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New Eastern Europe

On how Ukraine's suffering goes well beyond the front line

LOSS AND DIVISION



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DEAR READER,

September marked six months since Russia's unprovoked invasion against Ukraine began. The Ukrainian defence, even though initially doubted by some, remains admirable. We often hear that had the Ukrainians showed less courage and determination, the western assistance, especially in terms of military equipment, would not have been offered to the extent that it has.

Yet, even though the quality and size of the equipment that the Ukrainian army has received is impressive and effectively used, it is also clear that it may not be enough as the aggression is far from over. The destruction continues.

At the time when this issue was being prepared for print the damage to Ukraine's physical infrastructure estimated by the Kyiv School of Economics was 103.8 billion US dollars. This is not to mention the human loss, cultural capital and agriculture. The authors of this issue address all of these topics, presenting the perspective from inside Ukraine. We publish them with an aim to encourage you to start thinking about Ukraine's future and one key challenge it will face – overcoming this enormous loss. Certainly, the war will end one day and it is our deep conviction that Ukraine will come out victorious and territorially integrated.

Yet, the reconstruction to follow will take years and the cost will be massive, especially since the Ukrainian government has promised that it will do its best to "rebuild better than before". To make that happen the international community needs to get involved and willing to share in the costs. That is why we fully agree with the proposal presented in this issue to offer Ukraine debt relief, just as Germany received it after the Second World War and Poland – partially – after the fall of communism. We hope that such thinking, with a long-term perspective in mind, will prevail and adequate efforts will be made so that security and democracy become deeply rooted in the region.

In addition to discussing the current situation in Ukraine, we also tackle the topic of the long-term perspective of Germany's reunification in 1991. It is worth revisiting this historic event from various viewpoints, understanding that while it should be consider a success, lessons should still be drawn. And the future developments in Europe are still being shaped by Germany's reunification.

As always we invite you to follow us online and via our social media. And we welcome your comments and feedback.

The Editors

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Ukraine's suffering goes beyond the front line

OKSANA FOROSTYNA

Ever since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February, the country has lost people, cities, infrastructure and money at a dizzying speed. Current statistics regarding the state of the country make for grim reading. However, not every loss is measurable.

There is nothing more devastating in life than the loss of a child. It is not only a tragedy for the family, but it also appeals to our deepest evolutionary mechanisms – both to our modern set of values regarding the rights of children and to our eternal drive to survive as a community. As of August 1st, 358 Ukrainian children have been killed since the beginning of Russia's invasion and 693 have been injured. Furthermore, 203 children are still missing, most of them in the combat zones (there have been 4,242 reports to police since February 24th, though most children have been found).

More than 2,000 Ukrainian orphans from the occupied territories have been kidnapped and taken to Russia. There, they are to be "adopted" by Russian families or brought up in military orphanages ("cadet schools"). According to Ukrainian sources, 5,700 Ukrainian children in total have been deported to the Russian Federation. At the same time, Russia claims there are 450,000 displaced or deported children on its territory. It is hard to estimate the scale of the "re-traumatisation" caused by Russia's policies of forceful deportations. They not only bring back painful collective memories of Stalin's deportations to gulags, but also of premodern slavery and human trafficking in the frontier territories.

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Demographic spiral

This re-traumatisation cannot be of little consequence to the social norms of bringing up children and the respective infrastructure. Ukraine was a post-genocidal nation before 2022 and it will be a "post-post-genocidal" nation after the war. Jokes about overprotective Jewish moms may be funny, but those are ultimately the result of the traumas of the Holocaust and innumerable pogroms. Ukrainian moms may soon give a name to their helicopter parenting in their frontier country.

Similar to other Central European states, Ukraine was in the midst of a demographic crisis before Russia's invasion. In fact, the Ukrainian population has been shrinking since 1990 – a year considered as "the maximum" (when the population was more than 51 million). But that is not fully correct. If it was not for the cumulative effect of the series of genocides in the 20th century (including the artificial famine of 1932–33 which claimed at least four million lives), the Ukrainian population could have potentially been at least 80 million in 1990, not 51.

Since 1990 the country has lost at least 20 per cent of its population. Back in 2020 the birth rate in Ukraine was at 1.2 per cent and the population was ageing. The current war sped up this downward spiral. The current debate now focuses on how many Ukrainian refugees, mostly women with children, will come back home from Europe. It is obvious that at least some will stay, especially in the countries facing the same demographic challenges. In many places Ukrainians have started working and adapted to the new environment. At least some countries will encourage them to stay.

For Ukraine the demographic crisis is a menace and a long-term setback to economic development. The country is the biggest in Europe and so is its infrastructure. This means that in the future less people will be able to support the country's transportation routes, electricity and water supply, heating, health care and education.

In economic terms a market of a small country, say 15 million people, is unable to provide a business the same opportunities to grow its output as a market of 40 million (many Ukrainian businesses do accomplish technological advancements that may surprise their European colleagues). Hence, the openness of other markets, first and foremost in the European Union, will be a matter of survival for Ukraine. And here is the big test both for the EU and Ukraine's authorities and business communities. Will European countries use EU legislation mechanisms to favour and protect old members facing new competitors from the East, who are skilled and hungry? Will the Ukrainian authorities stick to their declaration of taking the European path? Will the Ukrainian business community be persistent enough to ensure the politicians keep their pro-European promises?

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De-modernisation of the East

No one currently knows how the general landscape of the country will change after the war (and who can even define "after"?) Even the most optimistic scenario – the fall of the authoritarian regime in Moscow – presumes that Russia will still be a cause of instability in the region for generations to come. This means that life on the frontier will constitute a risk. Ukraine will subsequently need a sort of military zone along its border. At the same time, some Eastern Ukrainian cities are almost totally destroyed. In Rubizhne in the Luhansk region, for example, 90 per cent of its pre-war infrastructure no longer exists.

Rubizhne as a town grew out of a settlement for those who built a railway station in the late 19th century. Later, it was a city for the workers of an established local factory. The name of the town itself can be translated as "frontier". Before the railway, in the early modern history of Ukraine, Rubizhne was a paramilitary settlement of Ukrainian Cossacks. It was literally the frontier between Slobidska Ukraine and the Wild Fields – the steppes of modern-day Ukraine's eastern and southern territories alongside southern Russia. But now, after so much has been destroyed, it may return to its previous status as a wild frontier. One could wonder if there is any sense in rebuilding this town, if there are no jobs, infrastructure or prospects for the people.

The ruined industrial East of the country is a palpable example of de-modernisation by missiles.

The ruined industrial East of the country is a palpable example of de-modernisation. In this case, it is a de-modernisation by missiles. Hence, it is very likely that the region may once again become what it was during the 17th century: a military belt and a frontier between European civilisation and a menacing, backward despotism.

As Ukraine keeps losing infrastructure in the big eastern cities – one of the biggest and most important is Kharkiv, under regular attacks – some parts of them are now hardly liveable. In the case of Kharkiv, the border with Russia is just 50 kilometres away. Chernihiv is not as big, but also badly damaged. Back in May the mayor said 70 per cent of the city's infrastructure was destroyed (other sources confirmed the damages of at least 20 per cent of the residential buildings). Chernihiv is now rebuilding its local power plant. The city will hopefully have heating this winter. But will it have investments?

As of mid-July, more than 600 production facilities had already relocated to western Ukraine. Almost 500 others were looking for a place to relocate. These are the official statistics regarding businesses that applied for assistance to move operations. But not all businesses applied for aid. Many IT specialists essentially have

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their facilities in a backpack. As for these relatively well paid, young, and adaptive people, up to 57,000 (mostly women) of a total 285,000 left for other countries. According to research by the Lviv IT Cluster, 27.8 per cent of the IT community was living in eastern Ukraine in December 2021. Now, only ten per cent remain there. In May 2022 the IT community in the western region grew from 16.5 to 24 per cent. According to the same research, 57 per cent of IT specialists would prefer to stay in Ukraine.

The destruction of Ukraine's industry also means massive ecological problems and many of them are still unknown. For example, the Chornobaivka poultry farm in the occupied Kherson region, one of the biggest in Europe, was totally cut off from electricity due to the blockade. More than four million chickens died and there were no means for proper disposal. The chemical traces of the shelling, fires, abandoned productions and the erosion of the soil are hard to estimate at this point as most of the affected territories are still occupied. How much of it will be inhabitable after liberation? No one knows. However, it is certain that what is happening in Ukraine is giving a new 21st century meaning to the expression "scorched-earth policy".

Inherited trauma

Ukrainian historian Yaroslav Hrytsak noted in his latest book on the history of Ukraine *Overcoming the Past: The Global History of Ukraine* (published a couple of months before the invasion) that the country has faced numerous traumas related to war and revolutionary violence. One of these traumas is related to material loss. "By 1991, when Ukraine became independent, it was hard to find a Ukrainian family where a property would be inherited through three generations – from a grandfather and a grandmother to a father and a mother, and from a father and a mother to a son or daughter. Few belongings were left: an old, yellowed photo, an embroidered shirt from a box, a musical instrument. There are almost no precedents of inheritance for three generations of major family assets: homes, jewellery, shares or savings. Every generation had to start from scratch."

I am writing this text while sitting in the modernist quarters of Lviv. The very nice and comfortable residential buildings were built here around 1935–39, just before the first Soviet occupation of the city (followed by the Nazi occupation before returning to Soviet rule). Their residents were either deported (if Polish or Ukrainian) or killed (if Jewish). The luckiest fled to Poland or further on to Great Britain, France or the United States. They had just a few years in these then brand new, fancy apartments before all hell broke loose.

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This is the same story now facing those residents of Irpin or Bucha. These two Kyiv suburbs are the most well-known but there are a lot of small towns and villages in the regions of Chernihiv, Kharkiv and Kyiv where the atrocities committed by Russian troops were as horrible as those in Bucha. One of the possible reasons for the attention placed on Bucha is that these suburbs were the places where the growing Ukrainian middle class had recently moved. There, they found new, comfortable apartments with good infrastructure for families with kids. Many of the residents were the first generation in their families who had bought their own property. Many of them remembered the misery of everyday Soviet and early post-Soviet life, and finally found some comfort. Starting from scratch, they had inherited only trauma from their grandparents. And now they have their own.

Oleksandr Mykhed and Olena Mason are some of those who lost their home in Hostomel. In a Facebook post on March 6th, Olena published a list of their art collection they lost there. Oleksandr is a literary critic, and he lost his library full of rare and precious books he had been collecting. This is also a part of the catastrophe that should be respected as much as the loss of necessities. It is easy to say that "it's just stuff". Those who inherited paintings, photos, furniture, books, through three or four generations, just cannot understand how it is not to have all these pillars of memory, how much self-confidence they provide and that this self-confidence is indeed capital. Museums, libraries and art collections barbari-

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cally destroyed by Russians in Ukraine should also be counted as capital, not just "stuff". The loss of stuff makes people poorer for some time. The loss of culture, including personal and collective memories, makes a society poor in the long term.

Looking at the bright side

All the above does not necessarily mean that the country is doomed. In fact, it is the exact opposite. At some point there is more hope than there was before. However, it is not a question of what will change for the better, but how to talk about it. Most Ukrainians who lost housing in big cities were living in ugly and uncomfortable Soviet buildings. The Ukrainian government has already declared that it will pursue a policy to "rebuild better than before". Yet, how can one speak openly that it is better for a city to have a nice new residential area instead of a depressing old one in front of the people who lived there? The issue concerns not only those who lost their homes, but also their beloved neighbourhood, no matter how unattractive it may have looked to an outsider.

Some say that having lived for some time in Europe, Ukrainian citizens will come back with new demands, that they will expect more rules at home. Some may also imply that they will have become better citizens. Overall, the presumption is that the war makes those of us who survive better. The discussion as to what we gain in war inhabits a space between common sense and cynicism.

The discussion as to what we gain in war inhabits a space between common sense and cynicism.

Yet, even if we allow ourselves to entertain the thought that the war makes people change, and that these changes are for the good, how much can we expect? For instance, it might appear that having experienced the Russian occupation, shelling, or just living next to a genocide in your own country, that any pro-Russian sentiment would be reduced to zero. Yet, 11 per cent of Ukrainians as of July 2022 thought that Ukraine and Russia should be independent states with open borders and that the two countries should live on friendly terms. The good news is that back in February 2022 this figure stood at 48 per cent. The bad news is that there are still 11 per cent. Who are these people?

You would think that this 79 per cent figure of Ukrainians who prefer visas for Russians and closed borders would be higher in the current circumstances. However, the number is good enough for the country's respective policies. When we investigate the dynamics of the numbers, these policies appear not only doable, but also sustainable. The number of those who support the country's western choice

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has been growing. Conversely, the number of those who support closer links with Russia has been shrinking. The thing is that these changes were not fast enough to follow the path taken by other Central European countries back in the 1990s. But now the war has sped it up.

Professor Hrytsak, the Ukrainian historian mentioned above, wrote at the beginning of the invasion that any war is a time accelerator, and that it makes previously impossible things possible. If so, it is safe to expect that the changes that started before the invasion will accelerate. Ukraine has already received EU candidate status, progress that was unthinkable even last autumn. But this does not mean that good news just appeared in Ukraine, it means that the country's efforts and hard work are keeping it on a path that is paying dividends.

One last, critical change needs to be considered and it affects more countries than just Ukraine. Namely, if Ukraine does not win this war, all our political presumptions are just talk. If it does not win this war, the world will lose much more than a free country. It will lose everything that was considered progress during the last century: faith in freedom, justice and human rights. This potential change should not be a surprise. After all, the corruption of the West through Russian and Chinese money and the helplessness and complacency of international organisations did not appear yesterday. The accelerator of change works in both directions.

Oksana Forostyna is a Europe's Futures fellow at the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna and a Marcin Król Fellow at *Visegrad Insight*.

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What the Russian invasion has cost Ukraine

LEE REANEY

Ukraine has now experienced half a year of war with no end in sight. Despite this, numerous individuals and groups are now attempting to calculate the real cost of the brutal Russian invasion. Whilst the fog of war makes such studies difficult, they will prove pivotal in understanding the true level of suffering in the country.

Withstanding six months of onslaught from one of the world's most powerful militaries comes at a price – and Ukraine is learning about that cost in real time. Of course, Ukraine has been at war for far longer than just six months. Russia's capture of Crimea and the eight-year war in Donbas must also be included when looking at the price Ukraine has paid for defending its sovereignty. Ukraine's losses go far beyond the significant loss of life and livelihoods of tens of thousands of Ukrainians. At its peak, Russia occupied nearly one-fifth of all Ukrainian land, depriving the country of its resources and industry. This has also diminished its security, energy independence and, as of right now, its sovereign right to choose its own path forward. In the first of a two-part feature looking at what Ukraine has lost and gained during the conflict, *New Eastern Europe* tracks the costs of the war for Ukraine.

It is not easy to draw conclusions about what a country has lost while war continues to rage all around you, but it is important to try. Many groups, including a think tank at the Kyiv School of Economics, have been doing just that through the "Russia Will Pay" project. The group has released near-weekly reports on the damage to Ukraine's infrastructure, showing just how quickly the physical cost of war adds up. More difficult to track is the loss of life, as statistics can be unreliable

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due to the hesitancy of governments and militaries to release real-time information in an effort to manage strategy and morale. Even more difficult are the intangible future losses, though these too must be accounted for. That said, enough information is available to take a preliminary look at how much Russia's full-scale invasion has cost Ukraine.

Life as we know it

The impact of the war on Ukrainians' lives has been profound and all-encompassing, but perhaps the most logical place to begin is the loss of life itself. During the eight-year war in Donbas that preceded Russia's full-scale invasion, the UN estimates that at least 17,000 Ukrainian lives were lost, including 3,000 civilians. In the nearly six months since the full-scale invasion began, that number has skyrocketed. Estimates vary greatly, due in part to competing narratives between the Russian and Ukrainian militaries, but the UN has confirmed at least 5,400 civilian deaths. That number is considered the minimum, as the agency does not include those whose identities cannot yet be confirmed. Ukraine's Chief of National Police Ihor Klymenko explained the difficulty of identifying bodies in a statement in June.

"To date, about 1,200 bodies of the dead have not been identified," he said. "This is a long process, rather painstaking, because a lot of bodies are in a state of putrefactive decay." He went on to explain that the reason for the delay in identifying bodies is related to the need to draw DNA samples from close relatives.

The war marks the deadliest conflict in Europe since the Second World War, with more civilian and military deaths every day.

Taking this into account, the Ukrainian government claims a much higher figure regarding the number of Ukrainians killed since February 24th. The government has declared that there have been over 28,500 civilian deaths, including 22,000 in the devastated city of Mariupol alone. The number of military deaths in the war is even more difficult to pinpoint. The Ukrainian government has acknowledged the deaths of 10,000 Ukrainian soldiers, alongside 7,200 missing. Meanwhile, the leadership of the breakaway Donetsk People's Republic puts that number at over 193,000. Whatever the official number is, it already marks the deadliest military conflict in Europe since the Second World War, with more civilian and military deaths recorded by the day.

The violence has also displaced millions of Ukrainians, prompting Europe's largest migration crisis since the Second World War. The lives and routines of over a quarter of the Ukrainian population have now been fully disrupted. The

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A makeshift graveyard for victims of Bucha in Ukraine.
In September 2022, 13 more identified remains were laid to rest.

UN believes that 12 million Ukrainians have been forced out from their homes, including over five million that have fled the country. The overwhelming majority of the displaced are women and children, as martial law prevents men from leaving Ukraine. This massive, forced migration has completely disrupted the Ukrainian economy, leaving millions of Ukrainians out of work, struggling to attend classes, or in places with little or no family support.

Economics as we know it

The effect of the war on Ukraine's economy has been dire. The effects can be seen everywhere. This includes the hundreds of billions of US dollars in damage to infrastructure, the hundreds of millions more in resources lost in territories occupied by Russia, a staggering drop in expected GDP, tens of millions of Ukrainians out of work, and inflation that can only be managed through the generosity of Ukraine's allies and partners. There is simply no part of the Ukrainian economy that has not felt the full force of the war's impact.

According to the most recent report from KSE's "Russia Will Pay" project, Ukraine has suffered at least 113.5 billion dollars worth of damage – more than the entire annual GDP of Ukraine (112 billion). The report outlines both damages

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to infrastructure and losses to the economy. As of August 22nd, the sectors of the Ukrainian economy most affected include industry and business (29.9 billion in losses), agriculture (23.4 billion), commerce (23.3 billion) and transportation infrastructure (18.7 billion). The total effect of the damages means that the World Bank estimates Ukraine's economy will shrink by a staggering 45.5 per cent this year, with Kyiv suggesting that the country could experience a 50 billion dollar deficit this year.

"I would expect that by the end of the year we will have a global deficit of the state budget somewhere around 50 billion [USD]," Oleg Ustenko, an economic adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, said on public television in late July. "This is approximately 30 to 35 per cent of our GDP."

The National Bank of Ukraine does not foresee such a drastic decline in GDP, predicting in its most recent report that the country's economy will shrink by one-third. Still, the NBU expects inflation to remain above 30 per cent throughout 2022, meaning already high prices for things like food and rent will continue to rise for Ukrainians even as people's livelihoods are severely impacted. Recognising this, the NBU last month devalued Ukraine's currency, the hryvnia – by 25 per cent against the dollar – to manage inflation, reduce prices for Ukrainian citizens, and manage the increasing costs of repelling the Russian invasion.

What the KSE report does not consider are the resources lost in the occupied territories. More than a simple land grab, Russia's invasion could be considered a naked grab for Ukraine's natural resources. Russia's grab of Crimea costed Ukraine 80 per cent of its offshore oil and gas deposits, as well as a substantial portion of its port infrastructure. The occupied territories in Eastern Ukraine are some of the most valuable in Europe, with large deposits of coal, iron ore, lithium and titanium worth 12.4 trillion dollars according to Canadian company SecDev. Including the losses dating to the illegal annexation of Crimea, a SecDev report estimates that Russia has occupied territory containing 63 per cent of Ukraine's coal, 11 per cent of its oil, 20 per cent of its natural gas, 42 per cent of its metals, and one-third of its rare minerals. Viewed in this context, it is easy to see why Russia has so far focused on Ukraine's eastern and southern lands.

Geopolitics as we know it

More than just causing the mass destruction of people, land and the economy, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has struck a blow to the country's geopolitical status. Russia has occupied up to one-fifth of Ukrainian land, illegally annexed large portions of its Black Sea coast and resources, completely choked off exports by sea,

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and continues to use access to energy as a weapon. The results have made Ukraine reliant on the goodwill of its international allies and partners as it hopes to earn a full place in western alliances like the European Union and, perhaps, NATO.

In its attempt to turn Ukraine into a rump state, Russia has attempted to capture most or all of its coastline. This has deprived the country of vital naval export routes and turned Ukraine into a resource-deprived, landlocked nation. Ukraine's once thriving Black Sea shipping lanes have been closed for months, blocked by mines or sunken ships and far too dangerous to traverse. While as much as 70 per cent of Ukraine's pre-invasion exports and imports came by sea, no ships had sailed until early August following agreements that Ukraine and Russia made with Turkey and the UN. Still, Ukraine's largest port of Chornomorsk, which handled over one quarter of all Ukrainian grain exports before the invasion, remains blocked by sunken ships. At the same time, ships that choose to brave the dangerous waters will face at least double the insurance costs.

Russia has long used its oil and gas resources as a bargaining chip, or rather a hammer, in negotiations with both Ukraine and Europe. The effects of EU sanctions on the Russian oil and gas industry are now being felt worldwide. Europe has long been reliant on cheap Russian fuel and much of the reason for its affordable price was the direct "Druzhba" pipeline through Ukraine. Kyiv also benefited from this arrangement, collecting over a billion dollars annually in transit fees. Gas flows through Ukraine were first affected in May after Russia captured the Sokhranovka valve in the Luhansk oblast. Transit was further affected in early August following difficulties in receiving payments due to western sanctions on Russia. The loss of gas transit revenue, compounded by the increase in the cost of fuel, represents a double hit for an economy that is already, quite literally, under siege.

Much of Ukraine's electricity comes from nuclear power, with Ukraine's 15 reactors accounting for more than half of the country's pre-war electricity consumption, according to the World Nuclear Association. Russia's capture in March of the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (NPP), the largest in Europe, marked the first time in history that war had been waged on a nuclear site. Since then, as many as half of Ukraine's reactors have been knocked offline and fighting continues to rage outside the Zaporizhzhia NPP to the horror of the world. In early August, Energoatom – the agency that manages the plant – accused Russia of attacking the site to both deprive Ukraine of its electricity production as well as link the reactor to the Russian power grid.

"Artillery shelling of the Zaporizhzhia NPP is a terrorist act intended to destroy the plant's infrastructure, disrupt all of its power lines that feed electricity into Ukraine's power grid, and cut off power in the south of the country," the company said on Telegram.

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The company specifically accused Russia of targeting the plant's power lines, which connect the facility to Ukraine's power grid, in order to provide power to Crimea, which is completely reliant on Ukrainian power – primarily from the occupied Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant in Kherson oblast. In an economy already reeling from inflation, currency devaluation, increased fuel prices and, of course, constant bombing, the loss of Ukraine's access to affordable energy would be a particularly difficult pill to swallow.

Safety and security as we know it

Of course, you cannot look at the cost of the war for Ukraine without looking at some of the more intangible losses. People now face daily air raid sirens, the constant threat of bombing, and even skittishness when an airplane flies overhead. Overall, the costs to Ukrainians' safety, security and mental well-being are not yet well documented. While the world was shocked by images from Bucha, Irpin and Mariupol, Ukrainians themselves lived through these horrors. Stories of widespread torture, executions, rapes and looting abound. The war has been horrific and will affect Ukrainians for generations to come. A US study estimates that 12 per cent of American soldiers have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), while over 80 per cent have experienced some symptoms. A study by the Veteran Affairs Research Committee estimates that this costs the US military 232.2 billion dollars a year – more than any other mental health condition. How much will it cost when an entire population tormented by war needs to deal with PTSD?

This article looked at the costs already associated with the war as it approaches the six-month mark. It does not, for example, include any costs for rebuilding the country following the conflict. De-mining, for example, is expected to cost Ukraine at least 70 billion dollars, while repairing destroyed cities and rebuilding demolished bridges, airports and schools is expected to cost trillions more. Returning to a semblance of normalcy, in which Ukrainians can feel free to go about their days without fear or guilt, will take just as much time and effort to rebuild.

Stay tuned for the next issue which will explore what Ukraine has gained from its heroic defence of its sovereignty.

Lee Reaney is a Lviv-based journalist and editor of the publication *Lviv Today*.

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How Russia's war estranged us, probably forever

IRYNA MATVIYISHYN

Differences of views on Russia's invasion of Ukraine have not only split two nations, but also many families as well. The stories of Sasha and Daniil offer just two examples of how families have been split by toxic propaganda and war, with little chance for reconciliation.

When Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24th, it brought much more than political and ideological discord. For thousands of Ukrainians, who had family connections in Russia, it was a turning point. The ground of common understanding that had been eroding since the occupation of Crimea and parts of Donbas in 2014, completely cracked in one night, when Russian forces crossed the Ukrainian border in an attempt to take Kyiv. What had been thought of as western exaggeration prior to February 24th, became real, and the wall of misunderstanding split many friendships and family connections; some of them forever broken.

According to the study "100 days. Ukrainians and War", more than 47 per cent of Ukrainians have friends or relatives in Russia. A third of them do not maintain any contact with Russians. Research by the *Washington Post* also shows that many stopped their conversations in the first two weeks of Russia's war.

Growing radicalisation

Oleksandr (Sasha) Opanasiuk, a 29-year-old website developer, abandoned any communication with his father in Russia and tore his Russian passport up right

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after the invasion started. Having woken up to war and explosions in Kyiv, he told his parents that Russia had begun its attack. Those days of the invasion were so difficult, Sasha recalls, that he had no strength to talk about Ukraine with his family. "All I heard was "do not go out'"." He would spend his hours in the basement, but the fact that Sasha was in danger was not enough for his father to change his pro-Russian views. After two days of war, on February 26th, they stopped talking.

"I didn't see any sense to continue," Sasha explains with a bit of affliction in his voice. "You can say whatever you want but it does not break through." In his last messages, he sent pictures of the destroyed educational institution in Zhytomyr oblast, where his father had studied. "It did not affect him at all," he adds. "I thought it was weird; if you tell them what you see and they don't trust you, it is not very pleasant."

More than 47 per cent of Ukrainians have friends or relatives in Russia. A third of them no longer maintain any contact with them.

Born and raised in Novy Urengoy – a city in central northern Russia – Sasha recalls that he "always felt uncomfortable there", with "parades on May 9th and all the pseudo-patriotism". "All this seemed to be wrong to me." In 2011, he left Russia. His Russian father, Ukrainian mother and brother stayed and the relationship with the family was still great. Everything changed with the Maidan Revolution in Kyiv, when the Kremlin's propaganda ran amok and Russia decided to invade Crimea and Donbas.

"The male side of the family radicalised," he explains. "They started to tell me that here [in Ukraine] we live the wrong way. It escalated every year, and then, it reached its peak." Today, their rhetoric is similar to that of the Kremlin's state propaganda – that Ukraine was bombing Donbas for eight years, that it is all America's fault, and that Russia had to protect itself.

Unlike with his father and brother, Sasha still keeps in touch with his mother. Originally from Ukraine, he says that she had been there many times. She now understands that the reality "is far from what they've been told on TV".

Since all the discord between him and his relatives in Russia began, Sasha has been thinking about the roots of it all. He knew that his brother has not been watching a lot of state TV. Nonetheless, his views were reiterating another Putin narrative that "nothing is ambiguous, both parties are guilty". At the same time, Sasha remembered well his last trip to Russia – the atmosphere was suffocating. "Propaganda is everywhere," he explains. "You could just talk to a person and hear the same propaganda [that was broadcasted]. They share thoughts from TV that they pass off as their own."

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Family battlefield

Sasha's story is more an example than an exception. His words resonate with dozens of posts and comments that Ukrainians have left on social media about their broken ties with Russian contacts since the beginning of the full-scale war against their country, whatever their ethnicity or region.

Daniil Popkov, 29, originally from Donetsk oblast, blocked his father on all messenger apps after failed attempts to restore already weak communication with his family in Russia. Daniil's father is ethnically Russian and has always identified himself as such. However, prior to the Maidan in 2013–14, Daniil recalls that there were no particularly political or historical discussions in the family. Things changed when Daniil switched to Ukrainian and made his pro-Ukrainian and pro-European views clear. It got worse with the seizure of Crimea and the occupation of Donbas. He lost his connections with cousins in Russia, too. Daniil says that when Russian troops went into Ukraine, his family did not text him a single word.

In 2016, his father moved from their hometown of Bakhmut, in eastern Ukraine, to Surgut in western Siberia. He did this not only for personal reasons but also his negative sentiments regarding the Ukrainian government. Since then, they had a deal to only talk about family business when needed. Their agreement did not last when Russia invaded again.

Daniil says that when Russian troops went into Ukraine, his family did not text him a single word.

On the morning of February 24th, as Ukraine woke up to bombardments and missile strikes, Daniil was at home in Kyiv. He immediately sent a message to his father, asking, "What do you think about this?" The response Daniil received was very similar to the one Sasha heard from his father – that the war was necessary to protect Russia. "He told me that he does not like that the war started, but that it was "inevitable", that is, he supports this Putin delusion."

Daniil asked his father to return to Ukraine to "fight against Russia" together, but in response he received only the standard line about "Ukrainian Nazis". "He repeated Russian propaganda that soon there will be a new government in Ukraine, we will all live normally, we will have cheap gasoline and there will be no Nazis in power." After this, Daniil blocked his father.

If Kyiv was surrounded, his life would be in danger due to his civic activity. Daniil is a legal consultant for Vostok SOS, a charitable organisation that has been helping Ukrainians since the beginning of Russia's war in 2014. He switched to speaking Ukrainian a few years ago and fits well into the Kremlin's image of a "Nazi". His father did not accuse him of that, "but maybe he thinks that I am deeply mistaken and was deceived by propaganda," Daniil adds.

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When the full-scale war began, Daniil was forced to evacuate to Western Ukraine. His mother and her partner did the same, as Bakhmut soon became a battlefield. Relations with his other relatives are not easy either. Daniil's aunt and grandmother are living in Russian-occupied Crimea, where they had bought property years earlier. They are pro-Russian, however Daniil still keeps in touch with his 83-year-old grandmother, Valya. Outside of family events, they discuss the war on Skype.

"She mostly repeats the Russian narratives because she lives alone and watches TV. Now, and back then, when she was in Bakhmut," Daniil recalls. His grandmother believes that [the tragedy] in Bucha was staged. However, since the full-scale invasion, he adds that his grandmother became "more considerate in her estimations of Russian actions in Ukraine", not denying the fact that Russia is striking Ukrainian cities. "There were tense moments in February-March. Now there are no more emotions, because both her and I try not to play along and not to push the conversation to the extremes, we understand that there is no longer any sense to prove anything to anyone," Daniil says calmly. "We are already hostages of circumstances."

A reminder of deep trauma

Whatever his relations with loved ones, Daniil says that he understands why many people do not want to talk about it – it is a painful loss. At the beginning of his discord with his father, he recalls that it was "difficult" to process. Over time, he got used to it, like "people living without limbs". Nonetheless, "despite this, it bothers you sometimes or somehow reminds you of yourself." He was close with his cousins, too, however, not as much as with his father. "It happens that I dream of my father, and it evokes some sentiments in me," Daniil adds with a slightly trembling voice. "I understand that there is still some connection."

Like his peer Sasha, Daniil Popkov is perplexed by the question of under what circumstances communication with his family in Russia could be restored. Both of them do not see any prospects of it changing now. "I just don't want to argue, there is no point," Daniil says. "No matter what arguments I write, my dad will not change his position, because it is not rational. It's like faith – they believe in Russia and Putin," Daniil concludes. For him, it is also psychological protection – since every message is a reminder of deep trauma.

Daniil's words almost reflect the answer of Sasha, whom he has never met. "I didn't even argue with them! There was just this feeling of betrayal," Sasha recalls. If the war ends and his family has no redemption, he assumes it is possible that they could stop talking forever. For now, he does not know what to talk about. "We are worried with different things. I do not want to talk about the weather."

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Daniil describes such conversations as a repetitive script, when every question and response can be predicted. "They ask you things, and you know what they will tell you in response if you say this or that," he continues. "Often such communication loses its meaning. Except for some exchange of news of "who is doing what, what is he doing" among family members, the rest of the topic simply disappears."

If his father had returned to Ukraine or at least condemned Russia's aggression, Daniil says he might have resumed communication. "Back then, in the morning [of the invasion], I had the last hope that it was possible." After that, he admits, it came to a dead end.

The survey on communication between Ukrainians and Russians, published in June 2022, shows that less than 27 per cent of Russians expressed sympathy for Ukraine, and a bit more than 13 per cent criticised the actions and policies of Russia in their talks with Ukrainians. Meanwhile, almost 60 per cent of Russians have a negative attitude towards Ukraine.

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Revisiting the original loss

Crimea

MAKSYM POPOVYCH

The Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea has been occupied for over eight years now. The progressive establishment of Russian control and militarisation over Crimea contains a number of lessons not yet learnt about Moscow's political strategy in the more recently occupied territories.

Prior to February 24th 2022, Crimea had been an essential part of any discussion on the security situation in and around Ukraine. In August last year, the Ukrainian government launched a new initiative called the "Crimean Platform" to place the de-occupation of Crimea on the agenda of the highest echelons of diplomacy. In fact, Ukraine organised the second summit of the Crimean Platform this summer.

However, the brutal full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine has shifted the attention of the world to Kharkiv, Mariupol, Chernihiv, Bucha, and other cities. And understandably so. Media and civil society in the West hold an ethical and moral responsibility to prioritise calling out the atrocities in all of those places. Yet, one must not forget the instrumental role of Crimea in the unfolding Russian military attack on Ukraine, in its early operations in the south, as a launch site for missile attacks throughout Ukraine's mainland, and in the larger context as a key enabler of Russia's logistics and security goals.

Russia's first operation

Ironically, as I was writing these lines in July, Crimea and the adjacent Kherson region were the only parts of Ukraine where residents did not need to check their

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phones for alerts of possible missile attacks. The situation developed rapidly in August, with a number of military targets in Crimea having been hit, which generated heavy clouds of smoke in the otherwise idyllic coastal landscape. In the broader sense, the peninsula is hardly a safe haven at the moment, as no other area under Russian control has been as heavily militarised in such a short span of time. Currently, Crimea is used by the Russian military in numerous ways, most prominently as the *platzdarm* or lodgement of the southern axis of Russian troop activities. This ultimately enabled their *blitzkrieg* on Kherson, Berdyansk and Melitopol.

The most illustrative effect of this advance culminated in the gruesome encircling of Mariupol, as Russian troops moved both from the west out of Crimea and the east, coming from the territory of the so-called Donetsk People's Republic. The Crimean road and railway bridge – a key image of Russian propaganda which has already featured as a symbolic protagonist in state-funded films – became fully operational by 2019–20 and was an infrastructural centrepiece of the southern axis. The transport infrastructure on the peninsula proper has been refocused on supporting the movement of troops, ammunition and other equipment. The healthcare facilities in Crimea have taken on a new role of treating wounded soldiers. Simultaneously, Sevastopol became a vital missile launch site, in addition to its role as the headquarters of the Black Sea Fleet. This enabled the horror of Russian military attacks on civilians all around Ukraine. One can recall the devastating missile attack on Vinnytsia on July 14th, which killed at least 26 people (and counting). The attack was launched by the Russian Black Sea Fleet.

To understand the peninsula's role and how we got here, it is important to take a few steps back to 2014. Crimea has been occupied for over eight years now. And the progressive establishment of Russian control over the peninsula contains a number of lessons not yet learnt about Russia's political strategy in the more recently occupied territories.

The establishment of control over Crimea contains lessons about Russia's strategy in the more recently occupied territories.

According to international law, an armed conflict exists between two states in the event of the military occupation of a territory of one of those states by the other, regardless of the presence of armed hostilities. To put it simply, Ukraine and Russia have been at war with each other since the end of February 2014. This was Russia's first military operation in Ukraine, the success of which – together with the insufficient response of the West – fuelled the further expansion of the war to Donbas and, ultimately, the 2022 invasion.

On February 24th, both the general public in Ukraine and a wider international audience were shocked by the speed with which the Russian army crossed the ad-

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ministrative border between Crimea and mainland Ukraine and established control over the city of Kherson by early March. One can imagine that the sheer speed of the troop movements into the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions is how Vladimir Putin imagined the takeover of Kyiv and Kharkiv. Simultaneously, Russia moved its troops from the north through Belarus and from the east through Russia proper and Donbas. Would the swift occupation of Kherson, Melitopol, Berdyansk, Nova Kahovka, and the nuclear plant at Enerhodar have been possible if Crimea had not been occupied and progressively militarised for eight years? Evidently, no, or at least Russia would need to deploy a much larger force.

Crimea enabled a southern front for Russia's offensive. If one looks at the map of Ukraine, it is quite apparent that Kherson is hundreds of kilometres away from the eastern border with Russia, way inland in Ukrainian territory. If Russian troops had to move by land from the east of Ukraine, they would have needed to take over – or at least bypass and effectively besiege – major towns in previously unoccupied parts of the Donetsk region. They would also have to move across the full width of the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions before reaching the city of Kherson, not to mention Mykolaiv further west. The distance between Rostov-on-Don and Kherson is 603 kilometres, just 100 kilometres greater than the distance between Amsterdam and Paris (516 km). In comparison, Armyansk in the north of Crimea is 131 km away from Kherson. If Crimea had not been occupied and Russia had still wanted to strike from the south of Ukraine, it would, in most likelihood, have needed to conduct an amphibious operation with landing troops in the peninsula, moving them north.

Story of the occupation

However, let us move away from these hypotheticals for a minute and look over the story of the occupation of Crimea. In 2014, Russia made great efforts to integrate the peninsula into its political, economic and legal system. Arguably, one needs to browse the pages of history all the way back to the Second World War to find a comparable attempt at the swift and full absorption of an occupied territory. By the end of 2014, the Russian rouble had replaced the hryvnia as currency and all Ukrainian laws had been swapped for Russian legislation. This includes criminal laws, which in itself is a violation of international humanitarian law.

One immediate consequence of Russia's takeover was the rampant campaign to issue Russian passports to local residents. Under international law, the aggressive "passportisation" policy amounts to compelling the inhabitants of an occupied territory to swear allegiance to a hostile power. This infringes the 1907 Hague Regu-

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lations. A sceptic would say that this must have been to a large extent a voluntary process, with local supporters of occupation backing this passportisation effort. Yet, the reality of the process was that holding a Russian passport became inextricably linked to access to essential rights and services in Crimea and, eventually, to the very possibility of living in Crimea without risking deportation as a "foreigner".

Furthermore, the logic of the process was twisted. All residents of Crimea were automatically recognised as Russian citizens unless they explicitly rejected the new citizenship by going through a burdensome bureaucratic procedure. The real opportunity for rejecting Russian citizenship was minuscule. The relevant administrative centres opened on April 9th 2014, and the procedure had to be completed by April 18th. After that narrow period had ended, the person would have to go through an even more complicated process of renouncing Russian citizenship on general terms. Consequently, as reported by the United Nations, only four per cent of the residents of Crimea did not have Russian citizenship as of May 2015, a year after the occupation began.

In practice, most Crimean residents acquired the "red passport" or *ausweis* – local jargon for the maroon-coloured Russian document and a shrewd reference to the German occupation of Ukraine during the Second World War – but kept their blue Ukrainian passport. The visa-free regime between the EU and Ukraine, achieved in 2017, further spurred a natural interest among Crimean residents to receive new biometric Ukrainian passports. Ukraine adopted a smart policy of encouraging access to the new documents by establishing additional "centres of administrative services" in the Kherson region, with the idea that residents of Crimea could cross the administrative boundary line between Crimea and the mainland to apply for the passports. And they came en masse.

Although the process was often marked by delay and hiccups, Crimean residents gradually received the possibility to exercise other rights in mainland Ukraine. For example, the government started a special scholarship programme for high school graduates from the peninsula to study at certain universities across the country. Residents of Crimea could also exercise their right to vote in Ukrainian elections in the Kherson oblast. These smart policies helped maintain social ties with the peninsula and laid the groundwork for any future de-occupation and reintegration processes.

Submission and assimilation

Russia's passportisation was followed by several processes of population movement. The UN estimated that 205,541 civilians from Russia had obtained a regis-

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tered address in Crimea by 2020, which at the time represented 8.7 per cent of the overall population. These relocations are encouraged by various policies, including the appointments of judges, law enforcement and other officials to the peninsula alongside relocation support for their families. All key positions of the *siloviki* – members of the country's vast security services – were appointed from all over Russia. Human rights NGOs reported that academic and healthcare personnel also received incentives to move to Crimea. It is also highly unlikely that every Russian who moves to Crimea bothers to go through the hassle of changing their *propiska* or registered address. This means that many newcomers cannot be traced in the statistics. One cannot help but see these processes as a manifestation of the Russian version of *Lebensraum*.

Simultaneously, courts in Crimea expel people who do not have "residence rights". This is a violation of the Geneva Conventions, since residents of an occupied territory are "protected persons" under international law. This is normally coupled with bans on re-entry "into Russia", which de facto denies the right to return to the occupied peninsula. The hostile environment against the manifestation of any form of pro-Ukrainian voice or identity, as well as intolerance towards independent journalists, human rights activists, LGBTQ+ people, and different religious groups, compelled many to relocate to mainland Ukraine in order to avoid persecution. In a nutshell, the cumulative effect of these policies was to achieve submission and assimilation, with a simultaneous process of neo-colonisation through the relocation of people from Russia and squeezing out of any critics of occupation. Crimean Tatars, with their painful history of Stalinist mass deportation to Central Asia, stayed in spite of the crackdown on their self-governance institutions, such as the Mejlis. Members of this group have faced criminal prosecution under various categories of charges. Needless to say, the situation of the Crimean Tatars is unique in this sense and there is hardly a comparable example in all of the territories of Ukraine occupied since February this year.

Forced conscription and militarisation

We are naturally moving to the issue that is most pertinent in the context of the current cycle of Russian aggression: the forced conscription of Crimean residents into the Russian Federation's armed forces. Of course, this is a grave violation of international humanitarian law. Curiously, the occupying power allowed one full year of "transition period" before it started conscripting young men from the peninsula into its army. This can be explained by the fact that military drafts only apply to Russian citizens, meaning that the occupying authorities needed to

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Photo: Alexey Pavlishak / Shutterstock

A Russian flag flies over homes in Sevastopol Crimea. Russia's occupation of the Ukrainian peninsula began in 2014 and has made great efforts to integrate Crimea into its political, economic and legal system.

achieve decent results with their passportisation programme before moving further. Starting from 2015, however, Russia conscripted, on average, 2,500 young men per military draft. This occurs twice a year in spring and autumn.

Men were often drafted right after they had finished their studies and a portion of them were then sent across the Kerch Strait and allocated to various military bases in Russia. Crimean men of conscription age faced restrictions on their freedom of movement, as going to mainland Ukraine necessitated crossing one of three Russia-controlled checkpoints, which Moscow considers to be its "state border". This frontier is guarded with diligence by a special border department of the FSB, a blast from the past when the Soviet borders were guarded by NKVD and then KGB-subordinated units. To add insult to injury, those who tried to ignore the summons to the draft commissions faced criminal prosecution, which culminated in guilty verdicts for "draft evasion".

Conscription is a clear example of the risks that Russian passports carry for anyone who might receive them in the other occupied territories of Ukraine. Forced recruitment of civilians through the proxy hands of the so-called "republics" in the east of Ukraine has been even more brutal than in Crimea. The UN reported on the practice of sending local men to the front lines just a few days after their recruitment.

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In fact, if we zoom out a little, forced conscription of local men in Crimea is only one cog in the machinery of the peninsula's militarisation. Over the years, Russia has increased the presence of weapons systems, military infrastructure, personnel, and offensive capabilities in a broader sense. This was flagged as a security concern for the entire Black Sea region in UN resolution 73/194 and most recently in resolution 76/70 in December 2021. One might recall the naval incident on November 25th 2018, when the Russian fleet used force against three Ukrainian vessels and detained their crews for almost a year. That event triggered a declaration of martial law in Ukraine at the time. In fact, this more well-known confrontation had been preceded by a series of smaller incidents involving fishing crews from the mainland and Crimea. These culminated in a semi-official exchange of captured fishermen. Moscow has clearly tried to assert its dominance over the Black and Azov Seas for years. It used every opportunity to escalate tensions, test the waters, and potentially create a *casus belli*.

Democratic resistance

Conscription and militarisation occur against the backdrop of draconian limitations on access to information and rampant militaristic propaganda, including indoctrination in schools. Since the full-scale invasion, Russia has passed several new laws, further curtailing free speech by punishing any beliefs that "discredit the Russian Federation armed forces". At the same time, the state has also banned "fake news" about the "performance of functions by state authorities" outside the country. An unprecedented crackdown – even for Russia – on media outlets, human rights NGOs and social media turned the information space into a burnt field, to use a Russian metaphor.

All these laws are fully enforced in Crimea, with some incidents borderline Orwellian. In one example, documented by the UN, a 70-year-old woman was convicted of discrediting the Russian armed forces for bringing flowers and a handmade "No to war" sign on a blue and yellow paperboard to the Taras Shevchenko monument in Simferopol to commemorate the anniversary of his birth on March 9th. Can we find a more compelling warning sign for what awaits other areas of Ukraine if Russia establishes its "administrations" there?

In an interview on July 20th this year, the so-called head of Crimea, Serhii Aksyonov, stated that the process of integration and adaptation in the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions [with Russia] will be similar to the process in Crimea. Of course, he can be labelled as a minor player in Russian propaganda, aiming to "lift spirits" amidst the successes of the Ukrainian counteroffensive in the south.

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This has put the Russian military on the back foot. Yet, Aksyonov is not alone in discussing a so-called referendum in Kherson on joining Russia, even as the date for this vote keeps being pushed back.

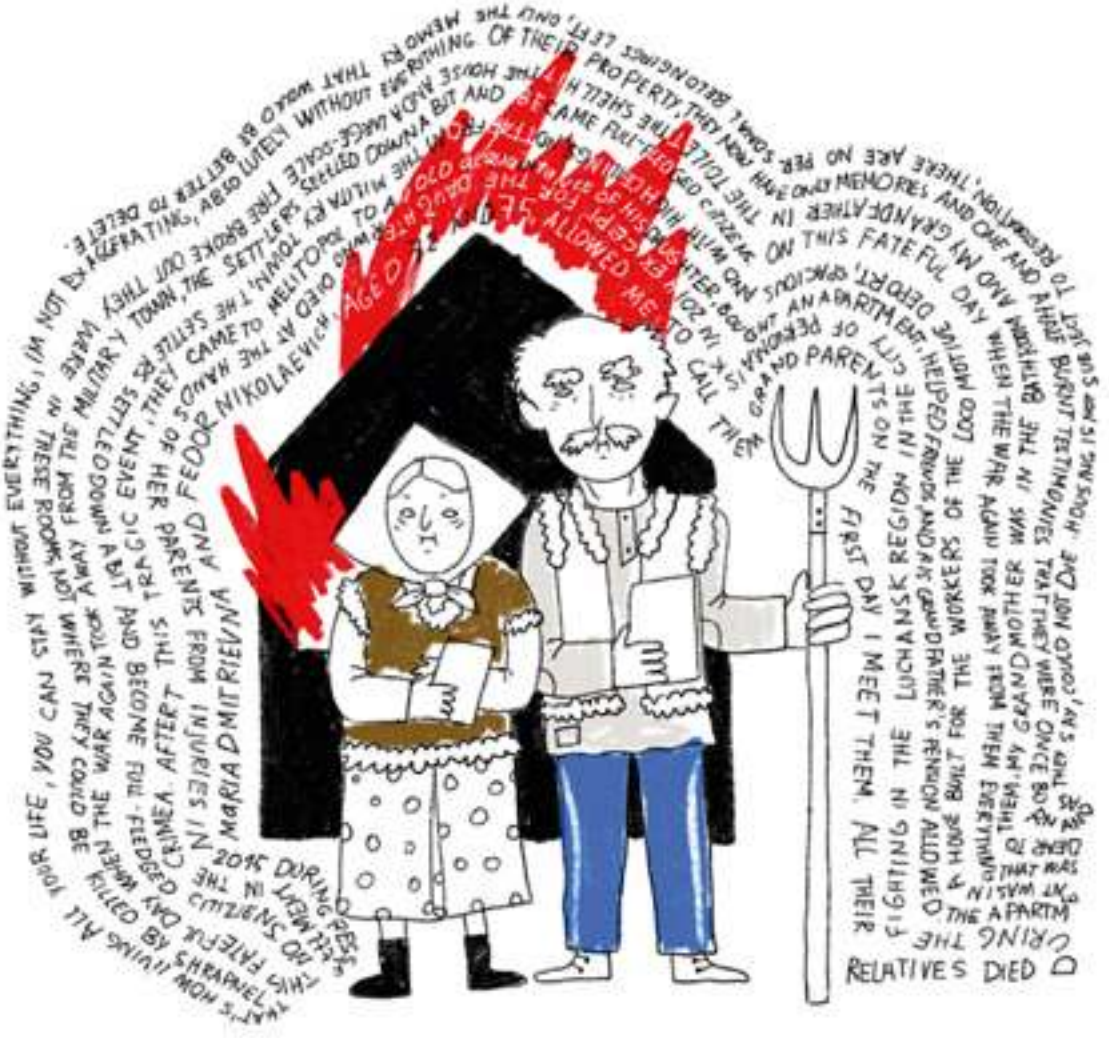
The author of this humble piece certainly shares the view that Ukraine will prevail in this bloody war. The circumstances and the cost of the victory, however, remain uncertain. In that sense, reminding ourselves of what can happen if Russia's administrative and legislative – and not only military – grip over other areas of Ukraine is firmly established provides an additional argument against any false appeasement strategies, including trade-offs for territories. As the example of Crimea shows, Russia will not only arm the newly gained frontline territories to the teeth, but it will also unwaveringly impose its entire legal and political system on millions of civilians.

We must never forget that unlike in the time of the Russian Empire, when the south and east of Ukraine were scarcely inhabited before industrialisation, the current population centre is focused on the densely populated areas in and around Donbas. In fact, the Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk, Luhansk and Kharkiv oblasts together are home to over ten million people, even by a conservative estimate. Ukraine is fighting for its people, first and foremost. We must spare these millions of people the prospect of imposed Russian citizenship, deportations, military enlistment, indoctrination in schools, the stifling of dissent and the persecution of free speech. To put it simply, Ukraine strives to fight back against a tangible risk of neo-colonisation in relation to these territories. We must make sure that Ukraine succeeds. NEE

Maksym Popovych is a human rights lawyer from Ukraine. He specialises in the situation of human rights and international humanitarian law violations in the territories of Ukraine occupied by the Russian Federation.

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Visualising the stories of war by Masha Vushedsky



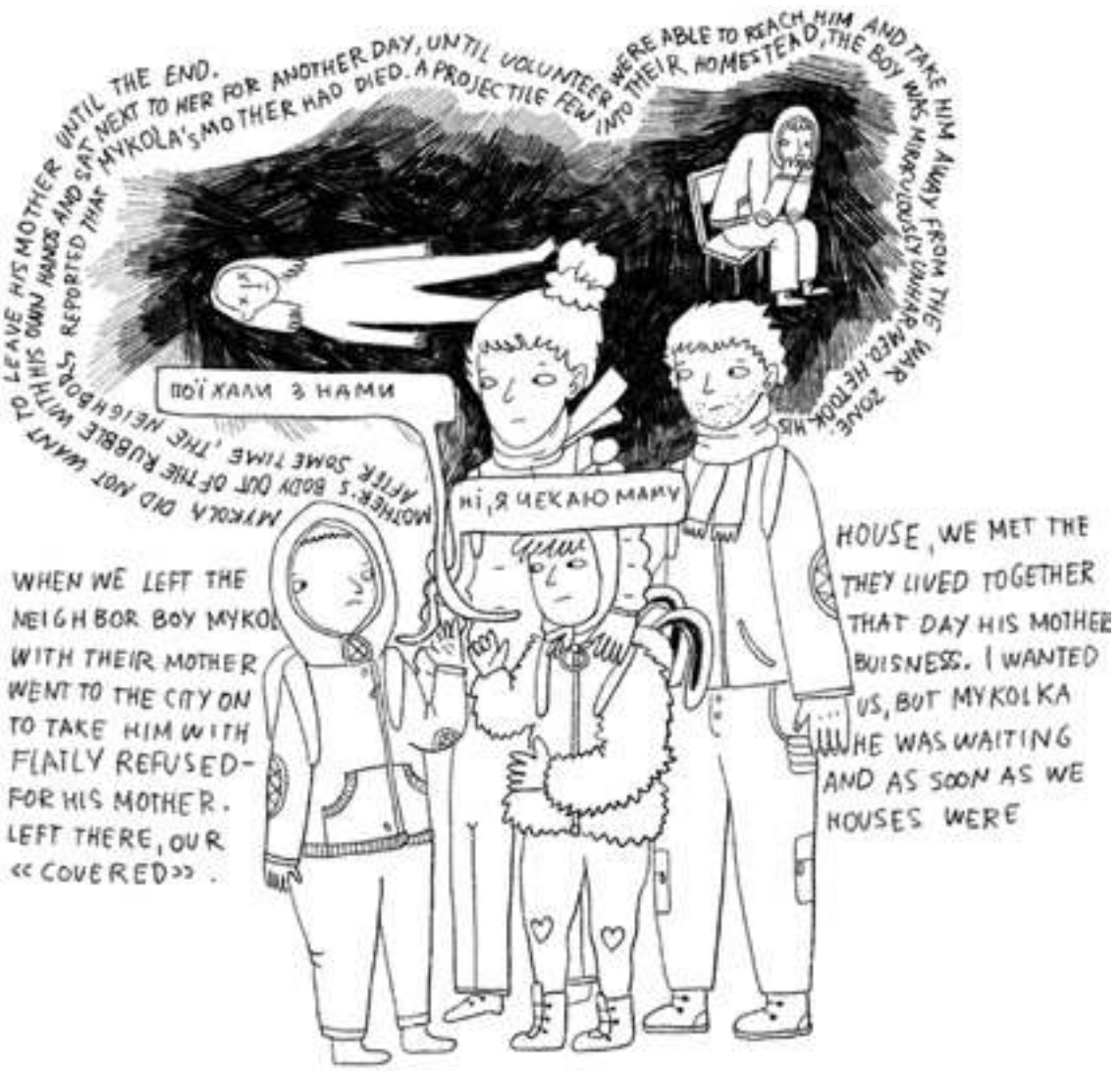
Masha Vushedsky is an artist from Ukraine, born and raised in Bakhmut, a small town in the Donetsk region. She has been drawing all her life, and since 2018 she has been collaborating in creative and socially significant projects with various public organizations. In these illustrations, Masha visualises the stories heard from other people who remained in her homeland.

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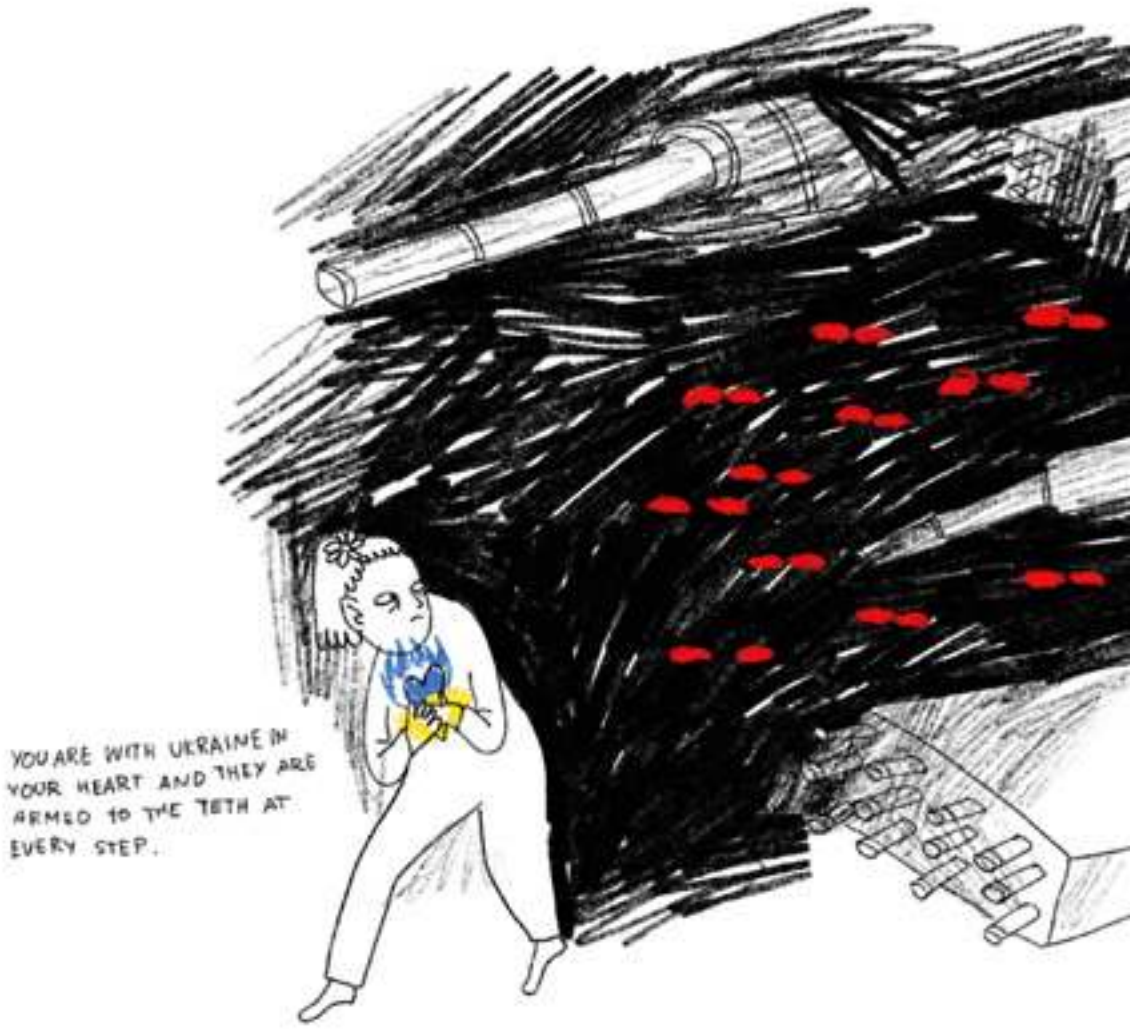
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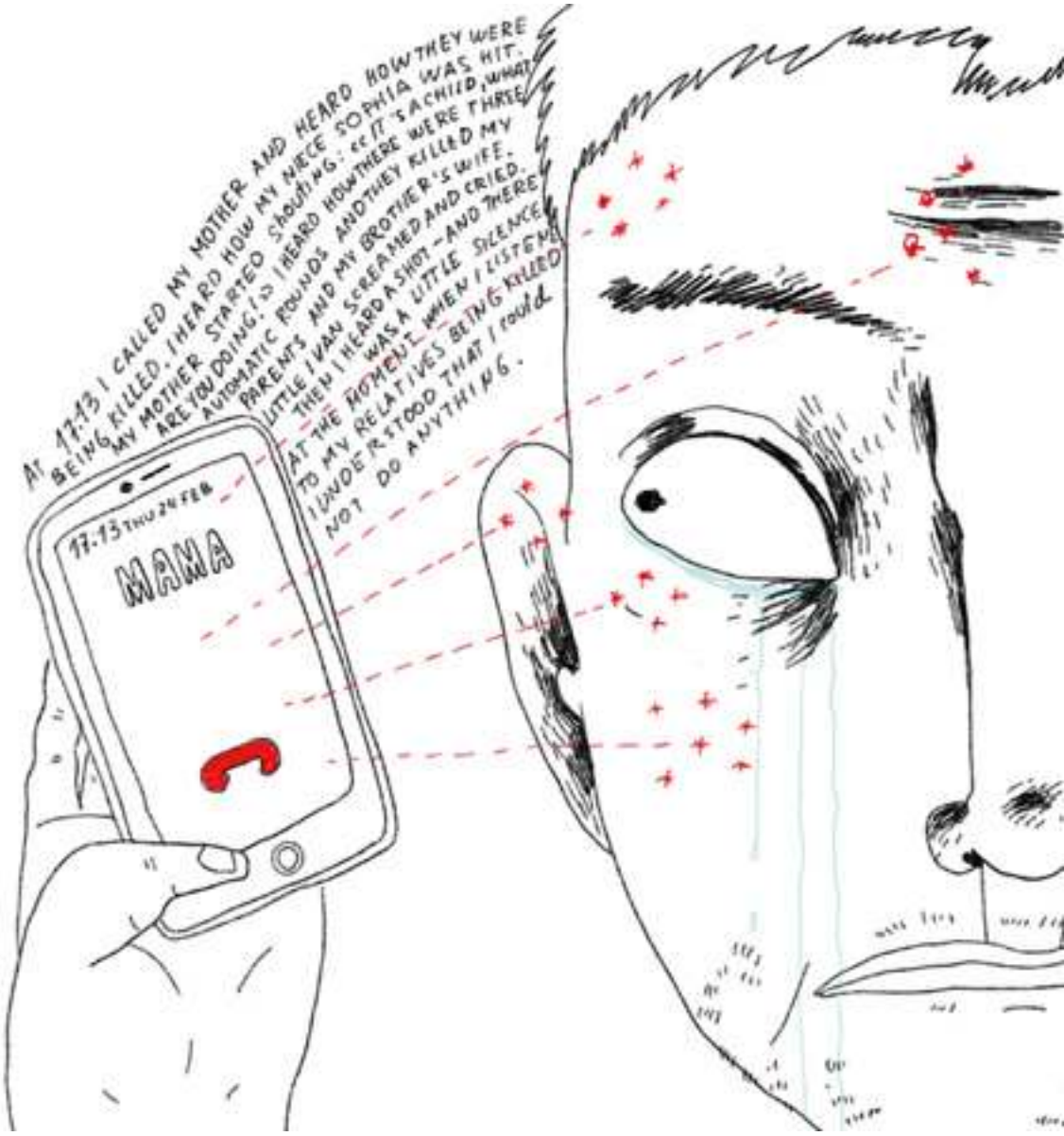
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The bees of war

ALISA KOVERDA

Ukraine's honey business is one of the largest in the world. Sadly, as a result of the war, dozens of apiaries and beehives are being destroyed every week. In some cases, beekeepers are able to get some financial support from the government, but it is not enough. Yet, the beekeepers remain optimistic. They share everything they have: their honey, knowledge and optimistic spirit.

The honey that you enjoy so much might be one that is produced in the Donbas region. Ukraine's eastern and southern territories contain rich melliferous plants. Most people who produce this honey had to flee their homes and move to safer regions following the outbreak of the war. Their families might now even be living in your neighbourhood. Some have attempted to save their bees and take them to a new place. This is very difficult, as it is not as easy as transporting a cat. But those beekeepers who were able to stay found themselves at risk, trying to visit beehives despite the constant Russian shelling.

Ukraine is the largest European producer of honey and the second largest producer in the world. According to reports from the European Commission, more than 30 per cent of the EU's honey was imported from Ukraine. A bit less is imported from China, though most EU countries try to avoid Chinese honey due to issues related to quality. The countries importing the largest volumes of Ukrainian honey in 2021 were Poland (16,989 tonnes), Germany (11,692), Belgium (6,225), France (4,337) and the Czech Republic (2,673).

Ukraine produced even a bit more honey than the United States, which is not surprising if you consider the fact that for many Ukrainians beekeeping is a hobby, and bees are something akin to a pet at home. That is why the Ukrainian authori-

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ties struggle to provide official statistics on the total number of beekeepers. Even though Ukraine managed to export 81,000 tonnes of honey in 2020 and 58,000 tonnes in 2021, the official number of registered beekeepers is only around 220,000 with 2,280,000 colonies. According to the Ukrainian Union of Beekeepers, the real number might be twice as large.

Patience and care

The honey lands of Ukraine are mainly Mykolaiv, Kherson, Kharkiv, Dnipro, Zaporizhzhia and, of course, the Luhansk and Donetsk regions. These were the areas most affected by the war and home to one-third of Ukraine's beekeepers. Obviously, the industry is seriously suffering at the moment, but beekeeping can actually help the Ukrainian economy to recover. The key factors for beekeeping are patience and care.

According to the Union of Beekeepers of Ukraine, in 2022, Ukraine will fulfil all its honey-related contractual obligations due to the good weather. This is in spite of the difficult wartime conditions. This year, we expect up to 140,000 tonnes of honey, but a large part of it will remain in the country for domestic needs. Another part will be available only after the liberation of the occupied territories and when the owners of the apiaries return from the war.

In 2022 Ukraine still managed to fulfil its honey-related contractual obligations. This is in spite of the difficult wartime conditions.

For Denys Soldatov, February 24th began with explosions in his native city of Kharkiv. Since 2014, he was expecting this to happen, but even for him, the first days were shocking; he could not imagine the scale and the number of bombs that would hit the city. Soldatov is the vice president of the Union of Beekeepers of Ukraine, an umbrella organisation for everyone involved in beekeeping in the country. With 20 years of experience in beekeeping under his belt, he understood the value of organic products and popularised the idea of co-operation between farmers and beekeepers. He also had his own beehives located in fields full of phacelia. This plant naturally enriches the soil with nitrogen, which is good for agriculture and also helps produce very high-quality honey. Unfortunately, there has been no way for him to get to his bees since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. The last time the beekeeper got news from his apiary was in May when he received some photos.

Denys lost his beehives, equipment, laboratory and even shops, but not his hope. "I just want all of them to be gone. Every day I read the news, I feel glad that less

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of them are here, and I wish I could help more. That is why I continue helping as a volunteer," he says. "My duty now is to do everything to help provide our soldiers with as many bullets as they need, and we will take care of our business afterwards."

Now, with Denys having no bees or business to attend to, he has thrown himself into volunteering. After his family left, he started helping people leave Kharkiv when it was under constant shelling. One day he lost his friend. He remembers that in the first days, he wanted to join the army, but was dismissed due to his age. Servicemen were joking about people hiding from the draft but now they are trying to bribe their way in.

In the framework of the Union, Denys organised honey sales with donations going to the Ukrainian military. The initiative also supported therapy and treatment for 65 soldiers in hospital. While helping at a hospital, he came up with the idea of an initiative designed to educate military personnel who were injured in combat on beekeeping. "I want to be sure that they will be able to earn money for their families themselves, because it is difficult to rely on the payments from the government. They are good people who were just unlucky to have such a neighbour," Denys says. He is sure that after physical and psychological therapy, this can be the next step in their social adaptation. To educate servicemen, Denys is preparing online lessons with further certification courses at the National University of Urban Economy.

Our brave beekeeper is sure that beekeeping will help Ukraine recover after the war by producing organic and ecological products. "Kharkiv is the beekeeping capital of Ukraine. We will get the territories and our bees back," Denys says confidently. "Many apiaries were destroyed, many beehives were burnt down, and the beekeepers had to leave, because of the constant shelling. Some of them even lost their homes and we had to help them get to western Ukraine. We are trying to evaluate the consequences, but it is hard since many locations are unreachable. But we will continue to develop beekeeping even with the occupied territories to make the economy work, and to help our army get our territories back."

What does not kill you makes you stronger

Just a week before the full-scale invasion, Yakiv was getting ready for the new season and buying new frames in Kherson. He remembers a clear sky with lots of helicopters. On February 24th, he woke up at five in the morning from a loud sound. At first, he thought it was an empty truck on the road. But the second explosion made him get up and go to his girlfriend. Upon hearing the news that multiple cities were under attack, they decided to escape back home to the country-

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side, just like many of the victims in Irpin, Bucha and Borodianka did. Yakiv is very glad they did not make it, because it saved their lives.

Yakiv is a 25-year-old PhD candidate studying agriculture and developing his own honey business in a village in the Mykolaiv region. Before opening his own apiary, Yakiv had been working on family farms in Europe, where he studied ways to intensify the production without harming the environment. He used the money he earned during those years to buy simple beehives and equipment, which he upgraded with time.

His apiary was located in the village of Stepova Dolyna, which is almost right on the border between the Kherson and Mykolaiv regions. An official evacuation happened there in March and April as the village and neighbourhood faced severe shelling. After the evacuation, only four people remained. Russian troops entered Stepova Dolyna only once.

When the Ukrainian military identified and destroyed a 50-vehicle Russian convoy, the soldiers spread out and hid in the village. "They were so surprised that in a two-street village we had roads, electricity and gas. I wish they saw our newly built concrete road between the Kherson and Odesa seaports that was built in the framework of the Big Construction Programme. They stole honey, because my neighbour found several jars in his yard; they tried to get inside my garage, but couldn't manage it," Yakiv says laughing.

On the other hand, he recalls one story a neighbour had told him: "He saw a man knocking very hard on my door. My neighbour asked him what he wanted. The man told him that he wanted to stay in position in the fields behind my garden, and he wanted to ask for permission to leave the position through my garden. The other time he told me that when Ukrainian troops were moving in and demining the villages, one of the senior officers saw my mother's homemade wine fermenting, and ordered that it all be poured out; the discipline [to stick to prohibition] is very high, which makes me feel very proud."

The first time Yakiv visited the village to look for some documents was in the middle of May. At that time, he saw a crater next to his house, but his house seemed only slightly damaged compared to others on the street. He arrived there one more time to take care of his bees and provide them with better conditions, because without human supervision, they can die. He knew that some of them would fly away.

"When I arrived the second time, I saw that some of the bees that left the beehive have found the old frames which smelled of beeswax in my barn. So, the next time, I might find a huge brick beehive there," Yakiv says cheerfully.

The only thing this young beekeeper knows about his house at the moment is that in the following weeks there was a fire in the fields caused by drought, or possible enemy fire, and that his house was struck again. "The roof was damaged

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and most probably one of the walls. Back then, it was impossible to walk and look around. At that time everyone left the village," he says calmly. "Recently, my village and the villages around it are in the reports on a daily basis. So, there is a very high chance that my house and apiary are already destroyed. If not destroyed, then burnt down; there are fires all the time."

But Yakiv is optimistic: "What doesn't kill you, makes you stronger," he laughs. "I understand that everything is going to be destroyed. So, I am not planning to

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rebuild anything, but I want to build new facilities that meet all international safety standards and ISO certification." He wants to develop his business in Ukraine, and is sure that lots of Ukrainians will return when the economy recovers. Since the conversation, Yakiv's village has been liberated by Ukrainian forces.

How the war will change the honey market

The war forced Ukraine to reorganise its agrarian policy in line with the new reality. One of the decisions made back in February was not to plant sunflowers close to potential areas of military fighting. This, in fact, includes the entire 1,200-kilometre border with Russia and Belarus, as it is easy to hide vehicles in fields of sunflowers. As a result, the amount of sunflower fields is 30 per cent less this year compared to last. The other reason for the decrease is that the seed storages were destroyed and most of the seed suppliers did not take the risk of ordering seeds from abroad.

To meet the demands of Ukrainians, some farmers decided to plant more buckwheat, which is very popular among Ukrainians in times of crisis. It is also a source of delicious dark honey. At the same time, some fields were abandoned, as it was hard to predict what would happen. They are now covered with carpets of wildflowers.

The Russian blockade of Ukrainian ports has also significantly affected the situation. As a result of the blockade, Ukraine still had 20 million tonnes of grain from 2021. According to Mykola Solskyi, the Ukrainian agriculture minister, this year we can expect around 67 million tonnes more. Despite this, we still face logistical problems as we are currently exporting only up to 2.5 million tonnes per month. Therefore, farmers will soon have to make the decision on what they are going to sow next season. If the grain prices do not increase, some of the farmers will have no resources for new sowing and others might prefer sunflower and rapeseed to wheat and barley. This is because they are easier to ship and more expensive. That can also positively influence the volumes of Ukrainian honey in 2023.

We shall start anew, on the ashes of our past lives

The Union of Beekeepers of Ukraine is informed about dozens of destroyed apiaries every week. In some cases, the beekeepers are able to get some financial support from the government, but it is not enough to cover the losses if you take into account the devaluation of the Ukrainian currency. Yet, the beekeepers remain optimistic. They share everything they have: honey, knowledge and spirit. It already seems as though they have nothing to share given the daily air-raid sirens.

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However, they still find something to give them hope. They are certain that Ukraine will be victorious; it is only a matter of time. Until then, they have to work, just like their bees.

The late Lithuanian filmmaker Mantas Kvedaravicius, a director of two documentaries about wartime Mariupol, used to say that war is a concept with so much attached to it. While battlefields span over hundreds of miles and thousands of lives are at stake every day, villages and cities remain in the crosshairs of the aggressor. Lifetimes are also lived in a single day. Trapped in the horrific reality of full-scale war, a proud nation is fighting for the future. Those who dedicate themselves to beekeeping are no different from those devoted to other areas of expertise. The hives can burn down, the bees can flee their homes set ablaze by enemy fire, and the land can be scorched by thousands of bombs.

Yet, every war ends and the innate human desire to build and create stays with us. We shall start anew, on the ashes of our past lives; with a will and dedication hardened in the tumultuous weeks and months of battle. We are living in very turbulent times that have a definitive bitter taste. All the more need for the sweet taste of honey.

Alisa Koverda is an interpreter with ministry of agrarian and food policy of Ukraine. She has an MA in Korean and English languages and is a PhD candidate in political science.

This article is published in the framework of the "Bohdan Osadchuk Media Platform for Journalists from Ukraine" co-financed by the Polish-American Freedom Foundation as part of the RITA – "Region in Transition" Program implemented by the Education for Democracy Foundation and the Foundation for Polish-German Cooperation.

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History lost

How Vladimir Putin's historical conceptions led to the invasion of Ukraine

JOSHUA R. KROEKER

Vladimir Putin's 2021 article on Ukraine was primarily dedicated to the notion that Ukraine is historically inseparable from Russia. He at least conceded that a Ukrainian culture and language exists. However, in his February 2022 speech, Putin ignores these ideas completely, using revisionist history to eradicate an entire nation, its language and culture. According to Putin, the history of Ukraine is now solely the history of Russia.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's historical conceptions, or rather misconceptions, have led to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Putin is manipulating, altering, rewriting and at times even completely inventing history in order to justify his actions against Ukraine and the Ukrainian people. Last year, I wrote an article in *New Eastern Europe* titled "Vladimir the historian: Putin's political revision of Ukrainian history" (Issue 6/2021), in which I analysed the Russian president's inaccurate understandings of history vis-à-vis Ukrainians and their nationhood. Nearly year later and over six months into an all-out war between Russia and Ukraine, it is important to return to Putin's alternative histories and his application thereof. It is only then that we can truly understand how this conflict came to be and where it is headed.

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Putin's denial

Two days before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Putin addressed the Russian nation in a long-winded speech. Similar to his historical articles of the past two years, in which he penned an alternative history of the Second World War and the "Unity of Russia and Ukraine" respectively, he used this speech to propagate another historical narrative. The Russian president sought to deny Ukraine's existence as a national state, arguing that its creation was a fluke of history and a mistake of the early Bolsheviks after the Russian Revolution. In doing so, he felt justified to take back what he sees to be Russian: Crimea, Donbas and even the whole of Ukraine. At the end of his speech, Putin officially – albeit illegally – recognised the two so-called breakaway republics of Donetsk and Luhansk. It was all but a declaration of war.

This time, Putin went further than ever before. In his article from the summer of 2021, Putin argued for the natural "unity" of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. His February 2022 speech, however, simply denied Ukraine's right to exist. Putin declared that "modern Ukraine was entirely created by Russia, or to be more precise, by Bolshevik, Communist Russia." For him, the father of the Soviet Union, Vladimir Lenin, simply split Ukraine from Russia "by separating, severing what is historically Russian land". This rhetoric, chosen very carefully by a man who envisions himself to be the primary historian of Russia – from Kyivan Rus' to today – was not simply a harmless utterance. Rather, these are the true beliefs of a man, a Russian president, who has very specific goals regarding the Ukrainian nation. Putin's words need to be taken seriously: he does not believe in the existence of a sovereign Ukraine.

Much of Putin's speech, or rather history lecture, focused on educating Russian society (Putin's students) on how Ukraine came to be. He employed a number of oftentimes contradictory arguments to achieve this goal. At the beginning, Putin asserted that historical Russian lands were given to appease Ukrainian nationalists and that the Bolsheviks' policy of creating a Soviet Ukraine can be referred to as "Vladimir Lenin's Ukraine". He goes on to mention that Stalin also gave foreign lands to Ukraine, including chunks of Poland, Romania and Hungary. Khrushchev then "took Crimea away from Russia for some reason and also gave it to Ukraine". For Putin, Ukraine was borne from a series of bad decisions, leading to the creation of a nation that should otherwise not exist.

In his February 2022 speech, Vladimir Putin simply denied Ukraine's right to exist.

Yet in Putin's 2021 article, he devoted significant space to exploring the historical unity of Russia and Ukraine. He explored the interdependence and relations of the Ukrainian and Russian nations from the beginning of Kyivan Rus', through-

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out the early modern period, and up to the collapse of the Soviet Union. In doing so, he effectively and ironically recognised the Ukrainian nation as a state in and of itself. In that article, he argued that the Ukrainian state (and not the Ukrainian nation) was created by nationalists, who defined themselves as anti-Russian and cooperated with the West in order to achieve statehood at the expense of Russia. He proposed the thesis that Europeans, also "anti-Russian", supported weakening the Russian empire and thus co-operated with these nationalists to construct Ukraine's statehood. At the time, as I argued, Putin completely ignored Ukraine's centuries-long relationships with other nation states, such as Poland, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Less than a year later, however, Putin's understanding of Ukraine and its history has completely changed.

The blame game

Now, for Putin, Ukraine did not exist before the Russian Revolution. At odds with his earlier arguments, he now postulates that it was in fact the Bolsheviks who created the Ukrainian state – a state that should not exist. According to Putin, "after the 1917 October Revolution and the subsequent Civil War, the Bolsheviks set about creating a new statehood … [Lenin] suggested making concessions to the [Ukrainian] nationalists, whom he called 'independents' at the time. Lenin's ideas of what amounted in essence to a confederative state arrangement and a slogan about the right of nations to self-determination, up to secession, were laid in the foundation of Soviet statehood." Here, Putin's argument brings to light two very important aspects of his understanding of modern Ukraine. First, Ukraine only exists because of Lenin, because the Bolsheviks allowed it to be so. It is no longer the West that is to blame for the creation of Ukraine, but rather Russia. The Kremlin therefore needs to undo that mistake. Second, reading between the lines, Putin very clearly does not recognise Ukraine's right to self-determination. In blaming Lenin and the Bolsheviks for allowing this mistake to happen on the premise of the right to self-determination, the logical deduction is that Putin denies Ukraine this right. For Putin it is clear: Ukraine is and has always been a part of Russia. For him, history made a mistake.

Furthermore, unlike Putin's article from 2021, he no longer pays any consideration to Ukraine's individual culture, language or history. No, for him, these factors no longer have any meaning or relevance vis-à-vis his geopolitical aspirations. Everything Ukraine is and everything it ever was, is because of Russia. Ukraine's entire existence is an accident; simply the result of a few bad decisions made by powerful men.

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Putin's 2021 article was primarily dedicated to the notion that Ukraine is *historically* inseparable from Russia, but he at least conceded that a Ukrainian culture and language do exist, albeit very similar to those of Russia. In his February 2022 speech, however, Putin ignores these ideas completely. Russia's principal historian is using revisionist history to eradicate an entire nation, its language, and culture. The history of Ukraine is now solely the history of Russia.

The future is history

Not only is Russian President Vladimir Putin now the principal historian in Russia, but he also sees himself, his person, and his presidency in historical dimensions. Putin seeks to fix what he views as historical wrongs, to remake history in a way that suits his conceptions of how Russia should be and should have been. This is what is most dangerous about Putin now. He is no longer acting rationally but rather acting in a way that permits him to achieve goals that only he can comprehend. In doing so, he has amalgamated revisionist history and a web of lies to justify the illegal invasion of Ukraine.

As spin doctor, Putin has turned questionable rumours into solidified fact for Russian society. In recent years, any historical work that does not tow this line, as I argued in 2021, will be censored or punished by law. On March 4th of this year, for example, police stormed the offices of Memorial, a Russian human rights organisation that was banned at the end of 2021. Memorial has been dealing with the Stalinist repressions in the Soviet Union for more than 30 years and stands for historical clarification, for a sliver of truth under a regime manipulating history. Putin's system is already taking every possible step to silence any account of history other than its own. Developments in Russia in recent days illustrate the unimaginable consequences the war is having on Russian society. Putin's hold on the truth has now evolved beyond the realm of history. Russian media is, for example, not allowed to refer to the war in Ukraine as a war, but rather as a "special military operation". Russian media is now required to propagate Putin's understanding of the conflict.

Putin used his February 2021 speech to disseminate a number of lies that justified his incursion into Ukraine. The first is that Putin sees Ukraine today as a threat to Russia. Though he will not admit it, Ukraine's pivot towards the West and its democratic aspirations are what Putin fears most. He views this development as a threat to the sovereignty of Russia. Throughout his speech, Putin referred to Ukraine's desire to build nuclear weapons, its cooperation with NATO, and the "anti-Russian" nature of modern Ukraine. He devoted nearly half of his speech

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to discussing Ukraine's military build-up and NATO's assistance in the country. The conclusion that Putin has drawn is that both Ukraine and NATO intend to threaten Russia. Therefore, Moscow must act now. Yet he goes further; one justification is not enough.

A war of historical dimensions calls for historical justifications. Putin has no problem drawing these from the memories of Russia's proudest moment: the Second World War. Putin's most important argument is that Ukraine is led by neo-Nazis, who have for years been committing genocide in Donbas against ethnic Russians. This is a very convenient narrative, especially as much of modern Russian society has been founded on the notion that the Soviet Union brought an end to Nazi Germany and secured freedom for millions of people. The use of the terms "genocide" and "Nazi" successfully unify Russians, particularly as the vast majority of Russian society views the Second World War as the defining moment of Russian greatness. In claiming that the war (special military operation) seeks to end the genocide against ethnic Russians and "denazify" Ukrainian society, Putin is guaranteed to find support amongst Russians. This is even more so because of the government's complete control over the media and political and historical narratives.

The conclusion that Putin has drawn is that both Ukraine and NATO intend to threaten Russia.

Within his concept of genocide, Putin advances the claim that Ukraine's policy is to "root out Russian language and culture". He asserts that Ukrainian nationalists and neo-Nazis have made Ukraine an anti-Russian state. This argument, however, is littered with inaccuracies. Of course, the Ukrainian language and culture are being fostered in Ukraine, and rightfully so. However, large segments of the population continue to speak Russian on a daily basis and at home. For the most part, this is done peacefully and without notice. A 2014 law that sought to ban the use of the Russian language in governmental offices was never passed, but Russia has never been able to let go of this unfortunate incident. Nevertheless, Ukraine is not systematically attacking the Russian language. Rather, it is defending itself from Russian disinformation, cyber-attacks and hybrid warfare.

The question of actual genocide, which Putin claims to be directed at nearly four million people, is utterly unfounded. There is no evidence that the Ukrainian government or military forces have been persecuting ethnic Russians in Donbas. Rather, ironically, Russian-backed separatists have occupied much of Donbas since 2014. This raises the question of who is committing this supposed genocide in the region. For Putin, the matter of genocide is a much more rhetorical, semantic attempt at justifying Russia's war against Ukraine. It is by recalling the horrors of the Holocaust – the Shoah of the Jewish people – at the hands of the Nazis in

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Ukraine, Poland and other countries, that Putin is attempting to rally the Russian people. He has also attempted to gain the support of Russian-leaning Ukrainians as part of his ambitions.

Grim outlook

For Putin, history is the driving factor for his war in Ukraine, and it is exactly these historical misconceptions that are driving both Ukraine – and Russia – towards ruin. Both his article from 2021 and his 2022 speech were designed to discredit Ukraine's chosen path towards democracy and the West. The result has been the opposite. Putin has consolidated an oftentimes divided country around the Ukrainian flag and president. For Russia, however, the future is looking much grimmer.

Putin has long lamented the break-up of the Soviet Union. A famous quote from the Russian president from his early years as the country's leader, which is found in nearly every publication ever written on him, asserts that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the 20th century. Yet now, 22 years after coming to power, he seems to be acting exactly on those words. For years, politicians, historians, political scientists and Russia experts disregarded Putin's historical and world views, considering them to be the ravings of a man angry about reality, but too weak to take action.

The war in Ukraine has shown everyone how dangerous Putin and the Kremlin truly are, as well as how there needs to be a greater understanding of both Russia's history and leading personalities. Most importantly, the conflict has shown how important it is to go back and reread Putin's writings and speeches about world history and Russia's place within it. Vladimir Putin and his rhetoric need to be taken literally from now on. Until there exists a better understanding of Russia, its president, and its history, unfortunately for both Russia and Ukraine, the future is history. NEE

Joshua Kroeker is a historian and political scientist, holding degrees from the University of British Columbia in Canada, Heidelberg University in Germany and St Petersburg State University, Russia. He is currently undertaking his doctoral study at Heidelberg University. He specialises in modern Russian and Ukrainian history and politics.

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Why Ukraine needs debt forgiveness

DOROTA KOLARSKA AND MAGDALENA MILENKOVSKA

The long months of war have given Ukraine the chance to think about its future reconstruction effort. Despite this, large amounts of debt may ultimately mean that this goal is unobtainable in any meaningful sense. States, international organisations and businesses must now recognise the reality on the ground and work with Ukraine to manage its debt obligations.

On July 20th 2022, Ukraine made a long-expected U-turn and finally asked international creditors to freeze its debt payments for two years. The Ukrainian government argued that it could use financial resources saved this way in the war against Russia. The request was quickly followed by a statement from the Group of Creditors of Ukraine, which includes Canada, France, Germany, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States. Noting the exceptional circumstances and "acknowledging Ukraine's exemplary track record of honouring debt service to date", they agreed to provide a coordinated suspension of bilateral debt service until the end of 2023, with the possibility of extending it by an additional year.

The decision came just in time for the September repayment deadline. However, debt in the hands of those creditors is only a portion of Ukraine's burden. A significant part – more than one-third of public debt – is in the hands of international financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. To this date, they have not stated whether they would agree to defer repayments. Private investors have also yet to follow these moves and, for now,

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their share of debt remains to be repaid on time. Moreover, it is important to remember that for private markets, any suspension, even if voluntary, is recognised as a default. Soon after the government's announcement, Ukraine's credit score was downgraded by Fitch Ratings from CCC to C. This means that Ukraine may have a problem with future access to capital.

Instead of temporary and long-delayed steps, we need solutions that fully address the problem. The people of Ukraine have stood up against the imperialist oppressor and continue to fight a heroic war for dignity and sovereignty. They have been bearing the enormous cost of such resistance, both in human and economic terms. Now Ukrainian civil society groups and trade unions are calling for debt forgiveness; any show of solidarity should not be just an empty slogan.

Debt burden

Even before the Russian invasion the country was succumbing to a massive foreign debt burden. As of the end of 2020, the gross external debt of Ukraine amounted to almost 130 billion US dollars, of which 57 billion was owned by the general government and central bank. However, the real problem for the Ukrainian economy was not the amount but the costs of debt servicing. This is mainly a result of the terms imposed by creditors for the postponement and restructuring of the Ukrainian debt in 2015, when the country faced a huge crisis caused by the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and the declarations of independence by the Moscow-backed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics. As a consequence, Ukraine had to allocate around ten to 15 per cent of gross national income annually to debt servicing.

This year alone, debt service costs were expected to be approximately 6.2 billion dollars. This is a lot even for a country not at war, but the Russian invasion has made it virtually unattainable. It is predicted that Ukraine's economy will shrink by almost half in 2022 as a result of the ongoing war. At the same time, the war caused a significant drop in budget revenues. Depending on the sources, they are now between 15 and 25 per cent of the normal level in peacetime. As a result, Ukraine's finance ministry assesses that the country's fiscal gap is five billion dollars a month. Some argue, however, that the financing needs are even higher. Oleg Ustenko, an economic adviser to Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, suggested that Ukraine needs an extra four billion dollars a month in addition to the finance ministry assessments. And while Ukrainian allies, be they European or

Ukraine's finance ministry assesses that the country's fiscal gap is five billion dollars a month.

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American, pour money into helping Ukraine in various forms, these funds should not quickly flow out of the country to repay the creditors, sometimes from the very same countries these funds initially came from. We must not deceive ourselves. Sending money back and forth is not, after all, the real financial assistance that Ukraine needs at the moment.

In the face of the Russian invasion, Ukraine must provide military equipment and food supplies for the army and territorial defence units. Resources are needed to protect the civilian population and provide housing for the displaced. It is also necessary to maintain the regular activities of the state, such as the payment of civil servants' salaries or pensions. Any repayment of debt takes money away from where it is so needed at the moment. This is why the decision to suspend debt service is crucial right now. And while we welcome the decision by the Group of Creditors of Ukraine, we need international financial institutions and private creditors to follow.

Future rebuilding

We also need to recognise that debt suspension is only a first step. As the war rages on, the damage experienced, and with it the cost of future reconstruction, increases. As reported by Sotsialniy Rukh, the Russian military "destroys sites and enterprises of strategic and critical infrastructure, transportation arteries and the economic potential of our country". Every day, the media shows us new images of towns shattered by Russian bombardment. As of June 13th, the direct damages to real estate and infrastructure exceeded 95 billion dollars. Back then, Ukraine's reconstruction needs already amounted to 165 billion. Now the figures are much higher.

Taking into account that we do not know when the Russian invasion will end, it is impossible to say what the final post-war reconstruction cost will be. However, given the scale of the destruction that the war has caused in six months, we can expect it to be astronomical. The post-war reconstruction will require a propitious economic environment, which can only be facilitated by debt cancellation. Otherwise, we can expect that Ukraine's debt will hamper efforts to rebuild the country by eating up a large proportion of economic aid and blocking access to capital needed for large-scale investments.

The debt restructuring alone will in all likelihood lead to a situation comparable to that in 2015, when the postponement of payments for some time led to higher costs of debt servicing soon after. If Ukraine is to rebuild, it cannot be held back at the same time by such a burden. Without rapid reconstruction, in turn, Ukrain-

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ians will be doomed to poverty and a standard of living well below that before the war. And even back then Ukraine was considered the poorest country in Europe.

German past sets direction

At such difficult moments, it is useful to look to history for examples to guide us. Contrary to the impression that neoliberal economists sometimes try to create, far-reaching debt forgiveness was not such a rarity in the past. For example, after 1989, half of Poland's communist-era debt was forgiven. But the comparison that seems even more relevant here is the situation in post-war Germany.

In 1953, West Germany was a completely different country than its successor today. High indebtedness – a legacy of reparations following the First World War and reconstruction following the end of the Second World War – was hindering economic development. As the country was viewed suspiciously by creditors, it also had troubles with access to capital. Huge investments were still needed to rebuild state infrastructure after the war, and foreign currency to pay back foreign-owned debts was limited.

And then on February 27th 1953, the London Debt Accords were signed. The governments of the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Canada and 16 other countries came together and agreed on the cancellation of half of West Germany's debt. In the following years, they were joined by the governments of Egypt, Argentina, Belgian Congo, Cambodia, Cameroon, New Guinea and the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, making the London Debt Accords at the time a unique example of debt relief on such a scale.

Contrary to the impression that neoliberal economists sometimes try to create, far-reaching debt forgiveness was not such a rarity in the past.

This global effort bore outstanding results. In the years following the debt relief, West Germany experienced the highest growth rate in Europe – known as the *Wirtschaftswunder* or "The Miracle on the Rhine". Part of this success should be attributed to the debt relief programme. According to economists Galofré-Vilà, Meissner, McKee and Stuckler, the London Debt Accords "created fiscal space for public investment and social spending, restored the full convertibility of the Deutsche Mark, and stabilised inflation". As another economist Rombeck-Jaschinski points out, the German economy benefitted immensely from the resulting strengthening of German borrowing capacity and capital flows at low interest rates. Although debt relief was not the only component

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of the West German miracle, economic development of this scale would not have been possible without it.

Ukraine's stability is our stability

There is, of course, a strong moral argument for Ukrainian debt forgiveness. A nation that resists brutal imperialist aggression with such sacrifice should receive our support. However, to those who call themselves "pragmatists" and believe that only hard interests can justify such steps in relations between states, we have an important message: supporting Ukraine, including the cancellation of its debt, is a step that is most definitely also beneficial for us.

Debt relief will help stabilise the economy by giving it financial breathing space.

In times of economic and political interconnectedness, the question of Ukraine's stability is also a question of the stability of our economies. Already in the first days of the invasion, we saw how strongly events there affect the economic situation across the region. An excellent illustration of this is the fact that the currencies of most European countries experienced sharp drops, and the euro has hit parity with the dollar, falling to its lowest level in 20 years. But, as Ukraine is one of the top suppliers of some grains and other agriproducts and as many as 400 million people worldwide rely on Ukrainian food exports, its impact stretches far beyond Europe. Now, with the Russian invasion and blockade of ports, we are faced with the danger of global food shortages. While the resumption of deliveries is crucial in the short term, knowing the importance of Ukraine's role as the world's granary, we need to work on making its market stable and reliable in the long term. Debt relief will help stabilise the economy by giving it financial breathing space. And the key truth here is that Ukraine's stability will benefit us and our economies. This is what creditors saw in 1953. This is what some also need to see now.

As the example of West Germany shows, for post-war reconstruction to be successful, it should go hand in hand with debt relief. That is why writing off Ukraine's foreign debt is not an abstract or radical idea but a realistic way to help our Eastern neighbour. As the political party Razem, we have stood behind this recommendation since day one. We have organised meetings with other left-wing political parties, such as one with our partners from the region in Warsaw in March or one with our allies from France, Switzerland, Denmark and Finland in Przemyśl in May. We have also been writing about Ukraine's debt in the international press. We have urged our partners to take up relevant resolutions in their parliaments, like

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those discussed in Portugal and the US. Now that we see some change in thinking about the issue, we have no doubt that things are moving in the right direction. There is no other option but for the Ukrainian debt to be cancelled in the end. We owe this to the people of Ukraine.

Editor's note: Just as the text was being prepared for print, another agreement was announced that Ukraine's overseas debt of around $20 billion would be frozen for a period of two years.

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The tragedy for Belarus and Ukraine

PAVEL LATUSHKA

The dream of Belarusians to end the occupation and build their own democratic nation-state will come true when Europe realises that the values of western civilisation should be prioritised over the interests of different influential groups. If Ukraine can stop the imperial ambitions of Russia, a free and democratic Belarus can shut them down for good.

Milan Kundera's essay "The Tragedy of Central Europe" had an enormous effect on many European nations fighting for freedom and independence before the end of the Cold War. Here, we refer to those nations that Western Europeans did not consider European enough. When reading the first lines of the essay in 2022, the banal yet proven argument that history is cyclical comes to mind: "In November 1956, the director of the Hungarian News Agency, shortly before his office was flattened by artillery fire, sent a telex to the entire world with a desperate message announcing that the Russian attack against Budapest had begun. The dispatch ended with these words: 'We are going to die for Hungary and for Europe.'"

Did Berlin, Paris or Rome understand what that person was talking about in 1956? Not to the same extent that they do now, listening to the Ukrainians saying that "We are going to fight for Europe." How many decades had to pass before Western Europeans realised that Hungarians, Czechs, Poles, Lithuanians, Latvians and other peoples of Central Europe and the Baltics have a right to live in their democratic nation-states?

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Chimera of the Soviet empire

Several nation-states appeared on the map after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Their independence was gained in the internal turmoil of the Soviet empire. How did Europe, or the West in general, react to that? For some unknown reason, western politicians preferred Ukraine and Belarus, as well as Moldova and Georgia, to stay within the sphere of Russia's interests. While the right of the former Soviet satellites of Hungary, Poland and other states of Central Europe to form nation-states was not even in question, Ukrainians and Belarusians were labelled as more Russia-influenced than Poles and Czechs. As the decades have passed, we realise how wrong this judgement was. One can delay but not cancel the liberation of people. History puts everything into place.

As a Belarusian, it breaks my heart to see that the missiles destroying Ukraine are often being fired from the territory of Belarus. The question arises as to why we are doing the opposite of supporting and helping the free nation of neighbouring Ukraine. One of the reasons is that Belarus became a part of Russia's sphere of influence and no one until 2020 argued with that, not even many Belarusians themselves.

Eventually, the sphere of influence in its current form ceased to satisfy the imperial ambitions of the chimera of the Soviet empire. Once the Belarusian nation decided to make its own choice about the future, the gradual occupation of Belarus began. This process came to an end in February 2022, when Russian troops did not leave Belarus but instead attacked Ukraine from the north. Someone decided that instead of building a democratic nation-state, Belarus should do whatever is in the interests of Russia – be it joining a union state or maintaining a dictator in power. That is what made the atrocities in Bucha and the assault on Kyiv possible.

I foresee critics saying, "that was the choice Belarusians made!" But such criticisms come from those who are not familiar with the political history of Belarus. Alyaksandr Lukashenka is confirmed to have won only one election. He falsified the results of the following votes and repressed his opponents to build up his authoritarian system of power.

Unlike Belarus, in 2014, Ukraine proclaimed its desire to leave the sphere of Russian interests. We all know how this ended. Lukashenka's dictatorship did its homework and Belarus lost its last chance to leave the sphere of Moscow's influence on its own. The 2020 awakening of Belarusian society slightly altered the situation. Having both ignored the problem and pursued co-operation with the dictatorship in Minsk, the West now looks on with concern regarding the repressions and violence. Today's crisis stems from the refusal of some nations to use their right to self-determination because some countries in Western Europe continue to possess imperial or at least realpolitik outlooks.

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Nations in slavery

The dream of Belarusians to end the occupation and build their own democratic nation-state will come true when Europe realises that the values of western civilisation should be prioritised over the interests of different influential groups. Belarusians do not ask Europeans to solve their problems. We ask them to help us use the instruments that every nation fighting for its existence has used. Please support the Belarusian nation when helping Ukraine; it will eventually bring benefits to Ukraine too! A liberated, independent, European and democratic Belarus would guarantee that Russia will not be able to pursue aggression not only against Ukraine but also Poland, Latvia and Lithuania – key outposts of the European Union.

If Ukraine can stop the imperial ambitions of Russia, a free and democratic Belarus can shut them down for good. But Belarus can only do that if liberated from dictatorship and occupying troops. Do not stand on the side-lines when two young nations are being abused and held in slavery, do not decide their destiny without asking them. Instead, help them to gain freedom and offer them assistance in line with European values.

> Today, when we see what is good and what is evil, we cannot let the evil win.

As I started this essay with a quote from Milan Kundera, I believe it would be fair to finish with one more: "The real tragedy for Central Europe, then, is not Russia but Europe: this Europe that represented a value so great that the director of the Hungarian News Agency was ready to die for it, and for which he did indeed die. Behind the iron curtain, he did not suspect that the times had changed and that in Europe itself Europe was no longer experienced as a value. He did not suspect that the sentence he was sending by telex beyond the borders of his flat country would seem outmoded and would not be understood."

The difference today is that it is not about Central Europe, but post-Soviet Europe. I do hope that my position will not be disregarded as romantic and old-fashioned in these times of realpolitik. Let us help those who cannot win against unprincipled people on their own. Today, when we see what is good and what is evil, we cannot let the evil win. Belarusians and Ukrainians have chosen European civilisation. It is now Europe's turn to appreciate how much has been sacrificed for this choice.

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Can Georgia get back on track?

BEKA CHEDIA

The European Union's recent decision to award candidate status to Moldova and Ukraine has left Georgia in a difficult position. Whilst eager to integrate with the bloc, the country still suffers from numerous political issues. Tbilisi must now take full advantage of all the tools available to it in order to not fall further behind.

Since the restoration of independence in 1991, Georgia has increasingly identified itself as part of the European family. Despite this, no real reciprocal steps have been taken by Europe to acknowledge these developments. Georgia has most often been perceived by Europe as part of its geographical periphery, somewhat separate from the continent. Since the formal establishment of the European Union in the early 1990s, Tbilisi's dream of joining the EU has remained a utopian vision. The country has constantly been referred to as simply a "neighbour" of the EU.

Georgia is a part of European civilization and the fact that the EU only perceives it as a neighbour has always been frustrating for Georgians. It was not until the August 2008 war with Russia that the country's current integration process truly began. The Eastern Partnership programme, which was launched in 2009 on the initiative of Poland and Sweden, was received enthusiastically in Tbilisi and has even turned into an effective mechanism for integration. However, it should be remembered that only half of its members (Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova) have managed to take their relations with the EU to a new level. At the early stages of the Eastern Partnership's development, many doubted its effectiveness, especially in the EU. No one considered it a future tool useful for the next wave of integration. Of course, Russia looked on with disdain at the initiative, hoping for its failure.

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More than just a neighbour

The EU's Eastern Partnership has become especially significant for Georgia. The country has gradually strengthened its image as an Eastern European state, and not just a country of the South Caucasus. This classification is still considered controversial by many in Georgia. In 2011, the then French President Nicolas Sarkozy addressed a rally in the Georgian capital with the following words: "When I am in Tbilisi, I feel like I am in Europe."

Ten years later, the current president of France, Emmanuel Macron, made a very strange statement about Georgia and hinted at the country's physical distance from the EU. He made this statement on the eve of the EU's decision to award candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova. Of course, Georgia is indeed geographically far from the EU's centre. However, this location comes with its own advantages. The EU has no other such foothold in the region. The truth is that both sides currently benefit from today's relations, as the EU has a vested interest in Georgia as a bridge between Europe and Asia. It is also a beacon of European values in this complex region.

In June, Georgia was denied candidate status. At the same time, the EU officially recognised Tbilisi's European perspective. In other words, Georgia is no longer considered just a neighbour of Europe, as it has been perceived for many years, but a real part of the continent that aspires to become an official candidate.

Issues surrounding the geographical distance of Georgia from the EU ended with this declaration. Brussels has decided that Georgia does have the right to become a future member of the EU. This recognition of the country's European perspective would have been unimaginable even last year. Suddenly, Georgia has been declared a potential candidate, and therefore a potential member of the EU – this is a significant achievement. At the same time, it represents a setback as Moldova and Ukraine are now further ahead on the path to integration with the EU. The blame for this appears to lie with the current Georgian government, which has been unable to resolve various serious issues, as outlined by the EU.

No rush to Brussels

The previous government headed by Mikheil Saakashvili put a lot of work into taking the country closer to the EU. Yet this success was not built on by the current administration. On the one hand, the current Georgian Dream government was quite lucky to start with such a position. On the other hand, they have been often criticised for following a pro-Russian political course. Despite this, the cur-

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rent authorities have managed to sign both an association and free trade agreement with the EU. They also achieved a visa-free regime with the bloc. Tbilisi has even made claims that Georgia has already implemented 45 per cent of the regulations and directives stipulated by the association agreement.

Since then, the EU has become Georgia's main trading partner and exports of Georgian goods to the bloc have risen to a notable degree. After signing the association agreement with the EU, Georgia has received just over one billion euros in financial assistance as of this year. It was on the eighth anniversary of this agreement that Georgia received acknowledgement of its European perspective. However, the current government does not appear to be in any rush to become an EU member. The leaders of the ruling party have stated that accession will take another ten to 15 years, so it makes no sense to hurry. When compared to the steps of the previous authorities, the current government looks more insecure and pessimistic when it comes to integration.

The current government in Georgia does not appear to be in any rush to become an EU member.

During the 2003 Rose Revolution, the revolutionaries used EU flags during demonstrations and rallies. The new authorities led by Saakashvili then "legalised" the EU flag (it is noteworthy that Ukraine did the same after being awarded candidate status) as the country's second symbol alongside the nation's flag. EU flags were then installed in all state institutions and raised in front of the Georgian parliament building. This official move was watched with surprise by Brussels, as Georgia did not in principle have the right to use the bloc's flag as one of its official symbols. Even Georgia's European perspective was not recognised at this time. Through this widespread use of the EU flag, however, the country's authorities wished to emphasise their desire for European integration.

Regional context

Looking at previous enlargements, it is clear that the EU prefers a regional approach rather than working with individual countries. This is especially true when it comes to small countries. In order to overcome this preference, Georgia has done a lot politically to move away from the South Caucasus and integrate with the Black Sea region.

It was then believed that any identification with the South Caucasus would damage the country's chances of getting closer to the EU. After all, the other two countries of the region, Armenia and Azerbaijan, have not clearly expressed any

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desire for EU integration. This is in spite of the fact that they are also part of the Eastern Partnership. Hence, Georgia gradually began to position itself as a country of the Black Sea basin, associating itself more with Ukraine and Moldova.

When Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU in 2007, the desire to promote this geographical outlook became even more attractive for Georgia. This new image ultimately played a key role in the gradual formation of a distinct group within the Eastern Partnership. It is noteworthy that from the very beginning this trio of countries (Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova) have faced numerous differences in development. Their paths simply converged around their shared desire to integrate closely and quickly into the EU. Georgia was at one time ahead of both Moldova and Ukraine in terms of the pace and quality of reforms, the effectiveness of anti-corruption campaigns and the modernisation of state institutions. Recent years, however, have seen Georgia lag behind these countries in democratic development.

Georgia was at one time ahead of both Moldova and Ukraine in terms of the pace and quality of reforms.

Nevertheless, these three states strengthened their ties further when they officially formed the "Associated Trio" group after the signing of their association agreements. This is in spite of the fact that political consultations and economic ties between these countries have been insufficient and generally absent in recent years. This is especially true regarding the difficult relationship between the current governments of Georgia and Ukraine.

The Baltic and Central European states have been traditional supporters of this trio within the Eastern Partnership. In contrast, older EU members from Western Europe have remained sceptical. They saw a danger in the potential collapse of the Eastern Partnership programme. Brussels had pinned its hopes on the success of the entire initiative in relation to all six states. The current advantages enjoyed by the three associated countries could eventually push the rest – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus – to co-operate more actively with the EU. Some of these states expressed active dissatisfaction with the trio's formation, with Azerbaijan perceiving it as an almost unfriendly step.

Looking ahead

The countries of the Associated Trio have not always acted in sync and their success on the path to the EU has not always coincided with one another. Therefore, the fact that Georgia has not yet received candidate status does not mean that Georgia can afford to just fall behind Chisinau and Kyiv. The country's European

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future has now acquired real contours in spite of its current status. Fears in Georgia that the EU may once again perceive the country in the context of the South Caucasus are not justified at this stage. Apparently, Brussels will soon reconsider the case of Georgia in the same context as Bosnia and Herzegovina or Kosovo, which have a similar potential candidate status. It is therefore positive that a political consensus on further enlargement is emerging within the bloc. Even a year ago this would have been unimaginable. Faced with a bloody war in Ukraine, Europe decided to open its doors to its Eastern neighbours. European Council President Charles Michel stated on May 18th that the EU should begin to build "a European geopolitical community" that would cover a wide area. Involvement in such a group would not preclude full EU membership in the future.

In the meantime, Georgia has a chance to fully use the transformative power of both the EU and its status as a potential candidate. Along with candidate states, Tbilisi can also use the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) – a multi-billion-euro fund – to modernise the country. Ultimately, all the reforms that Georgia will implement in anticipation of European integration are needed not just for the EU, but for the development of the country as a whole.

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Shame and a disintegrated society

The curious case of Russian intelligentsia

WOJCIECH SIEGIEŃ

Since the outbreak of the war in February 2022, the Kremlin has abandoned any illusions of cultural freedom in Russia. Its cynical mask has been taken off completely and now we can finally see the real and purely aggressive faces of those who wield power in the state. It is clear that Russia's priority remains maintaining national unity rallied around the flag.

"We were getting ready, but never fully believed in the war," said Andrii Yermak, the head of Volodymyr Zelenskyy's presidential administration in an interview with *Ukrainska Pravda*. This conversation took place just days after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February. From today's perspective, which includes our knowledge of the hideous atrocities committed by the Russian army against the Ukrainian people in places such as Bucha or Irpin, we can say that Yermak's confession was an illustration of the huge naiveté of the Ukrainian political elite. This naiveté seems even more striking when it is contrasted with the other side (Russia), where steadfast cynics spoke through propagandists and official spokespersons such as Dmitry Peskov or Maria Zakharova. The Russian side was also getting ready. Except, it believed in the outbreak of the war.

A spectrum where one end marks Ukrainian naiveté and the other Russian cynicism can also be used to show the different degrees of political realism observed

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in these two states. Before February 24th, the Kremlin evidently had an advantage in this regard as well. Another area where Russia was unquestionably stronger was cultural production. Since the annexation of Crimea and parts of Donbas in 2014, Russia has effectively managed to maintain its channels of cultural influence in Ukraine. At the same time, it convinced everybody that Russian artists and Russian-language products were apolitical. They were presented as belonging to the sphere of beauty and truth.

Propaganda fog

The Ukrainian authorities naturally tried to counteract Russia's orchestrated cultural influence aimed at their population. One of the initiatives undertaken by Kyiv was to deny entry to Russian artists who had illegally travelled to Crimea after 2014 and performed concerts there. However, in these endeavours, it turned out that the Zelenskyy administration was not always consistent and the restrictions were not always enforced. For example, Vasiliy Vakulenko or Basta, a Russian rapper, had performed concerts in Crimea. This showed his role in the Kremlin's propaganda machine, which is ultimately aimed at promoting the "Crimea is ours" narrative. Despite this, the Ukrainian authorities let him enter their state and perform in Ukraine. As expected, this decision was criticised by patriotic activists.

Other examples include situations when cynical illusion and manipulation won over reality among Russian cultural figures. Consider the Russian film actor Mikhail Porechenkov's visit to Donetsk in 2014. He was wearing a helmet with the word PRESS on it and shot at Ukrainian positions with a Soviet-style NSV heavy machine gun. When asked why he had done it, he explained that he wanted to express support for the separatists, adding that he had done enough of his own shooting in Georgia in 2008. Thus, we can believe in the honesty of his surprise when, first, he was attacked in Russia and accusations were made against him for having put journalists working in Donbas in danger and, second, when Ukraine issued a warrant for his arrest, treating him as a terrorist. It is thus the so-called propaganda fog that affects thinking among the majority of Russian society. This also explains how Porechenkov effectively mixed up reality with a war movie, which he was essentially promoting back then in Donbas. In other words, he did not even notice the moment when he transformed from being an actor to a potential murderer.

Already in 2014 Russia was promoting a false illusion that there is no connection between politics and cultural production. The second phenomenon, in today's Russian reality, is reduced to mass staged productions. However, Russia's aggression against Ukraine on February 24th changed everything. It should indeed be

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seen as a breakthrough moment for both states with regards to the promotion of culture. Ukraine almost straight away banned any public performance of Russian music and cultural productions. Russia, in turn, has put a halt to its false policy that culture and politics belong to two different spheres. Everything has become crystal clear: in a country where there is no such thing as politics (Putin is the only politician), everything is political. This, in turn, has led to extreme polarisation and a zero-sum game: you either stand with us or with our enemies.

Keeping up appearances no more

Neutrality is no longer possible and especially in the cultural sphere. The old-time excuse expressed in the popular saying "Мая хата з краю, я нічога не знаю" (my house is on the periphery, I know nothing), is no longer applicable. As a result, the decisions of artists to not support the "special operation" in Ukraine or show the "Z" or "V" signs at their concerts are interpreted as hostile acts towards the state and its authorities. At least this is what the band Bi-2 learnt in April after it refused to perform a concert in a facility which possessed a *"за президента"* (for the president) sign and a large letter "Z" above the stage. This letter has indeed become the most recognisable symbol of Russia's attack against Ukraine. The authorities reacted quickly. Bi-2 concerts were cancelled in different Russian cities, one by one, like a perfectly aligned row of dominos. The musicians were said to be under the influence of the "State Department" or "fat Afro-Americans from the CIA". In today's Russia such accusations suffice when officially calling someone an agent of foreign influence.

The strong politicisation of culture was noticeable in Russia even before the start of the current war.

Evidently, the strong politicisation of culture was noticeable in Russia even before the start of the current stage of the war. Until then, this cynical phenomenon remained somewhat restrained. A kind of consensus between the Kremlin and the "creative intelligentsia", as artists are commonly called in Russia, still survived during this time. Ivan Urgant, Russia's answer to Jimmy Fallon, could still make some subtle jokes about the authorities. Simultaneously, the seemingly liberal Echo of Moscow radio station, with Alexei Venediktov (linked with the Kremlin) as its editor in chief, allowed Alexander Nevzorov to trash talk the authorities every Wednesday. An unwritten hierarchical show-business arrangement was also in place and remained pretty influential. Performers such as Alla Pugacheva, as well as her comedian husband Maxim Galkin or former husband Philipp Kirkorov, could thrive in this environment.

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Since the outbreak of the war in February 2022, the Kremlin has abandoned any illusions of cultural freedom in Russia. Its cynical mask has been taken off completely and now we can finally see the real and purely aggressive faces of those who wield power in the state. It is clear that Russia's priority remains maintaining national unity rallied around the flag, which is now often decorated with the "Z" or "V". The war, which was started but never declared by Russia, has also eliminated a decades-old pantheon of Russian stars and invalidated their hierarchy in a matter of a few days. Within a day of becoming an enemy of the homeland, Pugacheva fled to Israel with her husband. Lead Kremlin propagandist Margarita Simonyan even accused Pugacheva's husband of being a secret homosexual.

According to Moscow's discourse it is Russian culture that is being cancelled in the West.

The invasion has also significantly changed the language of state media, removing any forms of politeness. Thus, when you listen to Russian television programmes, do not be surprised when you hear various inflammatory names used to describe the state's enemies. These include scum, beasts, bastards, sons of bitches, gays, fags, shit, urine, penises and pindos (this is a popular Russian derogatory term used to describe strangers, especially Americans). In the same vein, TV presenters or their guests recommend that these people "are taken from the back" or enter into history's "asshole".

What is striking in this language is the number of sexual references and homophobic vocabulary, which can be read as a sign that Russia has indeed become a fascist state. Perhaps the last trace of the country's cynical discourse upholding a dichotomy between politics and culture, but now targeted at the external audience, is its own version of the American cancel culture debate. However, according to Moscow's discourse it is Russian culture that is being cancelled in the West. Sticking to such talking points, the hosts of Russian television shows scare their audiences in western states with stories about hypersonic Zircon missiles and nuclear weapons.

A third way?

Within this ongoing process of increasing totalitarian control of culture in Russia, it is interesting to take note of the artists who have chosen what we can call "a third way". As stated above, since February 24th the choice faced by many Russian artists has been basically limited to either support Putin unconditionally or pack up and leave. Yet, once the shock of the first days of the war was over and

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the ideological fog began to clear, it became possible to say who was who. It turned out that there were some artists who did not opt for any of these aforementioned choices. Among them were bloggers, essayists, writers and musicians, who despite not supporting the war decided not to leave Russia. Instead, they chose to stay and fight for the truth.

I would argue that the feature that distinguishes these artists from the other two groups is their attitude to shame and guilt regarding Russia's aggression against Ukraine. It can thus be said that they refuse the moral reactions of those who have left Russia, thereby manifesting their discontent.

The most illustrative example of this third way of artists can be seen in the alternative music band Shortparis. Originally from St Petersburg, this group, which has long skilfully balanced between experimental music and pop, is indeed very popular both in and outside Russia. A few weeks after the invasion of Ukraine its frontman, Nikolai Komyagin, was interviewed by the Russian journalist Nikolay Solodnikov on the popular *Yeshchonepozner* (ещёнепознер) YouTube channel. I will use this conversation to show this unique way of thinking among some of the "creative intelligentsia" who decided to stay in Russia.

Indicatively, the word "war" is not used in the interview, rather the two refer to it with a series of euphemisms. From the beginning, it seems that both interlocutors are testing each other's view on that matter, thus talking about an "event", "a world change" or "inhuman transformation taking place in the streets". Yet, at a certain point Solodnikov states that the members of Shortparis, just like him, have

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not left Russia and decided to stay. In the meantime, they have released new songs and even some new music videos. He then adds that after the start of the aggression, he himself reached out to his own mentor, the director Alexander Sokurov, and asked him an existential Russian question: what to do? Sokurov answered that he should "keep working and strengthen his faith".

Solodnikov and Komyagin quickly agreed that they felt disrespect towards those who believe leaving Russia was the only ethically possible reaction. In their view, emigration is the way towards self-denial. This declaration then led them to what they see as the core of the whole problem: the sense of shame and guilt among the Russian people ever since their state's aggression against Ukraine. Komyagin admits that once the war started, he indeed felt ashamed.

This feeling, however, quickly turned into frustration once he understood that shame is unproductive. In his view, shame is also a distinctive feature of the Russian intelligentsia, which is always embarrassed about something. This is especially true when it comes to the actions of the Russian nation. At the same time, both Solodnikov and Komyagin admit that the (simple) Russian nation is not known for tackling difficult matters or experiencing a collective sense of guilt. So much for a diagnosis!

The solution that Komyagin, who is quite familiar with post-structural theories, comes up with is not a rebuttal of Russian identity. Instead, he opts for national unity. To achieve this, he suggests a "change in the level of linguistic co-operation", which could help create horizontal social structures. In a way, this suggests an antithesis to Putin's vertical system. Referring to the theory of post-structuralism, Komyagin complains that in Russia there is a game between the "signified" and the "signifier" and that this has been visible even to the "philistines" (this word is actually used in the interview). Such post-modern newspeech means that the Russian authorities are lying to their people and that the people know this.

Shame is a distinctive feature of the Russian intelligentsia, which is always embarrassed about something.

Solodnikov, who is on the same page as Komyagin, states that not only Russia but the whole world is now taking part in an anthropological catastrophe – where it is no longer clear what makes a human being. In this world, there is also a shortage of grand ideas which, as a rule, are more important than human beings. Without them, no beautiful churches in Milan or St Petersburg would ever have been built. These assumptions are yet only one step away from the neo-Putinist concept of *Russkiy mir* (or Russian world). Indeed, for Komyagin Russia is a kind of metaphysical country. Russians absorb grand ideas, which later turn into a sacrifice paid by the whole nation. This metaphor seems to refer to the

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current war. Yet, in his view, the national trauma that haunts society is closely connected to the fact that Russians are removed from the "civilised world". This means that there is hope that one day they will build a new reality, one that goes beyond globalisation and capitalism. For this to happen, a new generation needs to come to an understanding that a different (Russian) world is possible.

The fictional politics-culture dichotomy

All told, it is quite clear that Komyagin and Solodnikov do not fully grasp that all these linguistic games and ambiguities in Russia ended on February 24th. This is probably why, without even knowing it, they use the language of the Kremlin when talking about Russia's distinct civilisation; or Russians being victims of collective responsibility imposed on them by the hostile West; or when saying that Russians should not feel ashamed or guilty for starting the war against Ukraine. In the end, they even state that national unity is what Russia needs the most right now.

The politics-culture dichotomy is a fiction in today's Russia.

Their blaming of the "intelligentsia" for the wrongdoings of the "nation" is nothing more than an imitation of Sergey Lavrov's words. Specifically, when the atrocities committed by the Russian army in Bucha were revealed to the world, the Russian foreign minister reportedly said to a western journalist that his state was what it was and that he was not going to be embarrassed about it. All in all, the politics-culture dichotomy is a fiction in today's Russia. Thus, Solodnikov's aforementioned question to his mentor Sokurov was a political question. As such, it calls for more details as it is not enough to just ask "what to do?" Instead, the artists who have stayed in Russia and want to continue working there should rather ask a political question: how to oppose the authorities in a situation where they are part of the very same authorities that they are acting against? Noticeably, none of the participants in the interview used the word "Ukraine" or "Ukrainians" when describing the victims of Russia's aggression. And yet, there was much discussion about shame and guilt.

The American philosopher Judith Butler discusses the collective sense of guilt in her book *The psychic life of power*. In its pages, Butler claims that guilt is a remedy against the sadistic need to destroy an object that we would like to see die. In other words, without the feeling of guilt, societies are faced with their own destructive violence. It is difficult to imagine a more adequate example of this reality than the aforementioned interview.

The interview ends with two moments of confusion. First, when Solodnikov attempts to say what he feels about the war and starts struggling with his words. As

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he does not know what to say, he starts holding his head and groans. Komyagin helps out by stating that the current situation needs to be handled in a way reminiscent of Wittgenstein. This probably means that when something cannot be talked about, it should be silenced. After this statement, the interviewer – unexpectedly both to his guest and himself – suggests that they should round off this intellectual feast with, of all things, some arm wrestling. Surprised by the proposal, Komyagin nonetheless agrees to it and both gentlemen start wresting and groaning. At the end, speaking through his teeth, Solodnikov says: "and look, in this way we get closer to the people, for fuck's sake!"

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The game of influence in the South Caucasus

TATEVIK HOVHANNISYAN

While the world remains focused on the war in Ukraine, an important political game is being played in the South Caucasus. The local states of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia now find themselves in rather different positions as external powers attempt to jostle for position in this fractious region.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has destabilised not only Europe but also its neighbourhood and inevitably the South Caucasus. This region already has a complicated geopolitical milieu even without any external triggers. Regardless of the outcome, the war will result in a resentful spillover effect in the three countries of the South Caucasus, as they are connected to Russia through trade, remittances and tourism. The economic sanctions, imposed by the West, have enormously affected the rouble, decreasing the remittances sent from Russia by the Azerbaijani, Armenian and Georgian diasporas. Russia is and will be isolated and this will create difficulties for the nationals of the three countries living there. Furthermore, according to predictions by the World Food Programme, the world is facing an incoming global food crisis. Due to the war, Russia might further limit wheat exports as a means of countering sanctions and for its own food security reasons. In that case, the South Caucasus will also be affected as Russia is the main exporter of wheat to those countries, supplying 94 per cent of the total needs of Georgia, 96 per cent of Azerbaijan, and 98 per cent of Armenia.

The war in Ukraine has also affected the foreign policies of the three countries, which are widely influenced by external players . Although Russia's main focus is on

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the war in Ukraine, it does not forget its presence in the South Caucasus, especially at a time when other international actors are trying to strengthen their positions in the region. The geopolitical game in the South Caucasus varies in each country based on relations with Russia.

Is Russia getting Georgia back?

Once a pioneer of successful democratisation reforms among the countries of the Eastern Partnership, today's Georgia has found itself in a more difficult situation. Indeed, in Georgia at the moment there is an institutional split regarding the position to be adopted on the war in Ukraine. This exists between the government led by the Georgian Dream party and President Salome Zourabichvili. Georgia's prime minister, Irakli Gharibashvili, decided that the country would not join the sanctions regime against Russia, justifying this through reference to the country's national interests. This caused significant criticism in Ukraine and Europe and also among Georgian society. Fearing the country's international isolation, Zourabichvili flew to Europe to try to calm the situation.

Georgia's prime minister decided that the country would not join the sanctions regime against Russia, justifying this through reference to the country's national interests.

This clash takes place in a society that is familiar with Russian aggression and where public opinion largely fears that Georgia could be the next Ukraine. This sentiment is shown in the opinion polls carried out by the Caucasus Research Resource Centre Georgia. These show that the majority of society supports Ukraine (61 per cent) and is in favour of joining the sanctions (66 per cent). A part of Georgian society even demands the resignation of the government as its actions are not in line with the real Georgian dream: Euro-Atlantic integration.

Interestingly, the Georgian government is now walking a tightrope, trying to balance between Russia and the West. On the one hand, Georgia decided to maintain a neutral stance by not joining the sanctions in order not to infuriate Russia and avoid military action. Russian troops, in fact, are still located in the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali (South Ossetia). Of course, this poses a threat to the country, which is not militarily ready. Moreover, having seen what happened to Ukraine, Georgia may fear that the timing and type of military support provided by the West may not be enough to save the country from destruction and suffering. On the other hand, Tbilisi showed its willingness to work with the West by joining the vote to expel Russia from the Council of Europe, the UN

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resolution to condemn Russia, and the International Criminal Court's investigation of alleged Russian war crimes.

However, it is not an easy game, not least because the European Union has dusted off its so-called "negative conditionality" and denied Georgia candidate status. This denial is not only due to Tbilisi's decision to maintain a neutral stance but also the leading party's normalisation process with Moscow. It should be noted that Georgian Dream does possess ties with the Russian leadership. In the end, this normalisation led to more economic connections, which may eventually decide the political course of a developing country like Georgia that needs foreign investments.

The EU's decision is naturally a political one: European integration implies certain rules to follow, reforms to implement, and, most importantly, a coherent foreign policy to make. If the assignments are not complete, the EU has a legitimate right to put the integration process on hold. Notwithstanding, the policy of even temporarily "punishing" Georgia is fraught with its own dangers because Tbilisi may gradually become more economically dependent on Russia as data is proving. Indeed, according to Transparency International, in 2022 Georgia's economic dependence on Russia has increased. Notably, the number of Russian companies registered in Georgia increased to 6,400. In addition, imports from Russia increased by 51 per cent in the first six months of the year. This was driven by oil, which increased by 280 per cent, while exports to Russia decreased by 2.8 per cent.

The EU policy of even temporarily "punishing" Georgia is fraught with its own dangers.

Azerbaijani gas matters

Until recently, Russia was using the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as leverage to exert influence over Azerbaijan and Armenia. This situation changed after the war unleashed by Azerbaijan during the pandemic in autumn 2020. During the war, Turkey openly supported Baku and this opened the door to the region for Ankara. With their recent partnership declaration, Azerbaijan and Turkey accepted that they must coordinate their foreign policies. And now Turkey, sometimes through Azerbaijan, is playing "geopolitical chess" with Russia in the South Caucasus, where they may sacrifice some pawns to move into a more advantageous position.

One of the examples of this chess match is that Russia openly shared its position with Turkey in the region, in return acquiring a peacekeeping mission in Nagorno-Karabakh. Moscow had been seeking this for years against Baku's op-

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position. Azerbaijan, backed by Turkey, regularly violates the November 2020 ceasefire in the territories under the mandate of the Russian peacekeepers. This is done to discredit the peacekeeping mission and/or gain an advantage. Remarkably, Russia tries to solve the issue in a diplomatic way, preferring not to have an open confrontation with Turkey. In turn, Turkey is often reciprocal. Ankara is the only NATO member not to join the sanctions and not to close its airspace to Russia. Thus, through the old strategy of bargaining with others' territories and lives, Russia serves its own interests. Being a strategic partner of Armenia, Russia has halted the war when it found necessary as there was more to gain by sacrificing its partner than supporting it. This includes trade and gas and oil co-operation with Azerbaijan, and avoiding confrontation with Turkey.

Hence, it is not surprising that the headlines about the new EU deal with Azerbaijan did not cause a great stir in the Kremlin. After all, there was an allied declaration signed between Putin and Azerbaijan's Ilham Aliyev on the eve of the invasion of Ukraine. The declaration implies that the parties will refrain from carrying out any economic activities that will cause "direct or indirect" damage to the other. Indeed, as the British Petroleum (BP) in Azerbaijan website shows, the Russian giant Lukoil possesses a considerable stake in the Azerbaijani energy industry. It currently holds a 25 per cent stake in the Shallow Water Absheron Peninsula exploration project and 19.9 per cent in the main Azerbaijani gas field of Shah Deniz. Thus, both parties are too dependent on the energy industry to openly confront each other.

This might be the reason behind Aliyev's neutral stance related to the war in Ukraine. He also did not join the sanctions and was even absent from voting in the UN resolutions against Russia. Interestingly, these positions are in line with the fourth clause of the Allied Declaration, according to which Russia and Azerbaijan must maintain equal or similar positions on international issues. In addition, it is worth noting that the actual deal between the EU and Azerbaijan is so small that there is no real competition between Russia and Azerbaijan. According to the EU deal, by 2027 the gas supply should be doubled – reaching 20 billion cubic metres. This is only about six per cent of the supplied gas from Russia in 2021 and only three per cent of the total amount of Europe's needs.

At the time of the war in Ukraine, the EU has also become more vocal in the South Caucasus. In particular, European Council President Charles Michel tried to mediate between the parties on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict without much success. In search of alternative energy suppliers to replace an authoritarian state like Russia, the EU signed a deal with Azerbaijan, which has even worse indexes of human rights. With this deal, the EU only strengthens the position of autocratic power and its own dependency on authoritarianism.

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Is there a real alternative for Armenia?

Armenia is the most vulnerable of the three countries in the region. More war could also greatly affect the country due to its strong economic, energy and military dependence on Russia. This situation only worsened after the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War and the placement of peacekeepers to guarantee the security of Armenians living there. Additional servicemen were also brought into the territory of Armenia to support border protection in its north and south. Turkey and Azerbaijan, taking advantage of the fact that the world's attention is focused on Ukraine, are trying to make the most of the situation. They are putting pressure on Armenia both to surrender in the struggle for the rights of Armenians living in Nagorno-Karabakh and to implement the ceasefire clauses according to their interpretation.

In particular, the implementation of the ninth point of the November 2020 ceasefire statement stipulates that transportation channels should be opened between Azerbaijan and the Nakhichevan Autonomous Region, thus connecting Azerbaijan and Turkey. The road that is supposed to connect Turkey and Azerbaijan is part of Armenian territory, but both Ankara and Baku are demanding an end to border inspections, going well beyond what was agreed in the 2020 statement.

Meanwhile, Russia proposes deployment of its servicemen on the border officially to protect Armenians. Most probably, however, this is meant to establish its control over the road. In this context, Armenia, although always in favour of unblocking regional channels, cannot accept a proposal that represents a violation of its sovereignty.

Remarkably, Iran has also been active on this issue, categorically opposing the project to create a transportation link between Turkey and Azerbaijan in the strategic border that connects the Islamic Republic with Armenia. The Iranians also fear that if the Erdogan-Aliyev project succeeds, the next target of the ambitious plan to connect all the Turkic peoples will include the northern regions of the Islamic Republic, where 20 million ethnic Azerbaijanis live. That is why, over the months, Tehran has increasingly flexed its muscles, bringing troops to the border and publicly reminding the leaders of Turkey and Russia about its red line: any violation of its direct border with Armenia. In addition, to secure its positions, Tehran has recently expressed its intention to open a consulate in Syunik, an Armenian region bordering both Iran and Azerbaijan.

The tense situation in Syunik has also attracted the interest of the West and, in particular, of the United States. Notably, US Ambassador to Armenia Lynne Tracy has visited the region several times, sending a clear signal to all parties involved that Washington is closely monitoring the situation. Tracy's actions follow the visit

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of CIA Director William Burns to Yerevan on July 15th this year, to understand the state of relations between Yerevan and Moscow after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. He also hoped to get to know Yerevan's view on recent developments in the region.

The geopolitical turmoil surrounding Armenia poses a dangerous dilemma for the country: to continue to be loyal to Moscow, a strategic partner that often proves inadequate to serve Armenia's national interests, or to develop alternative relations, at the risk of ending up like Ukraine. Surprisingly, Armenia has recently moved closer to the EU and is also deepening its military partnership with India. This is a big step, considering that Yerevan's room for manoeuvre is very small. But a real change in foreign policy would require external guarantees. The same ones that, at the moment, no one seems to be willing to offer to Yerevan or Tbilisi.

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Georgian Dream faces a critical moment

NINO CHANADIRI

Georgia's response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine has caused controversy at home and abroad. Adopting an approach aimed at avoiding Moscow's attention, the state has often been accused of effectively pursuing a pro-Kremlin outlook. Tbilisi must now take clear and effective steps to support Ukraine in order to win back the trust of its partners.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has already dramatically changed developments in Europe, has become closely linked with Georgia's internal politics. The ruling Georgian Dream party has come under strong criticism from society many times due to their not necessarily clear position on, and lack of support for, Ukraine. Many even believe that if previously Georgian Dream tried to maintain a pro-western image, then the war in Ukraine has unveiled their real face in terms of being pro-Russian. In this critical period, the party managed to make Georgian-Ukrainian relations tense, with a diplomatic scandal erupting between the two countries.

These tensions between the governments of Georgia and Ukraine were visible from the very first days of Russia's full-scale invasion. However, in April, Georgian Dream temporarily changed its rhetoric and decided to send a parliamentary delegation to Bucha. Amidst diplomatic tension, this move surprised the Georgian public and encouraged even more questions regarding what game the party was really playing.

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Do not irritate policy

Opponents of Georgian Dream often mention that the authorities long ago chose a "do not irritate Russia" policy. For some, this is perceived as a pragmatic policy, as it aims to avoid Russian aggression against the country. The ruling party has continued this policy since February 24th by trying to not take any action that could cause Moscow to change its focus to Georgia. Yet, Georgian Dream fails to understand that for society, which is also a victim of Russian aggression and occupation, it is not only a moral duty to stand with Ukraine but also a pragmatic choice to clearly and undoubtedly express a position that the country is part of "team Ukraine". The war in Ukraine is now a critical moment for the ruling party, especially since its policy seems less pragmatic regarding its own people. The steps derived from this policy harm Georgia's interests in the international arena and the party faces growing criticism for not being able to do the right thing.

Relations between the current Georgian and Ukrainian governments were troubled even before the war. This is due to the fact that some former government members in Georgia, perceived as criminals by the authorities, including former President Mikheil Saakashvili, were appointed to high positions in Ukraine. The Georgian government's positions on this matter are deeply rooted in interparty enmity between Georgian Dream (GD) and the United National Movement (UNM), which was the country's previous ruling party. The fact that many UNM figures went to Ukraine created an awkwardness between the two countries for years. However, the tensions became serious after Russia invaded Ukraine, when the Georgian government had to choose a side and express clear support for Kyiv. Going beyond narrow party interests and not putting relations in danger during today's critical situation appears a difficult task for GD.

Relations between the current Georgian and Ukrainian governments were troubled even before the war.

On February 25th, Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili commented on the events in Ukraine and stressed that Georgia is not going to join sanctions against Russia. He argued that such a move would harm "national interests", as Georgia's dependence on Russian energy is still high and other commercial trade also takes place. At the same time, the government made no announcement that it was seeking ways to ease its dependency on Russia – a move which could enable Georgia to act more freely.

Once asked if he was going to visit Ukraine, Garibashvili said that he did not have such plans, leading to scathing criticism not only from opposition parties but also from the Georgian public. In the following days, huge demonstrations broke out

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in Tbilisi. The majority of them involved young people protesting against the government's position on Ukraine. The demonstrations did not go unseen in Ukraine. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy commented that the Georgian people understand the need to stand with their friend. He then added that "there are times when citizens are not the government, but better [than] the government". This was a clear signal to the Georgian government of Kyiv's dissatisfaction with Tbilisi's policies.

The Georgian government did not respond with words but with actions. The decision regarding sanctions was not changed and in some cases the government even created obstacles for those volunteers from Georgia who wanted to go and help Ukraine. In one case, the government refused to allow a plane for these volunteers to land in Tbilisi. The government justified this move by saying that it could have been perceived as direct Georgian involvement in the war. However, Kyiv was angered by the move. On March 1st, Zelenskyy recalled his ambassador for consultations due to the volunteer issue and called the Georgian government's position on sanctions "immoral". This caused another wave of demonstrations in Tbilisi and other cities, where people started voicing demands for the resignation of the prime minister and concrete steps to help Ukraine. Protesters also demanded that the government follow Ukraine's lead and apply for EU membership.

Widening gap

Georgian Dream responded to the situation by saying that the country supports Ukraine on every international platform. At the same time, it started building a narrative that the opposition United National Movement are trying to "drag Georgia into the armed conflict". The polarising conflict between GD and UNM, the biggest opposition party in Georgia, has a long history. The war in Ukraine has become just one more aspect of this dispute. Facing great public dissatisfaction, GD tried to frame the Ukrainian issue in a narrow domestic context and make the public, or at least its supporters, believe that the United National Movement was influencing Kyiv's decisions against the Georgian government.

Early in March, Zelenskyy addressed Georgian citizens and the residents of other European countries, asking for support for Ukraine. Zelenskyy's words were broadcasted live on Tbilisi's main Rustaveli Avenue. Again, thousands gathered in the centre of the capital to listen to the Ukrainian president's speech. Representatives of the government did not attend.

What became clear during this time, both at the international and domestic level, was that the government and the public were on opposite sides of the issue. The ruling party was apparently unable to listen to the public. This growing gap be-

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Photo: Nelson Antoine / Shutterstock

Thousands of Georgians took to the street to protest Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The lack of a clear position of the Georgian government during the war has been surprising, even disappointing.

tween the government and the public became visible internationally as well. A distinction between the government and the Georgian people was visible in the statements made by Ukrainian officials, including Zelenskyy. Declarations would thank Georgians for their support, but not the government. Over the last few months, Ukrainian officials have addressed the citizens of Georgia many times, declaring that open support is not about being "dragged into a war" but about choosing a side between the aggressor Russia and Ukraine. It seems that the majority of the Georgian public understands that Ukraine and Georgia are in the "same boat". According to one poll from March, 87 per cent of Georgians perceive the war in Ukraine as their war as well, and that it affects Georgia fully or partially.

Georgian Dream's attempt to blame dissatisfaction on the United National Movement in order to shift attention away from its Ukraine policy might have worked for a part of the GD's supporters. However, it has not worked for the wider public as a whole. The society sees the developments in Ukraine and understands that

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tomorrow Georgia might find itself in a similar situation in which international support is needed. One must stand with Ukraine today, firmly and undoubtedly, against the common enemy to ultimately earn support from partners. As a result, "not irritating Russia" in light of the war in Ukraine does not seem pragmatic for many in the country. It is not because any Georgian irritation of Russia is necessary, but because the case of Ukraine shows that Russia does not need any reason to be aggressive.

Change in direction?

Tensions between Ukraine and Georgia flared up again when Zelenskyy expressed dissatisfaction with his ambassador's inability to convince the country to take productive steps to support Ukraine. Due to this, Zelenskyy recalled the diplomat. After a few days, Ukraine's defence ministry stated that Russia was working to establish smuggling routes for military goods in order to bypass sanctions. Ukraine argued that routes through Georgia could be used. The Georgian government demanded evidence for such accusations and called the statement "unfriendly". In the end, no evidence was presented.

The number of high-level visits by western leaders after Bucha did not go unnoticed among the Georgian public.

At the same time, the world discovered the massacres that took place in Bucha, with many international figures visiting the site to pay their respects to the victims. The head of Ukraine's parliament, Ruslan Stefanchuk, invited his Georgian counterpart, Shalva Papuashvili, for a visit to see the scale of the tragedy, alongside other colleagues. Georgian Dream expressed a "general readiness" for the visit. However, the party listed some preconditions – issues they wanted to resolve before the visit. This included the return of Ukraine's ambassador, evidence for the smuggling route allegations and an end to "radical" opposition leaders holding high positions in Ukraine.

Despite this, it seemed that GD then changed its position overnight. On April 13th Papuashvili expressed his readiness to visit Ukraine. Two days later, a parliamentary delegation consisting of parties from the parliament (except the United National Movement) led by Papuashvili travelled to Ukraine. There, they met Ukrainian officials and expressed solidarity with the Ukrainian people.

This sudden change surprised the Georgian public and brought new questions about what could have caused such a move. The authorities mentioned that it was due to consultations between the heads of the two countries' parliaments and

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their agreement to continue friendly and constructive relations. Yet, for many this argument was not enough to explain the sudden change after several months of refusals to visit Ukraine.

Indeed, it is difficult to explain. Yet when looking at the big picture, we know that the Bucha tragedy changed how the whole world viewed the war in Ukraine. It revealed the brutality of the Russian forces and the scale of the war crimes committed by the country. The number of high-level visits by western leaders after Bucha did not go unnoticed among the Georgian public, including the supporters of the ruling party. It became more and more difficult to explain why Georgia does not stand where its partners stand. On the other hand, it became known that the parliamentary opposition parties were planning a joint visit to Ukraine to express solidarity in the name of the Georgian people. Perhaps Georgian Dream came to understand that not being present during the visit would only further damage its domestic and international image. Consequently, this coincidence of circumstances forced the authorities to go against their own policy, abandon their preconditions and finally travel to Ukraine.

The Ivanishvili factor

Nevertheless, this change did not last long. Ukrainian officials began to openly talk about Bidzina Ivanishvili, the founder of the Georgian Dream party, and his Russian business ties. Some even called for sanctions against him as a pro-Russian oligarch. The Georgian government responded by blaming the desires of the United National Movement and its "Ukrainian partners" to drag Georgia into the war and open a second front.

The Ivanishvili factor, which is believed to be influencing the Georgian government and ruling the country from the shadows, gained significant importance in June. Unlike Ukraine and Moldova, Georgia was denied candidate status by the European Union at this time. Georgia was given a list of conditions it needed to fulfil to gain full candidacy status. "De-oligarchisation" is one of the recommendations that the European Commission gave to Georgia.

To add insult to injury, the European Parliament held a debate in June about the media situation in Georgia and adopted a resolution describing Ivanishvili's role in Georgian politics as destructive; stressing the need for the EU and its democratic partners to impose sanctions against him. Georgian Dream immediately began a campaign to defend Ivanishvili, saying that he cannot be considered an oligarch. They then argued that it was in fact the former president, Saakashvili, who should be subject to de-oligarchisation.

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At the same time, the ruling party's leaders have linked the EU decision with the Ukrainian government and said that leaders from the country have been "begging the EU not to grant Georgia candidate status". The decision and the government's response caused massive anti-governmental protests in Georgia, in which tens of thousands participated. A new popular pro-western movement was even launched during this time. The group's manifesto describes Ivanishvili as the main obstacle on Georgia's European path.

Does Georgia still have any friends?

The lack of a clear position towards Ukraine during the war has been surprising and even disappointing for many close partners of Georgia. Georgia has close relations with many Central and Eastern European countries, including the Baltic states and Poland. Key figures from these countries, who know Georgian politics well, have stressed their disappointment and confusion regarding Georgia's unclear position on Ukraine. This is especially true given Tbilisi's calls for its partners to condemn its own occupation by Russian forces. Members of the European Parliament have repeatedly expressed concerns not only about the situation of democracy in Georgia but also about Georgia's positions towards Ukraine, calling it "difficult to understand".

It is clear that Georgia's traditional partners in the EU do not necessarily understand its unclear positions. This demonstrates not only the government's inability to stand above domestic interests, but also raises questions about Georgia's civilisational choice and future path. For many outside Georgia, the country's lack of a clear and firm position is closely linked with its internal democratic problems and oligarchy. Thus, more and more high-ranking European figures have voiced the need to take action against the Georgian government and specifically the one person behind it, who rules the country in practice – Bidzina Ivanishvili.

Today, in Georgia, the common belief is that Ukraine is a key test for the ruling party.

Today, in Georgia, the common belief is that Ukraine is a key test for the ruling party. For many, Georgian Dream has already failed this test. GD's continued negative outlook on the presence of former high-ranking Georgian officials in the current Ukrainian government, as well as their unwillingness to discuss these issues constructively, have damaged both relations between the countries and Georgia's international image. If the Georgian government continues its game of sending mixed signals to Ukraine in the future, it might harm the history of friendship between the two countries. The policy of

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supporting Ukraine in international organisations, but not being "too loud" in order to not irritate Russia, is no longer considered pragmatic by the Georgian public. This point of view is also taken by Ukraine and Georgia's international partners.

For many in Georgia, this kind of positioning no longer serves the national interest. After all, it might contribute to the end of a good relationship with an important friend and strategic partner, whose fate is interconnected with the fate of Georgia. Moreover, Russia's demands for a halt to NATO enlargement and regional states' neutral status are not limited to Ukraine, they affect Georgia as well. Needless to say, Russian success in Ukraine will result in Georgia facing the same demands and aggression again. Hence, taking effective steps to contribute to Ukraine's victory and restore trust among international partners is what Georgia's national interest needs now more than ever.

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Germany as a bellwether for post-war European energy security

ISMET FATIH ČANČAR AND MARC OZAWA

The interdependence between Russia and Germany has also created geopolitical and security concerns for the EU. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Germany needs to now understand that domestic and European energy security are intertwined. There are several measures that Germany can adopt in order to address this energy security dilemma in the short and long term, taking into account geopolitical circumstances at the EU level.

Three days into Russia's invasion of Ukraine, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced a *Zeitenwende* – a turning point in the history of East-West relations. His speech in the Bundestag was meant to mark a generational change in German foreign policy towards Russia. When Chancellor Scholz declared that Germany would, in a gradual process, dramatically reduce its dependence on Russian energy supplies, it launched a debate among German policymakers that has reverberated across Europe. While the goal is apparent, to extricate Germany from Russian energy dependence with minimal economic trauma, there is still no consensus on how to achieve this. Germany's change of course is constrained by a myriad of technological and infrastructural obstacles, namely the lack of pipelines and liquefied natural gas (LNG) import terminals. To underscore the urgency for action, in July Gazprom raised the spectre of permanently cutting off energy supplies to

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Europe by suspending deliveries of natural gas to Germany through the trans-Baltic pipeline, Nord Stream 1.

New arena of conflict

Rather than restructuring the industrial base of the economy away from natural gas – which is likely untenable for political and environmental reasons – policy-makers should work with the private sector to formulate effective regulations and subsidies, while making targeted investments, first in natural gas and then oil. Additionally, an optimal approach requires Germany to work in close co-operation with bordering neighbours, the European Union and allies. If Germany is left to "go alone", there is a real risk that the economic and political fallout could undermine European security and unity in support of Ukraine.

Responding to Moscow's threats does not replace the long-term transition away from hydrocarbons towards cleaner and renewable energy. The reality is that oil and natural gas are expected to remain the largest component of Germany's energy supply mix until at least 2050 according to the latest government projections. Thus, for the next 20–30 years, it makes sense for Germany and Europe to invest in oil and gas supply diversification. Even if Russia continues to be an important supplier in the future, creating supply alternatives will prevent Russia from weaponising energy.

Whichever path Germany ultimately takes, Berlin's approach is a good practical indicator for what is in store for Europe as a whole. As the *Energiewende* was a precursor to EU energy policies, Germany today, with its diverse federal state politics, strong industrial lobby, plurality of views on Russia, and tension between economic and environmental goals, stands as a bellwether for future negotiations and compromises that European states must take to wean themselves off Russian natural gas. If Ukraine represents the new frontier for Russian military aggression against Europe, Germany is the new arena of conflict where Moscow is wielding its energy weapon regarding the West. Moscow's goals are twofold – to coerce the German leadership to reverse its policies towards the Russo-Ukrainian War through industrial and public pressure and secondly, to divide European solidarity in support of Ukraine through sanctions.

The origins of German-Russian co-operation

In the 1960s, the discovery of natural gas fields in Western Siberia encouraged the Soviet Union to enhance trade relations with the Eastern Bloc as a means of

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integrating them into the Soviet sphere. For West Germany, pursuing normalisation with East Germany implied pursuing détente with the Soviet Union. For the strategy to work, Bonn considered natural gas imports to be the foundation of trade and co-operation with the USSR. This launched a process of West German-Soviet cooperation, known as *Ostpolitik*. The ruling Social Democratic Party (SPD) credited *Ostpolitik* with improving relations not only with the USSR but also the German Democratic Republic (GDR, East Germany). Using the principle of *Wandel durch Handel* (change through trade), Chancellor Willy Brandt's government pursued natural gas trade with the Soviet Union with the intention of improving relations with the Eastern Bloc.

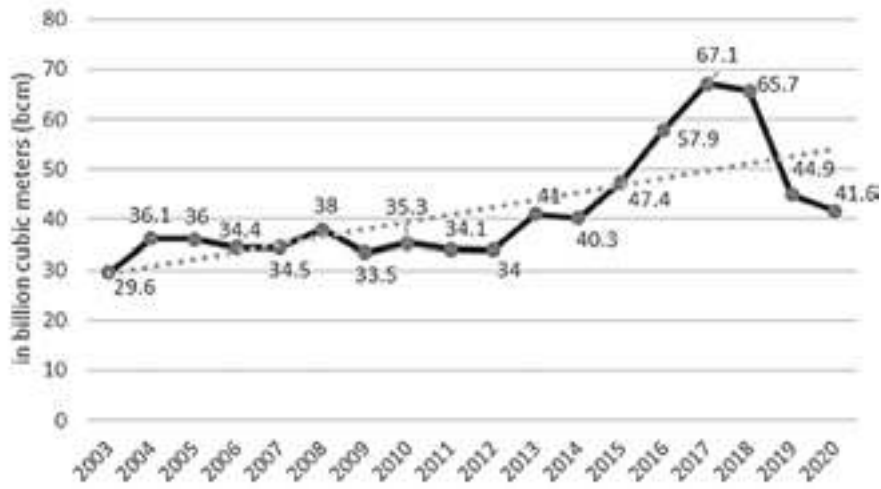
Negotiated in 1969, the first German-Soviet natural gas deal included an interconnecting pipeline of three billion cubic metres (bcm) of supply. Then in the 1980s, West Germany aided in the development of the Urengoy-Pomary-Uzhhorod pipeline despite objections from the United States. West Germany soon became the Soviet Union's largest western trading partner as energy exports nearly tripled from the first negotiated agreement. Before Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the history of *Ostpolitik* and German-Soviet partnership continued to influence Berlin's policymakers after the Cold War, particularly those from the SPD. The notion that trade, co-operation and dialogue could also change Russia's behaviour on non-commercial issues was widespread, and it is still unclear to what extent the Russo-Ukrainian War will alter this in the long term. Indeed, Berlin appears to be navigating a balancing act between western support of Ukraine and placating Russian aggression to this day.

Negotiated in 1969, the first German-Soviet natural gas deal included an interconnecting pipeline of supplying three billion cubic metres.

Unequal interdependence

Since the 1970s, German policymakers and commercial leaders have pointed to the interdependence of natural gas trade between Germany and Russia as a stabilising force. From this perspective, dependence on German energy markets would constrain Russia's actions when disputes arise. While this dynamic may have influenced Russia's calculus in the past, interdependence is not a static state and actors have different thresholds for acceptable costs. Over the past two decades, Russian gas deliveries to Germany have risen, supported by new pipelines and joint gas field development projects. Ever since Germany announced that it would support

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Gazprom

Russian natural gas exports to Germany

Ukraine with military equipment and arms, Russia's veiled threats of suspending natural gas supplies to Germany have caused energy prices to soar with inflationary effects on the German and European economy.

The German-Russian trade relationship, which initially created a balanced interdependence between the two economies, has become more weighted in Russia's favour over the years. While Germany's neighbours have sought to build alternative supplies through LNG, Germany did not diversify its natural gas suppliers, depending largely on Russian and Norwegian pipeline gas. Complicating matters, Germany has a high concentration of gas-fired power plants, making its economy more dependent on natural gas for electricity generation compared to other large European countries. France and Sweden, for example, use nuclear power to supply a majority of their electricity consumption. The following figure illustrates the European natural gas pipeline and LNG infrastructure (excluding Ukraine and Belarus) combined with gas-fired power plants.

While the lack of LNG terminals makes Germany vulnerable in relation to Russia, another factor makes the trade relationship unequal. This is Germany's growing dependence on Russian natural gas. From 2003 to 2017, the volume of Russian gas exports to Germany grew from 29.6 to 65.7 bcm. As the figure below illustrates, Russian natural gas exports to Germany have steadily risen over the past two decades, even after the Russo-Georgian War in 2008 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014, reaching its peak in 2017. Although exports dropped in 2019–20, this was primarily due to the downturn in demand during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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As Russian supplies have dwindled in recent weeks, Uniper SE (formerly E.ON/Ruhrgas), the largest German importer of Russian gas, is facing pressure to meet the demands of customers. Because Russian pipeline-transported natural gas is typically cheaper than LNG and supplies from other regions, reduced access would affect the competitiveness of Germany's manufacturing-heavy, export-oriented economy. Natural gas accounts for 25 per cent of Germany's energy consumption, of which industry consumers make up 15 per cent. The chemicals industry is particularly gas intensive and BASF, the German chemicals company, requires natural gas not only as a source of energy, but also as raw material-feedstock for the production of products such as plastics, fertilisers, solvents and glues. This is further exacerbated by the fact that the chemicals industry's demand for natural gas is fairly rigid, meaning natural gas may be substituted for only four per cent of production. Because of the complexity of supply chains and the logistics of the product lines in the manufacturing process, it will be impossible to relocate parts of the production to other locations without building completely new infrastructure.

Geopolitical ripple effects throughout Europe

The interdependence between Russia and Germany has also created geopolitical and security concerns for the EU. Only after the Russian invasion of Ukraine did Germany suspend the Nord Stream 2 pipeline (expansion of Nord Stream 1), which was scheduled to double the volume of natural gas, from 55 to 110 bcm per year. This trans-Baltic pipeline running from the Gulf of Finland to Germany, bypassing transit countries in between, was condemned by some EU member states, particularly Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. These countries viewed the pipeline as a tool for Russia to weaponise natural gas. Although Germany has suspended Nord Stream 2, the project has tarnished German credibility within the EU.

While Chancellor Scholz was preparing to visit Kyiv with President Emmanuel Macron and Prime Minister Mario Draghi to show support for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Gazprom announced a cut in gas supplies to Germany through Nord Stream 1 by 40 per cent. Robert Habeck, Germany's economic minister, called the cut off "a political decision and not due to technical reasons", as Gazprom has initially stated. Yet, there is little Germany could do to offset this disruption. As Russia has been gradually cutting off gas deliveries to Europe, state-owned Gazprom has managed to maximise profits from soaring prices and reduced volume. Out of the 62 billion euros from EU exports of oil, gas and coal, Germany imported the most – nine billion euros in the first two months of the war in Ukraine. As Russia continues military operations, the energy weapon targeting

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Germany uses economics as an underlying strategy. With Russia's windfall in export revenues and weaponisation of energy dependence, it has managed to mitigate the effects of the sanctions imposed by the EU as evidenced by the rebound of the rouble, while Germany will pay a high price for needing to quickly replace Russian pipeline gas.

Germany's actions risk undermining the EU's combined sanctions against Russia.

The prospect of natural gas shortages this winter has already produced cracks in EU unity for support of Ukraine. Two recent events exemplify this situation. After Lithuania blocked freight trains from mainland Russia to Kaliningrad Oblast carrying steel and ferrous materials, a provision under new EU sanctions against Moscow, Russia quickly threatened retaliatory measures. While the EU has reaffirmed Lithuania's right to check sanctioned goods, Germany has been urging Lithuania to lift EU restrictions on transport to Kaliningrad. In support of Russia, Scholz argued that the shipments in question were a domestic matter between two parts of Russia, and therefore, EU sanctions should not apply.

Similarly, Canada has submitted to pressure from Berlin to exempt a sanctioned electric turbine needed for the operation of Nord Stream 1. In response, Habeck recently stated that "releasing the component would remove an excuse for Russian President Vladimir Putin to keep the conduit closed." However, both the Kaliningrad and Nord Stream component examples will only assist Russia in violating the sanctions regime and strengthen Moscow's energy leverage over Europe. Germany's actions risk undermining the EU's combined sanctions against Russia. They will be perceived by Moscow as a weakness, another reason to further deprive Germany of supplies. Thus, it is possible, if not likely, that Russia's current decrease in natural gas deliveries could turn into a complete shut-down of supplies to Europe.

How Germany responds to Russian coercion will have both political and economic ripple effects throughout Europe. In order to sustain political credibility within the EU – and to reassure the Central and Eastern European member states – Germany could lead in the European response to Russian aggression by setting an example and extricating itself from dependence on Russian oil and gas. Likewise, the German leadership will need to safeguard the national economy and mitigate the effects of energy price spikes and inflation to the greatest extent possible. As such, Berlin has committed to hasten the transition to alternative sources, cut usage of natural gas, fill storage facilities for the upcoming winter, and restart conventional coal-fired power plants. These measures will likely alleviate the current inflationary pressure that Germany is facing temporarily.

Decoupling from Russian energy dependence in the long run, however, will require significant investments and years-long lead times to build the necessary in-

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frastructure. With respect to oil, Germany has relied on deliveries through Russian pipelines because of the country's limited super tanker compatible ports and insufficient pipeline network connecting the northern coast to inland industrial centres in the south. To supplement the loss of Russian oil imports as a result of EU sanctions, Germany has already turned to Norway and the Gulf states for replacement supplies. Additionally, Germany will have to access the port of Gdańsk and refineries in Poland to supplement the potential loss of the crude oil refinery in Schwedt. The refinery is owned and operated by Russia's Rosneft. As a sign of problems to come, Rosneft has refused to process non-Russian oil in its Schwedt refinery.

Germany is rushing to procure natural gas from other sources, even though switching suppliers poses more obstacles compared to oil due to the physical constraints of transporting natural gas, possible only by pipeline or in super cooled LNG infrastructure. Alternate supplies from Norway, the US and Qatar are potential options but are limited and more expensive than Russian pipeline gas. In the short term, this will impact German manufacturing industries, making them less competitive on the world market due to higher production costs. According to recent assessments, Germany's economy could contract by up to six per cent if Russian natural gas deliveries are completely withheld. With respect to LNG, there are two newly planned terminals set for construction in Brunsbüttel and Wilhelmshaven. The terminals are expected to cost three billion euros and will become operational in 2024 at the earliest. In the meantime, four floating LNG regasification terminals will serve as an interim solution, with the first ship expected to receive LNG shipments by the end of 2022.

Germany's economy could contract by up to six per cent if Russian natural gas deliveries are completely withheld.

Despite these short-term measures, Germany will require "wartime" levels of funding to execute plans. This includes an accelerated investment and permit approval process to ensure that alternate energy sources will come online in time to minimise the economic shock from the loss of Russian hydrocarbons. Ironically, the suspension of Nord Stream 2 could assist with the construction of new infrastructure. This would require Germany to expropriate newly built pipeline material from Nord Stream 2 and then put it to use for the planned construction of LNG terminals. The German Federal Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK) is reportedly investigating the possibility of deploying unused pipeline segments of Nord Stream 2 as an interconnector pipeline for offshore LNG imports in the Baltic Sea. Finally, the current energy crisis is calling into question the speed at which Germany will ultimately phase out nuclear energy, a commitment

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the previous Merkel administration made in response to Fukushima. Given Germany's position as the "engine of the European economy", the effects of its new, crisis-inspired *Energiewende* will be felt across the EU.

Extricating Germany from Russian energy dependence

For the future, an optimal strategy for Germany would need to account for the entire region, taking into consideration concerns of the Central European and Baltic member states while at the same time benefitting from available supplies from Western European neighbours. Domestic and European energy security are intertwined, and there are several measures that Germany can adopt in order to address this energy security dilemma in the short and long term, taking into account geopolitical circumstances at the EU level.

Before measures can be identified and implemented, however, Europe must come together along with like-minded allies and partners in North America, the MENA region and the Indo-Pacific to coordinate a strategy. The recent announcement of an extraordinary meeting for EU energy security is a step in the right direction. These meetings should convene at least monthly to respond to the coming winter energy crisis. Furthermore, the topic of coordinating energy supplies will be important to include on the agenda of multilateral meetings in the G7, G20 and International Energy Agency (IEA). Allies can also continue to put pressure on OPEC and petroleum-exporting countries through bilateral channels to support increasing supplies to Europe. The fallout of a poorly managed response in Germany (and the rest of Europe), could undermine international unity and support for Ukraine, which is what Russia is aiming for and expects.

However, there are steps that Germany has already taken, such as rationing gas consumption, that are clearly needed in the short term. Germany's immediate priority should centre around accumulating as much gas in storage as possible in order to weather the upcoming winter, while simultaneously advancing more long-term strategic projects to diversify away from Russian hydrocarbons. Environmental trade-offs will be required, such as increased coal consumption, to secure enough electricity for households and industries. Industries will require significant economic and financial aid in order to keep production levels constant, including subsidies to dampen the impact of higher energy prices. Even with subsidies, some gas-intensive companies and industrial giants will inevitably face financial hardship. They may even require government bailouts. Fortunately, German policymakers can defer to recent pandemic programmes, such as *Kurzarbeit*, as a template for companies that are particularly vulnerable in the short term.

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The rising energy costs accompanied by soaring inflation for German citizens and companies are unfortunately, unavoidable. Had Germany used its market power to diversify gas suppliers before the February invasion of Ukraine, it could have avoided the current Russian-initiated energy crisis.

One option that may counter export revenue windfalls for Russia is to support Italy's initiative to form a unified EU response – by introducing a price cap on Russian oil and gas together with a joint European procurement platform. While some analysts believe that this could lead to supply disruptions, this is already a reality for Europe. It is possible that Russia could refuse to sell any oil or gas under the capped price, but a countermeasure could sanction those states who break ranks and pay above the capped price, thereby putting further pressure on Russia. In times when oil is sold to China at 70 US dollars per barrel, significantly less than the current European price – which is fluctuating between 110–120 dollars per barrel at Brent – this two-pronged approach would constrain Russia's ability to destabilise Europe with price spikes and unstable supply deliveries.

Looking ahead past 2022, Germany can invest now in new energy infrastructure for long-term supply diversification. This would entail building sufficient LNG import capacity (terminals) in addition to non-gas alternatives. Likewise, investments in electricity interconnectors and a wider-spanning network of interstate pipelines with reverse flow capacity would open transportation options from neighbouring countries and create flexibility for deliveries to the industrial south (especially Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria). To accompany this on a political level, a new set of national regulations is needed to safeguard foreign-owned, domestic infrastructure from being weaponised by Russia. In this case, the oil refinery in Schwedt and the Rehden storage facility in Lower Saxony are prime examples of vulnerable assets that Russia has already signalled it would use to coerce Berlin. New regulation targeting these facilities would deprive Russia of the possibility to weaponise critical energy infrastructure in Germany, while making new assets available for national and EU-wide needs.

Beyond its national borders, Germany could lead the way in establishing a joint EU energy infrastructure fund to explore building new pipelines for supplies from the MENA and Caspian regions along with Central Asia. Recent discoveries of natural gas in Algeria's Hassi R'Mel, which already supplies 11 per cent of gas consumed in Europe, and is planned to increase supply to Italy to 30 bcm per year, will require expanded infrastructure to tap into newly discovered supplies. A Trans-Med 2 (TM2) pipeline doubling the existing 30.2 capacity of Trans-Med 1 would supplant half of Russian natural gas exports to Germany in 2020. TM2 would also open a new link for the Greenstream pipeline from Libya, thereby providing the EU further import capacity from the south. Similarly, the expansion of the pro-

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jected East-Med pipeline would further connect the Mediterranean Basin with Europe, adding a hub of integrated pipelines, gas fields and LNG terminals to the network of pipeline routes connected to Europe. Given Germany's large Turkish minority and special relationship with Ankara, Berlin could also strengthen bilateral relations in the area of energy co-operation. After all, Turkey is a natural gas hub and important transit country for Caspian and Central Asian supplies. In this context, the US-backed Qatar-Turkey-Europe pipeline project may be revisited, along with the Trans-Caspian and Nabucco pipeline projects. Qatar alone boasts 25 trillion cubic metres of proven gas reserves. Besides Qatar's LNG shipments that are already destined for European terminals, a gas pipeline that would connect Qatar through an Iraq-Turkey transit route to Europe would, theoretically, replace the EU's need for any Russian gas. This is just a partial list of projects that, with European investment, could significantly diversify European supplies and extricate Germany, along with Europe, from Russian energy dependence, particularly with respect to natural gas.

Is past prologue?

In 1973, a geopolitical crisis in the Middle East, the Arab-Israeli War, caused an energy crisis in Europe and North America through OPEC's oil embargo. This in turn prompted West Germany to look east for security of supply, leading to the first natural gas pipeline agreements with the Soviet Union. In the decades that followed, West Germany, with other Western European countries eventually following suit, would benefit from ever greater access to oil and gas supplies from Russia unfazed by Cold War rivalries and geopolitics. In 2022, however, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has not only changed the geopolitical landscape of Europe, it has also ended an era of uninterrupted energy trade with Germany that began in 1973. Ironically, Germany must now return to the south (and globally) to secure oil and gas supplies. While there are some historical parallels with 1973, Germany today has more options to diversify energy supplies, including an ongoing energy transition process toward renewables, alternative pipeline suppliers (such as Norway), and a developing global LNG market that could eventually replace Russian supplies. Yet, the process of extricating the country from Russian energy dependence will take time, significant investment, and most importantly, political will.

Germany today has more options to diversify energy supplies, including an ongoing energy transition process toward renewables.

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The temptation to succumb to Russian demands in exchange for cheap energy will only grow as Germany enters the peak demand of winter. At the same time, Germany will need to uphold European solidarity in support of Ukraine, while also enacting significant changes in its long-term energy diversification.

Germany has two hurdles to overcome. The first is simply to get through the winter with minimal economic disruption. This will require securing as much gas supply as possible and putting it into storage, reducing energy demand through a combination of regulation and incentives, and working with neighbours, the EU and allies to coordinate policies and distribution of supplies. The next hurdle is more long term but will require immediate investments. This entails building pipeline and LNG infrastructure that will allow Germany to import from alternative suppliers. While the *Energiewende* is ongoing, the prospects for transitioning away from hydrocarbons completely are untenable, at least in the next 20 to 30 years when the German economy will still require oil and gas supplies. In the very short term, environmental trade-offs will be necessary for electricity generation such as burning coal and extending nuclear plant operations. If Germany can overcome these two hurdles, it will find itself in a more diversified, resilient, and secure energy position.

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Building back greener

A roadmap for rebuilding post-war Ukraine

OKSANA KHOMEI

Ukraine can play an important role in the European Union's energy transition. A green agenda should be prioritised as a part of Ukraine's post-war recovery. Its integration into the EU's energy market and energy transition priorities should become key targets not just for the EU, but for other external donors and international financial institutions.

Russia's latest invasion of Ukraine in February triggered a global energy crisis and has forced the European Union to speed up its vision for energy security. It has also broken down the barriers between energy security and climate policy. At the same time, Ukraine needs to review its own vision for energy security; as a candidate for EU membership it ought to enact binding targets to reduce its fossil fuel use. The EU's climate target for 2030 was to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by more than half compared to levels in 1990. This target is in line with the EU Green Deal objective of achieving climate neutrality by 2050. However, Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine has forced not just leaders in Kyiv, but also in Brussels and EU member state capitals, to review these targets. With Russia openly threatening to cut off gas supplies and with winter quickly approaching, carbon neutrality and fossil fuel dependence suddenly seem less important than keeping the heating turned on this year. The impact of the war has created an energy crisis not just for Europe, but for the entire world. World leaders were not prepared for such a shock; they had no "Plan B".

However, as early as 2015, they had at least laid the foundations for such a plan by committing to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Yet despite this com-

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mitment, in reality, little progress has been made towards their implementation. Cheap fossil fuel, especially from Russia, benefited EU economies and huge industries, while the drastic, long-awaited energy transition was postponed.

Rethinking energy security

The term "energy transition" encompasses a global shift from fuel, such as coal, natural gas and oil, to renewable energy sources such as geothermal, hydro, solar and wind. This list is by no means exhaustive, both because new technologies or sources (such as clean hydrogen) are emerging and because experts and policymakers continue to debate whether nuclear energy should be included. Yet a wide expert consensus supports the shift towards generating energy from sources with no or minimal emissions of greenhouse gases, including methane and carbon dioxide. Hence, the EU Green Deal envisages the full decarbonisation of the European continent.

However, it is important to highlight that the EU cannot achieve its energy transition goals without Ukraine, which is the largest country entirely within Europe and one that borders four EU member states. In June, Ukraine received EU candidacy status, which will potentially open doors for additional funding from Brussels. Reconstruction plans, supported by the EU, should definitely include investment in cleaner energies. Both renewable and alternative energy sources should be given priority by both Kyiv and Brussels as an integral part of the future post-war recovery of Ukraine. Successfully implementing an energy transition will help both sides prevent the future consequences of climate change and address those being felt even today.

As a future EU member – and current oil/gas transit state – Ukraine's energy security challenges are in a real sense also those of the EU itself. Continuous Russian targeting of Ukrainian critical infrastructure, as well as the underfunded state budget and the large role of state-owned enterprises in its energy sector, all represent considerable obstacles. They must be taken into account by all relevant stakeholders when designing new policies. The war has forced the EU to rethink its energy security. However, even though most discussions in Kyiv are centred around ramping up domestic oil and gas production due to short-term needs, Ukraine will have to review its vision for energy security and prepare to catch up with its EU counterparts.

Yet, to be able to integrate into the EU energy system and adopt the energy transition paradigm in the medium term, Ukraine first needs to do its homework by fully aligning national legislation with that of the EU in all relevant spheres.

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Thankfully some of this work has already been undertaken. For example, in 2019–21 Ukraine made significant progress by completing the complex legislative process of unbundling its gas and electricity transmission system operators from energy producers.

Clearly, Ukraine has great potential to become one of the biggest hubs in Europe in both producing and exporting clean energy. However, a coherent and broad strategic policy umbrella needs to be first developed. While Ukraine has great potential to develop wind, solar, geothermal, and even hydrogen power generation for both domestic use and export to the EU, as of now the government has no clear vision of what the future holds for the country's energy security and supply. It needs to develop such a vision urgently, in close co-operation with EU institutions.

A new plan

At a minimum, Ukraine's government should recognise that its Energy Strategy 2035 document (drafted in 2017) has been made irrelevant by the realities of war. According to a study by the Kyiv School of Economics, Russia's invasion has caused a total of 103.8 billion dollars in damage to Ukraine's infrastructure. The coal mining industry, concentrated in Eastern Ukraine, has suffered much more, and gas extraction relatively less. However, the war alone will not automatically make Ukraine's energy future less carbon intensive. Without a clear vision of the future and the strategy to implement it, no meaningful change is possible. Despite the obvious ongoing challenges related to the active phase of the war, once the situation is stabilised both parties should jointly work out strategies and action plans on designing a future place for Ukraine in the EU's energy transition.

Russia's invasion has caused a total of 103.8 billion US dollars in damage to Ukraine's infrastructure.

Due to the loss of many key industrial facilities and significant housing stock, Ukraine is literally faced with a giant reconstruction project. To meet this reality, Ukraine needs to devise new energy efficiency targets. Given the carbon intensive nature of construction as a whole (globally the sector accounts for almost 40 per cent of carbon emissions), energy efficiency targets could have a huge impact on not just regional but also world climate targets. In the previously adopted national plan covering the period until 2030, Ukraine's energy consumption that year should not exceed 91.5 million tonnes and 50.5 million tonnes of oil equivalent. However, due to aforementioned reasons these targets could be reviewed and made more stringent. Furthermore, the plan could be revised by in-

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cluding carbon capture and storage technologies. Other modern solutions worthy of inclusion in a revised plan include battery storage, heat transition, hydrogen and biogas production.

Recently, the EU adopted an ambitious plan, called REPowerEU, to increase energy efficiency, produce clean energy and diversify energy supplies. Ukraine should endeavour to incorporate this plan into its future reconstruction, thereby opening up new channels of financing for pilot initiatives and large industrial projects alike. Eighty-five per cent of Europeans believe that the EU needs to decrease its dependence on Russian oil and gas, and from a geopolitical perspective such a move will make the EU stronger and more resilient to possible energy shocks in the future. There is no doubt that dependence on fossil fuel should be minimised. However, wise strategies on investments should be worked out by governments in close co-operation with private companies (from both SMEs and larger businesses) and civil society experts to make cleaner energy affordable and competitive. In this way, the temptation to return to higher use of fossil fuels simply because of price will be lessened. Commitments aligned with real action plans for the development of more alternative energies and investment in renewables will ensure that the EU and Ukraine make fundamental and irreversible changes on the path towards what should be a shared energy transition.

Controlling costs

Energy supply shocks will be an inevitable part of the energy transition journey, accompanied by price fluctuations and even inflation. Thus, to safeguard the economies of EU states and Ukraine alike, resilience and energy diversification should be increased within the next several years to mitigate the negative effects of macroeconomic volatility. Transparency and openness to civil society monitoring are also vital ingredients in a green recovery for Ukraine. Both independent experts and the general public should be able to influence policy and decision-making processes related to the energy transition. Independent civil society-state platforms, advisory bodies at the central and local government levels, e-democracy tools such as e-appeals and e-petitions, public consultations, and participatory budgets should be further developed using the policy and decision-making principles set out in Ukraine's existing European integration commitments.

The war has caused irreversible damage to many cities, towns and critical infrastructure. At the same time, given the need to construct new residential and industrial buildings and to diversify its energy supply, Ukraine will have a unique chance to incorporate climate friendly and durable approaches into its post-war

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recovery. The EU should ensure that reconstruction is carried out according to the latest green principles. Moreover, with solid expertise from individual member states, the EU can advise on the best approaches to be adopted by Ukraine at both the local and national level.

Ukraine can play an important role in the EU's energy transition. A green agenda should be prioritised as a part of the post-war recovery of Ukraine. Its integration into the EU's energy market and energy transition priorities should become key targets not just for the EU, but for other external donors and international financial institutions. For both Brussels and Kyiv, there is no acceptable geopolitical alternative besides a complete transition away from fossil fuel usage. Accordingly, close co-operation between the two parties is a necessary and essential part of mitigating climate change effects on the European continent.

Given Ukraine's huge potential, some prioritisation is necessary. The country possesses large oil and gas pipelines that could be potentially used for hydrogen exports, as well as wide areas of high winds or dry and warm climates ideal for wind and solar power generation respectively. The state also benefits from nuclear power plants and agricultural capacities for biogas production. Accordingly, it is necessary for both the EU and Ukraine to quickly bolster the state's energy security, as well as develop a strategic yet concrete vision of how Kyiv can participate in the future medium-term energy transition of the EU.

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The Asian front of the war in Ukraine

TIZIANO MARINO

In the Asia-Pacific region, political and diplomatic actions to isolate Russia by the West are complicated. This is because it is unclear what the United States and the European Union can offer to the many troubled countries in search of cheap raw materials, foreign investments and technology. Washington and Brussels need to realise that the Ukrainian game is played on a global level and requires a much greater effort.

The invasion of Ukraine is generating global consequences that will have a long-term impact on the regional order and the geoeconomics of the Asia-Pacific. In particular, the protracted conflict is causing a deterioration in the economic situation of many South and Southeast Asian countries, which are still trying to recover after two years of the pandemic. The rising cost of raw materials, especially energy commodities, coupled with the blocking of exports of Ukrainian and Russian products, has fostered the emergence of huge trade deficits and soaring inflation throughout the region. The shock was so severe that it even triggered a series of economic crises that quickly turned into political ones undermining regional stability.

As a result of the war in Europe, many Asia-Pacific actors found themselves in the midst of a diplomatic tug-of-war between the West and Russia; one which is likely to reshape the international order and influence their future. In this context, Beijing's choice to support the Russian narrative on the conflict in Ukraine and its refusal to implement sanctions proposed by the West has forced many countries in the region to carefully weigh up their international position. Indeed, the risk for

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many small and medium-sized countries is to remain isolated from Beijing, a key trading partner and the main source of investment in the region, should they decide to cut ties with Moscow. For this reason, the West's call for unconditional support in the fight against Russia has often gone unheard in the Asia-Pacific. Noble as they may be, western motives are in fact unacceptable to many Asian actors in the absence of an alternative in terms of security and financial backing.

The war's impact on the Asian economy

The war in Ukraine is having a dramatic impact on the economies of the Asia-Pacific region, albeit differentiated according to specific areas and countries. Given the economic structure of the countries in the region, which are generally net importers of oil, gas and food, South Asia in particular is paying the highest price. The uncontrolled rise in commodity prices has rendered some states, already struggling with a shortage of foreign exchange reserves due to the blockade of tourism and remittances caused by the pandemic, unable to pay for the necessary imports.

The most striking case of crisis in South Asia was seen in Sri Lanka, which declared a default on its foreign debt in May and is still unable to secure energy and food for its population. The effects of the war in Europe, combined with the damage caused by COVID-19, also weakened the economies of Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and the Maldives, which had to resort to preliminary talks or even direct support from the International Monetary Fund to avoid a default.

Equally dramatic is the situation in Southeast Asia, where rising inflation, a slowdown in supply chains and uncertainty in financial markets are having a strong impact on regional economies. In this area, the impact of the war was high, as Russia and Ukraine are important partners for the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Notably, Moscow has been the main supplier of major arms to Southeast Asia, accounting for more than 25 per cent of all deliveries over the past two decades. It has also established important partnerships with the defence sectors of Vietnam, Myanmar, Malaysia and Indonesia. Moreover, Russia is one of the world's leading producers of fertiliser, which is exported to much of Asia. Kyiv is also a major exporter of raw materials to ASEAN countries, with Indonesia the world's second largest importer of Ukrainian wheat in 2020. The Philippines, Thailand and Malaysia also appear on the list of the top 15 importers in recent years. In this context of economic interdependence

Russia is one of the world's leading producers of fertiliser, which is exported to much of Asia.

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Many Asia-Pacific actors found themselves in the midst of a diplomatic tug-of-war between the West and Russia; one which is likely to reshape the international order and influence their future.

and the export blockade of Russia and Ukraine, the sanctions regime imposed by the West has had a significant impact on ASEAN countries, with serious risks also for food security.

The magnitude of the current economic shock was such that it also had negative effects on the economies of regional powers, such as China and India. The recent economic slowdown in Beijing, due to its zero-COVID policy, has been exacerbated by the effects of the conflict in Europe. Figures show a growth of 2.5 per cent in the first half of the year, far below the annual target of 5.5 per cent set by the government. Meanwhile, driven by the cost of commodities, inflation has reached its highest level since July 2020 and the outlook is not rosy. The conflict and trade blockades are also creating enormous problems for Chinese business, and more precisely, for the transfer of products to Europe via the New Eurasian Land Bridge, one of the six corridors of China's Belt and Road Initiative. This trade route, which passes through Kazakhstan and Russia, risks being blocked by increasing security problems and the sanctions regime. In this context, China has to consider shipping goods by sea with much longer delivery times and an ever-increasing dependence on the Strait of Malacca, a vulnerability that has worried the Chinese leadership since the early 2000s.

The war in Ukraine has also created serious problems for India, which is trying to maintain a neutral posture to alleviate the economic effects of the crisis. With

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inflation around seven per cent and an almost total dependence on Russian military supplies, New Delhi has greatly increased its import of Russian oil that is offered at a discounted price. Notably, in July, more than 40 per cent of Russian oil exports were bought by China and India, exactly twice as much as in July 2021. Should these trends intensify, the risk is that sanctions will have little effect on the course of the war and the management of the post-conflict situation. It is precisely from the Asia-Pacific region, therefore, that western strategy could suffer a severe blow.

Tug-of-war spills over into the Asia-Pacific

The war in Ukraine has created deep division between the West and Russia, which are putting increasing pressure on third countries to pick a side. While the major players in the Asia-Pacific can leverage their political and economic power to decide which side they are on, as in the case of China or Japan, or even opt for opportunistic neutrality, as in the case of India and Indonesia, many small and medium-sized states find themselves unable to determine their own future. What prevails in this context of extreme economic fragility and political instability are very often opportunistic assessments or short-term national interests, rather than long-term strategic visions. This may explain, at least in part, the diplomatic positions taken, and turnabouts made, by many Asia-Pacific actors towards Russia and Ukraine.

In the case of Southeast Asia, we can observe a shift in behaviour regarding the conflict over the months. On March 2nd, less than ten days after the invasion of Ukraine, eight out of ten members of the ASEAN voted in favour of the resolution condemning Russia at the UN Assembly. In that case, only Laos and Vietnam abstained. However, as the war prolonged and the economic consequences of the conflict worsened, this bloc of countries changed its attitude and dusted off its long tradition of non-interference and opted for neutrality. As a result, in the April 7th vote on the "Suspension of the Russian Federation's Participation in the Human Rights Council", most Southeast Asian countries abstained. Only the Philippines voted in favour.

China and India have instead followed their own well-established national strategies. Beijing has opted for a type of alignment with Moscow probably driven more by a desire to oppose NATO than by any real sharing of the Kremlin's plans. Meanwhile, New Delhi has maintained its usual "pragmatic neutrality" which, in India's plans, should lead, on the one hand, to the consolidation of relations with Moscow and, on the other, to the revival of those with the West eager to have the country on its side.

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In contrast, the neutrality stance adopted by other South Asian countries has been driven more by the absence of real diplomatic and economic leverage than by free choice. Besides, many regional players have historically enjoyed good relations with Russia, such as Pakistan, whose former Prime Minister Imran Khan was visiting Vladimir Putin when the Russian armed forces entered Ukraine.

Why Russia's isolation depends on the Asia-Pacific

The strategy adopted by the West to counter Russia has two dimensions. The first concerns warfare on the ground, which involves the direct supply of intelligence and weapons, while the second concerns economic pressure aimed at weakening the Russian Federation led by Putin. In order to succeed, such an ambitious plan requires a strong diplomatic effort that must also include the Asia-Pacific region. Only by "looking East", in fact, could Russia avoid being cut off from the international system and find new partners. For now, Moscow has found many interlocutors willing to listen – thanks in part to the oil and gas discount policy it is adopting, which allows buyers to keep inflation low and the Kremlin to fuel the conflict and avoid default. In light of this, the West must try to change this dynamic if it really wants to succeed in pressuring Moscow and forcing it to accept a truce in Ukraine.

However, in the Asia-Pacific region, political and diplomatic action by the West is complicated, not least because it is unclear what the United States and the European Union can offer to the many troubled countries in search of cheap raw materials, foreign investments and technology. Even more difficult is taking political and economic initiatives in a region where China, which has no interest in supporting western demands, dominates and exerts influence. However, Washington and Brussels, together with their allies in the Asia-Pacific, should realise that the Ukrainian game is played on a global level and requires a much greater effort. Should military operations on the ground be prolonged, as is predicted in the absence of structural intervention in the region, the number of troubled nations ready to expand relations with Moscow to mitigate the devastating effects of ongoing economic crises may increase. Against this background, even if western actions in the Asia-Pacific do not seem relevant to winning the war, it should not be forgotten that this vast and dynamic region, through its choices, could determine who will win the peace.

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Sovereignty kills

Lessons learnt from the war

An interview with Andrey Makarychev, a visiting professor at the Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies at the University of Tartu in Estonia. Interviewer: Maciej Makulski

MACIEJ MAKULSKI: Would you agree that the region has lost a sort of stability and predictability that it has enjoyed for over 30 years (with significant turbulence though in 2008 and 2014)? Or was it only an illusion of stability in which people wanted to believe?

ANDREY MAKARYCHEV: Of course, the security landscape in this part of Europe has drastically and dramatically changed. I think the changes are very much related to the fact that we, in Europe, have lost many of the illusions that were inherited from a relatively peaceful and very liberal mindset from the beginning of the 1990s. First of all, this relates to the way we understand security. There were many expectations that security would transform from its military version into something softer and more related to issues such as people's well-being, environmental protection and climate change, etc. These dimensions of security have been rebalanced by the clear use of military force by Russia. It was something beyond our expectations a few years ago, or even a few months ago, before the invasion began. Not many people took this perspective 100 per cent seriously. What also has changed, and this is a very long-term process, is the decreasing trust in international law, as well as global and regional organisations. Some of them were created after the fall of the Soviet Union, while others have of course much longer legacies like the United Nations and the Red Cross.

Why did such international organisations lose trust?

Just to give you an example, UN representatives were quietly attending various Russian operations – detainments, data collection and forced relocations – taking place on the outskirts of occupied and destroyed Mariupol in Ukraine. Can you imagine that? Was this a tacit and de facto acceptance of the barbar-

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ity committed by the Russian army? At the same time, was it a clear sign of the organisation's inability to change the situation in one way or another? So, UN representatives were just bystanders during a major war crime in Europe. This is something way beyond the world we expected in the 1990s and in the very beginning of the 21st century.

There are also other factors that are conducive to this loss of trust. This includes the originally German idea of *Wandel durch Handel*, meaning the more you trade with deviant and problematic regimes the more you influence their behaviour. That was wrong. Russia has proven this is not the case. And this is also a security issue. The whole idea of liberal peace was based on the idea of the transformation of regimes like Russia, but also Belarus.

Indeed, Belarus has disappeared a little bit from the radar recently in comparison to the initial phase of the invasion, not to mention during 2020 and the following period…

Belarus became a very important factor regarding insecurity for Central Europe. I do not mean only the de facto deployment of Russian troops and military infrastructure in Belarus but also the artificial refugee crisis created by Alyaksandr Lukashenka's regime in 2021. So, in this sense the modernisation of Russia and Belarus did not bring greater demand for democracy and it did not even bring louder demands for peace. Civil society has also not matured to the point of demanding the implementation of an agenda based on well-being, peace and normalisation.

I would also say that, in a more general sense, rationality is another victim of our security thinking. We thought, in the field of political science and international relations, that we can explain everything in these disciplines. Again, it is not the case. This triggered a big debate in the professional community of security studies and scholars about what we should do when confronted with what we would characterise as explicitly irrational behaviour. And this is first of all related to Russia. The idea that no security can be realised without Russia is past its time. More and more people are thinking the other way, believing that no security with Russia is possible as it exists right now. And this also changes the way we think about security.

Borders are another concept that made us rethink many previous security assumptions. In the 1990s we used to think that borders rather connect people than divide them. This is another example of wishful thinking. Borders do divide and there are even countries located on the borders of different blocs, military powers, and even civilisations in the case of Ukraine. They cannot play multi-vector games anymore as was expected a decade or so ago. Of course, multi-vector policies are not completely impossible but they are becoming more and more complicated in light of Russia's aggression.

The idea of normative power, which was one of the underpinnings of peace

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in Europe, is also now facing limitations. Again, it did not disappear but it needs reinvigoration. We must work out how to make normativity a strong instrument for guaranteeing peace and non-intervention in Europe. To some extent, we are returning to the debates surrounding the Helsinki Process back in the 1970s.

Are you expecting more regional militarisation as the outcome of this process? The Polish government has recently announced plans for huge investment in the military domain, including purchases of new types of weaponry from the United States and South Korea. The scale of these investments, if successful, would be unprecedented. Do you see the possibility that other countries will follow Poland's path and the region will eventually become more militarised, with all the consequences for politics and social life?

I think it might be the case and the Polish example is quite illuminating in this context. Frankly speaking, financial discipline within NATO has not met expectations and the presumptive level of two per cent GDP spending on the military has not always been achieved by all member states. That definitely reflects a kind of inertia from 1991 and this illusion of a new beautiful and peaceful world now or in the future. I certainly observe similar trends in the Baltic states, including Estonia, the country where I live now. The military element of security and defence is definitely on the rise. We can also add to this list Sweden and Finland. These aspiring NATO members are drastically reversing the neutrality paradigm in Nordic Europe. I think this is a game-changer for these two countries. These developments also have implications for military budgets, procurement systems related to technical issues of weapon supplies, and the protection of borders with Russia. So in this sense, the paradox is that Russia to some extent managed to impose its vision of international relations and politics as an area focused on military force. This contrasts with its previous strategy of transforming international relations into a more normative playground in which non-military, institutional factors would largely prevail. In this sense, yes, having faced this aggression, most European countries need to reconsider their military budgets. But it is not only about money.

What else is it about?

It is also about this new factor connected to Central European and Baltic countries and their donations to Ukraine; how much they are helping and assisting the state. This is a new phenomenon because Ukraine is not a member of NATO, but for many countries it does not matter because helping Kyiv is not an act of charity. Helping Ukraine is an investment in the future security of these countries. In some future cases, which are rather easy to imagine, these countries might face pretty much the same challenges as Ukraine. You mentioned that Poland has become a strong military hub, with a greater military budg-

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et and power. I think this is good news. I also think that given successful developments on the battlefield, Ukraine may become one of the strongest armies in Europe; one that is fully able to resist unprecedented aggression from its eastern neighbour. How many western armies would be able to resist direct Russian aggression? I am not sure that there are too many. So in this sense, I expect a lot from the reinvigorated Polish-Ukrainian partnership, in which issues of troubled history might be overcome by issues of contemporary importance. This is especially true regarding the need for political coordination.

Continuing the thread of losses due to the war, perhaps a positive one could be a loss of Western Europe's illusions regarding Russia. Central and European and Baltic states been advocating this for years. Is this probably a moment in which they can finally say "we were right"?

First of all, I completely agree that the countries in close proximity, which historically had multiple unfriendly encounters with Russia, had been trying to send this message to their western partners for years. Very often the response they received went something like "you might have your post-Soviet traumas, but you exaggerate, you're just inflating this sense of threat coming from Russia." The clear position of the Baltic states and Poland and other countries was a very important factor that contributed to this mental transformation among western elites. I think this cognitive dimension is very important but this is a long process. It is very difficult to throw away false assumptions and expectations.

Why is it so difficult?

For thousands of people in western countries this rethinking and reconsideration represents a very strong blow to their careers. Angela Merkel can be an example. She left her position being perceived as the best leader in the post-war history of Germany, and now she faces many, I would say, uneasy questions regarding her policy of energy dependence on Russia. After February 24th, this policy looks very different and much more problematic. Yet it is a very long process. In the meantime, I also think that this change is underway but it is not the whole story.

What would make the story complete?

The whole story includes not only these mental changes that are inevitable in my opinion. But also very practical questions regarding the energy situation in the forthcoming autumn and winter. It also includes a debate on to what extent the sanctions are detrimental to Russia's economy, whether we are on the right track of sanctioning Russia with six packages of sanctions. Why is it that Russia is still able to economically survive and the rouble is not collapsing? So, apart from these mental changes there are other issues and those were never discussed in public discourse in the western countries. Also, helping Ukraine with efficient weaponry is, as

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I mentioned, an investment in the security of the European countries themselves. But in the meantime, what I am also observing is a new debate that boils down to the very simple argument that Ukrainians should demonstrate that these weapons do work.

What does it mean exactly?

There is an expectation that Ukrainians need to put something on the table. They need to regain their territories in the short term to make sure that Western weapons are effective and are in the right hands. So, there is an anticipation that Ukrainians will bring one victory after another. And I think it is a completely new debate that has never happened before.



Photo courtesy of Andrey Makarychev

Since you have mentioned a hope for a stronger Polish-Ukrainian partnership, I want to ask a broader question about a possible political reconfiguration in the region. The diminishing credibility of international institutions and multilateralism as such that you mentioned perhaps indicates the re-invigoration of the concept of the nation state. This is because it is mainly individual countries responding to the crisis, on their own or in co-operation with others. Are you expecting the emergence of any reshaped regional order as a result of this?

I agree the regional order in this part of Europe is in flux. I do not think there is one single vector. There are many different factors of transformation. On the one hand, we are clearly witnessing an increased military presence of NATO in the Baltic states and in new NATO members in Scandinavia. It is a relatively new development which is leading to the enlargement of areas of direct contact between Russia and NATO member states. We need to take into account the absorption of Belarus by Russia, at least in a military sense, which also brings Russia and NATO physically closer to each other. Therefore, the buffer zone between two geopolitical and civilisational blocs becomes almost non-existent; especially if we consider the perspective of gradual transformation of Ukraine and Moldova towards the status of fully-fledged members of the European Union in a decade or two. In this sense, the whole idea of Eastern Europe as it was known for a couple of decades is transforming, if not disappearing.

My expectation is that Ukraine and Moldova, on the way to Europeanisa-

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tion and accepting European norms and standards, would be happier to join the space of Central Europe rather than remain in the area of Eastern Europe that definitely has negative connotations nowadays. But this pathway to institutional acceptance by the European Union is quite bumpy. I see two clusters of issues. The first relates to the question of what would be the policy of the Ukrainian state in the aforementioned post-war arrangement? What would be the policy of the Ukrainian state in the case of the successful de-occupation of Mariupol, Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson, etc.? What would be the policy towards the people who live there, who might have accepted Russian citizenship? Are they collaborators? Or full-fledged Ukrainians who lived under occupation? I think these issues need to be strategically decided. Another forthcoming Ukrainian debate is what would be the policy of the Ukrainian state toward millions of Ukrainians in Europe who fled the country due to the war. On the one hand, these people could be lost to post-war Ukraine. They have lived there for some time which means that they study the language, some of them get a job, they might have changes in their refugee status, so they might stay where they are. On the other hand, these millions of people represent enormous human capital. They could come back to Ukraine with first-hand understanding of Europe. This is indispensable for rebuilding post-war Ukraine, with people who would have knowledge about the European Union not from Facebook, but from personal experiences. And this is also an issue of governance.

Another debate awaits the EU. What would be the main tracks of assistance to Ukraine in the case of the stabilisation of the situation on the ground and probably some kind of a solution to the war, hopefully on Ukrainian conditions. Is it going to be a kind of new Marshall Plan for Ukraine? Is it going to be the responsibility of the EU or individual member states? The Estonian government, for example, is already making commitments to specific Ukrainian cities like Vinnytsia to invest resources and funds to rebuild the urban infrastructure. And this is a very good initiative, but in the meantime, the EU should come up with a policy on this. These are all structural factors which are important to understand regarding the future of regional reconstruction and system of interactions in this part of Europe. Ukraine needs to be accepted not as just a victimised country but as a full-fledged European nation that suffered a lot but still has very strong resource potential.

There were wars in the past that changed not only the physical borders of states but also the sort of mental structures or paradigms that influence the way people perceive politics, relations between states, societies, etc. Do you expect to see those kinds of repercussions after Russia's war against Ukraine?

It is really interesting that in our conversation you reference these mental structures that define how we perceive

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politics or humanity. I think there is a very profound controversy in this respect. On the one hand, we need to somehow reconsider or readjust our pre-existing, liberal expectations and anticipations regarding the new reality. This reality was not our choice; it was created by the Russian government. But this process might be quite painful.

What should be readjusted in particular?

Some of the elements of the liberal order have to be reconsidered, including the fascination with globalisation and unwavering trust in global institutions that largely failed, in my opinion, in the case of the war in Ukraine. This includes regional institutions that are an element of the global liberal paradigm of international relations. Their performance was not as strong as I would have expected. This concerns, for example, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, and others which are elements of the international liberal order. They were supposed to somehow contribute to making this part of the world more cohesive, coherent and resilient. As you mentioned, most of the efforts came from nation states, not from global organisations, with the exception of NATO. These efforts also did not come from regional organisations which is a very sad part of the story.

In the meantime, we need to somehow reconsider the liberal distinction between the bad Russian government and the "good Russian people and good Russian culture". It is also a part of this wishful thinking we touched upon. The majority of Russians support the war, that's a fact. It does not matter if it's 55 per cent or 75 per cent, it is the majority. This is a very sobering piece of information that might open one's eyes when it comes to the question of what line we should take on Russian society and culture. Russian culture is very imperial and was always promoted by the state. It did not exist as a form on its own. It was more like an instrument in the invisible hands of the state. That explains why Russian culture did not go through the process of decolonisation, as many other cultures did in Europe. Hopefully this is an issue for the future but I am not sure how distant this future is.

But some of the concepts we know have proven their validity. For example, the very simple Foucauldian idea that sovereignty kills. Just two words: "sovereignty kills". That is what we have seen, unfortunately, in Ukraine. To some extent, we need to return to what has been written by the French political philosophers half a century ago. They were right, it is not about culture. It is about making the whole society of a country completely depoliticised and unable to formulate its own political agenda, demands or expectations. Basically, it is a transformation of the whole population into a group of mass culture-consumers, without being able to produce political impulses and demands. This happened to Russia. One of the explanations for this is that this constant performativity of political action and over-saturation of

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the information and culture spaces with different genres of shows and spectacles did have an effect in Russia.

So, in this case the history of political thought offers us some solutions on how to become more resilient?

Take the issue of irrational behaviour as an example. Political scientists were quite comfortable studying mostly those events that correspond to our understanding of normativity and institutionalisation, which are well-established and quite easy subjects of our studies. But what if not all of the events that surround us are institutionalised, rational and explainable? Maybe we need to dig a bit into the political psychology of irrational behaviour, political myth, political mantras or political cults of certain concepts? We just might need to reread Jacques Lacan or Sigmund Freud to understand a little bit more about the irrational terrains of political psychology. Not only as a matter of academic interest, but as a matter of security regarding the reasons that triggered this disaster Russia has carried out in Ukraine.

You can listen to this interview as a podcast along with other exclusive content by becoming a patron of Talk Eastern Europe at www.patreon.com/talkeasterneurope.

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Contemporary left in Georgia

A conversation with Bakar Berekashvili, Georgian political scientist and sociologist. Interviewer: Veronika Pfeilschifter.

VERONIKA PFEILSCHIFTER: Thinking about today's left in Georgia, how can we characterise it and who promotes left ideas in Georgia, in your view?

BAKAR BEREKASHVILI: First of all, I believe that we must analyse the left in Georgia in two dimensions: the left in the field of political parties and the left outside of it. In the political field, when speaking about the left, the so-called mainstream political parties have power and resources that they use to dominate the political field. There is no leftist political party that considers positions that we can describe as left in today's Georgia. The political parties in Georgia's political field share views and strategies about the neoliberal organisation of the state and society. This means that Georgia's dominant political class believes that salvation can only be found in the free market economy. This is the main political idea that they usually follow and share. Practically, if you observe Georgia's political parties, we cannot even say that there is a left-right dichotomy. There is only right-wing hegemony. For them, liberalism is something like a religion that must be preached and followed. When I speak about liberalism, I mean the equating of the free market economy with democracy. For Georgia's political parties, this is the liberal agenda that they usually follow. Thus, the political field in Georgia is completely devoid of leftist ideas.

However, there is another dimension that we need to observe when we speak about the left in post-Soviet Georgia. This is leftist activism – the left outside of the political field. This can be found in academia and cultural life. In this field, we see some forms of leftism. I see that those young people who are engaged in activism – the students in academia who participate in cultural life – are a generation living under a form of post-Soviet capitalism that gave practically nothing to them – apart from social suffering and boredom. As a result, they are more attached to these leftist ideas in general.

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There was a time in Georgia, in the early stage of the transition, when leftist ideas were not popular among students – among young people. I remember some 18–19 years ago when I was a student, there were just a few students who considered themselves to be left. There were really very few. You could count them on one hand. Now, however, the situation has changed. This is because Georgia has positioned itself to be among the "best" in today's capitalist reformation. Due to this, many young people are now associated with the left. Again, the development of capitalism, especially the development of neoliberal capitalism in Georgia, encourages certain structures – certain forms of structural violence, including social injustice, inequality, deindustrialisation, problems of cultural inequality, and poverty. Thirty years of neoliberal transition saw leftism re-emerge in Georgia's cultural field.

When talking about the left, which ideological outlooks would you include? How would you define leftism ideologically in Georgia?

Predominantly, the "ideological habitus" of the post-Soviet Georgian left is a simulation of western Marxism. In order to understand this ideological habitus, we need to look at a broader picture – an ideological portrait of Georgia. In some respects, the left in Georgia copy the West much like other ideological groups in the country. For example, liberals, as well as conservatives, traditionalists and nationalists, do the same. There is a very funny competition, actually, especially between liberals and conservatives in Georgia. Liberals say, "you know we are a real pro-western group because we are loyal to secularism, we are loyal to the market economy, we are loyal to various democratic ideas. This is the real West." Then conservatives say, "Oh no, it is not you who is pro-western. We are pro-western because we look to Marine Le Pen in France, Matteo Salvini in Italy and Viktor Orbán in Hungary." They all try to shelter their ideological identities under this umbrella of the western ideological mentality. The left in Georgia is not so attached to pro-westernism. They are more critical; they question western history and today's life. However, they still use lots of western Marxist narratives in order to interpret the totality of today; politics, economics, cultural life and so on.

When we speak about this ideological habitus of the left, I would like to make a distinction and categorise the Georgian left into two groups: the liberal left and the anti-liberal left. They have different views in terms of politics, society and morality. Left-wing liberals are closer to the general philosophy of liberalism, especially cultural liberalism. For the liberal left, the class issue is not important; they focus on cultural emancipation. The anti-liberal left is engaged in the field of socio-economic emancipation, a traditionally Marxist mentality. Sometimes, they are supportive of certain social norms that are not liberal. They are supportive of certain views that

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are shared by the majority of Georgian citizens. They are more attached to the idea of socio-economic emancipation.

I would like to say that there is a new generation attached to a completely new process of leftist formation. There are some collectives of students, some groups of young people, who show more interest in Soviet Marxism. This is a new trend. They want to look into the intellectual history of Soviet communism; they want to look into alternative stories about Soviet Georgia. They feel the need to reinterpret today. These young people I am referring to want to be emancipated from the prevalent neoliberal, right-wing ideology. I think this is quite a progressive approach.

Can we state then that the new left in Georgia consists mostly of young people?

There have always been young people who are attached to the left, but this is a growing trend. Today, I cannot say that the left is flourishing among young people in Georgia, but it is stronger than it used to be. Of course, this needs to be researched more.

My own general impression is that there are more people [involved in the left] who were born at the end of the 1990s or the beginning of the 2000s. These are young people who were born in the times of Mikheil Saakashvili or, let us say, grew up in the time of Saakashvili. Today's young people had many negative experiences when they were studying in school. I mean even the young people who were school children in the



Photo courtesy of Bakar Berekashvili

2010s and after 2013, for example, when Saakashvili lost power. Then, Georgian Dream came into power and continued with the same ideological outlooks. These young people who were school children and then became university students are getting angrier because they know some stories about the past. Of course, there is a large section of young people who are captured by right-wing ideology or non-ideological narratives. People are captured – let us say, students, for example – in this neoliberal ideological narrative, but they do not know about it. Ideology is not about what you know; ideology is about what you do not know but still believe in. It is not about verbal statements; it is about internal feelings.

There were students, I remember, some ten years ago when I started teaching, who did not represent a high social class but were fans of this market economy. They liked rich people and the economy of rich people. They disagreed with progressive taxation; they did not like the idea of equality even though they

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came from low social classes. This is because of the ideological incorporation of the masses into mainstream ideology that was promoted by Saakashvili. This approach still continues. It is also how universities, schools and cultural institutions are training [students] in these kinds of ideas. But again, there are young people who confront these narratives. There are not as many as there used to be under today's neoliberal capitalist order. However, if Georgia continues this neoliberal order, these left-wing sentiments will definitely increase.

The politics of memory is also a tool to enforce certain ideologies. Could you elaborate more on the Georgian case in the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s before Saakashvili? Was there any attempt to form a certain memory of the Soviet Union? How was it done?

The Georgian politics of memory from Zviad Gamsakhurdia's times (1991–92) until now is defined by two ideological determinates. Georgian history and memory are focused on the rethinking of liberal or nationalist narratives. In this way, liberals and nationalists agree on various things. They have one enemy, which is socialism. Clearly, we can talk more about socialism in the Soviet Union. Liberals and nationalists considered the Soviet Union a socialist society. The liberals usually talk in a way that rejects pursuing any rethinking of liberalism and nationalism in reference to the Soviet Union. I would say that Georgia's politics of memory is based on the right-wing ideological sentiment of the past, starting with Gamsakhurdia, continuing with Saakashvili, and lasting until today, with Bidzina Ivanishvili.

Eduard Shevardnadze's period (1995–2003) was the time of silence. Shevardnadze's regime, as an ex-communist *nomenklatura* regime, was an exhausted regime. They did not have the energy to organise the strong cultural politics of liberal nationalism. I am not saying that it was completely muted, but it was more or less silent. What we have today is rooted in Gamsakhurdia's anti-Russian history. These discourses, hysteria, anti-Russian sentiments, and nationalist liberal sentiments were rehabilitated under Saakashvili after 2003. Both Saakashvili and Gamsakhurdia engaged in the so-called memory wars. They had a very particular aim. This was the consolidation of power. Gamsakhurdia tried to use this politics of memory to stay in power, but he was not successful. Saakashvili did the same, and he managed to rule the country through neoliberal autocracy for nine years. Saakashvili was involved in this process of liberal nationalist reconstruction – the revision of history and the past. He needed the support of cultural institutions, like universities and schools, especially in urban areas. He mobilised right-wing intellectuals around his idea. What he did, in a typical old-fashioned autocratic way, was to consolidate the intellectuals and scholars around this idea that "Not only the Soviet Union, but also socialism is our enemy." This was a larger

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goal of politics of memory in the times of Saakashvili. In this way, the ideological rethinking of the past – this liberal-nationalist ideology – was a class-based project and remains a class-based project. It creates certain illusions – a "dogma" – to get the society to focus on the past and forget about today. By demonising the past, it is possible to legitimise today's neoliberal capitalism. This process, from Saakashvili until now, has been morally sanctioned by the liberal class of the West. The post-Soviet liberal revision of history consciously and knowingly marginalises the history of the Soviet Union – its processes of urbanisation, industrialisation, population growth and modernisation of the social and economic system. Georgia was an example of this Soviet story. However, they consciously and knowingly marginalised it. This is a purely ideological process.

What about a rural left in Georgia? Are there any alliances between urban leftist groups and workers in such towns as for example Tkibuli or Chiatura?

At a glance, of course. We mostly see the left in Tbilisi – only in the urban area – and even in Kutaisi, but this is not the whole story. Because recently, and you probably know this, there was a protest that emerged in Namakhvani around the power plant. This shows that there are leftist practices and circles that have emerged particularly in western Georgia, not only in Kutaisi but also in other small towns, such as Tkibuli and Chiatura. These are some small-scale leftist practices but you were talking about alliances. In Chiatura, I saw that young people are actually working with miners – young people who consider themselves more or less left, maybe not so much in their political and intellectual foundations, but they are leftists in their emotions, in their thinking, in a way. They have some alliances with workers in Chiatura. Strikes occur frequently and young people support them.

Kutaisi is definitely another locus of leftist activism that has been growing in the last few years. Historically, Kutaisi has always been the locus of intellectuals – of poets, of writers, and of scientists. I cannot say that there are more leftists there than in Tbilisi, but there are more than there used to be before.

This could be related to many factors. One of the factors is the ruthless deindustrialisation of Kutaisi, which affected the social lives of local citizens. The leftists in the regions are not institutionally organised. We also cannot say that the left in Tbilisi is very well organised institutionally. Of course, there are some small groups in the regions, but they are devoted and enthusiastic; they are local patriots, especially when speaking about western Georgia. And I believe this tendency will become stronger. At least, this is my observation.

My other observation is that eastern Georgia is completely silent. In western Georgia, the regions are more active in terms of leftist practices. This can be explained by the area's history since eastern Georgia was not so highly industri-

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alised. Plus, western Georgia usually faces many more economic problems than eastern Georgia. For example, in eastern Georgia, agriculture is developed. There is wine, and so on. Historically, western Georgia lived well under socialism and socialist industry. This could be related to several socio-economic and cultural factors. Western Georgia used to be the locus of socialism – Guria and these regions.

And what is the role of trade unions and especially the involvement of the youth in them?

There are some young people in trade unions but I am not very familiar with it. Most of the young people, students at universities – they are not so much attached to the trade unions. They also might not have trust in the trade unions. People do not trust these organisations because their reputations were destroyed in the 1990s. In Soviet times, trade unions were very strong. Of course, they were under the ideological supervision of the Communist Party, but they had strong mechanisms to protect workers… However, in the 1990s they were completely destroyed and practically did not exist. In the times of Saakashvili, in turn, they faced a great conflict. Later on, they tried to confront Saakashvili so there are plenty of dark stories surrounding trade unions in Georgia. That is why, unfortunately, they are not strong today. However, some independent trade unions have also appeared and there are autonomous unions that are trying to self-organise. Like when they organised the strikes with the metro workers in Tbilisi. I would say this shows how diverse the left is in Georgia, at least the division line goes between leftists in non-governmental organisations and those who are trying to strengthen the workers' movement. Here, it becomes visible that it is necessary to analyse the different ideologies and, I think, utopias as well.

There are two types of utopias among the Georgian left. One, which is equality, is perceived to be a utopia, although I believe it is not. In today's world, there is consistent neoliberal propaganda. You know, this idea that equality is a strange utopia that is promoted by socialists. This is actually a crazy and inaccurate approach. When speaking about utopia, which particular utopia? I believe there are many utopias that are considered to be utopian, but in fact, they are not. You know about the Georgian case. This is the long result of neoliberals misusing and misinterpreting the concept of equality and inequality. In Georgia, they tell people – especially young people – that equality is a dangerous socialist utopia; nobody can be equal and live in complete equality. This is such a misuse of the concept of equality. Of course, no one, not even socialists, have such a perception of equality. Socialists do not think that we will all be the same in every aspect of life – that we would have the same amount of money, same clothes, same cars, and so on. Equality, first of all, means having access to welfare – access to good education, healthcare, and welfare in general. In Georgia, young peo-

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ple have this utopia. However, the neoliberals say that this is a utopia because they do not want to improve the social order. Some young people are trying to emancipate themselves from this ideological pressure. Equality is something that can be real. You do not need to think that we are all the same.

However, there is another utopia, which is a real utopia for leftists. Some Georgian leftists, especially liberals, believe that there should be certain alliances with the liberal class. Some leftist-liberals have this hope that they can transform society with Georgian liberals. In my view, this is utopic and not realistic thinking as liberals do their best to maintain the current system. The neoliberal transformation is nothing else but a class-based project which is only useful to those dominant in the current civil society and financial institutions.

Another utopia might be to reimagine democracy as thoroughly economic in nature: to rethink the notion and interrelation between liberalism and democracy.

I believe that historically liberalism and democracy have always been hostile to each other, but today they are particularly incompatible. Actually, they are hostile because the pathos of democracy is different from that of liberalism. Liberalism is about individual and economic liberties. Democracy sticks to collective interests. The English political scientist Harold Laski wrote that capitalism and democracy cannot be built together because capitalism seeks inequality while democracy is always trying to destroy it. Today's liberalism has mutated into neoliberalism. Actually, about democracy, I now recall the great Soviet film director Andrei Tarkovsky's very succinct words about western democracy: "Western democracy is egoistic because western democracy gave freedom to the people but took from them the belief in other people." In western democracy, the individual only trusts him or herself. He or she does not trust other people. As Pierre Bourdieu said, in capitalism you are the owner of yourself, and you are responsible for your happiness and unhappiness. This is what neoliberals repeat: you are a free person and you are responsible for your happiness and unhappiness. The social order and system have nothing to do with it. If you are happy, then the system is good, and then you are good, too. Unfortunately, today's western liberal democratic model clearly offers greater opportunities for the Darwinist social order.

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Forced into exile, young Russian activists continue the fight against the regime

CRISTINA COELLEN

The story of Liuba and Anzhela, two young Russian activists, shows that causes mobilising young people in Germany, Italy or Finland are just as much a concern to some young Russians. Yet as Russians, they are also fighting on several other fronts. The most important is the imperialism that their country is forcing on the world.

On a sunny May 8th in Berlin, the day before a highly contested Victory Day march, pro-Ukrainian activists set up stands and a small stage opposite the city's Soviet war memorial. There is Ukrainian music playing and people walk around dressed in yellow and blue. A political activist speaks in Russian before the assembled crowd and a woman next to her translates into German.

Liuba and Anzhela are behind one of the little stalls with posters, where in big letters the words "REAL PRICE OF ANTIWAR FEMINIST ACTIVISM IN RUSSIA – 10 YEARS" are written. The word "RUSSIA" is surrounded by drawings of small black drops, whether they are meant to represent tears or blood is unclear. Both would be fitting. The two young Russian activists, who are originally from St Petersburg and Volgograd, invite passers-by to write some kind words to female political prisoners in Russia. They will send these words translated into Russian to the women whose names they have also marked in big black letters on cardboard next to their first poster: Maria Ponomarenko, Anastasia Levashova and Alexandra Skochilenko.

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Maria Ponomarenko published information about the bombing of the drama theatre in occupied Mariupol in March, which Russia continues to deny. Anastasia Levashova threw a Molotov cocktail at police officers during an anti-war rally on February 24th. Alexandra Skochilenko replaced price tags in a grocery store with information about Russian crimes in Mariupol. While Levashova has already been sentenced to two years in prison, a ten-year prison sentence could await Skochilenko and Ponomarenko.

Warning sign

Liuba and Anzhela, both still students, have not shared the same fate as these women, who are now faced with an unfair trial and a prison sentence. This is thanks to their decision to leave Russia in April. Their flat was searched by the authorities a few days earlier. "It was a red line," Liuba says calmly. House searches are a warning sign for activists that they have been noticed. The system of political repression in Russia is complicated and a house search does not mean that the next day will bring a sentence to a penal colony, where Alexei Navalny is currently imprisoned. Nevertheless, with the daily rise of repressive measures in Vladimir Putin's Russia, an eventual arrest becomes more and more likely. This could be justified by new laws, such as those prohibiting criticism of the Russian armed forces.

During our third meeting, in their flat somewhere in the south of Berlin, they tell me about the details of their last days in Russia. While we sit in the kitchen of the almost stereotypical Berlin flat – high ceilings, large windows through which the sun warms the floor, a slightly chaotic mix of furniture and decoration – Liuba and Anzhela talk about their experiences for two hours with long periods of silence between their words. In the hallway behind them, a poster from their last protest against Moscow's aggression in Ukraine leans against the wall: "STOP SPONSORING GENOCIDE". They regularly go on anti-war protests in Berlin. While in the German capital, they can do so without constraints. However, in Russia this was ultimately the reason why they had to leave the country.

In March, the young couple had been to anti-war protests in Volgograd, getting arrested and then held for six days in a police station before being released again. It seemed like the worst was over. "I thought we were too small," Anzhela tells me, referring to their status as activists. Yet in Putin's Russia, nobody is too small and too unimportant anymore when it comes to criticising the regime. Anzhela starts by saying that "They came to our flat early in the morning. We pretended to not be there at first and did not open the door. It was not even my official address; I had given my grandmother's address. They were watching us to find us there."

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"I was only afraid when they were breaking down the door," Liuba adds. After taking all their electronic devices – Anzhela was lucky to have her phone in a repair shop that day – and leaving the flat in a mess, the police took them back to the station. Liuba says, "It was to scare us." They were not instantly charged with a crime, but they both knew that a criminal case would be inevitable sooner or later. They came to Berlin, purely because they had some friends there who could make their escape possible.

Activism in the face of hopelessness

Neither of these two women grew up in a particularly progressive or anti-government environment. They are too young to have consciously experienced the brief interlude that the 1990s provided after the fall of the USSR. At this time, Russia glimpsed the path towards democracy and human rights. How does one then become a political activist in a country that has descended into autocracy with every year that Vladimir Putin has added to his reign?

"It started when I realised my sexuality," Anzhela says. The discrimination that the LGBTQ+ community experiences in Russia has grown rapidly in recent years. While female homosexuality might stir up slightly less hatred in the public sphere than male homosexuality, walking down the street while holding hands as they are doing now in Berlin would be impossible. In a recent move in July, Russian lawmakers proposed an extension of the "LGBT propaganda" law, already in place since 2013, which restricts information on non-heterosexual relationships for children. The extension of the law would include all age groups, likening the spreading of information on LGBTQ+ topics to other "dangers to society" such as drugs, suicide and extremism.

Anzhela explains how she once tried to organise a pride parade in Volgograd. "Of course, it was immediately shut down," she adds. Her brief smile oscillates between bitterness and resignation, as if to say that it would never be any different in Russia. What especially furthered their activism and brought them together, however, was protesting climate change. In Russia, movements like "Fridays for Future" remain small and are restrained by the excessive reactions of the authorities to anything that resembles protest or political assemblies in the public space. There is also another problem, as Anzhela believes that "People really don't know how to unite." Even if protest movements are formed, the process takes a lot of time. Given the comparably feeble attention placed on environmental issues in Russian society, such activism results in little success. "We were not heard – it is a general problem in Russia," says Liuba, looking tired.

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There is indeed a lot of hopelessness in the air of the small kitchen during the interview. Nevertheless, giving up is not an option either. After protesting climate change, the build-up of Russian troops on the Ukrainian border in winter 2021 made activism an even more urgent issue. Liuba and Anzhela continued, starting their project focused on writing to imprisoned female activists. Then, the invasion started.

Quest for decolonisation

Liuba and Anzhela show that the fight for causes that mobilise young people in Germany, Italy or Finland – LGBTQ+, climate change, equality – are just as much a concern to young Russians. Yet as Russians, they are also fighting on several other fronts. The most important is the imperialism that their country is forcing on the world. This imperialism manifests itself most brutally in the invasion of Ukraine, but has many, many layers, both inside and outside of Russia.

On her Instagram, Anzhela has pinned a photo of herself standing alone in the street, holding a poster with the well-known words *"Net voine"* or "No to war". Below the picture, she appeals to the citizens of Russia to "acknowledge" that "we are an imperialist aggressor state." On Liuba's page, there are similar photos and similar appeals.

The imperialism that is exhibited by Moscow in its war against Ukraine – and its other neighbours at various other moments in recent history – has an important implication: decolonisation. The quest for decolonisation is what separates these young activists from the "older" generation of regime critics in Russia. The political opposition and opposition movements in the country are a complicated matter, and there are few clear-cut categories. Yet while the generation around Alexei Navalny, arguably Putin's most well-known opponent, likewise condemns the invasion of Ukraine and seeks to fight the regime, it is often accused of repeating certain nationalist and even imperialist narratives.

For Liuba and Anzhela, it is not enough to say "no to war". They want more radical change, a complete overhaul of the Russian mentality regarding its neighbours and the world. When asked on the subject of Navalny, they both agree in their criticism of him. "It's terrible that he is a political prisoner now, but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't criticise him," Anzhela explains, adding that he still has an "imperialist mentality". For them, Russia needs to move away from its centuries-old imperialism.

"We have started to learn Ukrainian," Liuba already told me when we met on May 8th. In all their actions, they attempt as much as possible to do the opposite

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of what their home country does. They are in fact driven by an enormous feeling of guilt and responsibility. "It is the most toxic relationship in my life," says Anzhela about her country. It is impossible to shake off the fact that both of them are Russian citizens; but their hatred and shame for their country is palpable. She adds that "I want to do everything to destroy Russia in this way."

The fight within

When talking about Russian imperialism, there is also another cause aside from Moscow's aggression against its neighbours: it is the imperialism within the country itself. Russia is in no way a homogenous nation. Instead, it contains an estimated 193 different ethnicities, all with their own languages, cultures and traditions. These minorities, sometimes living in semi-autonomous regions like Tatarstan or Buryatia, are however overshadowed and repressed by the imposed "Russianness" of Moscow and St Petersburg. This does not take place on a merely cultural and linguistic level. "Moscow is eating all of their resources," explains Anzhela. This exploitation has also made the regions dependent on Moscow as the economic centre of Russia.

Liuba and Anzhela also campaign for more autonomy for groups such as the Tatars, fighting for the preservation of languages and identities within the regions. Neither of them currently has much hope for Russia's future, although they bring up the idea of the regions becoming autonomous countries once – if – Putin's Russia is destroyed.

While Russia's future is uncertain, what about their own? An EU visa for Russian citizens lasts just three months. After that, the options dwindle. The two are hoping to stay in Berlin, where they have friends, freedom and some possibility of rebuilding their lives. What remains clear to them is that, as long as Russia remains as it is now, there is no going back. Anzhela says calmly at the end of the interview that "To love Russia right now… it is something I don't understand." NEE

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Women will shake and reverse public opinion about this war

An interview with Liliya Vezhevatova, a coordinator of the Feminist Anti-War Resistance in Russia. Interviewer: Anna Efimova

ANNA EFIMOVA: According to recent research by the Russian human rights project OVD-Info, more than half of Russian protesters are women. How have feminists, who have never been a leading public and social force in Russia, managed to unite against the war in Ukraine?

LILIYA VEZHEVATOVA: Feminist organisations have been burgeoning in Russia over the last two decades. Activists have been deeply involved in internal and external discussions. However, we were not treated seriously during this time. We subsequently remained intact as the war started, while prominent Russian political activists were either in prison or in exile. We mobilised fast at the right time – our movement started on February 25th. Through gender optics, we see that women from both sides of the conflict suffer the most from wars. They lose their sons or have to seek refuge in another country. Because the men are either at war or absent, they have to set up households in the occupied territories. There is an understanding of the horrendous implications that war has for women and that united us, despite the theoretical disagreements between the feminists who belong to different wings.

Your movement started on the second day of the war in Ukraine. When we are having this conversation, it has been almost six months. What do you think about the opinion among some in Europe that anti-war activism in Russia is pointless?

We are fully aware of the fact that we cannot put an end to this war, but we can push for it. We need to make passive opponents active and embolden our communities. Breaking through the information blockade is our primary goal now. We have around 50,000 people following the anti-war publications that we produce on social media. The activists dis-

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Photo courtesy of Liliya Vezhevatova

tribute our *samizdat* (self-publishing), a newspaper for women over 45 called *Female Truth*, in 20 Russian cities and towns. Russian authorities can hide data on the Russian army's losses as much as they wish but they will not be able to hide cemeteries. The more coffins return to Russia, the more attitudes to the war will change. When they do, we will be ready, and we will have people who already know what to do next.

Do you cooperate with Ukrainian activists and feminists?

We do interact with Ukrainian activists. For instance, we consulted with Ukrainian feminists and received their approval for the organisation of our most well-known action called "Mariupol-5000". In commemoration of the war victims from Mariupol, our activists erected improvised graves and memorials around Russia. We joined the Ukrainian Feminist Initiative group's manifesto, entitled "A Right to Resistance", and invited our supporters to sign it. As feminists from Russia, we know that the "Russian world" brings domestic and sexualised violence, femicide, torture, homophobia and transphobia along with "traditional values". That is why we do not agree to fight for "peace" as seen by Putin's Russia. Together with Ukrainian feminists, we stand for the peace that would come with Putin's army laying down its arms and a right to self-determination for the entire Ukraine. At the 50th session of the UN Human Rights Council, I spoke about the scale of anti-war resistance in Russia and suggested ways the international community could support it to bring about an immediate end to the war. Furthermore, we called for the arming of Ukraine to better defend it against the aggression. We also called for a halt to energy trade with Russia, as its income permits Putin and his entourage to stay in power and continue the war.

More than two million Ukrainian refugees found themselves in Russia as the war unfolded, making it the country that has received the largest number of displaced people from Ukraine. Can your organisation offer them some help too?

We work with Ukrainian refugees who were forcibly relocated to Russia from the occupied territories. Since our activists are convinced that they are in danger here, we are helping them leave for other countries. For that, they volunteer at the temporary refugee recep-

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tion points for Ukrainians in Russia. Of course, they cannot register there as activists of the Feminist Anti-War Resistance due to their own safety concerns. These refugee points are well guarded. So, the activists go there with other volunteer groups, earn credibility and distribute information. To some extent, this is partisanship. We also support other similar Russian anti-war initiatives that help Ukrainian refugees leave Russia by spreading information about them.

Someone said that spreading objective information about this war in Russia is like asking Soviet people to protest the invasion of Finland in 1939. Your revived partisan *samizdat* in the form of a female newspaper serves to circumvent censorship and repressions, as in Soviet times. But why then do you target women over 45, who are statistically more passive or loyal to the government?

In Russia, women that age make up a large part of the population. Theoretically, they should have proportional representation in the government and be in charge, but this does not happen. In fact, they are excluded from the information space and rely solely on Russian television. In the long run, however, we believe this group will become a force that shakes and reverses public opinion about this war. They are our elderly relatives, mothers of the officers, of the Chechen war participants. We consider them victims of the current situation. By believing in the succession of the war in Ukraine to the 1941–45 war, they were tricked and lied to. We face the complicated task of shifting them away from this narrative of fighting Nazis in Ukraine, of this war not being a crime and genocide. We transfer the war from the ideological battlefield to their fridges, wallets and families, making it real and close as if it was happening on their doorstep. We approach them with universal human-interest topics that are interesting for this audience, talking about increased prices, their favourite celebrities who disapprove of the war, and the compensations that [have been promised by the Russian government but] have not been paid out to the families of the Russian military who died in Ukraine.

The newspaper has received very positive reviews. People tell us that after palming off the newspaper to their elderly female relatives, they were able to have a conversation about the war. They did this without blaming each other for being traitors for the first time since the war started. By choosing a non-radical tone and responding to the interests and worries of its audience, our newspaper achieved these results. Visually, it mimics ordinary free district newspapers that are widely distributed to mailboxes before the elections in Russia. Postmen and cleaning services do not throw them away because they do not realise these are anti-war publications, or, according to new Russian legislation, extremist materials.

Some of your activists were prosecuted in Russia and had to leave. How did this happen?

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At the beginning of the war, many of us participated in street protests in different Russian cities, from Moscow and St Petersburg to Novosibirsk and Yekaterinburg. As a result, criminal and administrative cases were opened against us. We faced a choice – either stay in Russia as political prisoners or emigrate and continue to work from abroad. I had to leave Russia myself. Now I reside in Armenia. I coordinate the entire movement from here, help to edit our newspaper, and participate in the activities of the Yerevan unit of the Feminist Anti-War Resistance.

In what ways have Russian feminists who left the country continued their anti-war activism?

The possibilities for anti-war activism depend on the character of the country. When we walked in the streets of Yerevan, protesting the war in Ukraine, we were told: "Where were you in 2020, when *we* were killed?" Armenia is a small country, and the war it experienced two years ago brought losses to almost every family. Ukraine supported the Azerbaijani side in the 2020 war in Nagorno-Karabakh. The local population does not understand why they should worry about Ukraine now if no one was worried about them two years ago. With this in mind, we cannot just go into the street with pro-Ukrainian slogans here, but develop a decolonial aspect to our activism. To study contemporary Russian imperialism, questions of colonialism and decolonisation, we host events with Armenian civic, feminist and LGBTQ+ activists. A public reading of the letters of Ukrainian mothers that were collected by our friends among Russian bloggers was organised. This event was not considered to be a large-scale gathering, but it was emotional and was covered not just in activists' social media but by local journalists.

How does it affect the movement that its activists are residing in different countries?

Those remaining in Russia are working anonymously. We do not even gather them in one group chat because this is unsafe. They communicate with us via Telegram and Instagram. Feminist Anti-War Resistance has a horizontal and decentralised structure. Should some activists be arrested or forced to flee Russia, the movement does not stop. Prominent coordinators of the movement are in exile now. We constantly update and distribute the safety protocols among activists. We do not wish to be split by the regime and do our best so our activists stay alright physically and mentally.

Activism is a very demanding job. How are you getting ready to endure the long march before the end of the war?

The problem is that when you manage the refugees' needs with transportation and clothes, you see the results of your everyday efforts. However, it is completely the opposite with civic activism. You will meticulously do your part of the job without an opportunity to see the picture in its entirety or even the result of our work. Russia only has

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grassroots anti-war movements – we may be less visible than old men with dual citizenship in Europe who organise conferences for "good Russians"; but we work very hard. Our editors, journalists, interpreters, therapists and volunteers all work for free. Therefore, people involved in activism burn out. For that, we teamed up with professional therapists and psychiatrists who conduct several hundred free consultations for our activists voluntarily. Thus we help those who do anti-war campaigning in Russia and those who recently emigrated, so they do not feel alone and are reminded that we are many.

Liliya Vezhevatova is a coordinator of the Feminist Anti-War Resistance, a grassroots organisation that works in 13 cities in and beyond Russia.

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Modern Europe – forged in the Gdańsk Shipyard

BASIL KERSKI

In recent years Polish collective memory has become too focused on the military traditions of freedom and independence fighters. This approach overlooks the thinking and achievements of the 1970s and 1980s, which were the result of peaceful social movements. By opting for non-violence, the ten-million-strong Solidarity movement, Solidarność, chose a difficult, but in the end effective, path.

The historic Gdańsk Shipyard is one of the most important memory sites in Europe today. It is a complex that includes Solidarity Square, alongside the Monument of the Fallen Shipyard Workers of 1970, the historic Gate Number 2, the former BHP Hall (a place where in 1980 the famous August Accords between the communist authorities and the democratic opposition were negotiated) and the European Solidarity Centre (ECS). Upon the ECS's initiative the shipyard was placed on the European Heritage Label list. Through this programme the EU aims to promote historical sites which have proven important in the process of the continent's democratisation.

Indeed, the Solidarity movement, Solidarność, which was born in the Gdańsk Shipyard in the second half of the 20th century, turned out to be the most important democratic mobilisation effort in this part of Europe. Its members organised a revolution which brought a fundamental political change to Europe as a whole. It led to the reunification of a continent that had been divided since the Second World War. Recognising the importance of this place and the developments which took place on its premises, the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage

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together with the City of Gdańsk began in 2020 the official application process for the historical shipyard to be placed on UNESCO's World Heritage List. This initiative is a good opportunity to reflect on the role that the shipyard, as well as the Solidarity movement, have played in the history of mankind.

The shipyard as a political *agora*

In August 1980 Gdańsk was the site of one of the largest anti-communist protests in Europe's history. This workers' strike, which may have looked like a spontaneous event organised to show solidarity with fired trade unionists, was in fact a thoroughly prepared action. It was the work of the members and supporters of independent unions who had drawn conclusions from a decade of opposition activism, including the brutal crushing of the anti-communist riots which took place in Gdańsk in 1970. By 1980, the oppositionists already knew that for change to succeed it had to take place in all countries of the socialist bloc, while the ideals of freedom and human rights had to become an integral part of international relations.

At the same time, most western politicians and media, despite their wide support for freedom movements, wanted to maintain the post-war order which was seen as a guarantor of stability. Only very few supported the idea of revolutionary changes, while the majority feared that uncontrollable actions could lead to a new international conflict. At that moment in history Eastern European freedom fighters were still not well known to foreign audiences nor did they participate in international public debates. However, as isolated as they were by tightly controlled borders and imposed repressions, they managed to establish an international network of supporters, both within the bloc and outside it.

Therefore, when in 1980 a workers' strike started at the shipyard and was followed by negotiations between representatives of the opposition and the communist authorities, the eyes of all Europe turned towards Gdańsk. From their homes, via TV screens and press reports, people saw that a new European political *agora* or assembly was starting to form there. In less than a decade, the consequences of this event were to bring a great change both to Poland and Europe at large.

Thus, in 1988 Solidarity activists again organised strikes and a new stage of the democratic revolution began. It was completed through a negotiated agreement, which took the form of a roundtable. The communists agreed to this format of negotiations as they were convinced that it would guarantee them power. Yet, the outcomes of the talks resulted in the exact opposite: the communist system started to topple in the region and the democratic transition began. In Poland full-scale system change started after the semi-free elections that were held in June 1989.

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This vote brought victory to the Solidarity camp but also once again showed the Gdańsk Shipyard as a place central to Polish democracy. Not accidentally, all Solidarity candidates would arrive here from all over Poland to be photographed with Lech Wałęsa, the leader of the opposition. Posters with these photographs are now recognised as iconic illustrations of the country's democratic revival.

Factory of solidarity

The main value and driving force of the anti-communist revolution that started at the Gdańsk Shipyard was solidarity. This is not surprising. The complicated process of ship construction requires teamwork and co-operation. It also confirms the thesis of Zygmunt Bauman that the concept of solidarity was grounded in the industrial culture of the 19th and 20th centuries, while contemporary societies of individualised consumers still look for their "body".

Also, as the production of ships was limited to one place, which in today's world of global chains of production is a rarity, it required well-developed infrastructure and qualified workers. In addition to employment, the shipyard had to offer other benefits to maintain its workforce, including educational programmes and social and medical services. Thereby, it was not only an enterprise, but "a city within a city". Most importantly, the shipyard became a place that united people of different backgrounds and qualifications, as well as those with different dreams and personal ambitions. The teamwork and co-operation that were required of them also helped the workers to develop a sense of respect and bonds that would go far beyond their group and spread throughout the movement.

The shipyard became a place that united people of different backgrounds, qualifications, dreams and ambitions.

This large factory of solidarity, as the shipyard came to be, also offered employees opportunities for personal development, including vocational training. Thus, employment at the shipyard was particularly attractive to young people who would come to Gdańsk from all over Poland. Such was the story of Lech Wałęsa, who later became the Solidarity union's leader. He arrived in Gdańsk at the age of 24, hoping to leave behind his small-town life. At first, he did not know anybody in the city but like many others he headed to the shipyard, where he not only found employment but also obtained his civic and political education.

Solidarity emerged in the Gdańsk Shipyard also because of the poor working conditions, which the employees experienced on a daily basis and which showed large disparity between official communist propaganda and reality. Everyday life

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was increasingly more difficult to endure as shipyard equipment was becoming outdated and the quality of safety measures remained poor. Accidents and occupational injuries were thus frequent occurrences.

The top-down chain of command that was applied in state-owned enterprises in socialist states was the main cause of permanent shortages and improvisation. Therefore, the tensions that started to grow between the shipyard workers and the management reflected in fact greater problems within the socialist system. Thoughts about their consequences were clearly giving the state authorities sleepless nights.

Despite a wide network of surveillance on the ground, the communists clearly could not have control over the whole shipyard. When it comes to an enterprise of this size the greatest challenges are of course posed by the workers, whose aforementioned sense of pride and dignity had only grown and strengthened. This grew to the point that we can talk about a feeling of community belonging, which was autonomous and independent of the communist authorities, emerging at the shipyard. Thus in the 1980s, when an economic crisis unfolded throughout Poland, it only increased the workers' determination to change the political and economic system.

Witness to global conflicts

The shipyard made Gdańsk a city where industry and global politics meet and intermingle. This started in the mid-19th century when the Kingdom of Prussia established a royal shipyard here at the Baltic Sea. At that time, the Prussian state had started to grow in force, heavily focusing on industrialisation. The monarchy saw infrastructure investments and innovation as instrumental to modern political power.

Nonetheless, it is unclear why the imperial authorities opted for Gdańsk as the location for the shipyard. Gdańsk was a rather peripheral harbour and its role in Europe was marginal. It lacked influential academic or research institutions. Impressive research was to be found in nearby Königsberg, which also has a large harbour. Physical location could also not explain the decision to establish a shipyard in Gdańsk. After all, Szczecin (Stettin), another Prussian city with a harbour, was much closer to the era's political centre in Berlin. The Prussian authorities yet chose Gdańsk, Danzig. Maybe because they wanted to strengthen ties between this former Hanseatic city and the Prussian Kingdom.

Once established here, the shipyard entirely changed the city's culture and life. It served as the cornerstone of Gdańsk's further industrialisation. It also turned the city into a vibrant trade centre with a strong cosmopolitan identity. This di-

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versity, however, was lost once Poland lost its statehood as a result of the three partitions and became divided between three large powers: Russia, the Austrian Empire and Prussia.

In the new political reality, Gdańsk and the shipyard became strongly dependent on the Prussian state, the presence of its military and servicemen, and industrial investments. From that moment on, they were an important element in Prussia's imperial and modernisation policies. Prussia became a leading force within the German state in the second half of the 19th century. France's loss in the Franco-Prussian War in 1871 turned Germany into an empire under Prussian leadership. The war had a lasting impact on Europe. By hastening the process of German unification, it significantly altered the balance of power on the continent, with the new German nation state supplanting France as the dominant European land power. It also had an ambition to gain a strong position at sea. Vast amounts of money and effort were subsequently put into the development of the navy.

This growth in naval power was particularly pursued by Wilhelm II, who started his reign in 1888. The ambition of the young emperor, who was also the grandson of Queen Victoria, was first and foremost to challenge the weakening British Empire by ridding it of its domination of the sea. This vision later became known as the "German imperial illness". To put it directly, instead of focusing on increasing the state's wealth through peaceful measures and personal connections, the emperor opted for conflict, treating other European states, especially Great Britain and France, as enemies. He engaged in a competitive weapons race heavily centred on the fleet. History showed that Wilhelm II's assessment of Germany's potential was an overestimate. That is why in the end Germany lost in its challenge, while Wilhelm's reign remained perceived through the prism of political irrationalism.

In the early 20th century Gdańsk again became an important player in the European weapons race. The royal shipyard was already a large-scale enterprise, while the newly established technical university turned Gdańsk into an important centre of science and innovation. However, once these modernisation projects became part of authoritarian and imperial politics, they brought Europe no good. Instead of peace, they contributed to war. During the First World War the imperial shipyard in Gdańsk was indeed an important producer of weapons.

Once the war was over and the German Empire collapsed, the shipyard's premises became an issue of international dispute regarding the post-war order. The victorious states decided that its ownership should be split between four states: Poland, Germany, Great Britain and France. By turning the shipyard into an international enterprise, they wanted to deprive it of the role it played in the German industry.

Although the First World War had come to an end and new states, Poland included, had gained independence, peace did not reign on the European continent

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The historical gate to the Gdańsk Shipyard, where in August 1980 the Gdańsk Accords were signed and Solidarity was born. In the background is the European Solidarity Centre which opened in August 2014 and has linked together all the historical monuments that are located in Solidarity Square and its vicinity.

for too long. Growing nationalisms, border disputes and economic crises halted democratic developments, giving birth to fascist and communist totalitarianisms. The Polish-German conflict over Gdańsk served as an easy trigger for a new military conflict on the European continent. It also did not take long before the Gdańsk Shipyard was, once again, turned into a weapons factory. It operated in this manner during the Second World War, brutally exploiting the prisoners of the Stutthof concentration camp and forced labourers. Therefore, during this period the operations of the shipyard showed a certain paradox: the enterprise was both a centre for the development of new technologies, including modern submarines, and a place where the Third Reich committed hideous crimes.

The more contemporary history of the shipyard thus shows a surprising turn. Namely, from a place which was used for war and authoritarian purposes, first by the emperor, then by the Nazis and the communists, it eventually turned into the birth site of Solidarity, which was one of the largest non-violent movements of our time. Thus, when in the summer of 1980 the shipyard workers put forward their demands, they were not only asking for better working and living conditions, but also showed that they had the courage to start building a new political culture in that place. This would be based on co-operation and respect for human dignity. As a result, the workers would break away from a century of exploitation that took place at the shipyard, an enterprise which only served those in power. All told, by

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starting the democratic revolution in Gdańsk, the shipyard workers said "no" to the communist authorities and all other systems which do not respect human rights.

Refolution

In recent years, Polish collective memory has become too focused on the military traditions of freedom and independence fighters. This approach overlooks the thinking and achievements of the 1970s and 1980s, which were the result of peaceful movements focused on long-term positive change. Such beliefs were yet a shared philosophy of at least two generations: the first Polish post-war-generation who experienced the bloody crushing of the 1970 riots and the older generation who had gone through the hell of the Second World War.

By opting for non-violence, the ten-million-strong Solidarity movement chose a difficult, but in the end effective, path. The British historian Timothy Garton Ash called it a "refolution". By this term he meant a political and economic system transformation that combines step by step reforms with aspects of a revolution. Ash was right in his observations; in the beginning the democratic opposition did not question the state monopoly of the communist authorities. It questioned the monopoly of labour force representation and thus created its own independent trade union.

When confronted with the non-violent opposition, the communists found it difficult to justify the use of force.

Non-violent means can also prove effective in the process of challenging the moral legitimacy of authoritarian systems. When confronted with the non-violent opposition, the communists found it difficult to justify the use of force. Thus in December 1981 they brutally crushed social resistance by introducing martial law. This decision, however, led to the victory of the democratic forces in the long term. By putting thousands of Solidarity activists in prison and depriving tens of thousands of people of their income and employment, the communists only strengthened the Solidarity myth and gave it a new moral authority.

Most importantly, unlike military uprisings and guerrilla warfare, non-violent movements generate greater support and solidarity among the international public. Even if military actions are freedom and independence oriented, they often only attract attention for a little bit. With time, people start fearing further escalation of the conflict and become reluctant to provide direct assistance. That is why the world became so fascinated with the Polish Solidarity movement and continued to organise support actions for those who were opposing communism. This allowed the Polish activists to openly articulate the need for system change and

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demand respect for human rights. Their strategy of gradual reforms appeared to be well matched with the need for stability in the world.

This method, but also the great amount of diversity within the movement, explains why Solidarność was admired by many different groups worldwide. They included politicians, trade unionists, journalists and intellectuals of different political views. We can thus say that the movement not only organised and emboldened millions of Poles but also lessened the ideological and emotional distance between citizens of the democratic world.

Recognising these features, Aleksander Smolar, a well-known Polish intellectual and former dissident, described the change that took place in Poland in the 1980s as an "anti-revolution". By this term he meant an anti-system protest with no ambition to turn utopia into reality. Smolar coined his term by modifying the phrase "anti-politics", which was first discussed in the 1980s. Its creator was the Hungarian former oppositionist and writer György Konrád. He pointed out that the democratic opposition to the communist authorities did not truly aspire to take over because it had already been legitimised thanks to its moral and cultural authority.

The shipyard in the centre

Looking at Gdańsk from the roof terrace of the European Solidarity Centre, I often ask myself to what extent the city's topography influenced the course of its history. The area of the historical Gdańsk Shipyard is located in the city centre. It takes only a few minutes on foot to get to Solidarity Square from the central railway station. Such an arrangement is, however, quite unusual for a historical Central European city with a medieval structure. Namely, while in most cities industrial areas are located on the outskirts, in Gdańsk it is the opposite. As a result, the centre and the shipyard spatially overlap and influence one another.

The unique location of the shipyard surely contributed to the emergence of the political *agora* in Gdańsk. For the city, this has proven to be both an asset and an opportunity. However, it can also be a challenge, especially when it comes to the issue of the preservation of the shipyard's heritage. For over two decades now the historical area of the shipyard has not been used for industrial purposes. This does not mean that the industry completely disappeared from Gdańsk; it is just now located further away from the centre. The Remontowa Shipyard Holding, for instance, which opened 70 years ago, is located on Ostrów Island. With eight thousand people employed it is one of the largest shipyards in Europe today.

Today, the historical buildings and the area that once belonged to the shipyard near the European Solidarity Centre are in the possession of private Polish or Eu-

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ropean firms, which are now planning to build on it offices, residential and service buildings. This area, however, is also very attractive to many artists and young people who see it as an unconventional and inspiring location.

The history of the Solidarity movement and the historical Gdańsk Shipyard is documented at the permanent exhibition of the European Solidarity Centre (ECS). In addition, on July 15th 2022, a new temporary exhibition presenting over 170 years of history of the shipyard industry was opened at ECS. Titled "Shipyard. Man. Industry. City.", it is the first comprehensive presentation of the history of the modern ship industry in Gdańsk, its impact on the social and political history of Europe and the role that politics played with regards to this industry and vice versa.

By renovating the historical BHP Hall of the former Gdańsk Lenin Shipyard, where in August 1980 the Gdańsk Accords were signed and Solidarity was born, the trade union NSZZ Solidarność has conserved one of the most important sites of Poland's history. The opening of the European Solidarity Centre, in turn, in August 2014 has linked together all the historical monuments that are located in Solidarity Square and its vicinity for the future. In addition to being a museum of Solidarność and other freedom movements in the region, ECS is an educational institution and a contemporary public *agora*. In its building numerous conferences and events are held. During these gatherings important discussions are organised to reflect on the current and future state of democracy. Through these and other activities aimed at implementing its mission, the European Solidarity Centre remains faithful to the ideal of human rights as the foundation of political development, in Poland and Europe.

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The unfin(n)ished story of the Baltic alliance

GRZEGORZ SZYMBORSKI

From the region's perspective, the 1922 Warsaw Accord between Estonia, Finland, Latvia and Poland was a significant step in strengthening geopolitical interests and safeguarding against Russian aggression. Unfortunately, the agreement ultimately failed. This year's ratification by Finland's parliament of its application to join NATO can be seen as a final step in this process that began over 100 years ago.

The most promising and – to a certain degree – surprising declaration made by Finland on its interest in joining the NATO Alliance immediately reminded me of the so-called Warsaw Accord. This treaty was drafted 100 years ago on March 17th 1922 and embodied the initiative of a Baltic alliance between Estonia, Finland, Latvia and Poland. Anti-Soviet in nature, co-operation ultimately failed due to reservations expressed by Helsinki. In the summer of 1922 the Finnish parliament – *Eduskunta* – decided not to ratify the pact. A century later, on May 17th 2022, 188 out of 200 Finnish MPs voted on accession to NATO. The story has come full circle. A story which deserves to be told.

Roots of the alliance

When speaking of the Baltic alliance, one may think of the Baltic Entente, originally forged by the three Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in 1934. Although to some extent it expressed the idea of a covenant in the Baltic Sea region,

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it was far less spectacular than the concepts that were put on the table shortly after the First World War. It was actually the remains of a once ambitious project. The Baltic alliance was meant to unite the newly established states of Eastern Europe.

The question of co-operation arose around the struggles for independence undertaken by the former subjects to the tsars, now fighting back the Bolsheviks. Obviously enough, it was Warsaw which advocated for the anti-Bolshevik entente at the time these states were still at war with Soviet Russia throughout 1920. Poland counted on Finland's support which was provided by its foreign minister – Rudolf Holsti. At the time of his term, Helsinki was at war with Moscow and faced a threat of a new conflict in early 1922. According to Estonian historian Raimo Pullat, Holsti was reluctant to pursue co-operation with Germany, which was surprising considering the general pro-German attitude of his countrymen.

At the same time, Finland's relations with Sweden deteriorated in the early 1920s due to a dispute over the Aland Islands. This was finally resolved in early 1922, but not forgotten. Harsh feelings towards Sweden made Finland temporarily look eastwards to co-operation with the Baltic states and Poland in particular.

It was in September and October 1919 that the three Baltic states' representatives met at several initial working conferences in Riga, Tallinn and Tartu. Finland joined the consultations and agreed on organising the summit in its capital city. It was also in late 1919 that Helsinki was ready to open negotiations with Warsaw. At that time, Warsaw remained not so focused on such an idea. Poland's leader Marshal Józef Piłsudski hoped to create a federated bloc with Belarus and Ukraine, not necessarily an alliance with small states such as Latvia and Estonia.

Finland hosted the first big conference between January 15th and 22nd 1920 with Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian and Polish representations. Latvian historian Alberts Varslavans claimed that the summit in Helsinki in January 1920 was "the first practical step in the formation of a Baltic Alliance". The Polish delegate was instructed to call for a joint peace of all states against the Soviets. Estonia did not wish to do so, as it was at that time close to reaching its own agreement with Moscow.

The agenda was composed of the idea of a political and military covenant, along with a joint outlook towards Soviet Russia. According to Raimo Pullat, Finland and Estonia advocated for peaceful coexistence, while Poland still pushed for confrontation with Moscow. Helsiniki did not share Warsaw's scepticism towards Berlin and did not wish to take part in any projects oriented on expansion. According to the first Finnish President Kaarlo Ståhlberg, except for Eastern Karelia, Finland was satisfied with its territorial status. Helsinki did not wish to join any strict military alliance but to think of development, whilst Warsaw dreamed of greatness and a self-declared, bold approach towards both Berlin and the Moscow. At the same time, Lithuanians accused Poles of aggression as it claimed its rights over

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Vilnius. As the result of bilateral tensions, only some of the future summits could take place with both representatives of Lithuania and Poland on board. The Helsinki conference turned out to be fruitless but not pointless. The idea of the Baltic alliance was not left behind.

Too many obstacles

In March 1920, several meetings with Latvian and Finnish delegates took place in Warsaw. A Romanian representation was also invited as Poland still focused mainly on its war with Soviet Russia and the military effort was the main driver for Warsaw's interest in the Baltic area. However, all efforts for joint action, or a military convention, failed. The number of meetings organised throughout 1920–24 was substantial, although only two of them concluded with some drafts or alleged results worthy of recognition. The first was a conference of the Baltic states, which took place in August and September 1920 in Bulduri, Latvia. As the result of Poland's regional policy goals, representatives of the Ukrainian People's Republic also attended that summit. However, this was more symbolic than anything else.

Polish historian and diplomat Jarosław Suchoples claimed "that the most important event during the month-long Bulduri conference was the conclusion (August 31st 1920) of a political agreement. The contracting parties agreed that it would be necessary to sign a military alliance in the future." Unfortunately, too many obstacles between the states prevented them from tied co-operation and ratification of the treaty. The main difficulty was the Polish seizure of Vilnius on October 9th 1920. According to Suchoples, the Bulduri agreement's fate was sealed with this event. This disappointing outcome was also noted by other historians. For Alberts Varslavans, "the first stage of the attempt to create a Baltic Alliance ended with the Bulduri conference. The goal of uniting the five countries – Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland – into an anti-Soviet bloc was doomed to failure." Latvian historian Edgar Anderson claimed that the meeting "provided the greatest opportunity for forming a regional diplomatic, economic, and military Alliance, [but] was destroyed by Poland's subsequent seizure of Vilnius".

The Helsinki conference turned out to be fruitless but not pointless.

Throughout 1921 conferences were again convened on multiple occasions. These occurred at a time when Poland was interested in co-operation after the Treaty of Riga on March 18th 1921 and the failure of the federation concept. Warsaw subsequently sought other paths to security. This is why co-operation with

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the northern countries seemed promising. Yet, all of the summits resulted in very little. The whole concept of the Baltic alliance was not only discussed between the negotiating parties, but also closely observed in European capitals. The involvement of the United Kingdom and France should be noted to embrace a wider view. According to Varslavans, London's aim was to preserve the balance of power in Europe. In order to achieve this, it wished to unite the Baltic states under the British economic banner. Paris, on the other hand, used Warsaw as its agent to strengthen French influence in the north. The original Helsinki meeting in January 1920 attracted British attention, while the French were afraid of creating any sort of anti-Soviet bloc, meaning de facto recognition of the Bolshevik state. Following the failure of the first conference and the Polish fixation on war with the Soviets, the UK no longer included Warsaw in its plans. It was now willing to create a bloc of the Baltic states excluding Poland.

Great Britain focused on an alliance of the three Baltic states and its economic goals shared by Latvia and Estonia – both dependent on the UK due to their debts. London and Moscow looked for economic rapprochement and the Baltic states were pleased to serve as a bridge between these countries. Riga and Tallinn's economies had to rely on this transfer role in the 1920s. In order to achieve this goal, London and Moscow signed a trade agreement on March 16th 1921. With Latvia increasingly falling into the British sphere of influence throughout 1921, Riga's attitude towards Warsaw also deteriorated. Prime Minister Zigfrīds Meierovics acted harshly towards Poland, fearing that after the seizure of Vilnius it could go after six disputed counties in Latgale. As the result of the deterioration of Latvian-Polish relations in the second half of 1921, some summits took place without Poland.

Soviet Russia was obviously alarmed about any treaties which were even indirectly turned against Moscow.

Meanwhile, Soviet Russia was obviously alarmed about any treaties which were even indirectly turned against Moscow. It was interested in the same goals as the UK, primarily international trade. The Soviets also expressed wishes for a future league of the three Baltic states. Maxim Litvinov, the Soviet envoy to Estonia, declared in the summer of 1921 that Moscow had no concerns regarding the Baltic entente as long as Poland is excluded from the project. Between October 28th and 31st 1921 a special trade conference in Helsinki took place with Russia and the Baltic states. Economic interest prevailed over political goals. For obvious reasons, the Polish delegation was absent. Such initiatives proved that Polish influence was beginning to decrease. For Warsaw, the league of the three Baltic states without Poland would mean a bridge between Germany and Soviet Russia and an increase of a threat from the north.

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A new opening

International turmoil arising from the Eastern Karelian uprising in the autumn of 1921 resurrected the idea of a Baltic alliance turned against Moscow. This borderland of Soviet Russia, even though throughout history never within the Grand Duchy of Finland, revolted against Moscow and looked for Helsinki's support. The possibility of a new Finnish-Soviet war led to rapprochement between Riga and Warsaw.

The last British-oriented conference – excluding Poland – took place on December 16th 1921 in Tallinn. Thanks to Holsti, this economic forum was forced to deal with political issues. Two topics were discussed among the participants: the Baltic alliance and the Vilnius question. According to Polish historian Andrzej Skrzypek, Finland's interest in Eastern Karelia was recognised by the Baltic states. Estonia and Finland wished to cooperate with Poland on this matter. After an initial setback caused by the Latvian delegation, it agreed to invite Polish representatives for future summits. Tallinn and Helsinki called for military co-operation. In late January 1922 Finnish President Kaarlo Ståhlberg entrusted Rudolf Holsti with opening negotiations with Poland, willing also to expand the format by including the Baltic states.

Early 1922 resulted in other important factors that shed light on the international situation. On January 9th parliamentary elections for the local Vilnius parliament took place. As the result of a boycott by Lithuanians, the vast majority of MPs elected soon called Poland to incorporate the Republic of Central Lithuania. Approved or not, the final word of Poland on the Vilnius question made the situation clearer than ever before. At the same time, the western powers intended to organise a summit on economic issues with Soviet Russia. Now threatened with a rapprochement between Western Europe and Moscow, the smaller states of Eastern Europe had to act quickly. Under these circumstances Poland called for a meeting in Warsaw. The Polish General Staff saw the Baltic states as potential key allies, with Estonia, Finland and Latvia maintaining as much as half of all Polish troops mobilised in time of war.

The Warsaw conference held between March 13th and 17th 1922 resulted in the signing of the Warsaw Accord between Estonia, Finland, Latvia and Poland and indicated a surprising turn of events that disappeared just as quickly. The question of a military pact was not officially put on the agenda. No one expected such an agreement to be the outcome of the summit. Only Estonia counted on some political understanding. Nevertheless, the treaty was signed on March 17th 1922. In fact, the direct course of events leading to the signing of the treaty remains a mystery. It is only known that the conference participants were hosted at some

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point by Józef Piłsudski. The many issues discussed included banning the signing of treaties threatening the contracting parties, the protection of national minorities and the willingness to sign consular and trade agreements. A vague formula related to a collective security mechanism was also hidden within Article 7. This stipulated that in the case of an unexpected attack on an allied state, the other countries would adopt a benevolent attitude towards the victim of such aggression and discuss further steps.

Estonian historian Magnus Ilmjärv wrote that "this agreement clearly meant the political readiness for co-operation in case of a threat." However, even Article 7 was not what Helsinki and Tallinn expected – a military pact. The Warsaw Accord was ratified by Latvia (March 31st), Estonia (April 6th) and Poland (May 10th). Meanwhile, Finland procrastinated, having the dispute over Eastern Karelia resolved only four days after signing the Warsaw Accord.

Ultimate failure

The Soviets were by no means impressed by the Warsaw Accord. It put in jeopardy the peace achieved after the uprising in Karelia and the subsequent agreement with Finland. The peace was Helsinki's ultimate goal, far more valuable than the treaty signed prior to the Moscow agreement. Apart from the Finnish question, Moscow continued its attempts of rapprochement with the Baltic states, inviting them, as well as Poland, to a joint conference that took place in Riga. As a result, Estonia, Latvia and Poland promised to lobby for de jure recognition of Soviet Russia in return for the confirmation of peace treaties. On June 12th Moscow called for a conference with the Baltic states and Poland on demilitarisation.

But it was not in Moscow or secret cabinets where the fate of the alliance was ultimately doomed, but the Finnish parliament. After reaching agreement over Eastern Karelia, Helsinki lost its vigorous spirit. Both the Finnish right-wing parties and social democrats thought that the alliance would function not only against the Soviets, but Germans as well. According to Magnus Ilmjärv, the Finns were afraid that in the case of a German-Polish war, they would be forced to support Warsaw. Finland's reluctance and the Polish-Lithuanian dispute were the main obstacles to the bloc.

Rudolf Holsti was forced to leave his post on May 13th, and the whole cabinet was changed on June 2nd 1922. The parliament actually never voted on the ratification of the treaty. It postponed relevant discussions until autumn 1922 but the topic was never again put on the agenda. After new parliamentary elections, Helsinki diplomatically informed its counterparts on August 18th 1922 that it will

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refrain from ratification. Considering the international context, we also have to bear in mind the specific issues facing Finland's parliaments in the 1920s, which suffered from the same disadvantages faced by others including Poland. According to Finnish historian Seppo Hentilä, only two out of the country's thirteen governments were majority-based.

Competition rather than collaboration

Alberts Varslavans admitted that "the Warsaw conference of four states in March 1922 once again proved the impossibility of creating an overt military anti-Soviet bloc of the Baltic states. The divergence of interests between France and Poland on the one hand, and the smaller states on the other, undermined the effectiveness of the military agreement signed at the conference, which was composed in vague and general terms … the failure of this second stage in the Baltic region signified a setback for France's policy in the Baltic region and, consequently, a further increase of Britain's influence." Historian Magnus Ilmjärv argued that this event turned out to be the climax of the Baltic alliance dream even though the conferences continued. The British approach prevailed and following the failure of the Warsaw Accord various economic forums were called – one took place in Helsinki in March 5th 1923 and another between July 9th and 11th in Riga. Further unsuccessful attempts at co-operation continued until 1924. With the Treaty of Locarno signed, the new international situation changed the optics of the *cordon sanitaire*. Germany became the main anti-Soviet power for Britain to the extent that it did not want to offer any guarantees to the Eastern European states.

The young states, competitive in many ways, could not reach rapprochement in the first years after their creation.

The young states, competitive in many ways, could not reach rapprochement in the first years after their creation. Too many contradicting elements ultimately doomed the ambitious and far-reaching project. The only visible result of the talks was the Latvian-Estonian agreement reached on November 1st 1923, which was signed against the newly formed Soviet Union. The fact that the only outcome of this great dream was a mere bilateral treaty of two neighbours only proves how difficult it was to reach any sort of consent and approval.

"One should also add", claimed Edgar Anderson, "the fierce nationalism and pride in undulated independence too, were formidable obstacles to meaningful co-operation of the Baltic states. Economically they were competitors rather than collaborators. Still, largely strangers to one another, the Baltic states had no close

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cultural contacts." British and French rivalry, Lithuania and Poland's dispute over Vilnius, the unwillingness of Estonia and Latvia to be dominated by Poland, the potential German-Lithuanian dispute over Memel, Tallinn and Riga's indebtedness to the UK and Finland's aversion to conflict – this international net of unresolved and obstructive issues led to the failure of the Baltic alliance. The more this failure is disappointing, however, the more welcome and encouraging the current turn of events should be in this region. All three Baltic states, Poland and Ukraine are now praising Finland for finishing what was once initiated in Helsinki a century ago.

Grzegorz Szymborski is a diplomatic trainee at the Diplomatic Academy of the MFA of the Republic of Poland, graduate of the College of Europe in Natolin (Poland) and the Faculty of Law and Administration at the University of Warsaw. He is also the author of 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 interwencji rosyjskiej 1764 roku* (2020).

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GDAŃSK

IT HAPPENED IN GDAŃSK

MACIEJ BUCZKOWSKI

The Mayor of Gdańsk – Aleksandra Dulkiewicz – summarised the effects of the programme with the following words: "I am happy that so many couples could fulfil their parenthood dream, and take advantage of this project. I am happy that you are happy".

In Gdańsk in vitro procreation has been subsidised since 2017. In 2020, as a reaction to the decision of the Polish government to stop financing in vitro programmes, the Gdańsk City Council decided to prolong its own programme until 2025. Altogether the budget of this programme is around 8.6 million Polish zlotys.

566 – this is the number of children who were born thanks to Gdańsk's in vitro programme

The programme consists of three parts. It includes an educational module which is directed mainly at secondary school pupils. This part is in no way connected with other modules and participation in this part of the progamme requires written consent from the pupils' legal guardians. The second element includes psychological support. Its beneficiaries are couples that are dealing with infertility issues as well as their close family members. The third module includes medical assistance – it offers financing for in vitro procedures.

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In early July 2022 the list of important sites in Gdańsk was expanded by one place: the Square of Heroic Mariupol

Located near the General Consulate of the Russian Federation it was instituted by the decision of the Gdańsk City Council already in April of this year. At the opening ceremony of the square, the chairwoman of Gdańsk's council – Agnieszka Owczarczak – said the following words: "This dynamically developing city [of Mariupol] was turned by Russians into ruins. They systematically destroyed its buildings, one by one, regardless of whether they were military or civil facilities."

Gdańsk's mayor, in turn, brought up the long and fruitful co-operation between Gdańsk and its Ukrainian partner: "(…) Mariupol was always presented as an example of change that was possible in Ukraine. A place where local democracy was developing, clear and transparent procedures were in place, corruption was being eliminated, and foreign investment flowing in. Today each of us can see online photos what this city looks like now and how brutally it was attacked and how brutally it is still being destroyed by the Russians."

Gdańsk and Mariupol have been connected by friendship ties since 2014. In 2017, joining forces with our partner – the European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA) – we opened a Local Democracy Agency in Mariupol. We thus contributed to building of the local civil society and encouraged greater civic participation and civic activism.

Russia's aggression in Ukraine stopped this process, for a short moment. The evil deeds that Russia commits in Ukraine have yet generated a lot of positive energy, power and determination in Europe. We, Poles, want to lead the discussion both on the emergency assistance to our Ukrainian neighbours and friends as well as the planning of specific activities aimed at Ukraine's reconstruction. Evidently, the former will not be limited to infrastructure only and include also the aspect of human development.

We are strong supporters of Ukraine's joining the European community of values. There needs to be a place for Ukraine in the European Union. That is why, we welcomed with great joy the decision to award Ukraine with the EU candidate state status. This is a windy road and Ukrainians have still much to do, as much as will have to EU member states.

The EU also needs to change to meet the current challenges and become immune to the threats that the future may bring along. In the name of our shared

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European responsibility for brining Mariupol's old glory, we signed – together with the City of Warsaw – a call "Mariupol – the Phoenix City". It is our shared expression of faith, because "Life needs hope that comes from friendship". We also state that "Today in the face of an unimaginable catastrophe which had been caused by Russia's aggression against the free and independent Ukraine, whose embodiment is the destruction of Mariupol, on behalf of the community of Polish cities we declare our readiness to support the activities aimed at rebuilding a new, modern, wealthy, and full of life and hope Mariupol".

The Mayor of Warsaw, Rafał Trzaskowski, who is one of the signatories of this call, took part in the Gdańsk event. He then said the following: "We not only want to help here and now, which we are doing, but we also want to help in the rebuilding in the independent and strong Ukraine. For us Mariupol will always remain a symbol. This is indeed a hero city and we will always remember about it. Slava Ukraini, Slava Mariupolu".

A group of Israeli guides visited Gdańsk

The Mayor of Gdańsk took part in a Sabbath meeting with guides responsible for the organisation of educational trips of Israeli youth to Poland. During these trips, which are part of the obligatory school curriculum in Israel, the youth visit the places of the extermination of the Jewish nation that the Germans were carrying out in our country. The Mayor of Gdańsk remarked that "the guests are thrilled to discover the City of Gdańsk, its diversity and interesting, but also complex history".

The mayor successfully convinced the guides to expand their tour programme by such unique places as the European Solidarity Centre in Gdańsk. We would like this place and the spirit of solidarity which it cultivates and further develops to become a source of inspiration and hope for a peaceful and non-violent "fight" for freedom and democracy.

US Ambassador's visit to Gdańsk

Mark Brzeziński is the son of the late Zbigniew Brzeziński, the National Security Advisor to US President Jimmy Carter (1977–1981). Zbigniew Brzeziński's contribution to the tearing down of the Iron Curtain was recognised also in Gdańsk where he was awarded the title of the Honorary Citizen of the City of Gdańsk.

On August 9th 2022 Mark Brzeziński, as the US Ambassador to Poland, paid his first visit to our city – the City of Freedom and Solidarity. The Ambassador visited the European Solidarity Centre where he toured the permanent exhibition, met with Mayor Dulkiewicz and laid flowers at the Monument of the Defenders of the Polish Postal Office in Gdańsk. He also met with some media representatives and visited the American Corner Gdańsk (a branch of the regional and city public library).

During his visit the ambassador mentioned that Gdańsk always had a special place in his parents' hearts. They felt great respect towards the people of Gdańsk who had the courage to

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fight for freedom and democracy. The Ambassador's mother Emily Brzezinski, who had passed away recently (July 22nd 2022) paid a visit to our city in 2013 to open her exhibit "Family Trees" at the Günter Grass Gallery. During this trip she was accompanied by her husband – Zbigniew Brzeziński. The Mayor of Gdańsk thus gifted the Ambassador with a photo from that visit.

When touring the permanent exhibit at the European Solidarity Centre, the US Ambassador found many places that were connected with his father's activities and work. He was extremely impressed with the exhibition and stated that every one of the ten thousand US soldiers who are now stationed in Poland should see this exhibit to understand what it is to fight for freedom, solidarity and democracy. The American presence in Poland is also meant to protect, together with Poles, this gained democracy, solidarity and freedom. "Today Ukrainians are fighting for this freedom, while the Poles – with their engagement in helping them – have become an example and heroes for the Americans".

When talking about the support that was provided to Ukrainian refugees the Ambassador stated that the Poles and the people of Gdańsk are real heroes in this regards. Their respect for democracy and love for freedom is especially seen now, when Poles are helping the victims of war in Ukraine. The Ambassador then called them the heroes of today's world.

On the second anniversary of the forged presidential elections in Belarus a March of Freedom for Belarusians took place in Gdańsk

The event was organised by the Belarusian Cultural Association "Chatka" and it was meant to show discontent with Alyaksandr Lukashenka's regime. The protesters also showed their solidarity and support to political prisoners and all victims of the Belarusian regime.

Time has proven that the resources that are at the disposal of the Belarusian society are not enough in face of the brutality of the determined dictator who is still enjoying Moscow's support. This calls for an even greater solidarity and readiness from the international community to help Belarus. It is our duty to support the victims of the regime and build coalitions of good-willed people who are working towards change in Belarus. Civic education is one of the tools to build European awareness among Belarusians and as a result bring Belarus closer to the democratic world.

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We cannot be indifferent! We need to protest, support, and inform others that fundamental human rights are being breached in Belarus. Let us help those who need our help and let us not leave them alone.

Gdańsk supports its numerous Belarusian diaspora, as well as artists and independent Belarusian activists, who often visit us and participate in our city's life. Our Belarusian community has been on the increase. Thousands of Belarusians have found their new home here. They live here, work and engage in social life. The Belarusian Cultural Society "Chatka" has also been intensely active in organizing concerts, literary meetings, thematic walks in Gdańsk, free Polish language courses, solidarity actions and much more.

From July 23rd to August 14th the traditional St. Dominic's Fair was held in Gdańsk

This was the 762nd edition of this great open-air trade event. This fair was established in 1260 by the decree of Pope Alexander IV. By this decision the Pope granted the Dominican order with the privilege to organize the fair. That is why, until today the patron of the event is St Dominic.

The current format of the fair derives from medieval traditions, that is trade and entertainment. Every year the fair attracts a greater number of artisans, artists, and collectors while the trade that takes place there is accompanied by a developed cultural programme.

The event is attractive for visitors and artisans not only from Poland. This year, we had many traders from such countries as Denmark, Sweden, Lithuania and Estonia. Thus, in the Old Town area, over

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700 trade stands were set up. While this number is smaller than in 2019 when on Gdańsk streets we had over 1,100 trade stands and seven million people visited our St Dominic's Fair, we should be happy that after the coronavirus pandemic, we can be enjoying this fair together more safely and numerously with visitors from all over the world.

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

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

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The operator of the place is the Wrocław Center for Social Development.
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WroMigrant is runned by the Wrocław Center for Social Development within the scope of the Strategy For Intercultural Dialogue in Wrocław (2018-2022).

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Wrocław the meeting place

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Legacy of German Reunification

A view from the neighbours

The reunification of Germany has been a key event in recent European history. It is also a turning point in the construction of the European Union and the democratic transition in Central and Eastern Europe. German unity may seem obvious today – especially for young generations – but in 1990, the prospect of a reunification between East and West Germany aroused strong reactions from its neighbours. The difficult historical relations of Germany with these countries have also played a role. As such, German reunification presented an immense challenge for the entire European continent.

To address this issue, a special project was launched last year called – rEUnify. The aim is to put into practice an exchange of ideas on the current significance of German reunification in European neighbouring countries such as the Netherlands, Poland, France and the Czech Republic. A series of debates took place in all of countries of the participating institutions and included historical witnesses, local citizens and students in the discussion.

Participating institutions included the Jan Nowak-Jeziorański College of Eastern Europe in Wrocław (PL), University of Groningen (NL), Euro-Créative (FR), Europeaum (CZ) and the Institute for European Politics (DE).

In this special section of *New Eastern Europe*, we present the different national perspectives as a summary of the debates for a wider audience. They look not only at the challenges of the early 1990s, but also put the debates into today's complicated political and geopolitical context.

rEUnify

Co-funded by the Europe for Citizens Programme of the European Union

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From a fractious to uneventful relationship with the reluctant hegemon

German reunification from the Czech perspective

TEREZA NOVOTNÁ AND VÍT HAVELKA

Czech-German bilateral relations have become stable and rather uneventful. Since the fractious debates of the 1990s on past injustices, diplomats of both countries have sought to find a robust common topic for discussion. Even though Prague is viewed by Berlin as a more or less unproblematic partner that oscillates within the desired margins of German foreign policy, Germany would prefer that Czechia presents clearer positions on grand European and global debates.

When Germany commemorated the 31st anniversary of its reunification on October 3rd 2021, not that many people paid much attention. Despite the pandemic conditions, large outdoor festivities took place a year before to celebrate three decades of unified Germany. In contrast, the 31st birthday of the country was barely noticed. Among foreign dignitaries, South Korean Minister of Unification Lee In-young, a regular to the reunification events, was the most prominent overseas guest who attended the ceremony in the East German city of Halle last year.

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Yet the celebrations in the capital of Saxony-Anhalt were indeed quite special for a very specific reason: it was the last occasion for outgoing Chancellor Angela Merkel to give a big speech in front of her fellow Germans after 16 years at the helm of the unified state. Merkel did not disappoint. Her 18-minute-long address offered a thoroughly personal and touching reflection on her experiences as an "Easterner" in unified Germany. She took aim at an author of an article outlining the history of the CDU party, who called her East German background a "ballast". A few minutes later, she criticised another journalist who called her a German and European that was not born to be one but had to "learn" her German and European "citizen-ness". She then asked if there are two kinds of Germans and Europeans – the original ones and those who have to prove their affiliation every day.

In Czechia the 31st anniversary of Germany's reunification did not attract any great interest either. Czech President Miloš Zeman was confined to his residence due to his ill health at that time, while Prime Minister Andrej Babiš devoted the October Sunday to campaigning ahead of crucial parliamentary elections less than a week later. The 2021 commemorations of German reunification were nonetheless illustrative of two other broader aspects. Firstly, the Czechs – as well as most of their neighbours – are no longer concerned about the size of the "reluctant hegemon" in the midst of Europe. Since the 1990s the Czech bilateral relationship with unified Germany has been transformed from fractious to uneventful but with a vital bond. Secondly, it is now further afield in Korea, where politicians, academics and citizens look up to Germany for inspiration. This also concerns any dissuading lessons on how (not) to go about unifying two countries.

No reunification without the Czech (and Hungarian) contribution?

As Joachim Gauck, a leading East German activist and former German president once put it, "before the [German] unity, there was freedom." In other words, before any efforts to unify the country could come to fruition, there had to be East Germans who would start the fight for their rights and liberties within the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). In brief, the process of reunification began with the process of democratisation. The tearing down of the Berlin Wall on the night of November 9th 1989 has become an iconic symbol of the downfall of the East German state and the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe. Yet in many respects it was the culmination rather than the beginning of the democratisation process in the GDR (and CEE).

One can identify various other moments when the domestic situation in East Germany started changing before the system's collapse. These include the peace-

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Photo: Lubomir Kotek / Courtesy of the European Commission

Young Czechoslovak students gather during a protest rally at Wenceslas Square in Prague. Less than ten days after the East Germans dismantled the wall in the midst of Berlin, the Czechs found themselves busy with their own peaceful Velvet Revolution on November 17th 1989 and transition to democracy.

ful demonstrations in Leipzig and other East German cities in September 1989, the visit of Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to the GDR for its 40th anniversary on October 7th, and the big rally on Alexanderplatz on November 4th. The mass pressure on the East German leadership to allow free travel to West Germany, which ultimately resulted in the opening up of the Berlin Wall, nonetheless started in Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

In the spring of 1989 the Hungarian authorities began to dismantle a fence between Hungary and Austria with the goal of allowing Hungarian citizens to cross the border to buy better goods and services. The barbed wire was completely removed with a fence cutting ceremony on June 27th and the Hungarian border to Austria was fully opened on September 11th. Thousands of East Germans who watched these events via West German television decided to take their chance and went to the border in the hope of being let out. By the time that the Berlin Wall fell, more than 50,000 East Germans had fled to the West through this escape route.

Another large exodus took place via the West German embassy in Prague. By the end of September 1989, the embassy's Lobkowicz Palace hosted on its premises about 4,000 or 5,000 East Germans who had tried to reach Hungary but were stopped on their way. Negotiations that helped solve the East German refugee crisis were held on the margins of the UN General Assembly in New York. In the

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end, the decision was taken to let the East Germans leave for their West German neighbour. However, they would have to travel through GDR territory in order to be officially "expelled". West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher personally announced the news of free passage to cheering crowds of his Eastern compatriots from the balcony of the Lobkowicz Palace on September 30th.

The first train carrying East German refugees departed from Prague via Dresden that same evening and arrived at the Bavarian border town of Hof within several hours. Nonetheless, the free passage to West Germany functioned as a "pull factor" and a new wave of several thousand East German refugees arrived shortly to Prague's embassy and nearby areas. Another train transport was therefore organised for October 4th and 5th, while a fresh migration wave was temporarily halted by introducing visas for East Germans who wanted to visit Czechoslovakia. Yet the visa duty lasted less than a month and, on November 1st, the GDR government allowed free travel to West Germany for anyone who wished to pass through Prague without having to undergo the detour via East Germany. As a result, up to 20,000 East Germans fled to West Germany, whereas Czechia became the key changing station on their way to freedom.

The East German exodus may have also encouraged Czech citizens to start thinking about their own struggle for liberty.

The dramatic episode at the West German embassy in Prague was the first direct encounter for the Czechs with the unfolding events in the GDR that led to the fall of the Iron Curtain and, ultimately, the reunification of Germany. The East German exodus may have also encouraged some Czech citizens to start thinking about their own struggle for liberty and better living conditions. After all, the Czechs were confronted with many "Trabi" and "Wartburg" cars that were abandoned around Prague by the fleeing East Germans – a relative luxury good for many of Prague's inhabitants. The German federal authorities have always been very grateful for Czechia's assistance with the East German refugee flows and for serving as a transit country. A lively commemoration of the summer 1989 events took place thirty years later in September 2019, when the Lobkowicz Palace opened its gates once again and about 6,000 visitors participated in the "Road to Freedom" festival organised by the German ambassador to Czechia.

Nonetheless, it is a bit of an astounding paradox that, at the time of writing, the Czechs – both politicians and the public – are much less welcoming and accommodating to the new waves of refugees from the Middle East and Africa who want to use Czechia as a transit country to flee from oppression and economic hardships to the "West". Similarly, Hungary is now building – rather than cutting – a barbed-wire fence to prevent refugees from travelling through its borders. Despite

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this, it is no exaggeration to say that without the Czech help, the road to German reunification may have developed quite differently.

East and West German views of reunification

One of the authors of this essay has previously argued that German reunification and the Eastern enlargement of the EU (including Czechia) illustrate two ways how countries and regions can undertake a unification. This involves transplantation and adaptation models of political integration respectively. To go into detail about both theoretical models as well as the two case studies would require at least another article. Here it suffices to say that once the prelude of democratisation driven by the East German masses (ending with the fall of the Berlin Wall) was over, the West in the form of Chancellor Helmut Kohl clearly became the moving force behind the reunification process. In the end, the GDR joined the *Bundesrepublik* within less than a year. At the same time, however, the standing of the East German actors – whether it was the people, oppositionists, reform communists, or the first elected government led by Prime Minister Lothar de Maizière – decreased from those who "pulled down the Wall" to those who dissolved their own state and joined another.

This is however not to say that the reunification of Germany was not welcome. The initial response of East Germans was indeed very positive. Not only did they reward Helmut Kohl with a resounding victory for his CDU in the first all-German elections in December 1990, but opinion polls conducted by Eurostat in late 1990 demonstrated overwhelming levels of support for reunification amongst both West and East Germans. Support was even higher in the East (93 per cent versus 85 per cent in the West), while those opposed to reunification amounted to only four per cent among East Germans and six per cent among West Germans.

Nonetheless, these headline figures mask more nuanced opinions revealed in other polls. In 2019, for instance, West and East Germans disagreed on who had benefited most from reunification. Thirty-eight per cent of West Germans and 22 per cent of East Germans think that reunification mainly benefited East Germans, while 15 per cent of West Germans and 28 per cent of East Germans see the benefits mainly for the West Germans. To compare these answers with the same question ten years before in 2009, 60 per cent of West Germans and 23 per cent of East Germans believed that the main benefits of reunification were for East Germans. At the same time, 18 per cent of West Germans and 34 per cent of East Germans saw the benefits mainly for the West German side.

Throughout the last 30 years, East Germans have therefore tended to view reunification as a kind of annexation in which they were afforded little opportunity

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to input and influence the process. The manner in which reunification was carried out, such as the transplantation of West German political structures and direct economic, personnel and legal structure transfers from the West to the East, planted the seeds of discontent. East Germans' disillusionment with post-reunification developments is therefore not just down to – still – lower wages or nostalgia for the communist past, but to the ownership of the process.

Unifying Germany while improving relations with its Czech neighbour

Less than ten days after the East Germans dismantled the wall in the midst of Berlin, the Czechs found themselves busy with their own peaceful Velvet Revolution on November 17th 1989 and transition to democracy. Václav Havel, the newly minted Czechoslovak president, took the initiative and chose both East Berlin and Munich for his first state visits abroad on January 2nd 1990. Havel also launched a debate on how to deal with collective guilt. The state could apologise for the expulsion of the Sudeten Germans from the Czech lands after the Second World War or emphasise that the roots of these actions lie in the Nazi crimes that preceded them.

Nonetheless, the Czechoslovak government at that time was more interested in the future of the Warsaw Pact and withdrawal of Soviet troops from Czechoslovak territory. This is however not to say that the Czech ministers were ignoring German reunification. In fact, much like Warsaw, Prague was very keen that the external side of German reunification negotiations – the so-called 2+4 talks – guarantee Europe's post-war territorial integrity and Germany's borders. In addition, the Czechs would have liked to receive confirmation that the 1938 Munich Agreement was illegal from the start. This was however as acceptable to the wartime Allies as the Czech (and Polish) demand to participate in the 2+4 negotiations. In the end, unified Germany and Czechoslovakia signed an agreement on good neighbourly relations and friendly co-operation in February 1992.

The German-Czechoslovak agreement became a starting point for the Czech–German Declaration on Mutual Relations and their Future Development from 1997, which should have been the final full stop regarding wartime and post-war atrocities and different interpretations of history. Although the declaration has significantly improved Czech-German relations and represented the right step towards mutual reconciliation, including through the establishment of the Czech-German Fund for the Future, the question of compensation for the expropriated property of the Sudeten Germans and the validity of the so-called Beneš Decrees have become recurrent themes in Czech politics. This includes the 2012 presidential campaign and the ratification of the EU's Lisbon Treaty by President Václav Klaus.

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Once the Czech Republic's accession negotiations to the EU were in place, the Beneš Decrees became a political headache that could have torpedoed the entire enlargement. Although the accession process – in line with the adaptation model – proceeded much less spectacularly than German reunification, with a team in charge rather than a single leader and over the course of several years rather than being completed within a year, a political solution to the issue had to be found. In the end, a special commission found the decrees "extinct", or not creating any new effects, thereby allowing for the Czech accession to the EU. Despite this, MEPs from the Christian Social Union (CSU) still voted against it in the European Parliament.

Current Czech-German relations and challenges

More than 30 years after German reunification, the process of uniting the two German states is no longer a topic in Czech-German bilateral relations. The Czechs perceive Germany as a single entity, albeit with a higher degree of regional diversity and structural problems. Moreover, peaceful and correct relations are the main goal of Czech foreign policy towards its western neighbour.

Nonetheless, if we look at other levels, we can observe different dynamics. For instance, a sociological research project has shown that Germany is considered an integral part of the Czech cultural and geopolitical sphere. The Czechs view themselves as a nation in Central Europe which all four neighbouring countries also belong to and where the Czechs strive for as good relations as possible. This is an important difference to the German perception. Germans would probably not include themselves within the same cultural area as Czechs. In their mental map, the Czech Republic is an Eastern European country, albeit one located closer than, say, Romania and Bulgaria.

However, for the Czech society, Germany represents its main point of reference. The Czechs constantly compare their living standards, values and infrastructure with their German counterparts – usually arriving at the conclusion that Czechia is underdeveloped and that "everything is better" in Germany. Much like during the communist period, when the GDR was seen as a privileged state within the Soviet bloc due to its geographical proximity and family ties with West Germany, Czech citizens would also say that the East Germans were very lucky when the two German states merged. This is because they did not have to work as hard to achieve a higher economic standard. It is therefore an irony of history that what is considered a huge comparative advantage by the East Germans' neighbours (this lack of a need to build their own institutions and economies by simply transferring them ready made from the West to the East, alongside the West's vast financial

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backing) has been the cause of dissatisfaction with German reunification among the East German population.

The Czechs are furthermore cognizant of the fact that Germany is their closest trading partner and that the Czech economy is well integrated into Germany's supply and production chains. Nonetheless, this awareness contributes to two crucial side effects. Firstly, the Czechs are wary of any excessive dependence on German politics and, to a certain degree, even feel exploited by German corporations. These fears are partly reminiscent of the Czech-German struggle in the 19th and 20th centuries, when the two nations shared one state and the Germans were perceived as those having the upper hand and oppressing the Czechs. Secondly, this alleged dependency causes anxiety regarding political developments in Germany and raises fears of "what will be the next thing that the Germans will want from us?" At the same time, however, it is clear that Czech public discourse "falls" about five to ten years behind the German (and West European) one when it comes to "progressive" issues. This includes climate change, LGBT+ rights and racism. This delayed debate results in an equally delayed willingness to actually pursue policies directed at tackling these future-oriented topics. For instance, whereas Germany moves fast towards decarbonisation and sustainability, the Czechs still doubt whether they should proceed and even if decarbonisation will pay off.

The Czechs are wary of any excessive dependence on German politics.

At certain occasions, however, the former GDR appears in the current Czech public discourse. The Eastern *Länder* and their support for Alternative for Germany (AfD) is often described as a voice of rationality by more radical Czech citizens. At the same time, the Czech illiberal forces adopt the AfD's discourse at times that "they know how a dictatorship feels like". They therefore say that they can identify it easily when it is coming, pointing to the migration crisis a few years ago and to the recent COVID-19 anti-pandemic measures. Collaboration between the AfD and Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD), a Czech far-right party, was indeed evident during the migration crisis. Former Czech President Václav Klaus has also attended various AfD meetings in (the Eastern parts of) Germany, embracing the AfD's Eurosceptic rhetoric.

This brings us to the subject of relations between Czech and German political parties. All the major German political parties have offices in Prague. They represent the main tool of co-operation between the Czech and German political groupings. The Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung usually communicates with the Czech Social Democrats (ČSSD) and labour unions, whereas the Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung has close ties with the Christian and Democratic Union – Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL) and Tradition Responsibility Prosperity 09 (TOP09), the two

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Czech Christian Democratic parties. During the election period of 2013–17, Czech politicians from KDU-ČSL also often visited Bavaria's CSU and worked with its representatives on Czech-German reconciliation.

All in all, Czech-German bilateral relations have become stable and rather uneventful. Since the fractious debates of the 1990s on past injustices, diplomats of both countries have struggled to find a robust common topic for discussion. Even though Prague is viewed by Berlin as a more or less unproblematic partner that oscillates within the desired margins of German foreign policy, Germany would prefer that Czechia presents clearer positions on grand European – and global – debates such as migration and decarbonisation. Czech diplomacy is however not able to come up with constructive positions, which significantly hampers any mutual dialogue. Nonetheless, it is important to point out that these rather "boring" bilateral relations are also the result of conciliatory Czech politics. In contrast to Budapest and Warsaw, Prague has not been provoking the EU, and Germany, with any heavy illiberal tendencies and limitations on a free press and independent judiciary. Unlike its two neighbours, the Czech Republic is a moderate EU member state, not a troublemaker.

In contrast to bilateral diplomatic relations, transregional co-operation flourishes, especially with regards to the states of Bavaria and Saxony that share borders with the Czech regions. In the borderlands, the Czech and German authorities have integrated their emergency systems, while Czech labour often commutes for work to Germany. In recent years, transregional relations have received a new boost through plans for a high-speed railway that should connect Prague with Dresden by 2027. It is therefore most likely that we will witness further integration and partnership between the Czechs and Germans at the regional level. The reunification of Germany will most probably remain yet another historical event that will be commemorated every year, but will not play any major role in the bilateral relationship.

Mutual lessons

Returning to Angela Merkel's emotional reminiscing during the 31st reunification anniversary, she did not forget to thank Germany's friends in Europe – West and East, including in the Czech Republic – for their support in overcoming the division of Europe and her homeland. The text above has also provided an audit of German reunification and the Czech contribution to it. Even though the Czechs – and other Central and Eastern Europeans – may envy the fact that the East German *Länder* did not have to build their democratic institutions and political and

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economic systems from scratch, or to work hard over the course of several years to join the EU, it is this lack of an input into the reunification process that makes the East German population still hesitant about its benefits.

In the September 2021 federal elections, over 19 per cent of East Germans voted for the AfD, while ten per cent cast their votes for Die Linke, the traditional left party which is partially composed of East German post-communists. The German election results thus stand in stark contrast to the outcome of the Czech elections that took place only about two weeks later. For the first time in its post-1989 history, the Czech Communist Party did not enter parliament, while SPD, the Czech equivalent and partner of the AfD, reached almost ten per cent. This is about half of the votes of the AfD in Germany's East. With a degree of hyperbole, one could argue that it is the Czechs who are starting to resemble the West Germans – at least in their political inclinations – more than their East German compatriots.

When it comes to the outlook for the Czech-German relationship, we can presume that Prague will eventually have to come up with a constructive position on the EU's grand debates and cooperate with Berlin in areas such as digitalisation, automation and the energy sector. This is especially true given the fact that Czechia is not very likely to join the eurozone anytime soon. Should the current ambiguity persist, the Czechs will be forced to follow the EU's general consensus and German politics anyway. Such stagnation would however be a shame given the fact that Czech-German ties will not receive any significant boost and will continue to linger.

Needless to say, having an uneventful bilateral relationship with your largest neighbour is not a bad option at all. A boring relationship means that there are no disputes that need to be settled. For the Czech economy, it is beneficial if the country is considered a relatively safe and stable haven, where investors are not afraid of setting up their businesses. In the end, the Czechs – as well as the Germans both in the East and the West of their country – will have to hope that their mutual partnership will remain uneventful for the foreseeable future.

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A gap in Polish-German relations

KINGA ANNA GAJDA

Over 30 years have passed since Germany reunified and signed a pivotal agreement on bilateral affairs with Poland. Meant to signal the start of a new age of co-operation, the treaty's spirit has nonetheless been challenged by numerous issues both old and new. A renewed agreement is now needed to build a shared future free from the ghosts of the past.

The 1991 reunification of Germany was not met with indifference in any of the European states. Among the countries which expressed the greatest concern regarding this change was Poland. For this reason, when in 1991 both states signed the Treaty of Good Neighbourship and Friendly Co-operation, it was seen as a breakthrough moment. Both states started on the path towards reconciliation. Unfortunately, today we can see that not enough effort has been put into reaching this goal and much work still remains to be done.

A hole in the bridge

In the early 1990s three legal acts were signed between Poland and Germany with an aim to improve inter-state and people-to-people relations. They included the treaty confirming the existing Polish-German border signed in 1990; the Polish-German Treaty of Good Neighbourship and Friendly Co-operation; and the agreement on the establishment of the Foundation for Polish-German Reconciliation, signed in 1991. These acts initiated a series of cross-border initiatives, cultural,

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academic and educational exchange programmes, and co-operation between local governments. As a result, economic co-operation has developed and flourished.

The implementation of these agreements was not free from the influence of various external changes. These included the NATO and EU enlargements (1999, 2004), the global financial and Eurozone crisis (2008), Russia's annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas (2014), the migration crisis (2015), the COVID-19 pandemic (2020–21) and finally Russia's current invasion of Ukraine (2022). These events have had an effect not only on the countries' internal and external policies, but also on bilateral relations. For example, the different policies of the Polish and German governments during the 2015 migration crisis led to unprecedented tensions in relations. In the same way, different policies towards relations with Eastern Europe and Russia have led to many misunderstandings in bilateral affairs throughout the 2010s and 2020s.

For these reasons, the consequences of the changes that have taken place since German reunification in Polish-German relations should neither be treated as static nor permanent. What seems to continuously affect them is the difficult shared history that has not yet been adequately addressed or overcome. Symbolically, one of the first warnings about this threat came from the German caricature artist, Walter Hanel, who drew a cartoon in which two architects of Polish-German reconciliation, Polish Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, find themselves on two opposite sides of a bridge. They try to reach each other and shake hands but cannot due to a hole in the middle of the bridge. This hole symbolises the past that hinders full reconciliation and unfortunately remains until today. Perhaps there was a time when both nations seemed close to this metaphorical handshake. Yet things changed for the worse in 2015 when the Law and Justice party won elections in Poland and began to instrumentalise old historical sentiments, using them for their own political purposes. Since then, the hole in the bridge has only expanded.

Lack of trust

It can also be said that the last 30 years of Polish-German relations resemble a sine wave, with positive and negative moments. Looking back to their beginning, that is around the time of the reunification, we can notice that in Poland, despite the country's official support for the process, many people were afraid of its consequences. The fear of a strong united Germany and the role it could play in Europe was even shared by Mazowiecki himself, who publicly admitted that he too worried that such a large state could affect the European balance of power. In a way,

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Mazowiecki spoke on behalf of a large part of Polish society. Opinion polls carried out in March 1990 showed that only seven per cent of Poles supported the reunification of Germany, while 40 per cent were against it. This negative outlook was a result of both wartime memories and over 50 years of communist propaganda, which presented Germany as Poland's enemy. Paying attention to these factors, Michael Ludwig, then a correspondent for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in Poland, warned that a lack of trust between Poles and Germans could one day be used by politicians to negatively affect bilateral relations. It turns out that he was right.

Polish political scientist, Aleksandra Trzcielińska-Polus, divided the first 25 years of relations between Poland and united Germany into three periods. The first period, between 1990 and 1998, was a time of reconciliation. Both states aimed to build new quality relations and focused on their common European future. At that time, Germany even became known as "Poland's advocate in Europe". The foundation for Polish-German reconciliation was established during this time and the legal situation of the German minority in Poland was agreed upon.

The second period (1998–2007) was the time of greater distance. It started with a Bundestag resolution passed in May 1998, which addressed the situation of historically expelled and displaced persons as well as the German minorities. The resolution described them as a bridge between Germany and its neighbours in the region. The resolution was not well received in Poland. In response, the Polish parliament issued a public announcement stating the need for "the inviolability of the Polish border and the Polish title to the ownership of property on Poland's western and northern territories". This period overlapped with Poland's preparations to join the European Union, which entailed signing various necessary agreements. Among them were those that regulated issues such as the opening of the German labour market to Polish workers.

The shared, difficult history was used to cast doubt on developing Polish-German relations.

During this period, this shared difficult history was used again to cast doubt on the otherwise improving Polish-German relations. The most divisive topic was that of compensation for Polish forced labourers and victims of German concentration camps, as well as reparations for the damages committed by Germans in Poland during the Second World War. The controversy around this issue was sparked by the activities of a German politician named Erika Steinbach, who was also the president of the Federation of Expellees from 1998 to 2014. Steinbach went on to establish the Centre against Expulsions, an organisation which also caused controversy in Germany. This organisation only worsened Germany's relations with both Poland and the Czech Republic. Among other things, Steinbach claimed that

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Poland is also responsible for the outbreak of the Second World War and that millions of Germans were subject to forced labour in Central, Eastern and Southern Europe. This rhetoric brought on a new stage in the debate about the consequences of the Second World War.

As a result, the topic of German suffering and harm also came to the surface. It also became clear that interpretations of the post-war relocation of Germans from today's Poland differ greatly between the two states. While Poles describe it as a "resettlement", Germans often opt for "expulsions".

During this time, disagreement also appeared in other areas. This included more contemporary disagreements over such issues as the decision to go to war with Iraq (2003) or the voting system in the European Council. Krzysztof Ruchniewicz, a Polish historian and expert on Polish-German relations, called this "the period of unwilling indifference", which was pursued by the governments of both states. In Poland, the right-wing conservative party Law and Justice came to power for the first time in 2005 and formed a coalition with the extreme right League of Polish Families and populist Self-Defence party. This government started to pursue a cooling down of relations with Germany. In Trzcielińska-Polus's opinion, "The cooling down of relations and a decrease in mutual trust showed differences in interests and problems which in the previous period were silenced over and passed." This period of Polish-German relations was also characterised by a pivotal conflict over energy policy, especially with regards to the construction of the Nord Stream pipeline. Germany's enthusiasm for the project was seen to be disregarding Polish opinion.

Germany's enthusiasm for the Nord Stream pipeline was seen to be disregarding Polish opinion.

The third period (2007–15) was the phase of correction and aspiration to develop better neighbourly relations. In Poland, elections took place again and the government was formed by the centre-right Civic Platform. Evidently, this phase was characterised by a notable improvement in relations between the two states. This was true in spite of some natural differences. These included Germany's underwhelming response to the Eastern Partnership. Of course, Poland was one of the champions of this policy.

In 2008 Poland's Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski promoted a concept he called the "Partnership for Europe". It was envisioned to overcome the "stereotypical philosophy of Polish-German relations where the central point is unsolved historical problems, which are treated as obstacles impossible to overcome in allied co-operation with Germany." The year 2011 would prove important during this period, as it marked the 20th anniversary of the Polish-German Treaty

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of Good Neighbourship and Friendly Co-operation. During its celebrations, both sides tried to highlight their desires to pursue good bilateral relations and the European dimension of this co-operation.

To seal this commitment, a shared statement following a special Polish-German roundtable was made available to the public. This expressed support for the German minority in Poland and Poles in Germany. As a result, a contact office for Poles in Germany was opened in Berlin alongside the Centre for the Documentation of Culture and History of Poles in Germany. Germany also announced that it would commemorate the memory of the Polish victims persecuted and murdered during the Second World War.

The most difficult period

These periods should be complemented by one more, namely the current era starting in 2015. Unfortunately, this may be the moment of greatest trouble regarding mutual relations. This is clearly the result of the activities of the Law and Justice government which came to power in 2015 and was later re-elected in 2019. This government, like no other in Poland's democratic history, sees Germany as a challenge, if not a serious threat to Poland's interests. As a result, it pursues a policy of distrust towards Berlin, implementing the exact scenario that Michael Ludwig had warned about. Piotr Buras, a Polish expert on European relations, notes that during this period Berlin and Warsaw have demonstrated significant differences in their handling of issues such as the pandemic, migration, ecology, energy and security policy. Yet, the main topic of dispute between the two states was Nord Stream 2 and Germany's "change through trade" policy towards Russia. This is in spite of Moscow's aggression in Ukraine that began in 2014. Like other countries in Central Europe, Poland vociferously criticised Nord Stream 2, which was supposed to transport Russian gas to Europe by bypassing the Central European states.

The full-scale Russian aggression in Ukraine in February 2022 again highlighted certain differences between Poland and Germany, especially with regards to military aid for Ukraine. It also exposed disagreement over the scope of EU sanctions imposed on Russia following the invasion. Here, we should yet keep in mind that Germany itself is quite divided with regards to assistance for Ukraine and support for its membership in the European Union. In former East Germany, for example, around 60 per cent of respondents to a *Der Spiegel* opinion poll stated that they were against future Ukrainian EU membership. At the federal level, the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has also criticised EU sanctions on Russia. The Polish and German governments also strongly disagree over the distribution of the EU budget

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and, especially, the conditions in which funding should be received regarding a country's adherence to the rule of law.

Thus, probably the only unifying moment for both states was the Bundestag decision to create a memory site in Berlin that would commemorate the Polish victims of the Second World War. Despite this, the conflict over the war has not ceased, with the Polish government continuing to demand war reparations from the German state as elections approach. Berlin refuses to agree to such demands, arguing that Poland had already given up such claims in the past.

During this last period (2015–22), Poland held elections in 2019 that were once again won by the Law and Justice party. As expected, this election result was not received with much joy in Berlin. The German media pointed out how Law and Justice had been destroying Poland's good relations with its neighbours and the European Union, expressing fear that these relations would only further worsen. Indeed, the rhetoric of Law and Justice has reactivated negative stereotypes about Germany in Polish discourse like never before. Namely, the image of Germany as Poland's "eternal" enemy has been widely promoted by many politicians and pro-government media.

As a result, different public opinion polls started to show that today's negative stereotypes about Germany are stronger than before. Also interestingly, they seem to be geographically correlated: the further away from Germany the respondents are, the more negative stereotypes they have. This is probably caused by a lack of direct contacts and the influence of public television. Even though the majority of Poles have no anti-German views, there has been a clear decline in positive opinions regarding Polish-German relations. These negative tendencies are confirmed by various opinion polls.

Different visions

Public opinion polls, conducted since 1987 by the Centre for Public Opinion Research (CBOS, a leading Polish opinion poll research institution), show that Polish foreign policy has an impact on the attitude of Polish society towards Germans and Germany. Specifically, the years and periods when Polish foreign policy is aimed at improving relations with Germany result in more positive attitudes regarding the country's western neighbour. In the same way, the years and periods when the Polish authorities pursue conflict with Berlin only encourage more negative attitudes within society.

Research also shows that Polish respondents tend to repeat negative rhetoric more than Germans. Thus, we can read in a 2016 report from CBOS that the "as-

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sessment of Polish-German relations is influenced by the activities of the Polish government". Accordingly, the most positive assessments of relations were recorded in 1991 and 2015, while the most negative in 2007 and 2017. In fact, in 2017, over half of the respondents (56 per cent) evaluated these relations as average, 18 per cent as good and 16 per cent as bad. In the last group, namely those who believed that Polish-German relations were bad, over half (59 per cent) blamed the Polish authorities for such a state of affairs.

By 2017, the share of Polish respondents who thought that Germany and Poland have different political and economic interests also increased. Available research points to a worrying tendency indicating that many people in Poland no longer believe in any possibility of building good relations between both states. Poles are overall sceptical about Germany's growing influence in Europe and the world.

Poles and Germans not only have different views of their shared history but also different visions of handling current and future challenges. To illustrate these differences, we can say that Poles generally represent social attitudes characteristic of a more normative society, tend to be suspicious of social change and are more attached to tradition than Germans. According to cultural studies research carried out in line with the ideas of Geert Hofstede, Poles indeed show a high level of the so-called "uncertainty avoidance". This translates into a wider acceptance of strict codes of behaviour and a lack of tolerance towards unconventional outlooks and ideas. As a result, when a situation seems unclear or unknown, people tend to feel endangered. To avoid it, they prefer situations where they understand and control everything. They believe in the existence of absolute truth.

Poles and Germans not only have different views of their shared history but also different visions of handling current and future challenges.

German society, on the other hand, is culturally more pragmatic. It invests in the future and believes that truth is conditioned by the situation, context or time. Its members also have better skills when it comes to adjusting traditions to changing times. Sociological research also shows that there is a strong preference in Germany for deductive thinking and planning. This is the philosophical heritage of Kant, Hegel and Fichte. This is also reflected in the need for a sense of certainty and assurances that issues are thoroughly discussed and investigated. As a result, Germans prefer to compensate for their greater insecurity by relying on expert knowledge. Possibly for this reason, the German elite does not often comment on the changes taking place in Polish-German relations. Germans, more than Poles, are also more politically correct in public discourse. That is why, among others, they avoid categorical answers to key questions.

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Asymmetries

Different attitudes towards history explain why in the 2020 Poland-Germany Barometer, almost one-third (30 per cent) of the associations that Polish respondents made in regard to Germany were related to war. This share represents a notable increase since 2016 when such associations were made by 21 per cent of respondents. In this group, terms such as "criminals", "occupiers", "concentration camps", "Hitler" and "world war" could be found. At the same time, only 14 per cent of associations made by Polish respondents indicated an image of Germany as an economically prosperous country. A mere seven per cent of respondents discussed German culture, tourism and language. The situation is quite different on the German side. Here, as many as 29 per cent of respondents point to culture, tourism and language when making associations with Poland, while history is mentioned by only seven per cent. Poles and Germans also differ in their perceptions of who is their most important neighbour. While for Poles Germany is still their strategic neighbour, for Germany such a partner is found in France.

Despite their geographic proximity and thirty years of co-operation, Poland and Germany are still little known to one another. However, Poles also seem to know more about Germany than Germans know about Poland.

In both countries, the main source of information about the situation in the other state is still the media. As shown in the 2011 CBOS poll, 20 years after Germany's reunification, the majority of Poles were learning about their western neighbour from the media, especially TV, press and the internet. Only 12 per cent of surveyed Poles admitted that they know Germany from personal experiences (such as visits to the country), while nine per cent stated that they have contacts and conversations with German people. These are mostly young people who go to Germany to study. More recent research shows that the situation has not changed much over the last decade and that the majority of Poles are still getting to know Germany through the television and press.

Positive balance, nonetheless

Władysław Bartoszewski is a former Auschwitz prisoner and Poland's former foreign minister (2000–01), who for decades had been an architect of Polish-German reconciliation. When reflecting on the 20 years of co-operation between democratic Poland and united Germany, he stated that while the documents signed in 1991 were the best that could have been produced, neither Poland nor Germany have used them in the right way. As a result, they did not solve many issues in their

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mutual relations. Researchers of Polish-German relations were more optimistic in their assessment during the 25th anniversary of these links. They stressed various successes, established partnerships and mutual friendship. They praised the large network of contacts between politicians, artists, academics, the private sector and NGOs. Despite this, looking at the state of these relations today it is difficult to agree with this optimism. Realistically speaking, Bartoszewski was more correct in his perceptions.

Nonetheless, when compared with other historical contexts and various confrontations, we can say that the total balance of the last 30 years of Polish-German relations has been positive. Clearly, many good initiatives have been created in culture, education, academia, local government and trans-border co-operation. Due to this, many personal contacts have been established that did not even stop during the pandemic.

These areas are where positive change is taking place on a long-term basis. The Polish scholar Jolanta Molińska has analysed the consequences of the countries' 20 years of relations since Germany's reunification. She pointed to 11 areas of co-operation which allowed for the breaking down of negative stereotypes between both nations. They included co-operation in the framework of the Weimar Triangle, the partner cities programme, co-operation between historians, intellectual debates organised by the Copernicus Group, Viadrina University in Frankfurt am Oder, and mutual language instruction.

Without a doubt, the economy is the area that has seen the greatest success in Polish-German relations. Specifically, since the reunification Poland has become Germany's fifth most important trade partner. It now constitutes five per cent of Germany's foreign trade and is positioned only slightly behind France and ahead of Italy and Great Britain.

Youth exchange programmes and education have also been quite successful. In 2021–22 almost 7,300 Polish students studied at German universities, while German is the second most popular language taught in Polish schools. Cultural institutions also play an important role in building strong mutual relations. Partnership co-operation has simultaneously developed between cities and local governments. Each larger city in Poland now has at least one partner in Germany.

A new treaty?

During the Conference of Polish Ambassadors which took place on June 15th 2020, it was agreed that the 1991 treaty contributed to breaking down hostile attitudes and starting a constructive approach to solving disagreements. It was also

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stressed that any challenge to earlier achievements within bilateral affairs should be stopped. According to the ambassadors who gathered at the conference, this has led to a situation in which Germany engages in consultations with France but not Poland. That is why on January 22nd 2019 Germany signed an agreement with France on mutual co-operation and integration known as the Aachen Treaty.

A similar treaty, between Poland and Germany, could prove to be a good instrument for renewing Polish-German relations. If not a full treaty, then a trilateral protocol could be added to the Aachen Treaty to include Poland. This could serve to revitalise the Weimar Triangle. This important political co-operation scheme established between Poland, Germany and France has been quite dormant in recent years.

A new treaty, as Polish political scientist Krzysztof Miszczak argues, could dismiss any doubts regarding the countries' shared responsibility for the future of the European continent. It could encourage stable development and the integration of both states in the areas of economy and defence. It could also include commitments regarding war compensations. Most importantly, signing a new treaty would strengthen the 1991 document and allow for a new stage in building positive bilateral relations and settling difficult historical matters. In other words, such a treaty could finally serve to fill the gap, which despite the passage of time, is still present in the bridge between Poland and Germany.

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Caution, "concrete utopias" and common threats

Dutch perspectives on German unity

FLORIAN HARTLEB, FLORIAN LIPPERT AND FRISO WIELENGA

Dutch reactions to the fall of the Berlin Wall and German reunification were, all in all, more positive than many Germans perceived them at the time. The main point of Dutch concern was the role that a united Germany would play in a (not yet united) Europe. Three decades later, some elements of the "concrete utopia" of a closer union have been realised. Yet, both countries also face massive challenges in the years to come.

"Holland finds it hard to say goodbye," wrote the German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* in October 1990 with reference to the division of Germany. This summarised the impression which many Germans had at the time: that the Netherlands were sceptical, or even hostile towards German reunification. However, this impression was – and is – simplistic and misleading, as a closer look will show us. For the Netherlands, a convinced "Atlantic-oriented" country during the Cold War, the reunification of Germany was not primarily a daunting prospect (as it was, for instance, at the beginning for the United Kingdom under Margaret Thatcher). Rather, it was both a challenging and promising development. Before the fall of the wall, for the Dutch foreign policy elite "the area east to the Federal Republic of Germany (had) seemed almost terra incognita." German reunification

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and the EU's Eastern enlargement were thus two sides of the same coin from the Dutch perspective. They were both parts of a learning and development process which concerned, above all, the evolution of European integration.

A slow start

The German question "casts a shadow ahead", read a report from the Dutch embassy in Bonn to The Hague at the end of May 1989, a few weeks after the Hungarian government had begun to dismantle its part of the Iron Curtain on the border with Austria. Liberalisation in Eastern Europe, the authors assumed, could one day put heavy pressure on Bonn to deal intensively with reforms in Eastern Germany, the GDR. According to them, this was not necessarily negative. On the contrary, close intra-German co-operation or indeed reunification, embedded within pan-European integration, was deemed an "attractive" model.

On the other hand, the report also stated that the development could lead to diminished German interest in European co-operation in favour of an imposing pro-German outlook. This perspective would "force both West and East to reflect". Rather far away from such reflections was the first public reaction by Dutch Foreign Minister Hans van den Broek of the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) party. He viewed the reunification of Germany without European and Atlantic integration as "by definition not an issue". Despite this, keeping Germany integrated and anchored were the central concepts in The Hague, and the status quo ideas that had shaped Dutch politics on this issue since the 1950s set the tone. Just like the West German state, a united Germany would also have to be a member of NATO and the other western communities.

The growing importance of the German question only slowly led to more specific and concrete considerations in The Hague.

In general, the growing importance of the German question only slowly led to more specific and concrete considerations in The Hague. The only detailed analysis and policy recommendation in this phase came in September 1989 from the *Adviesraad Vrede en Veiligheid* (Peace and Security Advisory Council). This body was commissioned the year before by van den Broek and Defence Minister Frits Bolkestein to prepare an expert report on the changes in Soviet domestic and foreign policy and their consequences for Europe and western security. These changes, according to the council's report, offered the prospect of an end to the division of Germany. Even if reunification was not imminent, the German question had to be central both in current policy and in discus-

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Photo courtesy of the European Commission

Helmut Kohl in the European Parliament in Strasbourg in 1990. Kohl was German Federal Chancellor from 1982 to 1998. He played a crucial part in the German reunification and thereby became the first Chancellor of the reunified Germany since 1945.

sions about future European security. In concrete terms, this meant showing understanding for the national interests of the Federal Republic and supporting them where possible: "Without an attitude of understanding, what could be achieved is what must be avoided at all costs: a receptivity of the Federal Republic to 'special offers' from the East."

It was in the well-balanced western interest to prevent German isolation in a changing Europe, and the further embedding of German *Ostpolitik* in the western community was a demand of the first order. Reunification, in turn, could only come about as a final step of far-reaching political and psychological changes in Europe. If the question of reunification was put on the agenda at an early stage, the authors of the report warned, this would have destabilising consequences.

The report was thus not free of contradictions. On the one hand, it claimed that the reunification question had become topical again. On the other, it warned against dealing with it at an early stage. Pointing out this ambivalence, the foreign policy commentator Jerome L. Heldring, in a commentary in *NRC Handelsblad* titled "Running Behind the Facts", noted that such talk suggested "that we (the Netherlands or the West; the authors) have some control over the course of the German question. Well, that is not the case." This was not an apocalyptic prophecy on Heldring's part, but a call to prepare for a faster and much less controllable development that would not easily follow the route outlined and desired by the Peace and

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Security Advisory Council. Heldring was to be proved right. In The Hague, Bonn and other capitals, the idea that reunification could only be the very last step of a new European order still held right until the end of the 1980s. However, developments in the GDR had taken on a different dynamic, including a rapidly growing number of refugees, the Monday demonstrations and Erich Honecker's forced resignation. On November 9th 1989, the Berlin Wall finally fell.

Ambivalences after the fall of the wall

Like other countries, the Netherlands shared the German joy over this development. A wave of sympathy for the East German population swept through the media. Alongside this joy at the freedom of the GDR's citizens, however, confusion and uncertainty about the future of Germany and Europe were also palpable. The daily *De Volkskrant* spoke of moving images from Berlin that gave cause for optimism, but at the same time did not rule out the possibility of "an arrogant German unified state". Another publication, *Trouw*, expressed both its hopeful expectations and its uncertainty in a commentary titled "Praying in the morning … thanking in the evening?" It asked whether, given the speed of developments, there was still time for reflection.

Concrete political reactions, however, continued to be rather slow in the Netherlands. Even when the first reports about Chancellor Helmut Kohl's ten-point plan were received on November 28th 1989, the reunification question was not immediately discussed. But soon after his initiative, it was obvious that reunification had become an important international issue that also required a concrete Dutch outlook. Indeed, columnists, editorialists and other experts in the Dutch daily press had already been dealing with the developments in East Germany for weeks. After studying Kohl's surprising plan, Prime Minister Lubbers spoke in a restrained way about it. There was no mistaking that he, like many others, felt caught off guard by Kohl's initiative, which had been presented to allies without prior consultation. He did not want to be "too critical" and expressed "some understanding" for the chancellor's difficult situation. For the Dutch government, said Lubbers, the "aspect of European healing is in the foreground". This included "the community between peoples who speak the same language".

While on this occasion, Lubbers had carefully avoided the term "reunification", two weeks later, the Dutch parliament finally had to acknowledge that this question was very much on the agenda. The parliament debate which took place in December 1989 following the EEC summit in Strasbourg was then almost entirely dominated by the uncertainty surrounding German guarantees regarding a final

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recognition of Poland's western border. The chamber reacted uneasily to the confusing signals from Bonn concerning this issue.

In the time following the debate, Prime Minister Lubbers repeatedly expressed strong caution and even mistrust concerning the German stance on the border question. This in turn contributed significantly to the false impression in Bonn that the Netherlands as a whole had a fundamentally negative attitude towards reunification. Overall, the Dutch foreign ministry took a more pragmatic approach. Even before the exact content of Kohl's plan was known, the planning department noted in a memorandum intended for Minister van den Broek that "The West (the Netherlands) can do little else but agree to Kohl's initiative. We have always been in favour of reunification in self-determination, while Kohl now also names the right parameters and timetables. Moreover, his plan can have a stabilising effect on the East German situation (and on the internal conditions in the Federal Republic)."

Similarly, in January 1990, the ministry's first detailed discussion paper on the matter was carried by a spirit of sobriety and realism, which formed the basis for future policy. The pros and cons were dealt with point by point. The line of argument against reunification was that Germany could become too strong, perhaps not militarily, but politically and economically. This could also mean that Germany would either dominate the EEC or lose interest in it. Thirdly, reunification would mean a defeat for Mikhail Gorbachev, with the possible consequence of undermining his reform policy. On the pro side, the fact that self-determination was part of the Netherlands' "fundamental values" was stressed, as was "the joy over the broken wall"and the great sympathy for the people's movement in the GDR.

Another argument in favour of reunification was that the GDR would become part of the western sphere of influence and that any other solution would "probably be temporary and unstable". Finally, the paper stated, it would be "unwise" to "resist the inevitable", as this would make it impossible to influence the process to some extent. Although the outlines of a future Europe remained necessarily vague, it was obvious that a united Germany had to be a member of the EEC and NATO.

Towards the EU

In the meantime, steps had already been taken within the EEC since the autumn of 1989 to strengthen its internal cohesion. This would ultimately result in the establishment of the European Union. In view of the importance The Hague attached to the EEC regarding the further integration of Germany and the pleas for a further strengthening of this integration, the Netherlands strongly supported this development. At the beginning of 1990, there had been talk of the parallel nature

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of German and European unification. In the spring of that year, it became clear that developments in Germany were proceeding too quickly for this. The plans for the EU now ensured that the link between German reunification on the one hand, and the acceleration and deepening of European integration on the other hand, had nevertheless been established.

The Dutch government's concept of European integration, which was supported by all the major political parties with the exception of the Greens, was focused on the preservation of the achievements and structures of the western community as a basis for a future Europe. Regarding this focus, fears of future German power ambitions did not play a major role. Rather, from the Dutch perspective, it was clear that the "European House", which was already viewed with scepticism because of its vague framework, would disintegrate if its only actual foundation – the European Economic Community – was undermined. A glance at the map of Europe was enough to establish that Germany was a cornerstone of this foundation. The "house" could not be imagined without Germany.

At the beginning of 1990 there had been talk of the parallel nature of German and European unification.

The picture of sobriety and approval on the one hand and some criticism and uncertainty on the other is also mirrored in the results of public opinion polls. The day after Kohl's ten-point plan was announced, a poll showed that a majority of Dutch people (54 per cent) were in favour of reunification, while 27 per cent were against it and 19 had no opinion. Remarkably, it was mainly younger people who expressed a positive stance. Among older people, support did not exceed 45 per cent, and more than 35 per cent of Dutch citizens over the age of 65 were against German reunification. In surveys conducted in the following weeks, a large majority (up to 76 per cent) were in favour of German unity. The proportion of those opposed varied between nine and 27 per cent and those without an opinion between five and 25 per cent. As awareness spread that reunification was no longer a theoretical issue, the number of supporters dropped to 50 per cent in February 1990. It was precisely in those months of heightened unease that the reunification process accelerated and criticism of Kohl for his stance on the Oder-Neisse question grew. West German dominance in dealing with the GDR also became particularly apparent. The decline in the number of supporters of reunification was also evident in other countries, but was particularly clear in the Netherlands.

Finally, the Dutch media reported very extensively on developments in Germany in 1989–90 – mostly positively, but with certain reservations. They were also largely unanimous in their negative judgement of Kohl's attitude regarding the Oder-Neisse border. Journalists were also uncertain about the future of Euro-

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Atlantic co-operation and the role Germany would play in it. From time to time, people made their unease clear by using suggestive German expressions such as *rücksichtslos* (ruthless) or *Heim ins Reich* (back home to the Reich). Some even referred to Kohl's *Blitzkrieg*. Many political cartoonists gave free rein to their powers of association, resulting in many cartoons with direct allusions to the Third Reich and the Second World War. If one were to focus exclusively on these aspects of image-forming, one would come to the hasty conclusion that the confidence of many commentators in 1989–90 had sunk to the level of the 1960s. However, this was certainly not the case. Rather, it was characteristic that approval dominated, but criticism, unease and uncertainty led to an overall picture that also revealed ambivalence.

Friction and (European) solutions

Some of the worries that had been addressed in the context of German reunification re-emerged in Dutch-German relations in the following years. In 1993, a conflict arose about the question of where the newly founded European Central Bank should be located, with Frankfurt ultimately winning over Amsterdam. One year later, Kohl, together with François Mitterrand, blocked Lubbers' attempt to succeed Jacques Delors as president of the European Commission. The Dutch media discussed these "defeats" in much detail and portrayed Germany as adopting an arrogant attitude towards its close ally.

In Dutch politics, questions about a (too) "German Europe" and of the EU's enlargement have remained issues of some discussion.

Old clichés were revitalised when the German company DASA took over the Dutch aircraft builder Fokker – an important symbol for Dutch industry. Debates took on a bitter and tragic tone after the 1993 attacks on a Turkish family in Solingen. The hosts of the popular Dutch Radio broadcast "Breakfast Club" called for listeners to send a postcard with the text "I am angry" (*Ik ben woedend*) to Chancellor Helmut Kohl. No less than 1.2 million people followed the call. In the middle of this debate, the Institute for International Relations published a poll among the Dutch youth concerning the image they had of other countries. Many participants considered Germans to be arrogant and aggressive.

Both countries reflected carefully on the results of the study. The lessons learnt led to a new dialogue in order to strengthen bilateral relations. In 1995, during two visits by Chancellor Helmut Kohl and one by President Roman Herzog to The Hague,

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the question of how to overcome existing misunderstandings took centre stage. The following years saw an increase in productive co-operation. For example, this was seen in the framework of the growth and stability pact agreed in 1997 and the Treaty of Amsterdam. In Dutch politics, questions about a (too) "German Europe" and of the Union's enlargement have remained issues of some discussion. However, it was the German commitment to a wider Europe that was honoured by Prime Minister Mark Rutte, when on April 21st 2016 he awarded Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel the Four Freedoms Award and attested that "You are acting on the inner conviction that Germany and Europe have to be a beacon of liberty, stability, and progress for all." As such, the ceremony testified to "the remarkable improvement in German-Dutch relations since the fall of the Berlin Wall". The foreign ministers took the lead in intensifying co-operation between regional governments in both Germany and the Netherlands.

Both the Netherlands and Germany have been facing a growing wave of Euroscepticism.

Common challenges

Both the Netherlands and Germany have been facing a growing wave of Euroscepticism, closely related to the rise of new populist challengers. In 2005, 61.5 per cent of Dutch voters (turnout 63.3 per cent) voted against the constitutional treaty, causing a "German shock". Decisive for the *nee* side were forces from the far left and right. However, effects on the government could be observed immediately. On the very night after the referendum, the decision was made that in all official government documents, the words "European integration" should be changed to "European co-operation".

An exemplary case in the Netherlands regarding the populist anti-European turn is Geert Wilders, whose main focus has shifted from demonising Islam to Euroscepticism as his primary mobilisation topic. When in spring 2012 Wilders refused to give his approbation to a new government budget plan that was to meet more restrictive EU requirements, he declared Brussels as the new number one threat to Dutch sovereignty. Wilders, himself married to a Hungarian national, also campaigned against "Eastern Europeans" in the Netherlands and promoted a racist "registration website" regarding "disturbances" and other "problems" caused by them, stirring up outrage and provoking ten Eastern European countries to denounce the website. Wilders' thoughts on Germany are ambivalent. Being fluent in German and born in Venlo (close to the border with Germany), he has given

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speeches in Germany on several occasions, such as in October 2010 in a Berlin hotel under police protection, and in 2015 for the anti-Islamic Pegida movement in Dresden. While responses to Wilders were mostly sceptical to negative, Germany did respond to the Dutch example in 2013, with the AfD (*Alternative für Deutschland*) starting out as a predominantly Eurosceptic project. With anti-migrant rhetoric, the party quickly gained popularity during the "migrant crisis" in 2015–16 and has been present in all the country's state parliaments and the Bundestag since 2017. Similar to the Netherlands, concerns, fear and prejudice could mobilise many voters. The AfD's initial stance towards Wilders, however, remained ambivalent apart from their common Eurosceptic and anti-migrant agendas. Shortly after the Pegida event in 2015, the AfD's leader Alexander Gauland stated in a debate that he would not have invited Wilders.

Having developed a more radical nativist outlook over the last few years, today's AfD is considerably more successful in Eastern Germany than in the West. It has subsequently mobilised frustrations related to the ongoing results of the German reunification process. AfD campaigns even attempted to make direct reference to the GDR's civil rights movement by copying the most prominent slogan of the 1989 peaceful revolution: "We are the people" (*Wir sind das Volk*). Today, the AfD and Wilders' PVV are part of the European far-right "Identity and Democracy" (ID) party and share a growing number of radical views. At the AfD's convention in the spring of 2021, a majority of delegates voted that Germany should leave the European Union ("Dexit").

While Eurobarometer polls clearly show that neither "Nexit" or "Dexit" are realistic perspectives and that the overall pro-European consensus is not at risk, classical consensual models of representative systems are being challenged in both the Netherlands and Germany. The decline of the so-called people's parties (*Volksparteien*) is also causing debate about the future of liberal democracy. In this context, Dutch developments – towards a fragmentation into more and smaller parties, and towards support for soft and hard Euroscepticism that currently exceeds 25 per cent – might serve as a warning to Germany. However, the AfD's current support is "only" around ten per cent. Lately, violent protests and demonstrations in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic have revealed further cracks in both Dutch and German consensus societies. From these perspectives, while the topic of integration – both on the national and the European levels – is more virulent than ever, the continuing threats to liberal democracy appear to be more substantial than many had expected in the early 1990s. In this regard, the way that the current Russian invasion of Ukraine might influence and shake up these threats remains to be seen. The most recent co-operation between Germany and the Netherlands in this context – joint artillery weapon deliveries to Ukraine

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and plans to jointly drill for a new gas field in the North Sea – are representative of the EU at large, both with regards to the EU's short and mid-term concerns and the big open questions about its long-term future in the face of a fundamentally changing geopolitical situation.

Quest for the future

While the Dutch reactions to the fall of the wall and German reunification were, all in all, more positive than many Germans perceived them at the time, the main point of Dutch concern was the role that a united Germany would play in a (not yet united) Europe. Three decades later, after a phase of friction in the 1990s, some parts of the "concrete utopia" of a closer union have been realised. The Hague and Berlin are now playing important roles and acting in agreement concerning many main lines in European policies.

Yet, both countries also face massive challenges: right-wing populist parties and populist impulses in government policies, Euroscepticism, xenophobia, deepening ideological rifts within the populations, and most recently the Russian war on Ukraine. While the memory of German reunification is mostly addressed in the context of European integration and inclusion, it is occasionally also hijacked and misused for nationalist and populist purposes, as are other former idea(l)s of European inclusion.

German debates about the equality of East and West are as ongoing as the pan-European quest for a unified future. The complex and often surprising history of German-Dutch relations since German reunification can be seen as a key example of the complexities of this goal. More importantly, they show that yesterday's symbols and reservations cannot be a substitute for bold policies for tomorrow.

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More Europe in the face of realpolitik's return?

French perspectives on 30 years of German reunification

MARIE KRPATA

The current geopolitical situation has disrupted the European and global order, which were both consolidated in the 1990s and have been key factors in the modern German model. The Franco-German duo is currently facing new challenges and it will have to respond appropriately in a time when the EU's global influence is shrinking in the face of what some analysts call a "new Cold War".

On October 3rd 1990 Germany regained its full sovereignty through reunification. This was a defining moment for Germany, Europe and the entire world. Positioned at the centre of Europe, Germany became a major arena of rivalry during the Cold War and was then in the spotlight of world politics. The reunification marked the transition from a world divided into two blocs to a "new world order" dominated by the United States, which has revealed itself to be increasingly unstable. Moreover, the end of the partition of Germany paved the way for the unification of Europe through the enlargement of the European Union. At the same time, Germany gradually became Europe's leading economic actor.

For France, Germany's mounting confidence following its reunification raised concerns about its destabilising potential regarding Europe's equilibrium. France

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perceived potential further enlargements and Germany's growing influence in Europe as factors in its own potential marginalisation. At the same time, the "Franco-German couple", which had already established itself as the European driving force during the Cold War, could accelerate the pace of European integration after 1990. Nevertheless, with the accession of states from Central and Eastern Europe and the European institutions' growing competencies, the "Franco-German couple" must constantly readapt and assert itself as a compass for Europe in order to remain relevant.

Even more so, in the face of the challenges of the 21st century, new thinking is required – more in European terms than in national ones. The world's decoupling, which could be glimpsed against the backdrop of US-China rivalry, seems to be materialising and accelerating with the war in Ukraine – at least to some extent. It poses many challenges for Germany due to the openness of its economic model and energy dependence. The fundamentals on which it bases its foreign policy are also being questioned, and its inhibitions in terms of defence policy are increasingly apparent. Within this context, Germany's potential evolution towards becoming a relevant geopolitical actor goes hand in hand with the EU's own shift towards increased global actorness.

The way in which France and the EU will be associated with the transformation of Germany's model will be decisive for European unity. Three questions are of crucial importance. Firstly, how could Germany assert itself in the world and Europe after its reunification; and what is the French perception of this German repositioning? How does Germany intend to adapt its model to the challenges of the 21st century? And what role will the EU, and in particular France, play during this transformation?

Germany's regained post-Cold War confidence

Reunification was a turning point (*Wende*) that allowed Germany to regain self-confidence. It was the first step towards Germany's "normalisation" into a "nation like any other". German unity meant that Germany had recovered its full sovereignty "over internal and external affairs" and that it could rebuild constructive relationships with its neighbours. However, the weight of history gave it a responsibility and a duty to remember, which explains its reluctance to commit itself too assertively on the international level.

Nevertheless, it did regain confidence as far as economics are concerned. Germany relies on the competitiveness of its industry, and its open economic model favours the export of its goods. By GDP, Germany has become the fourth largest

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economy in the world and the biggest one in Europe. Its trade surplus made it the world's leading exporter for a long time. Globalisation, which gained momentum at the end of the Cold War, enabled it to expand its markets and forge links with newly industrialised countries, particularly China.

Due to historical reasons, Germany's renewed confidence as a global player was, however, limited to its economic strength and its action as a "civilian power". Germany defines itself within the EU and United Nations as an advocate of multilateralism and international law. Berlin assumed that its role is best played through negotiation and consultation, not through an assertive foreign policy based on military power.

In terms of defence policy, Germany remains reticent. Interventions in Kosovo, Afghanistan and in the Sahel region, for instance, focused on civilian operations. In contrast, due to its political system and institutional organisation, France differs from Germany in terms of external operations. The French president even has prerogatives independent of parliamentary approval. France and Germany also differ in terms of arms exports. While Paris considers them necessary to strengthen the European defence industrial base and make it competitive, Berlin is committed to better control of these exports by taking into account "questions of ethical responsibility".

Europe's centre of gravity shift

Franco-German relations are marked by the three bloody wars of 1870–71, 1914–18 and 1939–45. The rivalry between these two powers was later to be a determining factor in the construction of what was to become the EU. This construction process was an attempt to convert hostile relations into a project of peace and prosperity which is what makes the Franco-German relationship, at the centre of the European Union, a "special relationship".

However, at the time of reunification, German unity raised concerns in France, which feared the return of a Germany eager to dominate Europe. French newspapers such as *Le Monde* published the headline in 1992: "Should we be afraid of Germany?" During the Franco-German summit in Bonn between November 2nd and 3rd 1989, François Mitterrand replied to that question by saying, "No, I am not afraid of reunification." In a survey conducted in September 1989, 75 per cent of French people also answered positively to the question "Do you think that the German demand for German reunification is legitimate?"

As the prospect of reunification became more realistic, however, France's fears of a reunified Germany weakening and marginalising it within a new Europe became

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increasingly evident. Mitterrand considered it "legitimate" that the Germans felt the "will to reunite". However, he also invited caution by stating that "the new German equilibrium cannot be achieved to the detriment of the equilibrium of Europe."

This feeling was confirmed by the moving of the German capital from Bonn to Berlin, which was seen as a sign of the direction Germany's European policy would take. Keeping the capital in Bonn, and therefore a three-hour drive from Brussels, would have marked the choice – centred around the Franco-German couple – of "maintaining privileged links with the capitals of the Western European states", whereas establishing the German capital 80 kilometres from Poland meant "anticipating a shift in the continent's political and economic centre of gravity towards the East". As Willy Brandt put it: "Germany does not remain the East of the West but becomes the new centre of Europe."

German unity raised concerns in France, which feared the return of a Germany eager to dominate Europe.

The accession of Austria to the EU in 1995, followed by the 2004 and 2007 enlargements, which included the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, shifted the continent's centre of gravity. From a French point of view, this "risk[ed] coinciding with a strong extension of the Germanic zone of influence".

Rising post-Cold War challenges

Faced with the concerns of France and other European partners about the effects of reunification, Germany agreed to sacrifice the Deutschmark in favour of a common currency, the euro. This went hand in hand with further European integration, which gained momentum in the 1990s through the Treaty of Maastricht (1992) and the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997). However, it was a stony path. The war in Yugoslavia erupted in the EU's neighbourhood and the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, drawn up with a view to be adopted 15 years after German reunification, ultimately failed. The Constitutional Treaty was replaced by the Lisbon Treaty, abandoning the mention of European symbols (common anthem, flag, motto). External shocks also affected the EU, such as the economic and financial crisis of 2009, the migration crisis of 2015, and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. On top of such uncertainty various geopolitical challenges can also be added. These include growing Sino-American rivalry, on which the EU must endeavour to take a clearer stance if it does not want to become a collateral victim of the resulting world repolarisation. Of course, the war in Ukraine is also causing tremendous issues for Europe and its future.

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Post-Cold War European construction should be seen as the continuation of Germany's reunification. The current geopolitical situation has disrupted the European and global order, which were both consolidated in the 1990s and have been key factors in the modern German model. The Franco-German couple is currently facing new challenges and it will have to respond appropriately, in an inclusive manner together with other member states, if it wants to proactively defend the EU's interests at a time when its global influence is shrinking in the face of what some analysts call a "new Cold War".

The *Zeitenwende* and Germany's new inclination towards more assertiveness

Heightened tensions at the international level, which are only increasing with the war in Ukraine, call into question a certain number of policy fundamentals including energy policy and economic policy, but also foreign policy. This repolarisation of the world represents a challenge of such magnitude that it cannot only be tackled at the national level but must also be assessed on a European scale. The geopolitical context and reorientation announced by Olaf Scholz on February 27th 2022 in a speech before the Bundestag are likely to change Franco-German and European priorities. Scholz's speech articulated Germany's intention to bolster its assertiveness in military, energy and economic matters, as well as in terms of its foreign policy to respond to these issues. By announcing a new *Wende*, the *Zeitenwende* (turning point), he intended to prepare the Germans for a new rupture of a magnitude comparable to reunification.

The war in Ukraine has shown that Germany's reliance on foreign trade and investment, as well as its belief that it could democratise authoritarian countries through economic interdependence, have been naïve. The internationalisation of its value chains is becoming Germany's Achilles' heel. This is particularly noticeable on the energy front, where dependence on Russian gas reached 55 per cent in 2021 (however, since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, Germany was able to reduce this dependency to 35 per cent). Germany's previous claim that Nord Stream 2 was merely an "economic" and "energy" project, as well as its hesitation to include this gas pipeline in the package of sanctions against Russia, testify to Germany's inability to assert itself at the diplomatic level. Its timorous positioning in foreign policy so far has prompted authoritarian regimes to strengthen their assertive stance.

As for France, the energy crisis in the 1970s saw the country mainly shift its energy strategy towards nuclear energy. It also buys its uranium from multiple suppliers. Therefore, France is not currently confronted with the same energy chal-

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lenge as Germany. The French model may however not be easily copied inGermany. The debates on EU taxonomy over the end of 2021 illustrate the Franco-German divide in this respect. Indeed, nuclear energy is unpopular among Germans and Berlin even decided to phase it out in 2011 after the Fukushima catastrophe. The last German nuclear power plants were set to close in 2022. However, the German government recently announced that it would extend the runtime of two nuclear plants as emergency reserves due to energy challenges caused by the war in Ukraine.

Germany will hence have to look for alternatives with a view to decoupling energy from Russia, which is also an ambition from a European perspective with regards to the REPowerEU plan. From a French perspective, the challenges faced by Germany confirm its call for European "strategic autonomy" – although Germany prefers the terms "strategic sovereignty" or "European sovereignty". This concept may notably be translated into reducing the EU's vulnerabilities resulting from dependencies.

Rethinking relations with Eastern Europe and the Balkans

As a result of the war in Ukraine, the question of a new European security architecture is arising. The war marks the violation of the principles and spirit of the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, established in 1990. This consolidated Europe's post-Cold War security architecture by condemning the "[…] threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State […]". France and Germany, which have tried to find a political solution to the conflict between Ukraine and Russia since the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas, are increasingly being criticised for what has been deemed as hesitant support for Ukraine. They now must regain credibility in the eyes of some of their European (and American) partners in order to participate effectively in the new European security architecture.

In addition to the question of Europe's security architecture, it is the EU's enlargement, and relations with its neighbours, that are essential. While the countries of the Western Balkans aspire to EU membership and regret the lack of prospects, three Eastern partners of the EU (Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) have declared their intentions to become members since Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Moldova and Ukraine were granted candidate status at the European Council meeting on June 23rd and 24th 2022, while further reforms will be necessary for Georgia. The current difficulty lies in the need to enthusiastically welcome the new applications while remaining clear on the reforms necessary before membership can become effective. At the same time, the EU cannot afford to frustrate "long-time

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applicants" with this differential treatment that may favour those new applicants over former ones.

Knowing the road to accession may be bumpy for the new applicants, France and Germany hesitated before supporting their accession claims. Beyond that, what is at stake in the long run are security guarantees for Ukraine, provided Kyiv asks the EU to act as a guarantor of its security and territorial integrity in possible future negotiations with Russia. In the assumption of such agreements being envisaged by Ukraine to end the war (on the condition of assurances regarding its sovereignty and territorial integrity), the EU must be a credible and respected actor capable of enforcing such provisions. This will greatly depend on France and Germany because of their specific role within the EU.

European priorities on the Franco-German agenda

The Franco-German relationship has been institutionalised in the Elysée Treaty (1963) and the Treaty of Aachen (2019), which provide for a rapprochement of civil societies, institutions, and players in cross-border co-operation. Beyond that, Germany and France aspire to be the "engine of European construction". However, the Franco-German couple is also marked by divergences in the European project that various crises, which multiplied from 2009, make increasingly apparent.

This was particularly obvious during the economic and financial crisis of 2008–09, when Germany embodied political leadership while France played a rather secondary role. Overall, the divide between the "frugal countries", on the one hand, and the EU's most heavily indebted countries, which had drastic austerity plans imposed on them, on the other, persists to this day. Certainly, the management of the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a shift, with the suspension of the Stability and Growth Pact and the elaboration of the Next Generation EU Plan, in which the member states committed to common debt. These measures exemplify Emmanuel Macron and Angela Merkel's leadership capacities and powers of persuasion. But when returning to "business as usual" debates on the Stability Pact will resume, where some – including Germany – will advocate for balanced finances, while others – including France – would rather like to reform the pact and adapt it to the modernisation needs of the EU. This is especially true in terms of the digital and energy transitions, as well as associated investment needs.

Another bone of contention between France and Germany is defence policy, with Germany still holding a timorous and traditionally pro-American position and France wishing to bolster European strategic autonomy, including in relation to the United States. The war in Ukraine has painfully shown the EU's underesti-

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mation of security threats and the unpreparedness of the German armed forces, which are far from alone in this case. The EU's "Strategic Compass" aims to respond to the shortcomings of European defence. However, the war in Ukraine reinforces the role of the US as a defender of security in Europe. Therefore, the EU faces a fundamental question on the place of European defence in the NATO Alliance. Similarly, how will the colossal investments mentioned by Chancellor Olaf Scholz on February 27th 2022 to strengthen the German defence be used exactly? Will they be compatible with defence initiatives on a European scale and employable for co-operation with France in particular, for instance in common arms projects?

EU institutions are part of the equation

Certainly, the Franco-German duo has often given momentum to the EU's political action, which undoubtedly requires political will and the assumption of leadership. If under this leadership the EU has shown itself able to quickly adapt over recent years to unforeseen events, notably during the COVID-19 pandemic, there are still calls to sustainably carry out structural institutional reform. The EU's adaptability was exemplified by its suspension of applicable rules in state aid, the protection of its critical assets against unfriendly takeovers from third countries, the creation of the Next Generation EU Fund, and the temporary suspension of the Stability and Growth Pact.

The EU's strength in consensus can also be its weakness given its lack of flexibility, responsiveness and efficiency.

The current decision-making process seeks to embody the spirit of compromise, aiming to avoid the domination of one or two member states over the others. The constant strive of EU institutions towards consensus is a strength on the one hand, but it is also a weakness on the other, as it is synonymous of lack of flexibility, responsiveness and efficiency. This is especially true in the face of issues that sometimes require immediate decisions and action. In domains where unanimity is required, this weakness is particularly felt. In order to circumvent possible deadlocks and render the EU as efficient as the dynamics of international relations require, the question of replacing unanimous voting with qualified majority voting arises.

The possibility of a further EU enlargement makes this issue all the more relevant to avoid stalemates. Voting could eventually require unanimity among what may be over 35 member states (in the maximum scenario). Such reform would however need to be adopted with unanimity, which again renders the prospect of it succeeding under the current circumstances improbable.

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The reunification of Germany may have aroused fears of political marginalisation in France. German reunification was synonymous with Europe's unification as it hastened enlargement towards Central and Eastern Europe, which was seen as possibly resulting in a reduced weight of France in Europe. Benefiting from a unique 30 years of lasting post-Cold War momentum that was particularly conducive to multiplying relationships with international partners, Germany has managed to rise to the position of Europe's leading economic actor. Although it has often been criticised for its budgetary orthodoxy, Germany was regarded as a model to follow by some. In light of the war in Ukraine, the cracks in the German model have however become evident and were articulated by Olaf Scholz in his speech on February 27th. Nevertheless, there is also reason for hope in this otherwise quite sobering context. Germany and the 26 other EU member states responded to crises such as COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine with the adoption of the Next Generation EU and REPowerEU plans – both strongly supported by France and Germany. These prove their resilience and capacity to adapt.

The EU's modernisation agenda and the plan to strengthen the EU's technological and industrial leadership as part of the twin green and digital transitions – which might actually be accelerated by the need to decouple from Russian hydrocarbons – could be a first step in achieving increased EU assertiveness in fields like the economy and energy. Moreover, on defence, awareness regarding the unpreparedness of European military forces in relation to a conventional war pushed NATO and the EU to strengthen their co-operation. As a consequence, Germany also made major announcements which – if met with concrete implementation – may assert its position in international relations.

For Europe to emerge stronger from the war in Ukraine, it is necessary to adopt a truly inclusive attitude towards all the member states, including the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic states. This must take into account their history and political specificities. Likewise, a clear policy on enlargement, particularly with regard to the Western Balkans, which has been lacking in the past but which was brought back to the fore with the war in Ukraine, is particularly crucial. Developing a Franco-German agenda around these priorities is all the more important for France as its credibility in these various areas is being increasingly questioned. NEE

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