claim or control. For example, the state's power lies in its seemingly legitimate claim to decide questions of life and death, something that no citizen of the state can possess. Think about our experience of the current COVID-19 pandemic. Our lives are now subject to an almost mechanical process of counting infections and making projections, as well as modelling the possible movements of people inside their own homes. There is something artificial to it. Yet, it also possesses a mystical power that is the only source of human salvation – the possibility of avoiding chaos, misery, suffering and death. The government's decisions have the power only as long as a majority of the citizens freely consent and obey its guidelines.

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It goes to show, that we are in an entanglement with the state that is always about something more than our consent. We create the state's power yet ultimately lose control over it. The paramount example of this reality in action is elections. We gain the ultimate control over those who are in power, and yet, once they take their oath, power is once again out of our control. Despite this, politicians still need to honour their mandate. As a result, power in a modern state cannot be claimed by either the people or the government. Runciman argues that the predicament of the modern political man is this "doubleness". He structures the following essays around this issue, exploring and exposing it as a contradiction between freedom and control, power and violence, and equality and disparity among various classes, sexes and cultures/civilisations.

The conundrum of the modern free man

The book's more fascinating essays tell the story of modern man as one of reconciliation with this doubleness. As Marx, MacKinnon and Fannon discuss, the idea of freedom often coexists with persistent forms of class, economic, sexual and colonial oppression and exploitation. Runciman focuses on exposing the deeper associated tensions between egotistical men, who enjoy individual freedom, and humans searching for meaning. This again exposes the doubleness of our political life, which is directly discussed in an essay by Benjamin Constant. In his 1819 work, titled "The liberty of ancients compared with that of moderns", Constant compares the modern free man to the ancient notion of freedom. The Greek and Roman understanding of freedom was associated with public life and the wider "polis". Ancient freedom begins with interaction with others, as well as an ability to build a common world through speech and action. The "moderns" stand in radical contrast to this ancient idea and practice of freedom. Overall, modern freedom is much more internalised, as it is

The idea of freedom often coexists with persistent forms of class, economic, sexual and colonial oppression and exploitation.

something enjoyed individually and in private away from politics. Ultimately, the free men are the trading, consuming, mobile men.

We separate ourselves from premodern political men through our universal, natural rights. When pressed to

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the limit, this form of individualised freedom also creates opportunities for the abuse of power. Too few people in a democratic state invest enough time and effort into political life. This is because we see our ultimate self-fulfilment, sense of self and happiness as lying outside the political domain. But that is not all. Freedom is the paramount political idea that modern men take special pride in. This is why, according to Tocqueville, the key division in modern politics is between different forms of governance, which he saw as a showdown between the Russian Empire and revolutionary America.

By trying to avoid the increasing bureaucracy of politics we fall into a different extreme by overpoliticising every aspect of our life.

Yet, as Constant pointed out, we often feel inadequate. As the mass movements of the 20th century show, we are easily persuaded that there is something wrong with us, that our freedom is a bit flat and hollow in comparison to ancient freedom. This is how we become easily drawn into different mass movements, lured by the promise of a meaningful collective experience. Here once again is that doubleness – we separate ourselves from pre-modern man through individual freedom. At the same time, we feel this freedom to trade and consume is not worth the blood and sacrifice that the fight for freedom demands. Hence some thinkers like Arendt, who, having lived through the worst of the 20th century, cautioned us against reducing liberty to any single thing or idea. As soon as we are allowed to be reduced to a single thing and lose the diverse horizons of freedom (to speak and act with others), we become easy prey for control and manipulation.

There is, indeed, no simple resolution to this doubleness. The story of the horrors of the last century speak to the need for an individual who will stand out and not follow the rules. However, every modern state relies on a certain level of obedience to rules and procedures. Whilst an increasingly complex bureaucracy did contribute to hellish systems of mass killings, imprisonment and torture, it also limits human error and hubris in state affairs. By trying to avoid the increasing bureaucracy of politics we fall into a different extreme by overpoliticising every aspect of our life. The political process can be paralysed by emotions and polarisation, as they encourage a situation in which expertise and wisdom become completely disposable. The contradictions of this individualised freedom once again stood out sharply during the pandemic. For instance, the individual freedom to not get vaccinated leads to restrictions on your freedom to assemble, get an education or care for relatives.

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Political men

This doubleness runs through different aspects of political life and a true politician is someone who is willing and able to reconcile themselves with it. We want leaders with vision and ideas, as well as a strong individual character. Contrasting visions and ideas steer the political process, and modern, large states ensure the process of representation. Naturally, people who hold different values and ideological positions feel they should have a place in public political life.

Yet, if politics becomes a battleground among different ideological positions, we risk ending up with political discourse that is radically out of touch with reality. You cannot simply take an idea and apply it to whatever new phenomena you come across without thinking of its implications. These politics of ideas also help political figures evade personal responsibility. As Weber suggested right after the First World War in *Politics as a Vocation*, politics is by no means the business of saints. A true politician is subsequently someone who holds beliefs and convictions, but also realises that power bears real responsibility, often with lives at stake. To be a true politician, according to Weber, you must reconcile yourself with the doubleness of the ethics of conviction and responsibility. A political leader not only promotes a certain vision but realises the burden of governance.

This is why the professional politician is not necessarily someone who is trained in governance, nor a knowledgeable scientist, expert or academic. The vocation implies character, as well as a willingness to undertake and live with this doubleness and possibly thrive under difficult conditions. In contrast, someone who uses sovereign power to transform the world regardless of any associated misery, destruction or violence is as bad a politician as someone who is so burdened by their conscience that they paralyse the state's decision-making process. By accepting the doubleness of politics, we are able to consider the consequences of our own actions whilst still having enough conviction to face up to these decisions if they go wrong.

While the essays themselves present only a fraction of modern thought, this somewhat eclectic collection exposes the burden of modern man regarding this doubleness. We now enjoy a level of freedom unprecedented in human history. This warrants a political power that cannot be claimed by those who rule us. At the same time, this extensive private, individual freedom can have a depoliticising effect, such as neglected responsibility for the world we share. The modern doubting and wondering mind led to the triumph of science. At the same time, there are radically different ways of how we use this science: to build all descructive bombs at the same time scientific inovation is our only chance to preserve and save the plannet.

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Accepting this doubleness can guard us against extremes. The tale of the modern man is a tale of the revolution of freedom. At the same time, it is a story of new forms of oppression or segregation (as in the case of the United States). It is not one or the other, it is both. Indeed, it is more difficult to tell ourselves this story because the origins of our problems are much harder to comprehend. When we identify the origins of inequality, oppression, totalitarianism and egoism with modernity, we are opening the way for the rejection of science, facts, universal natural freedoms and dignity. What this book offers is a reflection about political life through this doubleness. It allows us to look at the complexity of political life and avoid a one-sided understanding that can ultimately lead to the radicalisation of political thinking.

Simona Merkinaitė is a chief project officer with the East European Studies Centre in Vilnius. She is also completing a PhD focusing on Hannah Arendt at Vilnius University.

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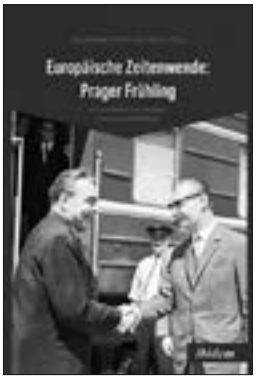
New conclusions from 1968

GERD TEBBE

A review of *Europäische Zeitenwende: Prager Frühling* (*European turning point: Prague Spring*). Edited by Iris Kempe and Wim van Meurs. Publisher: ibidem-Verlag, 2021.

This slim but substantial volume edited by Iris Kempe and Wim van Meurs recalls the Prague Spring of 1968, rightly reflected in the title *European turning point*, through reports from eyewitnesses and other contributions from both East and WestThe book covers a wide range of topics from historical perspectives to current challenges in the relationship between East and West in Europe. This includes the development of a new *Ostpolitik*, the continent's relationship with democracy and debates on bridge building and peace. The authors thus directly or indirectly take a position on various current political debates.



The book opens with eyewitness accounts from Tamara and Michal Reiman, who are just as familiar with Moscow during the Stalin era as they are with Prague before and after August 1968. Indeed, they were personally involved in different capacities in the Prague Spring. Through their descriptions, they share here for the first time previously unpublished memories of the course of the Prague Spring, its protagonists and its heirs.

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Atmosphere of upheaval

The memoirs of Tamara Reiman deserve a special mention. She at the time became a translator at the meeting of the Soviet and the Czechoslovak reformist political leaders, led by Alexander Dubček and Leonid Brezhnev in early August 1968 in a remote town on the Soviet-Czechoslovak border. Her impressions which she shares here for the first time illustrate the foreseeable failure of the country's "socialism with a human face" era that culminated on August 21st 1968.

> The group of reformers from 1968 is described by Reiman as a "large and motley conglomeration of people of different political persuasions".

At the beginning of his memoirs, Michal Reiman (now the husband of Tamara) places the Prague Spring in the context of political developments in the Soviet Union after Stalin's death. In particular, he discusses the process of de-Stalinisation, the effects and after-effects of which also influenced the Czechoslovak communist party under its General Secretary Antonin Novotny. Novotny was replaced by Alexander Dubček who, according to Reiman, was initially mistaken for a "Soviet cadre" because he had spent his childhood and youth in the USSR until 1938. The group of reformers from 1968 – to which he himself belonged – is described by Reiman as a "large and motley conglomeration of people of different political persuasions", the core of which was made up of intellectuals in Prague and the country's other major cities. In an atmosphere of upheaval, these figures were involved in editorial offices, associations and unions. They drafted texts and documents, including an action plan for the Prague Spring that Reiman "brazenly" presented at a well-attended conference in Moscow. The reformers were always aware that they were treading a fine line politically if they wanted to avoid a hopeless and open conflict with the Soviet Union.

In her contribution, Anna Kaminsky takes a look at the year 1968 in East Germany from the perspective of the country's leadership and their "agencies". They understood that the developments in Czechoslovakia were perceived by the population in a way that did not correspond to the official "line". The regime tried to counter widespread popular interest in the Czechoslovak reform process, which saw a sharp increase in East Germans travelling to the neighbouring country. Many East Germans expressed sympathy and solidarity and – after the invasion – even engaged in individual acts of open or hidden protest. According to Kaminsky,

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the hope of those in power at the end of the year that "calm" would return was not fulfilled. The Prague Spring was followed by the uprising in Poland in 1970, the protests against Wolf Biermann's expatriation in 1976, the founding of the Solidarity trade union in 1980 and finally the 1989 revolutions.

Cautious examination

The historian Peter Brandt points out that the political system created throughout 1968 by the post-Stalinist Czechoslovak communist party, which came as a surprise to many outside observers, can only be understood through a close examination of past events. "As early as 1963", writes Brandt, "several reformatory or emancipatory developments began, which, viewed in retrospect, in their combination led up to the Prague Spring." Brandt stresses the importance of the work of the economic reformers around Ota Šik, as well as the sociological analyses of the philosopher Radovan Richta and his group. Last but not least, the Franz Kafka Conference in May 1963 initiated by the literary scholar Eduard Goldstücker is also viewed as a crucial event. A cautious examination of its own past began within the communist party after 1948. This subsequently influenced the activities of the party's reform commission, which was set up in 1963 under Zdeněk Mlynář to deal with the relationship between democracy, law and politics within socialism. At the same time, Brandt emphasises that the Czechoslovak communists "originally enjoyed a relatively high level of support among the population". For example, the party won almost 40 per cent of the vote in the free elections of 1946. This made it easier for the communists to credibly lead the reform process in 1968.

Wim van Meurs connects the memory of the "Images from Prague in August 1968" with other events in Eastern Europe that have influenced collective memory in a similar way. He discusses Boris Yeltsin's speech on a tank in Moscow on August 21st 1991 and the "heroes of the fall of the [Berlin] Wall". These heroes include both East Germany's protesting citizens and West German politicians Helmut Kohl and Willy Brandt, who with his visit to Warsaw in 1970 "laid the foundation for the end of the division of Germany and Europe". He also looks at the popular uprisings in East Germany (1953) and Hungary (1956) and finally the events in Poland that followed the founding of Solidarity in 1980. A commitment to democracy and freedom connects all these events. According to the author, who specifically mentions Russia, Poland and Hungary in his conclusion, this commitment must be continued today under different circumstances as the cornerstone of a "New *Ostpolitik*".

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Reason for hope

Similar to Tamara and Michal Reiman, the Lithuanian poet and writer Tomas Venclova, born in 1937, also writes as a contemporary witness to events. He further discusses his personal experience of attempts at democratic development, which resulted in some disappointment but ultimately hope. Venclova uses the memory of the Prague Spring as an opportunity to give a historical review of resistance and dissidents in Lithuania under Soviet rule. He soberly analyses these figures' various motives and goals. As a convinced European, he also critically notes that most Lithuanian dissidents tended more towards nationalism than democracy, which still has an impact on Lithuanian politics today. Nevertheless, he finds reason for hope and a "paradigm shift … to a truly European, bourgeois concept of people and state".

Michael Thumann, a journalist and expert on Eastern Europe, provides an appropriate thematic conclusion. He discusses a global political event that can be viewed as a late consequence of the Prague Spring, namely the end of the Soviet Union. Through his stimulating description of the meeting in the Białowieża Forest on December 8th 1991, during which the presidents of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus decided on the formal dissolution of the USSR, Thumann challenges the "myth" widespread among today's Russian elite that "an empire was destroyed without need". The many courageous people who fought for freedom and democracy in what was then the Eastern Bloc can now view with belated satisfaction the quiet end of the state that emerged from the October Revolution and ruled over Central and Eastern Europe. NEE

Gerd Tebbe is a scholar of Central and Eastern Europe based in Berlin.

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A tale of emotions

KINGA ANNA GAJDA

Beanpole. A film directed by Kantemir Balagov, Russia, 2019.

The Belarusian writer and Nobel Prize Winner Svetlana Alexievich begins her book, *The Unwomanly Face of War*, by stating that women have been taking part in wars since antiquity. However, their involvement in the Second World War was unique. They fought, in large numbers, in the British, American and German armies. In the Soviet Red Army, there were also around one million Russian, Belarusian and Ukrainian female soldiers. They found themselves on the frontline as tank drivers, snipers, gunners or even in the infantry. It was their stories that Alexievich collected and published in her book, which provides a unique record of the war. This record is truly extraordinary as it is presented from an explicitly feminine point of view. Alexievich argues that "Everything we know about war we know with 'a man's voice'. We are all captives of 'men's' notions and men's sense of war … Women are silent."

Alexievich gave these women a voice and made their stories known. It then turned out that their experiences were different than the heroic descriptions of victories and other military acts presented by men. Yet Alexievich also talked about heroic acts and victories. She just did it through the use of a different, more female language.

"When women speak," Alexievich writes, "it is almost nothing of what we are used to reading and hearing about … How certain people heroically killed other people and won. Or lost … What equipment there was and which generals [were in charge]. Women's stories are different and about different things. A women's war has its own colours, its own smells, its own lighting, and its own range of feelings. Its own words."

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A new, female perspective

War stories written by women are deprived of pathos. In Alexievich's view, pathos has proven to be the least durable substance regarding memory. As a result, women's stories are instead filled with psychology and feeling. A story written by a woman is thus not only more human, but also inclusive regarding all living creatures and filled with emotions.

Directed by Kantemir Balagov, Beanpole seems inspired by Svetlana Alexievich's writing on women's perspectives. Women are the heroines of the film while the men are depicted as weak.

We can subsequently say that Alexievich's writing proves the concept of *l'écriture féminine*, which assumes that men and women use radically different language, including grammar. While men focus more on the rational presentation of facts, women exploit emotions. "Writing from the margins", as women's writing is often described, allows writers to present the war from a lesser known perspective. This is the perspective of emancipated women, who have gradually departed from their stereotypical roles and started to see a new dimension in their femininity. This dimension concerns the fact that the war left a mark on them. Ultimately, this mark is what the Russian film *Beanpole*, is all about. Directed by Kantemir Balagov, the film is inspired by Alexievich's writing on women's perspectives. Women are the heroines of Balagov's movie, while the men are depicted as weak and subordinate. It is the women who decide who they want to have sex with and why. It is also their decision who will be the breadwinner during times of hunger, whether their paralysed husbands should ask for assisted suicide or who should marry their son. It is a woman who comes to the wounded soldiers with gifts to thank them on behalf of their country – "the Motherland".

It seems that, based on the stories, post-war Soviet women were also very self-sufficient. They only need men to father their children and to have someone help them paint their flat. The post-war world is indeed a world without men, as many of them had lost their lives on the frontline. Those who returned home often came back with physical and/or mental handicaps. As a result, the men who lived in Leningrad in 1945 were either inexperienced youngsters or elders. However, after the war nobody is the same as before. Women also stopped feeling feminine. Those who talked to Alexievich admitted that they had lost all of their femininity. For example, one woman ex-

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plained how she had to spread salt and garlic on her baby boy's body to make it swollen and covered with blisters. In this way, she could pretend that her son was sick with typhus, pass the German guards and deliver medicine and bandages to the soldiers.

Experiencing death and pain on a daily basis, these women stopped being care-giving mothers and turned into female killers. In this way, they fully personified the concept of "Mother Earth". They were completing the whole cycle of life and death, playing the role of a mother who is both a source of all life and the end destination for all signs of life as it returns back to her womb. These women would later tell how their bodies were dying out during the war. They had no menstrual periods, nor any sexual desires. During the war, and right after it, they thought mostly about death, as death was omnipresent. During the war, women were also not giving birth. Illegal abortion was common, as was killing babies after birth. Women had to kill.

Soldiers forever?

All these experiences turned women from mothers who give life into a hollow Mother Earth, just like the protagonists of *Beanpole*. This includes the main character Iya, nicknamed "Beanpole", who suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder. Her symptoms include catatonia, which is the medical term for a lack of communication and movement in a traumatised patient. As a result of her symptoms, Beanpole is sent away from the front, where she had served as an anti-aircraft gunner. She took along her best friend's son, whom she later treated and raised as her own. Soon, everyone believed that Pashka was her own son and the boy himself called Iya mum.

One day, however, Iya accidentally smothers the child to death while suffering an episode as a result of her PTSD. Once an adopted mother, she ultimately turns into a child murderer. Iya never wanted to have a child on her own, though. The idea of having sexual relations with a man appals her. Clearly, she would prefer to have a close relationship with Masha (Pashka's real mother), whom she loves both platonically and as a friend.

Masha is also hollow. On her return from the frontline, she says that she wants to become a woman again. For her, to be a woman means being a mother. This role has been assigned to women for centuries – the guardians of the home. Women have been raised to become mothers and caregivers. For Masha, however, Pashka's death brings an end to this dream. Even though she manages to find a young boy to sleep with her, believing in the miracle of conception, this miracle does not happen. The infertile Masha, after a series of abortions and serious surgery caused by a shell

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wound, can no longer give life. Hence, both women are doomed to live together and only dream.

The two women cannot become the women they were before the war. They are marked by trauma and war experiences that they cannot forget. For a long time, they experience an inability to adjust to the new reality – something Alexievich often wrote about. In a way, they will be soldiers forever; to the point that they even feel uncomfortable in civilian clothes. They had to learn everything anew, including how to wear civilian shoes, dresses and skirts. Masha experiences this in the film. In one scene, she is trying on a green dress. At first she wants to spin in it and see how it twirls, but her joyful spinning also turns into a failure. Masha understands that she can no longer be the woman she once was, even when she is wearing a dress.

Stories of contrasts

What has not changed is the need for heroic deeds. For these women, this means the need to continue on living despite all the war memories and difficulties adjusting to the post-war reality. Such life and heroism requires acceptance of a new identity – that of the hollow post-war woman.

In this way, *Beanpole* acts as a continuation of Alexievich's book. It shows what happens to women after their return from the frontlines. It is a story about the brutality of the post-war reality, as people try to rebuild their lives on the ruins of war and start anew. It is a story about dreams and faith that a miracle can happen. The story about Iya and Masha is also full of physical experiences, such as gentle touches and the pain of the first unwanted intercourse. Others include the satisfaction of a one-night stand, the warmth of a baby's fingers and the touching of the husband's paralysed face.

This is a story of emotions: joy, embarrassment and fear. In the end, it is also a story about life and death, which includes both assisted suicide and attempts to conceive. These are the experiences of women who are both meek and strong; scared and heroic; fighting and retreating. It is a story about listening.

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

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

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The closer to the border, the less fear

IWONA REICHARDT

For those people who live in Donbas, the war has been taking place already for eight years now. They have learnt to live with it, even if not everybody has managed to rid themselves of the trauma since 2014.

At the time when I received an invitation from the Ukrainian Academy of Press to join a group of international journalists on a tour to Donbas, Polish and foreign internet was becoming paralysed with more and more information on Vladimir Putin' s plans, the massive build-up on the Russian-Ukrainian border and diplomatic tensions at the highest level. Specialists on the region have been living and breathing these developments 24 hours a day, as evidenced by their constant presence in traditional and social media.

The amount of information that they share with us is so vast that the so-called Average Joe has probably no choice but to get lost in figuring out who has and who will soon meet with Putin. And indeed, the list of those willing to meet with the president of the Russian Federation is long and constantly updated. The only clear piece of information that emerges from the media is that the spectre of war hangs over Ukraine.

Foreign journalist expedition

If there is war, it might not necessarily be over Ukraine, but everything will start in Ukraine. For this reason crowds of journalists, not only from Poland, are

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rushing to Kyiv to report first-hand on the mood and what is going on there. I was one of them. On my flight to Kyiv at the end of January 2022, I was joined by a French TV crew whom I later see reporting from the front of Hotel Ukraina, an ideal place to view the entirety of the city's main square, the Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square), the site of the 2014 Revolution of Dignity. For that reason the hotel is one of the main accommodations for international journalists who at such breakthrough moments as revolution or war, come to Kyiv en masse. The whole spectrum of media representatives and their cameramen fill up the hotel lobby and the breakfast bar on the second floor.

The mass presence of foreign journalists in Donbas, in the east of Ukraine, also comes up in my conversation with Piotr Andrusieczko, a Polish journalist with *Gazeta Wyborcza* but also contributor to *New Eastern Europe* whom I met in Severodonietsk, a post-industrial city which is now the acting capital of the Luhansk region. Andrusieczko, who has been covering the war since 2014 and for which he was awarded the title of Journalist of the Year in Poland, has many local contacts and a military press pass which allows him to get to the frontline. However, even for him, many meetings have been cancelled since the demand for conducting interviews with military personnel is so high. In such cases, expectedly, the biggest outlets get the priority. Nobody says no to CNN or the BBC.

The Ukrainian army and local authorities, although fully aware of the importance of media messages sent to western societies, have to first and foremost concentrate their efforts on territorial defence and local communities. They are also fully aware that unlike in the media where information about the war sells and brings huge profits to owners, it brings no material benefits to those who are on the ground. On the contrary, its outcome includes destruction and death. And the mass exodus of people.

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Indeed, since 2014 around half a million people have left the Donetsk region and over 100,000 have left the territory of the Luhansk region. Many of these people will never return, even though modernisation processes are under way and speeding into high gear. They have been taking place not only thanks to the efforts of the authorities in Kyiv, but also with huge financial support from international donors. The latter have been investing not only in physical infrastructure, especially roads, but also many social, community-oriented projects. For example, in the Luhansk region alone over 11 billion hryvnias (almost 350,000 euros) have been spent on reconstruction work. With this money 460 kilometres of roads have been built, while another 560 km will be reconstructed this year. Ten schools, preschools and sport clubs have also been opened to the

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A ruined house in a village located along the contact line in eastern Ukraine. A grim reminder of the 2014 war.

public. There is a swimming people and a new hospital, as well as social housing for IDPs and those who lost their homes as a result of the war.

Here there is civilisation

The first deputy head of the Luhansk Regional State Administration, Oleksiy Smirnov, boasts that thanks to these investments his region is no longer just existing but developing. Last year it even got the third position in the national ranking of the fastest developing regions in Ukraine. His story about the modernisation progress concludes with a quote of a statement that he apparently heard at the check-point and which was uttered by a person who was coming into Ukraine from the occupied territory. It went as follows: "Here there is civilisation".

Changes for the better can indeed be spotted with the naked eye, possibly even from the Kremlin – certainly Putin does not welcome such processes. And in a modernising Ukraine, it will be much more difficult to convince Ukrainians that the eastern direction is better for them. It is clear that a pro-western thinking is now slowly starting to take root here, where the pro-Russian sentiments were always

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the strongest. This trend is confirmed by sociological research which shows that a large majority of the society supports Ukraine's membership in the European Union and support for NATO is also growing.

The pro-integration – or in other words pro-Ukrainian and pro-western – message is also directed towards those who live on the occupied territories, in the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk Peoples' Republics. Kyiv's policy towards this region reveals some similarities to South Korea's Sunshine Policy towards the North – which assumes that through positive economic and social interactions the two Korean states will become reunited. This policy of soft "attracting" to the Ukrainian state in Donetsk and Luhansk region includes, for example, provision of infrastructure services to people who live in the self-proclaimed republics, paying their pensions with money from the Ukrainian state coffer and also medical assistance at the so-called check-points where Ukraine offers free PCR tests and COVID-19 vaccines to those living in the occupied territories.

War is already here

At the time when I was leaving Ukraine I did not know whether, despite a large amount of meetings with people from different places and areas, the escalation will take place. And if yes, in what form? The question about the latter seems the most tiring to our speakers, especially when we were asking "When will the war break out?". Obviously, they understand that this is what has been on the minds of the whole western world, from Warsaw to San Francisco. Yet, for the people who live in Donbas the war has been taking place for eight years now. They have learnt to live with it, even if not everybody has managed to rid themselves of the trauma from 2014 and despite the loud shellings that wake them up at night.

"The closer to the border, the less fear", we were told by Oleksiy Babchenko, a defender of the Donetsk Airport in 2014 and now head of the military and civil administration in Hirske, a locality whose territory is in direct contact with the occupied territory of the Luhansk region. Indeed, when we met two teenage girls (age 13) in front of the village shop, it was clear to me that they were more excited to get their pictures published online than answer our questions as to whether their parents had already prepared everything in case of the war. NEE

Iwona Reichardt is the deputy editor in chief of *New Eastern Europe*. She participated in a special study tour to Donbas organised for international journalists by the Ukrainian Academy of Press.

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