Bimonthly **April-May** **No 3 (LI)/2022**
20 PLN (w tym 8% vat) | 12 EUR | 14 USD | 8 GBP
www.neweasterneurope.eu

New Eastern Europe

THE PAIN OF WAR

Testimonies of aggression and resistance

ISSN 2083-7372

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

ADVERTISEMENT

Libereco
Partnership for Human Rights

Humanitarian Aid for Ukraine: Donate now!

Donations account Germany: DE96 8309 4495 0003 3203 32
Donations account Switzerland: CH61 0900 0000 8579 2427 8

More information:
www.libereco.org/help-ukraine

ADVERTISEMENT

EVEN MORE CONTENT ON CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

CHECK OUT OUR PODCAST

New Eastern Europe

Talk Eastern Europe
hosted by Adam Reichardt & Maciek Makulski

WWW.NEWEASTERNEUROPE.EU/TALKEASTERNEUROPE

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

DEAR READER,

As our previous issue went to print, we were still uncertain as to whether a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine was going to actually take place. The events which began on the early morning of February 24th 2022 gave us the unfortunate final answer to that question. The invasion by Russian forces of Ukraine from the north, south and east – with the initial aim to take the capital Kyiv – has changed our region, and indeed our world, forever. This issue of *New Eastern Europe* brings you some tales and reflections of the brave Ukrainians who have united to fight the invading aggressor. These stories provide a distinct account – some of which are written in a diary format – of the first month of the war, the incredibly horrible period when Russian troops were brutally attacking villages on the road to Kyiv and elsewhere in the country. The disturbing images of the Russian inhumanity only emerged after the Ukrainians successfully defended the areas around the capital.

This issue also analyses the impact that the war has or will have on the region and beyond. Our authors examine the sanctions against Russia, the role of Belarus in the war, Poland's new position as a frontline country as well as the future of Russia's relations with the West. A significant development of the wartime has been not only the unity of the European Union and NATO but also the fact that all three countries known as the Associated Trio (Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia) have officially submitted applications to become members of the EU. These developments clearly demonstrate that the war has not only brought tragic results, but historical ones as well.

Lastly, the issue provides a look at the extraordinary level of human response to the war, including humanitarian activities and the welcoming of refugees. At *New Eastern Europe* we have been extremely involved in these actions as well, and have put a lot of focus on supporting our Ukrainian contributors and translators. Please consider donating to support them. More information about our crowdfunding campaign can be found online at www.neweasterneurope.eu. We invite you to begin this issue with a special editorial, written by the *New Eastern Europe* team. We welcome your reflections and reactions via email or social media. We look forward to hearing from you.

The Editors

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Contents

The pain of war

7 Time to look into the mirror

The argument that NATO provoked Russia is an obvious example of Moscow's narrative being regurgitated in mainstream western media. The truth is, however, that we did not take enough action. This is what ultimately encouraged Putin to act in such a brutal manner.

12 War diaries from Kyiv
Andrey Kirillov

Since the start of the war, journalist Andrey Kirillov found himself in Kyiv. He began documenting his daily experiences through his war diaries. We publish several excerpts from his diary here.

23 #UkraineUnderFire. A war diary
Imke Hansen

33 Ukrainian refugees flee the war to Poland
A photo-story by Omar Marques

41 New habits of wartime. A view from the rear
Maria Protsiuk

It has been scientifically proven that 21 days are needed to form and strengthen a new habit. Unfortunately, Russia's war against Ukraine has been going on long enough to force Ukrainians to adopt new habits. What are these habits and how do Ukrainians live in the relatively safe regions in the rear of the fighting?

50 Putin's biggest mistake
Zoriana Varenia

I left behind the city I was born in, where I learnt to ride a bike and ice skate, where I finished school and where I had my first kiss. There, I also left my ambitions, my plans and a part of my soul.

55 The news of the invasion was like a bomb
A conversation with Pedro Caldeira Rodrigues

61 Waiting for Fortinbras
A conversation with Oksana Zabuzhko, a Ukrainian writer and intellectual

"In Ukraine there is a society. The state may be a disaster, it may have many flaws just like during the winter of 2014, but there is a society that knows how and when to say 'no'. In contrast, we have a state that is eating up its own society in Russia."

66 Ukrainian territorial defence. How regular city dwellers will vanquish the fierce Russian bear
A conversation with Roman and Iryna, officers of the territorial defence in Kyiv

72 The soft power of Ukrainian women will defeat Mordor
A conversation with Iryna, a territorial defence officer, and Natalya, a civil volunteer

78 Open Letter. An urgent call from Mariupol

A Joint Call of European Mayors to European governments and the European Commission on raising efforts to end the war

Russia in its war against Ukraine

86 Putin's Fascism
Tomasz Kamusella

Russia's political system is nothing but a dictatorship along the lines of Lenin and Stalin's democratic centralism. After all, the main goal is to re-establish a new Russian empire with Putin on the throne.

96 The devastating long-term effects of sanctions against Russia
Kiril Kossev

102 Why Russia has very little to offer
Tatevik Hovhannisyan and Tiziano Marino

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

107 **Russia's targets: children, pregnant women, civil institutions and infrastructure**
Jan-Henrik Wiebe
Not a day goes by without a war crime being deliberately committed by Russia in Ukraine. Documenting these crimes is a huge task that cannot be done by just one organisation.

112 **Bearing witness. Despite repressions and state propaganda, the anti-war movement in Russia continues**
Anna Efimova

120 **Learning "history" with Putin**
Allyson Edwards

The view from the region and beyond

125 **Bulba in a pickle. Belarus and the war in Ukraine**
Kacper Wańczyk
Stuck in the middle of a war, Belarusian strongman Alyaksandr Lukashenka has tried to save himself by using his old tricks.

130 **Poland as a new frontline state**
Wojciech Michnik

136 **The more things change… Britain, Russia and the war in Ukraine**
Niall Gray

143 **Relations with Russia will never be the same again**
Mark Temnycky

148 **Mission Impossible? EU membership for Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova during wartime**
Denis Cenusa

161 **Hardship on the horizon. Armenia amid sanctions against Russia**
Anna Vardanyan

167 **Russia's war in Ukraine. Perspectives from the South Caucasus**
Veronika Pfeilschifter, Bidzina Lebanidze And Irena Gonashvili

Context and reports

174 **More volunteers than refugees. How Romanians mobilised for Ukrainians**
Marcel Gascón Barberá

179 **Why Russians still regret the Soviet collapse**
James C. Pearce
In 2019, a Levada Centre poll revealed that 66 per cent of Russians regretted the collapse of the Soviet Union while just a quarter did not. This represented an increase of 11 per cent in ten years.

185 **Raphael Lemkin. The ambassador of our conscience**
Grzegorz Szymborski

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

New Eastern Europe
www.neweasterneurope.eu

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

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

New Eastern Europe is published in partnership with the European Solidarity Centre in Gdańsk.

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

EDITORIAL BOARD
Rebecca Harms, Yaroslav Hrytsak,
Paweł Kowal, Ivan Krastev, Georges Mink,
Cornelius Ochmann, Mykola Riabchuk,
Eugeniusz Smolar, Lilia Shevtsova,
Roman Szporluk, Jan Zielonka

EDITORIAL TEAM
Adam Reichardt, Editor-in-Chief
Iwona Reichardt, Deputy Editor, Lead Translator
Daniel Gleichgewicht, Editor
Contributing Editors: Mackenzie Baldinger,
Maciej Makulski, Wojciech Michnik,
Maxim Rust, Anna Efimova,
Anastasiia Starchenko

COPYEDITING
Niall Gray

ILLUSTRATIONS AND COVER
Andrzej Zaręba

COVER LAYOUT
Do Lasu s.c.

SUBSCRIPTION:
www.neweasterneurope.eu/subscribe

LAYOUT AND FORMATTING
Małgorzata Chyc | AT Wydawnictwo

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

Content with the notation (CC) is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License. All attempts are made to give proper and appropriate attribution to the author and source.

Circulating texts without the Editors' permit is strictly forbidden. The Editors bear no responsibility for the content of advertisements.

Copyright © by the Jan Nowak-Jeziorański College of Eastern Europe in Wrocław (Kolegium Europy Wschodniej im. Jana Nowaka-Jeziorańskiego we Wrocławiu), 2021

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

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

Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland

NARODOWY PROGRAM ROZWOJU CZYTELNICTWA

Legal Services Provided by KOKSZTYS S.A.

KOKSZTYS

Circulation: 3000
Printing: Zakład Poligraficzny Moś i Łuczak sp.j.
International Distribution: Magazine Heaven Direct / https://www.magazineheavendirect.com
Printed in Poland
Published since 2011

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Time to look into the mirror

The argument that NATO provoked Russia is an obvious example of Moscow's narrative being regurgitated in mainstream western media. The truth is, however, that we did not take enough action. This is what ultimately encouraged Putin to act in such a brutal manner.

On February 24th 2022 the world awoke to the news that the Russian Federation had begun a brutal invasion and attack from land, sea and air against independent and free Ukraine. That terrible winter morning confirmed that the evidence gathered by US intelligence and shared with the world weeks before was indeed correct. Russia's large-scale military invasion was inevitable. It was to take place, despite our utter disbelief.

Russia's plan of mass aggression directed at the Ukrainian people could also have been gathered from the televised speech that Vladimir Putin delivered on February 21st, just a few days before the invasion. In this over one-hour-long gloomy talk to the Russian nation (and indeed the whole world), Putin bluntly declared his hatred of the former republics, now independent states, and bitterness over the collapse of the Soviet Union. The communist state's breakup is for him, as we have long known, the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century. Today, it is crystal clear that Putin will not spare anything that humanity holds dear in order to restore the Russian empire and halt the NATO alliance from accepting new members.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Cowardice and denial

The brutality of the Russian army since the start of the invasion not only shows that Putin has no respect for international norms or human lives, but also that his own state – the Russian Federation – has become a repressive fascist system. The infamous letter "Z", first painted on Russian military vehicles, has now become an explicit symbol of this fascism. But the truth is that Russia has been on the totalitarian path for quite some time now. We have just refused to accept this, naively believing that the lessons of the Second World War had been internalised long ago and its atrocities would never be repeated. This was especially true immediately after the Cold War, when it appeared that liberal democracy would prevail worldwide as part of the "end of history".

Today, when news about Russia's hideous crimes against the Ukrainian nation reaches us daily, we have to admit that Russia acted in this way partly because of our own cowardice and denial. To put it honestly, it was us, the international community, that absolved the Russian Federation from accountability for its many brutal invasions in the past. These actions started with Moldova and Chechnya in the 1990s, then Georgia, Syria, Crimea and Donbas in the first and second decades of the 21st century. Like now in Ukraine, all these other places witnessed the Russian army commit crimes against humanity. Yet, instead of punishing those responsible for the atrocities in our international system of justice, we stood by, silently watching as the Kremlin ordered the murders of those who had openly opposed them in Russia and abroad.

> Instead of punishing those responsible for the atrocities in our international system of justice, we stood by.

Among those who were killed is Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya, who was murdered for informing the world on the reality of the Second Chechen War. Natalya Estemirova, a human rights activist, was also assassinated in Chechnya for similar reasons. We all remember the murder of Boris Nemtsov, who was killed for his reports on the Russian military intervention in Donbas. The closure of Memorial – an organisation that investigated Stalin's brutal crimes – should have been no surprise as the totalitarian regime began closing its ranks internally.

And while we may have been shocked by all these events and even expressed our anger publicly, we did very little to prevent them from happening again. Some in the West believed that these were even isolated incidents or that business with Russia did not necessarily mean business with those killers responsible for these horrible yet largely ignored crimes. Russian disinformation and propaganda fuelled ignorance and provided a cover for those who valued business over morals, and profits over lives.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Information pervasion

Russia also gained a foothold in many of our own countries, often exploiting corrupt politicians and disseminating state-sponsored fake news and disinformation that inflamed internal divides. By allowing Russia Today, later RT, and Sputnik, primarily broadcast in English (the global lingua franca, but also translated into many other languages), to frequent our media landscape, we believed that we were adhering to our cherished democratic values like freedom of speech. Under the impression that these channels were offering "a different perspective", we allowed Putin's sick vision of restoring the Russian empire to take root in our societies and Kremlin-created narratives meant to divide us to enter into our discourse.

We nourished the monster in the Kremlin through numerous business deals that we now find so difficult to free ourselves from.

Thus, in 2014, instead of talking about the Russian war against Ukraine, we could read about a "civil conflict" in Ukraine; "the Ukrainian crisis"; and the problem of "Ukrainian nationalists". These phrases, however, as many finally learnt in 2021 and 2022, were only to serve as a background for a much stronger lie. It was uttered by Putin himself and used as a pretext to start the current war. He falsely stated that Ukraine has no historical right to exist and even requires "denazification".

The "denazification" of a state whose president is Jewish is obviously a groundless argument. Yet, we have to admit that many politicians in our own countries have long been under the influence of Russia. Thanks to this, we have witnessed many destructive trends that have severely damaged not only the operations of our state institutions and political processes, but also brought on deep divisions within our highly polarised societies. Almost any issue that requires a democratic choice has become prey to Russian manipulation via its disinformation machine, online trolls, bots and useful idiots. This is true for elections, but also COVID-19, Brexit, abortion rights, race relations, LGBTQ+ rights and many other issues. Instead of adequately diagnosing the sources of these divisions, we eagerly joined in; fanning the flames that were stoked by Russia's interference. While we cannot blame Russia for everything wrong within our own societies, we do need to acknowledge all the risks it poses to our social cohesion through echo-chambers, bubbles and cancel culture.

Our money also allowed Russia to grow. We nourished the monster in the Kremlin through vast and numerous business deals that we now find so difficult to free ourselves from. For some, business with Russia is still acceptable even if their daily news reports highlight the inhumane blockade of Mariupol and the shelling of

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

breadlines in Kharkiv. Several EU member states remain prone to pressure from Russia, having ignored repeated calls for the diversification of their energy supply.

Who provoked who?

Unfortunately, there are still commentators, politicians and opinion makers in the West who continue to act as useful idiots for the Kremlin by claiming that it is NATO's that fault Russia invaded Ukraine. They say that NATO provoked the conflict and Russia is only acting in its own self-defence. Is Moscow defending itself by brutally killing civilians in the thousands? By destroying entire cities and forcibly moving their populations to various regions in Russia, including the Far East? How we can even point the finger at anyone else beyond Putin and his regime is still a deep-seated mystery. Besides, NATO does not "expand"; it has an "open door policy". In other words, if a country wishes or decides that it is in its own best interests to join the Alliance, NATO will welcome them into the family after it conforms to the highest western standards. Seeing how Russia assaults those who even consider joining NATO, we should not doubt the importance of the Alliance. What if Poland did not decide to join NATO in 1999 and waited to announce such intentions until 2015? It would not take much imagination to fathom how Putin would have reacted in such a scenario. The argument that NATO provoked Russia is another example of the Russian narrative being regurgitated in mainstream western media. The truth is, however, that we did not take enough action. This is what ultimately encouraged Putin to act in such a brutal manner.

Not that long ago, we were disgusted by the revelations in Alexei Navalny's film about Putin's mansion. But no one really bothered to speak up against the gas pipeline that allowed him to reach such levels of wealth. Many in the West in fact never felt obliged enough to see their business with Russia as an act of corruption. Yet many of them were eager to point to Ukraine as being corrupt and hence unable to "meet European democratic standards". We expected Ukrainians to listen to our guidelines on what modern statehood should look like, but their arguments (or those in Poland or the Baltic states) on why Nord Stream 2 is dangerous for the region and our security went ignored, written off as wild "Russophobia".

Now, Europe and the West face their greatest challenge since the end of the Cold War and perhaps since the outbreak of the Second World War. The refugee crisis that the Russian forces have now set in motion through their indiscriminate attacks on Ukraine will be an immense and lengthy test. The tactics of total war have already forced a large percentage of Ukraine's future beyond its borders. It must remain a priority for the international community to provide them with care

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

and safety. Pushing these masses of civilians into Poland, Romania and Moldova in particular is also part of the Russian strategy to put these countries under pressure, sow divisions and exhaust resources. These countries and their allies must quickly come to terms with the fact that they are now on the frontline.

Towards a common victory

Now, of course, we have reached a stage of western unity and solidarity with Ukraine. The response by the transatlantic community to Russia's invasion was impressive. Putin certainly did not expect such a reaction. A new emboldened sanctions regime has been introduced and Nord Stream 2 has finally been put on hold (yet for how long, we do not know). How this war will end depends on many factors. The brave and courageous Ukrainians defending their home, led and inspired by their democratically elected president, convince us that victory is not only possible but likely. However, peace at any cost cannot be the western-imposed solution to Putin's war. Ukraine has already sacrificed too much. It has lost too many husbands, wives, sons, daughters and grandparents. Instead, peace can only come with Ukraine's victory; its territorial integrity intact and its future bright and prosperous.

The Russian totalitarian regime must be held to account for its crimes in this war. This includes an end to Vladimir Putin's rule in the Kremlin. A return to business as usual, drunk on Russian disinformation and corrupted by dirty money – to a place where we were before February 24th – is no longer possible. There is only one outcome: Ukraine's victory and the renewal of the West and its promise of a new future. The price that Ukraine is paying today cannot and will not be made in vain. Understanding this is the first step towards our common victory.

This text was written by the editors of New Eastern Europe.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

War diaries from Kyiv

ANDREY KIRILLOV

Since the start of the war, journalist Andrey Kirillov found himself in Kyiv. He began documenting his daily experiences through his war diaries. We publish several excerpts from his diary here.

Day one

The editorial office where I am now writing this is located in a residential building. The grocery store in this building is the only one in the whole block that is open today. This is a luxurious district that used to be noisy, with crowds of citizens, young people and tourists walking around. Now, these streets are nearly deserted. Expensive clothes shops, restaurants, coffee shops and barbershops are all closed. But what is important are the people who have gathered around that open store. It is in the basement of the residential building. An old man is sleeping in the corner. Children are riding about on office chairs. Their mothers are having tea that they pour into cups. Fathers are smoking at the entrance. All of them are using this space as a bomb shelter.

Kyiv woke up to the sounds of shelling and military aeroplanes at sunrise today. Believe me, this is impressive, especially when the glimpses of the distance shelling can be seen in the dark. The light was switched on in every window. People found out that Russia had declared war on Ukraine.

When the sun came up, citizens started to take care of their family issues. Those who had houses in the countryside took their wives, elderly parents and children there. Many decided to stay with their relatives in small towns, away from big cities. Lines were formed in the supermarkets, cash was being withdrawn from the ATMs, necessary medicine was being purchased in pharmacies. From the news, we found out that martial law had been introduced. Since the early morning, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Vitali Klitschko, the Kyiv mayor, have been say-

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

ing that all the vital infrastructure of Ukraine and its capital were operating. Later the news came that the air defences shot down Russian planes and the infantry is stopping tanks from pushing through Ukraine's borders.

There was no shock, no thrill, no panic. Ukrainians have been waiting for Putin to attack for several years, since the start of the war and especially during the last few months. Everyone had their evacuation planned. To some extent, it reminds me of a sick person who is waiting for surgery. When this day came, he was ready because he had been getting ready for a long time.

The scale of the intervention becomes clearer in the morning. Ukraine has been attacked from the East, from the sea, from Crimea, and from Belarus in the North. Saboteurs and drones are blowing up military warehouses, army headquarters and TV towers, even those located far from Ukraine's borders. Tanks are moving to Kharkiv and Odesa was shelled. And Kyiv, of course. Kyiv was shelled.

Khreshchatyk Street, Kyiv's central avenue, heard a strong hum in the middle of the day. Passers-by stopped just for a moment, only one teenager ran towards a metro station. This sound reminded my friend – a veteran – of a near-miss of a large-powered artillery piece. Later we found out that Russians shelled a military base on the Kyiv outskirts, on the other side of the Dnieper river. Six people were killed, 12 were injured. Meanwhile, the Ukrainian military shot down helicopters that were taking Russian paratroopers to the other side of Kyiv.

Mobile data and connections are operating without any problems. If some bank card does not work with one ATM, it works with another. Public transport works free of charge. Citizens are constantly calling each other and talking about the war. They are checking up on the news from the ministry of defence and the government. I need to admit that there was a lot of news. On social media, people are supporting each other and asking each other to only trust the official messages of the ministry of defence. From time to time, you can see desperate posts of those Russians who were shocked by the war. Ukrainians accept their curses towards Putin and themselves with restraint.

Ukraine has been attacked from the East, from the sea, from Crimea, and from Belarus in the North.

An acquaintance of mine calls me, "Help me find a blood donation centre! Their lines are always busy!" She wants to donate blood to the army and other future victims of the war. I spent 30 minutes on the phone, failing to reach any hospital. Finally, someone picks up and tells me the address. "Come here, do not distract us! We cannot talk on the phone and accept blood donations at the same time."

Along with housewives who went out to buy some milk and dog owners, one can already notice people who are rushing to the railway station or a bomb shelter.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

This is usually a man and a woman with backpacks and suitcases, accompanied by their daughter or son who is usually cheerful and thrilled – for them this is just an adventure. This picture reminds me of sending a child to a summer camp, with the only difference being that the parents look too focused. Six new armoured vehicles appear on the street. They are on their way to taking defensive positions.

The Kyiv underground is not only a means of public transportation but also the largest and safest bomb shelter now. Those who believe it is too dangerous to stay in their buildings stay here in the halls of the underground stations, sitting next to the walls or on the benches or their bags, alone or in a group. Hundreds of such dormant people at every metro station. There is a lot of movement around military commissariats. Men of all ages are coming here. Most of them are in their 30s, wearing sports or summer clothes; but some are wearing a military uniform. Their backpacks are jammed full. At military commissariats, they can join the army or territorial defence forces under a simplified and hastened procedure.

I join them. I show my passport and military documents to the officer in charge. Then I am redirected to a large room where around 50 men are waiting for an interview in line. All of a sudden, an officer enters the room and says loudly, "Air alarm! Follow me!" We descend into a large basement where we stare at our smartphones to kill some time. A man in his 40s who has a Cossack moustache and wears a British military uniform directs my attention to the screen of his phone. "Have you seen it?" Here is a video of Ukrainian drones destroying a Russian tank column. I reply that I have already seen it, but it will be nice to have a look again.

Later, the same officer returned to the basement and announced, "All clear! Those who have signed the contract should present themselves to their commanders. You will receive weapons." I say that I have some urgent business and go outside. I am not ready to go to war with a rifle yet. And, I am sure, they will manage there without me.

Ukrainians have been waiting for this war for too long, for eight long years. Everyone was waiting for it. Those who were at war and came back, their wives and children, refugees from the occupied territories, relatives of the dead, teenagers and elderly people, alcoholics at cheap bars, athletes, owners of fancy bistros, musicians, peasants from the villages. All of them have seen Putin's real face and they are not scared. They were scared before. Now they have some confidence.

Day two

I am writing this in the evening at the editorial office. I can see the residential buildings from the windows of our office – there are almost no lights on. It used

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

to be the opposite. In those expensive apartments and offices, people work late. But not now. Car noise is very rare too. It is almost a complete silence. Almost.

I can hear something exploding in the distance when I go to the balcony for a smoke; a heavy bomb in the distance. During the day, air raid sirens kept going. There are several reasons why there are no lights turned on in the neighbouring building. Many people left yesterday when it became clear that the Russians aim to take Kyiv. Others do not want to attract the attention of Russian pilots or drone operators. A lot of people prefer to spend the night in the bomb shelters that are usually at the closest metro station. I do not hide in the underground and do not switch off my lights. I feel that there is a low probability that my building will be shelled. Yet, those whose houses get shelled always think like this. Last night, a downed Russian drone fell over a nine-storey residential building. It sparked a fire and all the residents were evacuated. The building is not habitable anymore. Eight people were injured.

At the metro station, around 150 people are lying on blankets, sitting on benches, or just wandering around.

In Hostomel, a town nearby Kyiv, the latest generation of Russian missiles fell in an alley between multi-storey residential buildings. Russians are bragging about these high-precision missiles but this one went off course and did not reach the target, a place where Ukrainian troops were concentrated. The Kyiv authorities announced that this night may be very disturbing and even "decisive". Tanks are moving towards the city from the north. Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka permitted the training of Russian army forces on his territory, but they decided that Belarus provides the shortest way to Kyiv. They should overcome this 200 kilometre route in one day and night. The Ukrainian military believes it will be easier and more secure to stop this convoy on the outskirts of the cities than in the woods and swamps.

At the metro station, around 150 people, mostly women and children, are lying on blankets, sitting on benches, or just wandering around. At the exit, a group of men in sport suits and with backpacks are asking me where they can register to join the territorial defence. I explained where to go. We go together across the streets of Kyiv. We meet men in civilian clothes but with orange armbands and rifles on our way. Those are the volunteers that we want to join. Their headquarters is located in one of the industrial buildings. Around 100 cars are parked next to it. Future members of the territorial defence drove here in their cars. In the distance, I can see a line of army trucks. All of them waiting to receive weapons. Hundreds of such people are here. While new people arrive, the others who already received their rifles, ammunition and orange armbands, leave the building. This reminds me of a conveyor providing the unarmed with weapons.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Photo: Drop of Light/Shutterstock

The Kyiv underground is not only a means of public transportation but also the largest and safest bomb shelter now.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

I get a little confused. Does this mean that anyone can show their passport, take a rifle, and go search for the enemy? Later, I found several experienced people who explained to me how it works. After registration, volunteers join a small group, become subordinate to a commander who is chosen among them. This commander is responsible for the weapons and discipline. They receive a specific task, for instance, to patrol and guard an area or help the military.

At the roundabout of the last city avenue, excavators dig trenches, the military check arriving transport and military vehicles come and leave. The last time I saw a similar territorial defence point was in Mariupol in 2016. Back then, the attack from the Donbas separatists was expected. Trenches and roadblocks are located next to residential buildings. This is a place where fights, crossfire, and shelling may take place. I meet my old acquaintance, a veteran of the war in Donbas, a twice injured holder of several state orders. He was a commander of a survey team. He looks like he has never returned from the war, even though he has been working as a truck driver for the last several years. I point to the body armour and a helmet that he is wearing and ask, "But they do not give out these things here, right?" He says that these are his personal belongings. "I had all my equipment in order. We knew that we would have to fight." His friend also has good equipment. He wears an American winter uniform, infantry helmet and light body armour with plastic details. Those are also the personal belongings of a veteran who has been preparing for the war for a long time.

Suddenly we see how not far away from us, military police stop a young man, turn him over in a second, take some documents out of his pocket and take his phone. An officer says something loudly to his colleagues, but we also can hear his words, "Yes, he was taking pictures of the positions". In 20 minutes, all this time the young man is lying down, afraid of making a move, the police car arrives and takes him away.

I asked, "Wow, are they not being too harsh to him?"

"Maybe they are, but just this morning they liquidated an infiltration team on the roundabout over there," my friend who used to serve in a survey team says. "They stole our military trucks, wore our uniforms, and were moving towards the city centre."

Day six

I go down Steven King-like, empty and mysterious halls. This hospital, like many others in Kyiv, has been shut down because of martial law, but I know that trauma specialists still should work. I get to the second floor and take several turns down

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

a corridor, with no one in sight in the treatment rooms. I eventually find them, a middle-aged doctor and two old nurses. My recently broken arm hurts and I felt I would need a professional to have a look at it. These days, many local doctors continue to work. They have organised in such a way that someone is always on duty, ready to provide consultations online or on the phone. It is not the worst option during these times of curfew, shut down public transport and empty hospitals. One would at least get an idea of how to act next and what medicine to purchase if needed. This hospital belongs to a chain that offers a variety of medical services, from psychologists to urologists and professionals treating asthma. I first considered reaching out to them but then found a list of open trauma treatment points on the city council website. One of them is not far from my home, so I decided that it is what I need. I wanted a professional to check my arm in person.

Kyiv is struggling to live. Those who can work continue, even if part-time or remotely, as much as they can.

The doctor examined my arm quite inattentively and told me to have an x-ray. After that, he had a look at the picture and said that everything was fine. I felt calmer when I left his office. He also gave me a prescription, written in typical doctor-style, an unclear doodle trying to pass as handwriting. But why are there no other patients here waiting in line? A nurse explained to me, "When do people get injured? When they move a lot. And now everyone is sitting at home. Or builders injure themselves on construction sites, but what construction site would be open now?" She adds, "But we still work because there are still some people coming."

This is true. Those affected by the shelling are immediately taken to the hospitals for emergency care by ambulances. Injured military personnel and policemen are taken to military hospitals. But a few trauma points should stay open in every district for such worried patients like me.

There is a famous saying, attributed to, I believe, Bismarck: "War is war, but lunch has to be on time." These days, Kyiv residents have brought this back in style. They use it under different circumstances like a password. Housewives say, "War is war, but laundry has to be done on time." A security guard of an empty hotel next to my house says, "but duty has to be on time". A truck driver says, "vehicle inspection has to be regular". Dog owners say, "walks have to be done on time".

Kyiv is struggling to live a normal life. Those who can work continue, even if part-time or remotely, as much as they can. Colleagues, bosses, clear and understandable office tasks are still there, even though we have no clarity about salary. But what is important is that this activity grants you a feeling that you are doing something useful and significant, something that you are good at. It is so vital now, otherwise you would have to call a therapist every day.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

When approaching my residential building, I notice a woman holding a small rake – she is taking care of the lawn under a small tree. Wearing gloves and boots, she gives an impression of a person who is well-prepared for gardening. I stop by her and ask, "Why have you decided to start gardening? It is, how can I put it, not the best time for that…". She stands up and answers me gracefully, "And what, what war? Should I abandon everything? I have wanted to start gardening for a long time."

This day, the sixth day of defence, has left a blank impression on me, as probably many not the best and not the worst days of this war will. There was no shelling, it was quiet on the city outskirts. The city council keeps giving recommendations, soldiers keep fighting, air raid sirens keep blaring. Children keep growing up, the elderly keep getting old. Those who are between them are supposed to feed, warm and comfort them. Kyiv residents are prepared to wait… but for what? No one knows. What if the electricity goes out? What if there was no bread? What if aspirin will disappear from the pharmacies? What if it will be given away for free? What if the Russians will start a new attack and shelling? "We will wait", people say.

Kyiv residents are prepared to wait… but for what? What if the Russians will start a new attack? "We will wait", they say.

P.S. While I was writing this small chapter, the Kyiv television centre was reportedly shelled. A missile could have landed in the buildings where the technical systems of the centre were located. The centre can be seen from many districts in the city, before the war, it was beautifully illuminated at night. Five people died, five were injured. This is a part of the Russian military and Putin's plan to damage Ukrainian information infrastructure. Does it matter? No one is watching television now, even grandfathers watch football on smartphones.

Day eight

The editorial office is empty. Everyone has gone home or never left it. When rummaging through some closet in the most distant room of the office, I found a bottle of Port 1993 from Massandra. I was stunned. Massandra wine from Crimea … for me?! You could try to find it here, in Kyiv, but… that would be too sentimental to have Crimean wine in Kyiv. It would bring not joy but longing. I would drink it and think that those bastards who now manage Crimea have it too. But it is still hard to find this wine, anyway.

I was 14 years old in 1993. That summer, I was diving for crabs. Water got in my left ear and it was aching. I also scratched my stomach on shells. Once, when I

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

was crawling over the seaside rocks, the water suddenly receded, and I hung on to those rocks. That year, we moved from Simeiz to Simferopol. My childhood came to an end. I remember becoming aware of it.

And here is this bottle. Prohibition was announced in Kyiv … no one has any alcohol. The first week of the war came to an end. I remember life before it quite ambiguously. Amazing, amazing taste. Simple, deep, astringent, slow. Warm. Pale amber in colour; liquid grace! But, oh my God? What if it will be possible… Unbelievable hope warms my soul – will I be able to see Crimea again? Will I go back, walk there, breathe, wave my hands? And here is this bottle, God knows how it got here.

Day eleven

I visited one of my friends the other day. I came in right at dinner time. He gave me quinoa with canned ham, canned tomatoes and homemade unleavened pita bread.

"I bought them at the closest Silpo store. No kasha this time," he explains. He received the canned ham as a reimbursement for his patriotic service in the territorial defence. "Silpo" is a nationwide chain for middle and upper-middle-class customers. The way its stores look now gives a weird impression. There is nothing where kasha and pasta used to be, but the showcase of meat delicacies, pieces of Spanish jamon, ice with oysters and aquariums with lobsters all remain intact. I talk to the salesperson. He says that the store received a new supply of fish on the eve of the first day of the invasion, so the cheapest fish has already been sold out while no one wants to buy the expensive ones.

> Only a few continue to work, meaning that most residents will not receive their salaries by the end of the month.

"I have never tried this quinoa. But now I got a taste for it," my friend says and swears with restraint. One box of quinoa cost him the same as five boxes of rice.

Food supplies in the stores have been more or less restored. There are no lines, no bread shortage, milk is available again. The first shock passed and many residents have started to think about what sociologists call the "financial cushion". This refers to the money that you have saved for a rainy day, in case you were saving or had something to save. In Kyiv, only a few continue to work, which means that most residents will not receive their salaries by the end of the month. Municipal services have informed us that water and electricity bills will not be suspended due to the war, but late payments will not be penalised. I am sure that they know that they will be lucky to receive one-third of their usual income for February. And

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

how much will they receive for March? Flat owners probably will not be too strict with their tenants – anyway, it looks like a significant part of Kyiv's tenants have already left. Those who rent accommodation usually pay from their monthly salary that they will not receive this time.

Also, there is some pleasant news. Mobile operators have waived payments for calls and data for a month. Without any irony, this is very important during wartime – it grants us communication! This is now part of the simple arithmetic done by the majority of families staying in Kyiv. All they are left with is to watch how their financial cushion deflates, much as an ordinary inflatable cushion deflates because of a broken plug.

The city of millions does not produce anything and spends the rest of its money. The middle class that has some savings constitutes less than one-third of the city's population. But they cannot count on anything else other than the money they already have in cash or saved in their bank accounts. It is impossible to sell some property or take a loan. Two-thirds of city residents do not have any savings and live "pay check to pay check". If you are a man, you can join the territorial defence – they will not let you go hungry there. But what if you can't go? The majority of people here cannot.

"We need to form some sort of labour battalion for food rations, this is a real chance," my friend says. "They will find things to do, people can at least do clean ups after the shelling or build fortifications."

I ask, "Does Klitschko suggest that?"

"Not yet. But this is obvious, something needs to be done."

As a person who has experience in sustaining order, he knows very well that order is only possible in a well-kept city. There are no signs of hunger protests yet, but we all are trying to prepare for the worst-case scenarios. Production in Kyiv – in those parts that are still operating – leaves a paradoxical impression because the industry is struggling with understaffing in a city where everyone has plenty of spare time. Low-skilled workers in different industries, including bread factories, have always been coming from the regions surrounding Kyiv. Most of them returned home, with no one in sight to replace them quickly. Three out of five Kyiv bread factories stopped, and it caused a bread deficit last week. The second reason was the collapse of public transport. Many residents of the city have to commute from afar and transfer somewhere on their way to work. When transport stopped, there was no one at the bread factories to unload flour sacks or prepare the fresh bread for delivery. Even the drivers did not show up sometimes.

Maybe the city council has some plans regarding how to compensate for this loss of labour resources with those residents who do not mind working? Maybe they provide these people with transport to the factories? Meanwhile, people are

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

already compensating for labour shortages at a grassroots level. At Silpo, competent smart young men are now cashiers. One of them explained to me that he is replacing another employee, a girl who left home to a village in Volyn, even though at this store, he is a professional dealing with logistics.

However, so many people in Kyiv have neither a financial cushion nor something that would even distantly resemble one. The other day, I saw a woman and her son, around ten years old, who were pushing a baby carriage with huge bottles of water. They were taking it from somewhere to their dwelling, a basement of an abandoned building. They do not have any documents and cannot receive food rations that the city council is providing people. They do not have a cell phone and therefore cannot call any volunteer organisation that helps the homeless. If earlier they have used expired products given by stores for free, now there are no expired products left and stores are barely open. The boy tells me this story while his mother is having a rest, smoking a cigarette that she got from me. I wonder if Klitschko, the city mayor, has any plans for such people – the homeless, unemployed, undocumented, surviving in a city almost under siege? NEE

Translated by Anna Efimova

Andrey Kirillov is a Ukrainian journalist. Originally from Crimea, he escaped during the 2014 occupation. He now resides in Kyiv.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

#UkraineUnderFire

A war diary

IMKE HANSEN

Imke Hansen is an international peace worker at the Sievierodonetsk field office of the Ukrainian NGO Vostok SOS. Together with her colleague Maksim, she has established a trauma-informed training system for war-affected people in Luhansk region. She has shared her diary of the first weeks with us.

February 17th 2022

In the morning, the kindergarten in Stanytsia Luhanska was shelled. When Maksim told me, it felt like a punch in the gut. During the past two days, we had breathed a little sigh of relief; the diplomatic appeasements to Russia seemed to be working. Today's sudden shelling along the entire frontline exposed this as an illusion, as Russian disinformation policy. At noon, a school director called to request psychological help for the younger schoolchildren. There had been shelling there as well. In the past weeks, we already expected something to come. It was exhausting and stressful to prepare for something that you hope will not happen, something you do not know how it will look like, and how you can respond to it. It is like being stuck between hope, rationality, the wish to keep calm and anticipation of the worst.

Vostok SOS was founded in 2014 by "internally displaced persons" from Luhansk. The organisation immediately made a name for itself by providing humanitarian aid to other internally displaced persons and people in the warzone. The humanitarian team was one of the few that brought aid to the most remote places,

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

even during the hot phase of fighting. Few know the Luhansk region better than they do. Most of the organisation's employees have families on the other side of the front line. As a Libereco Partnership for Human Rights activist, I have worked closely with Vostok SOS since 2015. I have participated in numerous humanitarian transports myself. I have been stuck in the mud on a bus packed to the last millimetre with supplies, distributed washing powder and oatmeal, and listened to stories about how a bullet recently hit the village's last cow. I experienced the daily warzone life with the Vostok SOS team for several hot Donbas summers. We provided aid during the wildfires, trained the police in stress resilience and many more adventures.

> Despite the threat, many find it difficult to leave the warzone. It means increased distance from family.

During these summers, I grew into the family of Vostok SOS. Since early 2021, I have been working full-time with them as an International Peace Worker on behalf of the German organisation for civic activism and peacebuilding Kurve Wustrow. Since then, my home has been Vostok SOS's field office in Sievierodonetsk. The other field office is located in Mariupol, our main office is in Kyiv. While I am writing this, I am not in Ukraine anymore. Due to the impending threat of a Russian invasion, we peace workers are not allowed to be in the country anymore. So I am safe. But my team is not.

February 18th

It is Friday night, and I have just talked to Maksim on the phone. Together with his sister, he worked hard to convince his mother to leave Luhansk. Their efforts were successful, he sighs with relief. We discussed where his parents should be located in case of a Russian invasion. "My parents need to be together to feel safe," he told me. "And I feel better when they are close, in case something happens to them." This is true for most families in Donbas. Despite the looming threat, many find it difficult to leave the warzone because it means increased distance from family members. Since 2014 most of them have known the pain of separation and the feeling of guilt that often accompanies it.

As we continue talking about his parents, his body suddenly freezes. I ask him what is going on. Staring into the smoke he exhales, he recalls a situation from 2014 – an old couple that he could not evacuate from their home in eastern Ukraine. Every day we stumble upon such senses of déjà vu from 2014 and 2015. The triggers of old traumas lurk everywhere, so people are not only confronted with the current threat but additionally with the trauma of the past.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

February 19th

This Saturday morning's extraordinary meeting marks the beginning of Vostok SOS's humanitarian crisis response. The discussion is focused. Most staff members have already mastered several crises and know how to set up support systems. We will add capacities to our hotlines and develop an online help request form. Some requests for help do not reach the organisation directly, but through third parties who often have incomplete information because the people concerned have no network or internet.

Tasks are being distributed. Who will recruit volunteers? Who will create a list of people who can temporarily host refugees? Where will we send people in the first place? Which parts of Ukraine are most likely to be safe? Everyone signs up for responsibilities. My task will be the fundraising for our emergency response and the organisation of humanitarian aid supply. Even though the political situation is threatening, I feel relief knowing that Vostok SOS has begun unfolding its unbeatable skillset: sticking together in a crisis, joining forces and helping other people with professionalism and creativity.

Throughout the weekend, we are in contact with our colleagues in Sievierodonetsk. Right now, several staff members are documenting the situation on the front line, providing us with up-to-date photos, reports and needs assessments. Journalists come to the office, which resembles a media centre, to get first-hand information and conduct interviews. At the same time, we try to be in touch with our contacts in the warzone: civil society activists, teachers, medical personnel, and others. This direct line into the affected area helps us to understand the situation on the ground. More importantly, it maintains connectedness.

February 21st

The electricity plant in Shchastia has shut down after severe shelling. This event already exceeds our experiences of the hot combat phase from 2014/15. The power plant contributed significantly to stabilising the humanitarian situation during that time. The whole region depends on this plant. A couple of hours after the shutdown, my colleague talks to a local hospital. They no longer have electricity and are struggling to refrigerate medicine. Around 7300 households are already without power, not to mention infrastructure. This will make the humanitarian situation deteriorate swiftly, Maksim predicts. What is coming now, he suggests, will have a completely different quality than the war we know from the past seven years. His prophecy frightens me as he is usually correct with these things. Mon-

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

day evening is full of phone calls and short messages on all channels. Putin gives a speech where he denies the legitimacy of Ukraine's independence. Russia recognises the self-proclaimed "people's republics of Luhansk and Donetsk". Unsurprisingly, its first official act is to send in Russian "peacekeepers".

February 22nd

This morning we tried to convince our colleagues from Sievierodonetsk to leave the East and come to Kyiv with their children. Responses are between hesitation and rejection: "At the first checkpoint, they will take my husband into the army" or "What about our parents?" The most frequent reply is "For now, we will observe the situation." At first glance, that sounds calm and reasonable. But it means we are waiting for clarity, for a clear signal. However, we do not know what that signal would be. I am afraid that at some point, it will be too late, the roads will be clogged, the passage to the West will be much more dangerous.

February 24th

Russia has started a large-scale attack in the morning. Their forces have taken parts of Ukraine. No one knows where it will be safest. Evacuation is becoming difficult; roads are clogged. We are beginning to organise evacuations and help for refugees in Poland. Even though I am non-stop organising things, I feel helpless. No words left.

February 25th

Numerous Zoom meetings with Polish organisations. Polish civil society has mobilised insanely fast. People are driving to the border, collecting money, putting together information, showing an overwhelming readiness to help. However, coordination is still lacking. The meetings demand concentration and composure from everyone. Volunteers meet highly professionalised organisations, generations clash, different perceptions of work speed and speaking time become apparent. Some colleagues even address these issues with the gentle reminder that we have to work together now, even if it is chaotic, and if we might step on each other's toes.

I can barely reach my Ukrainian team. Some members are sitting in a bomb shelter. Others are on the road, trying to evacuate, exposed to shelling. I am the

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

only one who is safe. I need to take care of the things the others cannot right now. Represent the organisation, raise funds, make decisions. In between calls and interviews, I miss my colleagues so much and feel so alone that I cry. And then, I clean my glasses, take a sip of water, and move on to the next Zoom meeting.

February 26th

We made it into *Time* magazine! I am not too fond of fundraising, or of posting things on social media, I usually avoid journalists. I prefer working on the ground. With people. Help them overcoming trauma. See them gaining resilience. That is what I love. But now, as I see that more and more people care, as I see that the world cares about Ukraine, I am really touched. @AOC mentioned us on Instagram. Various bands promote us, and even a football club. And now *Time* magazine. Unbelievable.

February 27th

I talked to Maksim on the phone. He had not slept, I think the last time he slept for more than two hours was three days ago. Dok, he says to me, it can't be real all that has happened in the past 48 hours. Indeed, it is hard to believe what he has managed to do during that time. Organising, deciding, creating safety, leaving his home for an uncertain time. Maksim evacuated 13 people out of Kyiv during several trips. On the penultimate trip, just as he was heading into the city, he recorded three voice messages for me:

1. "Dok, when we meet again, we'll write a book. We need to write about everything we have done here, today, yesterday, the past year."
2. "If ten years pass without our reunion, then you may write the book alone."
3. "And just to make sure, I want to be played by Brad Pitt."

I replied that I would never let anyone else play him.

March 1st

In the past year, I have spent a lot of time in the city of Shchastia, a name that translates as "happiness". Now, 80 per cent of Shchastia is destroyed. Recently, we have worked there with a group of civil society activists. At our last meeting, we developed ideas for local development by drawing symbolic maps of an ideal ur-

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

ban civil society. First, each one focused on his or her own vision, then we made a shared map, which became colourful and crazy. While driving back to Sievierodonetsk, Maksim and I rejoiced: so many ideas had emerged during the mapping process, so much content we can build upon in the coming weeks. That is what we thought. Now it is all in ruins. Someone posted a list of survivors on Facebook. Dead people without papers are buried anonymously. When I read that, my mind recalls driving through the streets of Shchastia towards our training place. In the summer, I recognised the driveway to the old factory that hosted our meetings by the colossal flower bed on the corner. The last time I was there, it was snowing. After the training, we said goodbye in the light of the dim outdoor lamp that made the thick snowflakes look like a romantic movie animation. Now I do not know who from our training participants is still alive.

March 2nd

The polyclinic in Tryokhizbenka, our first partner project in Ukraine, was razed to the ground. The clinic's catchment area is a significant bit of frontline territory. Lilya, who runs the clinic, is the medical authority of this area and a legend. Her way of speaking to people, solving problems, reassuring without patronising, impresses me deeply. Lilya and I met in 2016 and instantly fell in love with each other. Since then, we have seen each other whenever we could. In the past year, me and Maksim tried to stop by regularly, at least for a quick lunch. If we failed to visit them for a fortnight, it was not unlikely that Lilya and her husband Vovo would turn up at our door on early Saturday, catching us still in pyjamas. They claimed they had errands to run in Sievierodonetsk and wanted to provide us with homegrown vegetables and eggs on the way. And they happily stayed for morning coffee.

The polyclinic in Tryokhizbenka, our first partner project in Ukraine, was razed to the ground.

Lilya and her ambulatory care increase the capacity for civil society in the frontline area. Everyone knows her, and even those who generally avoid physicians seek her advice. At the clinic, one can get information, encouragement, treatment and everything else needed in the war situation during the last eight years. Even in the clinic's garden, locals hang out to debate the latest news. Lilya and her staff's work has been crucial for the cohesion and continuity of the village's civil society.

Lilya and Vovo's home was the last house of Tryokhizbenka. Right behind it, the frontline cut off the street to Luhansk. Their garden has bordered frontline

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

trenches and a military camp for the past years. Their house is cosy and creatively decorated. I particularly liked the bathroom shelf, a discarded fridge door. Whenever we came in, there was a home cooked meal, we could take a nap on the couch, and get strong coffee with milk and sugar. Lilya asked us to help her with a computer problem that she then solved without actually needing any help. It was like visiting family. Now Lilya and Vovo are in Sievierodonetsk, in our office, trying to organise help for Tryokhizbenka, desperate and exhausted.

March 3rd

Today I am supposed to speak during an online peace prayer. I want to get a quick update on the situation on the ground and ask my teammate Zhenya what he finds necessary to say. "We want peace, freedom, and independence, and we have been forced to fight for it for 39 years. Now the whole world is watching how the Russian army destroys the Ukrainian people. Russia does not want to have a neighbour with democratic values.

For seven days, Russia has been waging war against a peaceful population, destroying kindergartens, schools, and homes. More than 2000 civilians have already lost their lives in this war. Ukraine cannot fight a war with Russia on equal terms. We lack the weapons and the financial resources. But we have faith, the truth, and the desire to live in a free country. Ukraine is on the brink of a humanitarian catastrophe. We need help from our neighbours, partners and friends. Without your help, it will be difficult to withstand the Russian invasion."

Ukraine cannot fight a war with Russia on equal terms. It lacks the weapons and the financial resources.

This is the briefing that is given by Zhenya.

March 5th

We have to re-plan supply chains. Warehouses along the border are no longer usable. They are stuffed with old clothes and cuddly toys, delivered by private individuals and initiatives. For many people, donating things that they do not need any more is the first impulse when it comes to helping. Christmas-themed pullovers and teddy bears quickly accumulate, which then clogs up the logistics that are actually needed for food and medicine. The same goes for the activity at the border. Many people want to pick up refugees at the border but fail to coordinate

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

this with the aid organisations on the ground. The border crossings are becoming chaotic. Human traffickers mingle with people from help organisations, picking up young women who are stressed and exhausted by days of flight. At the same time, well-meaning German drivers do not understand why women refuse to enter their car. It's great how many people want to help. However, the ways they choose often leave me with the question whether this is about themselves or those who need help. To help effectively, one needs information and coordination with the professionals on the ground. Otherwise, it is more harm than support.

I have not heard from Lilya in three days. I know that there are problems with connectivity.

March 7th

We receive many calls from people who need help to evacuate. In many places, evacuation is almost impossible. It is hard to find drivers. The roads are not safe. Vehicles are shelled. The safest evacuation seems to be the train at the moment. Every day there is an announcement of evacuation trains. People squeeze onto the trains. At the station in Lviv there are masses of people who want to cross the Polish border at Przemyśl. Most of them have also been travelling for days, they look exhausted, hopeless. My colleague Tanya is there and provides psychological first aid.

March 9th

Today is a frustrating day. The near 20-year-old Mercedes Sprinter we bought in Germany to deliver humanitarian aid has been stuck between the Slovak and Ukrainian border for three days. Libereco cannot donate it to Vostok SOS for some new law that only allows donations of such vehicles to the army or other state organs. We are trying everything to get the car out. The prognosis of the customs officers is not leaving much space for hope. Around 95 per cent of the vehicles with the same problem do not make it over the border, they said. At least we could reload the humanitarian cargo into another car and deliver it. Still no sign of life from Lilya. I am getting worried.

March 10th

The car is free!!! The magical finale of four nerve-racking days.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

March 13th

I had a Zoom session of psychological first aid with a fellow activist on the run. She was able to leave Berdyansk under siege after spending days and nights in a bomb shelter. Now, she stays with friends in another city. She does not know what to do next, and does not even have the strength to think about it. The windows are darkened with additional textiles in her room so that no light can get outside, as air raids are expected. We've been working, and step by step, she achieves more stability. Suddenly I hear a dull sound as if a cupboard had fallen over. Her whole body winces. An impact, not too close but not too far away. We start over again.

The humanitarian situation is getting worse; there are many places that aid does not reach. The Russians attacked a humanitarian aid convoy. A colleague writes to me that a pro-Ukrainian activist in Sievierodonetsk was intercepted by Russian troops and taken away. They took another one out of his house in Starobilsk. Other colleagues report that in the East, doctors only use private cars. It is too dangerous to use ambulances or other medical vehicles, as they are targeted. It gets scarier every day. We have still not heard anything from Lilya. The whole office is extremely worried.

It is dangerous to use ambulances and medical vehicles, as they are targeted. It gets scarier every day.

March 17th

Several darkish days. Getting up, organising aid and evacuation support, calls, problems, more calls, more problems. During the day, I feel like a machine. In the evening, I am really afraid of chemical and nuclear weapons. In the East, emergency information is distributed: in case of chlorine – up, in case of ammonia – down. At night, I dream of Mariupol, of attacks on evacuation buses. No sign from Lilya.

March 22nd

I saw my parents today. They gave me an old GEO magazine. It took me a while to remember that I asked them to buy it months ago because it contains an article about Lilya and the polyclinic of Tryokhizbenka. I cannot stand reading it. I cannot even look at the pictures.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

March 23rd

I woke up, looked at my phone, and was instantly the most awake person in the world: I got a message from Lila. She is alive. She writes that it is hell on earth, with no connectivity, no electricity, nothing. She writes, "We love you all and hope to see you again." I feel the tragedy and sadness of this message, and I feel joy and gratitude that she is alive. This is not a happy ending. But it is a good beginning of another day.

Imke Hansen is a historian and trainer, specialising in the experience of violence and trauma. Currently she works as an international peace worker with the German peace organisation "Kurwe Wustrow" at the Sievierodonetsk field office of the Ukrainian NGO Vostok SOS.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Ukrainian refugees flee the war to Poland

PHOTO-STORY BY OMAR MARQUES

Omar Marques is a freelance photojournalist from northwest Portugal based in Kraków, Poland. He works as a stringer for Getty Images, Anadolu Agency and collaborates with magazines on editorial and commercial assignments between Central/Eastern Europe and the Balkans.

People wait to cross the passport control after arriving on a train from Kyiv at the Przemyśl main train station on February 27, 2022 in Przemysl, Poland.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Polish citizens organise individual packages from aid donations inside a sports hall located a few kilometres from the border crossing point in Krościenko, Poland.

People who fled the war in Ukraine arrive at a reception centre after crossing the Polish Ukrainian border in Krościenko, Poland.

eprasa.pl/366920cb83

Women who fled the war in Ukraine weave camouflage netting inside a public library in Kraków, Poland.

A woman shouts names of registration forms as people who fled the war in Ukraine wait to hear an update on their requests at the Ukrainian consulate courtyard on March 14, 2022 in Kraków, Poland.

tasa.pl 366920000

A train with refugee passengers gets ready to leave Kraków station for destinations onward in Poland.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

People who fled the war in Ukraine rest inside a sports hall that has been converted into a temporary shelter in Nowa Huta district on March 15, 2022 in Kraków, Poland.

20cb83

A woman lights candles before attending mass in Krakow's Orthodox church on March 20, 2022 in Kraków, Poland.

People who fled the war in Ukraine fill out registration documents while lining up to be part of Poland's electronic system for registration of the population at the Tauron Arena in Kraków.

epresa.pl/366920cb83

New habits of wartime

A view from the rear

MARIA PROTSIUK

It has been scientifically proven that 21 days are needed to form and strengthen a new habit. Unfortunately, Russia's war against Ukraine has been going on long enough to force Ukrainians to adopt new habits. What are these habits and how do Ukrainians live in the relatively safe regions in the rear of the fighting?

Are Ukrainians used to the fact that there is a war in their state? How can one get used to war? Is it like going through all the stages of the Kübler-Ross model of grief, from denial through to anger, bargaining, depression and finally to acceptance? Actually, no.

Every day, it is difficult to immediately know what the date or day of the week is without thinking. But we do know what day of the war it is exactly. Early in the morning of February 24th, a completely new calendar and way to tell time began for Ukrainians.

In Ukraine, it is said that every day is just another day in the eight-year war with Russia, which has actually been going on for centuries. When we talk about centuries, we really mean a long historical period. This began with the Pereiaslav Council in 1654, when Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky and the Ukrainian Cossacks swore allegiance to the tsar in Moscow. As history later showed, nothing good came of this.

Every year in early March, Ukraine celebrates the Shevchenko Days, which are associated with the birth and death (1814–61) of Taras Shevchenko, the great Ukrainian poet. In terms of the scale of this figure's significance for Ukrainians,

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

he can be compared to Adam Mickiewicz in Poland, William Shakespeare in England, Johann Goethe in Germany, or Matsuo Basho in Japan. This year, as never before, there was a strong feeling that Taras Shevchenko is still alive through his poems. Even though he wrote about the insidious Muscovites and the struggle of the Ukrainians against the Russian Empire 200 years ago, it feels like he is describing the last few weeks of the war. His works are so relevant today that Shevchenko appears as a real prophet for Ukrainians.

A matter of time

In the 20th century there were many incredibly tragic stories in Ukraine's history and the authors were often Russian. Undoubtedly one of the most brutal events that occurred was the Battle of Kruty, when the Bolsheviks defeated a military unit of the Ukrainian People's Republic near the Kruty railway station in 1918. This battle resulted in a large number of casualties. Furthermore, it is difficult to forget the three great famines, known as Holodomor (1921–23, 1932–33, 1946–47). These amounted to deliberate genocides of the Ukrainian people. We must also remember the "Executed Renaissance", a literary and artistic generation of the 1920s and early 1930s in Soviet Ukraine. This group produced highly artistic works in the fields of literature, painting, music and theatre but was ultimately destroyed by the totalitarian Stalinist regime. We Ukrainians were ready for what is happening today at the level of genetic memory. Russia's full-scale, insidious attack on Ukraine was only a matter of time.

> We are very afraid that the world will get used to the war and Ukraine will disappear from western media.

The ongoing Russian war of aggression against Ukraine began in 2014. Rather, it was launched by Russia against us, our sovereignty, territorial integrity, democratic freedoms and European values. But no one will ever say that Ukrainians are used to the fact that there is a war in the country. We have simply become accustomed to adapting our daily lives to this reality. Moreover, we are now trying to put aside our political convictions and live with a new unspoken rule to not criticise the state authorities during a time of war.

We are not used to war. We are very afraid that the world will get used to it and the topic of Ukraine will disappear from the front pages of western media. After all, "conflict" cannot remain on the agenda all the time, as the media often write about similar events in different parts of the world. However, the unprecedented level of support for Ukraine from the international community and the enforcement of large-scale sanctions against Russia somewhat allay such fears today.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Thank you, I am okay!

When the war broke out, I was surprised to learn that I had "my people" in dozens of countries around the world. It just so happened that I had not seen or heard from many of them for years. But in the early days of the war, almost all of them got in touch with me. After assuring them that I was in the rear of the fight in safety, foreigners began to ask how they could help Ukraine. In response to such questions, I still, almost every day, continue to answer succinctly: help with a dollar and/or a word. With a dollar, you can donate to the Armed Forces of Ukraine or support Ukrainian refugees in your countries. From the other side, help us by spreading truthful information about the events taking place in Ukraine to the widest possible audience, the public in your countries. No one should be left with any illusions fuelled by hostile propaganda regarding who is the aggressor and who is the victim, who was attacked and who is defending themselves.

> No one should be left with any illusions regarding who is the aggressor and who is the victim.

As for my answers to foreign friends: yes, I really am okay. It is a sin for us, the residents of the rear regions of Ukraine, to complain. We blame ourselves every day for doing little to win. For those internally displaced persons who managed to escape from the very hell of war, this feeling corresponds with the well-known and scientifically studied "survivor guilt syndrome". But with such sentiments, we will not bring victory.

No, we are not just calling for "peace". Peace will only be possible with our victory! We are not even considering any another option. Any peace based on a compromise with a bloodthirsty aggressor would only see the war carry on in a different way. We would expect more terror from the Russian side in the near future. Peace without victory means even more devastation and even more sacrifices. This is the "Russian world" or *Russkiy Mir*, the loss of all that we are fighting for around the clock. We have already observed this in Crimea and we have seen it in the occupied territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. We are not fighting only for ourselves. It is sad if we still need to convince someone of this fact. At the same time, we should thank those foreigners who understand what is happening and who help Ukrainians both in Ukraine and in their countries. They are contributing to their own peace and a tranquil tomorrow as fellow Europeans.

It is clear now more than ever that the saying "a friend in need is a friend indeed" is really true. If Ukraine has been terribly unlucky with its neighbours to the East, it has been incredibly lucky with those in the West. As much as we are grateful, we also understand what a burden it is now for our neighbours to accept such

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

a huge number of war refugees. How important and priceless such support is for Ukraine and Ukrainians today!

The borders of many countries are open to Ukrainians. Even those that used to be difficult to reach yesterday do not need visas today. We are understood and supported. But still, wherever you go, Ukraine is everywhere as there will always be a blue and yellow flag. This is largely due to the efforts of the Ukrainian diaspora.

People across the world now understand who is holding back the *Russkiy Mir* from moving closer to the West. Whilst the force of the whole united Ukrainian nation is clear, it has been joined by the International Legion of Territorial Defence of Ukraine. This group consists of volunteers and veterans from more than 50 countries and is supported by military equipment from a number of friendly countries.

New habit: every morning, "how are you?"

I have another new habit. Every morning I ask friends and acquaintances in different parts of Ukraine and the world, "how are you?" In fact, every day I especially make sure to ask this of those friends who live in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Sumy, Chernihiv, Kherson and other parts that are most affected by the war. I am in touch with many people who remained in these cities and towns. They do not have the opportunity or the desire to leave. Whilst others have gone to the western regions of Ukraine to their relatives, some have gone abroad with small children. There are also those in the ranks of the Ukrainian Armed Forces on the front lines.

Those who are no longer alive are honoured with a minute of silence every morning at nine o'clock.

I, like many other Ukrainians, have not received much news for a long time from those acquaintances from Mariupol. This city has already been completely destroyed by Russian barbarians according to the "Syrian scenario", what is widely spoken with this wording in Ukrainian media citing Ukrainian politicians and political experts.

Those who are no longer alive are honoured with a minute of silence in Ukraine every morning at nine o'clock. Many heroes, unfortunately, have fallen. Ukrainians get on their knees to pay tribute to the fallen soldiers being brought to their hometowns for burial. So the heroes definitely do not die in our memory. We will never allow this.

If you can hear or read "I'm okay" in response to these messages, you can calm down a bit for a short period of time. You can continue to do your usual things during the war in the rear regions far from the frontline. This sounds a little strange, right?

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Say "palyanytsia"!

The rear today, as it turns out, is not such a safe and calm place. The aggressor has shown that his missiles will reach any target, even if Ukraine's state border with a neighbouring NATO member is some 20 kilometres away. Just look at the strike on the International Centre for Peacekeeping and Security in Yavoriv, close to the border with Poland. One more example is the missile "greeting" to US President Joe Biden during his visit to Poland (an air attack on the oil depot in Lviv during Biden's visit next door).

In fact, the issue of safety in the rear regions not only concerns the issue of missile strikes. The enemy can try to strike you from the inside. In the region of Ivano-Frankivsk, the Security Service of Ukraine detained separatists in early March. They were there to recruit more than five hundred traitors in the western regions of the country. According to Ukrainian intelligence, the Russian-led separatists planned to create a "Federal Republic of Ukraine" that would include five oblasts: Ivano-Frankivsk, Zakarpattia, Lviv, Ternopil and Chernivtsi. The Russian occupiers believed that the creation of pseudo-republics would deprive the Ukrainian military of support and supplies from the rear. The separatists planned to eliminate key law enforcement officials and local executive officials, seize administrative buildings and proclaim new "people's republics". Naturally, these would be modelled on the so-called people's republics in Donetsk and Luhansk. All of these areas would then be united as part of a new Russian-controlled state.

While you may ask what did the Russians count on in the western regions of Ukraine, it is worth remembering the local elections in 2020. According to the results, many people in Zakarpattia and Chernivtsi backed the political party Opposition Platform "For Life". This group showed its obviously pro-Russian face but received relatively decent support among the local population (9.4 per cent of seats) in the oblast councils of both regions. Since March 20th, this political parties' activities (alongside ten other pro-Russian political parties) are prohibited during martial law following calls from party members to overthrow the government and violate the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine.

The constant work of the Ukrainian intelligence and special services in the rear to expose the activities of sabotage groups is not surprising. Information regarding the long-term activities of Russian spies in Ukraine is becoming more and more public. For example, one recent case involved the violinist of the Volyn Regional Philharmonic, who was aiming rockets at the airport in Lutsk. It remains to be seen just how many more saboteurs and neighbours we need to be aware of across the country. It is not enough to use the only legendary and already anecdotal code word "palyanytsia" to check a person – a Ukrainian word which is difficult to pro-

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

nounce correctly for Russians. The habitual mutual trust seen especially in small towns is slowly changing into a habit of being less trusting and more cautious.

New faces of old cities

Regional centres in Western Ukraine are becoming more and more crowded. For example, as of mid-March, the Lviv region alone had received more than 200,000 internally displaced persons. At the same time, the Zakarpattia region had received more than 80,000 and the Chernivtsi and Ivano-Frankivsk regions each received almost 60,000. At first glance, there is a certain imbalance and this can be explained by the different numbers of local inhabitants in these regions during the pre-war period. Overall, these figures are proportional. Currently, migrants from those regions of Ukraine where active defensive actions are being taken are usually more and more often living in communities far from the regional centres. For the needs of IDPs, local authorities and volunteers provide everything needed absolutely free of charge.

This is not the only help. In each region, there is a humanitarian headquarters that deals with the reception of displaced persons and the distribution and transfer of humanitarian aid. This is given out to displaced persons on the spot and also sent to the regions of Ukraine that need it more. Just from Bukovyna, there are three trains running daily in the direction of Kyiv and the eastern regions. These trains are loaded with humanitarian aid and return with evacuated people.

One should not ignore the fact that on social media both in Ukraine and abroad there are unpleasant stories about the unacceptable behaviour of migrants. This automatically affects the image of all civilian victims of the full-scale Russian aggression in Ukraine. In all fairness, it should be noted that such moments do occur, but they are infrequent. However, they are much more widely circulated compared to the stories of those who really need help and accept it with gratitude. After settling in relatively quiet Ukrainian cities, many of these people immediately join a team of volunteers or look for a permanent job.

On the other hand, the decision of many Ukrainians to go abroad should be treated with understanding, regardless of where they are from in the country. After all, everyone has own psychological threshold in such a situation, as well as their own personal and health conditions. However, even in this situation, Ukrainians continue to joke that after winning the victory we will be able to write in our CV that we can handle stress as we "didn't leave Ukraine during the war".

It has become common in our rear cities to quietly work out through intonation and conversation the origins of our new neighbours. Since most of the IDPs

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

come with children of school age, there is already a simplified system for displaced pupils to join the school process. After two weeks of forced war-related holidays, distance learning resumed in schools. Initially, there were discussions about the format of education. But in the end, given the work of many schools as volunteer centres or public shelters, it was decided to focus on distance learning.

New habits or a completely new way of life?

On the morning of February 24th, the Russians carried out missile strikes on military infrastructure objects in virtually all regions of Ukraine. No matter what the highest-ranking officials said to Ukrainians the day before (in order not to cause panic among millions of civilians), it later turned out that everyone higher up knew about the attack and were prepared for it. That is why no Ukrainian aircraft were lost during these first hours of the morning airstrikes.

Even though the morning offensive affected areas all over the country (like when Hitler attacked the USSR on June 22nd 1941), it is strange that in the early days of the war there was little to no fear. There was no panic either. There was another emotion, destructive, but very strong. There was a powerless rage and anger, from which I had to grit my teeth. Eventually, my teeth began to ache unbearably. So it turned out that this was not the way out. This feeling had to be subjugated and I had to find useful ways to release this negative energy in a constructive way.

> We joke that there is nothing we cannot get. If volunteers have not brought something yet, they have just not been asked for it.

Yes, at first everyone was probably a volunteer. Everyone who was not forced to leave their home and could cope with those emotions tried to help out in any way possible. Volunteering was (and still is) divided into the two categories of "in the field" and "with gadgets". Providing all possible kinds of volunteer assistance (sorting medicines, weaving camouflage nets and preparing food) required great human resources and good management. Volunteering in the field can take on a military or humanitarian dimension. Given the growing need to protect the people's livelihoods and the defence capabilities of the military, we in Ukraine already joke that there is nothing we cannot get. If volunteers have not brought something yet, then they have just not been asked about it.

Russia is waging an insidious, inhuman and barbaric hybrid war against Ukraine and the whole world. This is happening simultaneously on two fronts. One of these is real and involves the military. On this front, people are dying, cities are being ru-

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

ined and every norm of international law and world order is being destroyed. The second front can be found online, where the Russian propaganda machine never sleeps. This virtual space is full of fake news and hate speech. It is necessary to drown out this cacophony of horrible fiction from Russia with our chorus of truth from Ukraine. Preferably, we have to do this in different languages and on all available information platforms.

However, at some point, you definitely realise that not everyone needs to volunteer. You need to go back to your normal life and do what you do best. This is especially true if you are very lucky and your job is still relevant. This will benefit everyone many times over. After all, an army can be productive only if the rear is stable. For the front to be stable, the rear must work.

The frontman of the band *Okean Elzy*, Svyatoslav Vakarchuk, offers a good example of this reality. He managed to visit all the hotspots in the country, including Kyiv, Kharkiv, Mykolaiv and Zaporizhzhia. Whilst our first thoughts about such kind of his actions may have been overly emotional (and involved thinking about why didn't he take a machine gun and join the territorial defence), we later appeared to realise that Vakarchuk could better support Ukrainians with his words, his voice and his work where people need it most. This is the daily life of Vakarchuk's wartime.

The second front can be found online, where the Russian propaganda machine never sleeps. This virtual space is full of fake news and hate speech.

Even in those regions of Ukraine where peace is (largely) still preserved, we have one more habit. This involves a packed emergency suitcase or backpack. These items have now become an integral part of our daily lives. In our country, the emergency backpack was probably packed in every apartment a long time ago. They usually contain money, documents, medicine, water, dry food, charged power banks and warm clothes.

Some people sleep in tracksuits at night just to be ready to run to the shelter as soon as the air siren goes off. My family jokes that we trust in God and the gods of the Ukrainian military enough to sleep in our pyjamas. However, it is quite a long way to go to the public shelter in case of danger from the sky. In our old apartment building built during the Austrian times in the city centre, we have arranged a shelter with makeshift beds in the basement.

In the end, the emergency backpack logically and magically turns into an anxious lady's handbag. The reason for this is that no one knows where the next air raid siren will catch you out. It could go off when you are at work, or in the middle of the street in the city centre. It is therefore useful to know the map of shelters along your route. When you arrive at work, you realise that, frankly speaking,

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

the usual work has become different. Without going into details, during wartime, everyone is working for a common victory as well as they can. Moreover, the war has no days off.

Old habits in the new life

One topic has been present throughout this entire text so it is probably time to explain. It is a strange thing, but Ukrainians continue to joke. Moreover, I have developed a new hobby of collecting wartime memes related to the defeats of the occupiers and the victories of Ukraine's armed forces. This will also one day become a part of history as folk humour in the struggle against the Russian occupier. There seem to be even more of these jokes than the number of soldiers Putin managed to send to Ukraine.

This in no way means that we do not mourn the dead. It also does not mean that we do not take the situation seriously. After all, humour is something that allows you to stay afloat and give your psyche a chance to relax.

Ultimately, humour means that we continue to live. We try to go to our favourite café in the morning before work and say to the barista, "please, as always". We try to maintain our little daily joys while supporting local small and medium-sized businesses, which also need to continue working and paying taxes to provide a stable rear. Finally, if you do not joke, or do other things like put on your lipstick, drink coffee in coffee shops, read books, or bake pancakes in the morning on weekends, you might as well just get rid of even the deceptive feeling that you are still able to control at least something in your life. The Kremlin tried to take this away from us with tanks at around five o'clock in the morning on February 24th.

So, after all, the old life is not filled with new habits. Instead, some habits from the old pre-war life still remain in this new way of life on the war's rear.

We will win the victory. On all fronts. Glory to Ukraine! Glory to heroes!

Maria Protsiuk is an expert at the "Quadrivium" NGO working at the International Office of the Chernivtsi Regional Military Administration (Chernivtsi, Ukraine). She has a PhD in Political Science and is a former Lane Kirkland Programme Fellow (University of Wrocław, Poland).

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Putin's biggest mistake

ZORIANA VARENIA

I left behind the city I was born in, where I learnt to ride a bike and ice skate, where I finished school and where I had my first kiss. There, I also left my ambitions, my plans and a part of my soul.

I did not believe that this war would take place up until the very last moment. All arguments, expert opinions and pure logic had convinced me that it would not reach Kyiv. Yet, it did. It destroyed my life on February 24th at five o'clock in the morning. The worst part was the first phone call I received about half an hour later. It was my dad, who only said, "Pack up your stuff". This meant that everything that was written in the media was real. It was not a dream, not a fantasy but my life here and now. This was my life, with Russian rockets that were destroying not only the nearby airport but also my future.

I will soon turn 24. I am a representative of the generation of Ukrainian freedom, a generation of conscientious citizens and soldiers who believe in what they are fighting for. With air raid sirens in the background, I started to chaotically pack my things. I had some time and a half-packed bag. I looked at my house, as if it was the first time in my life, not knowing what to take along. I always kept here some souvenirs, my favourite mug, a small, but my own, library and a bunch of photographs. Now, during the war, none of this was needed. As a result, my bag stayed half empty. It took me the longest time to figure out what to do with the large board next to my bed. The one where I had laid out my plans and goals for 2022. It was supposed to be a decisive year, in many ways. On March 26th, I was supposed to get married, which quite clearly did not take place. Most of my friends do not even know about it. As for me, marriage was something very intimate and personal. A small party was supposed to take place in our family house near Kyiv. Before the

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

war, I had bought numerous decorations to make it look nice and now I do not even know if the building is there in one piece. What is worse, I do not know what will happen to my fiancé who is still in Ukraine.

Dreams and nightmares

For the summer, we planned to have a housewarming party in our new apartment. My parents had dreamt about it their whole lives and have long been saving for it. In early December last year, we got the keys to our new place. When the bombs started falling over Kyiv, our place only lacked furniture and some electronics. But the last thing that I had learnt before leaving was that the house located next to our building had been bombed.

On the board that is hanging next to my bed, I also wrote that in 2022 I would like to get my driving licence, compete for an internship in the Canadian Parliament, visit five new countries, and a few other things. Now my goal is survival and spreading love to Ukraine against the ill-will of the occupiers and fascists, who came up with the idea that they will sweep us off the face of the earth.

I ran away to Poland. It took me three whole days and nights to cross the border but I do not want to write about all the details. I experienced a small hell on earth in which two moments were the worst. The first was the farewell that my parents had to say to each other. They have been together for 30 years, 25 as a married couple. I am an only child and the three of us have always been close. We have always been together in the most difficult situations. But this has changed in the new reality.

We got stuck in a 30-kilometre traffic jam before the border crossing. It did not move even by a few centimetres for a few hours. When it became clear that it will take a few days to reach the border crossing, we decided with my mother to walk those 30 kilometres. My dad, with tears in his eyes, took our luggage out of the trunk. Then he hugged my mum, kissed her hands and apologised for everything he had not done for her or what he had done wrong. My mum was shouting and crying at the same time, saying that for sure they will see each other again and that she will not say goodbye to him in such a way. This scene is stuck in my head. I cannot hold back my tears when I think about it, even now when I am writing this text and tears are dropping down on my keyboard. It was probably the first time when I saw what real love means.

The second worst thing took place after we crossed the border and the Polish volunteers took us to Warsaw. This was our third day without food, almost nothing to drink and no sleep. I already had hallucinations and when I was not concentrating my body was refusing to work properly.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

I was sitting in the front seat, next to the driver. The trip from Przemyśl (where we got picked up) to Warsaw took around four hours. I fell asleep after the first one. However, at a certain point the driver said something about Warsaw over the phone. To me, it sounded like the Russian tanks were already there and we could not escape from them. It sounded like we were heading towards a war zone. I started to shout. The volunteer who was transporting us woke me up and said that everything will be okay. But for the next three or four nights I continued to have the same nightmare: I was being driven from the border to Warsaw and heard that Russian tanks are already in Warsaw. After such dreams, I cannot fall back to sleep and just watch the news from Ukraine.

My soul is in Kyiv

In the end, together with my mum we reached Warsaw. All we had with us were our documents, two old sweaters, a laptop, headphones, a phone and public transport tickets from Kyiv.

We left behind my father, who was my best friend, and my grandma, who had raised me with great love. We also left behind my beloved fiancé, our new flat in Kyiv and our house near Kyiv where I spent the best days of my childhood and where I was dreaming to raise my own children. I left behind the city I was born in, where I learnt to ride a bike and ice skate, where I finished school and where I had my first kiss. There I also left my ambitions, my plans and a part of my soul.

> We will fight for the territory for which since 2014 many thousands of people have lost their lives.

A question came as to "how to carry on?" I was constantly asking everybody "how to carry on?" After a complete lack of understanding of what was going on, after the panic and despair, the time had come when I started to understand that I had to do something. First of all, I recalled who I was, what I had been doing before and how I had lived. And right away I thought about 2014 and the Maidan. This was the most important event in my life, even though I did not personally participate in this revolution. I was just about to turn 16, which is the age when we are the most sensitive and when are values are shaped. It is an age of high emotion. At that time, I realised that freedom was the most important thing in life. This is what I also heard from the majority of my peers. Due to this, I believe we are the generation of freedom.

This is the biggest mistake that Putin has made. He did not take into account the fact that it has been a whole eight years now since the occupation of Crimea

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Photo: kibri_ho / Shutterstock

A russian rocket hit a high-rise building in Kyiv. It destroyed apartments on about six floors.

and the start of the war in Donbas! We have grown up as a generation, as conscious citizens and soldiers who are now defending our land. Everyone is on their own frontline: some are in the trenches, others in humanitarian organisations, some are providing psychological assistance and others information. But we are all fighting because we all grew up surrounded by Russian lies and we learnt to recognise them. We learnt to distinguish what we really want and what has been imposed on us. Everyone and each of us will fight for the territory for which since 2014 many thousands of people have lost their lives.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

A war between the past and the future

We called the last Maidan the Revolution of Dignity. This is very important. Dignity is something that Putin wants to take away from us and something he cannot stand that we have. He also cannot stand the fact that we come out onto the streets when we do not approve of something or that we can change our president every five years in an election. He hates the fact that we let a comedian become our head of state and that we constantly encourage Russians to protest. In his view, we are not entitled to any of that, as he believes that we are nothing but a Russian province.

It turns out that what has been happening is not only a Russian war against Ukraine but a war between democracy and dictatorship. It is a war between progress and Soviet nostalgia, a war between the past and the future. A war between good and evil. Neither Russia, nor the rest of the world, have rightly estimated the strength, determination and devotion of Ukrainian society in defence of its sovereignty. Ukrainian soldiers, or even ordinary people, are not scared of death. In occupied cities, our girls approach Russian tanks with Ukrainian flags, and our men lie down in front of Russian vehicles to keep them away from cities. I would call it a national stubbornness. This is something that the majority of Russians will never understand, as they are scared of their own police forces.

Yesterday, I talked with my best friend who is in her small family town near Dnipro. She complained to me that after she joined the territorial defence she was assigned to work with documents and got no weapons. This was due to the large number of people who want to defend our homeland. She is just an average 24-year-old who has a rabbit as a pet. Before, she worked in human resources and never talked about the war.

Now, everybody needs some time to come to terms with all these things that we have feared so much. But soon our energy and love for freedom will turn into anger. My friends from Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhia, Sumy and Odesa were once neutral towards Russia but now express only hatred towards the aggressor. The invader can take over territory but not its people. This is the most important thing in this war. NEE

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

This essay was first published in Polish on the web portal www.new.org.pl.

Zoriana Varenia is a political scientist from Ukraine who has left Kyiv as a result of the war.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

The news of the invasion was like a bomb

A conversation with Pedro Caldeira Rodrigues, Portuguese journalist. Interviewer: Iwona Reichardt

IWONA REICHARDT: You went to Kyiv to do reporting for the Portuguese Press Agency LUSA just a few days before the war started. Can you tell me what was your assessment of the situation then? Did you have a sense that such a large invasion was about to take place?

PEDRO CALDEIRA RODRIGUES: None of the people I interviewed right before the war, including commentators and analysts, believed that there would be a large invasion of Ukraine. Some indeed said that the Russian troops could start a small operation in Donbas aimed at achieving the recognition of the separatist republics, but nobody expected what we are seeing right now. As you know, this was not my first visit to Ukraine. I was there three weeks before the war too. At that time, I was a member of a journalist study tour into Eastern Ukraine, which was organised by the Academy of Ukrainian Press and supported by the American embassy. During this trip, together with a group of international journalists, we had an opportunity to meet local leaders in the areas that were affected by the war in 2014 and which, as we believed back then, were of the highest risk if an invasion was to take place again. Our interlocutors were of course very aware of their situation, they were preparing their localities for different scenarios, which included training people, and especially the territorial defence. They also informed us that in early 2022 the Ukrainian army was much more prepared than it was in 2014, when the war broke out in eastern Ukraine. As I now recall these meetings, I can once again repeat that nobody expected that such a large invasion would take place. Vladimir Putin's decision to attack Ukraine in so many places at the same time was unpredictable and brought on the consequences that we are seeing now. That is why even now nobody knows how this war will end.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

The war broke out early in the morning on February 24th. You were then in Kyiv staying at Hotel Ukraina in the city centre, as I know. What was this moment like for you?

I must say that the news that the invasion had started was like a bomb. I am sorry for the comparison, but yes it was actually like this. In our hotel there were lots of foreign journalists. I got to know them a bit since I arrived there on February 16th. We spent time together in the lobby talking, drinking, etc. On February 24th many of these journalists started to do their live reports from the hotel stairs that overlook the Maidan. There was a lot of chaos too. There were no taxis, it was impossible to get an Uber. In my case, things changed already the day before. We had plans together with journalists from Portuguese television to go to Donbas. We had purchased train tickets to Kramatorsk for six o'clock in the morning on February 24th. As you can imagine, we could not go there. It was actually crazy to compare the Kyiv of February 23rd, the day before the invasion when there were many cars on the streets and many people on the sidewalks, with Kyiv of February 24th, when there was a deep, profound silence. And people were very apprehensive.

I decided to change hotels because the journalists with Portuguese television were in a different hotel. I joined them there. We stayed together until our evacuation. This relocation and later evacuation were due to the advice given to me by the Portuguese embassy, which was already trying to arrange a way for us to get out of Kyiv. At the hotel where we stayed until the evacuation, we were practically barricaded, especially once martial law was enforced and a curfew declared. This was the case for the first 36 hours of the war. It was practically impossible for us to leave the premises because the outside conditions were very difficult. We attempted to leave the city by train on, I believe, February 28th. We got to the train station but it turned out the number of people there was incredibly huge. There were literally thousands of people trying to leave the city and it was impossible to get on a train. Thus, we returned to the hotel. In the end, the embassy arranged a van for us that was at that point 25 kilometres south of Kyiv. We had to wait for it until the next day and we had to pay the driver. In this way, our entire Portuguese media team left Kyiv. Now, there are other Portuguese journalists in Ukraine covering the developments, but we had to leave the country back then. Not only was the situation very difficult then, but we also could not do any reporting. Because of the martial law, we were stuck in the basement where the garage (our shelter) of the hotel was located. Food was rationed.

So you started your evacuation with a group of Portuguese TV journalists. I can imagine they had their cameras and all this large equipment that television teams always carry with them. Did they manage to take their equipment along when you were leaving the city? Or did they have to leave it behind?

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

They did not leave it behind. They took it because we got the van. There were 11 of us. Nine journalists and two Ukrainian women who also wanted to leave Ukraine. One of them actually came with us to Portugal. The other went to Italy where her mother lived. We took one more Ukrainian lady with a baby. We picked her up in a city near the border with Moldova. So when we arrived at the border there were 13 people in the van plus the driver.

Your evacuation route was through Romania?

Yes.

If I recall correctly, in this early stage of the war the Polish border was already quite jammed. However, Ukraine has also a border with Slovakia, which has always been less busy. Why did you choose Romania?

This was the advice of the Portuguese embassy in Kyiv. In fact, on our van we had a sign with a Portuguese flag and the logo of the Portuguese embassy. So our vehicle could be identified. The ambassador left Kyiv on February 25th or 26th. Our evacuation was thus arranged by a member of the embassy's staff. This person was a Ukrainian national who speaks Portuguese. The trip to the border was long because there were lots of checkpoints on the way. And lots of cars and traffic. That is why it took us 19 hours from Kyiv to Botoșani, which is a city in northern Romania where we stayed after we crossed the border. We left Kyiv at nine o'clock in the morning and we arrived in Botoșani at four in the morning the next day.

Photo courtesy of Pedro Caldeira Rodrigues

And what was the situation at the border? Were there a lot of people trying to cross it?

We got to the border at night, at around 11. There were some cars but we crossed the Ukrainian-Moldovan border on foot because there is some sort of bridge to a no man's land. Then we took another van that was waiting for us in Moldova. It took us to the border with Romania and this was a much longer ride because there was a lot of traffic and

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

controls along the way. All in all, it took us three or four hours to enter Romania.

Unfortunately, this is not the first war you experienced. In the 1990s, you were also covering the Balkan wars. I remember when we talked together in Ukraine before the war you were saying that a lot of Balkan memories came back to you. In what way?

First of all, I must say that it was very important for me to be in Kyiv before the war and talk to people and listen to their concerns. I think this was very important for me to understand the country. When it comes to the Balkan wars, indeed in the 1990s I was working for a daily newspaper in Portugal – I was actually one of the founders of this newspaper that launched in 1990, it still exists and it is considered a good daily. Back then I worked for the international section, and when it was decided that I should start to follow the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the start of the Balkan wars in 1991, I understood that it would be very difficult to inform the Portuguese readers about what was going on.

Why?

First because Portugal is a country where borders have not moved for centuries. Our wars – during the Portuguese right-wing dictatorship that lasted 48 years – were mainly taking place in our colonies in Africa, like Angola. So war was not here. It was not something that we knew first-hand. Second, Portugal is in a sense a homogeneous country. We do not have large minorities. Now, we live in times of greater globalisation, there are of course some immigrant communities and there have been cases of racism. The far-right party, with their very racist rhetoric mainly against the Roma, has been growing.

But back to Ukraine. When I went there before the war, I felt that the conflict with Russia could have some similarities to what I saw in the Balkans. Namely, the wars in the former Yugoslavia were the result of a growing and dangerous nationalism that was used to turn local populations, mainly Serbians and Croats but also Muslims in Bosnia, against each other. To put it more precisely, the ethnic minorities that stayed in the countries that declared independence were used as a pretext to justify the enlargement of territory. For instance, when Serbs declared their autonomous republics in Croatia, or Bosnian Serbs declared their own republic in Bosnia, Belgrade under Slobodan Milošević decided to turn these territories into parts of a Greater Serbia. The same was true in Croatia. So, in the Balkans there was a civil war but it was also an ethnic war. It was a war initiated to cleanse territories of populations that lived there for centuries and felt threatened by independence. They were manipulated by the leaders. As a result, in Croatia, where before the wars the Serbs constituted almost 14 per cent of the population, the Serbian population is now at about two or three per cent. This ethnic cleansing that took place in the regions, mainly those between Bosnia and Serbia that

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

were inhabited by many Muslims, illustrates the nature of these wars. Groups aimed to control territories that were to be cleared of those who were different. As a result, people who lived together for centuries in communities where a church, a synagogue and a mosque stood not so far away from each other, now disappeared. In my opinion, this was a tragedy for Europe.

Also, today when I hear people say that the war in Ukraine is the first war in Europe since the Second World War, I disagree. The one in the Balkans was the first war in post-war Europe, but we also need to remember about the war over Nagorno-Karabakh between Azerbaijan and Armenia in 1991. This second example was also a very painful war with lots of refugees. Thus, I would like to stress that the similarity between the current war and the earlier wars in the Balkans lies in this manipulation of the national feelings of local populations. In the Balkans, the memory of what took place in these areas during the Second World War became a sort of bridge that allowed it all to happen again. That is why many of the massacres and fighting that occurred in the 1990s happened in places that saw massacres and killings during the Second World War.

So this manipulation of a minority population's national feelings in a territory of an independent state that was once a part of a larger unit, is something that you also saw in Donbas. Do you believe that they are first and foremost used to start wars?

Yes, these minorities can be very useful in starting aggression, unfortunately.

We have started discussing the disintegration of Yugoslavia. That is why I want to point out a statement made by Professor Serhii Plokhy, who in a discussion with our magazine on the 30 year anniversary of the collapse of the USSR said that "the disintegration of the Soviet Union is still going on and it is not peaceful." Given your experience of the equally chaotic process of disintegration in the Balkans and looking at what is going on right now in Ukraine, what do you expect may happen in the future?

I believe that it is very important to properly reflect on what happened in the former Yugoslavia and mainly in Bosnia. The situation in Bosnia is again very difficult and there are signs that a conflict could return there too. We also have to keep in mind the role of the superpowers in the conflict, as in the Balkans we clearly saw the involvement of the US, which pressed for the 1995 Dayton Agreements. As a result, Bosnia was divided into two entities with the recognition of only three peoples: Serbs in Republika Srpska in Bosnia and the Federation of Bosnia, which includes Bosniaks and Croats and does not work. And now, as you know, the Serbs in Republika Srpska are trying to leave all the central institutions of Bosnia.

Yet, other people who also live in Bosnia were not recognised by the treaty. This includes representatives of the Jewish and Roma communities, who appealed to the International Court of Jus-

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

tice precisely because they are not recognised in Bosnia. They do not exist there, as – in legal terms – Bosnia is only inhabited by Serbs, Croats and Muslims. This means that the Dayton Agreement was a peace deal aimed at stopping the war, but it did not solve the problem. That is why, even now, almost 30 years since the conflict took place, the problem is still there. This case could probably serve as a lesson for the future of the current war in Ukraine. However, to be honest I have to tell you that I really do not know how this war will end…

Nobody knows, I think. The only thing we do know is that there will be more victims than winners in this war and that the consequences of this conflict will be long-term.

Yes. This is certain.

In meeting with refugees who have now been coming to Poland in large numbers, I can say that the trauma that haunts these victims of Russian aggression will not go away quickly. It will last for a long time and may even be passed down through the generations. In this region, we have had similar experiences with the trauma of the Second World War, which has stayed with us for a very long time and in the case of many nations affected their development.

This is very true.

To continue the topic of the refugees, Portugal is also home to a Ukrainian community that was established there in the 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Are today's Ukrainians who are fleeing Russian aggression also choosing Portugal as their destination?

Yes. Since the early stage of the conflict, Portuguese television has been reporting on the arrival of Ukrainian refugees and the government has already made some decisions with regards to their reception here. It is not that surprising because as you said the Ukrainian community in Portugal is relatively large. It is around 20,000 to 30,000 people. They have been here since the 1990s and they are very well-organised. They have their own church. Now they are, of course, helping the refugees but they are also politically active. For example, they organised a light projection of the blue and yellow Ukrainian flag on the buildings of the Russian embassy. They have also organised anti-war demonstrations in several cities.

Pedro Caldeira Rodrigues is a Portuguese journalist specialising in international and European affairs.

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

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Waiting for Fortinbras

A conversation with Oksana Zabuzhko,
a Ukrainian writer and intellectual.
Interviewer: Adam Balcer

ADAM BALCER: We are speaking in Warsaw after the beginning of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. This attack is in fact an escalation of a conflict that has been going on for the last eight years now. After the outbreak of a war we often hear questions as to whether or not it could have been prevented. Could we have stopped the aggressor in this case?

OKSANA ZABUZHKO: When it comes to Russia and its aggressive policy towards Ukraine I have been asking this question not for the last eight years but much longer. Back in the 1990s, I was an optimist and I was convinced that the world was going in the right direction. Francis Fukuyama proclaimed the "end of history" and the West had won the Cold War. It was believed that from now on we would only be getting richer and live in prosperity. Back then, I wrote about the example of the crown prince Fortinbras from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, who at the end of the play offers hope that the Danish state will improve. For my generation of intellectuals, Fortinbras is an example of someone who takes the "corpses" away. In the same way, we should have finished the work that was left to us by the 20th century. This century exposed us to two totalitarianisms, communism and Nazism, together with their horrific crimes and massive number of victims. That is why I even created a slogan: "Generation Fortinbras to work!" Yet, the corpses have not been taken out. They are still alive and now these zombies from the Kremlin are bombing Ukraine. Russia has been governed by Felix Dzerzhinsky's offspring, who now work for the FSB. Make no mistake about it, this group is a criminal organisation, one that was earlier called the KGB, NKVD and Cheka. The devil has many names, but it is this particular devil who is responsible for genocide and mass murder.

Back in the 1990s there was a chance for a better Russia. However, when the former KGB agent became president, I knew that this chance was over. Since 2000, Russia has been ruled by the KGB,

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

which resembles Orwell's Inner Party from *1984*. It is a criminal organisation that has never been punished for its crimes.

When did you first understand that Putin had "crossed the Rubicon"?

For me, such a moment came with the Kursk submarine disaster and our reaction to it. At that time, Putin arrived in the US and took part in Larry King's show. This was his first extensive interview for western media. At one point, King asked Putin what had happened to Kursk. Putin's answer was cynical. With a KGB-style smile he simply said that "It sank". Years later, in an interview for Russia Today, King admitted that he really liked this answer and thought it made good TV. In his view it was short, to the point and catchy. Putin and King shook hands, sealing an alliance between two different types of sociopaths: a KGB agent and a showman-journalist. A combination of "infotainment" with politics aimed at manipulation on a mass scale. This is the problem with today's media all over the world.

But wouldn't you say that today's Putin, with all his botox, works well only in the Russian market, while outside his charm has faded away? He is a former KGB agent who resembles a Frankenstein. He reads statistical data from a piece of paper and talks, for over an hour, about something that could be said in a few minutes. Can such a leader, in the time of memes, TikTok and Instagram, manipulate people who live outside Russia?

It is not about Putin's charm or his human side. He is an executor of a role in a system, where media, regardless of which kind, has a huge impact on people. Umberto Eco noticed this danger in Italy much earlier. This mechanism creates a world in which there are specific people who write scripts for reality, including the scripts of war, such as hybrid and information war. This was the case in Donbas in 2014, when people were being frightened with information about the non-existent threat of Ukrainian aggression and genocide. In this new media reality, KGB methods can work.

Do you think that Putin is still effective?

If he had not been, severe sanctions would have been imposed back in 2014 and 2015. However, back then, we were being told that there was no Russian aggression, but a conflict in Ukraine. I would often get furious when I heard about this conflict in Ukraine, or even worse, a "Ukrainian crisis". I would often say that there is no Ukrainian crisis but a Russian aggression. At the same time, western media outlets were calling the officers of the Russian army operating in Donbas "Ukrainian rebels". Right now we have some form of a realisation but it is not enough. The question of "Will he enter Ukraine or not?" showed that lessons have not been learnt from the 20th century. Had we learnt them, we would have known that this is what Hitler did in the 1930s. Of course, those actions ultimately led to the Second World War. Instead, some western journalists, ex-

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

perts and politicians are now saying that Ukraine should perhaps give up its aspirations to join NATO. This means that we are focusing on what Ukraine should do to please Putin. It is unbelievable that people can talk like this and be treated seriously. Ukraine is being wrongfully treated like a woman who has been the victim of domestic violence. She is encouraged to forgive her husband who had been beating her.

We have learnt nothing. On May 8th 2014, on the anniversary of the Second World War's end, I was in Berlin. Then, today's German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier stated that we need to understand Putin. He was saying this at a time when Russian forces had already been murdering people for speaking Ukrainian. I was talking right after Steinmeier. However, when I compared Putin to Hitler my microphone was cut off. The only person who spoke in my defence was the Lithuanian philosopher Leonidas Donskis. Now, this analogy between Putin and Hitler is becoming more and more apparent for everybody.

You watched Putin's speech before the invasion in which he talked about history. What do you think about his statements?

He is of course creating his own myth. In psychiatry, it is called a delirium or created reality. These hallucinations have a very specific logic behind them. This idea that Ukraine was created by Vladimir Lenin… This war is a projection of Putin's fears of Ukraine and the collapse of his empire. Of course, this

Photo: (CC) Commons.wikimedia.org

would also mean the collapse of today's Russia. He is scared of the consequences of the collapse of the Soviet Union and he desperately wants to maintain Russia as an empire.

But this projection is not only Putin's problem, but also a problem for many Russians.

Yes. Peter Pomerantsev was correct when he said that, as a former KGB agent, Putin essentially recruited a whole nation. The vast majority of the population either stay silent or actively support him. This was achieved with the help of TV and the internet. Overall, this is a form of reality show, in which a war and people's deaths are manipulated for a spe-

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

cific purpose. I would describe this as "neo-Orwellian metaphors in the 21st century". Unfortunately, in Russia there is no real society. Over the last 200 years there have been a few moments when it could have become a reality. However, none of these moments ended with success. That is why Russia has been either a totalitarian or authoritarian state on a cyclical basis. In Ukraine there is a society. The state may be a disaster, it may have many flaws just like during the winter of 2014, but there is a society that knows how and when to say "no". In contrast, we have a state that is eating up its own society in Russia. The West, unfortunately, is a victim of an illusion that there is such a thing as a Russian society and that it can be relied on.

So why are there these moments when Russia is close to achieving a proper society?

I actually believe that Russia's ethnic and religious diversity plays a key role in these matters. There has to be a simultaneous change amongst Tatars, Bashkirs, Siberian Russians, etc. in order to create a proper society. But Russia's unity has been, for centuries, executed by force. This is an imperial history. A society could have been realised during moments when minorities or regions showed that they did not want to disappear from the map or be subordinated to Moscow. That is why Ukrainians say that "without the Volhynia Legion Russians could not do anything". After all, it was Ukrainians, with their blue and yellow flags, who started the 1917 February Revolution. It is thus a huge mistake of the West to associate Russia with the USSR or ethnic Russians.

In that case, what should the West do now?

It should create a large frontline that would call things by their real names. Russia is a terrorist state and for the good of its people it has to change on a fundamental basis. There has to be a discussion on the transformation of Russia into a real federation and even about the freedom of Russia's different nations. I know that this is not politically correct to say, but I am not a politician and I can say whatever I want.

What do you think about the opinion that whilst Putin is terrible, he is a lesser evil compared to what can come after him?

The problem with Russia is not only Putin. The disease has been progressing. Russia is a state governed by the FSB, which is an organised crime group. This is what needs to be eliminated, as otherwise things will only get worse.

The current Russian aggression against Ukraine has brought relations between Berlin and Moscow to the forefront. Ukrainians and Poles were disappointed with Germany's passivity but it looks like that has now changed. What is your opinion on this matter?

Somebody created a meme that said "Let the Germans know that the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact is no longer in place." This is of course an ironic message, but

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

there is something true to it. Again, we have to refer to psychology, as Germans still suffer from a great amount of post-war trauma. This is a mixture of fear and guilt. In Germany I once talked about my book *Field research on Ukrainian sex*, which discussed the issue of mass rapes committed by Red Army soldiers on German women at the end of the Second World War. I will never forget the facial expressions of two older women who were sitting in the first row. Even now, when I am talking about them I shiver. They froze. They looked so frightened, as if they saw these soldiers again. Maybe it was the first time when someone talked publicly about this in their presence.

The German sense of guilt regarding the horrible crimes committed on the Eastern Front led to the situation in which the country did not talk about the suffering of German women for three generations. There was only one book made about this theme. It was written by Marta Hiller and was titled *A woman in Berlin*. There was also a movie based on this but it also portrayed this issue through the prism of some terrible love story. Unfortunately, Germans solely associate Russians with the victims of their crimes in the East. Putin reminds them of this all the time. The truth is that among the German victims, there were also millions of Ukrainians and Belarusians. In this way, we have returned to the first part of our conversation. The Germans also appear to be waiting for their Fortinbras.

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

This interview was first published in Polish on the web portal www.new.org.pl.

Oksana Zabuzhko is a Ukrainian poet, writer and public intellectual.

Adam Balcer is a programme director at the
Jan Nowak-Jeziorański College of Eastern Europe in Wrocław.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Ukrainian territorial defence

How regular city dwellers will vanquish the fierce Russian bear

A conversation with Roman and Iryna, officers of the territorial defence in Kyiv. Interviewer: Andrii Horobchuk

Territorial defence units have played a big role in repelling the Russian aggression in Ukraine. The units, made up of volunteer local residents and led by military professionals, regularly confront Russian troops. They are very successful at this. They neutralise Russian sabotage and reconnaissance groups, destroy Russian infantry units and seize and blow up Russian tanks and artillery.

ANDRII HOROBCHUK: What is the difference between the territorial defence and the regular army?

ROMAN: Territorial defence emerged in Ukraine around 2016, when security companies and defence detachments consisting of local residents were formed into groups in case a military threat began to appear in the area. Whereas the armed forces perform tasks anywhere in the country, the territorial defence is meant for local residents to defend their own territory. For example, a certain district in a city. These people are supposed to be assigned to the military enlistment office of the district that they will defend. These are irregular units, reservists. These people train in their free time and it was assumed that they would only be mobilised in the case of a "zero hour". In 2021, a law was adopted and signed by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy that turned the territorial defence units into regular armed forces units. Today, they form a full-fledged service. The organisation

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

has equal rights and functions. In peacetime, there are two ways to serve. One is in the reserves, when a person who signs a contract attends sessions, trains in his or her spare time, combines training with regular employment, and is mobilised during an armed conflict. They are there to contribute to the backbone of regular soldiers. The management of the territorial battalions is made up of professional military personnel.

IRYNA: In this war the territorial defence force is a key unit regarding the mobilisation of the population. This means that all those who wanted to volunteer for the armed forces joined the territorial defence. This service is developing as we speak. If initially we planned that they would be just people with light arms, we now have grenade launchers and mine throwers. We are also getting supplies of heavy artillery. So, the territorial defence is quickly transforming into a full-fledged military unit. Each district has formed a battalion for people who live within walking distance of the headquarters. They know the area very well and are ready to help. Even if they are not fit to serve immediately, they work as civil volunteers. They are highly motivated because they are defending their land, the city blocks where they live. It is not the same as people who are enlisted, put on trains and sent to faraway places where they have never been. People here defend their families, their homes.

What kind of tasks does a city district territorial battalion perform?

ROMAN: The first order priority is to set up the headquarters and mobilise the population. In the first days of the war, we had about a thousand people a day come to us. We had to interview them, determine whether they were fit to serve, sign a contract, equip them, assign them to specific units, form the units and start training them. This was a huge task and a top priority. Then we gradually started to guard and defend strategic objects located in the district. The system to monitor and control the perimeter was set up. Observation points and patrols were formed, as well as rapid response teams that catch sabotage and reconnaissance groups and disable enemy sniper positions. We are responsible for the area where we are located. If we are located in the way of the enemy troops, we have built checkpoints on those roads, anti-tank barriers and other engineering structures. In addition, intelligence works to collect information on the enemy's actions.

Has co-operation with the armed forces, police and other security agencies been established?

IRYNA: Of course. Since we are located in the city we closely cooperate with police, the National Guard, Security Service and other agencies to make sure there is collaboration and synergy. We exchange information to make sure that there are no instances of friendly fire. We do this to make sure that when a unit moves it is clear that this is our unit, as there are multiple enemy sabo-

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Photo courtesy of member of the territorial defence.

Yevhen Tytarenko, a member of the territorial defence northeast of Kyiv.

tage groups, including those in disguise and without insignia.

What are the goals of these enemy groups, what do they plan to achieve?

ROMAN: First of all, they hope to identify the pockets of resistance such as the territorial defence. We have already faced enemy fire, including rockets. Air defence works to protect us. Enemy scouts, spotters and artillery observers work to gather information for enemy artillery and aircraft.

Do snipers work against you?

ROMAN: Yes, our dislocation point has already been shot at. In the early days when we still had not deployed and organised our patrols, they took up positions in the neighbouring buildings and opened fire.

Do you work exclusively in your district or do you help other units as well?

ROMAN: So far, we have been helping with information, evacuation and delivery of supplies for our friendly units.

What are other functions of the territorial defence besides the military functions?

IRYNA: Another very important function is to help the population when a humanitarian crisis happens. We are currently working with relief organisations to stock up on food, water, medical supplies, and warm clothes to assist civilians in our district. And we provide moral and psychological support. A lot of people experienced great suffering during the bombardments. They have often been sitting in cold underground shelters for two weeks with children and are scared. And for this reason, we work with psychologists to help these people. One other function we perform is so-called civil intelligence. Local residents pass information to us about suspicious people and our rapid response group immediately goes to the location to conduct an inspection.

Has your unit detained any saboteurs or groups yet?

ROMAN: We have detained multiple Russian intelligence officers with Russian passports. They had been planning acts

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

of sabotage around railroads and in the city and were detained by our fighters. We also identify sniper positions and saboteurs who conduct surveillance and take photos. We detain them ourselves or jointly with police.

The backbone of the territorial defence is comprised of professional military officers and the rest are civilians. How do you approach their training?

ROMAN: Battalion commanders are professional military officers. Companies have also been formed, commanded only by combat officers who fought in Donbas and have experience in coordination and defence. These combat officers train new recruits. Of course, when recruiting people, we prefer those who have combat experience or at least experience of conscription. However, there are not enough of these people so we accept guys who have high motivation and organise daily trainings for them to give them sufficient preparation to be able to carry out military tasks. Basic arms handling skills sufficient for a soldier or a sergeant can be acquired rather quickly. Of course, it is not realistic to train an officer in such a short time. We have officers, however.

What is the situation with supplies like food, protective gear and medicines?

IRYNA: So far, we have an uninterrupted supply only of light arms and other kinds of weapons. As for water, food, gear and medical supplies, all of this currently falls on the shoulders of civil volunteers who are not necessarily local. We receive supplies from abroad on an industrial scale. So far, it's the volunteers who take care of this but we already have enough to form reserves for the civilian population as well. This is true for food and medical supplies. The situation with gear is more difficult. However, everybody already has clothes, shoes, gloves and can stay warm. And we have formed a sufficient number of companies.

So, you already have a full house of fighters or is there no clearly defined limitations on the number of people per unit?

IRYNA: We continue expanding. And if in the early days we were frantically recruiting volunteers and did not really have a choice, now people who are not fit to serve for psychological or health reasons are gradually stepping aside. We replace them with other people who have been on the reserve list. We call them in and have an interview in a calm atmosphere.

Iryna, you are a slender woman. What is your position and functions?

IRYNA: In peacetime I was considered deputy company commander. Currently I am a battalion psychologist, an officer psychologist. However, because everybody now started doing the best they can, I have formed a civil-military co-operation unit, a volunteer centre and my own unit. When I saw potentially talented boys who had not served in the army even as conscripts but played football, for example, and had an understand-

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

ing of tactics and could learn quickly, I had them train with an instructor for two weeks and then they moved on to their respective combat units. So, I already have both staff and volunteers, about 20 people and a group of soldiers who are being trained to use light arms.Now I am recruiting new ones, a second group.

So, you are simultaneously a psychologist, the person preparing training groups and someone who leads civil volunteers?

IRYNA: That's right. My unit is in charge of all volunteer supplies starting with hot food and ending with anti-tank barriers and excavators that dig ditches plus recruiting. Because I have extensive experience with anti-crisis management and communications, all this has come in handy. I have applied all the skills that I could apply.

Roman, what are the relations like between people in the unit? Many civilians have come to serve but some probably, did not really understand where they were going. What is the general atmosphere in the territorial defence currently?

ROMAN: In general, a gathering of such motivated and positive people as we have here, is very hard to come by. These are volunteers who receive no payment and who have been living in the same bunks with us, helping us every day free of charge. They use their talents, perform their civic duties, defend their country by helping the military and enjoy this. They no longer can imagine a different way. One can only imagine a similar level of altruism and civic consciousness under such circumstances. Obviously, conflicts happen just like in any other society, someone wants to assert himself, someone wants to order others around. This is why we have psychologists, and this does not affect the general situation.

What does the average day of a territorial defence member look like?

ROMAN: I am a headquarters officer and my day starts at 7:30 in the morning with a commander meeting and then we start carrying out our missions. Since the war has started, we face new challenges every day, we orient ourselves by the situation. We report every four hours including at night. We have no regular sleep. This is the reality because there are always air raid sirens or some troubles in the unit. The sleep is half dozing. In general, there is a lot of work.

What is the hardest part?

IRYNA: I personally lack privacy. We are deployed in barracks, thousands of people in the same space. This is tough because everyone has some needs and issues and there is nowhere to hide. To make sure no one goes crazy the army has to work all the time, the units have to always be busy with something, such as learning or training. People are now shocked with what is happening and many people come to us and give us something to do because we cannot just sit with our arms folded, we would go crazy because of this. Therefore, our task as officers is to think every day about ways

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

to keep them busy, to train, teach and coordinate so that they do not stay idle but prepare as efficiently as possible to perform their missions. In addition, we are stationed at a non-military facility, so our task is to turn it into one, reinforcing it as much as possible and building the appropriate engineering structures. It's a huge amount of work to be done from the ground up. We are involved in a dozen large-scale projects at the same time. Our workday, of course, has no set hours. But we understand very well the purpose of all this. We defend our children, our parents, our land. And we believe in our victory.

Translated by Julia Kazdobina

Iryna and Roman are officers with the Territorial Defence Headquarters in one of Kyiv's districts.

Andrii Horobchuk is a journalist based in Kyiv.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

The soft power of Ukrainian women will defeat Mordor

A conversation with Iryna, a territorial defence officer, and Natalya, a civil volunteer. Interviewer: Andrii Horobchuk

ANDRII HOROBCHUK: What motivates women to join the territorial defence? How different are their motivations from men?

IRYNA: In fact, there are many kinds of women. First and foremost, there are female civil volunteers. For example, those who do not have children or have taken their children out of Kyiv but remain here themselves. And they just cannot sit at home. A woman generally needs to take care of someone and keep herself busy. This is the way her psyche works. And that is why there are a lot of women who just come of their own free will and do things to take care of the fighters. A lot of volunteer work, like cooking and cleaning. Businesswomen come and wash toilets, sorry to mention this. But they are willing to do any work, they believe that they must do something to help the armed forces. If we talk about female military officers, not civil volunteers – the female warriors – they probably have a special psychological type. This is more of a masculine activity that requires physical training and aggression. Our society is rather emancipated so many girls and women have found themselves in the military. We have two female officers in the headquarters. This is rather common because a military education is required. I graduated from the military department last year and among us, the new generation, there were many girls who received officer ranks as psychologists and political scientists. This is why I think there will be many more female officers in the future. The culture is changing.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Are there more female privates than female officers?

IRYNA: Yes, especially among the medical staff. There are many female medics. This has always been the case. Office workers as well, women are in charge of doing documentation work. However, there are many girls in the combat units too.

In general, what is the percentage of females in the territorial defence?

IRNYA: It is difficult to say. I think it is just about under ten per cent in the headquarters. And about five per cent in the units. But it is rare in general, a woman at a checkpoint or on a reconnaissance mission is not a very common sight. For example, as I was working on mobilisation in the first days of the war, when I saw a girl signing a contract to join a combat unit, I came up to the commander and to her and explained that she was probably overestimating her ability. Many of them do not understand where they are going. This looks romantic to them. And this is why I tried to get them out of this and get them to work in the headquarters. I understood it was going to be hard for them to be freezing while guarding some object. This has to be left to men, they are able to endure more in this sense.

So, you believe that a woman's role is organisation in the rear?

IRYNA: Yes, and they are a lot better at it than men. When the crisis started and the territorial defence headquarters needed to be set up and the work organised, all necessary processes established, women turned out to be more adaptive and effective than men. They understood and did things quicker.

You have said that you lack privacy. There are thousands of people under the same roof. How do you solve the issue of female hygiene?

IRYNA: We have separate rooms in the headquarters. This is not a military barracks. This is why we allocated rooms where women sleep. Since I am in charge of the unit, I sleep together with the boys. For the first two days we slept on a concrete floor without sleeping mats. Then we got mats, then we got beds. NATO standards do not differentiate between men and women. If you are a fighter, you are a fighter with no gender. Since I have been in the military for seven years, I have experienced different situations and I do not have a threshold of shame, so in this respect I need no personal space for hygiene. I lack something different. Generally, a commander in the military can efficiently manage eight people. For a battalion commander those are company commanders, for a company commander they are platoon commanders. But when one is approached by thousands of people a day, it negatively affects one's nervous system. So far, my major discomfort comes from the fact that thousands of people who need something can contact me. I just want to spend five minutes in silence.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

What is the situation in terms of self-care? I see you and other women are well groomed and even manage to get a manicure. How do you do that?

IRYNA: A woman's morale is not too high if she does not have a manicure, or her hair is not done (laughing). This is why we went to the battalion commander and organised this. Men, actually, do not feel comfortable without a haircut either. So, first of all we started giving men buzz cuts. We organised a massage salon for March 8th (International Women's Day). We have found a manicure master. So, gradually we are making ourselves at home. We do not know how long we will have to live like this, so we cannot let ourselves go unkempt. It is important for a woman to remain a woman even sitting in an underground shelter. So, this is why we already have a barbershop and a massage salon. And the girls value this highly. Because this is support. I do not mind living in a parking lot but when my hair is not coloured, I am not fit for battle.

So, a fighter cannot go home, take a bath and take care of some urgent matters?

IRYNA: Each time a person goes somewhere, he or she has to file a report. I have done it twice. The first time I managed to take a bath and then the air raid siren sounded, information of a possible airborne troops landing came and I immediately went back to my unit which was left without a commander. The second time I went to say goodbye to my old friend who had also joined the territorial defence, he was killed at a checkpoint. So, this is 24/7 non-stop work, you do not have downtime.

Where are your children now?

IRYNA: My children are in Germany with my sister. I have three children and my sister took responsibility for their evacuation. The younger children had left early. I had to take the older one out of occupied Irpin into an area that was under fire as part of a military convoy. I was very nervous but now I am relaxed because they are safe.

Are you scared for yourself that at any moment they can be left without their mother?

IRYNA: We are located in a place the enemy knows very well. We have already been under attack. This is why for the first five days we used to say goodbye to our lives before going to sleep. Because there are no guarantees we are going to wake up in the morning. We slept next to our guns. Then we got sick of this and nobody reacts to the air raid sirens anymore. Everybody just keeps going about their business. The danger perception threshold is getting lower. I have given all my passwords from Google Photos to my sister to make sure pictures, documents, contacts of insurers and notaries are accessible to my children, so that I can serve without worries. I know my sister will take care of the kids if something happens to me. But living in an underground shelter or as an evacuee is not for me. This is my country.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Where is your husband?

IRYNA: He also serves in our battalion but in a combat unit. They are away all the time. We have combat companies at their combat posts, at checkpoints. My husband is part of a reconnaissance unit.

What are the relations like between women and men in the military? Do you feel discriminated against?

IRYNA: Sure, there is discrimination. When I was a soldier and I was younger, I did not really feel discriminated against because a woman soldier with a gun is sort of a cute personage. However, when there is a woman in the headquarters in the officers' meeting, it is like proving yourself to a new male collective. You have to prove every time that you are competent, that you are a professional. Here you also have to prove that you are not in the headquarters by accident, that you are an equal combat and intellectual unit with your own knowledge and skills. You have to prove that you are a combat officer and can carry out your missions. Because we still have officers with a Soviet upbringing in the headquarters, it is a discovery for them that a woman in the army has the right to say anything.

Has the attitude changed since the time you arrived at the headquarters?

IRYNA: It is changing every day. The attitude is formed by achievements and over several weeks I have done a lot of work and initiated the processes that are very important for the functioning of the headquarters. Everybody knows that if you need to find an excavator, you go to Ira, if you want to find an artillerist, you go to Ira, if you want reconnaissance to work, you go to Ira. And when all roads lead to me they begin to understand this this person is probably capable of something.

Photo: Andrii Horobchuk

A Ukrainian woman joined the territorial defence in Kyiv.

So, your managerial skills are recognised and they have come to accept it?

If initially it was very difficult to get permission from commanders, now I have carte blanche for many things. They increasingly trust me because they understand that this works. For example, we had gone hungry for two days because

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

we had no food or water; and then all of a sudden there were hot breakfasts and dinners in sufficient quantities to feed not only us but also the neighbouring maternity hospital and neighbouring military units. Everybody understood that somebody was capable of something. Because generally running a military unit and being a corporate manager is very similar. If you have 20 years of managerial experience in the private sector you can do this all by combining it with the knowledge obtained in the military department.

Are there other women with managerial experience working with you?

IRYNA: Many. For example, we have a female volunteer Natasha, she owns a jewellery business. She has arranged the whole food supplies process. From A to Z. Starting with volunteer supplies and ending with cooking and serving the food. She did this all single-handed and it's working like clockwork. We have a woman who is a director at one of the central TV channels who does unbelievable things. She brought a railroad car full of humanitarian aid from Poland, for example, unloaded it here at the train station supervised by a military convoy and then sent it to the occupied city of Sumy. My request to do this was turned down by the armed forces and the national police, but she managed to do it. And she is a small slender woman. Girls here perform heroic deeds every day and I do not even know how they manage it all.

Getting supplies for the territorial defence falls on female shoulders?

IRYNA: Basically, yes.

And charitable foundations pay for it?

IRYNA: Not only. Local businesses and local restaurants do so as well. The Ukrainian diaspora also got involved as well as volunteers who have ties abroad. Everybody helps. The armed forces only provide us with armaments.

NATALYA: Wonderful girls work for us. They manage to procure things the army fails to such as uniforms and equipment. The army does not give it to us but Natasha and Gayane manage to get it. There are girls working on medical supplies, which we also are not getting. We have a volunteer headquarters where everyone does his or her own job. Day and night. A man follows his heart to come and defend his home. However, he needs a lot of things besides his gun. He can come without socks, wearing his tennis shoes. Without spoons, without mugs. Without necessary clothes. He is not a fighter like this. And we provide him with all of this. Everything is new and of excellent quality.

I see a functioning kitchen, an organised distribution of hot food – it's all clean and orderly. Do I understand correctly that all of this was set up by female volunteers under your leadership?

NATALYA: When we came here, the boys were sleeping on cardboard and using it as cover as well. The room was very cold, many of them got sick.Coming up to

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

them, giving them water, medicines – all this was done by girls. We create a home-like atmosphere for the soldiers. You do not just put food onto the soldier's plate, you show support as well. You touch his hand, so that he feels you care. You ask him, "Would you like some lemon?" We had two couples here who got married. And we did a wedding ceremony for them. Although it was different from a usual church ceremony, we used the Ukrainian flag. We also have a volunteer masseuse who takes care of our backs.

Did you evacuate your family?

NATALYA: Yes, I have sent all of them away. I have two old grandmas; I have sent them to my brother. My daughter is about to give birth any day. I understood I was not going to take up arms. I am not going to help this way. However, I can support the soldiers. The room is not suitable for so many people. Infections may spread. And if an epidemic starts, are they going to be able to fight? So, we organised the disinfection of the rooms, of the bathrooms, introduced rules that everybody has to wash and disinfect their hands, clean up after themselves to make sure it is not dirty. Many elderly men have come. If he sleeps on a concrete floor, he will get sick and will not be able to get up. We got sleeping mats, blankets.

Do you have managerial experience?

NATALYA: Yes, I own a business, I have stores in different cities. And our task now is to get supplies so that a soldier can come to us and receive everything he needs, not to get disheartened. Because when we came here, we saw that they only got food and then went to sleep.

How did you manage to set up the kitchen that serves a thousand people?

NATALYA: Two boys with kettles and a microwave came and then all of this grew to the scale you are seeing now. Initially the kitchen was used as a bathroom. We washed and scrubbed it, got huge refrigerators in. Set all this up. We are trying to make sure there is home-made food, hot food and soup for sure. For someone to fight, he needs others to prepare the ground, to make sure he is fed, healthy, can get some sleep, make sure that he is warm.

How is the women's morale now?

NATALYA: If more and more new women join, I think we will be more resilient than the men who came to take up arms. We cannot go back now. If we give up, what are they going to do? But we will not give up!

Translated by Julia Kazdobina

Iryna is a territorial defence officer in Kyiv and Natalya is a civil volunteer who arranges food supplies for the military.

Andrii Horobchuk is a journalist based in Kyiv.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Open Letter

An urgent call from Mariupol

A Joint Call of European Mayors to European governments and the European Commission on raising efforts to end the war

We strongly condemn Russia's war acts and armed aggression against Ukraine. Nothing can justify Russia's illegal use of force.

While Ukraine is on the path to joining the EU, Ukrainians and other European nations are already integrated. Ukrainians already constitute more than 10% of citizens in a dozen EU cities. There is no major European city, county or region without Ukrainian women and men.

Today, our Ukrainian sisters and brothers are forced to defend their homeland. Although the EU and its citizens have initiated hundreds of humanitarian and solidarity actions, every one of us can see that Ukraine stands alone against the aggression of a much more powerful invader. After 20 days of the unprovoked destruction of the 40-million nation of Ukraine, we are calling on you to act immediately:

1. We call on you to force the Russian government to open humanitarian corridors. Europe cannot just stand by and watch while innocent people are ruthlessly murdered with impunity. We cannot accept that so called humanitarian corridors "opened" by the Russian army are corridors in which civilians are being shot at and killed, while trying to escape on foot or by bus. Our friends must look up to the sky not for hope, but rockets fired at them. All military action toward civilians must end now. We believe it is Europe's and its global allies' duty to enforce it.
2. We call for European solidarity to work out and swiftly adopt decisions concerning the refugees' capable reception and relocation in Europe. We call for the governments of the border countries between the EU and Ukraine

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

to engage with international and national organizations with expertise in emergency response and crisis management. Humanitarian aid for internally displaced women and children in Western Ukraine should also be initiated as soon as possible. Unless we act now, the biggest refugee crisis after WWII will turn into a humanitarian catastrophe.

We agree that all European countries need to act, participate in the support and show solidarity. We will fulfil the EU 2015 decision on common and shared responsibility related to the refugee crisis management and support.

3. We demand a stop to all trade relations with Russia and Belarus until the Russian army withdraws from Ukraine. It is a choice of profound gravity, but we have no doubts whatsoever about how European values should guide us. We believe that the lives of women and men are more important than trade, jobs and even energy. Even though it is challenging, the choice should be very simple. You do not trade with murderers and liars.

   We strongly believe in European solidarity to manage the inevitable energy crisis. We believe that the EU member states will equally share the burden of radically eliminating fossil fuels from our economies. We have no doubts that the sudden shock of ending our addiction to oil, gas and coal is a necessary sacrifice compared to the sacrifice of innocent Ukrainian women and men. In the face of war crimes and genocide, "business as usual" must end.

Finally, we call on all the mayors of the world and on the international community to speak with one voice: deliberate attacks on civilians are war crimes. Starving thousands of innocent men, women and children and making entire communities of people die from hypothermia is genocide. International tribunals must fulfill their duties. The guilty must be punished. In order to do so, war crimes evidence must be well documented for future trials at the ICC and elsewhere.

It is with great respect that we observe thousands of brave Russian youth and elders who are being detained for taking part in rallies each day. At the same time, we condemn all those who support Russian propaganda that makes it impossible for their fellow citizens to access the truth. In fact, they support the terror in Ukraine.

We hereby demand the immediate release of the captured, detained and, most probably, tortured mayors of Melitopol and Dniprorudne. We are hoping for a longstanding peace between the EU and a democratic and law-abiding Russia that respects human rights. For the past 20 days, the citizens of our cities and villages have been helping Ukrainian refugees, and we will not stop helping in any way we can. This is our priority. However, the current situation does not allow us not to speak out about what our citizens feel.

Could we ever again believe in Europe if it lets one of the European countries bleed out and fall into ruin? We ask for more. The time is now. NEE

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Signed by Mayors of European Cities:

1. Vadim Boichenko, Mayor of Mariupol
2. Aleksandra Dulkiewicz, Mayor of Gdansk
3. Dario Nardella, Mayor of Florence, President of the Eurocities (association of 233 cities)
4. Roberto Gualtieri, Mayor of Rome
5. Zdeněk Hřib, Mayor of Prague
6. Philippe Close, Mayor of the city of Brussels
7. Christian Estorsi, Mayor of Nice
8. Rafał Trzaskowski, Mayor of Warsaw
9. Raymond Johansen, Governing Mayor of Oslo
10. Sadiq Khanm Mayor of London
11. Carlos Moedas, Mayor of Lisbon
12. Kostas Bakoyannis, Mayor of Athens
13. Francisco De la Torre Prados, Mayor of Málaga
14. Tomas Gulbinas, Deputy Mayor of Vilnius
15. Edvards Smiltens, Vice Mayor of Riga
16. Gillian Coughlan, Mayor of Cork
17. Erion Veliaj, Mayor of Tirana
18. Minna Arve, Mayor of Turku
19. Mathias De Clercq, Mayor of Ghent
20. Burkhard Jung, Mayor of Leipzig
21. Peter Kurz, Mayor of Mannheim
22. Peter Feldmann, Lord Mayor of Frankfurt am Main
23. Triin Varek, Mayor of Rakvere
24. Gunter Czisch, Lord Mayor City of Ulm
25. Katrin Albsteiger, Lord Mayor, City of Neu-Ulm
26. Filipe Ferreira, Metropolitan Secretary, Lisbon Metropolitan Area
27. Tomislav Tomašević, Mayor of Zagreb
28. Ricardo Rio, Mayor od Braga
29. Leoluca Orlando, Mayor of Palermo, President of the Sicilian Association of Cities
30. Juan Mari Aburto, Mayor of Bilbao
31. Laia Bonet, Deputy Mayor of Barcelona
32. Ernest Maragall Barcelona Metro Area, Vice-president of the Barcelona Metropolitan Area
33. Jordi Ballart, Mayor of Terrassa
34. Jennifer Ramírez, Councillor of Terrassa
35. Bev Craig, Councillor, Manchester,
36. Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester
37. Matteo Lepore, Mayor of Bologna
38. Anna-Lisa boni, Deputy Mayor, Bologna
39. Michèle Rubirola, Mayor of Maresille
40. Gregory Doucet, Mayor of Lyon
41. Rita Viljanen, City of Vantaa
42. Jimmy Nordengren, Deputy Mayor of Örebro
43. Dominic Fritz, Mayor of Timisoara
44. Jukka Makela, Mayor of the City of Espoo
45. Wojciech Szczurek, Mayor of Gdynia
46. Jacek Karnowski, Mayor of Sopot, president of the Polish Local Government Movement 'Tak! dla Polski'
47. Ellie King, Cabinet member for Public Health, Communities and One City, Bristol
48. Susana Carillo Aparicio, Vice Mayor of Malaga
49. Huw Thomas, Leader of Cardiff Council
50. Lauri Lyly, Mayor of Tampere
51. Aino-Maija Luukkonen, Mayor of Pori
52. Anna Tenje, Mayor of Växjö
53. Visvaldas Matijosaitis, Mayor of Kaunas
54. Johan Persso, Mayor of Kalmar
55. Ritva Viljanen, Mayor of Vantaa
56. Ann Kajson Carlqvist, Mayor of Trelleborg
57. Erik Rostoft, Deputy Mayor of kristiansand
58. Laur Kaljuvee, Vice Mayor of Rakvere
59. Lars Vikinge, City of Linkoping
60. Janis Baiks, Chairman of Valmiera
61. Rytis Račkauskas, Mayor of Panevezys City
62. Ralvis Ragainis, Chairman of Jēkabpils municipality Council
63. Jimmy Nordengren, Mayor of Orebo
64. Aires Pereira, Mayor of Póvoa de Varzim
65. Anders Josefsson, Deputy Mayor of Lulea
66. Tadeusz Truskolaski, Mayor of Białystok, president of the Union of Polish Metropolises
67. Rafał Bruski, Mayor of Bydgoszcz

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

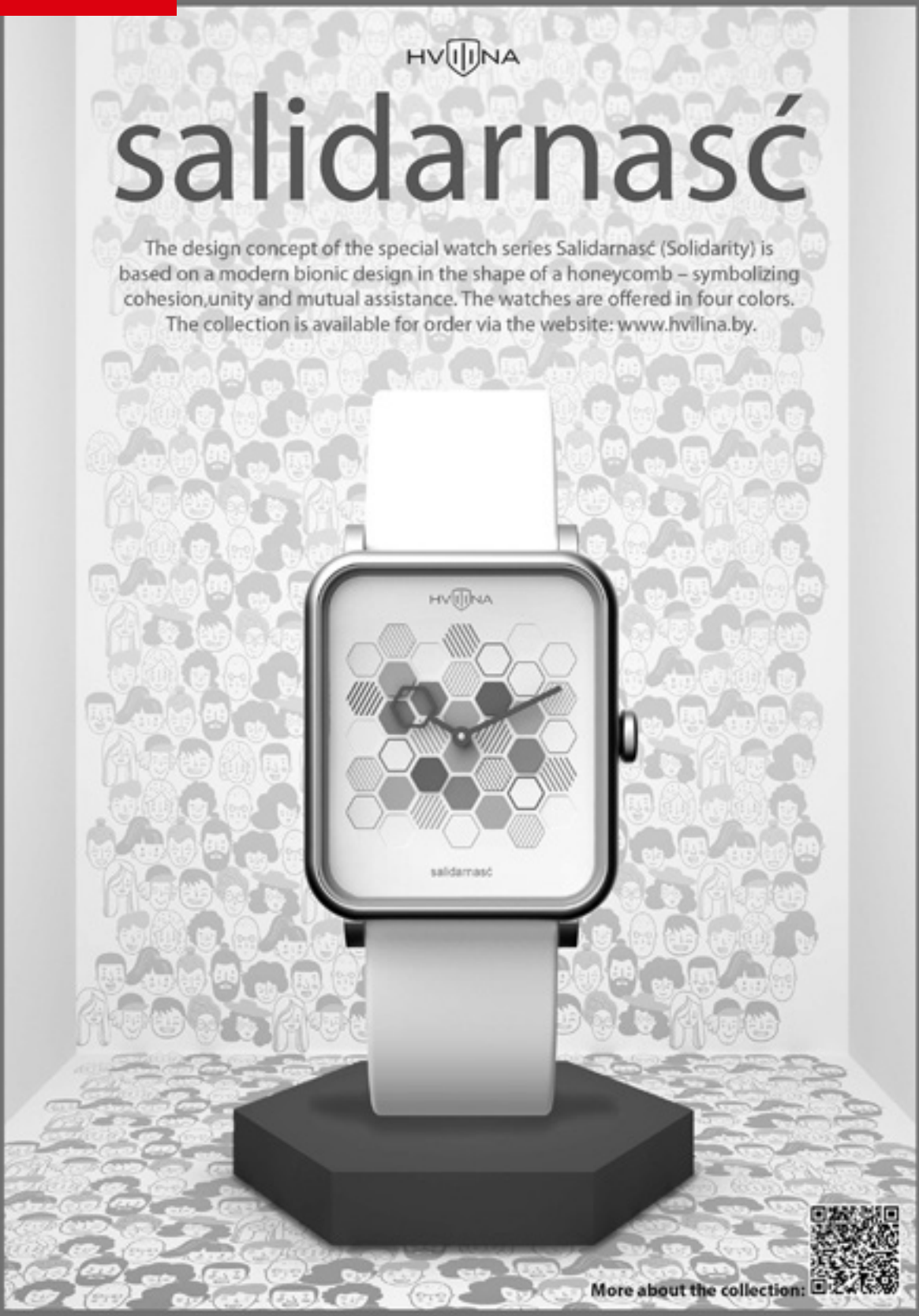
68. Marcin Krupa, Mayor of Katowice
69. Jacek Majchrowski, Mayor of Kraków
70. Krzysztof Żuk, Mayor of Lublin
71. Hanna Zdanowska, Mayor of Łódź
72. Jacek Jaśkowiak, Mayor of Poznań
73. Konrad Fijołek, Mayor of Rzeszów
74. Piotr Krzystek, Mayor of Szczecin
75. Jacek Sutryk, Mayor of Wrocław
76. Dorota Zmarzlak, Mayor of Izabelin
77. Artur Tusiński, Mayor of Podkowa Leśna
78. Piotr Grzymowicz, Mayor of Olsztyn
79. Anna Mieczkowska, Mayor of Kołobrzeg
80. Arkadiusz Wiśniewski, Mayor of Opole
81. Andrzej Nowakowski, Mayor of Płock
82. Jerzy Łuźniak, Mayor of Jelenia Gora
83. Roman Szełemej, Mayor of Wałbrzych
84. Artur Kozioł, Mayor of Wieliczka
85. Gabriela Staszkiewicz, Mayor of Cieszyn
86. Przemysław Major, Deputy Mayor of Cieszyn
87. Daniel Putkiewicz, Mayor of Piaseczno
88. Małgorzata Żebrowska, Mayor of Łomianki
89. Marcin Jakubowski, Mayor of Mińsk Mazowiecki
90. Elżbieta Radwan, Mayor of Wołomin
91. Albina Łubian, Mayor of Pilawa
92. Marek Banaszek, Mayor of Józefów
93. Mirosław Lech, Mayor of Korycin municipality
94. Beata Moskal-Słaniewska, Mayor of Świdnica
95. Roman Ciepiela, Mayor of Tarnów
96. Kazimierz Karolczak, President of the Metropolitan Area of Silesia
97. Zygmunt Frankiewicz, President of the Union of the Polish Cities
98. Henk Bouwman, Secretary-General, METREX network for European Metropolitan Regions and Areas (Association of 51 metropolitan regions and areas inhabited by 125 million inhabitants)
99. Antonella Valmorbida, Secretary General of ALDA, Strasbourg
100. Mantas Jurgutis, President of Union of the Baltic Cities

With a global support:

101. Nina Hachigian, Deputy Mayor for International Affairs in Los Angeles
102. Wen-Je Ko, Mayor of Taipei

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

ADVERTISEMENT



eprasa.pl 866920cb83

ADVERTISEMENT

New Eastern Europe

EXPLORING POLISH SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

A special podcast series looking at the history and contemporary state of Polish science fiction and fantasy in literature, film and video games.

This series is being conducted in conjunction with the Year of Stanisław Lem 2021 and will be produced by Talk Eastern Europe.

AVAILABLE ON APPLE PODCASTS, SPOTIFY AND GOOGLE PODCASTS

The project is financed by the Polish Ministry of Culture, National Heritage and Sport

ADVERTISEMENT

Europe's leading cultural magazines at your fingertips.

One of the few places where the word Europe is not yawn-inspiring but productive.

—— Giovanna Zucconi, La Stampa

A valuable window on the cultural public sphere in Europe

—— Paul Gillespie, The Irish Times

EUROZINE

www.eurozine.com

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

ADVERTISEMENT

DIALOG FORUM

PERSPEKTIVEN AUS DER MITTE EUROPAS

Das deutsch-polnische Onlineportal, das sich publizistisch mit Fragen zur politischen und kulturellen Dimension Europas auseinandersetzt.

www.forumdialog.eu
redaktion@forumdialog.eu
www.facebook.com/dialogforum.eu

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Putin's Fascism

TOMASZ KAMUSELLA

Russia's political system, officially known as "sovereign democracy" (*suverennaia demokratiia*), is nothing but a dictatorship along the lines of Lenin and Stalin's democratic centralism. After all, the main goal is to re-establish a new Russian empire with Putin on the throne. Imperialism is this "new-old" ideology's proper name.

During the past decade, the term "fascism" has become ubiquitous in Russia's public discourse. The more that freedom of expression and freedom of the press have been curbed, the more the word "Nazism" has appeared in the country. The preferred form of both terms is that of a slur, namely "fascists" (*fashisty*) and "Nazis" (*natsisty*). In the West, this phenomenon has been largely disregarded as a peculiarity of the political language in present-day Russia. Arguably, it appeared to be nothing more than a rhetorical flourish. On February 24th, however, in a totally unprovoked move, the Russian president ordered his armies to invade peaceful Ukraine officially to "denazify" the country. A day later, he gave a bizarre speech in which he denigrated the Ukrainian government as a "gang of drug addicts and neo-Nazis".

It appears that Putin and his inner circle seriously believe in their own rhetoric, which is not supported by a shred of evidence. What is more, the country's state-controlled mass media has done all it could to instil this propaganda message among not only Russians and Russophones in post-Soviet countries but also in Germany and Israel. At the same time, the Kremlin-controlled multilingual television network RT and *Sputnik* news agency promote this distorted image of reality across the world via satellite and cable TV distributing networks. As a result, this distortion and its uses merit urgent attention in order to understand how the Rus-

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

sian leadership perceives the world. This outlook informs their decision-making process and ultimately what they see as "rational".

Friends and enemies

Despite the holding of regular parliamentary and presidential elections, few have any illusions about the autocratic character of Russian governance. Putin has time and time again reasserted his position as the country's unquestioned dictator or "tsar". Alternative candidates – or Putin's peers – from the 1990s, who could have become Russia's democratic leaders, were either side-lined, co-opted, compromised or even assassinated in cold blood, like Boris Nemtsov, a former Russian deputy prime minister. The new generation of aspiring democratic leaders in the country are pressured to become loyal cogs in the authoritarian system. Otherwise, they are made to leave the country or are imprisoned on trumped-up charges, as in the case of Alexei Navalny.

In the meantime, more powers were increasingly concentrated in Putin's hands. Across the length and breadth of the Russian Federation the number of regional, local and municipal elections was reduced, while the powers of remaining elected officials were eroded. Regional leaders were handpicked and encouraged to follow Moscow's demands. At present, only Putin can legally avail himself of the title "president". Putin's party, United Russia, controls the Russian parliament and all the country's other elected assemblies. The executive is under the Russian president's tight personal grip, including the electoral process. Thus, potentially successful opposition candidates are prevented from standing for any parliamentary or other assembly mandates. If needed, the election results are rigged. The legally guaranteed recourse in courts of law changes nothing, as it is the executive that dictates to the judiciary. In Russia, justice is dispensed in a highly arbitrary manner.

> Vladimir Putin has time and time again reasserted his position as the country's unquestioned dictator or "tsar".

In Putin's Russia, the constitutionally guaranteed separation of powers was de facto liquidated, alongside any effective political opposition. On the other hand, the officially accepted "opposition" parties and their deputies are nothing but branches of United Russia under alternative names. All of them are the sitting president's political friends, pampered with financial perks and other benefits into submissive loyalty. Any attempt on a deputy's part to practice political independence is short-lived and often suicidal. In recent weeks, as usual, the Russian parliament voted unanimously, but this time even more so, to pass numerous measures that

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Putin needs to wage the ongoing war on Ukraine. Putin's enemies, including genuine democrats and any other effective opposition leaders, are now abroad, in penal colonies or dead. Russia's political system is officially known as a "sovereign democracy" (*suverennaia demokratiia*). However, it is nothing more than a dictatorship similar to Lenin and Stalin's democratic centralism. After all, the main goal is to re-establish a new Russian empire with Putin on the throne. Imperialism is the "new-old" ideology's proper name.

Democracy as understood and upheld in the liberal West is a dirty word in Putin's Russia of "conservative" values. In turn, such Russian values have more to do with the Soviet ethos of a KGB officer rather than what the term "conservatism" means in the West. Supporters of Putin enjoy mispronouncing the word democracy as *dermokratia*, which literally means "shit-o-cracy". The Russian state mass media presents the West to viewers as degenerate and in terminal decline. The leading proof that the Kremlin marshals have for supporting this diagnosis is the western acceptance of LGBTQ+ persons and irreligiosity. In Russia, this acceptance typical of democratic open society is assessed negatively as "un-Christian permissiveness".

The Russian state mass media presents the West to viewers as degenerate and in constant decline.

This is all reminiscent of Nazi propaganda's use of Oswald Spengler's 1918 reactionary work *The Decline of the West* to "justify" the replacement of democracy and civic freedoms with totalitarian autocracy under a single and totally virtuous leader's (*Führer*) rule. At the same time, the personality cult of Joseph Stalin as the Soviet people's "beloved" (*vozhd*) "great leader, commander-in-chief" flourished. This Russian term was employed to translate Adolf Hitler's honorific *Führer* into Russian. In this language both Hitler and Stalin were titled *vozhd*, basking in the sun of authoritarian camaraderie until 1941. This past has caught up with the present. Almost no one blinks when Putin is declared to be *vozhd* by the Russian nation.

Fascists and Nazis

In the rhetoric of Putin and his supporters, democratic opposition leaders, LGBTQ+ activists and western liberals are all fascists, since they do not support or even dare to oppose Russia's "sovereign democracy" and "conservative" values. According to the Kremlin, the problem is that the West is unable to see the light that emanates from Russia. After all, the Latin saying goes *ex oriente lux* ("out of the East, light"). This reluctance to embrace Moscow's kind ideological offer only

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

proves the West's deepening degeneracy. As a result, from Putin and his followers' perspective, the West is becoming fascist again, much like prior to the Second World War.

The fact that during the 1930s fascist dictatorships replaced continental Europe's democracies does not concern Moscow's ideologues too much. Putin the *vozhd*'s guiding hand firmly steers public discourse away from this cul-de-sac that might muddle a typical Russian's "correct" thinking and views. Likewise, in 2021, any comparisons between Hitler and Stalin, or Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, were banned in Russia. Stalin and Hitler's red-brown alliance of 1939–41 must be consigned to oblivion.

What counts most for modern Russia's ideology is the Great Patriotic War (Russia's term for the Second World War). This war began with Germany's 1941 attack on the Soviet Union, which forced Stalin to switch allies from the fellow totalitarian regime of Nazi Germany to the hated West's liberal democracies of Britain and the United States. The war as such is not really mentioned in Russian school textbooks. Propaganda mainly focuses on the Allied victory over Germany. The symbolic significance of this event has been so huge that neither the collapse of communism, nor the official breakup of the Soviet Union, have managed to erase it from everyday practices in the post-Soviet states that chose autocracy. In 2001, I observed in Tajikistan how a newlywed couple made a sombre beeline to the local Great Patriotic War monument. They laid flowers and paid their respects in silence. It was explained to me that the couple did this to ensure prosperity and the quick arrival of their first son. Soviet gods still rule supreme three decades after the end of the Soviet Union.

Soviet, Russian and western textbooks agree that Nazi Germany's Hitler was worse than Italy's fascist dictator Benito Mussolini. In Putin's Russia, this conclusion translates into the gradation of the official slurs as employed for branding the regime's opponents. As a result, the terms "fascist" and "Nazi" are not simple synonyms. In today's Russian rhetoric, a Nazi is the worst kind of fascist. As a result, the Kremlin's official labelling of the Ukrainian government and Ukrainians, who are fighting effectively against the Russian invaders, as Nazis means that they are like Hitler and wartime Germany's Nazis. In turn, this conclusion "justifies" not observing any agreements that post-Soviet Russia had concluded with Ukraine. It is subsequently fine for Moscow to employ all its tactical tricks and illegal kinds of weaponry to ensure "victory over fascism-Nazism" in Ukraine.

After all, in Putin's view, this war against Ukrainian Nazis is like the Great Patriotic War against Hitler's Germany. It does not matter that Russia pounced on Ukraine in 2022 much like the 1941 German attack on the Soviet Union. Supposedly, Russia's very existence has been at stake, leaving the Kremlin no choice in

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

this regard. That may be a correct diagnosis, but it is based on a misreading of the actual causes of such an existential danger. Should Russia fall or break up soon, it will not be of Ukraine's making, but due to Putin's ill-thought-out decisions and his personal demons. The Russian elite and the Russians at large allowed themselves to be led by this apparently unbalanced dictator into the abyss.

Who is a fascist?

There is no single and universally accepted definition of fascism. However, most understandings have a considerable overlap with one another when it comes to the ideology's main observed elements and practices. For instance, British historian Ian Kershaw believes that fascism often consists of hyper-nationalism, racial exclusiveness, the complete destruction of political enemies, and an emphasis on discipline, manliness and militarism.

One of the goals of Russia's current war on Ukraine is to "regain" Kyiv. In the variety of Russian ethnolinguistic hyper-nationalism as espoused by Putin, all Eastern Slavs (Belarusians, Russians and Ukrainians) constitute a single nation. In this ideological outlook, Belarusians and Ukrainians are Moscow's younger brothers who need to give up on their "peasant, lowly" languages and cultures in order to merge with the mighty Russians who produced world-class high culture and a language of international importance. In this way of thinking about the past and future, the medieval polity of Rus' with its capital in Kyiv cannot be seen as an early or medieval Ukraine. The Kremlin maintains that it was early Russia, while Kyiv was Russia's first capital. It is no wonder that Putin's messianic politics convinced him to attack Ukraine in order to seize what "rightly belongs" to Russia.

It appears that racial exclusiveness does not play an obvious role in Putin's self-made ideology. Yet, his imperial-style identification of all Russian native speakers as members of the Russian nation, irrespective of their own identification and whether they are holders of Russian citizenship, points in this direction. Ethnolinguistic nationalism played an important role in Nazi Germany's ideology. All ethnic Germans were expected to be fluent in German or to soon learn this language. The German nation (*Volk*) was defined as a biological entity in dire need of "living space" or *Lebensraum*. The only group of German speakers excluded from the German nation as defined by Nazis were Jews.

The Kremlin's current definition of the Russian nation to a degree excludes Russia's non-Slavs, who account for a fifth of the country's population or 30 million people. A certain reprieve is offered to these citizens in the form of assimilation through mastering Russian, rejecting their native languages, and by accepting at

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

least Orthodox culture as their own, if not Orthodox Christianity. Ethnically (East) Slavic Russophones are seen as "better" or "more promising" Russians than non-Slavic ones. The fact that after the breakup of the Soviet Union so many of this group live outside present-day Russia is an ideological scandal. In Moscow's eyes, this tragedy proves that the Russian Federation is too small a state for the Russian nation and that the Russians urgently need more *Lebensraum*.

As discussed above, the Kremlin uses suppression, expulsion and liquidation to get rid of political opponents. In other words, the government pursues the complete destruction of its political enemies. In Putin's Russia, militarism rules supreme. Even elementary schoolchildren are encouraged to "man up" by donning military-style uniforms, joining paramilitary youth organisations, or learning how to shoot and kill "fascists". The de facto censorship of all of the country's main mass

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

media, coupled with a repressive and arbitrary judiciary, ensures ideological unity or discipline within Russian society.

Kershaw believes that these ideals, now present in Russia, are used as a means of achieving fascism's goals. These are namely the building or rebuilding of an empire and the construction of a new man for such an empire. At the same time, the country in question will do away with the degenerate West's "wrong values", including capitalism, and ensure each citizen an appropriate place in a new society in line with their loyalty and skills (corporatism).

Putin's criticism of the breakup of the Soviet Union and his ideology of the Russian world (*Russkiy Mir*) offers a millennial vision of a renewed Russian empire. In the Russian leader's thinking, such an empire should include all the territories that used to belong to the Tsarist empire when the Great War began in 1914. The new man that would befit from such a rebuilt Russian empire would pledge unwavering loyalty to the *vozhd*, become fluent in Russian, follow Orthodox culture, and bravely join any war to which the empire calls him. In turn, the new man would be required to reject the degenerate West. For instance, this would entail a "struggle" against the "disease" of LGTBQ+ persons who sully the purity of the Russian nation, alongside the rejection of capitalism. The latter process of doing away with a capitalist economy began with Putin's subjection of the oligarchs to his politics and ideology, as exemplified by the imprisonment of the defiant Mikhail Khodorkovsky in 2003. At present, the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war has encouraged the West to impose punishing economic sanctions on Russia and its ally, Belarus. As a result, unless the Kremlin desists and stops this conflict, the Russian government has no choice but to prop up an economy in free fall through the state's direct intervention. Russia's economy is rapidly becoming state-owned and state-controlled like its Soviet predecessor.

Putin's criticism of the USSR's breakup and his Russian world ideology is a vision of a renewed Russian empire.

If the pariah Russian state's new and rapidly emerging socio-economic system is going to last, the individual citizen's place in it will be decided by their constantly expressed and assessed loyalty to the *vozhd* and the empire. For instance, in North Korea the most trusted citizens, whose loyalty has been checked time and time again over the course of several generations, constitute the elite. Beyond the hardcore loyalists, the "wavering caste" consists of those who follow the state's requirements but without too much enthusiasm. Additionally, in the past, some of their relatives even crossed some of the ruling ideology's red lines. Lastly, the remaining caste are the "hostile population", who are to be re-educated in concentration camps or in some cases executed. Today's Russia, with its security police and special task forces inherited from the Soviet peri-

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

od and modernised under Putin's rule, has already embarked on this course in recent years. The ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war and the imminent collapse of Russia's capitalist economy are only going to hasten this process. Furthermore, the Gulag concentration camps, now known as penal colonies, survive to this day, ready to house a new wave of inmates. Free forced labour may once again be an answer to Russia's coming economic woes.

Pax Rossica?

The Russian language term *Russkiy Mir* tends to be officially translated as "Russian world", meaning all the lands where Russian speakers live. With Putin's war on Ukraine raging on, I believe that it is fair to propose that the term is nothing more than a code name for a "new Russian empire". Another meaning of this term immediately discernible to any Russian speaker is "Russian peace". Bearing this in mind, an Orwellian intimation of *1984*'s newspeak becomes immediately obvious: war is peace; lies are truth.

The peaceful Ukrainians going about their own business must be "fascists", while Putin's fascist regime is a "pure Russia" destined to defeat the degenerate West and save the world. However, what if all of this does not go according to plan? The *vozhd* has already thought about this worrying possibility. If necessary, he will unleash a worldwide nuclear war as a Plan B in order to win in this clash of civilisations. Putin sees himself as even more of a religious figure than the Pope, the Moscow Patriarch, Iran's Supreme Leader, or let alone the Dalai Lama. After wiping humanity from the face of the planet, the Russians will go straight to heaven, while the rest of us will just die like animals.

What solace! What joy! What Russian wisdom! Straight from the mouth of this delusional KGB officer. Mr. Putin, spare yourself shame, man up, and at long last make good use of your issued sidearm.

Postscript: Russian occupation

What if Putin manages to occupy Ukraine? Swamping a country of 40 million and the size of France with a quarter of a million of Russian and Belarusian troops is a realistic possibility. But what then? The Kremlin's official line is that the Russian military is liberating Ukraine from "fascists". These fascists are meant to be a minority of the population or the country's "nationalist and corrupt" elite. They "illegally" kept Ukraine's inhabitants in an unwanted stranglehold, prevent-

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

ing them from enjoying the joys of good relations with Russia. Freed from such fascists' ugly control, the inhabitants were supposed to welcome their liberators with bread and salt.

This deluded dream of Russian propaganda did not come true. The danger now is that the Kremlin may interpret this fact as proof that the majority of the population were poisoned by fascism. Increasingly, Russian propagandists equate what they see as fascism with Ukrainian language, culture and statehood. Thus, any effective Russian occupation of Ukraine would need to be heavily militarised and entail the widespread use of brute force to "denazify" the Ukrainians. For the Kremlin, the country's population must understand that they have always been Russians and that Ukraine is nothing but an "artificial state" maliciously created by fascists and imposed on this fertile land's peaceful Russians.

A genocide of the Ukrainians by Russia's politicians and military is now on the cards. This is in place of Moscow's big lie about a concocted genocide of Russians by "Ukrainian fascists". The Kremlin is no novice when it comes to using genocidal measures to force Ukraine into submission. Putin extols Stalin and wants to be seen as his worthy successor. In 1931–32, this Soviet *vozhd* unleashed state-imposed hunger on Soviet Ukraine to convince this country's peasants to give up their farms for the sake of the collectivisation of agriculture. The resultant Holodomor cost over four million Ukrainians their lives.

The Ukrainian language's elite and culture were subsequently liquidated in the late 1930s. As many as 30,000 people were repressed. Thousands were summarily executed and more died in the Gulag concentration camps. Eighty-six per cent of the interwar period's Soviet Ukrainian language writers perished. This was a mighty blow to Ukrainian language and culture, as it allowed Moscow to accelerate its Russification of Soviet Ukraine after the Second World War. Today, this process would be classified as a case of cultural genocide.

Chillingly, it is reported that the Kremlin is busy drawing up blacklists of Ukrainians to be killed or deported to concentration camps. The plan is a repeat of Stalin's repressive policies in Ukraine but ten times more efficient, as it is meant to be completed in less than a year. Stalin took extra care and pursued intricate subterfuge to conceal what his regime was doing from the West. On the contrary, Putin is more than happy with the thorough live coverage of Russian atrocities and war crimes. Russia's *vozhd* believes that he is above any human or international law. What westerners now see on their television and smartphone screens is meant to frighten them witless, so that no western country would even dare to think about standing in Moscow's path.

But what is the Kremlin's constructive and peaceful plan for an occupied Ukraine? First, it is pursuing a military conquest with a vast loss of lives on a genocidal scale,

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

alongside the wanton and rampant destruction of urban areas, production plants and vital infrastructure. Rockets and increasing exposure to the elements will beat the surviving Ukrainians into docility. Second, with the blacklists ready, Putin is busy preparing a genocide of the Ukrainian elite. Siberia's frozen emptiness – more than three times larger than the EU itself – will welcome them to its deathly embrace, as it did in the past in the case of their grandparents and great grandparents. A cultural genocide of the Ukrainian language and culture will follow in quick succession. In neo-imperial Russia's future province of *Velikaia Novorossiia* (Greater New Russia), Ukrainian will be banned from any official or public use. After all, the Tsarist administration in 1863 already declared that "the [Ukrainian] language has never existed, does not exist and cannot exist."

We have now been reassured that death is a master from Russia in the early 21st century. The great Nazi-fascist *vozhd* in the Kremlin can cast a calm glance southward as the empire expands once again. There will be no talk of such things like decolonisation. Putin's legacy is a new dark future for Russia and Europe. NEE

Tomasz Kamusella is Reader (Professor Extraordinarius) in Modern Central and Eastern European History at the University of St Andrews in Scotland.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

The devastating long-term effects of sanctions against Russia

KIRIL KOSSEV

Vladimir Putin and his criminal war in Ukraine have returned the Russian economy back to the dark days of the early 1990s, with spiralling inflation, winding queues in front of banks and shops, stringent financial controls and a new wave of skilled Russian emigrants flowing out of the country. This crisis is only likely to get worse as Russia turns into a pariah state unpalatable for the world's most technologically-advanced nations and enterprises.

As Vladimir Putin launched his brutal invasion of Ukraine on February 24th, a US-led coalition of like-minded governments launched their own economic barrage of sanctions against the Russian state, its largest companies and some of its most prominent individuals. The sanctions have focused on crippling Russia's finances and its ability to pay for the war in Ukraine, as well as severing its military-industrial complex from strategic components. They have put a prohibitive lock on key Russian economic sectors like high-tech, energy and tradeables. The sanctions have also targeted wealthy and powerful Russians who are accomplices to the Putin regime in order to inflict harsh personal cost for supporting the Russian aggression.

The sanctions have been enacted rapidly and in a stunning show of unity by the West, which may have come as a surprise to the Kremlin. Russia has been under sanctions for some time now, ever since its annexation of Crimea and the start of

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

the conflict in Donbas in 2014. The myriad of restrictions then – the hardest being the ban on certain Russian companies from borrowing on international capital markets – has not been truly effective and may have left the Putin regime sceptical of the West's desire and ability to act united. However, Putin has been proven wrong. The current sanctions have been well coordinated and designed to be relatively comprehensive in decoupling Russia from global flows. They will most certainly have severe, far-reaching and long-term depressing effects on the Russian economy and society.

Banking and finance sector

The most immediate and powerful sanctions have been financial. With great impact, the G7 countries have effectively frozen the assets and accounts of the Central Bank of Russia. This means that out of about 640 billion US dollars that could be used to regulate the floating value of the rouble, only about 127 billion remains free in the form of gold kept in Russia itself and 70 billion of reserves kept in Chinese renminbi. The US and the EU have also disconnected some (but not all) Russian banks from the SWIFT system, a global financial messaging service. This does not preclude the banks from making international payments but makes these longer and more expensive.

A number of Russian banks and companies have been blocked from western capital markets, while US investors have been barred from buying new Russian government bonds. The result is a substantial outflow of foreign investors from Russia, with large western fund managers already removing Russian securities from their indices and writing-down Russian exposures as losses. This ban will severely impact the ability of Russian banks and companies to repay their foreign debts. The Russian foreign debt (both sovereign and corporate) is about 30 per cent of GDP, which is a relatively low fraction when compared to industrialised western countries. However, much of it is short term and about one-quarter is due in the coming 12 months. Default seems to be looming, as Putin suggested on March 5th that creditors in "unfriendly" countries should be paid in roubles rather than the foreign currency the debt is issued in (the legal tender of repayment).

The immediate impact of the financial sanctions has seen the rouble plummet in value, which was down by 40 per cent against the dollar in the first week of the war. The country has also experienced a rapid rise in inflation (up by 20 per cent in the first two weeks of the war) and the collapse in value of Russian companies listed abroad by magnitudes greater than 95 per cent in most cases. Furthermore, the closure of the domestic stock market has made it impossible to trade securities

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

or release cash from equity. In practical terms, this has meant large and instant losses in wealth for those invested in Russian securities (both Russian and foreign investors among them) and huge queues in front of ATMs and banks, where Russian people have tried to get hold of foreign currency and cash. Russia is also now seeing a sharp rise in prices of consumer goods.

Economic and targeted sanctions

Economic sanctions imposed by the West have restricted exports of high technology products, components and equipment to Russia. This is very significant in the long term, as Russia is a large importer of these products and its industry and military depend on such imports for final production. At the same time, global companies are withdrawing from the energy sector in Russia. BP is willing to take a very severe loss by seeking to end its 20 per cent ownership of Russian state-owned energy firm Rosneft. Out of all the large western energy companies only the French TotalEnergies is still operating in Russia at the time of writing. To add to this, almost all consumer brands – from Apple to McDonald's – have decided to avoid reputational and political risk and are exiting the Russian domestic market. Thus, at a stroke of a pen, Russian companies have lost a very important source of financial liquidity, but also foreign expertise and technology. Russian consumers have lost access to a wide variety of goods and services.

Sanctions that are more symbolic have targeted individuals from the political and economic elite of Russia who are close to Putin (who has been sanctioned himself) and are accomplices to his regime's criminal actions. The appropriation of estates, yachts and other assets from Russian oligarchs represents serious individual wealth loss. The widespread travel bans enacted on individuals and Russian airlines are contributing to the isolation of the formerly globetrotting and moneyed Russian elite.

To further the isolation, western-led international institutions have begun suspending Russian membership. The Bank for International Settlements suspended Russia from using its services on March 11th. On March 15th, Russia left the Council of Europe in a move to pre-empt its expulsion. The UN's International Court of Justice has condemned the Russian invasion and made a legally-binding order for the invasion to be halted on March 16th. The certain rejection of this order will rubber-stamp the pariah status of the Putin regime in international legal terms.

The current sanctions are not unique or unprecedented in their severity. Sanctions imposed on Iraq following the occupation of Kuwait in 1990, and those on Iran in 2006 after its refusal to halt the uranium enrichment programme, were

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Photo: Alexander Chizhenok / Shutterstock

Close-out sale in the Finnish supermarket "Prisma" after the company decided to shut its business in Russia.

much more severe, all encompassing and immediate. However, Russia is the largest and most globally-connected economy to suffer such a sizeable mix of sanctions. The length of the current round of sanctions against Russia is hard to estimate now, with the war in Ukraine in its fourth week and the scale of violence escalating. The length of sanctions regimes in the past has varied. EU sanctions against Serbia, imposed in response to the military operation in Kosovo in 1998, ended after about 18 months. The UN ban on Iraqi export of oil in the 1990s lasted over 70 months. Barring an unexpected and unlikely regime change in Russia, the current sanctions are likely to stay for some years to come even if the military conflict stops.

Dynamic effects

One consolation for Putin is that the longer the sanctions last the more their edge will be dampened, as loopholes are created and Russia finds alternatives (domestic production focusing on import substitution and/or greater trade with China, for example). However, the economic damage to Russia will also compound with time. The financial sanctions will push inflation to great heights. It is likely that higher and more volatile prices will be a feature of the Russian economy for a long time, with the rouble effectively not convertible under sanctions. High prices will certainly lead to social unrest, even in the very oppressive Russian society.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

The dynamic effects of sanctions over time, continued flight of capital away from the country and limited future profits available for reinvestment implies that there will be a long-term depression of investment across all sectors of the Russian economy. Being cut off western capital markets will be aggravated by the expected default on parts or the whole of the foreign debt. This will mean very little funding available for investment in existing or new businesses, infrastructure or research and development.

The economic sanctions are likely to completely halt domestic Russian production using technological components such as microchips, for example. Certain industries, with a leading candidate being the airline industry in Russia, will likely entirely crumble due to lack of suitable repair parts. The decoupling of the Russian economy from global supply chains will also lead to failures of service enterprises engaged in import and export, as well as financial insurance and legal services. This will lead to a very important loss of highly productive economic activity, but also of skills.

The exodus of foreign firms will lead to long-term loss in expertise, both managerial and technological.

The war itself started a flow of emigrants out of Russia, the scale of which is hard to assess. The loss of productive industries (and the closure of Russian offices of the large multinationals) will further feed this exodus of talented individuals. This brain drain is likely to be one of the worst effects of the war and sanctions in the long run for Russia. The most highly educated, capable and enterprising Russians will offer their talents to employers abroad. If they stay home, they will be forced to work in lower-value added domestic sectors.

The exodus of foreign firms will also lead to long-term loss in expertise, both managerial and technological. The outflow of foreign investors is certain to lead to a severe loss of corporate governance expertise and give a big boost to the already existing state of crony capitalism in domestic industry. This second issue has been a key reason why Russian enterprises are uncompetitive in global markets and the country itself has a very limited range of exports (namely selling hydrocarbons and raw materials abroad). This is evidenced by the low score Russia has on the economic complexity index, which measures the technological advancement of a country's basket of export goods. By this measure, Russia is ranked significantly lower than its neighbours Poland, Belarus and Ukraine.

All of these issus will lead to a sharp economic contraction that will last for some time. Medium-term GDP is already estimated to drop by seven to ten per cent, or by as much as one-third. Depending on how long the war and sanctions last, we could be discussing another lost Russian decade of utter economic destruction and shattered living standards, a mirror image of the 1990s.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Russian response

To counteract the immediate effects of the financial sanctions, the Russian government has applied some extreme measures. They have instituted capital controls and blocked transfers of foreign currency to non-residents. Exporters have been obliged to convert 80 per cent of their proceeds to the domestic market. Russia's central bank has more than doubled interest rates and provided very large liquidity assistance in roubles to the banking sector, which in the first week of the war amounted to 3.4 per cent of GDP. Any moves to overcome the long-term effects of the sanctions are yet to be devised. The dynamic effects of a possible Russian policy response, to judge from those enacted during the COVID-19 pandemic (taking over struggling firms to try to prevent an unemployment spike), imply very negative effects on future efficiency, productivity and growth. Certainly, no import-substitution strategy and increased partnerships with Russia's few remaining "friends", namely China, will be able to compensate for the loss of access to western technological and productivity-enhancing acumen. To those Russians old enough to remember, it may seem that the clocks have gone back and the current extreme crisis, reminiscent of the early 1990s, may be leading to the stagnant 1980s.

The most severe impact of the sanctions, both immediate and long-term, will be felt by the people of Russia and not its corrupt warmongering elite. The budding middle class created during the years of rapid economic growth (2002–13) will wither and likely disappear. The poor will get considerably poorer. The poverty headcount in Russia (the proportion of individuals who live on income lower than a basic consumer goods basket) had fallen from 35 per cent in 2000 to around 14 per cent in 2006. It has remained stable since, but it is now likely to jump significantly. Personally, I believe that it may reach again the very high levels of the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Ultimately, Russia may become a poorer, more unstable, more unequal and possibly more confrontational society. This does not bode well for the stability of the region. NEE

Kiril Kossev works at the directorate for financial and enterprise affairs at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The views expressed are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the position of the OECD or its member states.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Why Russia has very little to offer

TATEVIK HOVHANNISYAN AND TIZIANO MARINO

Driven by an imperial vision, Russia has always thought of itself as the centre of an empire. After all, it has often ruled over a huge multinational territory and was always militarily stronger than the people who inhabited its sphere of influence. The golden rule for any state holding an imperial vision of inter-state relations is to present itself as the "saviour" of others, and Russia is no exception.

To understand alliances and partnerships, as well as rivalries and conflicts between countries, we often refer to geopolitics and its rules. Attention to the geographical, historical, demographic and economic factors that influence relations between states must not, however, let us forget about the people on the ground. Any alliance or partnership of countries within a sphere of influence should be based on mutual gains for all human beings. Otherwise, it is logical, as well as legitimate, for people to try to circumvent and override the rules of geopolitics. This is exactly what is happening in Russia's European neighbourhood. Moscow's relationship with its western neighbours has never changed over time and has always been characterised by recurring elements in the economic, political and identity spheres. These are namely dependence, the preservation of state inefficiency and a hierarchy of status. This approach creates relationships based on ownership rather than mutual growth. It is therefore not surprising that the neighbouring European populations, and among them the Ukrainians, want to move away from this reality.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

They want to dream not only of independence and freedom, but, above all, of an improvement in their economic and material conditions.

Economic blackmail versus opportunities

Over the years, Russia has not abandoned its imperial attitude towards its neighbours. The ongoing war waged against Ukraine proves this once again. Moscow considers its fate linked to that of Kyiv not by culture or history but by unquestionable divine right. In the 30 years since Ukraine's independence, coercion and blackmail have systematically characterised Russia's approach to Ukraine. Soft or even smart power strategies have never been considered by the Russian leadership.

Russia's actions in its neighbourhood have always been tied to a clientelist approach to regional political elites. This has never taken into account the needs of the population. Lacking in strategic vision, the Russian leadership has based its influence in the region, and therefore also in Kyiv, on discounts on energy supplies, the sale of arms and offering jobs to migrants who seek remittances to send home. This has created growing dependence among inefficient and indebted states. Moscow has either used this weakness to impose its agenda or to look benevolent by offering debt relief or debt for asset swaps. The unstable equilibrium created by Russia was destined to collapse mainly because on the other side of the border there is an "opponent". This is namely the European Union, which for historical reasons knows nothing but an economic approach that better meets the needs of former Soviet populations.

As a result, Moscow's idea of economic relations resembles more of a seller-client relationship than a partnership between states on an equal footing. Moscow's use of its trade balance is also linked to creating dependency, rather than fostering economic convergence and promoting growth and welfare in the neighbourhood. The trade surplus that Russia maintains with its neighbourhood through its abundance of raw materials also offers an example of an imperfect view of inter-state relations. It is enough to think about the United States and its huge trade deficit to understand that dependency can also be viewed in the exact opposite way.

Russia's structural inability to offer anything other than tips to its neighbours has allowed other international actors to get closer to Russia's partners. Another example of Russia's incorrect use of trade strategies can be seen in its free trade agreements. The Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) is, in fact, more about creating dependence than providing opportunities. Indeed, while the European Union's Association Agreement does not preclude states from concluding similar agreements with other countries, the EAEU is an exclusive agreement. For

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

instance, Ukraine and Georgia, which have concluded agreements with the EU, also benefit from free trade agreements with Canada and China respectively. In addition, the EU moves funds around the common market in order to redistribute wealth from richer to poorer regions. On the contrary, Russia has never pursued any principle of redistribution from the centre to the periphery and this has only fostered discontent in its European neighbourhood.

Oligarchic regime versus institutional reforms

The shock therapy imposed on the Russian economy in the 1990s, largely inspired by neoclassical economic theories, betrayed expectations and turned Russia into an oligarchy. Since then, in line with what powers have done throughout history, Russia's aim has been to support and sponsor similar systems in countries within its sphere of influence. Moscow subsequently hopes to foster dependence and loyalty and reduce the sovereignty of neighbouring states. Countries such as Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova and Armenia have tried to rebel against this imposed vision of a weak state led by a strong leader. This model is very clear with regards to Belarus and Kazakhstan. In this context, what the West has to offer is very attractive. In particular, with the launch of the Eastern Partnership, the EU offered its neighbours a new democratic model of governance and financial support for institutional reforms. This initiative was perceived by the Russians as an encroachment on their backyard. In 2009, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov even defined the Eastern Partnership as "an attempt to extend the EU's sphere of influence" at Russia's expense. Looking at Ukraine, the EU's engagement has, in fact, been remarkable. Since 2014, EU institutions have sent more than 15 billion euros in grants and loans to support reform processes in Ukraine. US aid to Ukraine in the same period amounted to some 5.6 billion US dollars directed, among others, to the security sector.

> Moscow hopes to foster dependence and loyalty and reduce the sovereignty of neighbouring states.

One of the main opportunities offered by the West was the granting of scholarships and visas to citizens of the former Soviet states. This allowed people from these countries to visit, study and live in western democracies. They experienced an alternative way of life, more effective models of government with strong civil societies and, above all, better living conditions guaranteed in the EU by strong health, education and welfare systems. Having a better and more appealing offer, they made their choice to reject the Russian outlook through revolutions. In

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004, 2014), Moldova (2009) and Armenia (2018), citizens fought for social justice and freedom against corruption and the autocrats who were misusing their power for personal gain. Since these oligarchic systems were deeply rooted in the public spheres, it was hard to make the transition from one regime to another. A vivid example of old regime resistance was seen after the Orange Revolution, when Ukraine stepped back from its EU Association Agreement under Russian pressure. As a result, the Ukrainians made their desires for European integration clear during and after Euromaidan. In that case, too, Russia tried to mend the rift by offering 15 billion dollars in economic aid, but with little success. This proved that citizens were not just asking for solidarity but were overall seeking a better future.

If we approach Ukraine's European integration process critically, we can undoubtedly find many drawbacks. To cite one example, academia has introduced the concept of "declarative Europeanisation" to criticise the lack of commitment to implement comprehensive reforms in Ukraine. However, even if the reforms implemented by Ukraine are far from ideal, this does not remove the fact that Ukrainians want to integrate with the EU. This is where Russia should ask itself what alternative it offered its neighbours to convince them not to take the Euro-Atlantic path.

Inferiority versus national identity

Driven by an imperial vision, Russia has always thought of itself as the centre of an empire, much like during the Soviet Union. After all, it ruled a huge multinational territory and was always militarily stronger than the people who inhabited the country's sphere of influence. The golden rule for any state holding an imperial vision of inter-state relations is to present itself as the "saviour" of others, and Russia is no exception. The recurrent use of the term "little brother" in relation to partner states exemplifies Russia's nationalism and sense of superiority over the other republics of the former Soviet Union, as well as the states and ethnic groups in the Russian Federation.

At the same time, it is worth emphasising Russia's "special" attitude towards the Slavic nations of Ukrainians and Belarusians. In particular, they are considered to be Russia's little brothers *par excellence*. While relations with Belarus are (for the moment) good, as they are based on a vulnerable president in Minsk, Ukraine proved more resistant to Russia's approach to state relations. Russia's special feeling towards Ukraine was perfectly described by Zbigniew Brzezinski, who argued that Russia without Ukraine loses its character as a Eurasian power. In other words, without Ukraine, Russia remains a local Asian power. This vision is totally at odds

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

with Moscow's claim that it should have a global role and a strong presence in the world. This outlook is made clear in recent speeches by Putin and Lavrov regarding their justification for the invasion of Ukraine. They constantly repeat the idea that their actions are aimed at ensuring European security and that Russia is an integral part of Europe.

Another part of Putin's narrative states that Ukraine is a historical part of Russia. Needless to say, in the regularly updated maps provided by the Russians on military operations, the name Ukraine is even absent while those of neighbouring countries remain. This shows that the Russian elite's general perception of Ukraine remains unchanged.

For Ukraine to remain with Russia would mean always having the inferior status of a little brother. Independence in 1991 opened a new chapter for Ukraine, allowing it to become a sovereign state. From this point of view, the further Ukraine moves away from Russia, the better it is for its nation-building process. This idea was crystallised especially after the annexation of Crimea, which encouraged Ukrainians to further strengthen their national identity by striving to differentiate themselves from Russia. For this reason, Euro-Atlantic integration was the best and only possible alternative route.

For any nation, crucial historical moments can become the foundation for building a national identity. For Ukrainians, these moments are often related to the Soviet past and its legacies, such as the Holodomor and Euromaidan. Such moments shape the collective memory of Ukrainians and encourage them to feel that they share the same pain and happiness. Today, Ukraine is probably experiencing the most crucial moment in its history. If before the annexation of Crimea, Eastern and Western Ukraine had different foreign policy visions, now the country's unification is clear. Against one of the world's most powerful enemies, Ukrainians are more than united. Regardless of the material outcome of the war, Ukrainians will win spiritually, as their nation-building will be considered complete precisely because of the aggression from their Russian "big brother". NEE

Tatevik Hovhannisyan is a political scientist specialising in political communications and civil society affairs. She is a graduate of the College of Europe in Natolin and Yerevan State University. Her areas of interest include EU-Neighbourhood relations, civic participation in developing countries and advocacy.

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

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Russia's targets

Children, pregnant women, civil institutions and infrastructure

JAN-HENRIK WIEBE

Not a day goes by without a war crime being deliberately committed by Russia in Ukraine. Documenting these crimes is a huge task that cannot be done by just one organisation. What is needed here is an alliance of various organisations, media groups and volunteers, both abroad and on the ground. They need to document Russian atrocities, sort them, process them for the media and forward them to the authorities for sanctions and prosecution.

No crime is too big for Vladimir Putin to commit, no lie too absurd to utter. This was true even before Russia's troops officially invaded Ukraine on February 24th. The images from Ukraine bring back memories of Grozny in Chechnya and Aleppo in Syria. There, Russian planes also destroyed homes, clinics, schools and other civilian facilities through mass bombardments. The West remained silent when the Russian army was rampaging through Chechnya and Syria. The West apparently did not care about the people there and they did not want a confrontation with Putin. In particular, the war against Syrian civilians was a test for the Russian army. The bombers of Aleppo are now showing their skills in Ukraine. Now the bombs are falling on Europe and Europeans are fleeing Putin's bombs en masse. Millions of refugees, mostly women and children, are already here. Millions more will come as long as Russian bombs keep pounding Ukraine.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Before the war even started, Russia and its allies in Eastern Ukraine set the tone on February 17th, by bombing a kindergarten and school in the small town of Stanytsia Luhanska. This was the prelude to an unprecedented bombing campaign the likes of which Europe had not seen since the end of the Second World War. It is also the first European war in which the internet is widely available and images from embattled Ukrainian cities can be seen on screens in Western Europe within seconds.

Collecting evidence

Not a day goes by without a war crime being deliberately committed by Russia in Ukraine. The war began with lies about a supposed "peacekeeping mission" and "denazification". Russia also claimed that it had no intention of "imposing anything on anyone by force". Yet, violence can be seen every day and each attack appears more brutal than the last. As early as March 3rd, the International Criminal Court began investigating possible war crimes. This was the day that witnessed a terrible attack on residential buildings in Chernihiv.

At approximately 12:15 in the afternoon on March 3rd, the small public square formed by Chernihiv's Viacheslava Chornovola and Kruhova streets was hit by multiple bombs, killing 47 civilians and severely damaging nearby buildings. Chief Prosecutor Karim A. A. Khan wrote in a statement that there were "sufficient grounds" to open an investigation. When International Court of Justice prosecutors have reason to believe that a war crime has been committed, they initiate an investigation to find evidence pointing to individuals who may be responsible for those crimes. The collection of evidence had begun.

In a resolution adopted on March 4th, the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva agreed to establish a commission to investigate violations committed during Russia's military attack on Ukraine. Thirty-two countries voted in favour of the resolution, which was presented by Ukraine. Russia and Eritrea voted against it, while 13 nations abstained. The resolution calls for a "swift and verifiable" withdrawal of Russian troops and Russian-backed armed groups from Ukraine and urges safe and unhindered humanitarian access to people in need. The independent Commission of Inquiry will have, according to a press release, a mandate that includes investigating all alleged rights violations, abuses and related crimes. It will subsequently make recommendations on accountability measures.

The United Nations Office for Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect distinguishes between war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity. War crimes are violations committed during a war between two states or in-

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

ternal conflicts. However, genocide and crimes against humanity are also possible in peacetime or during unilateral acts of aggression by armed forces against groups of unarmed people. The list of acts that can be defined as war crimes is long. For instance, arbitrary killings, torture, hostage taking, the inhumane treatment of prisoners of war, and forcing children into combat are the most obvious examples. In practice, however, there are many grey areas where courts will face difficult judgments.

Attacks on towns or villages like we see now in Ukraine on a daily basis, the bombing of residential buildings or schools, even the killing of civilians – all of this need not always be a war crime if it is militarily justified. But the same action can become a war crime if it results in unnecessary destruction. This seems true in most circumstances in Ukraine, as suffering and casualties often appear to exceed the military benefits of the action.

Establishing the crime

Under international humanitarian law, three principles are used to determine whether an individual or military has committed a war crime: distinction, proportionality and protective measures. The principle of proportionality prohibits militaries from responding to an attack with disproportionate force. For example, an entire village cannot be wiped out after the death of one soldier, as the Nazis did in the Second World War. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, it is also illegal to attack targets that are likely to kill or injure civilians or damage civilian targets, if the extent of such damage exceeds the expected concrete and direct military benefit. As Russia drops many unguided bombs on densely populated areas, the Russian military is accepting the deaths of Ukrainian civilians.

The principle of protection requires parties to the conflict to avert or minimise harm to the civilian population. The principle of distinction states that attempts must always be made to distinguish between civilian and belligerent populations and objects. However, this distinction can be very difficult and the transitions can be fluid. For example, in Ukraine, territorial defence forces sometimes wear civilian clothes and are recognisable as Ukrainian forces only by a blue armband.

On March 8th, the German Attorney General Peter Frank also opened an investigation into suspected war crimes by Russian forces in Ukraine. This is a so-called structural procedure. Such proceedings serve to secure extensive evidence and circumstantial evidence, in order to be able to take action against individual perpetrators at a later date, if necessary. The German authorities are concerned about reports of cluster bombs and attacks on residential areas, civilian infrastruc-

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

ture, a gas pipeline, a nuclear waste dump and a combined heat and power plant. Also in focus are reports of the so-called target lists allegedly kept by Russian and Chechen units deployed in Ukraine. Under the International Criminal Code, the German attorney general can prosecute war crimes and crimes against humanity worldwide. The action against suspected perpetrators of the Assad regime in Syria recently caused an international stir.

"Possible violations of international criminal law must be consistently prosecuted," said Marco Buschmann, the German minister of justice. "We will collect and secure all evidence of war crimes."

Two former German justice ministers also plan to file criminal charges with the federal attorney general against Russia's President Vladimir Putin. "The air strike that hit the streets of Chernihiv shocks the conscience. This was a merciless, indiscriminate attack on people as they went about their daily business in their homes, streets and shops," said Joanne Mariner, Amnesty International's director for crisis response. Amnesty has already well documented this crime.

Another particularly serious case was documented by drone footage and reviewed and published by the German public television station ZDF. On March 7th, the drone filmed the shooting of a surrendering civilian near a gas station on the E40 road west of Kyiv. This was apparently done by invading Russian forces.

Serial war criminal

The most atrocious war crimes have been taking place in the Ukrainian cities of Kharkiv and Mariupol. In both cities, Russian soldiers bomb mostly residential buildings. Images of a bombed maternity hospital from Mariupol, a city on the Sea of Azov, went around the world. Pregnant women escaped from the building in total shock, injured and bleeding. Despite this, Russian propaganda denies this reality and claims that there were no women left. The building had supposedly been occupied by the right-wing Azov Battalion. None of this is true. Whenever Russian officials announce something, the opposite is usually true. Russia itself is usually guilty of what it accuses the other side of doing.

The next shock took place just a few days later. Russian bombs hit the opera house in the city centre, destroying it completely. The word "children" was written in Russian on the ground in front of the building to draw attention to the fact that women and children were taking shelter in the building. Presumably, it was thought that the Russian bombers would not attack a cultural site with women and children inside. But exactly the opposite seems to be the Russian strategy. Those who attack homes, hospitals and theatres do not do it accidentally, but with pure intent.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

On the same day, according to the Deputy Mayor Serhiy Orlov, Russian bombs also hit the site of a public swimming pool in Mariupol. Civilians had sought shelter there as well. According to Mariupol's local authorities, by March 17th about 80 per cent of residential buildings in the city had been damaged or destroyed. All these criminal actions against civilians are well documented, just like in Syria. Russia became a serial war criminal, because nobody stopped Putin in Chechnya or Syria.

To secure all the evidence of possible war crimes will be a huge task that one organisation cannot do by itself. What is probably needed here is an alliance of various organisations, media groups and volunteers, both abroad and on the ground. They need to document Russian atrocities, sort them, process them for the media, and forward them to the authorities for sanctions and prosecution.

Not a quick conclusion

Currently, media outlets such as Bellingcat, major human rights organisations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, and authorities in various countries are already working to document the numerous war crimes and human rights violations committed by Russia. Almost all war crimes and human rights violations committed so far are well documented by surveillance cameras, dashcams, TikTok videos or satellite photos. What is needed now is a digital archive, publicly accessible, to which volunteers on the ground and from around the world can submit further evidence of the crimes.

Currently, we must assume that many more war crimes will be committed in Ukraine and that more civilians will die. There is no evidence that Russia – despite its own immense losses – will withdraw from Ukraine quickly. Various experts even fear a further escalation and warn of the use of Russian chemical weapons or even tactical nuclear weapons. To prevent or punish the use of these weapons of mass destruction, the world must now consider what it is willing to do to send Russia a strong signal of deterrence.

Putin, it seems at present, will not give up his plans so quickly and may even have changed them already. Instead of occupation, Ukraine could now be threatened with complete annihilation, since militarily the Russian army has not enjoyed any great successes. Already there are numerous reports of the targeted destruction of food warehouses and vital civilian infrastructure. It looks as though Russia's current war goal is to make the life of the population in Ukraine as bad as possible for many years to come, so that people will be even worse off than in Russia. NEE

Jan-Henrik Wiebe is the spokesperson for the human rights organisation Libereco.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Bearing witness

Despite repressions and state propaganda, the anti-war movement in Russia continues

ANNA EFIMOVA

As the war in Ukraine continues, questions have been asked as to the internal situation in Russia. Whilst the country's burgeoning anti-war movement may not live up to outside expectations, its attempts to work around the Kremlin's restrictions are inspiring new and unique forms of protest.

International critics often view the Russian domestic anti-war movement as helpless and doomed to fail. This might seem true as it does not comply with the West and Ukraine's main expectation that it will start large-scale street protests capable of overthrowing Vladimir Putin's regime. What often escapes the world's attention is that there are no such opportunities for the Russian anti-war movement in the country's political structure. It must first evolve in more sophisticated, symbolic ways to reach a point of numerical strength over time.

So far, the Russian anti-war resistance can be characterised as a movement that relies on the logic of "bearing witness". Lacking political opportunities to influence decision-makers, the movement aims to develop, test and maintain forms of collective action that successfully promote the values and positions of the anti-war activists. The more accepted their framework and the more accessible their actions

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

for people under state repression, the more numerical strength the movement may gain to pursue change.

Depersonalised and decentralised resistance

There is a huge difference between the forms of actions and opportunities available to the activists of the anti-war movement abroad and those who stay inside Russia. Those who manage to flee or fled a long time ago, promote a new, white-blue-white state flag, free of the red line now often associated with the blood of Putin's regime. Russian activists abroad help Ukrainians to evacuate from the conflict zones and offer free online tutorship and classes to Ukrainian schoolchildren deprived of an education due to internal displacement and war. Their activity implies certain consequences for their security but, as many do not intend to come back to Russia while Putin is in power, they can live publicly without hiding their names.

But most of the anti-war grassroots initiatives based in Russia are decentralised and depersonalised for security reasons. Spreading information and being visible online and offline exposes activists to threats from Kremlin intelligence and informants. Thanks to its new legislation introduced in the first days of the war, the state is now much faster in pursuing its enemies and other disgruntled groups and individuals. This encourages collective action and organisational structures that can comply with the demanding security protocols that most activists must follow. In the new Feminist Anti-War Resistance movement that unites more than 40 feminist groups across Russia, most activists do not know each other or even each other's names. This is done to make sure that no groups or individuals are endangered if some activists are prosecuted. On the day of the large anti-war rally in Moscow, Feminist Anti-War Resistance had to publish instructions on how to behave at a rally point so that no one would get arrested before the start of the protest. They stated that attendees should "Walk in circles around the [railway station] square, pretending to be a passenger, if there are still not a lot of people". When producing informational leaflets about the war, activists are mimicking the designs of the signs Russians usually pay attention to in the streets or in public places. These look like leaflets seeking the whereabouts of lost people and pets, announcements of public utilities and telecommunications networks, and price or sale tags in stores. The only difference is that they contain information about Russia's intervention in Ukraine, civilian victims, and the devastating losses

> Russians who fled promote a new, white-blue-white state flag, free of the red line now associated with blood.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

it has brought to the Russian economy. This allows information to reach the mass of the population while enabling activists to stay anonymous and free from arrest and police prosecution.

Logic of numbers

The Russian anti-war movement has pursued tactics of collective action, from street protests and marches to more conventional petitioning, in order to demonstrate its numerical strength. On the one hand, it empowers new and old movement members to get involved or maintain their activity despite the risks and constraints. On the other hand, large demonstrations have a better chance of gaining international media coverage. During the very first week of the war, international media published momentous photos of Russian protesters, creating a sense of solidarity with them across the globe. More than 1,200,000 people signed an anti-war declaration that aimed to demonstrate the numerical strength of the anti-war attitude in the country. Professional unions and communities, NGOs and charitable foundations, and students at Russian universities also published petitions to stop hostilities in Ukraine.

Ekaterina Shulman, a prominent Russian political scientist, suggested that people send official requests to national, regional and municipal deputies. She argued that "deputies are the most sensitive to the volatility of people's public opinion… Unlike others, they are reachable. Our task is… to create an impression of how people think about this disaster… They [the deputies] will remember that nationwide approval did not happen. This impression will prove important later." Guided by this call, 450 letters to all the deputies of the Russian Duma were sent out by volunteers. Russian and Belarusian activists are now using this tactic to reach regional and local deputies too.

These actions, however, are costly. According to OVD-Info, a human rights NGO, around 15,000 people had been detained at anti-war rallies in 155 cities across Russia by the end of March. Detention for wearing clothes in a blue and yellow colour scheme (blue boots with yellow shoelaces or a yellow coat with a blue backpack), carrying anti-war posters (even if it is just a white paper list), and shouting anti-war slogans were reported. "No war", "No fascism", "Stop the war", "Freedom to Russia, peace to Ukraine", "Maidan", "Ukraine, you are right", "Russia, do not touch Ukraine", "Enough of zinc coffins", "Schools and hospitals instead of bombs". These are real anti-war slogans that got protesters detained and indicted for "discreditation" of the Russian army or violating the rules of conduct regarding public arrangements. Authorities claim that the rallies "hinder the functioning

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

of city infrastructure". Some have found themselves in an *avtozak* (Russian for a prisoner transport vehicle) for silently marching in a dispersed crowd of people. There are even cases of lawyers and defence counsels being denied entry to police stations and courts.

Forty-four per cent of participants detained during the anti-war protests are women and the police exercise pressure and violence on vulnerable female groups. In Moscow, two women and their five children of seven to 11 years old were detained on their way to the Ukrainian embassy, where they wanted to lay some flowers. Police officers threatened to deprive these women of their parental rights and were going to detain them for the night. This is illegal regarding mothers of underaged children in Russia. More than 20 young women were beaten and tortured for refusing to let officers examine their smartphones. They also used their constitutional right not to answer the questions of interrogators. After a large anti-war protest on March 6th, at the Brateevo police station in Moscow, many women were detained. Later, journalists collected their testimonies.

Nineteen-year-old Tatiana stated, "He… was angry, why are we so dumb, why do we not reveal why we do this [participate in the protest] and be repentant about it. Then they tried to take a picture of me, but I was hanging onto the wall – then they kicked me with their legs from the back… They… decided that "the air" would help me to talk. They took a good, tight plastic bag from the wardrobe… The main interrogator in black started to strangle me, but I had access to air because I put my hands on my neck. Then they made me sit on a chair and two people started to strangle me. The man in a white shirt was holding my hands and pressing the bag to my nose and mouth. Another man in black was standing behind and squeezing. This was repeated several times. Once I nearly fainted but they did not notice that I managed to make a few holes in that bag."

Repressions and prosecutions have also been used against more conventional petitions. Lev Ponomarev, an 80-year-old human rights activist who started an anti-war petition, was detained on February 24th for "calls for illegal public action" after the large protest in Moscow. OVD-info reported that NGOs and charitable organisations that publicly disapproved of the war "were disconnected from the charity programme on the website of the Moscow mayor mos.ru". This system previously allowed them to receive donations. Later, Olga Zanko, the deputy chair of the State Duma Committee for the Development of Civil Society, suggested depriving such NGOs of state support if they oppose the interests of the state.

In April, a coalition made up of the *Vesna* youth movement, Feminist Anti-War Resistance, Eighth Initiative Group and Students Against the War presented five demands to the Russian government on behalf of the domestic anti-war movement. These demands include a stop to the war and a return of Russian troops to

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

their bases; the public release of information about Russian military and intelligence losses; an exchange of prisoners and dead with Ukraine; an end to the law concerning the inherently "fake" nature of any information that contradicts the Russian defence ministry; and the cancellation of all criminal and administrative cases concerning the anti-war protests.

Every movement should pose demands. The more numerical strength it shows, the more likely it will influence the decision-makers. Yet the logic of numbers does not serve Russian protesters. Decision-makers have been deaf to their demands. There is no sign that this will change when specific demands are made. However, in the current circumstances, protesters are not so much focused on influencing the authorities but on encouraging more people to join the anti-war cause. Saving and disseminating knowledge about past protests also grants activists a feeling of not being alone in this fight. This is exemplified by the "Chronicles of protests in Russia", an online map that collects data on anti-war street protests. The movement's core is becoming more aware of the needs of ordinary protesters. Activists of the *Vesna* youth movement from Saint Petersburg say there is a demand for alternative forms of street protest that would make participants less vulnerable to police violence. On April 2nd, this group organised a sit-in protest in major Russian cities. The idea is that if people sit on the ground holding each other's hands and legs, police will have more trouble separating and arresting them.

Russian families, with their strong intergenerational connections, are now often split over the war.

Logic of damage

American sociologist Sidney Tarrow argued that any actions that threaten the normal course of events are "inherently disruptive". In the eyes of the "silent majority" in Russia, the entire anti-war movement appears to cause disorder in relation to the "natural" order of things. Russian families, with their strong intergenerational connections, are now often split over the war. Overall, the elderly and young generations tend to have different attitudes regarding events in Russia and Ukraine. One female activist shared how a harmless expression of her anti-war attitude, such as wearing a handmade pin in a form of a Ukrainian flag, caused emotional violence on the part of her mother.

"When she realised that it was the Ukrainian flag… she started to shout at me, call me a fascist, a traitor to the Motherland, two-faced, zombified… In the end, she said that she cannot provide for me anymore, that I have to collect my clothes,

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

search for a job and a dwelling and move out of the flat that they bought me when I was enrolled in the university."

A lack of resources usually leads movements to violence. In the case of the peaceful anti-war movement, it has focused on disrupting state institutions in a less direct manner. *Antivoenniy bolnichny* (Russian for "Anti-war sick leave"), a depersonalised online initiative, urges Russians to get involved in boycotts and strikes. "Imagine that one morning a tram driver who drives workers to the defence industries would not come to work. A schoolteacher would not come to work, and a child of a defence industry worker will stay at home. Maybe even this worker would have to", their press release states. Those behind the initiative believe that these forms of protest are not typical for Russian society. To put it at the forefront and support striking employees, they provide legal advice on better ways to organise a strike and have recently started a fundraising campaign.

Activists also target the subjects of Russian propaganda. For instance, they tear down any propaganda material in the streets and public places. Age and television news consumption are the main factors dividing Russian society's understandings of the war. As a result, the actions of Marina Ovsyannikova, a long-time editor at the Russian state TV Channel One, were particularly impressive. Ovsyannikova burst onto a live evening news broadcast holding an anti-war poster and shouting "They are lying to you here". This protest certainly increased pressure on her employer. After the incident, Channel One has started to broadcast evening news with a delay of 30 to 60 seconds. As Marina disrupted the work of the state propaganda machine and refuses to leave Russia, she inspired the entire Russian anti-war movement. Her action presented an alternative culture in a thoroughly hostile environment.

The logic of bearing witness

Seventy-seven-year-old Elena Osipova is a painter and a survivor of the Leningrad siege during the Second World War. Having publicly protested against the war in Ukraine and being detained twice, she has become a symbol of the anti-war movement. Her activism does not pose a threat to decision-makers but comes with personal costs and risks. However, it does demonstrate a commitment to the values of human life, peace, rule of law and solidarity. These actions are conducted in line with the logic of bearing witness, which argues that defending these values outweighs the risks.

Russian anti-war activists promote the idea of challenging attitudes and values through civil disobedience and symbolic provocations. They spark an emotional

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

response, shift perspectives, and eventually nurture a sense of individual responsibility among their audiences. *Ne vojna* (No war), an anonymous art group from Samara, dressed up in black trash bags and laid in a line on the ice of the frozen Volga river, calling their performance "Word to the dead".

Artist Yevgenia Isayeva splattered herself with red paint while wearing a white dress as a part of her "Breaking my heart" anti-war performance in St Petersburg. She received a fine of 45,000 roubles and was then detained for eight days. Feminist Anti-War Resistance has organised nationwide campaigns in commemoration of the Ukrainians who have died since the start of the war. On International Women's Day, which has often become a celebration of essentialist stances on women in today's Russia, feminists in 103 cities in Russia and abroad brought flowers to monuments that commemorate the victory in the Second World War. In April, they led the "Mariupol 5000" protest in commemoration of the dead residents of Mariupol. Activists across Russia installed thousands of improvised crosses in the courtyards of residential buildings. The crosses included plates that provided information about the loss of civilian life in this Ukrainian city because of the war.

The movement is increasingly embracing routine practices of resistance. Feminist resistance also revived the "quiet picket", a protest initiative first tried in 2016 by Darya Serenko, a Russian poet and feminist activist. Then, passengers of Moscow's public transport could see Darya either carrying a poster or displaying a piece of paper with a slogan on her bag. Now protesters put anti-war posters, stickers and pins on their clothes, bags and backpacks. Since March 1st, Save Russia 2022, a partisan resistance initiative, has urged Russians to tie green ribbons around fixtures in public places. This is a symbolic gesture meant as a sign of solidarity with others who condemn the war. The green colour symbolises spring, life and nature.

The logic of bearing witness helps activists to break through the informational blockade of Russian society by spreading and discussing trustworthy information about the war. Feminist resistance has urged activists to write anti-war slogans on Russian money. This initiative has become increasingly popular. "It will be much harder for the state to fight against what is written on bank notes than on the social media posts and leaflets," activists argue. As prices have skyrocketed in Russia since the start of the war, activists have started to put anti-war stickers next to price tags in stores. This is done because "there are still people who do not understand the reason behind the increase in prices."

Another provocative tactic of Feminist Anti-War Resistance is to send out a scam-like "Unfortunate letter" on WhatsApp. Scam messages asking a user to send a message to several others for good luck are not a rare thing in the world of Russian messaging. Activists decided to use this to their advantage and created a scam letter about the Russian intervention in Ukraine and civilians dying as a result of

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

shelling. The difference here, however, is that the user has to send this scam message further if they want to avoid more "trouble". Activists say that this message has gone viral as some of them received it from random contacts: "We were told that one woman who supported Putin participated in a street protest, having read the letter." A "safe repost" initiative urges those who are based outside of Russia to repost safety instructions about participation in street protests for their network in Russia. Spreading this information is illegal under current legislation. Anna Filimonova, a Ukrainian journalist, and Alexii Ponomarev, an independent Russian journalist, together run a podcast called "Kavachai", where they discuss ongoing events in Ukraine and Russia. Doxa, a renowned student publication, regularly discusses war crimes committed by the Russian army in Ukraine and the conflict's negative economic and social consequences for Russia. This all started with the "Anti-war newsletter" for those who cannot use a VPN to access blocked social media. Many media and activist platforms publish stories about Ukrainian refugees.

Through their Telegram channels, a range of art and design initiatives, such as the Stop the war/Not alone project, produce, accumulate, and share layouts of anti-war leaflets. While some share posters on social media, others print them out and put them up in public places. The project's campaign states that "Protests are the final stage of resistance, and a good protest requires a lot of campaigning… Each of us can put up ten leaflets per day… thousands of people will have the impression that at least one person is standing up behind one leaflet, we will show them that we are not alone." "Graphic intervention", a Telegram anti-war initiative for designers, has also accumulated more than 100 stickers and poster layouts that Muscovites put up in city streets. At the same time, the Students Against The War initiative collects evidence of resistance in Russian academia, such as putting up anti-war stickers and posters and painting graffiti at universities. The group's programme statement declares that "Even though many of us did not elect Putin and did not want this war, it has already started. This is why it is our duty to fight against the war out of solidarity with Ukrainian men and women." NEE

Anna Efimova is a Russian journalist and contributing editor of *New Eastern Europe*. She is also a PhD candidate at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków and holds a MA degree from the University of Glasgow, UK and the University of Tartu, Estonia.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Learning "history" with Putin

ALLYSON EDWARDS

On February 21st, ahead of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Vladimir Putin delivered a state-wide history lesson on national television. Since then, the country's youth has become a key target group for state propaganda. School education has often been considered an effective vehicle for perpetuating and disseminating Russian state propaganda among these young impressionable minds.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine began on February 24th with Putin's announcement of a "special military operation". His announcement followed a speech he made on February 21st, in which he outlined his justifications for the recognition of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions' independence. He took his audience on a bizarre "history lesson", first outlining the country's founding, when Russia was more commonly associated with Kyivan Rus' (yet Putin often omits the "Kyivan" aspect). These ideas were also present in his July 2021 essay. All three "lessons" outlined ideas of loss and betrayal. For example, he mentioned Russia's loss of territory (or "stolen" as he claims) and Ukraine's betrayal, both in terms of the country's supposed denial of its shared history and its move towards the West. Either way, Putin has been carving out this discourse over the past few months. How many people have accepted this point of view?

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Unclear support

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, one of the main questions that scholars and outsiders are trying to make sense of is whether or not Putin's propaganda machine is working? Do regular Russian people believe in Putin's fables? After several weeks of war, things remained uncertain. At the beginning of Russia's invasion, thousands of Russian people came (and still come) onto the streets to protest Putin's decision. Many others, while angered by the Russian president's approach, did not take to the streets, mainly in response to the country's repressive laws on protest and opposition action. The general sense was that Russia's population was not supportive of war.

However, opinion polls and information that has been released over recent weeks indicate that this is not wholly the case. For example, when asked whether they did or did not support war in Ukraine, the Russian public opinion research centre "VCIOM" reported that over 60 per cent of respondents supported the military action. Conflicting views of Russia's war are also being reported in outlets like the BBC. Their recent article, titled "Ukraine war: 'My city's being shelled, but mum won't believe me'", shows that tight controls on media discourses are heavily influencing citizens' beliefs that Russian bombing is an accidental by-product of its "liberation" campaign. That being said, it is worth noting that often the most extreme cases are magnified, and opinion polls are not wholly reliable in Russia.

Do ordinary Russians believe in Putin's fables? After several weeks of war, things remained uncertain.

On March 4th the Levada Centre (an independent polling agency in Russia – editor's note) outlined that 60 per cent of Russians believed that the United States and NATO caused the escalation in Ukraine. However, it is unclear how this outcome sits across generations. VCIOM's most recent opinion poll shows a generational divide, with older generations showing great support for Russia's invasion in Ukraine. The younger generations have demonstrated discontent with Putin's action, not only in such opinion polls but in individual testimonies found in media outlets like the *Guardian*. When the *Guardian* called for Russian views on Putin's invasion of Ukraine, they received several submissions from younger Russians stating that they "got in touch to say that they were opposed to their government's actions in Ukraine, with many emphasising they had family, friends and partners in Ukraine". While some protesting "babushkas" that survived the Leningrad blockade and young people displaying the "Z" movement symbol on their chest do exist, how will Putin reconcile these large generational divides?

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Youth indoctrination

Since Russia's annexation of Crimea, Russian politicians have made changes to how historical education is taught. One aspect of this was the way in which key historical events in Russia are spoken about in public. This is especially clear with regards to the Great Patriotic War. In a 2020 referendum, several amendments were made to the country's constitution, including the protection of "historical truth". This amendment prohibited activities and statements that diminished "the people's heroic protection of the Fatherland", further restricting the popularisation or creation of diverging narratives concerning this historical event.

The state has also established numerous extracurricular initiatives in recent years to raise patriotism among young people. The youth movement *Yunarmiya* is one of these projects. The movement was established in 2016 by the Russian Minister of Defence Sergei Shoigu as a place where "young soldiers master the basics of initial military training, develop leadership skills, acquire scientific and technical competencies." By participating in an all-encompassing educational system that glorifies military victory and promotes essential life skills (appropriately attached to military training), the youth is exposed to several "good" civic values that promote pride in the nation and a willingness to sacrifice for the fatherland. The Nashi movement would have been the perfect vehicle for promoting Putin's propaganda initiative but the group's aggressive tactics led to its dissolution in 2019. *Yunarmiya* prides itself on promoting both patriotism and discipline as propagated through its militaristic elements.

The youth is an important societal category as it is the future generation that will carry Putin's "liberation" message forward. With young impressionable minds, school education has often been considered an effective vehicle for perpetuating and disseminating state-led propaganda. In addition, a military-patriotic education has long existed in Russia (both Soviet and post-Soviet), with students learning about Russian/Soviet military victories and participating in the "Volunteer Society for Cooperation with the Army, Aviation, and Navy" (a predecessor of *Yunarmiya*). What Putin has now created around Russia's "special military operation" will fit easily into pre-existing educational structures because, if anything, they have only strengthened over time.

Putin delivered a state-wide history lesson on Monday February 21st. Since then, the youth has become the main group targeted by state-led propaganda. On Thursday March 3rd, for example, the television channel *Rossiya-1*, at 12 midday in Moscow, held an hour-long "All-Russian lesson on the war in Ukraine". The aim of this lesson was to teach students "why the liberation mission in Ukraine is a necessity". Alongside this lesson, teachers have been given manuals on how to explain

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and specifically to reiterate the idea that Moscow's invasion of Ukraine is a "special military operation" and not a war.

Alongside directives given to educators, resources have been created by the state to perpetuate discourses found in Putin's February 21st speech. Tsargrad.tv, for example, created a short cartoon sketch for children. In this cartoon sketch, five children (bearing the flags of their country in the form of t-shirts) are used to portray the supposed territorial disputes in the Donbas region of Ukraine. The video involves a showdown between the various countries (the US, Germany, Russia and Ukraine), Ukraine's betrayal of Russia and the subsequent bullying of Russia by other countries. Russian students are being indoctrinated across several societal institutions with "history lessons" that fit Putin's justifications to invade Ukraine.

A return to Soviet practices and isolation

These history lessons are enhanced by extracurricular activities that promote support for the "refugees" of Donetsk and Luhansk who have been "evacuated" to Russia. One example of this can be seen in the activities undertaken by *Yunarmiya*. On March 2nd, the organisation launched a "relay of kindness" event that started in Moscow and ended in Donetsk and Luhansk. The students of the Tula educational and methodological centre, for example, have staged activities for 95 chil-

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

dren displaced by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The children take part in various activities, including "Patriotic graffiti". The *Yunarmiya* web page stated, "In the future, similar street art will appear in all cities where internally displaced persons are located." The "relay of kindness" is set to grow and is envisaged to become an interactive programme that will see exhibitions and activities come to life in museums and cultural events. These activities reflect the Soviet volunteerism associated with groups like *Komsomol* but with a fresh coat of paint.

Over the last few months, many independent media platforms, such as *Dozhd*, *Ekho Moskvy*, and non-governmental organisations like Memorial and the Committee of Soldiers' Mothers, have either been silenced by the Kremlin or are heading that way. It seems that Putin has been preparing for his invasion for some time now. Initial figures documenting a lack of support by the youth for Russia's invasion of Ukraine were positive. This suggested that the youth's access to global social media platforms like TikTok, Twitter and Facebook meant that they were still able to access a mix of attitudes on events that were taking place in their country. Yet Putin has now banned Russians' access to Twitter and Facebook, with VPN structures having limited success.

In addition, on March 4th, 89 per cent of the State Duma voted for prison sentences for those spreading "fake news" about the "special military operation". Smaller sentences were also approved for those calling for sanctions against Russia. In the space of a few days, Russians have been stripped of various civil liberties that enable them to access different voices on events that are taking place around them. As the country's young people become even more isolated from global perspectives and ideas, it becomes more likely that they will grow receptive to Putin's "history lessons" and his wider war-propaganda machine.

What would usually take years has been orchestrated within a few weeks. But will it be successful? It is vital that we do not ignore the power of peer-to-peer messaging via WhatsApp and Telegram and people's access to VPNs. What may look like the growth of a young army could also end up being a "Potemkin Village".

Allyson Edwards is a teaching fellow in History at Warwick University.
She holds a PhD in Politics and International Relations from Swansea University.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Bulba in a pickle

Belarus and the war in Ukraine

KACPER WAŃCZYK

Stuck in the middle of a war, Belarusian strongman Alyaksandr Lukashenka has tried to save himself by using his old tricks. He officially supports the Russian invasion and claims that Moscow was provoked by NATO. At the same time, he is trying to demonstrate that he still has some sovereignty at his disposal.

Bulba, potato in Belarusian, is an important vegetable in Belarus. The country is well known for its production and various dishes (including *draniki*, potato pancakes) that go well with *Bulbash* vodka. Belarusians are known as *bulbashy* in the Russian-speaking world. Although, for a long time, it was a name that was considered offensive, in recent years it has been adopted by the younger generation who wear it with ironic pride. Today, one of the most famous *bulbash*, Alyaksandr Lukashenka, is facing probably the most challenging situation in his long political career. The Russian aggression in Ukraine led to a multifaceted crisis that presented him as Russia's errand boy, eliminated any hopes for a dialogue with the West and renewed internal opposition.

The crisis that follows the crisis

Lukashenka's violent crackdown on protesters and the Belarusian opposition after the falsified presidential elections in 2020 led to the harshest western response to

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

his policies to date. As a result, the West prepared phased sanctions that targeted the dictator and his entourage and significantly limited the sources of economic income for the government.

The EU and US finally restricted the trade of crucial exports, such as oil and potash products. This was a move for which many experts were calling for a long time. Moreover, new limitations targeted the trafficking of cigarettes and tobacco into the EU, another source of income for Lukashenka and his close circle. Another critical step was the EU's decision to place sanctions on oligarch Mikhail Gutseriyev, a close business partner of Lukashenka and a crucial person in Belarusian-Russian relations. European capitals subsequently showed their understanding that Moscow's economic support for the Belarusian regime was essential for its survival.

The Belarusian dictator responded with his usual policies. First, he escalated tensions with the West. The lowest point was reached when Minsk decided to use migrants as a tool to destabilise the situation on EU borders. He was hoping, much like before, that a mixture of aggressive statements with pressure on economic partners in European countries would lead to de-escalation on the West's side.

It seemed, however, that this time the Belarusian dictator overplayed his hand. As a result, the West stayed relatively united in implementing sanctions against the Belarusian regime. It took longer than usual for any calls for appeasement among western politicians to re-emerge. But as 2021 was ending, and the number of victims at the EU-Belarusian border was growing, the then German Chancellor Angela Merkel decided to re-engage with the Belarusian leader. This was followed by a diminishing number of migrants trying to cross the border. It seemed that EU-Belarusian relations were returning to normal.

With friends like these…

Unfortunately for him, Lukashenka was simultaneously securing the support of his only meaningful ally – Vladimir Putin. As a result, he once more has given Russian forces access to Belarusian territory. This only allowed Moscow to use the area as a staging point for its invasion of Ukraine. The Belarusian dictator probably hoped that the significant Russian force's presence would simply help him control internal instability.

To be fair, Lukashenka did not have much choice. Both countries have been members of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation military alliance since 1994. They both conduct regular joint exercises and operations. Their military organisations are closely interconnected. Moreover, Moscow gives Lukashenka much-needed economic and political support. But Lukashenka now has to pay the price

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

of further sanctions, more profound international isolation, and even a possible new wave of internal instability.

Stuck in the middle of the war, Lukashenka tries to save himself by using his old tricks. He officially supports the Russian invasion, stating that the Ukrainian army was ready to attack the Russian forces. He claims that Moscow was provoked into intervention by NATO. He also suggests that Poland and Lithuania were amassing a large number of troops at the Belarusian border before the Russian invasion.

At the same time, he is trying to demonstrate that he still has some sovereignty at his disposal. He has avoided fully backing the Russian side. He has not recognised the independence of the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics. After Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree recognising their independence, the Belarusian authorities expressed only "understanding" of Moscow's action.

In addition to this, the Belarusian dictator points out that his troops will not participate in the operation in Ukraine. Some saw the decision to withdraw the Belarusian embassy from Kyiv on March 19th as a sign that Minsk was ready to engage in the war openly. However, there was no explicit confirmation that Belarusian forces would participate in the aggression. In Lukashenka's words, the main task of the Belarusian army is to protect the Russian army's rear from possible NATO attack.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

The final element of Belarusian policy is presenting itself as an intermediary between East and West. Since 1994, Belarus has been a member of the OSCE Minsk Group, formed to prepare negotiations on Nagorno-Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan. After the first Russian invasion of Ukraine, the two ceasefires were negotiated and signed in Minsk. Later, the Belarusian capital was the meeting place of the Tripartite Contact Group, set up to resolve the conflict. Mimicking these earlier moves since the beginning of the second invasion of Ukraine, Lukashenka has offered to host peace negotiations. The first phase of talks took place in the Belarusian part of the Belovezhskaya Pushcha forest.

Belarusian society remains active

After the falsified presidential elections in Belarus in 2020, mass protests faded out after brutal repressions. However, the networks that emerged during the protests remained. While people refrained from open anti-government actions, they continued to maintain contacts.

With the start of the Russian aggression, the post-protest networks reactivated. A series of small-scale protests against the war took place in different parts of the country. According to the Belarusian opposition, more than 900 people were detained during these actions. In addition, the so-called "rail partisans" conducted several sabotage actions to block the Russian army's movements by the railways. Belarusian hacktivists at least twice attacked the servers of Belarusian Railways with the same goal.

Belarusians in exile actively support the Ukrainians in their fight against the Russian army. They gather equipment necessary for the defenders, help to collect essential pharmaceuticals, or evacuate civilians from conflict zones. Some of them also engage in direct combat.

During the 2020 protests, a few Belarusian anarchists formed a small armed unit that operated for a short period. The prevailing number of Belarusians chose the peaceful model of protests. Today, Belarusians in Ukraine are creating the "Kastus Kalinouski Battalion" to fight the Russian invasion. The team's core is formed of Belarusians who joined Ukrainian forces during the first stage of the Russian aggression. Now they are joined by a new wave of volunteers. While probably not significant in number (the initial data suggests around 200 soldiers), the emergence of a unified, trained and experienced anti-Lukashenka military unit may become a problem for the Belarusian dictator in the future.

Meanwhile, the Belarusian opposition in exile seized the opportunity to strengthen its political position. Underlining the fact that Lukashenka's support for Russian

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

aggression means that Belarus is no longer a sovereign country, Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya announced the creation of the Belarusian anti-war movement. Currently, most of the work of the Coordination Council focuses on informing people about the situation on the frontlines, promoting the anti-war protests of Belarusians and supporting the delivery of humanitarian transports.

The leader of the National Anti-Crisis Management organisation, Pavel Latushka, also stressed in a video statement that Lukashenka has no political legitimacy. Furthermore, Latushka announced the start of the "Not a cent to war" campaign, which aims to undermine the economic basis for Belarusian engagement in the war. This move follows an earlier political offensive to strengthen the economic sanctions against the regime.

Between a rock and a hard place

For the first time, Lukashenka is pressured from different sides simultaneously. First, Russia pressures him to engage in the invasion of Ukraine openly. Second, western countries continue their sanctions policy and keep the Minsk regime isolated. Third, the strongman leader is on the verge of severing relations with Ukraine, which was in recent years a very important non-Russian economic partner. Minsk's engagement on the Russian side against Ukraine showed that the mood of protest is still relatively strong within Belarusian society. Informal networks remain an essential tool of anti-war mobilisation both inside the country and abroad. The longer the conflict will drag on, the longer they will stay mobilised, threatening Lukashenka's internal position.

Even though Belarus and its world have changed, Lukashenka is not changing his tactics. He still believes that he will maintain internal stability through repressions and a "balancing approach" between Russia and the West. This may be the biggest mistake that he has made during his years in power. How deeply this will influence his future will depend on the dynamics of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the West's response to it. NEE

Kacper Wańczyk is an analyst focusing on Belarus, Russia and Ukraine and PhD student at Koźmiński University in Warsaw. He is a former diplomat who has served in Belarus and Afghanistan, among other places.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Poland as a new frontline state

WOJCIECH MICHNIK

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine not only wreaked havoc on Ukrainian society but also damaged the regional security architecture of Central and Eastern Europe. For Poland and other states on the Eastern Flank of NATO, it instantly meant that they had all become de facto frontline states.

February 24th marked the end of the world order as we know it when Russian tanks rolled into Ukrainian territory and Russian missiles started to target Ukrainian civilian and military infrastructure. It is by no means an exaggeration to claim that the international security architecture that was shaped after the Second World War is now gone. From the regional perspective, the first day of the Russian aggression changed everything for both Ukraine and its neighbours. Many of these states have been pondering whether they would be next on Putin's list. In an instant, Poland found itself in a situation that thus far few were warning against. Poland became a frontline state, bordering both a Russian aggressor and a Ukrainian state that had become the victim of Putin's latest attempt at ruthless territorial conquest.

For Warsaw, a member of both NATO and the European Union, it quickly became apparent that it needed to perform two key tasks at the same time. Poland would assist Ukrainians in their heroic struggle against the Russian occupiers while also attempting to do everything in its power to prepare contingency planning in case Russia chooses to escalate the war directly on NATO territory. Even though the war should have not come as a total surprise, becoming a frontline state has challenged Poland in various dimensions.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Adaptation and assistance

For Poland, becoming a frontline state in these circumstances means facing the reality of bordering an increasingly aggressive Russia and its military extension in the form of Alyaksandr Lukashenka's regime in Belarus. Since February 24th, Warsaw now faces a deteriorating security situation in relation to Russia's war in Ukraine, a subsequent refugee crisis and a potential conflict between Russia and NATO. As a result, Poland should be ready for every scenario that would require the defence of Poland and other NATO states.

It is noteworthy that Poland, the Baltic states, Romania and other allies in the region have been warning the West about Russia for years. Russia's invasion and full-scale war against Ukraine validated these concerns and signalled a fundamental change in western attitudes towards Moscow. A predominantly united response from NATO and the EU to Russia's invasion included harsh economic sanctions aimed at Moscow and financial and military support for Ukraine. Before February 24th, these united moves would have been hard to imagine. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz called this moment a *zeitenwende* (a turning point), while Liz Truss, the United Kingdom's foreign secretary, said it was a "paradigm shift", pointing out that "the age of complacency was over." Even though for Ukrainians it has all been viewed as (understandably) too little and too late of a response, the West implemented most of its toolset against Russia, short of direct military confrontation. Poland, with its political, geographical and cultural proximity to Ukraine, has stood at the forefront of this strategic transformation.

The direct effect of Russia's attack on Ukraine was most clearly seen regarding a refugee crisis on an unprecedented scale. As people from Ukraine fled for their lives, they escaped mostly through borders with Poland, Romania, Moldova, Slovakia, Russia and Hungary. As of March 22nd, the United Nations reported that more than 3.5 million people have fled Ukraine, describing the exodus as "the fastest growing refugee crisis in Europe since the Second World War." Poland took in most of the refugees (2.6 million by latest estimates) and continues to help and accommodate this group. Integrating the refugees into Polish society will most likely remain the central challenge for both the government and society. In this regard, Poland and its enormous grassroots societal engagement has made a remarkable effort to accommodate as many people fleeing war-torn Ukraine as it possibly could. In the first four weeks of the war, Polish society has shown kindness and openness, welcoming refugees and supporting them in various ways. That

Poland, the Baltic states, Romania and other allies in the region have been warning the West about Russia for years.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Photo courtesy of NATO

Polish President Andrzej Duda (left) with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg meeting with troops at the Łask Military Airbase in Poland in March 2022.

should not go unnoticed, as Poland has not always been known for such generous gestures towards refugees (i.e., the refugee crisis in 2015).

Diplomacy and fighter jets

On the diplomatic front, Poland's record since the beginning of the Russian war in Ukraine seems mostly positive, yet mixed. With so many crucial decisions to be made and high stakes involved, not everything could have gone smoothly. The diplomatic hiccup over the Polish MiG fighter jets may serve as a case in point. From the military perspective, even before the Russian aggression, Poland had become a hub for the West's co-operation with Ukraine. This has largely involved the coordination of weaponry shipments to the country. After February 24th, these efforts have been intensified even further, as more and more western countries decided to send arms, military equipment and humanitarian aid to Ukraine. Most of this has gone through Poland. As a result, Warsaw has become both the logistical and diplomatic regional centre of joint efforts to assist Ukraine with its resistance against the unprovoked Russian aggression.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

However, as the war progressed and Russia's onslaught on Ukraine continued, Kyiv's leadership started to call upon the western powers to supply even more weapons, including fighter jets. In this situation, the idea of providing Poland's MiG-29 fighters to Ukraine and receiving in their place F-16s from the United States seemed like not only a good idea but also a decent deal for the country's air force. Yet, given the fact that such an exchange would take months to implement and that Poland would lose one-third of its war planes without "Russian-made jet fighters", this move brought more questions than answers. In the end, Warsaw decided to take an unusual diplomatic move. The government proposed and publicly announced that Poland was ready to hand over its 28 MiG-29 fighter planes "immediately and free of charge" to the American air base in Ramstein, Germany, with the understanding that they would be transferred to Ukrainian pilots fighting against the Russian invasion. This proposal stunned US officials, not only because of its potential consequences but also because of its public nature (discussed in the spotlight of public opinion). Hence, it was little or no surprise that Defence Department spokesperson John Kirby rejected the Polish offer, stating that "we do not believe Poland's proposal is a tenable one" and that it is "simply not clear to us that there is a substantive rationale for it". The deal was clearly off, amounting to a sort of diplomatic "glitch" between Polish and American counterparts.

Yet it would be unjustified to point to Poland as a primary scapegoat for this misunderstanding. In retrospect, should the fighter jets have been offered publicly? Probably not, but the Polish government was being pressured by both the US and Ukraine and had little room for manoeuvre in this difficult situation. Why? Even before the war, western allies had way too many times been concerned that Poland and other regional allies were "escalating" relations with Russia. Handing over fighter jets to Ukraine in a direct and unilateral manner during a war that Russia started could have caused even more controversy in western capitals. Even more importantly, Poland would risk provoking Russia and then face fierce criticism from other NATO allies. This could negatively affect Alliance cohesion and even challenge its commitment to common defence. Indeed, Russia could have treated supplying Ukraine with war planes as a reason to attack Poland. By offering planes and discussing the details in the public domain, Warsaw signalled openly that it was willing to support Ukraine. However, Poland wanted the Americans to take care of the details so that they would bear the potential risks.

> Warsaw has become the centre of efforts to assist Ukraine with its resistance against the Russian aggression.

In this regard, it is worth discussing the view of Elliot A. Cohen, who pointed out in *The Atlantic* that the United States and its NATO allies are already "engaged in a

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

proxy war with Russia". He also stated that they are "supplying thousands of munitions and hopefully doing much else – sharing intelligence, for example – with the intent of killing Russian soldiers". According to Cohen, the problem mostly lies on the American side rather than on the Polish side because "when you are at war, you need to be disciplined in your decision making, and once again, the United States was not." Overall, being a frontline state might seem simple but it is never easy.

Miscalculating responses

War is always prone to full or partial miscalculations. With his invasion of Ukraine, Vladimir Putin has redrawn the world map but not the way he intended. He not only underestimated the Ukrainians' willingness to defend their independence but also unintentionally helped to cement the unity of the Ukrainian nation. Additionally, he provided the West with an exceptional opportunity to come together by rolling out sanctions against Russia and supplying weapons to Ukraine. He also gave NATO a proper reason to face up to a "new-old" adversary in order to defend peace and security in its transatlantic realm. For Poland, Russia's bloody war against Ukraine should also serve as a reminder that the country chose the correct course in the early 1990s when it decided to align itself with both NATO and the EU. This move marked its symbolic return to the West and the start of its path to becoming an integral part of its security structure.

Moreover, Warsaw should take this costly lesson as a reminder that it is not its geopolitical position but resilience that constitutes its best defence against external threats. The state should also better appreciate its ability to build long-lasting partnerships and alliances. Populist tendencies and party politics should not trump Poland's premium security capital built over the last 30 years of its democratic transformation.

It is way too early to make a realistic prediction on the outcome of the war. Yet, for Poland's decision makers, some things should already have become quite clear by now. First and foremost, Russia is the largest security threat to Poland and Europe's well-being and will remain so for years to come. Consequently, Warsaw would be wise to exercise strategic patience by (smartly) boosting its military spending and readiness while doing everything in its power to keep the West united and rallied against Russia. Secondly, Ukraine's security is inseparable to that of Poland. If anyone ever doubted that before, the war has made it crystal clear. As a result, relations between these two nations could be the single most important factor in the shaping of Central and Eastern Europe's future security architecture. Thirdly, there is no substitute for NATO, the EU and the United States as European pow-

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

ers, as all three should maintain co-operation in their attempts to bring peace and stability back to the continent. Poland should remember that this united multilateral response is where its strength truly lies and not necessarily in its public emphasis on its bilateral partnership with the US.

Lastly, whilst being a frontline state certainly means more concerns for Warsaw, it also allows Poland to be in the vanguard of NATO's response. For that, Poland's foreign policy would need to strike a delicate balance between hawkish temptations and the ability to maintain western unity in response to Russia's aggressive behaviour in the region. Equally critical in this regard, would be Warsaw's constant effort to keep reminding some of its allies in the West that the war is not just Russia's war against Ukraine but Russian war against the whole West. In other words, being a frontline state requires strategic readiness and patience for the likely very dangerous long haul. NEE

Wojciech Michnik is an assistant professor at the Institute of Political Science and International Relations at the Jagiellonian University and the Transatlantic Project Coordinator of the Central and South-East Europe Programme at LSE IDEAS. He is also a contributing editor with *New Eastern Europe*.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

The more things change…

Britain, Russia and the war in Ukraine

NIALL GRAY

The Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine has upended its bilateral links with countries around the world. This is no clearer than in the United Kingdom, which has forged a rather contradictory relationship with Russia over the past few decades. British politicians are now faced with pursuing a clean break with this peculiar status quo in response to today's exceptional circumstances.

It has not been an easy winter for UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Whether it is overlooking a friend's paid lobbying or lockdown parties at Downing Street, the British leader has often found himself in the media spotlight for all the wrong reasons. This uncertain domestic situation has had a drastic effect on the fortunes of his own Conservative Party, with recent by-election results often turning in favour of opposition parties. Polls now show steady support for the Labour Party for the first time since Johnson's landslide election victory in late 2019. Nevertheless, the famously resilient Boris continues to hold on to his job. A journalist by trade, the prime minister has shown a keen ability to deflect from a growing barrage of media and political criticism.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Political theatrics on the world stage

Whilst Johnson continues to fight off enemies at home, an increasingly chaotic international stage has ironically offered him and his government some breathing space. This is particularly true in relation to Central and Eastern Europe, a region that has experienced somewhat of a renaissance in ties with the Conservative Party top brass. For example, Foreign Minister Liz Truss and Defence Minister Ben Wallace were warmly welcomed in many regional capitals throughout the past year. Whilst both figures broke new ground in relations with the countries of the Western Balkans, the pair also reinforced Britain's traditional diplomatic and security links with Central Europe and the Baltic states. Such regional diplomacy has often been conducted in dramatic fashion, with a visit from the Royal Navy's Carrier Strike Group in June complemented by the almost overnight deployment of 140 soldiers to shore up Poland's troubled border with Belarus six months later. November even saw Johnson demand that the European Union decide between Ukraine and Nord Stream 2, showcasing to audiences at home and abroad the UK's renewed commitment to the area. These actions appeared to reflect a concerted effort in London to reimagine its role in the region post-Brexit. In light of recent events, however, it is clear that these decisions over the past year were by no means taken in isolation. Indeed, it now seems that the resurgent regional actor was responding to an increasingly personal rivalry with the Kremlin that even resulted in a naval standoff in the Black Sea last summer.

Whilst Johnson continues to fight off enemies at home, an increasingly chaotic international stage has ironically offered him and his government some breathing space.

Britain's initial response to the build-up of Russian troops on the Ukrainian border appeared to follow a familiar pattern when it comes to debate on Moscow. Whilst defence specialists and the government lined up to discuss further military aid to Kyiv, the opposition either criticised such moves as too little or too much. Traditional NATO sceptics affiliated with former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn even periodically took the media spotlight with talk of western aggression. For many politicians, therefore, the war at first simply presented yet another opportunity to draw battle lines and court support from their electoral bases.

This back and forth was seized on by the country's typically sarcastic media, with publications such as *The Spectator* and *Private Eye* linking these domestic squabbles to what could then be viewed as the "theatre" and hysteria of a potential "doomsday crisis" in Eastern Europe. Despite this, Johnson and Truss made

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Photo courtesy of NATO.

The past month has seen the UK largely attempt to push its allies towards what NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg described as a "new normal" for European security.

the unusual decision to visit Kyiv and Moscow respectively in early February. Traditionally the preserve of London's continental allies, such diplomacy appeared to reflect a change of thinking in light of increased uncertainty. These exceptional moves, however, quickly gave way to the established cycle following Russian President Vladimir Putin's recognition of the breakaway Donbas republics. Whilst a new round of sanctions was announced in line with international partners, the opposition maintained its scepticism. Labour leader Keir Starmer led criticism of London's lack of action regarding various Russian oligarchs and their ambiguous links to the government. The UK had once again gone full circle regarding another flashpoint in relations with Moscow.

A new normal?

Putin's fateful announcement of a "special military operation" in the early hours of February 24th confirmed the worst fears of British intelligence. One week before the invasion, the UK's Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) made a rare exception and allowed the release of a map of planned Russian operations across Ukraine. Officials subsequently responded with some measure of calm as these sweeping

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

geopolitical visions became reality. Johnson immediately held a phone call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and organised an extraordinary session of parliament. This pivotal session would mark the beginning of the country's shift away from its troubled yet largely predictable status quo with Russia. Certainly, the prime minister's declaration that "this hideous and barbaric venture of Vladimir Putin must end in failure" was roundly supported across the House of Commons. Even the usually cutting criticism of backbenchers was replaced by firm support, with former Prime Minister Theresa May urging her successor to make the Russian president feel the "cold wind of isolation".

In general, the list of sanctions drawn up by the government largely lived up to May's demands. Asset freezes on over 100 prominent groups and individuals were announced alongside the complete exclusion of Russian banks from the British financial system (the largest in Europe). Outside parliament, former Scottish National Party head Alex Salmond quietly suspended his long-running talk show on RT. At least on paper, the invasion had forced the British political establishment to pursue a clean break with various Russian interests connected to the country.

The past month has seen the UK largely attempt to push its allies towards what NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg described as a "new normal" for European security. For example, London was the first government to ban Russian aircraft, such as those of the national flag carrier Aeroflot, from its skies. This move saw the country react more quickly than many of its regional allies in this regard, with Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Poland quickly following suit. Russian aircrafts are now almost completely shut off from airspace to their west following the EU's ban on February 27th.

At the same time, Britain was also a pioneer with regards to the West's adoption of SWIFT restrictions on the Russian financial system. Johnson immediately declared his intention to pursue such action following the invasion and raised this issue in forums such as NATO and the G7. Whilst only able to enforce restrictions on some banks in light of German and Italian uncertainty, these moves display the UK's growing commitment to a long-term break with the Russian status quo. Johnson also appears to be a regular personal contact for Zelenskyy, with the Ukrainian president often praising the country's military aid on Twitter. Surreal scenes in British media of Ukraine's former President Petro Poroshenko praising the effectiveness of the Anglo-Swedish NLAW anti-tank system from the besieged streets of Kyiv exemplify a close bilateral relationship that looks set to persist well into the future.

London undoubtedly remains an enthusiastic partner of Ukraine. However, it seems that its assistance may ultimately be constrained by bureaucratic realities. This is perhaps made most clear by issues surrounding the millions of Ukrainian

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

refugees that are now scattered across Europe. Of course, it should be noted that the UK specifically placed 1,000 soldiers on standby to deal with such a possibility in early February. The prime minister even later held a dedicated meeting with Central European leaders in London to pledge further support. However, it appears that the resettlement of a part of this group in Britain will likely face a more complicated process compared to the EU and its long-standing visa-free regime with Kyiv. This is exemplified by a now deleted tweet made by Immigration Minister Kevin Foster, who urged Ukrainian refugees to apply for seasonal work visas in the initial chaos of the invasion. Even though the minister undoubtedly meant well in the circumstances, the statement reflected the realities of a bureaucratic system still lagging behind its regional partners. London has often claimed that its decision to maintain a visa regime for Ukrainian refugees is the result of past Kremlin abuse connected to events such as the 2018 Salisbury poisonings. Despite this, Labour's Baroness Kennedy has suggested that such claims have often been used to conceal a level of inefficiency last seen during London's evacuation of Afghan nationals from Kabul in 2021. The British government's strong backing of Ukraine may subsequently focus more on the peculiarities of its own traditional relationship with Russia.

Crackdown on oligarchs

The coming months will prove crucial as to the exact nature and strength of Britain's long-term support for Kyiv. Of course, any talk of diplomatic and military de-escalation with Moscow now appears a distant prospect. This is especially true in the case of the UK, which is viewed as an especially malevolent force by Moscow's top decision-makers. As aforementioned, such realities reflect an extraordinary bilateral rivalry characterised by everything from military confrontation to poisonings on the streets of Britain. It came as no surprise, therefore, when Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov claimed that Foreign Minister Truss was personally responsible for Russia's nuclear forces going on high alert. Changes at home are more likely to indicate Downing Street's real level of support for Ukraine in the long run.

This domestic reform is especially true in relation to the country's Russian oligarchs. At home in the most exclusive boroughs of London, many of these figures have often used the city's notoriously unregulated financial system to conceal their wealth in shell companies. This practice has been made all the more controversial by their often-cosy ties with both the Kremlin and members of the Conservative political elite. The war in Ukraine has finally forged a consensus on such murky matters, with the government no longer able to ignore the security risks of its un-

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

restrained zeal for deregulation. A long-awaited Economic Crime Bill will subsequently prove decisive as to Downing Street's willingness to root out these illicit financial practices. Universal political support for more "unexplained wealth orders" and a register of overseas property ownership already appears to be causing great worry among oligarchs in the UK. For example, Roman Abramovich's frantic fire sale of his British assets following the invasion has now been halted by the government. The future of Chelsea Football Club now hangs in the balance alongside a 125 million pound mansion on London's "Billionaires' Row". This move exemplifies London's desire to keep up with the rapid superyacht seizures made by France and Germany. Despite this, the bill's small print suggests that it could take months to fully implement such restrictions in relation to other controversial figures. It is now up to government to decide whether or not the summer resembles something other than a last window of opportunity for the questionable assets of Britain's oligarchs.

Support for "unexplained wealth orders" and a register of overseas property ownership worry oligarchs in the UK.

At the same time, Britain's avidly pro-Ukraine stance will also be tested in the energy sector. Whilst the government has now pledged to phase out Russian oil imports by the end of the year, continued uncertainties surrounding gas imports (three to four per cent of the country's total) represent a crucial blind spot in strategic planning. Like many European capitals, London now effectively funds Moscow's war effort through such inaction. In spite of spirited talk surrounding disengagement, this holdover of past realist realities has led the government to talk up the creation of a wholly new energy strategy over the next few months. Figures such as Conservative member of parliament Mark Harper have subsequently urged Downing Street for clarity regarding the potential impact of these moves on the cost of living.

In the meantime, the Johnson administration appears to be leading the way in pushing energy companies to break off co-operation with the Kremlin. For instance, February 25th saw Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng speak to BP boss Bernard Looney. What followed amounted to an effective U-turn on the group's 30-year relationship with Russia. BP soon announced that it would not only immediately withdraw from the board of state-owned Rosneft but also offload its 20 per cent share of the company. Such moves appear to reflect the seriousness of London's sanctions strategy. After all, BP could lose billions in any sale of these assets. The question must be asked, however, as to who will buy such toxic shares? Putin has temporarily banned the sale of foreign-owned assets and abandonment would only mean lining the Kremlin's pockets further. Continued uncertainty surrounding the war could see any such pivotal moves frozen for the foreseeable future.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

No going back

These realities suggest that the UK's new Ukraine and wider regional strategies are very much works in progress. The contradictory foundations of modern Anglo-Russian relations have indeed been shaken to their core. Despite this, it remains unclear as to the exact details of London's long-term plans. The months following the invasion have been a time of great rhetoric on both sides and the UK appears to be currently busying itself with continued military and aid shipments to Ukraine. These deliveries show London's eagerness to live up to its position as one of the first states to answer Kyiv's growing calls for military help in mid-January.

As the situation in Ukraine becomes an uncomfortable "normal", however, London will be forced to look for ways to make its wider rhetoric a political reality. Boris Johnson even wrote a piece regarding this issue in *The New York Times* on March 6th. Stressing the need to maintain a diplomatic option only if Ukraine has "full agency", the prime minister noted that there must be no "creeping normalisation" in relation to Moscow's latest military venture. As the halls of power look set to debate the minutiae of such plans, this should not distract from the monumental shift in attitudes that has recently occurred in the UK. Zelenskyy's Churchillian speech to parliament on March 8th made history as the first direct address by a foreign leader to the Commons chamber. In a rare display of unity, government and opposition alike joined each other in a round of applause for the president, challenging a tradition that has stood in parliament for centuries. If most British politicians now agree on anything, it is that there is no going back. NEE

Niall Gray is the copy editor and proofreader of *New Eastern Europe*.
He holds a master's degree in Central and East European, Russian and Eurasian Studies from the University of Glasgow.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Relations with Russia will never be the same again

MARK TEMNYCKY

No one knows when or how Russia's second invasion of Ukraine will end. But when the conflict ends, a rebuilding phase will be required. During this period, US and western leaders would be wise to tread lightly as they try to establish a new relationship with Russia.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, a new era was born. Fifteen countries emerged from the disbanded union and the West assumed that they would naturally gravitate towards democracy and capitalist economies. As a result, the West welcomed these new countries to join its institutions. One of these countries was Russia.

The Russian Federation would continue as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, inheriting its seat from the Soviet Union. Russian President Boris Yeltsin worked closely with US President Bill Clinton on arms control. Both leaders even signed an agreement to ban "multiple independently targetable re-entry vehicles" (MIRVs) in relation to intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). The treaty, however, was never implemented. Clinton also encouraged democratisation and capitalism in Russia. The US and its NATO allies even orchestrated the NATO-Russia Founding Act in an attempt to promote a more "stable, secure and undivided Europe". Democratisation in Russia was slow, but it appeared as if relations were strengthening between Russia and the West.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Everything then changed at the turn of the century. While the West continued to develop its relationship with Russia, the US, Canada and Europe also worked to establish partnerships with other countries in the former Soviet bloc. This set in motion a feeling of distrust among the Russians.

Bitter relations

In 1999, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation welcomed the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland into its organisation. In 2004, the Alliance accepted Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. The European Union also underwent a period of enlargement in 2004, when it welcomed Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. These countries had shown the world that they were serious about their democratisation efforts and that they wanted to participate in western institutions.

Vladimir Putin and Russia created the Eurasian Economic Community, which was seen as a response to the European Union.

Yet the Kremlin objected to these developments, arguing that NATO enlargement was nothing more than a western attempt to provoke Russia. These false claims would lead to a decline in Russia's relationship with the West. The election of Vladimir Putin would further strain the country's interactions with the West. During the early years of his presidency, Putin would work tirelessly to encourage other Eurasian states to join Russia's version of NATO. Formed in 1992, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation included Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Putin later created the Eurasian Economic Community, which was seen as a response to the European Union. The countries that joined included Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. These organisations' attractiveness for other post-Soviet states, however, was rather minimal.

Tensions between Russia and the West then escalated in 2008 following the NATO Bucharest Summit. During this gathering, Georgia and Ukraine had expressed a desire to join the Alliance. The US and several other NATO members also supported these ambitions. NATO subsequently stated that it would be open to potentially admitting these two countries.

Fearing it was losing control over its self-proclaimed sphere of influence, Russia launched an unprovoked conflict in Georgia. The Russian Federation moved its troops into Abkhazia and South Ossetia, two breakaway regions in Georgia with ties to Moscow. On August 1st 2008, an explosion near the city of Tskhinvali in-

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

jured five Georgian police officers and a skirmish erupted between the Georgians and Russian-backed South Ossetians. Days later, Abkhazian separatists attacked Georgian officers, forcing Georgia into a two-front conflict. As then President Mikheil Saakashvili called for a ceasefire, the fighting intensified. Russian troops quickly arrived, claiming that they would serve as peacekeepers. A ceasefire was eventually drafted, but the Russians continue to occupy these regions to this day.

Failed resets

Meanwhile, the Russians adopted a practice of conducting cyber-attacks on sovereign and democratic nations around the world. The Russian Federation has also meddled in the free and fair electoral processes in these countries and supported authoritarian regimes in Libya, Syria and Venezuela. Russian officials have met with political leaders from these countries, continued their business operations with these authoritarian regimes and provided military assistance. While the West has tried to resolve the conflicts in these countries, Russian interference has allowed these crises to continue. These actions show that Russia does not have a high regard for international law and that it has done little to alter its behaviour.

What is more shocking is that several western governments have tried to "reset" their relationships with Russia. For decades, the Baltics, Georgia, Poland and Ukraine have advised Western Europe and the United States against these policies. Nonetheless, these western states continued to pursue this bizarre option. Time and time again as the West tried to normalise its relationship with Russia, Putin and his inner circle continued to meddle in the affairs of Russia's neighbours and countries abroad. Moscow focused on violating these countries' sovereignty and undermining democratic practices.

> As the West tried to normalise relations with Russia, Putin continued to meddle in the affairs of Russia's neighbours.

US-Russia tensions escalated during the first Russian invasion of Ukraine. In November 2013, Ukraine's then pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovych decided that he would not sign an Association Agreement with the European Union. While the Ukrainian government wanted to maintain its neutral status, the country's citizens argued that establishing stronger relations with the EU would vastly improve their socio-economic opportunities. Ukrainians from all over the country then gathered in Ukraine's capital to protest their president's decision. After three weeks of demonstrations, the government ordered special forces to fire upon the protestors. This led to the deaths of over one hundred peaceful protestors and the

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

president's departure from the country. Although he was impeached by Ukraine's parliament, Russia intervened, stating it was coming to protect ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking peoples in Ukraine. The Russians illegally annexed the Crimean peninsula and launched their first invasion into Eastern Ukraine. The first war, which lasted from April 2014 to February 2022, would lead to the deaths of over 14,000 and the displacement of nearly two million Ukrainian citizens.

Russia ought to have been punished for its unacceptable behaviour. The US led a resolution at the United Nations that condemned the annexation of Crimea. It then worked with the EU, Canada and other countries to implement economic sanctions against Russia. Ukraine steered back on the course of democracy, organising two democratic presidential elections and two democratic parliamentary elections. Nonetheless, Russia continued to meddle in Kyiv's affairs. In other words, these financial penalties did little to force Russia to change its behaviour.

Today, Ukraine faces a second Russian invasion, one that is more deadly and destructive. Over the past few weeks, thousands of Ukrainian and Russian soldiers have died. Numerous innocent senior citizens, women and children have been killed and over three million Ukrainians have fled the country. Putin's war has been catastrophic.

What comes after the war

Russia's decision to invade Ukraine sparked a global response. The international community barred numerous Russian banks from the SWIFT global economic payment system, froze the assets of several Russian oligarchs and politicians, and expelled Russia from various international organisations. In a matter of weeks, Russia's stock market and economy have plummeted and numerous western companies have ceased their operations in Russia.

The Russian Federation has now become the most sanctioned country in the world. Moscow has demonstrated that it has no regard for the sovereignty of its neighbours and it has implied that it will not take international law seriously. As a result, Russian-American relations will never be the same. The US, as well as its allies and partners, will be hesitant to co-operate with Russian officials. After all, recent diplomatic talks have failed to produce results. These interactions demonstrated that the Russians will not accept calls for dialogue and that the West must respond to the Kremlin's unacceptable behaviour with forceful penalties.

These events will also present the US with a new opportunity to work closely with Russia's neighbours. As previously stated, countries such as Georgia and Ukraine have expressed interest in joining western institutions and structures. Ad-

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

mitting them into the EU would help boost their respective economies and help their governments pay for the damages caused by the Russians in their country. The West should also force Russia to pay reparations for the destruction it created in these countries. Moreover, Russia should not be readmitted to organisations such as the Council of Europe and the G7 until Georgia and Ukraine are rebuilt.

No one knows when or how Russia's second invasion of Ukraine will end. But when the conflict ends, a rebuilding phase will be required. During this period, the US and western leaders would be wise to tread lightly as they try to establish a new relationship with Russia. They should question the resolve and intent of the Russian leadership. Sanctions should also remain in place until the occupied territories in Ukraine and Georgia are returned.

Most importantly, the US should never consider a Russian reset ever again. Russia's treatment of its neighbours and the international community has seen it relinquish that right. NEE

Mark Temnycky is a nonresident fellow at the Atlantic Council's Eurasia Center and an accredited freelance journalist covering Eastern Europe.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Mission impossible?

EU membership for Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova during wartime

DENIS CENUSA

Whilst Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova's applications for EU membership were submitted before they were really ready, the Russian military assault on Ukraine has put the EU in a very delicate situation. Nevertheless, the EU has given the green light to start evaluating the eligibility of the three associated states for candidate status.

Never before have Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova's European prospects been as bright as they are now. All three partner countries in the Eastern Partnership region have already submitted applications to join the European Union. However, the trigger for this move was not the success of internal reforms or the fulfilment of other political and economic milestones (also known as the Copenhagen Criteria). Unlike the previous cases in Eastern Europe or the Western Balkans, the factor that accelerated the application process was the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine that began in February. Georgia and Moldova decided to follow Ukraine's example, understanding the magnitude of the historical precedent that is emerging and fearing being detached from Ukraine on their way to the EU.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Geopolitical calculations

Less than a decade ago, the EU set ambitious agendas for the Europeanisation and modernisation of its Eastern neighbours. In particular, it recognised the European aspirations of Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, which agreed to implement Association Agreements. After this, any active demand for more European integration was perceived as a potentially risky diplomatic move that could cause political damage. With five countries already queuing up to join the EU (Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey), fully opening the door to new candidates from the East was incomprehensible.

Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova also did not have adequate political conditions to carry out successful reforms. It was hard for these countries to continuously outperform in order to gain candidate status and obtain a well-deserved spot on the enlargement agenda. Both the "Brussels bubble" and the pro-EU political forces in the three associated countries were consciously delaying a serious discussion about the prospect of EU accession. It appears that they were waiting for sufficient and indisputable evidence of progress regarding sectoral reforms and the rule of law. These old patterns based mainly on the evaluation of progress lost relevance when Vladimir Putin unleashed his military fury against Ukraine. The Russian military assault has turned regional security upside down, forcing the EU and associated countries to reconsider their geopolitical reluctance and timidity respectively.

The main argument invoked by proponents of EU accession for the three associated countries stems from the perception that granting geopolitical guarantees must be swift due to the Russian threat. In the case of Ukraine, the EU perspective is believed to provide a sense of direction for those fighting a war in defence of their homeland against Russia. However, the wider benefits of EU membership for the country require more nuanced analysis. First, if Ukraine is admitted as a candidate, this could have a positive effect with regards to information warfare. In addition to destroying the enemy's psychological confidence, it would also serve to raise the morale of Ukrainian society. Second, the role of a concrete EU perspective is significant during the current war and is equally valuable in the post-war reconstruction process. It ensures a positive geopolitical fate for the Ukrainian state, regardless of how enormous the damage caused by the Russian invasion. Third, EU candidate status can play a substitute role for Kyiv's fading NATO prospects.

> An EU perspective is to provide a sense of direction for those fighting a war in defence of their homeland.

As a result of the war, the likelihood of Alliance membership is even more problematic and uncertain. This is especially true as Russia pushes for Ukraine's

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Photo: Alexandros Michailidis / Shutterstock

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba talks to the press as he arrives for a Foreign Affairs Council meeting at the EU headquarters.

neutrality in exchange for a cessation of military aggression. The EU perspective carries deep civilisational symbolism. It has a guiding function for the Ukrainian ruling elites and population alike in choosing the model of development embedded in liberal democracy and rule-based national and international affairs. Furthermore, candidate status would also send a powerful message to the Kremlin that the EU is serious about the European future of Ukraine and the other two associated countries.

Different motivations

Ukrainian diplomacy worked incessantly to achieve progress in various matters, including increasing military assistance, pursuing peace negotiations, mobilising humanitarian support and advocating for robust sanctions against Russia. On top of these enormous efforts, Ukraine sought to convince the EU to grant it accelerated membership. Integration with the EU remains the only viable path to the West. There has been a conceptual shift in Kyiv's current motivations towards the EU.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Further democratisation, economic development and international prestige are no longer the main objectives. Joining the EU is now seen as a means of survival and protection for the Ukrainian identity and state against Russian neo-imperialism pushed by Putin.

Georgia and Moldova's motivations to apply now for EU membership differed from those of Ukraine. The Georgian government was facing many protests fuelled by its non-alignment with the sanctions against Russia and ambiguous discourse in relation to the invasion of Ukraine. The protests also pushed for the ousting of the government and the country's official application for EU membership. To level down the public pressure and reiterate its own European outlook, the Georgian government had no other choice but to revise its previous plans of applying for EU candidate status in 2022. The fact that Georgia filed an application too was what changed minds among decision makers in Chișinău. Initially, they put forward a moral argument that they would not exploit the Ukrainian situation in order to apply for EU membership, which is a long-term goal anyway. Suddenly after Tbilisi announced its plans to send an application, however, Moldova decided to do so as well on March 3rd.

The three associated countries did not coordinate their membership application decisions among themselves, proving that the "Associated Trio" launched last year is not yet a fully functional platform. They also did not consult with Brussels in advance. The decisions of Georgia and Moldova came as an unpleasant surprise for Ukraine. Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba criticised the two attempts to move closer to Europe as "attaching two of their carriages to a high-speed Ukrainian train heading to Brussels". After all three applications were submitted, Ukraine demanded that its application be prioritised over the others. This revealed a sort of rivalry for EU attention among the three countries. EU institutions have refused to separate Ukraine from Georgia and Moldova. The European Commission has been tasked with evaluating the applications from the three associated countries, indicating that it is using a "one package" approach for their possible accession procedures in the future. In any case, the first in line is Ukraine, which chronologically submitted its request before the other two.

Hopes higher than real chances?

Although these applications for EU membership came before the countries were really prepared, Russia's military assault on Ukraine and aggressive policies concerning Moldova and Georgia put the EU in a very delicate situation. According to the Versailles Statement on March 10th, the heads of the EU states gave the

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

green light to the start of evaluations regarding the three associated states' eligibility for candidate status. The same goal was set in the European Council's Conclusions of March 24th and 25th.

This constituted a qualitative change in the EU's perception of these countries. Not only are their electoral and European aspirations recognised, but they are also considered to have a more advanced status than the Western Balkan states. These countries had to wait several months for the European Commission to deliver its verdict on their EU applications, compared with less than two weeks for the three partners. It is also worth remembering that most of the eight newly created Western Balkan states suffered from wars during the implosion of Yugoslavia in the 1990s. In the post-war era, these countries have waited 20 years or more for clear prospects to become candidates for EU membership. Today, only Slovenia and Croatia have been in the EU since 2004 and 2013 respectively.

The game changer for partner countries in the Eastern Neighbourhood is obviously the Russian aggression against Ukraine. The strategic thinking of the Ukrainian leadership to combine wartime diplomacy with a dynamic pro-EU outlook has also played a key role. At this point, hopes for a positive response remain very high in all three associated countries. The European Commission is already working on a sort of fast-track regime regarding Ukraine's candidate status. Once this is done, the evaluation of Georgia and Moldova will require much less time and effort, since they have implemented Association Agreements similar to Ukraine and are considerably smaller with no ongoing war on the ground.

Having candidate status is not the same as opening the full accession process and facilitating rapid accession, something that was rejected during the last EU summit in Versailles. Much like the EU, Ukraine is a pragmatic actor and understands the complexity of the process. However, it still wants to get the minimum (EU candidate status) by asking for the maximum (fast access). Never in history has the Russian factor been so conducive to promoting the idea of EU enlargement to the East. It must be remembered though that the price for such progress is high and is being paid by the Ukrainian state and people.

Denis Cenusa is an Associate Expert at Eastern Europe Studies Centre in Lithuania and PhD candidate at Giessen University in Germany. He is also an associate expert at the Expert-Grup think tank in Moldova and a contributor at the IPN News Agency in Moldova since 2015.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

ADVERTISEMENT

Kolegium Europy Wschodniej

HEAR UKRAINE

Listen now to our playlist available on Spotify

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

ADVERTISEMENT

GREEN EUROPEAN JOURNAL

A new take on geopolitics and security

The *Green European Journal* publishes perspectives, ideas and stories that go beyond daily news to read politics with a fresh lens.

Energy geopolitics, rising international tensions and the role of human rights in foreign policy – our latest edition looks at Europe's future in a warming world.

Subscribe in print for € 8 a year or read online with no paywall.

ILLUSTRATION: © Dieter De Schutter

www.greeneuropeanjournal.eu

@GreenEUJournal Green European Journal

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

ADVERTISEMENT

- What do Poles and Ukrainians know about each other now?
- How do they imagine each other and the respective countries?
- How do they perceive relations between their countries?
- How exactly do they interact with each other?
- In which areas do they see opportunities for or limitations of cooperation?

This study, which results from the partnership of four institutions – the Warsaw and Kyiv offices of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the Jan Nowak-Jeziorański College of Eastern Europe in Wrocław, and the Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism" from Kyiv – attempts to answer these questions.

Full report available online: **www.kew.org.pl/en/2021/06/11/poles-and-ukrainians-in-daily-contacts/** or **library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/ukraine/18309.pdf**

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

© phot. Piotr Wittman / gdansk.pl

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

GDAŃSK

Russia stands beyond the pale of the international community

MACIEJ BUCZKOWSKI

Today we cannot comprehend or accept the lack of impunity for Russia's crimes against the Ukrainian people. We cannot calmly continue co-operation with Russia seeing the scale of the tragedy which is a result of Russia's imperial and criminal policy causing destruction and death to our neighbours.

For many years the mayor of Gdańsk Paweł Adamowicz was an advocate of an ambitious project which we called Gdańsk Open to the East (*Gdańsk Otwarty na Wschód*). We wanted to become a bridge to cities which are located in Eastern Partnership states, but also those in Russia, and connect them with cities that are in countries that belong to the community of European values. Driven by these ideals we recently commemorated the collapse of the Soviet Union, proudly proclaiming the achievements of many goals. Today, we see that this was an overly optimistic approach characterised by wishful thinking.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine, even though it came as a shock to the majority of the international community, could have been predicted for quite some time. Evidently, we should have treated Vladimir Putin's words that "the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical tragedy of the 20th century" extremely seriously. Putin's dream of the return to the past and Soviet power became a hideous reality on February 24th 2022.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Cutting ties

The tragedy that has fallen upon our Ukrainian neighbours and Russia's criminal role in it met condemnation from around the globe, including here in Gdańsk. Our city council decided to break ties with our previous Russian partners. We stopped institutional co-operation with both Kaliningrad and St Petersburg, but also other cities in Russia. Looking back at the many attempts that we have made throughout the years to build relations with our would-be Russian partners we need to make a certain reflection.

Gdańsk's ambitions were always beyond pure administrative relations with the authorities in Russian cities. First and foremost, we wanted to pass our positive energy to representatives of different groups in our cities, including associations, non-governmental organisations, or just citizens. We were always ready to share – in the name of solidarity – our experiences in building civil society, or increasing citizen's involvement in participatory activities in the city. We wanted to talk about democracy, freedom, tolerance, understanding and co-operation. We were always driven by a belief that the power of arguments is more important than the argument of power. We always wanted to share what was allowing us to speak openly and with no complexes about our difficult past and together shape a better future. Peacefully and with mutual trust we wanted to look into the future.

Russia's aggression of Ukraine made all these beautiful ideals fall apart. Today we cannot comprehend nor accept the lack of impunity for Russia's crimes against the Ukrainian people and broken declarations that were agreed on during negotiations, which impedes the safe evacuation of people from occupied cities, including those who are sick, wounded or most vulnerable. We cannot calmly continue co-operation witnessing the scale of the tragedy which, as a result of Russia's imperial and criminal policy, is causing destruction and death to our neighbours.

We were hoping that at least partially we would be able to help some get through the closed world of Russia's state disinformation; a conglomerate of hate speech, fake news, lies and outright propaganda. The effectiveness of our attempts has now been put into question. Our hope that our Russian neighbours will want to take off the blindfold that is put over their eyes by the Kremlin propaganda machine comes from the protests of the heroic patriots. Not afraid of draconic punishments, they come to protest in many Russian cities. They want to show that there is no consent to lies, lack of freedom and lack of respect for the lives of other nations. We wish them success in this fight. They are also fighting for our freedom, future and peace in a large part of the world.

Gdańsk will not tolerate Russia's aggressive and false propaganda. We will be fighting hate speech and fake news. That is why we decided not to prolong the lease of the Russian Centre of Science and Culture that was based in the city.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

© phot. Grzegorz Mehring / gdansk.pl

A friend in need is a friend indeed

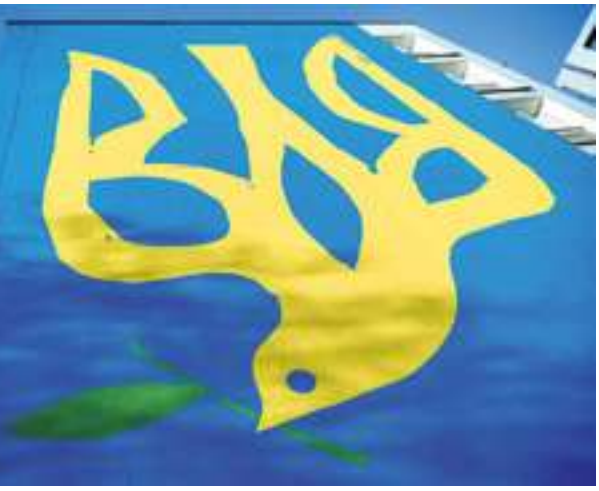
Regardless of the efforts of the national government, it is mostly local governments that are burdened by the organisation of aid for our Ukrainian friends. Every day thousands of refugees reach Polish cities and small towns. Gdańsk is also an important city on the map of Polish assistance and solidarity-based support. We opened reception points, organised shelters and places where most basic products are distributed. We can count on the unprecedented engagement of our residents, good-hearted people and volunteers, who are ready to help. In addition to providing shelter, food, first aid and vaccinations, we also offer psychological support. After that, we try to provide information about employment opportunities, education or relocation to other countries.

We also organised over 20 trucks with food, medical supplies, blankets, sleeping bags and medicine. We are planning to provide more such deliveries. Collections are still being made. On our website www.ukraina.gdanskpomaga.pl we update the list of the most needed goods. At the moment, it is mostly food with long-term expiration dates and hygiene products. The main collection point is located at Polsat Plus Arena Gdańsk. There, Ukrainian refugees can also obtain free of charge clothes and cosmetics.

We have opened a special bank account (PL 33 1090 1098 0000 0001 3470 1911, BIC/SWIFT WBKPPLPP) where we receive funds from all over the world. They are used to purchase medicine, including those needed by the patients from Children's Cancer Hospital in Lviv.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Direct co-operation



© phot. Dominik Paszliński / gdansk.pl

On March 16th 2022 a meeting between representatives of local governments in Pomerania and Lviv took place. The Polish delegation that went to Lviv included: Gdańsk's Mayor Aleksandra Dulkiewicz, who is now the head of a working group on Ukraine at the Committee of Regions, the Mayor of Gdynia Wojciech Szczurek, Mayor of Sopot Jacek Karnowski, the Deputy Marshal of Pomerania Leszek Bonna and Member of Polish Parliament Paweł Kowal. The Ukrainian side was represented by Mayor Andriy Sadovy and his staff.

With their visit to Lviv representatives of our local governments wanted to express our solidarity, but more than anything to discuss concrete aspects of how we can help. This included everyday medical and humanitarian assistance, acceptance of refugees and provision of shelter and food to them. One of the signs of the real support that our region provides are the 50 places in our hospitals offered to Ukraine's defenders as well as provision of medical equipment to Lviv hospitals.

Upon the initiative of Gdańsk's mayor and the head of the Working Group on Ukraine at the Committee of Regions on March 14th 2022 a virtual meeting was organised for over 200 representatives of local governments. It was participated by city mayors and representatives of cities from Europe, the United States and Asia. Our mayor's invitation was answered by, among others, local governors from Gent, Palermo, Taipei, Barcelona, Los Angeles and Mariupol, which is still under attack. The dramatic situation of the civil residents of Mariupol was presented by the deputy city mayor.

The result of this meeting was a joint call to politicians of national governments in the European Union and the European Commission to take next concrete steps, meaning more economic sanctions against Russia. The mayors were calling for the urgent opening of all necessary humanitarian corridors, end of crimes against civilians, limiting trade and economic exchange in the area of energy. They also called for the freeing of the kidnapped mayors of Melitpol and Dniprorudno. The letter is published here in *New Eastern Europe* to help spread the message and raise greater awareness of the need to take continuous action.

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

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

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Hardship on the horizon

Armenia amid sanctions against Russia

ANNA VARDANYAN

Armenian economists, entrepreneurs and private business owners are warning about hardships that have arisen due to sanctions against Russia following its invasion of Ukraine. The risks and consequences for Armenia's economy are severe.

Russia's war against Ukraine has gone beyond the borders of the conflict between the two states and has knocked on the doors of all countries, targeting their economies first. The invasion of Ukraine by Russian troops led to a global economic backlash against Russia in the form of additional economic sanctions. These complement the package of sanctions initiated in 2014 following the annexation of Crimea and the war in Eastern Ukraine. These restrictions are still valid and have already had significant negative impacts on the Russian economy.

According to recent analyses and opinions in the international media and amongst experts, Russia has less tools to counteract the long-term impact of these sanctions. As reported by *The Economist*, restrictions on technology exports will gradually hit the country's economic growth, causing great inconvenience to Russian consumers. Financial constraints will also strike immediately, causing capital outflows and halting external finance. Jason Furman, a former chair of President Barack Obama's Council of Economic Advisers and current professor of the practice of economic policy at Harvard University, believes that in the longer term Russia

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

will likely be the conflict's biggest economic loser. This position is of course after Ukraine, whose losses will go well beyond what can be measured in the national accounts. Furman believes these sanctions will be much heavier than the sanctions of 2014, as Russia will be almost wholly separated from the entire international financial system. The professor has stated that "Russia's economy, and the well-being of its population, have been stagnant since the Kremlin's 2014 annexation of Crimea. The fallout from its current, large-scale invasion will almost certainly be more severe over time. Sanctions will increasingly take a toll, and Russia's growing isolation, as well as heightened investor uncertainty, will weaken trade and other economic links."

Effect on Armenia

According to analysis published by *Al Jazeera*, the devaluation of the rouble, potential problems with imports and general political uncertainty may undermine any business's desire to take risks. This would result in lower growth in agriculture, lower overall supply and even higher food inflation. In addition, disruptions to payment systems may lead to issues regarding the supply of imported goods to Russia, further accelerating inflation. Disconnecting the country's largest banks from making customer payments will also disrupt the flow of goods and encourage a consumer market deficit. Some companies that focus on importing goods to Russia or selling imported goods in the country may go bankrupt. The average Russian citizen will pay the price for this, as real household incomes shrink. As usual, inflation will hit the poor hardest.

Current sanctions will be much heavier than those of 2014. Russia will be separated from the international financial system.

Armenia, which is not only a strategic ally but also a significant trading partner of Russia, is already facing economic trouble due to the large-scale sanctions against Moscow. First of all, this is clear in terms of the devaluation of the rouble. According to the website Rate.am, the maximum rouble price in Armenian banks as of March 5th is 4.61 Armenian drams (AMD). In parallel with the Russian rouble, the Armenian dram has been depreciating in value against the dollar and the euro. For instance, banks are now already selling one dollar for 525 drams.

Armenian economists, entrepreneurs and private business representatives are already warning about such hardships and the possible risks and consequences for the economy. According to them, this situation has already led and will lead in the near future to a sharp rise in prices for the whole assortment of food and goods

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

imported to Armenia. According to official statistics, prices in Armenia increased by 6.5 per cent last year. This year we are only in spring but the prices of gas, water and electricity have already risen.

The chairman of the Consumers' Union of Armenia, Armen Poghosyan, is confident that inflation will continue to increase given the current logic of events. After all, economic pressure on Russia cannot but affect Armenia. Poghosyan has stated that the only way to cope with this situation is to manage the economy so that the balance of imports and exports changes at least slightly towards exports. "Exports are now three times smaller than imports. This means that we pay the workers of another country, i.e. workers of Turkey or other countries. We need to increase our exports as much as possible. Of course, imports cannot be absolutely zero, but the balance must be shifted to exports."

The chairman of the Consumers' Union also expressed concern over the cessation of transfers from Russia. "There is a high risk that there will be issues connected to both the two types of comparative values, the dram-rouble, and that imposed by the West. Both are likely to have a negative impact on our living standard."

Remittances

Several economists in Armenia are arguing that the issue of current exports and imports in the country is also a matter of serious concern. According to Bagrat Asatryan, the former chairman of the Central Bank of Armenia, these sanctions will naturally have a significant impact on Armenia. He stated that the banking system is relatively more "isolated" than the economy. "The Russian rouble does not play a big role in our financial system, our export and import opportunities are more important here, this should be the matter of concern and we have to think in this direction."

As it can be seen, the biggest blow comes from foreign direct investments and remittances to Armenia, the largest source of which is the Russian Federation. According to Central Bank data, more than 40 per cent of money transfers to Armenia come from Russia. Last year, out of about 2.1 billion US dollars transferred to Armenia, 865 million was sent from Russia. Economists also express concern over the export of goods from Armenia and warn that as a result of all this it could suffer significantly.

Narek Karapetyan, an expert at the AMBERD Research Centre at the Armenian State University of Economics, is sure that the devaluation of the rouble will inevitably affect exports from Armenia to Russia. The relative prices of goods in the two countries are changing. As a result, the competitiveness of Armenian goods

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

in Russia will decrease to some extent. "If in the past our exporters in Russia used to sell at X price, now they will sell at a higher price. In this regard, the devaluation of the rouble has a negative impact on us."

Karen Sargsyan, an economist and management expert, also thinks that the revenues from the goods exported from Armenia will be devalued if the fluctuations in the rouble-dollar exchange rate last more than a month. After all, their fair value will decrease, as well as the number of remittances received by the overwhelming majority of our population. On average, remittances have made up 15 per cent of the country's GDP. Solvency could become a key issue if the devaluation of the rouble is long-lasting.

The sharp recession of the rouble due to western sanctions has exposed serious troubles and hardships amongst representatives of the Armenian business sector and companies providing services or producing goods. They are worried about an uncertain future due to financial instability. Some even compare this period to the 1990s, warning that this situation could lead to extreme poverty for Armenia.

Entrepreneur Karen Nersisyan, who is involved in the restaurant business in Armenia, specifically mentions that "Most of the work abroad is from Armenia to Russia. Armenians in Russia earn a rouble and pass it on to their family and relatives in Armenia. Whereas, in these war conditions, there was a moment when a thousand roubles became about three thousand drams, which was a historical decline and absurd. People who have a limited income, e.g., 30,000 roubles, which is equivalent to about 400 US dollars, now find they have 100 today. And it turns out that those who worked for five months for a certain amount of money and planned to solve some specific issues in Armenia can no longer do that. Whatever you want to do, the dram does not have that power in our country and the rouble and the dollar dominate, moreover, no one keeps the dram. And as of today, one of the ruling currencies in Armenia has become nothing. This can even lead to extreme poverty for Armenia. In other words, if there were any attempts to form a middle class, now there is not even a hope for it. It seems we are going back to the 1990s: the period of anarchy, from extreme poverty to extreme wealth."

Economic war

Nersisyan believes that Armenian businesses already face serious problems to make transfers from Russia to Armenia. This is also due to the partial suspension of the SWIFT international financial messaging service. "People from Russia make transfers via this or that system, for which the fees have risen sharply both for the sender and the receiver. Quite a lot of money has been stolen from people's accounts

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

through Ukrainian cyber-attacks as well. Not to mention that people in Russia can now deposit money in their accounts, but they cannot withdraw money because a number of systems are frozen. Roughly speaking, there is money, but you cannot use it to solve your everyday problems. Moreover, there is no cash in Russia, people want to withdraw at least a thousand roubles, but the ATMs are empty. In the last two weeks, people have cashed in 1.6 trillion US dollars, and now Vladimir Putin does not allow any currency to go out of the country, due to that, a number of ATMs are closed. In my opinion, the best option now is to get into cryptocurrency, which many did not take seriously, but in the last two to three years it has become quite a serious platform for investing in finance."

In these war conditions, according to Nersisyan, we must first realise that this situation will not last just a month or a year but could last quite a long time. "World War III has already kicked off and it differs from the previous two because it is an economic war, not a shootout", he concluded.

> The war will definitely have an impact on the entire economy of Armenia in a rather negative sense.

Robert Muradyan, a store owner who imports and exports clothes in Armenia, believes that the biggest problem in business activity now is the significant increase in the dollar exchange rate due to the fall of the rouble. "We buy most of the printed materials and raw materials at the dollar exchange rate," he says. "And in the last seven days, everything has become about 20 per cent more expensive. We exported our products to Russia. It was work clothes worn at festivals and events, Armenian businessmen there also ordered the clothes of their employees from Armenia. But due to the current situation, all the orders have been frozen."

According to Muradyan, the only way to survive in these conditions is to work even harder. "I was going to make new investments, open new jobs. Unfortunately, at this point I have stopped all this activity in order to strengthen what is available and evade the risks, and due to the rising prices around the world and declining sales. Even the prices of sewing machines have risen due to the dollar exchange rate." He argues that this war will definitely have an impact on the entire economy of Armenia in a rather negative sense. "But what is important at the moment is peace and its entrenchment for long-term perspectives," he concludes.

Armenia as a haven from sanctions?

Despite unofficial reports of ongoing difficulties and pessimistic forecasts (mostly encountered in the pages of local media outlets), a flow of business from abroad to

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Armenia has started. Most of the groups involved are Russian-Belarusian companies that are fleeing sanctions against their countries. Overall, they are predominantly IT companies that want to work with the United States and Europe from Armenia.

Nonetheless, representatives of the economic and business community are still puzzled as to what extent this tendency can be a basis for optimistic forecasts. For instance, Armen Poghosyan, the chairman of the Consumers' Union, does not share such optimism. "Of course, it is definitely positive if some businesses move to Armenia and it is an ongoing process, but it will be temporary," he says.

Karen Nersisyan has deep suspicions in this regard. He argues that "Armenia should, first and foremost, be capable of solving its own problems, and only then think about admitting Russian businessmen here." Nersisyan concludes that "We are not even a developing country so the Russians cannot bring some of their financial assets and be confident in success for a short time. There are a number of other post-Soviet countries more favourable for them. So no matter how swamped the Armenian press is with such views and predictions, I do not think that any serious businessman will transfer his financial assets in the hope that he will be capable of withstanding the economic crisis. Even if some ten businessmen decide to move their businesses to Armenia, this is not a matter to be solved in a day or even a month, so there is no need to set off fireworks prematurely on this occasion." NEE

Anna Vardanyan is a journalist and political analyst based in Armenia.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Russia's war in Ukraine

Perspectives from the South Caucasus

VERONIKA PFEILSCHIFTER, BIDZINA LEBANIDZE AND IRENA GONASHVILI

The war in Ukraine has also opened long-standing geopolitical wounds in the three states of the South Caucasus, which now find themselves on the frontline of the new Cold War. The modest reactions of Baku, Tbilisi and Yerevan to Russia's aggression against Ukraine underline the precarious states the three countries find themselves in.

Russia's war in Ukraine has geopolitical implications for Europe and beyond. This includes the three South Caucasus countries, all of which are members of the European Union's Eastern Partnership initiative. Yet, governmental and societal reactions have varied in all three countries, with the Georgian government being cornered into a strategy of "non-deterrence", the Armenian government subordinate to Russia's security interests, and the Azerbaijani government pursuing its balancing policy while also seeking a strategic partnership with Moscow. None of the three states have joined the sanctions against Russia's regime, underlining their vulnerability vis-à-vis Russia. The war's security implications for the three countries vary from being extremely dangerous for Georgia's statehood, to having negative economic and geopolitical impacts on Armenia and Azerbaijan.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Armenia: abstention due to overdependence on Russia

Armenia's reaction to Russia's incursion into Ukraine on February 24th has been mostly shaped by Yerevan's heavy reliance on Russia. However, this approach also indicates a certain level of agency. Russia is Armenia's key security and military ally in the region. At the same time, the well-being of ethnic Armenians in the Nagorno-Karabakh region depends on the Russian peacekeeping force, which was deployed there after Armenia's crushing defeat in the war against Azerbaijan two years ago.

Since the beginning of Russia's military campaign in Ukraine, the Armenian authorities have been trying to strike a delicate balance between politically supporting Russia and avoiding international isolation by not crossing red lines in the eyes of the international community. Armenia did not join any of the sanctions imposed by the West against Russia and was the only country that voted against the suspension of Russia's representation in the Council of Europe on February 26th. At the same time, Yerevan tried to establish its limits regarding how far it is willing to follow Russia by declining to recognise Ukraine's separatist republics. Furthermore, Armenia abstained from voting against Russia's invasion of Ukraine in the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA). Yerevan also abstained from voting on holding debates about the human rights situation in Ukraine in the UN Human Rights Council. On the societal level, a number of medium-sized protests in support of Ukraine have taken place in Armenia. Additionally, several pro-Russian rallies of a smaller scale took place in the country. Next to loyalty to Russia, Ukraine's arms supplies to Armenia's regional rival Azerbaijan in previous years could also have contributed to the reluctance of Yerevan and wider society to express more solidarity with Kyiv.

> Armenia abstained from voting against Russia's invasion of Ukraine in the United Nations General Assembly.

In the medium and long-term perspectives, Russia's war against Ukraine will very likely have serious negative security and economic implications for Armenia. The country's over-reliance on Russia's security guarantees makes Yerevan vulnerable to Moscow's demands. Should Russia start pushing Yerevan hard to actively align with its diplomatic position or recognise Ukraine's separatist and annexed territories, it could bring Armenia to the edge of regional and international isolation. On the other hand, angering Russia could result in more instability and a deteriorating security situation both in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh. Moreover, the Armenian economy too will suffer from the war and western sanctions against Russia. For the country, Russia is its main trade partner and main source of remittances and investments. All of these three areas may suffer significantly

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

under western sanctions. At the same time, Armenia has been trying to capitalise on the crisis by inviting Russian firms to relocate to Armenia in order to evade the sanctions. This risky but smart move could really help the Armenian economy.

Azerbaijan: humanitarian aid and deepening relations with Russia

Azerbaijan's reaction to Russia's war in Ukraine is closely connected to Baku's long-term objectives of securing influence over the Nagorno-Karabakh region and its "multi-vector" policy between Russia, Turkey and the West. Since the outbreak of the war, the regime of Ilham Aliyev has applied a tactic of strategic restraint towards Russia. It has also maintained its strong diplomatic ties with Turkey, as well as humanitarian engagement with Ukraine. Much like Ankara, Kyiv remains a key regional partner for Baku.

Shortly before the beginning of the war and after Russia's recognition of the self-proclaimed people's republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev travelled to Moscow. The meeting, which was held to commemorate the 30th anniversary of Azerbaijan's relations with Russia, ended with a declaration of "Allied Interaction". According to Aliyev, this agreement will take co-operation between the two countries to a new level as allies. While the declaration includes clauses about deepening military co-operation, it also underlines the significance of economic ties, stating that the two sides "will refrain from carrying out any economic activity that causes direct or indirect damage to the interests of the other party". This may jeopardise Baku's energy projects and its energy relations with EU states, which are frantically looking for alternative energy supplies to decrease their dependence on Russian gas and oil.

> Baku has been calling for a dialogue between Ukraine and Russia and offered to mediate between the warring parties.

At the diplomatic level, Azerbaijan has been extremely cautious. Similar to its major ally Turkey, Baku has been calling for a dialogue between Ukraine and Russia and offered to mediate between the warring parties. While Baku avoided taking an explicit position on Russia's recognition of the Luhansk and Donetsk republics, it indirectly supported Ukraine's independence by making reference to the "sovereignty and territorial integrity issues of the states" when discussing conflict resolution. Baku also did not attend the United Nations General Assembly vote about the Russian incursion into Ukraine and remained largely silent when the Azerbaijani honorary consulate in Kharkiv was struck by a Russian missile. At the same time, Baku sent medical aid to Ukraine and has provided free

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

gas to Ukrainian hospitals. At the societal level, medium-sized demonstrations took place in the country's capital in support of Ukraine.

Russia's war in Ukraine could have some profound security and economic implications for Azerbaijan. Already before the war the impression was strong in Azerbaijan that western influence in the South Caucasus was declining vis-à-vis an assertive Russia and Baku needed to adjust its standing accordingly. A deepening of its strategic partnerships with Turkey and Russia can be viewed as attempts by Baku to secure more external support for its position on Nagorno-Karabakh. At the same time, the ongoing war could result in Russia further consolidating its influence in the South Caucasus, endangering Azerbaijan's balancing policy and making Baku vulnerable in relation to Russia.

Georgia: gap in government and society response

Of the three South Caucasus countries, the most discrepancy between government and society can be observed in Georgia. Considering the close strategic partnership between Georgia and Ukraine and their co-operation as part of the Associated Trio, Tbilisi's cautious position caused controversy among the Georgian public and frustrated Kyiv.

Earlier in February, before Russia's invasion, the parliament of Georgia issued a resolution supporting Ukraine that failed to mention Russia's involvement in the crisis. In his initial statement on the first day of war, the Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili condemned Russia's "military attack". The Georgian government also allocated financial and humanitarian aid for Ukraine. Later, however, Garibashvili refused to participate in economic sanctions, considering them "ineffective" and harmful to the country's economic and security interests. The Georgian government also denied landing a Ukrainian charter plane intended to take Georgian volunteers to Ukraine. In response to Georgia's stance on sanctions, Ukraine recalled their ambassador from Georgia, describing the country's political position as "immoral". The ruling Georgian Dream party viewed Zelenskyy's decision as an attempt to involve Georgia in the war. It has also accused the opposition United National Movement of doing the same.

Memories of the 2008 war, as well as the government's vague stance, brought hundreds of thousands of Georgians onto the streets to protest in support of Ukraine in Tbilisi and other cities. Whilst they fiercely protested against Russian aggression, they also demanded the resignation of Georgia's prime minister. The public pressure increased as Ukraine applied for EU candidate status, fearing that Georgia would miss the window of opportunity due to the government's reluctance.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

As the Georgian society further challenged the government's official position, the latter later adopted a more supportive tone towards Ukraine and even decided to apply for EU membership. This step was initially planned to take place in 2024. The most recent polls also confirm that the absolute majority of Georgians blame Russia for the war and want their country to show more support for Ukraine with both words and concrete actions.

Interestingly, this discrepancy could be observed not only between the public and the government but also between the country's parliament and president. President Salome Zourabichvili, who has not enjoyed much popularity among Georgians and largely played a ceremonial role in Georgian politics, suddenly emerged as an actor with a voice. She tried to save Tbilisi's reputation by loudly supporting Ukraine during her visits to Paris and Brussels to express solidarity. In terms of security implications, Russia's war against Ukraine uniquely represents an imminent danger to Georgia. For Russia, Ukraine and Georgia are very similar in many regards as the two states stand in the Kremlin's way of reintegrating the former Soviet space. Many in Georgia subsequently fear that their country could be Russia's next target, again. The government's cautious approach towards the Russo-Ukrainian War can be viewed as a part of its non-provocative policy towards Russia stemming from these security-related anxieties. Yet, the way the Georgian government communicated its strategy was diplomatically disastrous and resulted in avoidable damage to Georgia's image, as well as diplomatic tensions between Ukraine and Georgia. Next to security threats, Georgia is also poised to suffer from international sanctions against Russia, as the country is highly dependent on Russian exports, imports, remittances and tourists.

Reactions from the de facto states in the South Caucasus

All three de-facto states in the South Caucasus – Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia– welcomed Russia's decision to recognise Donetsk and Luhansk, referring to the right of self-determination. While South Ossetia already directly recognised the republics in 2014, Abkhazia did so one day after Russia invaded Ukraine. Reportedly, both South Ossetia and Abkhazia have sent soldiers and military equipment to Ukraine to support Russia's military invasion. While it is difficult to identify the full scale of societal reactions in both de facto states, rallies have reportedly been held in both capitals – Sukhumi and Tskhinvali – in support of Russia. Sanctions targeted at Russia are expected to have a negative impact on Abkhazia and South Ossetia's political economies, which are mostly dependent on Russian subsidies and tourists. Moreover, due to the looming crisis inside Russia

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

amid the economic sanctions, Moscow may further reduce its already shrinking subsidies to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This would be a significant blow to the quasi-autarkic economies of the two regions.

Nagorno-Karabakh's Foreign Minister David Babayan called Russia's recognition of Ukraine's eastern regions historic and emphasised that Nagorno-Karabakh should also be acknowledged as independent. Yet still, the so-called people's republics in Donbas have offered no official recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh. This can be explained by the fact that Moscow has not recognised the area as an independent country either. Since the beginning of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the security situation has deteriorated in and around Nagorno-Karabakh. Ceasefire violations have allegedly accelerated, resulting in the death of an Armenian serviceman. Additionally, a critical gas pipeline to Nagorno-Karabakh was damaged, leaving the residents of the region without electricity for over a week. While some Armenian analysts fear that Azerbaijan could use Ukraine as a distraction to continue a "long-term policy of ethnic expulsion in Nagorno-Karabakh", Yerevan officially remains calm and committed to peaceful solutions in both conflicts. Next to security issues, Nagorno-Karabakh could also suffer from negative economic implications. Since the region remains highly dependent on Armenia, economic problems including but not limited to declining remittances, inflation, and declining trade with Russia, will easily spill over into the area.

What is to come

Russia's incursion into Ukraine marked the beginning of a new era in Europe and beyond. The rather peaceful security order established after the end of the Cold War was replaced by a more confrontational and dangerous system that amounts to a new Cold War between Russia and the West. The war in Ukraine also opened long-standing geopolitical wounds in the three states of the South Caucasus, which now find themselves on the frontline of the new Cold War.

> Since the beginning of the war, security has deteriorated in and around Nagorno-Karabakh.

Baku, Tbilisi and Yerevan's modest reactions to Russia's aggression against Ukraine underline the precarious states that the three countries find themselves in. Georgia is the most vulnerable among the three and could be the next victim of Russia's imperial plans. Perceptions regarding this imminent threat largely explain the Georgian government's cautious position that puts it at odds with the public.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Russia has also been effectively instrumentalising the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to increase its influence in both Armenia and Azerbaijan. This explains Baku and Yerevan's self-restrained positions regarding the war in Ukraine. Azerbaijan even decided to boost its security by scaling up its partnership with Russia. Overall, the Russo-Ukrainian War has made the three South Caucasus states geopolitically more fragile and economically more vulnerable regarding the potential spillover of Russia's looming economic decline.

Veronika Pfeilschifter is a doctoral candidate and research associate at the Institute for Caucasus Studies at the Friedrich Schiller University Jena, Germany.

Bidzina Lebanidze is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Institute of Slavic Languages and Caucasus Studies at the Friedrich Schiller University Jena.

Irena Gonashvili is a doctoral candidate and research associate at the Institute for Caucasus Studies at the Friedrich Schiller University Jena.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

More volunteers than refugees

How Romanians mobilised for Ukrainians

MARCEL GASCÓN BARBERÁ

Thousands of Ukrainian refugees enter Romania daily through the border crossings and are met by an army of volunteers. Yet, there is no central command running these humanitarian operations. They are, for the most part, happening spontaneously, with officials, refugees and volunteers finding the best solution for each case through word of mouth or on social media. Not having a plan seems to be the best plan so far.

Since Russian tanks started rolling into Ukraine on February 24th, nearly half a million Ukrainian women, children and elderly people have crossed the border into neighbouring Romania. They have arrived either directly from their country or through Moldova. Although a far cry from the more than two million that already made it from Ukraine to Poland, this influx of refugees poses a great challenge to a country that is not exactly known for its robust social services or the organisational capacity of its administration. But, at least until now, things have gone much smoother than most would have thought.

Part of this success is owed to the fact that an overwhelming majority of those fleeing Russia's onslaught on Ukrainian towns and cities only use Romania as a

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

transit country. After spending a couple of nights near the border or in Bucharest, most continue their journey towards Central and Western European countries such as Germany, the Czech Republic, Italy and Spain. Many have relatives and friends in these countries to stay with until the end of the war. Nonetheless, having to provide help on arrival and to accommodate for a few days such a volume of displaced persons is a formidable task. Romania is undertaking it with admirable spirit and efficiency.

All hands on deck

Thousands of refugees enter the country daily through the border crossing of Siret, which connects the north-eastern Romanian province of Suceava to the Ukrainian oblast of Chernivtsi, in western Ukraine. Dozens of tents and stalls offering toiletries, warm clothes, food and hot beverages are lined up along the first half a kilometre stretch of road in Romanian territory. Some come via cars bearing number plates from nearby Chernivtsi, but also from Kyiv, Vinnytsia and Kharkiv in Ukraine's East. They are immediately approached by dozens of volunteers, who often overwhelm them with unwanted items that they politely decline before continuing their journey.

Thousands of Ukrainian refugees enter Romania daily through the border crossing of Siret.

Most, however, get into Romania on foot, after having walked several kilometres carrying their heavy luggage in the cold. They trickle in irregularly as the Ukrainian border police open the gates and let small groups in after hours of queuing. Once in Romania, a loose army of firefighters, priests, social workers, gendarmes, NGO volunteers and citizens who have made it to the border help carry the women's bags to one of the stalls. With the assistance of interpreters from the Ukrainian minority in Romania, they make their plans known to the volunteers, who quickly arrange transportation to temporary lodging facilities provided by the government, churches, businesses or the thousands of individuals who have made themselves available to take in Ukrainians.

"The response of the Romanian people has been absolutely amazing," professional rescuer Moti Kahana tells *New Eastern Europe* while working by the Siret crossing. A dual citizen of Israel and the US, Kahana has led audacious rescue missions in war-torn countries like Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. Through his company GDC, which offers logistical services to NGOs and governments around the globe, he is now partnering with Jewish groups and the Israeli embassy to bring Ukrainians and Israelis to safety.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Photo: Marcel Gascón Barberá

A sign offering free transport at the border with Romania.

"Look at this, there's more people coming to help than actual refugees," says Kahana, pointing at the swarm of officials and volunteers ready to offer transportation to those arriving or to host them at their own homes. One of his tasks in this crisis is procuring food supplies for the NGOs to hand out at the border. Unlike in some countries, where local companies tried to make money out of the crisis and inflated the prices, Romanian distributors insist on offering discounts. "Many people are refusing to take money for their work," recounts Kahana. Like virtually everyone else working these days at and near the border, he is full of praise for Romania's border police. Besides working extra hours, they are doubling up as porters and social workers. In his career, Kahana has often come across corrupt officials and opportunistic politicians looking at humanitarian emergencies as propitious occasions to fill their pockets.

"Politicians, including small-town mayors, come to ask how they can help and offer themselves to take refugees; unlike in countries like Turkey and Jordan, where I have also worked, I have not seen anyone in Romania making money off of the refugees."

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Spontaneous organisation

Not far from where Kahana is working stands Bogdan Nicolae, holding a cardboard sign. The makeshift, handwritten placard reads *București*. Nicolae works as a soldier with the Romanian army. He has driven more than 400 kilometres from the city of Ploiesti and is offering a ride to the capital to any refugee who needs it. "I came by myself so I have space for more people," he told *New Eastern Europe* while walking to his car with a Ghanaian student and a young Ukrainian mother with her child who needed a ride to nearby Suceava. Other Romanians have come to help – by handing out basic items and serving hot tea – from far away towns such as Bucharest and Craiova, in the south of the country.

There is no central command running, or even coordinating, these humanitarian operations in Romania. They are, for the most part, happening spontaneously, with officials, refugees and volunteers finding the best solution for each case through word of mouth or on the Facebook groups linking up service providers with those who need them. Not having a plan seems to be the best plan so far. I have not heard of anyone sleeping in the open, or unable to find free transportation to their final destination.

One of the largest temporary shelters for refugees has been set up at the Magnificus ballroom in the city of Suceava, some 40 kilometres south from the Siret border crossing. Hundreds of Ukrainians, many of them with their pets, sleep every day under the mirror disco ball that, just a few days ago, spun at weddings taking place at the venue. Besides a roof to sleep under and a mattress, the owner of the venue, Stefan Mandachi, is offering the refugees food, drinks, hygiene products and even free transportation.

"Romanian drivers and transport companies are offering to take refugees to their destinations free of charge," says Ioana Samoilescu, a marketing specialist at Stefan Mandachi's company. "Drivers from Western Europe have also started to arrive, they are crossing the continent twice to bring Ukrainian refugees to their countries," she added, before asking me to drive to another hotel in central Suceava to pick up a Ukrainian mother with her son. According to a post published on Facebook by Stefan Mandachi, 13,000 refugees had already embarked on free journeys westwards from the parking lot of the Magnificus ballroom in Suceava.

Other refugees have found shelter at Orthodox monasteries near the Romanian border with Ukraine. The mobilisation is also happening online. Apart from international online platforms such as Shelter for Ukraine, refugees in Romania are finding free accommodation on the Facebook group *Uniți pentru Ucraina*, United for Ukraine in Romanian. Day after day, several Ukrainian women post their requests for an affordable apartment to rent or a place to sleep for the night in cit-

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

ies across Romania. Typically, within a few minutes, locals start posting offers for free accommodation. Some refugees are also looking for jobs to sustain themselves until they can return home, and they are referred to companies that have shown interest in hiring Ukrainians.

One of the group's most popular posts so far was written on March 19th by Ksenia Tsiganenko, who had arrived in Romania with four other adults and 19 children and had asked on March 7th for a place to stay one night before continuing their trip to Hungary: "I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the Romanian people for your generous big heart. Being in your country with children, we were surrounded by love, care and attention. We were provided with an overnight stay, food and everything we needed. We were touched to tears. May God bless you. You are an example to us."

Right wing response

The only public expressions of hostility towards Ukrainian refugees fleeing the war have come from right wing chauvinistic circles. Nationalist activist and folk musician Nicolae Voiculet posted on Facebook a sketch by comedian-turned-president Volodymyr Zelenskyy mentioning Romania's aspirations regarding the former Romanian region of Chernivtsi, which is now part of Ukraine. Voiculet wrote, "Zelenskyy makes fun of Romania!" He has also criticised Romanians donating money to Ukraine. Zelenskyy's video has been seen more than 278,000 times on Voiculet's page. In other posts, the musician falsely claims that the Romanian minority in Ukraine is being subjected to a genocide, and accuses Romanians helping Ukrainians of indifference towards their fellow citizens in need.

Voiculet interprets Romania's national anthem at virtually every event organised by the right wing populist party AUR, the fourth largest in the Romanian parliament. AUR's leaders are being uncharacteristically circumspect in condemning Russia's invasion of Ukraine and have centred their messages of solidarity on the Romanian minority of Ukraine. They have accused Kyiv of trampling on their national rights. AUR's ambiguous position seems to be taking its toll on the party's support base. After months of unabated growth in the opinion polls, a survey conducted by the research firm INSCOP now shows that the party would receive 18.9 per cent of the national vote, down 3.5 points from the support it enjoyed in February. NEE

Marcel Gascón Barberá is a Spanish freelance journalist based in Bucharest.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Why Russians still regret the Soviet collapse

JAMES C. PEARCE

In 2019, a Levada Centre poll revealed that 66 per cent of Russians regretted the collapse of the Soviet Union while just a quarter did not. This represented an increase of 11 per cent in ten years. In the same time, Russia's economy shrank by 23.2 per cent. The most stated, and consistent, reason for regret was the "destruction of a unified economic system".

On December 25th 1991, Mikhail Gorbachev admitted defeat live on Russian television. The red flag came down from the Kremlin after more than 70 years. Thirty years later, Muscovites found themselves voting in a referendum on whether to restore Felix Dzerzhinsky's statue to Lubyanka Square (headquarters of the FSB, formerly the KGB). Its toppling symbolised the rejection of Soviet socialism and a repudiation of the October 1917 revolution, which few initially believed in. Yet since 1991, a clear majority of Russians have consistently regretted the USSR's collapse.

Available polling data across several organisations shows regret for the Soviet collapse to be one area of consensus among Russia's polarised population since 1991. However, few want its return beyond a relatively small but active group of hardcore supporters. This group consisted of 28 per cent of respondents in a 2019 poll, compared to 11 per cent in 2011. Only twice has a feeling of "regret" for the Soviet collapse dipped below 50 per cent. This occurred during years of solid economic growth and prosperity (2006–07).

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Paradoxical realities

In one sense, the referendum was no surprise. Stalin's popularity reached its highest ever in a 2019 Levada poll (70 per cent). At the same time, nostalgia for the USSR has also increased. In 2020, 75 per cent of respondents believed that the Soviet Union was the best time in their country's history. It should be stressed that this is not out of support for the Red Terror or Stalin's purges – let alone socialism. Rather, it reflects contemporary Russia's paradoxical realities. The left-over nostalgia for a period of stability and certainty coinciding with one's youth co-exists with disappointment in the unpredictable present.

Liberalism's weakness and negative perception in contemporary Russia is directly linked to the Soviet collapse.

Russians live longer and healthier lives than ever before. Russia in 2022 compared to 1991 is a much richer, safer and in more respects than often acknowledged, freer country. Prior to the invasion of Ukraine, at least, the country was a far cry from the hardships of 1998, 1993, *perestroika* and even the 1950s, which are largely within living memory. Things can be – and were – much worse, though a worrying socio-economic picture is increasingly squeezing the population. Reflecting on the more positive aspects of the Soviet past provides many refuge from the paradoxes and problems of the present.

Russia in 1991 was enthusiastic about a democracy that has since degraded. Yet this enthusiasm was equally quick to dissipate. Liberalism was a vehicle for modernisation that, arguably, ignored the Russian reality at the time. As Yabloko's party leader Grigory Yavlinsky remarked, "we messed up the reforms and didn't come to terms with Stalinism, [and so] we ended up giving away our victory."

Liberalism's weakness and negative perception in contemporary Russia is directly linked to the Soviet collapse. Westernism, free markets and a paternalistic approach to the illiberal majority are also often viewed as part of this ideology in Russia. Many prominent liberals held high-ranking government positions at the end of the USSR, and even later, as Yegor Gaidar launched the market reforms. Though a good time for an imperfect democracy, this period saw ordinary people increasingly associate liberalism with the worst economic woes not seen again until 2022.

Another referendum needs urgent mention. Russian and Soviet citizens overwhelmingly voted to preserve the Soviet Union and the available public data shows a majority believe its end was not inevitable. This feeling has increased and is coupled with consensus among leading historians. The Soviet economy was alarmingly sluggish but not threatening to the USSR's existence. The economy was just about growing, with relative full employment. However, the professional classes

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

were becoming open to new ideas. Graduates were fed up with entering the workforce well below their pay grade and nationalism was growing in the republics. For all its faults, *perestroika* was something that most Soviet citizens were ready for as the economy was creaking under the weight of its domestic problems. At the same time, the Red Army that had defeated Hitler went into decline and long queues for empty shops appeared across the country. Such scenes were naturally incomprehensible to many. At the time of the August coup, the results of communism were obvious. Few in the Communist Party leadership believed in communism anymore.

Boris Yeltsin was indeed the democratically elected president of the Russian Federation but it was still a part of the USSR. Did Yeltsin really have a right to dismantle a state he did not head? By the end of the 1990s, Russia was a democracy in the sense that elections had uncertain outcomes, but more importantly in the sense that it was no longer communist. The ruling political class were mostly trying to embrace liberal democracy. Contrary to that liberal minority and initial enthusiasm for democracy, however, the majority of the Russian people did not approve of the destruction of the grand socialist project. Though they welcomed an end to its worst excesses, the Russian people equally did not want to accept blame or guilt for the crimes committed by the regime.

Russia's "mixed" economy in 2021

According to the Levada Centre, in 2019 66 per cent of Russians regretted the Soviet collapse while only 25 per cent did not. This represented an increase of 11 points in ten years. In much the same time, Russia's economy shrank by 23.2 per cent (2011–18). The most stated, and consistent, reason for regret was the "destruction of a unified economic system". The country's regional economies were growing rather stagnantly following the Crimean annexation, western sanctions, the rouble's devaluation and war in Donbas and Syria. Incomes started to shrink – 11 per cent since 2013 – and food prices also rose. Regional deficits grew (most regions were already running fiscal deficits) and all suffered budget cuts, especially to social subsidies and investment. The Russian research group *Romir* estimated that 46 per cent of the average family income was spent on food in 2019, up from 30 per cent in 2018.

Economic predictions during the COVID-19 pandemic were also bleak. Regional budgets were hit with a further drop of 30 per cent and tax revenue was set to fall by ten per cent. A handful of regions, like Mordovia, were facing bankruptcy and taken under the direct control of the federal government. Real incomes are since down 3.5 per cent and prices up eight per cent. Overall reliance on the state

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

has clearly increased. This points to serious longer-term problems not unlike the late Soviet period leading up to *perestroika*. By the summer, two in five Russians told Levada that they could not afford the necessities.

But herein lies another paradox: the economic picture was better than expected in 2021. Russia's economy had avoided the worst-case scenario, outperforming much of the G7 and G20. Its economy shrank less (3.1 per cent) than the global average (3.5 per cent) in 2020. Its projected GDP change was 3.8 per cent and banks were making record profits in August at around 19 billion US dollars (CBR, 2021). However, it should be noted that banks achieved this by selling off and restructuring debts. Unemployment was predicted to reach 15 per cent but it peaked, officially, at 6.4 per cent and shrunk to 5.8 per cent by April 2021. Production had also increased in general. For example, Siberian oil increased by 3.2 per cent and total production in Moscow and its surrounding regions by 15.5 per cent. The natural consequence was a lower global oil price. Despite this, Russia's Central Bank stated that the pace of economic recovery was higher than expected and that increasingly more businesses reported production rates that had returned to pre-pandemic levels. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a high number of deaths and pushed a badly underfunded healthcare system to its limits, but it did not implode. It took the invasion of Ukraine to wreck the economic progress of the last 20 years.

Generational shifts and the political landscape

The political mood and economic disillusionment are increasingly felt by Russia's youth and this fuels regret for the Soviet collapse. One survey of young people's political views revealed that social democracy was the group's favoured political ideology (28 per cent). Those identifying as "Russian nationalists" came in second (19 per cent), followed by communists (11 per cent) and liberals (12 per cent). Pre-invasion, the evidence pointed to the young not being more liberal than older generations. Young Russians, by and large, harbour the same diversity of political and cultural views as other age groups. Yet, the young are much less paternalistic, active in civic engagement and have lower expectations of support from the state. Only 27 per cent of the young say that they could not live without state support, as opposed to 70 per cent among older age groups. Support for Putin is also dropping, as the Kremlin cracked down on the opposition during the Duma elections in 2021.

The lives of the youth are increasingly less settled than older generations, many of whom inherited flats and property from the Soviet collapse. Many Muscovites became millionaires in the 1990s simply due to their address. Despite this, pen-

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

sions remain low at around 164 dollars per month in 2021. Whilst educational attainment levels in Russia are the fourth highest worldwide, average salaries are also lower than most of Europe. Career mobility often depends on one's political and social connections. The young's desire for a more settled life, like their parents and grandparents perhaps had, makes their regret for the USSR's collapse resemble a "fear of missing out".

Another great paradox was the revival of the Communist Party (KPRF) as the only legitimate opposition to the Kremlin. This party presents itself as the heir to the victory in the Great Patriotic War and other achievements of the Soviet state. Unlike most communist parties in Central and Eastern Europe, the KPRF never rebranded as social democrats. Instead, it held onto the Soviet legacy and Stalinism. Yet the young communist party members are typically more concerned with social justice than Soviet nostalgia, and its grassroots activists more radical than the pro-Kremlin Duma members. Members of this group are not, generally speaking, die-hard Marxist-Leninists, and have no memory of the USSR. Overall, much of the nostalgic commemorations are lost to them. But the political reality presents the KPRF with a new opportunity to challenge the Kremlin.

Communist lawmakers were among those arrested at protests in Moscow and Kazan following Navalny's arrest.

Communist lawmakers were among those arrested at protests in Moscow and Kazan following the arrest of Alexei Navalny. This was also true earlier in Khabarovsk in 2020. Many of those arrested have links to Navalny's organisation, whereas the KPRF's long-time leader, Gennady Zyuganov, and the party's leadership repeated the line that Navalny was a "foreign agent". The pro-Kremlin figures who campaigned for Dzerzhinsky's return also alluded to Navalny, arguing that the historical figure should be celebrated for his ability to uncover plots against Russia cooked up in the West. The KPRF has signs of life but its leaders have thus far been unwilling to rock the boat, accustomed to the privileges of the systematic opposition. They also demonstrated unwavering support for the invasion of Ukraine. Rather than take advantage of the new members' aspirations for social and economic justice, they cling to old Soviet slogans.

An uncertain future

For so many in Russia it is difficult to grasp that despite very real progress since the Soviet collapse, life is much harder in new and different ways as the years of stagnation seem relevant again. Whilst a majority do not want the USSR back, their

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

regret for its collapse manifests in their disappointment with the current political and economic status quo. It is significant that the 30-year anniversary of the collapse coincided with the appearance of a younger generation who are increasingly viewing their political, legal and economic system as unfair, unjust and insecure. Ignoring and disregarding this reality is not sustainable in the medium or long term. The economic changes of *perestroika* and the 1990s did not deliver, in part, because its leaders denied the severity of the economic situation. Many ordinary Russians fear these lessons have not been learnt. NEE

James C. Pearce is a historian at the College of the Marshall Islands and author of *The Use of History in Putin's Russia* (Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press, 2020).

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Raphael Lemkin

The ambassador of our conscience

GRZEGORZ SZYMBORSKI

The ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine has led to massive killings and casualties among civilian population. War crimes committed during the conflict remind us of the menace of genocide, especially while the invaders put the "denazification" motto on their banners. When dealing with such a divisive topic, it is important to remember the legacy left by the man who first coined the term "genocide".

He was the first to call genocide by its proper name. He was the one who dedicated his life to one mission and enhanced international law via his "own" convention. Like many selfless humanists, this man accomplished his goal at the expense of his private life, welfare and premature death. He was unsuccessfully nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize ten times. He was not heard, when needed. He was accepted, only when the world had no choice. He was forgotten, once the world had no more use of him. That was the fate of Raphael Lemkin.

It is characteristic that the man who initiated and successfully conveyed the message about genocide was an Eastern European. Lemkin was born probably on June 24th 1900 in present-day Belarus, in his family homestead near Grodno. He was Jewish and I believe it was his origin that brought him that much further in his international attempts to criminalise genocide. Despite his roots, there should be no surprise that a person with a "background" in Eastern Europe, someone aware of the tensions between peoples and flexible state boundaries, could add a miss-

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

ing piece to international law regarding the worst possible outcomes of hatred. In the very first page of his autobiography, Lemkin stated in regard to his homeland that "Poles, Russians (or rather Belarusians) and Jews have been living there for centuries. They did not like each other and even fought against themselves, but in spite of these arguments they were bound by the love for the cities, hills and rivers of their homeland. The feeling of the common fate stopped them from mutual destruction."

Shaping future views

Lemkin described himself as a caring person who cared for the rights of both humans and animals. As a seven-year-old boy, he attempted to become a vegetarian. Once he found an injured owl, he built a nest for it, fed it and cared for it for almost one year. "I was happy that I can save someone's life. I did not think that my care for the owl was an act inspired from the outside, this decision belonged to my inner self," he wrote. This need of righteousness became his creed.

Lemkin's road to his legal work on genocide began a long time before the tragedy of the Holocaust. Since his childhood he had been encountering examples of local hostility against national and religious groups. He heard of pogroms against Jews in Białystok (1906) and the case of Menahem Mendel Beilis, who was accused of ritual murders (1911). With the German army entering his neighbourhood in 1915, he became more interested in historical studies dedicated to examples of the planned destruction of national, racial and religious groups. He was moved by the image of Christians murdered by Nero, as depicted poetically by Henryk Sienkiewicz in *Quo Vadis*.

Since his childhood Lemkin had been encountering local hostility against national and religious groups.

Several years later, Lemkin learnt about the latest mass killings and persecution of Armenians at the hands of the Ottomans. The Turkish crimes of 1915 were the a main trigger for Lemkin's future views. He was shocked by the news that the British released 150 Turkish war criminals from their captivity in Malta, who then disappeared throughout the world. Lemkin asked, "Why do we sentence a man, who killed someone, but the destruction of millions is a lighter crime, than the single murder?"

He was deeply touched by the trial of Soghomon Tehlirian – an Armenian survivor of the massacres in the Ottoman Empire, who shot to death the former Turkish minister of interior, Talaat Pasha, in Berlin. He wrote that "Thanks to this trial the world finally noticed the true image of tragic events in Turkey. The same

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

world that kept comfortably silent when Armenians were murdered and intended to hide this via releasing Turkish war criminals, had to listen to the terrible truth." After the trial, which lasted just two days, a Berlin court did not sentence Tehlirian, claiming that he acted under "psychologic pressure".

Another similar case that affected Lemkin's perception of liability for genocide related to the assassination of Symon Petliura, the leader in exile of the Ukrainian People's Republic. He was killed in Paris by Sholem Schwarzbard – a Jewish survivor from the Ukrainian pogroms of 1918 who claimed that he took his revenge for his family's death. The man was not sentenced as well. Although the assassination could have been inspired by Soviet agents, Lemkin nevertheless referred to this case as another example of a lack of any legal instruments in the civilised world that could have prevented governments and individuals from annihilating nations, races and religious groups due to their characteristics.

Missed opportunity?

The most notable international event that influenced Lemkin took place before the Second World War in 1933. The Fifth International Conference for the Unification of Criminal Law was about to take place in Madrid within the framework of the League of Nations. "It was high time to establish a system of common security securing the lives of nations," he stated in his autobiography, claiming he initiated it shortly after Hitler's rise to power. Lemkin named two crimes – barbarism and vandalism – that he wished to discuss in the international environment. The first one referred to the annihilation of national or religious groups. The second also referred to the destruction of the cultural heritage of these groups, representing their spiritual values. Shortly before the conference, Lemkin spread the word about his plans, cultivating fertile ground for the discussions.

According to Lemkin, it was the justice minister of Poland, Czesław Michałowski, who cancelled Lemkin's trip to Madrid for the conference. At that time, the right-wing press in Warsaw published articles opposing the lawyer's ideas, which were supposedly "motivated by a need to protect Jews and Jews only". It might be questionable the degree to which Lemkin's ideas were opposed by the Polish government and what his absence at the conference meant. Yet, whatever the Polish government's take, Lemkin was still appointed by Poland as a delegate to other international conferences. Despite his absence at the Madrid conference, the idea of genocide was put on the table for the first time thanks in large part to his earlier work. While the participants in Madrid did not vote against the idea of genocide, it was not seriously discussed either. In his paper titled "Genocide", which was published in 1946

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

in *American Scholar*, Lemkin expressed concern that with the potential adoption of the law in 1933, "we would not now have had all the discussions about ex post facto law, in relation to crimes committed by the German government against its own citizens prior to this war".

After the outbreak of the war, Lemkin managed to escape Poland. Thanks to Karl Schlyter, the Swedish minister of justice, he found shelter in Stockholm. "In the peaceful Stockholm library I was observing how an entire race is put in captivity and sentenced to death. The de-humanisation and disintegration has begun. When does the hour of execution come? Will the world notice what is going on only when it is already too late? The aid can come only from America, which was born due to moral outrage against oppression and many times acted in line with that feeling."

During his stay in the north, Lemkin was studying historical similarities for the purpose of comparative genocide. Lemkin compared Nazi crimes with the Mongol invasion of 1241 that resulted in numerous crimes against Poles, Hungarians and Silesians. He argued that the "decimation of peoples of Poland, Hungary, Silesia and Russia was probably one of the most drastic examples of genocide". At that time, he was worried about the West's ability to unite against barbarity, just like in the 13th century when the Mongols were not stopped by Christendom. "I was wondering if the tragic division and lack of unity of the West can again occur facing this new barbarity," Lemkin wrote in his autobiography.

Frustration and setbacks

In the spring of 1941 as an émigré from Poland, Lemkin managed to reach the United States, where he dedicated his life to the struggle for the adoption of the international convention on genocide. After being welcomed at Duke University in North Carolina in 1942, he was offered a job as chief consultant to the Board of Economic Warfare. While working in Washington DC, he was allowed to deliver to President Franklin D. Roosevelt a one-page note on the genocidal tendencies of the Axis powers.

"How could I sum up the pain of millions, the fear of nations, hope for salvation from death on just one page? I suggested the adoption of the treaty, that would acknowledge genocide as a crime, crime of crimes, and adopted by the states all over the world. Such a treaty could have taken the lives of nations out of the hands of politicians and secured them in hands of objective legal basis. A declaration, questioned later on as limited to the expression of hope only, seemed to me inadequate."

In return, Lemkin received Roosevelt's answer in which he asked for patience, claiming that the time is not right for adopting such a convention. The lawyer had

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

become more and more desperate and frustrated, especially since the first reports on German crimes reached the Allies, writing that "Silence around the annihilation began, when in late 1942 the first reports on mass executions were delivered from Warsaw to London [by Jan Karski]. It lasted almost two years, until December 1944. No one admitted that the nation who granted to the world the faith in God, with His Bible read every Sunday in the churches of allied states, is being killed. It was a murder committed on truth: hiding the information of murder. In a way, it meant lack of respect for death, with its dignity in a natural life cycle."

Lemkin published his magnum opus, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, in the autumn of 1944.

Lemkin could have fought only with his sharp pen. He focused on retrieving and translating official German acts of law: "as a lawyer I knew how important the official documents are for understanding the politics. I knew that only thanks to acts of law like decrees or regulations I can decode the intentions of the Nazi authorities. A decree was an objective and indisputable proof."

He eventually published his magnum opus, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*, in autumn 1944. The book had become his business card that he eventually handed out whenever he tried to attract the attention of the mightiest of the civilised world. The overview of the genocide issue and possible legal remedies introduced by Lemkin were not welcomed by such notable reviewers as Hersch Lauterpacht and Hans Kelsen. The ambitious author was given credit for his selection of sources, but not for his intellectual input.

One step closer

Lemkin achieved some results only in 1945 with the upcoming Nuremberg Trials. His first successful attempt to lobby for his idea was connected with the appointment of US Supreme Court Judge Robert Jackson as the American prosecutor before the International Military Tribunal. Lemkin got a job in the war crimes office of the US Department of War and this led to the inclusion of genocide within the indictment formulated on October 6th 1945. During the trial, Lemkin's volume was quoted, but in the end genocide was not mentioned in the sentence. Under the impression of this failure, the Jewish lawyer focused on lobbying in the framework of the newly established United Nations.

In 1946, Lemkin battled for a UN General Assembly resolution that could lead to the adoption of a binding convention banning genocide. While opening the first session of the United Nations General Committee, he expected unanimity on the

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

inclusion of the genocide issue on the agenda. Interestingly enough, the Soviet representative opposed this idea.

"I tried to understand why the Russian delegate on the session of the committee was repeating: *eto ne nuzhno* – it is unnecessary. There was no further explanation. They had to have something in mind. I tried to form a logical whole from my conversations with Russians – the judge and the prosecutor in Nuremberg. They listened to me then with interest, even with sympathy, but in regard to the genocide question no common ground was achieved. Yet in Nuremberg I heard rumours that after recapturing Crimea and Northern Caucasus the Russians found out that some of the locals collaborated with Germans, therefore executions and deportations to Siberia occurred. Was that the reason for the protest of the Russian delegation?"

Running among the delegations, persuading them alone without backup, Lemkin managed to reach a consensus, even achieving Soviet acceptance through contacts with Czechoslovak representatives. With Paul-Henri Spaak, the future father of European integration, chairing the session, the UN General Assembly accepted the inclusion of the genocide issue on its agenda. Shortly afterwards, the body adopted "Resolution 96", which called for the adoption of the convention. It marked the beginning of two years of long struggle for the final embodiment of Lemkin's dreams.

The persistent lawyer held many lectures in the framework of the United Nations. He provided examples of genocide from the ancient times till today. "In this way I let them realise that the genocide is not the outcome of the mood of one or another culprit, but the pattern repeated throughout the ages." Asked about examples of genocide in the Far East, he explained the tragic story of 50,000 Roman Catholics killed in Japan in the 17th century.

But what actually did Lemkin try to include in the piece of legislation? He provided the answer in the paper "Genocide" from *American Scholar*. From the recent perspective, it is striking that while describing the essence of the term, he mentioned that so far any attempt to destroy a nation was called "de-nationalisation". For the lawyer, this sinister term was nonetheless inadequate as it excluded biological destruction. Indeed, imposing culture was a step behind the genocide itself, something different as "Germanisation, Magyarisation or Italianisation did not lead to the annihilation of suppressed and subjected people". Lemkin even referred to Hitler, who argued that Germanisation can in fact be related only to land, and not to the people.

Throughout his volumes, papers and addresses, the lawyer called for the supervision of the treatment of civilians during the war by international bodies like the International Red Cross. In this regard, Lemkin expected the amendment of the Hague Conventions. This idea was approved by Swedish Red Cross and Count

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

Folke Bernadotte himself. Moreover, Lemkin insisted on providing preventive and punitive measures in times of both war and peace. He argued to broaden the scope of genocide to include not just death. He wished to penalise attacks against life, liberty or property of members of a particular group. Lemkin expected every country to modify its penal code in regard to the letter of the international convention. He wanted to make sure persons accused of genocide could not abuse the regime of extradition. As for him, both commanders and executioners should be responsible, along with members of governments and political bodies tolerating genocide. He also insisted on the inclusion of anti-genocide clauses in treaties that were to be signed with Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania.

Personal victory

Lemkin believed that genocide must be penalised both by domestic and international legislation, to make criminals also responsible before the International Court of Justice in The Hague or the Security Council of the United Nations. For him, the UN played a significant role, as the Charter provided the international protection of human rights, "indicating that the denial of such rights by any state is a matter of concern to all mankind". He cared about the equal protection of all, writing that "Most of all we have to let other nations realise that minorities and weaker states are not chickens belonging to a farmer who can kill them whenever he wishes, but they are groups of people valuable for themselves and for the world's civilisation."

While discussing the scope of the genocide in the UN General Assembly, Lemkin recalled the Soviet delegate who wished to connect it with fascism and Nazism only. The majority of delegates disapproved of this view, as it could mean the term would refer only to the past. Political tensions led to the exclusion of political and social groups from the scope of the victims of genocide.

Nevertheless, Lemkin's mission was fulfilled on December 9th 1948 in Paris, with the unanimous adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The famous Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted the next day. While comparing both documents, Lemkin stated that the difference between them is like between a date and marriage. His personal victory is unquestionable. But the text itself free of the background behind the convention turned out to be a bitter victory for the civilised world. Polish historian Piotr Madajczyk has claimed that the definition of genocide adopted by the UN was useless and vague as it relies on a compromise accomplished in the reality of the Cold War. The United Kingdom, the Soviet Union and the US were reluctant to accept the text. Ambiguities in definitions were recalled by genocide

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

researcher Kelly Maddox at Lancaster University, while proving the convention's ineffectiveness in cases of massacres in Rwanda, Bosnia and Sudan.

Whatever the quality of this piece of the convention, it by no means could not prevent further massacres. In this regard, the accomplishment of Lemkin should be perceived more like the story of the persistent idealistic humanist who achieved a lot relying on his own work and skills. The lawyer from Eastern Europe strongly connected the biological destruction of peoples with the destruction of mankind's heritage. He insisted on the connection of endangered peoples and their contribution to global legacy, writing that "Cultural considerations speak for international protection of national, religious and cultural groups. Our whole heritage is a product of the contributions of all nations. We can best understand this when we realise how impoverished our culture would be if the people doomed by Germany, such as the Jews, had not been permitted to create the Bible, or give birth to an Einstein, a Spinoza; if the Poles had not had the opportunity to give to the world a Copernicus, a Chopin, a Curie; the Czechs, a Huss, a Dvorak; the Greeks, a Plato and a Socrates; the Russians, a Tolstoy and a Shostakovich." Beyond a shadow of the doubt these days Lemkin would have exceeded the hereinabove list by the names of gifted and influential Ukrainians.

Maybe this is the true greatness and legacy of Lemkin that should be praised over the letter or even the spirit of the law he inspired. The realisation that each group of people on earth enriches human civilisation in its own peculiar way and that every single man and woman should stand for everyone else with no exception, whatever the personal cost. NEE

Grzegorz Szymborski is a 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 such as *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).

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

ADVERTISEMENT

Prestigious Postrgatuade programme in European Interdisciplinary Studies. Full scholarships available for students from Eastern Partnership Countries.

The College of Europe in Natolin is offering additional full scholarships for the postgraduate European Interdisciplinary Studies program in 2023/24 to students coming from the Eastern Partnership countries

The scholarships cover tuition fee, full board and lodging on campus. They are funded under the **"EU4Youth phase III Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship"** programme, which receives funding from the EU and is co-financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania. Online applications will open in October 2022 and last till mid-January 2023.

Do not miss out! Pre-register now at coleuropenatolin.eu

College of Europe
Collège d'Europe

VIEŠOJI ĮSTAIGA
CENTRINĖ PROJEKTŲ VALDYMO AGENTŪRA

MINISTRY
OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA

Co-funded by
the European Union

eprasa.pl 866920cb83

ADVERTISEMENT

Make a donation

in solidarity with Ukraine by supporting free press in Central and Eastern Europe!

Please donate to New Eastern Europe's crowdfunding campaign to assist our contributors, writers, translators and editors to bring to you and the rest of the world comprehensive and reliable reporting, stories, analysis and commentary about the situation in our region.

eprasa.pl 866920cb83