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THE KREMLIN'S HYBRID WAR

The case of Georgia

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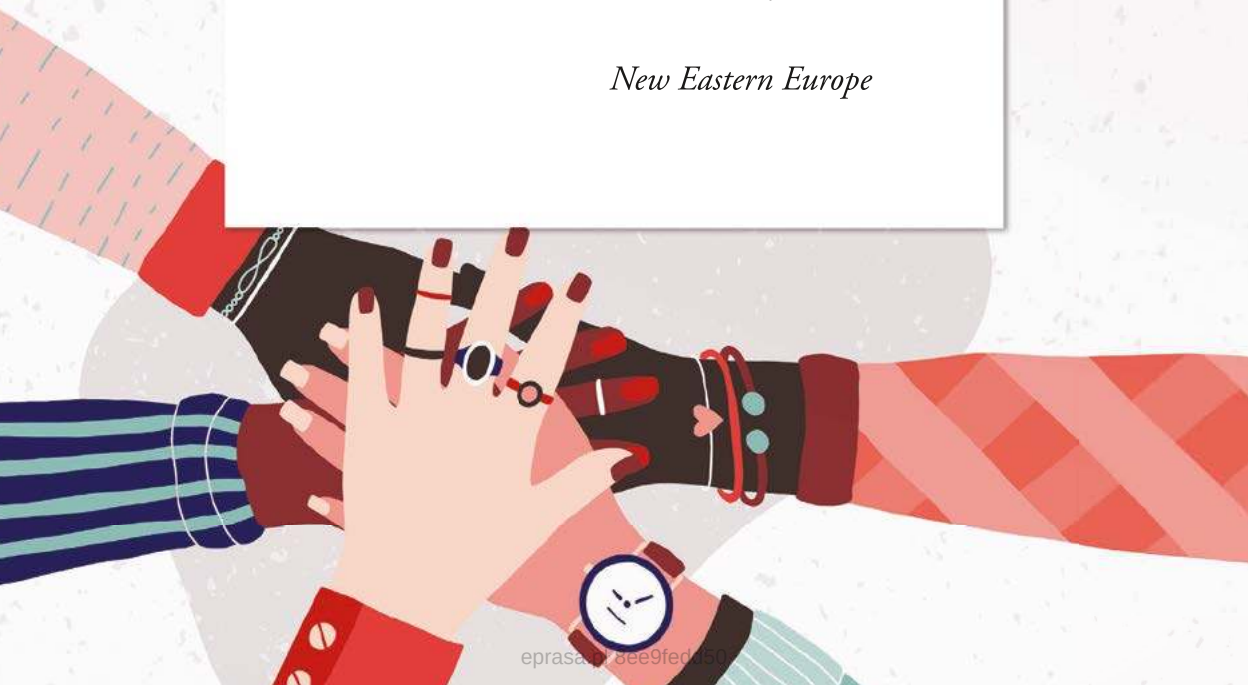

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Letter from a reader

DEAR EDITORS,

Let me at first mention that I support Joanna Hosa's position criticising Peter Handke's attitude towards Serbia and his receiving the Nobel prize ("The Swedish Academy and Peter Handke. Justice for whom?" by Joanna Hosa, published in Issue 1–2/2020).

Regarding the chapter "Alone against the world", I however regret Hosa's false translation of the German *words wohl wirklich leidend*, leading to her unfortunate conclusion that Handke "suggests that there was no real suffering at all" by other nations.

The words *wohl wirklich leidend* do describe other nations "really suffering" and not "supposedly really suffering". Hosa misinterprets the German expression *wohl* in this context. If Handke had wanted to write "supposedly really suffering", he would have chosen the words "*angeblich wirklich leidend*".

And finally: The editor says in a footnote: "The quotes in English were translated by the author of this essay from their German originals and may differ from other published translations." This shows that the editor was aware of the translation problem and could have reacted – not only in a footnote!

Very truly yours,
Sepp Reidlinger, Vienna, Austria

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DEAR READER,

We are delivering this issue to you with a huge sigh of relief. We are happy to inform that despite the spread of COVID-19 and closed borders, which automatically meant a temporary freeze of our international distribution, *New Eastern Europe* has survived and plans to continue, pandemic or not. The experience of the last three months during which against all odds we put this issue together as well as distributed the previous one, has taught us valuable lessons of solidarity, compassion as well as an even greater appreciation to our authors and readers. Hereby, we commit to cherish and implement these values in the months and years to come.

With these emotions we also share with you the latest issue of *New Eastern Europe* which is dedicated to examining the inner workings of the Kremlin's hybrid war against its neighbours in the post-Soviet space. The case of Georgia offers not only insight into how hybrid war can be waged, but also valuable lessons on how to mount a stronger defence. As societies and democracies around the world are faced with greater threats from home and abroad, there is a need for building a stronger social resilience. Our authors, who have first-hand experience and an every day encounter with hybrid tactics, highlight the many dimensions, which have only been amplified by the pandemic.

On that note, this issue also brings together expert voices to give some analysis and insight on how COVID-19 might shift geopolitics in our region. We are particularly interested in understanding the impact on relations with the Eastern Partnership and Russia – countries which have been hit hard not only by the virus but the economic consequences as well.

Such circumstances often reveal the role of other, non-political and non-economic factors, in the shaping of our collective behaviours and values. Among them is culture, which is discussed in the context of COVID-19 by a Polish poet and literary critic, Jakub Kornhauser, who in a conversation with Grzegorz Nurek states "Looking at the history of art and its development, we see that all large moments of turmoil became a driving force for new artistic movements, trends and ideas." Sharing this belief, we remain alert to all cultural and intellectual ferments that are taking place in the region today with an aim to share these stories with you in our next issues this year and beyond.

The Editors

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The many dimensions of hybrid warfare

EMIL AVDALIANI

Georgia is in the midst of a hybrid war with Russia. Among the various tools used by the Kremlin, economic pressure has been arguably the most effective strategy that has been directed at Georgia since the 1990s.

Georgia-Russia relations give great insight into the currently fashionable subject of hybrid warfare. Similar to the idea of "fourth generation warfare", which focuses on blurring the fronts between opposing sides and waging war by means other than head-on military confrontation, hybrid warfare is a more sophisticated way of using all of a country's available resources to achieve a specific set of geopolitical aims.

Hybrid warfare is also commonly known by terms such as "grey zone strategies", "competition short of conflict", "active measures" and "new generation warfare". I will stick to the traditional term to explain what is so unique about the Russian strategy of combining various political, military and economic tools to influence Georgia. Russia's hybrid warfare strategy is a highly innovative approach to modern conflicts. No longer pursuing the seemingly unilimited objectives of total war, it is considered an effective alternative. Innovation in Russia's military sector since the early 2000s, as well as the shifting balance of power along the country's borders, has encouraged its military and political leadership to develop a new concept for attaining policy goals.

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Coordinated campaign

Georgia is a good example of how Russia's hybrid strategy has developed over the years. The South Caucasus was among the first areas to experience a coordinated campaign of propaganda, military and economic actions, specifically aimed against successive governments in Tbilisi. Indeed, the West only started to pay attention to Russia's hybrid warfare after the war in Ukraine began. NATO and the European Union documents that included the term "hybrid war" only started to appear after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. The term began to spread in 2015 after NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini first used the term.

Despite this, Georgia began to experience the effects of hybrid warfare long before 2014. These effects include Russia's long-term support for Abkhazian and Ossetian separatists and the subsequent creation of frozen conflicts, which continue to prevent Georgia from joining Western institutions. This was the first modern case of war where military, economic and information components were purposefully intertwined.

These tactics were popular during the period preceding the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008. Afterwards, the Kremlin demonstrated an extraordinary array of tools and tactics, which eventually blended into an overall strategic vision focused on influencing a militarily and economically vulnerable Georgia. Such tools have included disinformation campaigns targeting specific issues. Larger disinformation campaigns could potentially distort certain historical periods in Georgian history, including the highly sensitive issues of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (known as the Tskhinvali Region to Tbilisi), or perhaps even the overall history of Georgia-Russia relations.

Campaigns to polarise different parts of Georgian society, specifically the territories populated by ethnic minorities in the country's southern regions, are also taking place. In the last decade or so cyber-attacks have also been used to target Georgia's energy, military and economic sectors. This is in order to gather critical information on the operations of state bodies. Additionally, campaigns that target government and media websites are now also common. In 2019 up to 15,000 state and private media websites were taken down by hackers. They were replaced by an image of the former Georgia President, Mikheil Saakashvili, with the caption "I'll be back". An investigation confirmed that Russia was the source of this attack.

Russia's use of the hybrid warfare in Georgia has been motivated specifically by a geopolitical dilemma it has been facing since the 1990s. This is namely Tbilisi's burgeoning ties with the West. Russia considers such relations as an attempt by

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the West to undermine its geopolitical influence in the region. From a strategic perspective, the purpose of Russia's hybrid war strategy in Georgia is to destabilise government structures as a means of permanently weakening the state.

The era of simply keeping territory after defeating an enemy in open battle has ended. Consequently, Russia has now combined various military, information, economic and diplomatic tools as a means of achieving specific goals in Georgia. As aforementioned, this strategy is preventing Georgia from joining Western structures.

Economic hybrid war in action

Prior discussion has highlighted the general premises of Russia's hybrid playbook. Despite this, media propaganda, targeted cyber campaigns and other methods might not always be an effective way of forcing the Georgian government to make concessions regarding vital geopolitical issues. The economic aspect of hybrid warfare is by far the most important sphere and this is where Russia has the greatest influence on Georgia. If the necessity arises, this market power could be translated into real geopolitical gains.

Georgia's difficult economic situation continuously presents Russia with opportunities to influence the country.

Georgia's difficult economic situation continuously presents Russia with opportunities to influence the country. For example, relatively low levels of approval for each major party in parliament (whether in government or in opposition), a high unemployment rate and a wider failure to improve the economy are all problems that highlight Georgia's vulnerability to external manipulation. One of Russia's main successes was the reopening of market links, which occurred after the Georgian Dream coalition came to power in 2013. This followed the ending of Moscow's embargo on agricultural goods which has been in place since 2006. Russia is now among Georgia's largest trading partners and is the largest export destination for various Georgian products, including wine and mineral water.

Renewed access to the Russian market continues to generate large economic benefits for Georgian producers. However, dependence on such benefits has also made producers vulnerable to potential Russian trade restrictions in the future. The 2006 economic embargo is a good illustration of how Moscow may use its economic power as a weapon. Alleged quality flaws found in imported Georgian goods may lead to disruptions in supply chains and ultimately economic losses for Georgian producers. Similar measures have been taken by Russia with other neighbouring countries.

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Every small incident or flare-up between the countries could lead to a renewed embargo or partial disruption. For example, in August 2015 Rozpotrebnadzor, Russia's agency for consumer protection, warned of "low quality Georgian wine" following Tbilisi's decision to join EU sanctions against imports from Crimea. Another revealing example occurred just last year, when Tbilisi witnessed a wave of protests condemning the visit of the Russian parliamentarian Sergey Gavrilov to Tbilisi. One of the possible countermeasures discussed in the Russian State Duma was the imposition of an economic embargo on Georgian products. There is an increasing understanding among the Georgian public regarding the instablity of

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Russia's economic outlook, with decisions often changing in line with geopolitics. This has subsequently allowed Moscow to become a key influence on geopolitical thinking in Tbilisi. Another influential tool at Russia's disposal is the large number of Georgian migrants working in Russia who send vast sums of money back to their families. For example, the 2006 crisis saw Russia deport many Georgian migrants. At the same time, Russia's ability to buy into Georgia's critical infrastructure is also problematic. For instance, Rosneft's purchase of 49 per cent of the Georgian Petrocas Energy Group in late 2014 is troubling from a strategic point of view. Indeed, the group owns an important oil terminal at the port of Poti. This is Georgia's major seaport and possesses a terminal capable of unloading oil products from tankers.

Political dimension of economic hybrid war

Georgia's economic vulnerabilities not only reflect the country's poor positioning in relation to Russia, but also create ideal conditions for the activity of pro-Russian groups. These organisations happen to be the most radicalised sections of Georgian politics. Despite this, the political importance of these groups is often exaggerated and their political influence is marginal at best. Nevertheless, they have a following that could complicate the situation on the ground in case of a major social or economic crisis.

As is the case generally with the anti-establishment ideas of radical parties, the rise of pro-Russian sentiment in Georgia could be strengthened by growing economic problems. This therefore links the activities of pro-Russian parties to the Kremlin's overall hybrid warfare strategy in Georgia.

Nino Burjanadze's Democratic Movement–United Georgia and Irma Inashvili's Alliance of Patriots are two major pro-Russian political parties in Georgia. Both have minimal public support, though it should be noted that Inashvili's party does have seven members in parliament. The two parties are important to watch as they both have contacts among the Russian political leadership. The two leaders share almost identical geopolitical outlooks, favouring Russia and believing that Western integration is a counterproductive idea.

Pro-Russian NGOs and their affiliated news outlets have also become increasingly active in the country. Their messages range from anti-Western reporting to appeals to Georgian nationalism. These organisations also discuss radical-conservative Orthodox values, which often do not represent the official line of the Georgian Orthodox Church. The largest pro-Russian NGOs are the Eurasian Institute and Eurasian Choice. Their activities focus on organising seminars and conferences which involve the participation of Georgian and Russian academics and ana-

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lysts. They often discuss topics like the Soviet Union's victory in the Second World War and the life of Joseph Stalin.

Countering hybrid warfare

It is clear that Russia's hybrid warfare strategy in Georgia is a rather complex process. It includes a sophisticated combination of tools that aim to undermine Georgia's stability and its desires for Western integration. By using this strategy, Russia has instigated conflict with the country without using explicit military might. The hybrid warfare that the Kremlin uses today is, in a sense, far greater and effective than what the communist party pursued during the Cold War. The existence of the internet, cable news, social media and the general spread of the Russian language has enabled Russia to operate extensively within Georgia. Russia's influence has also been strengthened due to the fact that its tactics are less ideologically driven than during the Soviet era.

The Georgian state needs to develop a long-term strategy to fight hybrid warfare and not just in relation to Moscow. Measures to counter this new form of conflict should include allocating more resources to state intelligence, as well as supporting transparency and anticorruption efforts. Indeed, corruption generally allows for the inflow of dubious foreign money.

So far Georgia has shown some resilience to Russia's hybrid warfare strategy. Nevertheless, the country's domestic economy will remain especially vulnerable to Russian interference in the future. NEE

Emil Avdaliani teaches history and international relations at Tbilisi State University and Ilia State University. He has worked for various international consulting companies and currently publishes articles on military and political developments across the post-Soviet space.

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How Russian propaganda works in Georgia

GRIGOL JULUKHIDZE

Russian disinformation activities in Georgia, a front-runner in the Eastern Partnership, illustrates how Russian propaganda works on a variety of levels. Understanding the Georgian case may provide an insight into how to counter such hybrid activities in the country and elsewhere in the West.

Today, no one questions with the fact that Russian propaganda is a global challenge. Over the past few years we have witnessed how well-structured disinformation campaigns can be used as a tool for achieving certain strategic goals: to shape public opinion, increase political polarisation, influence elections, demonise opponents, undermine state security, boost nihilism and cripple democracy. As the Soviet-born British journalist, author and TV producer Peter Pomerantsev wrote: "The Kremlin weaponises information!"

A number of countries have become targets of the Kremlin's propaganda operations. The list is long: Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Romania, Spain, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States. This phenomenon recognises neither a country's borders nor any moral restrictions. It may affect state actors throughout the world from Bucharest to Buenos Aires.

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Ideological basis

It is true that Russian propaganda threatens the political stability of the entire global democratic system. However, there are several regions where the Kremlin's disinformation campaign is extremely strong. I would point to the Visegrád countries (V4: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) and three countries of the Eastern Partnership (Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine). These states have always been viewed as significant regarding Soviet/Russian strategic spheres of interest. It should also be noted that the susceptibility of the V4 and the Eastern Partnership countries enables Russia to increase its political influence in Central and Eastern Europe whilst simultaneously undermining the stability of the European Union.

> In order to analyse the Kremlin's propaganda machine in Georgia, it is important to have an understanding of the information war's ideological basis.

Moreover, even today there are many Russian politicians who do not want to adapt to the new world order formed after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disappearance of these countries from the Kremlin's direct sphere of influence. To make a long story short, Russia is trying to regain this control by creating chaos and promoting political fabrications. One of the main instruments in this campaign is propaganda. As a result, activities in Georgia may provide a case study into how Russian propaganda works, as well as how such activity may be tackled by states.

In order to understand and analyse the methodology and narratives of the Kremlin propaganda machine in Georgia, it is important to have a comprehensive understanding of the Russian information war's ideological basis. One of the main thinkers regarding Russian propaganda is Igor Panarin – a professor at Moscow State University and author of *The Information War against Russia*. From time to time he makes different geopolitical predictions. For example, in 1998 he predicted that "the United States would disintegrate within the next few years". Panarin often emphasises that the main objective of the West's post-Cold War policy is the complete annihilation of Russia. In his written articles, Panarin often speaks of the necessity of countering this goal by means of public stereotypes, manipulation, misinformation and fabrications.

Evidently, the Kremlin's main ideologist is Aleksandr Dugin. This Russian scholar openly criticises liberal democratic principles and promotes the idea of a "Russian World" (*Русский Мир*). This concept promotes Russian culture, traditions, history and the "orthodox morale." Dugin foresees the creation of this ideological construction in the Eurasian space (i.e., the geopolitical area stretching from Cairo to Beijing). The consolidation of the Duginist post-liberal and neo-conservative

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Eurasian Union will be based on anti-Americanism and a rejection of "Western tendencies" such as same-sex marriage, terrorism, mass migration, etc. In his book, *The Fourth Political Theory*, Dugin also criticises fascism, communism and liberalism as "expired" ideologies that threaten the traditional family and religious values.

Another important ideological pillar of Russian propaganda is religious indoctrination. This started in 2004 when Russian MP Konstantin Kosachev stated, "Russia cannot justify its active policy in the post-Soviet space while the West is doing it with a 'banner' of democracy and our actions are viewed as 'imperialistic'. This is patriotic but not competitive." Since then, the Kremlin has been actively manipulating the issue of religion ("*Православие*") in other Orthodox nations. The Moscow Patriarchate's actions are fully in accordance with the Kremlin's propaganda operations which aim to gain political power through the use of religion.

Soft power and the Gerasimov Doctrine

American political scientist Joseph Samuel Nye Jr. introduced the idea of soft power in the late 1980s. According to Nye, soft power is the ability to attract and co-opt rather than to coerce. As for the Russian version of soft power, it has little in common with Nye's idea. We can assume that one of the initiators of this shift in understanding was Vladimir Putin. In 2012, Putin published an article titled "Russia and the Changing World". In this document, he describes soft power as "a mechanism for achieving foreign policy goals without the use of force, intervention and aggressive campaign". He paid special attention to the importance of co-operation with those compatriots who reside abroad as an instrument for strengthening the country's international position.

> Co-operation with Russian compatriots abroad has become an instrument for strengthening the country's international position.

Recent events have clearly shown that Putin's manifesto played the key influence in decisions to mobilise Russian state funds for the purpose of propaganda operations and underhanded activities against various countries. Officially, dozens of federal foundations were established to promote Russian culture abroad. In practice, however, these bodies merely simplified the financing of pro-Kremlin think tanks, media outlets, politicians and internet trolls throughout the world.

Another important fact was a new military doctrine suggested by Valery Gerasimov, the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia. It built on Putin's political manifesto but added more detail. According to Gerasimov: "The 21st century political goals could be achieved through non-military and informa-

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Photo: Website of the President of Russia (CC) http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/61584

Russian President Vladimir Putin with Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu (right) and Chief of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces and Valery Gerasimov. Gerasimov is cited as author of the "Gerasimov doctrine" which states that "21st century political goals could be achieved through non-military and informative means".

tive means. Modern Russia is capable of neutralising any threat coming from the West and acting the same way as the Europeans and Americans did while changing the political systems in Georgia, Ukraine and North Africa".

The case of Georgia

It should be noted that Russian disinformation campaigns existed in Georgia much earlier than in most other European countries. For instance, these campaigns appeared during the five-day Russian-Georgian war in August 2008. Apart from various propaganda messages, dozens of cyber-attacks by Kremlin-controlled hackers were carried out against Georgian state websites and internet servers. It could be said that this was the first large-scale and well-organised hybrid warfare operation by the Russian Federation. Since 2008 many tactics have been changed,

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modified and improved in the Kremlin's hybrid methodology. Propaganda became a key element, funding has increased ten-fold and the importance of the internet and traditional mass media also experienced a dramatic increase. This global systemic transformation also created the perfect ground for Russia's propaganda targets in Georgia.

All these integral aspects of the Russian information war – including Dugin's ideological narratives, Panarin's aggressive methods, Putin's notion of soft power, and elements of the Gerasimov's doctrine – are visible in Georgia. A closer look reveals that the main narratives of Russia's disinformation campaign in Georgia are:

- "The West is wicked and debauched."
- "Western ideology is incompatible with Georgian national identity and local traditions."
- "Americans and Europeans do not care for small nations like Georgia!"
- "Same-sex marriage will be legalised due to Euro-Atlantic integration!"
- "Hundreds of thousands of immigrants will be sent to Georgia by Brussels!"
- "The Georgian Orthodox Church will be under attack!"
- "Narcotic use will be legalised!"
- "Americans and Europeans do not care about family values!"
- "Democracy does not work anymore!"
- "NATO is preparing a war against Russia!"
- "Local and international non-governmental organisations serve as an effective mechanism for chaos diffusion".

Under these "potentially dangerous consequences", the Kremlin offers a unique alternative – a conservative and traditional state model. This is the aforementioned "Russian World" ("Русский Мир") that will be free from these "western tendencies". Another important factor here is the "innocent nature" of Russia. Moscow is obliged to react to the West's attempts to undermine the country. That is why the Kremlin sends its troops to eastern Syria, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Venezuela, and Vietnam. Self-defence is the only reason for Russia's military operations, because the main objective of the West's post-Cold War policy is the "full annihilation of Russia". The same narrative is used to defend the occupied territories of Georgia: "Americans encouraged and pushed President Mikheil Saakashvili to start the five-day war against the Kremlin-backed separatists in the Tskhinvali region." As a world power, Russia was "obliged to respond". However, according to some pro-Russian experts, "Moscow was even generous in its military response when it did not occupy the capital city of Tbilisi."

Pro-Russian narratives in Georgia are mainly promoted by traditional media outlets and internet news agencies.

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Actors of disinformation

Pro-Russian narratives in Georgia are mainly promoted by traditional media outlets and internet news agencies (fake news websites, Facebook pages). Despite many attempts by Georgian authorities and civil society to counter Russian propaganda operations, there has been no centralised, well-coordinated approach. It makes Georgia extremely vulnerable to disinformation. In addition, dozens of state-owned Russian television channels are widely broadcasted in Georgia. Most of these outlets directly promote propagandistic narratives. Other actors for propaganda dissemination include pro-Russian political parties and Moscow-sponsored non-governmental organisations.

The main goals of the Kremlin's information war in Georgia include:

- Weakening pro-Western opinion among the Georgian public – "Georgia will never become an EU/NATO member";
- Discrediting Ukraine – "The Maidan was organised by fascists supported and backed by Western intelligence services";
- Discrediting the United States – "The 9/11 terrorist attack was organised by the CIA", "US foreign policy is run by masons";
- Discrediting NATO – "NATO will place a military base in Georgia and will use Eastern Europe as a 'shield' against Russia";
- Discrediting the EU – "The EU is not effective anymore"; "There are only strikes and demonstrations in the European Union"; "The EU will collapse soon";
- Promotion of conspiracy theories and nihilism – "Politicians are only focused on their own interests";
- Positive representation of Russian foreign policy – "Russia is not an ideal state, but its policy is less aggressive than the West".

Russian propaganda frames the communist era as a relatively positive time in comparison to contemporary troubles.

We also have to pay attention to one other important issue. This is namely the Kremlin's attempt to romanticise the Soviet times in Georgia, especially among the older generations. This has seen the communist era framed as a relatively positive time in comparison to contemporary troubles: "Yes, maybe the USSR was not perfect, but it was far better than the modern Western capitalist order." Such an approach aims at undermining public consensus regarding Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

Christopher Paul and Miriam Matthews have described various physiological features of Russia's contemporary propaganda model. Their descriptions appear

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to correspond perfectly to how the Kremlin's disinformation operates in Georgia. For example, they view this campaign as: high-volume and multichannel; rapid, continuous, and repetitive; lacking a commitment to objective reality; and lacking a commitment to consistency.

It does not matter how unbelievable certain news items appear. Russia continues to promote various anti-Western and pro-Russian narratives without any moral restrictions. The goal is to encourage chaos and undermine the sovereignty of Georgia. It is important to first grab the attention of the audience. Then, in order to maintain this interest, false information is repeated over and over. Neither the credibility of sources nor the stories' authenticity are ever checked.

Georgia, it is fair to say, is experiencing an ongoing Russian occupation and information war. It is difficult to know truly which challenge is more difficult. As the politican Salome Samadashvili pointed out, "While Moscow remains a fortress to policymakers in the West, the Iron Curtain has been replaced by a one-way mirror through which the Kremlin can carefully observe the West, while remaining completely invisible and inscrutable." NEE

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Borderisation

The Kremlin's unending war

EGOR KUROPTEV

Twelve years since the August 2008 Russian-Georgian War – when Russia's aggressive policies divided neighbouring Georgia into different parts – the Kremlin still permanently reminds Georgians of this reality with barbed wire, border-signs, kidnappings and creeping annexation.

In order to describe the occupation lines which separate Georgia from the territories occupied by the Kremlin (Tskhinvali /Abkhazia), we first have to define the very concept of "borderisation". This is because, just like the "little green men" in Crimea, the process of "borderisation" in Georgia has been managed by the secretive FSB (formerly the KGB), in recent years. Borderisation is the process of installing equipment (fences and barbed wires) on the line of occupation between territory controlled by Tbilisi and the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and the so-called South Ossetia (known to Georgia as the Tskhinvali Region), which are de facto controlled by Russian security forces.

What does the FSB exactly have to do with this? After all, both separatist areas were recognised as independent states by Russia, Syria's Bashar al-Assad and a couple of other relatively unknown regimes; as if both have their own currencies, languages, army and special services. In other words, they appear independent.

Well, this is not exactly true. In reality Russia does not even fully recognise the independence of Sukhumi and Tskhinvali. The Kremlin has several military bases in these regions, as well as dozens of armed "border" posts. Russian authorities have also signed contracts with local representatives so that the FSB can continue "ensuring security". The Russian government even pays out pensions and prohibits

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the learning of any other language than Russian. Moscow forbids the teaching of Georgian, which is spoken by a considerable proportion of the population in the occupied territories.

No rights

Counting the number of human rights violations on the lines of occupation has lost its meaning, since local residents there have very little rights at all. One example of how the Kremlin has stripped people of their rights is the borderisation process.

Imagine for a moment that you have returned home after a long working day and go to bed. When you wake up in the morning, you find that part of your apartment now belongs to someone else. Overnight, in the middle of your house, robbers armed with machine guns have drawn a line and stretched barbed wire along it. This is how the FSB carries out borderisation. In short, this is theft of property. This example is not just some old story from a past war. It happened yesterday, it is happening today and it will happen tomorrow.

Counting the number of human rights violations on the lines of occupation has lost its meaning, since local residents there have very little rights at all.

In August 2019, several families in the Georgian village of Gugutiantkari woke up to find that they had lost access to their land plots, where they were growing crops. For these local residents their crops are their only means of subsistence. This, however, does not stop Vladimir Putin and his subordinates from taking advantage of their neighbours.

The number of kidnapped Georgian citizens on the line of occupation by year	
2000–2012	411 Georgian citizens were kidnapped by the occupation regime (on average 82 citizens per year)
2013–2017	705 Georgian citizens were kidnapped on the line of occupation (on average 145 per year)
2018	100 Georgian citizens were kidnapped on the line of occupation
2019	92 Georgian citizens were kidnapped on the line of occupation

The illegal detention of people crossing the administrative line, which Moscow and Tskhinvali call "a border," are described as "kidnappings" by the Georgian authorities. Since there is no border, either theoretically or practically (most of the line is not fenced off in any way), those who walk to a store, church or cemetery do so under constant fear of being arrested. After an arrest (in fact, abduction), families of the kidnapped are required to pay a fine for "crossing the state border". In

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addition to the fact that there is no official state border, just a line of occupation, the problem is aggravated by the fact that FSB border guards constantly enter territories controlled by Tbilisi and kidnap locals in order to pressure Georgia. During 2018–2020, occupying forces kidnapped more than 250 Georgian citizens in order to demand a ransom from relatives.

Creeping annexation

Kidnappings and borderisation have remained common tactics in Putin's aggression against Georgia over the past 12 years. Since August 2019 the FSB has been carrying out continual "engineering" works in the Chorchana forest, deep in territory controlled by Tbilisi. The occupation line has moved 1.3 kilometres further into Georgian territory. At the time of writing, FSB engineering troops are digging Georgian soil in the country's Karelian region. Along with misinformation and propaganda, especially in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Kremlin

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is using borderisation to pressure an already frightened society in order to, once again, demonstrate that Georgia and its partners cannot do anything against its aggressive policies. In practice, Putin is attacking small neighbouring countries as a means of maintaining the remnants of his influence. As of 2018, at least 34 Georgian villages were separated by fences built by Russian forces. Around 800–1000 families have also lost access to their land plots.

Since 2011, there have been 155 cases of borderisation:	
In April 2011	FSB border guards arrived in the Georgian villages of Tamarasheni and Dvani
In April 2011	in the Georgian village of Big Khurvaleti
In March 2012	in the Georgian village of Kvemo Nikozi
In March 2013	in the Georgian village of Gugutiantkari
In March 2013	in the Georgian village Khurvaleti
In 2014–2020	in the Georgian village in the area of the Chorchana forest

One might say: "Well, Putin's Russia is an occupier. In 2008 Russia occupied 20 per cent of Georgian territory. For 12 years the Russians have been building a 'border' for themselves at the line where their army stopped. Occupiers obviously need to fix the border of their occupation". Again, this is not the case. The Kremlin has shown "creativity" in this matter too. They are not building a "border" along the line that was occupied in 2008. They continue to move the line of occupation wherever they want.

After the 2008 war, Georgian authorities made the status of the occupied territories official within the framework of the so-called "South Ossetia Autonomous Region". The law enforcement agencies of both Georgia and Russia have a map which clearly marks out this area. To one degree or another, this region is reflected on Google Maps.

Signs that designate a "border" were placed far away from the actual line of occupation. This was done in order to gain tactical leverage over Georgia.

Having gained a foothold in the occupied territories in 2008, Russian forces began to use this map of the region as proof that Georgia recognised the area as an occupied zone. But they did not begin to build a "border" along the entire line of occupation. On the contrary, signs that designate the "border" were placed far away from the actual line of occupation. This was done in order to gain tactical leverage over the Georgian government already pressured by the occupation, with the "border" moved whenever the Kremlin and FSB felt it was appropriate.

Such movements have occurred on numerous occassions, especially during important events in Georgia such as NATO exercises, visits by senior American

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officials and elections. On every such occasion the Kremlin has moved and built a "border" within the occupied territories "map" in order to intimidate local residents and cause panic in Tbilisi.

Later, the Kremlin and their separatist supporters in Tskhinvali began to move the so-called borders even deeper into territory controlled by the Georgian government. This process is called "creeping annexation". As a result, there is now even more pressure being placed on Georgia before the upcoming elections, as the country suffers not only from the Kremlin's disinformation campaigns and its ongoing support for pro-Russian politicians and media, but also from physical reduction of Georgian territories when Moscow needs it.

The Kremlin continues to move even deeper into the territory controlled by the Georgian government. This process is called "creeping annexation".

Again imagine for a moment that you are at home, where robbers armed with machine guns have taken half of your house and divided it with barbed wire. It is your birthday, your family has gathered together and everybody is in a good mood. You try your best not to notice the guns and barbed wire in order not to spoil the celebration. Suddenly, the robbers decide to move the barbed wire exactly when you decide to blow out the candles on the cake. On the other side of the barbed wire, you now also see that the robbers have taken over your kitchen. All the dishes for your birthday are there and your aunt now finds herself trapped on the other side. Can you imagine how you might feel in such a situation? Multiply this feeling by a thousand and you will understand how Georgians feel every day.

Confuse and divide

In the summer of 2019, when some European countries once again decided to be friendlier with the Kremlin, Putin's Russia "unexpectedly" began to actively "make friends" with their neighbours. This resulted in an "exchange of prisoners with Ukraine", as well as Kremlin disinformation campaigns in Georgia. These campaigns tried to convince Georgians that the enemy and occupier is not Russia, but other countries. Instead of themselves, the Kremlin labelled Turkey and Azerbaijan as the enemies of Georgia, using old territorial disputes as part of their disinformation campaigns.

In September 2019, the foreign ministers of Georgia and Russia met during the United Nations General Assembly. This was the first such meeting in 11 years. Little occurred during this meeting, but the headlines worked in the Kremlin's fa-

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vour: "Putin exchanged prisoners with Ukraine" and "the Russian and the Georgian foreign ministers meet for the first time since the 2008 war". These events were welcomed especially by those who wish for greater "friendship" between the EU and the Kremlin.

It was during this period that Putin launched a new strategy for borderisation. In line with the ongoing occupation, the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism format has been operating for many years. Georgia, the occupation regimes, Russia and international observers all participate in this structure. During one of these meetings in August 2019, the occupation regime informed participants that the territory of South Ossetia (occupied territory) should not be established according to the "map" of South Ossetia Autonomous District, but according to a map from 1922. This map depicts the famous Georgian resort of Borjomi, the ancient capital of Georgia Mtskheta, and other lands as belonging to South Ossetia. This map, which seems to have appeared out of nowhere, has nothing to do with reality. It did, however, have a very definite purpose. When the separatist regime declared its right to more territory, the Russian delegation, despite financially supporting the breakaway authorities, acted extremely "surprised" and opposed the position of the separatists.

When the separatist regime declared its right to more territory, the Russian delegation acted extremely "surprised".

How are we to make sense of this? The separatist chiefs, supported by the Kremlin, appeared to increase pressure on Georgia so that Russia could step in and act as the peacemaker in a situation for which it was responsible. This action was seemingly meant to strengthen the idea that "the enemy is not Russia and Putin".

Who is the audience for this show? Clearly, the Europeans who participate in the negotiations and write the reports after the meetings noted Russia acting as a peacemaker. It is like killing Ukrainians and Georgians and then speaking on television about "protecting the Russian world from Nazis". However, this strategy does seem to work.

Political intervention

In the winter of 2019 the Russian foreign ministry and representatives of the State Duma "supported" the release of the well-known Georgian doctor, Vazha Gaprindashvili. Tskhinvali's KGB illegally kidnapped the doctor from a village and subsequently imprisoned him. The region's KGB is led by an FSB officer. Despite this, Russian authorities pretended that they had nothing to do with the arrest and

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"demanded" that Tskhinvali release the doctor. There have been many similar cases like this since August 2019.

At the same time, these actions have allowed the Russian government to resolve a number of issues. First, as aforementioned, they help to convince European mediators that the Kremlin has a peaceful stance towards Georgia. This is often reflected in the mediators' reports. Second, the Kremlin aims to "prove" to Georgian citizens, who are often susceptible to Russian propaganda, that the "Ossetians" are to blame and the "Russians are trying to help". Third, such events effectively allow more pressure to be placed on the Georgian government, with Ossetia acting as the Kremlin's "bad cop" by seizing even more land.

As a result of these actions, the Kremlin continues to successfully intervene in all of Georgia's political processes, especially elections. In October this year Georgia is scheduled to have one of its most important parliamentary elections in the last decade. Russia is already taking active steps to ensure that a fairly large number of seats go to openly pro-Russian political candidates. Considering this, it is clear that we should expect an increase in the number of Kremlin provocations against Georgia in the months prior to the elections and thereafter. NEE

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Religion as a powerful foreign policy tool

GIORGI JOKHADZE

Russia's principal aim towards Georgia is to reverse its Euro-Atlantic integration strategy and return Tbilisi to the Kremlin's political orbit. One of the main tools to achieve this aim is the use of the Orthodox Church, with the main narrative being that Russia is the last bastion of Christianity and conservative values in the world.

The conflict between Russia and Georgia dates back to 1801 when the Russian Empire annexed the eastern part of Georgia. The country was under the direct rule of the Tsarist regime until May 26th 1918 when Georgia regained its long-awaited independence as a consequence of Russia's ongoing civil war. Yet Georgia's democratic republic was short-lived. When the civil war ended in Russia, the Bolsheviks once again subdued the South Caucasus region, including Georgia. From 1921 to 1991 the country was part of the Soviet Union. After the end of the Cold War, Georgia regained independence. Unfortunately, the Russian Federation continued its violent policies toward its small neighbour. When war broke out in Abkhazia, a breakaway region in northeast Georgia, Moscow backed the separatists and provided them with military and economic assistance. In 2008, Russia directly invaded Georgia. The main aim of its campaign was to prevent Georgia's European and Euro-Atlantic integration. As a consequence, the Russian Federation now occupies 20 per cent of Georgia's internationally-recognised territories. The Kremlin continues the illegal process of borderisation as well as kidnapping Georgian citizens almost every week.

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After the military campaign of 2008, Russia launched a full-scale hybrid war against Georgia. This concept consists of an integrated use of multiple political, military, technological and societal tools deployed in a synchronized manner. The most important aspects of hybrid war, beyond military attacks, include propaganda and disinformation, in which the spreading of fake news and religious superstition play a crucial role. Russia, throughout its history, actively used religion as a tool of influence in Georgia. The same is happening today. The Kremlin tries to demonstrate that the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) is a main historical ally of the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC), which has been shaping Georgian culture and society since the baptism of the country in 326 AD. Russia also tries to manipulate Georgian citizens with pseudo-conservative values. The principal aim is to stop Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration and return Tbilisi to the Kremlin's political orbit.

Early history

Russia first began paying attention to Georgia in the 16th century, when the latter was fighting for its independence from Ottomans and Persians. Due to the same confession (they both were Orthodox Christians), Russia was perceived as a beacon of hope for many Georgians, which could help them regain independence. At the end of the 18th century, the Ottomans and Persians were losing influence while Russia was strengthening its position in the South Caucasus. The king of eastern Georgia, Heraclius II, decided to invite Russia to the region. He signed the Treaty of Georgievsk with Russia in 1783. According to the treaty, Eastern Georgia became a protectorate of the Russian Empire which was responsible for defending its independence and territorial integrity. In exchange, Russia gained almost full control over the foreign affairs of eastern Georgia. Georgians did not fully realise the consequences of the signing of the Georgievsk Treaty. They thought that Russia was the best possible option for preserving independence and statehood because of their common faith. Unfortunately they were mistaken and in 1801 Russia annexed eastern Georgia to the empire.

In 1811 the Kremlin abolished autocephaly (religious independence) of the Georgian Orthodox Church. In the same year, the Georgian Orthodox Church was transformed into the Georgian Exarchate, which was under the direct control of the Holy Governing Synod of Russia. The Georgian Exarchate existed for more than a century. In March of 1917, the Georgian Orthodox Church benefited from the dismantling of the Tsarist regime and regained its autocephaly. Yet after the 1917 October Revolution, the Bolsheviks seized power in Russia and established

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the Soviet Union in 1922. Along with fourteen other states, Georgia compulsorily joined the USSR. The communists started taking actions to neutralise the church, and most churches were closed and thousands of clergymen, as part of Georgian intelligentsia, were murdered. During Soviet times, the Georgian Orthodox Church was the key driver for the independence movement. In 1977 Ilia II became Catholicos-Patriarch of Georgia which is the head of the Georgian Orthodox Church. He managed to get recognition by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, followed by the recognition of other Orthodox churches, including the Russian Orthodox Church. Despite this fact, the Russian church continued to behave like an "older brother".

Kremlin's religious narratives in Georgia

After the Cold War, Russia's strategy towards the Georgian Orthodox Church changed. After restoring its significance in the 1990s, the Russian church became the main ally of the Russian government. The Kremlin now uses it as an extremely important soft power tool in both domestic and foreign affairs. In present day Russia, religion is a continuation of politics – the Russian Orthodox Church believes the country has superiority over other civilizations while Russian policies aim to strengthen its influence on neighbouring countries. The Russian Orthodox Church's notion of a Russian/Slavic world (*Russkiy Mir*) supports the country's leadership over other Orthodox churches. Consequently, one of the main strategies of Russian foreign policy is consolidating the Orthodox Christian world.

Russia's principal aim towards Georgia is to reverse its Euro-Atlantic integration and return Tbilisi to the Kremlin's political orbit.

Georgia is no exception. Russia's principal aim towards Georgia, as was mentioned already, is to reverse its Euro-Atlantic integration and return Tbilisi to the Kremlin's political orbit. To achieve this strategic goal, Moscow actively uses various methods, including the spread of disinformation and creating non-existent myths, in order to convince Georgian citizens that Russia is the best possible choice for ensuring the country's future security and prosperity. Taking into account that around 84 per cent of Georgians consider themselves Orthodox Christians, they are vulnerable to Russia's propagandist machine.

The main religious narrative of the Kremlin in Georgia is that Russia is the last bastion of Christianity and conservative values in the world. The Kremlin actively resists the ongoing process of globalisation, claiming it erodes national borders.

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Sameba Tbilis, largest orthodox Cathedral in Caucasus region. Officially the Georgian Orthodox Church supports the country's Euro-Atlantic aspirations, but in reality it opposes this direction because it believes the West is responsible for spreading anti-church propaganda.

Furthermore, the main narrative of anti-globalism is that globalisation promotes sole sovereignty, and consequently diminishes nation-states as principal actors of the international system. According to Moscow, the driving force behind globalisation is the West, which tries to undermine the traditional, conservative social order. That is why the Kremlin cordially opposes LGBTQ+ rights, as well as abortion rights.

This means the majority of Georgia's citizens, who are Orthodox Christians, share the more traditional, conservative views than liberal ones. In this way, the Kremlin can flare up anti-liberal sentiments in Georgia and use the Georgian Orthodox Church to create anti-West public opinion. Officially the Georgian Orthodox Church supports the country's Euro-Atlantic aspirations, but in reality it opposes this direction because it believes the West is responsible for spreading anti-church propaganda.

Russia has also tried to get involved in the domestic affairs of the Georgian Orthodox Church. One of the clearest examples has been the Russian Orthodox Church's appointment of a special "representative" in Georgia, Vladimir Aleksandrov. Officially, his main mission is to deepen co-operation between the two churches. In

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reality though, Aleksandrov is considered as the "eyes and ears" of the incumbent patriarch of Russia, Kirill. He is responsible for gathering "valuable" information and strengthening the pro-Russian faction in the Holy Synod of Georgia.

Presently, the Kremlin appears satisfied with the Georgian Orthodox Church since it preserves the so-called "historical friendship" with the Russian church and helps undermine Georgia's western integration. Yet the incumbent Patriarch of Georgia, Ilia II, is 87 years old. That is why the Kremlin is actively trying to support the candidature of a new patriarch who will continue these "friendly" relations towards the Russian Orthodox Church. It is interesting to see that the incumbent regent, Shio Mujiri, who will take the position as the new patriarch after the death of Ilia II, was the special "representative" of the Georgian Orthodox Church in Russia. He graduated from Saint Tixon's Orthodox University in Moscow. His connections with the Russian Orthodox Church are therefore quite significant.

The Kremlin appears satisfied with the Georgian Orthodox Church since it preserves the so-called "historical friendship" with the Russian church.

The Kremlin has also tried to use the Georgian Orthodox Church to create disorder and chaos within Georgian society during the COVID-19 pandemic. Before Easter 2020, the main advice of the Georgian government was for people to stay at home, and not to go to church. However the Georgian Orthodox Church tried to convince believers that going to church would not jeopardise their lives. The heads of the Holy Synod of Georgia blamed the government for "trying to destroy the faith". Apparently there was Russian meddling, and it is well known that the Kremlin's disinformation aims to undermine the Georgian state and governmental structures.

Independence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church

One of the clearest examples to show how strong the Kremlin's influence is on the Georgian Orthodox Church relates to the recent independence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC). The latter separated from the Russian Orthodox Church and gained autocephaly on January 5th 2019. The UOC received recognition by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople followed by other Orthodox Churches, including the Patriarchate of Alexandria and the Greek Orthodox Church. The separation of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church was a disaster not only for the Russian Orthodox Church, but also for the Kremlin. The Russian Church increased pressure on other Orthodox Churches, hoping they would not recognise the autocephaly of the Ukrainian Church.

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One principal direction of the so-called "non-recognition" policy was Georgia. The Kremlin needed to avoid undesirable complications and therefore used its main leverage on the Georgian Church by manipulating the status of Orthodox churches in the occupied territories of Georgia. Unlike the Russian government, the Russian Orthodox Church has not recognised the independence of the Abkhazian Church. Today, the Russian Orthodox Church considers the latter an inseparable part of the Georgian Orthodox Church. However, it has warned the Georgian Patriarchate that if the Georgian Church recognises the independence of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, it would recognise the autocephaly of the Abkhazian Church as a retaliatory action.

The above illustrates how Russia has used religion as a key policy tool against Georgia throughout history. Religious factors have become exceptionally impactful since the tenure of the incumbent president, Vladimir Putin. Moscow continues to gain political influence by manipulating the emotions of Georgian citizens and spreading fake news and disinformation to showcase the Russian Federation as the only protector of faith across the Orthodox world. Moscow creates disorder and chaos by both enhancing the role of the Georgian Orthodox Church and undermining the Georgian government and its institutions. Unfortunately, Russia's hybrid war, including its religious influence, remains a very serious challenge for the Georgian state and its declared priority, namely, becoming a member of the European Union and NATO.

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The Kremlin's fake news machine swirl COVID-19 conspiracies

TORNIKE ZURABASHVILI

To quell the impact of pro-Kremlin disinformation campaigns ahead of the milestone October parliamentary elections, the government, Facebook and civil society organisations will need to take more proactive measures.

Georgia has been particularly affected by Russian information operations, especially in light of its troubled political relations with Moscow and the country's generally unabated pro-western course. Over the last few years, large numbers of Kremlin-funded and domestic news websites and social media pages have carried out a massive information offensive against the country, undermining societal trust towards the West, public institutions and civil society organisations. They have been particularly active in the electoral periods, campaigning extensively against liberal values and liberal-minded politicians.

The coronavirus pandemic has been no exception to this general trend. Kremlin-funded news agencies, together with their Georgian counterparts, have skilfully exploited the country's vulnerabilities in the face of the pandemic outbreak and have tried to deepen societal divisions with an eye to the upcoming parliamentary elections, including circulating disinformation, online rumours and conspiracy theories. Facebook, the country's most popular social media network, has been the main arena of their operations. This is hardly surprising, since many Georgians are now spending more time on social media, hence, the ground for such information inroads has never been more fertile.

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Although much of these campaigns remain on the fringes of social media and their impact is somewhat limited, some of these messages still resonate with wider segments of the population. Those that do make it into the mainstream media are exacerbating societal fears about the virus and threatening the country's hard-won success in containing the pandemic outbreak. For that very reason, coronavirus-related disinformation in Georgia calls for a more scrupulous analysis and not least because it might shed light on the nature of the Kremlin's information operations elsewhere. More importantly, the timing, the messages and the means of the disinformation campaign point at the extent of coordination between various pro-Kremlin actors – an apparent sign that the Kremlin used the occasion as a dress rehearsal for the upcoming elections.

Who's who in Georgia's disinformation scene

Over the past few years, Russia has managed to build a strong information infrastructure in Georgia, spending considerable resources – financial and human alike – to establish, maintain and widen the scope of its operations in the country. Georgia's geographic proximity to Russia and its history of close cultural and religious ties, coupled with some parts of the Georgian population still using Russian-language media as their primary source of information, have all contributed to Kremlin's relative success in the Georgian information landscape, most notably on Facebook. No less important has been the Georgian government's general neglect of the threat of Russian disinformation. Although the authorities have repeatedly acknowledged the problem in their public statements and strategic documents, they have shown little concrete effort to counter the influence of these malign actors, let alone to proactively limit their freedom of operation. More disturbingly, there has been a growing number of reports, including those confirmed by Facebook, that the authorities have resorted to tactics similar or identical to that of the Kremlin-funded actors, and at times, even benefited from their inauthentic networks – to promote the government's work or discredit their political opponents.

As a result, the Georgian social media landscape has found itself flooded with real and false media pages, online trolls, accounts and groups of all walks of life and persuasion. Many of these actors have formed well-established and coordinated networks, spreading or amplifying pro-Kremlin, anti-western and anti-liberal messages in a synchronised and simultaneous manner.

This time around the Russian disinformation campaign relies heavily on false information and coordinated behaviour. At the forefront of these efforts stood Sputnik and News-Front, two Kremlin-funded media outlets with a history of ardent

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anti-western content. To achieve their objectives in the coronavirus context, the two agencies gave voice to usual pro-Kremlin mouthpieces in Georgia, including extreme conservatives, religious zealots and other anti-liberal factions. The two outlets then tried to amplify their messages using a network of fake accounts and false media pages, some of which were later removed by Facebook as part of its efforts to crack down on coordinated inauthentic behaviour.

Corona myths

Over the last few years, Kremlin-funded media outlets have spared no occasion to try and influence the country's pro-western course and its fragile, but still prevalent, liberal consensus. By circulating disinformation, rumours and conspiracy theories they have contributed to societal divisions along the lines of foreign and domestic policies and challenged the public's confidence towards democratic institutions, civil society organisations and liberal values.

> Questions about the origins of the virus created a conducive environment for the manipulation of information.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented a new opportunity for these actors to achieve their objectives. Questions about the origins and nature of the virus, combined with economic and political uncertainties caused by the lockdown measures, created a predictably conducive environment for the manipulation of information. The Kremlin-funded media were quick to exploit this opening. By fuelling doubts and conspiracy theories about the origins of the coronavirus and sowing distrust towards the government's lockdown measures, they have generated a social media spin against the West and democratic institutions. In doing so, they used a multitude of narratives, targeting specific groups of Georgians and tailoring messages that resonated with various segments of society.

An investigation by the Tbilisi-based International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy demonstrated that News-Front alone, together with Geworld, its partner outfit with Georgian registration, promoted these ten broad messages:

- Developed European countries had failed to quell the coronavirus outbreak, while Georgia – a developing country – was able to contain the pandemic;
- Social distancing and lockdowns – the two measures employed by the Georgian government – were counter-productive in the fight against the virus;
- Georgia's coronavirus response efforts were not supported by the United States and the European Union, but by the Chinese government;
- The virus was created and purposefully leaked by the US army;

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- The government was fighting against the Orthodox Church with its state of emergency measures and not the virus;
- Those who would refrain from attending church services during the state of emergency restrictions would not be regarded as true Christians;
- Foreign actors and liberal-minded elite were waging a war against the ritual of Holy Communion;
- Italy was abandoned by the EU, and it was Russia and China that came to their aid;
- The world is led by 13 families who have intentionally caused the virus outbreak in order to reduce the global population; and
- Russia was invincible in the fight against the coronavirus and they already have effective treatments.

Other sources went even further, attributing the virus outbreak to 5G technology or accusing Bill Gates of seizing the momentum to microchip humans. Some others spent considerable effort demonising the work of Amiran Gamkrelidze and Paata Imnadze of the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), Georgia's two top epidemiologists leading the country's coronavirus response.

Lugar lab in the spotlight again

The recent events have also seen the re-emergence of Russia's bio-warfare allegations involving the Richard Lugar Center for Public Health Research, a US-funded biological research facility functioning under the NCDC and located on the outskirts of Tbilisi. Established in 2011 to promote public and animal health through infectious disease detection and surveillance, the Lugar lab has become a frequent target of Kremlin's information operations, with Russian officials, Kremlin-funded media outlets and their proxies in Georgia frequently accusing the facility of spreading deadly viruses, and occasionally, at experimenting with human health.

The research facility, known for its high-level biosafety standards and cutting-edge technologies, has played a vital role in Georgia's coronavirus response, allowing disease control officials to have reliable diagnoses of possible cases of contractions and a full picture of the geography of the virus distribution. Yet the facility came under another information offensive; in a statement at the end of May, timed – perhaps intentionally – for Georgia's independence day, the Russian ministry of foreign affairs slammed the research centre for its "double-purpose activity" and for failing to explain "what exactly it is doing in the direct vicinity of Russian borders". The statement prompted an angry response from Georgian officials, with President Salome Zurabishvili slamming it as "slanderous" and with the Georgian

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foreign ministry accusing the Kremlin of "crude attempts" to discredit the role of the facility.

Strength of civil society

Georgian civil society organisations have also stood at the forefront of the fight against the recent wave of Russian disinformation. They have monitored, analysed and debunked coronavirus-related messages and related content and have successfully advocated for active counter-measures by Facebook, securing the takedown of pages and accounts affiliated with Sputnik and News-Front in Georgia, along with two domestic political networks. Despite these measures, however, civil society activities alone might prove to be insufficient to counter the problem of disinformation, not least because of their limited resources and capabilities. This will be particularly pronounced in coming few months – in the lead-up to the October parliamentary elections, a milestone event for the country's political system. With more actors at the table and more of them willing to resort to disinformation tactics to achieve their political objectives, the electoral campaign promises to be much more divisive and polarizing than the coronavirus outbreak.

Pro-Kremlin actors will stay vigilant. They will exploit every possibility to increase their power base along with socially-conservative and anti-liberal political forces and catapult them into the Georgian parliament. All of this will surely require greater public reporting – something civil society organisations have performed in a highly professional manner, but this will also call for more pro-active measures by the government of Georgia and Facebook, by far the most crucial link in the long chain of information transmission.

The social media company also needs to be ready to act upon civil society reports, and do so quickly and decisively. It also has to ensure stricter rules of transparency of electoral advertising, as well as a harsher application of community standards. The authorities, on their part, have to unequivocally decry the use of disinformation in campaigns and, where necessary, probe into the activities of malign pro-Kremlin actors. Only the combined efforts of civil society, the government and Facebook will minimise the impact of pro-Kremlin disinformation campaigns, and will ensure that Georgians are able to make up their minds in an environment that is free of manipulation and fear. NEE

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Far-right radicalisation and Russian soft power

UCHA NANUASHVILI

The growth of the far-right in Georgia is a dangerous development and it especially threatens the country's Euro-Atlantic integration. Russian soft power appears to have played a role in this process. The question remains whether Georgian authorities have enough power and desire to reverse this worrying trend.

Radicalisation, and in particular far-right radicalisation, is one of the most pressing issues in Georgia today. Recent developments, such as the mobilisation of far-right and conservative groups, have demonstrated the need to strengthen efforts to prevent radicalisation and to raise public awareness of the issue. The rise of the radical right threatens the country's democratic development, its peace and the operation of state institutions. In fact, since 2012 we have only seen a growth in these groups in Georgia. The country's society has proven to be fertile ground for far-right politics and the government's tolerance only supports the strengthening of these groups' influence in Georgian political life.

An emerging trend

There are a large number of factors that contribute to people's mobilisation around far-right groups. This includes unemployment, poverty, socioeconomic problems, Soviet heritage, intolerance of various forms of diversity, low levels of digital and media literacy, ineffective anti-propaganda policies, non-punishment or impunity "syndrome", the politicisation of law-enforcement bodies, failure to investigate past crimes, ethno-nationalism and the unwillingness to re-evaluate past

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events. This final point largely relates to the 1990s civil war and the ongoing conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (known to Tbilisi as the Tskhinvali Region).

Russia currently occupies 20 per cent of Georgian territories and continues the so-called borderisation process along its line of occupation. Borderisation specifically refers to the unagreed installation of border markers, fencing and barbed wire along the administrative boundary that separates Abkhazia and South Ossetia from the rest of Georgia. Since 2008 Russia has maintained its military occupation and is placing increasing pressure on Georgia by violating its territorial integrity.

Allegations have been made that far-right groups, such as Georgian March, have links with Russia. Despite this, actual neo-Nazi groups are quite anti-Russian and have distanced themselves from Georgian March. Today, many small far-right groups exist in Georgia. Until recently, their activities were quite fragmented but today this pattern has changed. They have become more organised, openly demonstrating their power, as well as threatening violence towards those from "outside the mainstream". Georgian far-right groups deny any links to Russia. However, their talking points appear similar to Russian far-right groups and subsequently represent the country's soft power. Certainly, the rise of ultra-nationalist rhetoric has negatively impacted Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration. Some of these groups are strongly anti-Russian, but a relatively large number of influential groups, such as Georgian March, find it difficult to hide their pro-Russian attitudes. This group, which was founded in 2017, unites thousands of ultra-radical nationalists from around the country. Naturally, these growing xenophobic and anti-Western attitudes can easily become a tool for Russian propaganda in the country.

Pro-Russian and anti-western messages

Both ethno-nationalist and pro-Russian narratives are often present in far-right discourse on social media. These messages have a tendency to be based on unverified information and disinformation.

As part of media monitoring conducted by our research centre, the Democracy Research Institute (DRI), we studied online media, including Facebook pages, which actively promote far-right ideas in Georgia. Most of these Facebook pages were found to be spreading false information and Russian propaganda. The far-right groups actively use online media and social networks to spread their ideas and attract followers. Consequently, the websites that often host far-right respondents and accounts acted as the subjects of our investigation on media monitoring.

Our results showed that the media outlets' editorial policies were different from each other. Their political messages and respondent lists are also different. Despite

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this, the spread of pro-Russian ideas, along with anti-Western rhetoric, was clearly evident. In addition, media outlets often promote hate speech material and misinformation. In particular, websites such as *Georgia and the World, Saqinform* and *Sputnik Georgia* displayed a high level of Euroscepticism and pro-Russian propaganda. Materials published on these websites are both in Georgian and Russian. The Russian populist media outlet in Georgia is *Sputnik Georgia*, which is highly active online. *Sputnik* was founded as part of the Russian state-run news agency, *RIA Novosti*, following a government order on December 9th 2013. Its Director General, Dmitry Kiselyov, is renowned for his loyalty to Vladimir Putin. *Sputnik* also owns a press centre in Tbilisi that is actively used by pro-Russian and anti-Western NGOs. These groups include Eurasian Choice and the Eurasian Institute.

The Democracy Research Institute has continued to research far-right discourse online. We have found that the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has become a key focus for the majority of Georgia's far-right Facebook pages. The pandemic is being used to spread anti-Western and anti-liberal ideas, which are often based on misleading information. Georgian media expressing pro-Russian attitudes has actively supported the spread of misinformation regarding the coronavirus, as well as conspiracies about microchips. These were first spread on Russian online media outlets, including zavtra.ru, fonds36k.ru and svpressa.ru.

Discourse of far-right groups

Georgian far-right groups often use Facebook to share their views and attract followers. Their anti-liberal discourse usually involves demonising and discrediting western liberalism, as well as spreading xenophobic and homophobic narratives. This is contrasted with the desires to encourage the protection of national traditions, values and cultural identities. However, different far-right groups have adopted different outlooks and this is made clear regarding Russia and the West. For instance, some of the groups focus on nationalist narratives and anti-liberalism, while other groups, particularly those connected to organisations in Russia, are more likely to communicate xenophobic or homophobic viewpoints. As a result, we have identified various kinds of far-right discourse during our monitoring of Georgian media. This has also helped us to further examine the historical context of these ideas.

Levan Vasadze is a businessman and founder of Georgia's Demographic Revival Foundation, which is part of the ultra-conservative World Congress of Families. Having spent the early 1990s in the United States, he became increasingly radicalised following studies in Moscow. There he entered the world of business and

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studied theology. He is known to be to a close friend of Aleksandr Dugin, Russia's Eurasianist ideologue.

In 2019 Vasadze claimed that his followers will create a "legion" charged with "establishing order" in Tbilisi ahead of the capital city's planned LGBT Pride event. He also noted that members of the legion will be "equipped with belts", in order to tie the hands of those who try to "propagandise depravity" and to remove them from public areas. Vasadze also said that the vigilante units will patrol the capital and he threatened that if any of the vigilantes are taken into custody, his followers will break police cordons and confront officers "with shepherd's staffs".

An investigation has been launched under Article 223 of the Criminal Code of Georgia, which forbids the formation, conducting, participation, or abetting of "illegal groupings". For the purposes of Georgia's criminal code, these "groupings" are any organisations not approved by Tbilisi that are armed with "tools or items that could be used to harm or destroy either animate or inanimate objects". The creation of such groups is punishable by six to 12 years in prison. It is likely that the investigation was only started formally after public outcry. It is also interesting that Vasadze was only interrogated three days after his declaration regarding the formation of vigilante groups. Several of his supporters were interrogated before him. The investigation, at the time of writing, is still ongoing.

There are also some allegations that far-right groups are useful to the Georgian government.

In other cases, Georgia's investigative bodies are usually more active. This hints at a certain degree of favouritism which only encourages a sense of impunity among Vasadze and his supporters. Therefore, we get the impression that the authorities have no real desire to respond to the group's alleged crimes and are only formally starting an investigation which will likely last years. Cases such as these are often quickly shelved and closed with little to no outcome. Developments such as this only reinforce assumptions that these groups enjoy the support of some government officials.

There are also some allegations that far-right groups are useful to the Georgian government. It is clear that authorities occasionally use these organisations to frighten and demonise liberals and other groups who disagree with Tbilisi. This is what happened during the "Bassiani events" in 2018 (which saw mass protests against police brutality during a raid on the Bassiani nightclub in Tbilisi and counter-protests by far-right groups – editor's note) and also during Tbilisi Pride in 2019. Even before these events, attacks against various groups at most resulted in small fines. It is clear that the responses to these crimes were inadequate and during my time as Ombudsman, numerous statements were made on those matters.

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Hate crimes

The recent ruling in the Vitali Safarov case is a classic example of a hate crime that was understood by the investigative bodies to simply be a murder. The verdict of the case was only changed thanks to the campaigning of human rights defenders, lawyers and NGOs. Safarov was a human rights campaigner who was killed by members of ultra-radical groups in the centre of Tbilisi because he was Jewish.

There has been some progress in terms of hate crime reporting and hate crime now has been named as the motive behind various criminal actions. According to OSCE data provided by Georgia's Ministry of Internal Affairs, the number of crimes motivated by hate has gradually increased since 2012. There were 13 cases of hate crime reported in 2012, 19 in 2014, 20 in 2015, and 44 in 2016. There was no data available for 2013. Moreover, the ministry has released a report claiming that 53 people were arrested for hate crimes in 2018. These crimes were motivated by racism, homophobia, xenophobia, and anti-Muslim sentiment.

The government, however, is still applying a double standard. It is impossible to fight against extremism by only reacting (often inadequately) in exceptional cases. There is no coordination among state institutions and there is a general impression that authorities are not fully aware of the devastating effects caused by encouraging these groups.

The Bassiani and Tbilisi Pride events illustrate how the "cultural divide" in Georgia has intensified in recent years, as well as how Georgian far-right groups are playing a significant role in creating this divide. The main concern is that Russia will use its soft power tools to encourage Georgian far-right groups, especially ahead of this year's parliamentary elections.

Growing polarisation in Georgia is even more likely in the future as these groups are against Western integration and continue to oppose those who support this path. By using propaganda, they will continue their attempts to alter the country's political orbit. Of course, this will not be possible without direct and indirect support from some members of the authorities. Indeed, the Kremlin has already had some success in this regard over the past few years. Therefore, it is crucial to continue watching these groups in order to see if they manage to increase their political influence. NEE

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Understanding the silent war

LASHA PATARAIA

It is important to understand the philosophy behind Russia's cyber capabilities since eastern and western actors have a different outlook. Cyber operations conducted from the West are government and military affiliated, while in the East they are mostly non-state players. The point is to have no proven link to a governmental entity allowing for plausible deniability.

I have been researching Russian cyber warfare and intelligence capabilities for more than a decade, and for all that time its significance and soft power was underestimated in Georgia. In order to assess the nature of ongoing Russian cyber operations against Georgia, we should start with the basics to better understand the role of cyber-security in today's global security environment. For decades, the world's most harmful threats were radical groups, terrorists and criminal organisations, intelligence agencies and military regimes. The weapons feared around the globe were weapons of mass destruction: chemical, biological, radioactive and nuclear. But there has been a significant shift in the global security landscape: after decades of a nuclear arms race between Russia and the United States, both shifted from being nuclear powers to cyber powers. Cyber capabilities are mostly hidden and can be used by anybody, and are thus more dangerous than traditional weapons. New threats have emerged as technology advances and we are now facing a fifth-dimensional warfare: the silent war.

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Russian capabilities

Cyber operations are cheap, easily accessible, inconspicuous – sometimes even stealthy – and have the element of plausible deniability. Cyber capabilities currently play a crucial role in collecting intelligence information and even conducting military operations. Threats from cyberspace can also create real, lethal damage in real life. The first thing to know about Russian cyber capabilities is that most of them are not that cyber at all. State-sponsored cyber-crime involves almost every law enforcement agency and special services, because of a "securitisation" scale in the Russian government. It also involves private companies, criminal organisations, NGOs, media, academia, the expert community, activists and individuals who have a key role not only in cyber operations, but in the extensive cyberspace propaganda campaigns. Russia, obviously, has a huge intelligence collection system, which was underestimated for many years. It has been growing and sharpening since the days of the KGB, which was once the strongest intelligence agency.

The first thing to know about Russian cyber capabilities is that most of them are not that cyber at all.

What exactly are Russia's cyber offensive capabilities? Some examples include: the very popular Cozy Bear / APT29 and Fancy Bear / APT28, the youth activists Nashi, one of the world's biggest anti-virus company Kaspersky, the private company Russian Business Network (RBN), and many others. Some IT companies implanted in countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) can also be tools for Russian intelligence services, gathering useful real-time data. One more example is Russian internet service providers (ISPs), which are both defensive and offensive tools. They can stand as an alternative and compelling communication channel with lots of features in case something goes wrong. They serve as an offensive tool since, through its structure, the ISP's customers can act as individual bots, which can be used to launch powerful cyber attacks such as "Layer 7", with new innovative forms of technical manipulation. During the years of my research, I have found hundreds of organisations, but the above-mentioned ones are the key players and, more importantly, the most relevant existing Russian cyber-offensive operations.

It is also important to understand the philosophy behind Russia's cyber capabilities since eastern and western players have a different attitude when it comes to cyber operations. Cyber operations conducted from the West are government and military affiliated, while in the East they are mostly non-state players, such as the Russian business network (an online cyber mafia) or the Syrian electronic army. The point is that non-state actors have no proven link to a governmental entity.

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The West is therefore using cyber capabilities as a governmental asset, while the East maintains plausible deniability.

Simple methods

The first and most important event in Russia's cyber attacks against Georgia can be traced to the 2008 war, which was the first real official cyber war in history. This is an issue of special importance for me as I had the opportunity to witness the events up close. This war strongly inspired me to lay the foundation for pioneer cyber-security institutions in the Caucasus region through the Caucasus Academy of Security Experts (CASE). In August 2008, Russia was preparing for a military invasion in Georgia, laying its foundations through propaganda and cyber attacks to position itself as a "peacekeeper". While the whole world was shocked by Russian aggression and the actual military warfare taking place on Georgian soil, the war was also taking place in cyberspace. First were the massive cyber attacks against important targets that were clearly strategically chosen by Russia: information agencies, blogs and media outlets. Then came governmental agencies and institutions which were the focal endpoints of the Russian strategy – the Georgian ministry of foreign affairs, consulates, embassies and foreign missions, as well as the official website of the president's administration. It became clear that the attacks were about disabling our information resources in order minimise the ability to fight Russian propaganda during its offensive.

Even though Russia successfully executed cyber attacks against well-defined targets, analysing the targets is not enough to see the bigger picture.

Even though Russia successfully executed cyber attacks against well-defined targets, analysing the targets is not enough to see the bigger picture – timing and methodology are equally important. Interestingly enough, and despite the complexity of the campaign, the methods used were not so innovative. At first, Russia needed tactical planning to conduct the campaign in a way to maintain plausible deniability: the attacks could therefore not originate from governmental infrastructure. Russia's reality was the following: they had extensive target lists, only a short period of time, and a need for machine power – they needed to find an alternative to governmental centres. What the Kremlin had, though, was a large population connected to the internet. Instead of running a network from powerful governmental servers, they used hundreds of thousands of internet users and their computers by infecting them with the ISP's and FSB's help.

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In this way, the Kremlin was able to maintain plausible deniability. The network of zombie computers with even more machine power than the governmental infrastructure could also provide them with time, since it was very difficult to track the source of attacks. A special system designed to intercept and manipulate local Russian networks, called SORM, came in handy during such operations. The botnet was launched and all the above-mentioned targets were attacked successfully. It is important to note that the aim of this campaign was to not steal information from a given target, but to disable it. Russian intelligence officers and affiliated groups on social media were sharing special software along with a list of targets to attack Georgian resources. One of the tools that I have retrieved and analysed from the Russian forum is explicitly designed for denial of service (DoS) attacks, which disables websites from functioning.

Lessons

The campaign against Georgia was similar to the cyber attacks against Estonia in 2007, when Russian intelligence services started aggressive cyber operations amid a disagreement related to the relocation of the Soviet monument of the Bronze Soldier of Tallinn. Yet the operations monitored in Estonia in 2007, in Lithuania (2008), and in Iran (2009) were never officially declared as cyber war. In order to define cyber attacks and cyber war as such, countries must either have a legislation defining the specific character of cyber war operations, or cyber attacks must be conducted along with actual conventional military operations. In the case of Georgia, the second one applies, as we had an ongoing military war following the Russian invasion.

Both the targets and the methodology were therefore strategically chosen. Russia was targeting information resources in order to have free ground to spread its disinformation and conduct propaganda campaigns. If we look back to the outcome of the war itself, despite every disruption and attack, our media and our government officials managed to spread the truth, which later enabled world leaders and organisations to declare their support and condemn the Russian aggression. Even though Georgians displayed heroic military capabilities, our army showed itself at its best after NATO's support and prep work through education, weaponry and infrastructure. Still, the war itself ended following the support of the international community, enabled by the successful monitoring of Russian propaganda.

The 2008 events should give us some lessons. Georgia did not declare the events as a cyber war when it had the chance. I was the first to define it as such, while diplomatic institutions did not present this issue to the international community.

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While the *New York Times*, *Computer World*, and other leading media outlets were talking about this war, Georgia did not push such coverage to prevent further Russian propaganda rhetoric. The 2007 events in Estonia were a wakeup call for that nation, after which they took cyber security extremely seriously and became one of the leading countries in the domain. Students at the Tallinn University of Technology studied the Georgian case for cyber warfare and a book titled *Georgia 1.0 was* published. Yet even after 12 years, Georgia has not learnt its lesson.

Shortly after the 2008 war, the Georgian Computer Emergency Response Team discovered cyber attack incidents coming from Russian security services designed to collect sensitive and confidential information from Georgian and American sources. The malicious software designed by Russian intelligence agencies was able to steal documents and had features to take snapshots of desktops, activate webcams and gather collected data on shadow servers. Starting from 2008 and still to this day, the Russians have used several approaches, including launching sophisticated attacks on specific websites or hosting providers, using satellite IT companies to retrieve sensitive information, spreading malware and especially Remote Access Trojan as a tool of cyber espionage.

Valuable experience

Cyber espionage, indeed, remains one of the main problems in the field. It is the most useful tool in the hands of criminals, intelligence agencies, corporate espionage, and even politicians and the media. These activities successfully gather information, fabricate facts and make an impact on certain informational campaigns. Cyber espionage is a tool that can provide a strong advantage both to governments and the private sector. Tools for spying are cheap, most of them are anonymous and very effective. Every intelligence agency is made to gather intelligence, be it classic human intelligence (HUMINT), signals intelligence (SIGINT) or cyber intelligence (CYBERINT). We should not be surprised that these actions are conducted however we rather need to think about the new ways to counter these strategies.

> Protracted conflicts have become a handy tool for the Kremlin to disrupt Georgia's development.

Russia continues to attack and Georgia is still under occupation. Protracted conflicts have become a handy tool for the Kremlin to disrupt our development. Georgian citizens from regions near areas of conflict are under constant pressure, and hybrid warfare is as active as ever. Cultural and economic expansion as a tool of

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Russian intelligence is exercised on a daily basis, and cyber space is not an escape. A few months ago, the Russians attacked Georgia's major hosting providers and more than 2,000 resources were defaced with the picture of the former president, Mikheil Saakashvili. Both the political situation and the pandemic have given an upper hand to Russian intelligence services interested in spreading disinformation. For me, everything that happens in Georgia seems to be a cyber exercise, which, after calibration and prototyping, will be exported to the West and elsewhere. In essence, Georgia has become a test field for designing more sophisticated cyber and intelligence operations.

Our value has to be our experience with being targeted by Russia. It is useful, if not vital. At the moment, we have already provided additional value to the intelligence community that no one has the luxury to underestimate. Today the international community is confronted with volatile, unpredictable threats. These challenges need to be faced adequately, and that is why now, more than ever before, there is a demand and dependence on information security and cyber security.

Lasha Pataraia is the founder and director of the Caucasus Academy of Security Experts.

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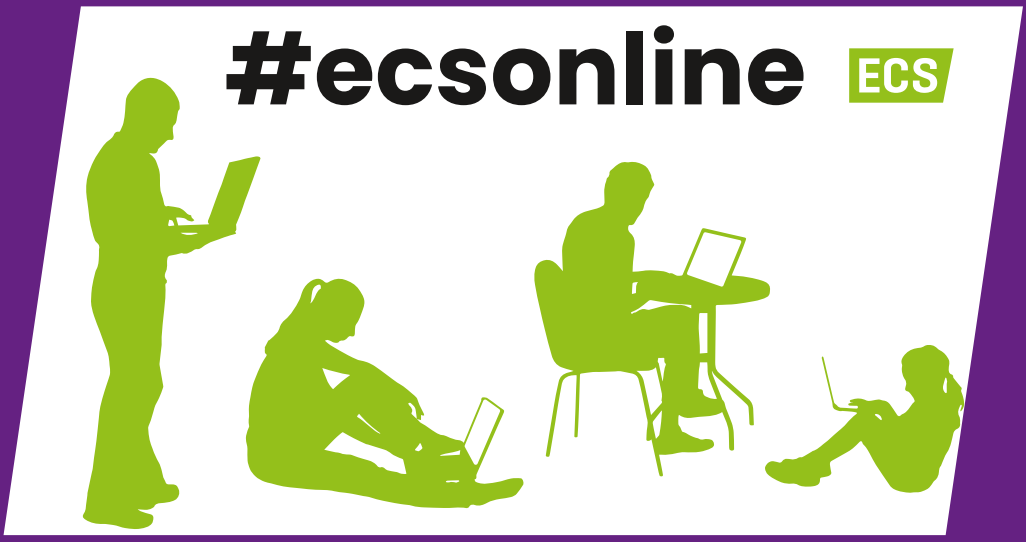

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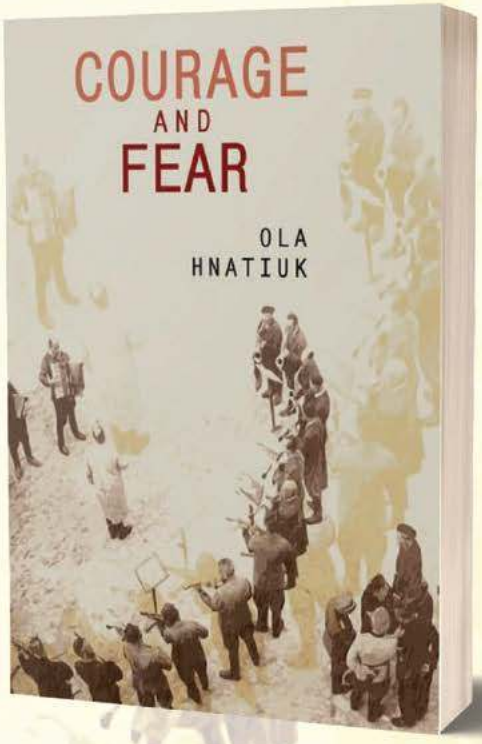

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The South Caucasus conundrum in the Black Sea

VICTOR KIPIANI

In the context of new levels of co-operation between western-aligned countries in the Black Sea region, NATO should focus on pursuing meaningful actions with regional partners that share its vision. At the same time, the Alliance should take advantage of every opportunity to make the region a platform for decreasing conflict and accommodating competing interests.

The recent NATO-Georgia Public Diplomacy Forum held in October 2019 rightly underlined the need for new ideas, skills and partnerships. It also stressed the need for viable security structures that are capable of meeting modern challenges. These needs are especially relevant when considering the current geopolitics and geoeconomics of the Black Sea region. Historically a space dominated by international trade, the area is now increasingly an arena of geopolitical competition and rivalry. This situation is only aggravated by the complexity of the conflicts that exist along its shores and by a notable lack of multilateral arrangements that are capable of ensuring some sense of balance. It is even more important for the three South Caucasus countries to develop a basic framework for co-operation. Certainly, even though the South Caucasus "big three" – Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan – do not agree on regional geopolitics, it is important that they coordinate their ambitions for trade and commerce. Reality, however, has proven that these ideas will be difficult to implement. This lack of agreement can be explained by the domestic and international outooks of these states.

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Interests old and new

The Black Sea region is unique in many respects. It is a perfect example of how interactions between "old" powers have been rendered more complex by the "new normals" of our changing world. For Russia, the geostrategic significance of the Black Sea has remained unchanged since the Crimean War of the 1850s. Despite this, the region has become even more important nowadays as NATO and the United States have replaced individual European states as Russia's main geopolitical competitors. This trend is also strengthened by Russia's belief that its neighbours are now acting as 'entry points' for Western attempts to shape its informational space and internal policy. The Kremlin's *modus operandi* reflects all these concerns. While trying to prevent neighbouring countries from escaping from its perceived sphere of influence in line with the ideas of Primakov's doctrine (who has called on Russia to strive for a multi-polar world), Russia aims to undermine their ability to build competitive and sustainable states. In purely strategic terms, the ultimate purpose of these objectives is to maintain "strategic depth" along Russia's borders. At the operational level, however, Moscow's actions rely upon a series of modern hybrid warfare tools designed to be used in "grey areas" or low-intensity conflicts. These actions follow the Gerasimov tactics, which focuses more on hybrid and information warfare.

It was not until the Warsaw Summit in 2016 that NATO pledged to increase its presence in this region.

NATO has long described the Black Sea region as "important for Euro-Atlantic security" (see, for example, the Bucharest Summit Declaration of 2008). However, it was not until the Warsaw Summit in 2016 that NATO pledged to increase its presence in the region. This promise was further emphasised in various NATO and NATO-Georgia Commission statements. Indeed, the latest statement by the North Atlantic Council in Batumi speaks of "new priorities for the coming period". Such strongly voiced interest is hardly surprising as Russia attempts to create a new Iron Curtain across the Black Sea. As a result, the region is now increasingly taking the form of a new defensive perimeter, running along the fault line of two normative worlds dominated by democracy and authoritarianism respectively.

In light of these developments, it appears that we are witnessing the reintroduction of George Kennan's containment strategy, which focused on the USSR after the Second World War. However, this comparison is only partially true. This is because many of the Alliance's inner contradictions are now challenging its ability to respond to modern asymmetrical warfare.

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Georgia as the "frontrunner"

The Black Sea region and Tbilisi's geopolitical outlook are marked by a series of specific features. For example, an "unfortunate" geography has effectively forced the country to exist as a sort of "in-between" state. This difficulty is only made worse by the fact that the Alliance continues to focus on the Baltic rather than the Black Sea. As a result, NATO appears unprepared to act near Georgia's borders, should the need arise. Recent NATO statements and decisions still continue keeping a disproportionately larger interest in the Baltic at the expense of the Black Sea region.

Another point of consideration is related to unrestricted and unimpeded maritime access to the Black Sea itself. In this respect, the long-standing issue of free passage through the Turkish Straits (Bosporus and Dardanelles) and the extent of the Montreux Convention's limitations are compounded by Turkish attempts to balance national and regional interests, as well as NATO's attempts to strengthen its regional presence. Coupled with its new ambivalency of a "special" relationship with Russia, Turkey is increasingly walking a fine line with regards to its interests. Furthermore, Moscow is now attempting to re-establish a "closed-sea" doctrine in the Black Sea. Russia has justified this goal by stating that it is essential to its own defensive interests in the area. By claiming de facto sovereignty over the Sea of Azov, future Russian moves may well endanger the wider Black Sea region and by extension the Eastern Mediterranean.

For the record, however, it must not be forgotten that of the six Black Sea states, three are now NATO members and two others have officially voiced their desires to join. This has effectively transformed the sea into a "NATO lake". For Georgia, this dangerous geographical position between Russia and the West has only increased the need for a highly sophisticated and rational policy. Therefore, Georgia's strategy should simultaneously involve robust domestic reforms and strong engagement with international partners in order to enhance national security.

Armenia and Azerbaijan in the Black Sea

A key feature of Azerbaijan's policy is to avoid a zero-sum game in the broader region of the Black and Caspian Seas. This is achieved by reconciling the expectations of all regional stakeholders. Baku is trying hard to balance its interests, never detaching itself fully from one regional player, should it temporarily cooperate with another. This is a maverick policy which requires an extensive knowledge of statecraft. By choosing this strategy, Azerbaijan avoids full political or economic integration, at least for the moment, with any of the regional powers. The Baku-

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Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline exemplifies how Baku extracts all of the possible benefits offered by its position at the crossroads of North-South and East-West transport networks.

Oddly enough, Azerbaijan remains a member of the Russia-dominated Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), but has not joined the Collective Security Treaty Organization. At the same time, it is also a member of NATO's Partnership for Peace programme. This is despite the fact that it has declined to host scheduled joint military exercises with the United States, possibly due to pressure from Moscow. Hikmat Hajizadeh, an Azerbaijani political scientist, summarised the essence of Azerbaijani policy, stating that "[We are] a neutral country and there can be no danger to you via our territory".

Armenia has great potential to co-operate and play a part in regional transportation, but is destined to be a "prisoner of regional geopolitics" for the foreseeable future. First and foremost, the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh still places tremendous pressure on the country due to the continuous need for material and physical resources. Moreover, Armenia is a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, which further restricts its foreign policy decisions. Yerevan specifically has a defence pact with Moscow, which also arms Baku.

All in all, Armenia continues to resemble a Russian protectorate. This situation has been created by Moscow through the strengthening of autocratic governance and pro-Kremlin economic agreements within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union. This provides Moscow with a strong influence on Yerevan, as it meddles in its internal affairs. It also helps Moscow to constrain Armenia's broader policymaking in relation to both European and Euro-Atlantic agendas. There is hope, however, that potential co-operation with Georgia, as well as a possible breakthrough in Armenia-Turkey relations, could allow the country to develop a more independent voice.

Hurdles, puzzles, outlooks

As Georgia's regional security environment in the Black Sea and Middle East faces rapid change, the country is searching increasingly for options that will strengthen its security. These options may come in a variety of forms, but must always be considered in a cautious manner. For instance, a recent – and highly controversial – study by the RAND Corporation entitled "A Consensus Proposal for a Revised Regional Order in Post-Soviet Europe and Eurasia" discusses a possible "third way" for countries located between Russia and the West. The think tank has proposed various mechanisms for easing existing tensions through the establish-

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ment of a new regional order. At the same time, Georgia could instead sign a defence treaty with the United States, its key strategic partner. This would help the country bypass ongoing uncertainty regarding the question of NATO's expansion near Russia's borders, as well as negate Moscow's veto rights.

When speaking about NATO in the Black Sea region and the idea of Georgian membership, one must bear in mind that, in addition to rifts between member states over the idea of the Alliance increasing its presence in Russia's "near abroad", there is also the difficult issue of ongoing "ethnic" conflict. Of course, Moscow is very much aware of the issues faced by the Black Sea countries in relation to their multicultural societies and has attempted to exploit such problems for its own gain. This policy of "divide, deter and dominate" has been met with no clear strategy from the West. That being said, the West must realise once and for all that these supposedly "ethnic" conflicts in the region are actually geopolitical. Subsequently, NATO should formally welcome Georgia as a fully-fledged member, since offering Tbilisi "just enough partnership" merely increases Russian hostility.

In light of the new level of co-operation between the countries of the Black Sea region, the Alliance must focus on working even more closely with regional partners that share its vision. At the same time, NATO must remain open to opportunities that may allow for the reduction of regional tension. Might this be feasible, in the long run, through agreement on the principle that the Black Sea region serves as a bridge between Europe, the Caspian Sea and Central Asia? Certainly, it may be possible, should the Alliance create a meaningful Baltic-Black Sea strategy and Black Sea countries manage to balance their conflicting interests.

It is in the interests of the South Caucasus countries to realign their desires as much as their egos may allow. Various proponents of a new multipolar world foresee the growing importance of rivalry between emerging geopolitical "poles". This would subsequently impact the ability of individual states to protect their own economic and security interests, as well as their overall voice in a changing global order. As a result, only a handful of truly sovereign states may remain. Others, particularly small states, are bound to sacrifice their own sovereignty in the name of a safer, more prosperous world. It is also to be seen how COVID-19 will impact the "moving sands" of the regional geopolitical scene while such impact is to be assessed thoroughly and specifically.

These ideas are something that Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan should be actively discussing. They should now attempt to identify common goals that may bring together their sovereign interests. That would hopefully encourage some new prospects for a peaceful and prosperous Black sea region. NEE

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Geopolitics and coronavirus

A survey of experts

This special section is dedicated to looking at what impact COVID-19 may have on the shifting geopolitics in the region of Eastern Europe. We asked a group of experts for their input and analysis on how relations between Europe, the Eastern Partnership and Russia could develop as a result of the pandemic and what might come next. Will this virus and the crisis fundamentally change relations and geopolitics – and if so in what way?

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COVID-19 not to spare Eastern Europe from great power competition

ALENA KUDZKO

Photo courtesy of Alena Kudzko

Despite official pleasantries on overcoming COVID-19 together, the pandemic still has not instilled a spirit of good faith co-operation between global actors. The crisis, to the contrary, has accelerated, exacerbated, and laid bare rivalrous trends that pre-dated its existence. While there is little reason to hope that the countries of Eastern Europe will be spared from this competition of great powers, the changes will be less profound than it might first seem. Europe, Russia, China and the United States will, in particular, be the outside players to watch.

The European Commission has set forth its geopolitical aspirations. Marshalling solidarity and consolidating a coherent EU foreign policy was a challenge even before COVID-19. Now faced with the financial strain of salvaging its own healthcare systems and economies, the EU will need to make do with fewer financial resources and institutional capacity in its outside engagement. In making these decisions, the EU is especially aware that its relevance and global ambition will be judged by how effectively it can address needs in its own neighbourhood. With the EU inclined to focus southward, the Eastern neighbourhood is not currently in pole position for attention.

Policy towards the Western Balkans brings more consensus and clarity. While there is still disagreement on the process of enlargement to the region, the agenda is backed by influential voices in the EU. On the eastern front, Europe has already abandoned its end-of-history thinking about the scale of transformation it can deliver. It has also learned that economic, democratic and security progress is neither linear nor irreversible. While recognising the value of strategic patience, the EU seems to be at a loss for novel ideas. Incremental updates to the Eastern Partnership agenda are laudable but hardly sufficient in light of the scale of the challenge at hand.

The EU's own east-west divide is not helping the situation. Exasperated

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by democratic backsliding in Central Europe, the opinion that the enlargement to the region was a mistake is not uncommon among western members. Having lost some of their lustre, Central Europeans are currently not in the best position to sway others towards adopting their policy goals and ambitions. Any perceptions of an EU solidarity deficit in a post-COVID-19 world will compound this effect. The southern members of the EU had already prioritised issues to the south and harboured fewer concerns about Russia. If solidarity is not forthcoming on the economic downturn ahead, there will be less incentive for these southern EU countries to convey more empathy and invest time and resources in the East.

Russia seized the crisis as an opportunity to project an amicable image to Europe by sending aid to Italy and other countries. But it has been grappling with containing the spread of the virus at home. The toll inflicted by the global drop in oil prices will only exacerbate the challenge the country faces in reviving its economy. Growing Chinese assertiveness in the region will not help ameliorate the situation either. With the global economy in freefall, China is likely to emerge in better shape than Europe or Russia. With its global ambitions incorporated into domestic thinking, China will have fewer qualms, compared to Europe, about pursuing outside investment opportunities. It is entirely plausible that Chinese-backed loans could be the only option on the market. Often with few strings attached in the short-term, governments facing economies ravaged by the crisis might have little alternative regardless of the notorious length of strings attached over the long-term.

Russia, for its part, is committed to supplying oil to China and is likely to turn to China's more affordable and trusted computer hardware over western offers in order to develop its digital infrastructure. The Chinese footprint on the region, and on Russia, will be immense. Emmanuel Macron has already attempted to use this China factor as bait for Putin to improve relations with Europe. While it is not unthinkable that Russia might want to improve relations with the EU, Putin's regime is unlikely to change. Nor are there convincing signs of a distinctively new foreign policy in Russia. With mutual trust long gone, even the health crisis has been interwoven into the geopolitical agenda and become characterised by habitual EU and US recriminations on disinformation, interference and manipulation.

In the past, Putin has relied on foreign policy manoeuvres to boost his domestic political standing against a poorly performing economy. And, moreover, Crimea and Georgia helped achieve desired ratings. Another foreign policy move cannot be ruled out given that domestic support has reached its pre-Crimea lows. While Russia is not likely to halt investments in its military forces and aspirations, a continued US commitment to underwriting security guarantees in Eastern Europe is less certain. This is

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not a new COVID-19 development but rather part of a long discussed pivot away from Europe. Despite talk of European strategic autonomy, Europe has not yet demonstrated that it has the capacity to project security. And regardless of the scale of US commitment, the idea of investing more into security guarantees in Eastern Europe remains inimical to many European countries. This leaves a situation where Russia is likely to stay put, China creeps further and deeper in, and the US risks providing a greater vacuum to fill.

Although interests and goals will continue to diverge, all actors in the region will have reasons to extend co-operation. Relying on as much help as it can get from the US and other partners, the EU has the greatest capacity – but also interest – in channelling a meaningful dialogue in the region. But to optimally secure the shared benefits that could be accrued from Russia's potential openness to new approaches and Chinese investment and business interests, the EU needs to invest in resources to protect economies devastated by COVID-19, renew its effort to solve protracted conflicts in the region, develop its own defence and security capabilities and support the resilience of countries in the region. This will not prove to be cheap or politically convenient. But European leaders are currently enjoying record high level approvals at home. They should seize this window of opportunity to include the Eastern neighbourhood into the agenda for the benefit of geopolitical and economic interests of Europe and the region alike. NEE

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Post-COVID Eastern Europe

Equation with many unknowns

WOJCIECH KONOŃCZUK

Photo courtesy of Wojciech Konończuk / OSW

From the very early days of the global COVID-19 pandemic, discussions about how it will change the world began. The overwhelming majority of commentators of international affairs believe that Europe (and the rest of the world) will be a completely different place than before the coronavirus. Although the social and economic consequences of the pandemic are already obvious, it is definitely too early to tell that the crisis will fundamentally change the international political order and the way the economic system will be organised. The big paradox is that, in spite of the far-reaching prognosis that "the world will not be the same anymore", there is an expectation that things will return to the way they were before.

Thus, what should be expected? Any honest observer should acknowledge that at present (as of early June) it is impossible to forecast the post COVID-19 world. This, to be sure, also applies to the situation in Eastern Europe and its relations with the European Union. This task can be compared to an equation with many unknowns. Yet, let's try to determine the present state of play in the region which could be helpful in shedding some light on its future. Here are some observations.

First, Eastern European countries have been affected by the coronavirus to varying degrees. Belarus has the largest number of infected cases per capita (1/233), significantly surpassing Russia (1/366) and Moldova (1/475); the situation in Ukraine is much better (1/1,583). However, the region is only halfway through the pandemic – numbers are expected to substantially increase.

Second, there is no doubt the various lockdowns will hit the economies of those countries fairly hard. According to the most optimistic scenario, GDPs will fall this year by 5–7 per cent. In Russia, the unprecedented collapse in crude oil prices has enhanced the crisis and greatly limits the government's budget spending. In Belarus, the recession already started as a result of the interruption of Russian oil supplies and will be further intensified by the pandemic.

Third, as the economic situation is strongly related to general social stabil-

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ity, the key question concerns political implications of the pandemic. In Russia, President Vladimir Putin's popularity is at a record low. Fewer state funds means more fights within ruling elite factions. Although the Kremlin in the past effectively tried to channel people's anger in the form of foreign interventions, this time they face numerous obstacles. In Belarus, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka faces the most difficult election ever (August 9th) and the domestic conditions are particularly unfavourable. There are many signals that the public is angry with the authorities due to their failure in fighting the coronavirus, which has caused a high infection rate. In addition, opposition candidates are stronger than usual this time around. All these factors create a picture of uncertainty and increase the risk of a forceful solution to Belarus's unfrozen relations with the EU. Probably the person with the most stable position in the region is the president of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, where at least half the voters still declare their confidence in him.

Fourth, the pandemic may be a good moment for the EU to strengthen its presence in the Eastern Partnership countries. A few waves of swift and smart financial assistance packages by the European Commission have been noticed and contribute to improving its image in the region. The EU has also a chance to be a key foreign partner – extending a helping hand to its neighbours. However, much will depend on how the EU will handle the pandemic at home and what kind of EU will emerge out of the crisis. Recently, the launching of a 750-billion-euro recovery package proposal has been an optimistic sign of the EU's vitality. Yet in the next few months it will face many internal and external challenges. Those related to its Eastern neighbours will probably remain in the shadows of issues like its relations with China and the US. At the same time, Russia remains among the EU's external priorities and pre-COVID-19 calls of Emmanuel Macron to essentially reset Brussels' ties with Moscow will definitely return to the "menu".

Overall, it is impossible to know what comes after the pandemic since too many elements are still uncertain, including the depth of the economic crisis and when scientists will find an effective vaccine against the virus. Although major shifts in international and economic systems due to COVID-19 seem unlikely, there could still be real trouble, especially in Belarus and Russia. Lessons learnt from history show that huge cataclysms did not so much generate fundamental changes, but accelerated those that were inevitable anyway. If it happens this time, the unexpected pandemic may be a turning point in the history of post-Soviet Eastern Europe. NEE

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Gone with the virus

How the pandemic makes Russian strategy evanescent

ANDREY MAKARYCHEV

Photo courtesy of Andrey Makarychev

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in three major blows to the Kremlin's international strategy, thus making it adjust to much less favourable circumstances than when Vladimir Putin annexed Crimea in 2014 and disrupted relations with the West. First, the crisis has shown the dysfunctional inefficiency of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). The most illustrative example is the current escalation of Moscow's tensions with Minsk, exacerbated by the two governments' dissimilar policies towards the coronavirus which was projected onto the symbolic competition over the Victory Day parade on May 9th, which was cancelled by Putin but held by Lukashenka in spite of the risks. Mainstream television channels in Russia and Belarus "have engaged in a war of words, accusing each other of failing to deal with the pandemic and spreading disinformation". According to information leaked to the media, the Kremlin is allegedly looking for contacts in Belarus who might run the country after Lukashenka. Against this background, some experts deem that the Belarus officialdom seems to be more interested in developing economic projects with Chinese partners than within the EEU.

The Moscow-Minsk tug-of-war is revelatory of a more structural problem the Kremlin has to face: COVID-19 neither fostered regional integration, nor boosted Russia's leadership in the post-Soviet space. At the recent EEU e-summit on May 19th, the president of Kazakhstan, Qasym-Jomart Toqaev, has overtly refused to support the inclusion of health care (!), education and science, along with customs regulation and customer protection measures into the sphere of the EEU competences. Russia's long-standing debate on gas price with Armenia and Belarus continues against the backdrop of the extremely challenging Moscow dynamics in the global energy market – thanks to the decision of the German court, the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, costing 11 billion US dollars, becomes (geo)politi-

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cally far less useful. Due to decreasing demand for oil in the world, Russia will not be able to use cheap energy as a carrot for buying loyalties from its Eurasian partners.

All these trends diminish Russia's ability to keep playing the role of the driver of Eurasian integration, and use it as a trump card in a power game with the European Union. Surprisingly, even a Valdai Club expert, representing Russia's mainstream discourse, recognised that "Eurasian economic integration has begun to stall. Since the EEU Court is a practically non-functioning institution, the member countries are very poor at fulfilling their mutual obligations … It is possible that the participating countries now consider it more profitable to slow down and achieve greater sustainability, having temporarily sacrificed extensive development, both in terms of areas of co-operation and in the levels of the arrangement's implementation."

Secondly, since the outbreak of COVID-19 Russian mainstream media have increasingly depicted China as a source of threat rather than an ally, which appears to be a meaningful departure from Moscow's turn from the West to East. Russia not only closed its borders with China earlier than its western borders, many of its public commentators implicitly admit that Russia is a second-rank player against the backdrop of the two "techno-economic blocs – American and Chinese". It remains to be seen how ruinous these sober assessments will be for Russia's traditional affection to multipolarity, as well as its penchant for equality with Beijing.

Third, none of Putin's proposals – "green corridors" and the alleviation of sanctions against countries most affected by the pandemic – was internationally supported, which explains why many Russian experts do not seem to have illusions about any structural transformations in relations with the West for the foreseeable future, unless Russia changes its policies. Putin's reiteration of Russia's "distinct civilisational mission in the world" does not help much in this respect. The COVID-19 crisis makes it clear that Russia cannot afford an expensive global arms race, and the financial and technological gap with the United States will only be widened. One may agree that for the Kremlin "opportunities to score big on the cheap are growing ever scarcer". Of course, Russia can take some short-lived advantage of performative actions such as the recent "humanitarian missions" in Italy and Serbia, yet they do not alter the long-term tendencies that are central for Moscow's conflict with the EU and NATO. The COVID-19 crisis has only amplified the perception of Russia in the West as a country whose government is complicit in the mass falsification of information, which, in the current situation, exacerbates a lack of trust and further shrinks the scope for partnership.

Putin, to a large extent, fell victim to his own strategy of attaching high symbolic, almost sacred, importance to his policies that otherwise could have been

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implemented on a more technical background – from partnership with China to Eurasian integration, from Ukraine policy to relations with the West. But today, Russia has to accept that major problems are to be expected not from the West, which year after year has been portrayed as Russia's major enemy, but from those expected to be Russia's closest allies – China and Belarus. What can be anticipated in the short run is a more balanced discourse towards the EU and Russia's western neighbours. The change in tone of the official narrative might be expected only in the medium term, and will largely depend on the extent to which Russian citizens would be able and willing to de-legitimatise Putin's domestic rule and foreign policies. Their first chance will come on July 1st with the "people's vote" on constitutional changes initiated by Putin to prolong his presidency and, by doing so, to further politically alienate Russia from Europe.

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Bracing for impact

Shifting geopolitics in the South Caucasus

RICHARD GIRAGOSIAN

Photo courtesy of Richard Giragosian

For the three countries of the South Caucasus, the sudden emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has reconfigured domestic politics, reordered policy priorities and recommitted each government to respond to the overwhelming crisis in public health. For Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, the urgency of managing the immediate crisis will soon be matched by the equally daunting task of ensuring economic recovery and enabling social repair. But beyond the need for containing the virus and the necessity for economic restoration, the deeper significance of the COVID-19 crisis is even more profound, as shifts in regional geopolitics now underway exert even deeper implications.

These geopolitical shifts in the South Caucasus region can already be seen. And although each country will have to "brace for impact" in the face of these looming shifts and coping with challenges of different degrees, the region as a whole is already subject to the effects from a new shared geopolitical landscape. More specifically, there is a set of three distinct geopolitical trends that directly impact the South Caucasus. The three elements of this triad of geopolitical trends include: energy, which has already become a downward driver of global economic decline; economics, when the traditional global supply chain, "just in time" model of highly interconnected trade in the globalised marketplace is on the verge of collapse; and security, where public health is now recognised as a more urgent threat than any external threat or consideration of border defence. As each of these three geopolitical trends and shifts – in energy, economics and security – poses serious repercussions, the longer-term impact will be largely irreparable.

Beginning with the first of these three trends, evidence of the shift in geopolitics is already clear in terms of energy, where profit and power from oil and gas no longer offer comparable dividends to energy producers. With the immediate collapse of global energy prices, producing countries, like Azerbaijan, can no longer rely on guaranteed energy wealth.

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The over-dominance on the energy sector, coupled with a lack of diversification, has already challenged the government in Azerbaijan, with wider implications as the sharp fall in energy exports only weakens its capacity to respond to the coronavirus crisis.

Important energy transit countries, like Georgia, will also suffer an immediate decline in revenue, matched by a downgrading of strategic significance as pivotal transit states. For Armenia, which has no oil or gas resources, the significance of its nuclear power plant is likely to increase, especially as it is the only country with a nuclear facility in the region. At the same time, both Georgia and Armenia will probably move further and faster in adopting more environmentally-friendly energy choices, thus aligning closer to EU standards of "green" environmental policies while also looking more to hydroelectricity and renewable energy (like solar and wind alternatives) in response to the broader decline of hydrocarbons.

Just as energy poses a substantial geopolitical impact on the region, the economics of the post-COVID-19 period will also transform the South Caucasus. The spillover from the dramatic revision of the traditional global supply chain, based on a model of highly interconnected trade, will likely result in new changes to the pattern and direction of trade. While this will affect agriculture throughout the region, it will also pose new challenges to Armenia's reliance on mining and mineral exports, magnified by both lower prices and greater volatility in global commodity markets.

Moreover, the shift in economics through the recovery phase will also result in wider disparities in wealth and income and will require new investment in a more equitable social "safety net" in each country. Additionally, there will be a sharp decrease in foreign direct investment in the region, as traditional investors and sources of finance will be distracted by competing priority areas. For the South Caucasus, this will only further alter the region's economic profile and investment climate, as Chinese investment may replace Russian investment and outmatch western aid in the coming years.

Beyond energy and economics, the third trend of security is also significant, and will impose a redefinition of threat and a reinterpretation of security. Obviously, public health has already been regarded as a more urgent threat than other external threats or military considerations of border defence. Within the region itself, the post-crisis security environment may also include a new risk: renewed hostilities over pre-existing "frozen conflicts". Such a scenario would be based on the temptation to exploit weakness as an opportunity to act militarily, possibly a renewed military offensive by Azerbaijani forces against Nagorno-Karabakh, or, less likely but still possible, a Georgian attempt to restore control over its Russian-backed separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

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Outside of the region, however, regional security may actually be bolstered as Russia will be less capable of power projection as it becomes more invested in the imperative of its own domestic stabilisation. At the same time, the necessity for economic recovery amid a collapse of the global energy sector may induce Iran to become more of a constructive, and even productive, contributor to security and stability in the region.

Most importantly, however, is the fact that each of these three geopolitical trends will impose irreparable and lasting change across a wide range of areas. In a cumulative convergence, these trends will only entrench lasting changes in the geopolitics of the South Caucasus. While the region is now "bracing for impact", it remains far too early to accurately assess the capacity for weathering these shifts, but also far too late to ignore the impact and severity of these changes. Therefore, for the South Caucasus, the geological tectonics of shifting geopolitics will pose a degree of unprecedented change with unparalleled opportunities. NEE

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The Eastern Partnership and Russia in the post-COVID world

KARINA SHYROKYKH

Photo courtesy of Karina Shyrokykh

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a severe negative impact on the economies of countries under lockdown. The OECD predicts a decline in annual GDP growth of up to two percentage points for each month that containment measures are in place. In the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries and Russia, the negative impact of the coronavirus pandemic is further exacerbated by the collapse in oil prices, which directly hits Russia, Azerbaijan and Belarus. In particular, the oil-price drop will likely push Russia into recession, with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimating a 5.5 per cent decline in real GDP in this year.

In addition, playing an important role in the economies in the region – particularly in Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – remittances inflow from migrant workers have dramatically decreased, further undercutting the economic situation in the region. Ukraine, being the largest recipient of remittances in the region, receiving nearly 16 billion US dollars in 2019, may suffer the most. According to Łukasz Kozłowski, chief economist at the Federation of Polish Entrepreneurs, Ukraine may face a loss of four billion dollars in remittances this year alone due to the crisis. And, moreover, the negative effects are further amplified by the ongoing war that Russia waged in the east of the country.

In the light of the economic decline awaiting the region, what do relations between the European Union, Eastern Partnership countries and Russia look like? And how could relations develop in the aftermath of the crisis? One observation that emerges out of the crisis is that the EU's policy towards its eastern neighbours is very unlikely to decay. Instead, it is more likely to develop new foci on economic and sectoral co-operation, as well as becoming more tailored to meet the specific needs of the individual countries. For example, the EU, as a measure of solidarity, has allocated two assistance packages to support their neighbours in need. The first emergency package, mobilised by the European Commission, allocated over 960 million euros to the

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region in early April. Its objective is to support countries' response to the public health crisis and the resulting country-specific humanitarian needs, as well as to support capacities to deal with the pandemic and mitigate the immediate economic consequences.

Acknowledging the damaging effect that the ongoing crisis has on the economic and financial stability in the neighbourhood shortly after the first package, the EU further allocated 3 billion euros of macro-financial assistance in the form of loans to help address the economic fallout of the pandemic. The funds are to complement the IMF's and World Bank's assistance in helping enhance economic stability.

The preparedness to step in and provide support in times of turbulences clearly indicates that the EaP region is of importance for the EU and is unlikely to be ignored in the aftermath of the crisis. At the same time, the extent of co-operation is likely to differ from country to country in the region. Economic co-operation is likely to receive more attention than political integration. Given no particular signals of membership perspectives, the COVID-19 crisis is likely to put aside the political integration agenda, giving priority to economic and sectoral co-operation. Both the EU and the various countries which have membership aspirations (i.e., Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine) are more likely to focus on more immediate issues.

However, the absence of membership perspectives does not necessarily imply the slowing down of reforms or sliding backwards. Rather sectoral co-operation and loans may include stricter conditionality. Although the current macro-financial assistance foresees the allocation of funds with conditions of respect for democratic mechanisms, the rule of law and human rights, those are too few and rather unspecified regarding what exactly is expected.

As the Eastern Partnership countries are likely to need long term assistance, the EU could seize the opportunity and develop more nuanced conditions to promote reforms in the region. As the case of the so-called "anti-Kolomoiskyy" law that forbids the return of nationalised banks to their former owners in Ukraine demonstrates, it is possible to overcome the lack of political will and adopt legislation that could potentially hurt the business interests of political elite and their cronies.

Missing the opportunity to further develop co-operation with the region, on the other hand, could make EaP countries turn to illiberal regional powers for assistance, such as China or Russia, who would exploit the crisis to strengthen their political and economic ties in the region. For example, Russia was prepared to provide Moldova with financial assistance of 200 million euros. Likewise, China provided Moldova and Ukraine with medical assistance. Turkey also portrays itself as providing vital assistance to its neighbours. Such instances of assistance are then heavily exploited by these illiberal actors, further pro-

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moting a false narrative that the EU is doing nothing, while they provide vital help to those in need within the EU and outside of it.

All in all, the COVID-19 pandemic is unlikely to reduce co-operation between the EU and the EaP region. On the contrary, as the economic impact of the crisis becomes more severe, the EU's role will be crucial in ensuring economic stability across own borders. Given the need of assistance to EaP states and helping them cope with the impact of the crisis, the EU can use this opportunity to further promote the rule of law and democratic standards in the region. Whether the EU will succeed in using this opportunity will reveal itself in the forthcoming fall, as a few countries prepare to hold presidential (in Belarus and Moldova), parliamentary (in Georgia) and local (in Ukraine) elections.

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Eastern Partnership in times of coronavirus

PÉTER STEPPER

Photo courtesy of Péter Stepper / AJKC

The COVID-19 pandemic affected global markets in a very similar way to the 2008 financial crisis. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the 2020 outlook does not project three per cent growth anymore, but a sharp contraction of the same number (minus three per cent), which will be worse than the loss in 2008. It is a clear threat for financial stability across the globe. Furthermore, it is important to emphasise that crisis management opportunities differ from region to region, creating greater challenges for countries lacking financial liquidity. Financial reserves are necessary to help the banking system and small businesses to survive the temporary setback. Eastern neighbours of the European Union have to tackle economic challenges: they look for help in any form of financial assets either coming from the East or West. Rivalry for the friendship of Eastern countries is anything but new in the imminent neighbourhood of Russia. The fate of this geopolitical game fundamentally depends on the success of recent crisis management efforts. In the meantime, Russia's intentions to exploit every situation are to be expected – for instance, the frozen conflicts in Georgia and Moldova or the recent situation in eastern Ukraine. However, the Eastern Partnership still exists and, as recently noted on the pages *New Eastern Europe*: "[Russian] efforts to derail and destroy it have clearly failed."

The European Union uses a hybrid approach in terms of its development policy. EU activities are based both on a communitarian perspective (local ownership) and liberal modernisation (deregulation, support of democracy). A mixture of modernisation by democracy building and maintaining stability by giving economic support is a compromise. Coercive diplomacy and withholding financial assets to enforce democratic reforms is not what most EU members and Eastern Partnership (EaP) states are looking for now. The EaP is increasingly heterogeneous and inclusive, supporting not just the front-runners, but all six countries. As Petras Auštrevičius recently said, "There is not only one cate-

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gory, or a one-size of partnership fitting all countries, and the EU shall remain open-minded" for every kind of co-operation with these countries. Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus might not seek EU membership, but they still maintained their partnership.

Moreover, we have to realise that, despite Carl Bildt's and Radoslaw Sikorksi's efforts in 2009, the EU's ambition towards the Eastern Partnership has never been high. In the period of 2010 and 2011, the EaP budget peaked around 600 million euros per year. To put it into perspective, resources for the common agricultural policy (CAP) for Poland exceeded 12 billion euros annually. Nevertheless, due to the expected economic hardships caused by the coronavirus pandemic, all foreign aid and development projects are essential for these countries, regardless of how little funds are available.

The European neighbourhood and enlargement policy is now represented by a Hungarian diplomat, Olivér Várhelyi, a vocal supporter of integration with the Western Balkans and someone who is fairly enthusiastic towards the EaP. According to Várhelyi, the European Commission has taken numerous actions on different levels such as responding to immediate needs, providing basic equipment to build healthcare infrastructures, and long-term economic help to provide financial liquidity. Assistance deployed to Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and some countries in the southern neighbourhood totalled to 3.3 billion euros.

Fighting the immediate consequences of COVID–19, the EU introduced an emergency support package of 80 million euros and 883 million euros for medium-term support of economic recovery. Armenia received 92 million euros for its immediate needs. Elderly people in Shirak, Tavush and Lori regions received humanitarian aid packages. Azerbaijan received 14 million euros in the form of direct aid, and with the help of EU funds, the Vocational Education Schools in several regions purchased equipment to produce personal protection garments for medical staff. Belarus has been the beneficiary of 60 million euros to support its short-term needs. Thanks to EU cross-border co-operation projects linking communities in Belarus, Ukraine and Poland, emergency medical services were available to help doctors in hospitals. Georgia received 183 million euros for immediate needs and started more EU-funded projects to produce safety equipment. A Georgian producer of medical textiles has produced 40,000 medical robes within a week after he was able to purchase 12 additional needlework machines. EU projects in Moldova were already in progress providing protection equipment such as gloves and masks for vulnerable people and medical staff; the country also received 87 million euros of direct financial support. In Ukraine, the EU supported resilience building, helped the transition to online education, and supported the fight against disinformation campaigns. Kyiv also received over 190 million euros in financial assistance.

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The COVID-19 crisis might bring about significant changes in some of the front-runner countries. The virus revealed the vulnerabilities within Ukraine because oligarchs could not overcome the crisis, and highlighted its remaining dependency on Russia. Russians continue to interfere into the matters of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region (so-called South Ossetia), and the chaos created by the pandemic helped Russian services kidnap opposition figures and supersede the situation little by little. Georgians also fear a possible Russian meddling in the upcoming elections.

The potential drop in domestic support for Putin could be a problem for Eastern Partnership countries as we might witness a more aggressive Russian foreign policy as a result. The same fears arose in Moldova, which was badly affected by the virus – the death numbers are fifteen times higher than in Georgia. In the meantime, pro-Russian political parties were looking for a loan agreement with Russia to finance liquidity problems. The Constitutional Court declared the loan invalid, partly because of its appendix related to Gazprom demands related to gas consumption in Transdniestria and Russia's idea to finance it with Moldovan public money. The upcoming elections in Moldova will be critical both for Moscow and Brussels. The margins are only about five to ten per cent: public opinion on the Russian loan deal and Transdniestrians with Moldovan passports will probably decide the fate of the next government.

COVID-19 in itself will not change anything in the region, but it can facilitate existing processes in every single EaP country. Therefore, the EU shall be extremely anxious to maintain good relations and remain a strong and credible partner of the eastern neighbour by supporting their economic recovery. NEE

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Georgia and COVID-19

The miracle of social and institutional resilience

BEATA GÓRKA-WINTER

Photo courtesy of Beata Górka-Winter

Shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, some forecasts on Georgia's prospects were apocalyptic – everything could have gone wrong. Although Georgia is ranked lower and lower each year (which, in this instance, means improvement) in the Fragile State Index since 2008, many had doubts if the conjunction of several factors would allow this small country in the South Caucasus to manage the incoming crisis effectively. While more than 40 per cent of the population still lives in mountainous, isolated areas, a robust inflow of tourists to the capital city as well as sea and ski resorts could have had a serious impact on the dynamic of the pandemic.

Extensive PR campaigns (#SpendYourSummerInGeorgia), the famous hospitality of Georgians, as well as business prospects, incentivised over nine million international travellers (almost twice as many as permanent residents) to visit the country in 2019, according to the Georgian National Tourism Administration. Tourists mainly come from Russia (despite the formal suspension of flights by the Russian government), other post-Soviet countries but also from Iran. Currently both of these countries are experiencing extremely high rates of COVID-19 cases. Moreover, concern was also expressed about Georgians working abroad returning to Georgia in large numbers from Western Europe.

Although the Georgian health sector (which is mostly privatised) improved some time ago and the number of medical staff and hospital beds is higher than some EU countries, there are still shortages in terms of medical equipment. For instance, there had been a small number of respirators in the country (only 3 ECMOs and about 2,000 respirators, half of which are already allocated to patients with other ailments). A large shortage of auxiliary medical staff (nurses predominantly), caused by massive emigration to the West, has also been of a great concern when dealing with the pandemic.

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COVID-19 patients are being admitted to nine hospitals, including the military hospital in Gori.

The possibility for a large number of COVID-19 cases was a legitimate concern in light of the demographic structure of the country. A sizable number of the population is over 65 (14.3 per cent of the total population) and three per cent are aged 80 or older. At the beginning of the pandemic it was widely believed that the virus would mostly target older populations. Against this background, in mid-March, when most EU countries were experiencing hundreds and even thousands of new cases every day, the total number of cases in Georgia was a mere 25. Over the next two months this number rose to over 700 cases, including 12 deaths – still nothing compared to most Western European countries, even if we take into consideration the alleged lack of sufficient testing.

The Georgian government responded fairly quickly to the virus with public health measures to curb the outbreak. International flights were suspended and a strict national lockdown was enforced: quarantines, curfews, a ban on public gatherings, including religious ceremonies (with the exception of masses held by the Orthodox Church). On March 21st a state of emergency was declared. Conscription planned for the spring season was suspended and educational and cultural establishments were closed. Movement was restricted, including a ban on private transportation (Marshrutkas) and private cars in order to prevent people from celebrating Easter with members of usually large families living in different parts of the country. To mitigate the economic consequences, the government introduced a control of prices for basic groceries, an unemployment benefit of 200 lari (55 euro) for six months as well as some tax exemptions.

The institutional response was led by the prime minister, Giorgi Gakharia, who established and is leading a coordination council to combat the pandemic. It is believed, however, that a crucial role was played by the biological lab in Tbilisi, created in 2011 by Georgia with assistance of the United States, which verifies samples from all over the country. Co-operation with the US in a variety of fields was coordinated by the United States Agency for International Development, while the US allocated 1.7 million US dollars to assist the Georgian government during the pandemic.

It is worth noting that the biological lab, known as the Lugar Lab, is the focal point of serious disinformation campaigns led by Russia, as a secret facility aimed at assembling biological weapons. What is worse, a former Georgian minister for state security, Igor Giorgadze, had supported these claims. The allegation had been dismissed by numerous reports by independent experts, but Georgian authorities are rightfully concerned about the intensity of such disinformation campaigns. Every time the flu season is in full swing in Georgia, rumours about the Lugar lab immediately spread. The Georgian government actually invited

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Russian officials to inspect the lab, but the offer was rejected. It was visited by a small number of Russia journalists, but efforts to change the image of the lab are futile and conspiracy theories continue to spread.

Other international institutions have also come to the rescue. As an effect of the "Team Europe" strategy, the European Commission granted Georgia 150 million euros (out of 960 million devoted for short and medium-term support for all Eastern Partnership states) in macro-financial assistance. The funds will be available for a year and disbursed in two instalments. No doubt, these loans are more than desirable by Georgian businesses, even if they by no means cover total losses. Notwithstanding the responses, no one is questioning the disastrous effect the coronavirus will have on the economy. Tourism, which will suffer the most, is an important part of the domestic economy, creating ten per cent of GDP and employing 500,000 people (a third of all workers, where unemployment is a pending problem). More than three billion dollars was generated from international tourism last year in Georgia.

What is more, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has approved a 100 million dollar loan to help Georgia contain the spread of the pandemic to mitigate the impact on businesses and protect the livelihoods of the most vulnerable, including women and children. The IMF is also discussing a package of "additional financing". The World Bank is offering Georgia 45 million euros to support the government to implement ongoing reforms and mitigate the economic impact of the pandemic. Georgia was also a beneficiary of NATO support. As early as April 3rd, the Alliance received a request for international assistance from the Georgian government. Some countries like Poland were also quick to deliver assistance to Georgia.

Against all odds, the COVID-19 crisis has shown that Georgia is much more resilient than we expected, both in institutional and societal dimension. The interesting thing is that while some external actors like Russia, with the "borderisation" process, pose the main threat to Georgia's security, at the same time other actors (like the United States, NATO, the EU, and foreign donors) have provided valuable support in crafting many mechanisms of resilience in Georgia. The state institutions and the public also proved to be extremely disciplined and showed much solidarity with the healthcare workers, providing them with food and water and sponsoring medical devices. Clearly, many countries can learn from Georgia's handling of the COVID crisis, both at the institutional and societal level. NEE

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Zelenskyy's populist learning curve

ANNA KORBUT

If Ukraine had a term for its current political landscape, "turbo regime" would definitely work for 2019. The cabinet of ministers quickly was staffed with "new faces" coming from a community of activists and technocrats previously engaged in international organisations and reform projects. Yet, the team delivered mixed results. In response, Zelenskyy sacked the government and replaced key officials hoping to keep his popularity high.

Upon being elected to the presidential office, Volodymyr Zelenskyy dissolved the parliament during his inauguration speech on May 20th 2019, paving the way for a snap election. That blitzkrieg helped him remove the unfriendly legislature and expand his grip on power by having his party ride the wave of popularity it was receiving. At that point, the Servant of the People party was ahead of any of its established competitors in the polls. The problem was that the party did not yet exist.

By late May, Servant of the People officially announced its bid in the election and launched a competition for potential candidates. The announcement called for prudent patriots capable of teamwork and leadership that are ready to support the president's course. By late May, 20,000 people had applied, according to Dmytro Razumkov, the party head and now speaker of the parliament. The result was a motley crew of reform-oriented activists, unknowns with no experience in public affairs, and representatives of different oligarchic groups. Shortly after winning the majority in July 2019, the new Servant of the People MPs spent a week

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in Truskavets, a resort town in western Ukraine, getting to know each other and going through a crash course on running the country.

Rushing through the honeymoon

Those who were running the training at Truskavets for the MPs were soon appointed prime minister and ministers and the party went into turbo lawmaking. Over several months, the new parliament passed long-sought changes, including laws on stripping MPs of immunity; a law on the impeachment of the president to reinforce the previous vague and virtually non-implementable provision on this; criminal responsibility for illegal enrichment of public officials; and a new election code replacing the mixed system with a more transparent open-list proportional representation. On the downside, the MPs were often left with no time to study the laws they were to vote on – so they were essentially expected to rubber-stamp them. Some of the proposed bills were of poor quality or had caveats that undermined their effect and many were rushed through parliament in violation of procedure, which critics interpreted as a demolition of parliamentarianism and a potential loophole for interpretation of these acts as unlawful.

All this was accumulating negativity around the new regime. Many factors contributed to this. Zelenskyy started appointing loyalists, mostly from his Kvartal 95 business, to key offices despite his earlier pledge against cronyism. Investigative journalists turned their lenses to the new power holders, uncovering their contacts with oligarchs and business ties in Russia. The struggle between the different centres of power resulted in leaks compromising members of the presidential office, the government and parliament. Controversial conduct by some top figures in Zelenskyy's team flared up high-profile scandals in the media. And the new government was a permanent target of criticism from political opponents.

The cabinet of ministers also became targets for criticism within several months, which is not unusual for Ukraine. It was staffed with "new faces" coming from a community of activists and technocrats previously engaged in international organisations and reform projects. Large segments of the pro-reform activists publicly supported Volodymyr Zelenskyy's bid for the presidency during the election campaign and their expectations were initially met when some of their colleagues ended up in ministerial offices, while the president's team seemed responsive to their proposals and criticism.

The cabinet also included people who came into government after the Maidan, such as Finance Minister Oksana Markarova, who replaced Oleksandr Danylyuk in 2018, or Education Minister, Hanna Novosad, previously in charge of strategic

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planning and European integration at the ministry. That signalled a continuity of the policies launched before.

Yet, the team delivered mixed results, especially on the economic front. On the one hand, Ukraine's economy looked promising, including GDP growth, interest rate and inflation decline, solid foreign exchange reserves and a stronger hryvnia. The prosecutor general's office under Ruslan Riaboshapka launched re-attestation of prosecutors and plan to complete it within two years.

On the other hand, industrial output started tumbling as a result of both domestic and international factors. Budget revenues and spending declined. This was in contrast to the expectations fuelled by both Zelenskyy's campaign, and by Prime Minister Honcharuk when he pledged to deliver 40 per cent GDP growth and one million jobs in five years – seen by many as unrealistic – massive infrastructural projects and lower energy prices.

> The cabinet of ministers became targets for criticism within several months, which is not unusual for Ukraine.

In parallel, a clash within Zelenskyy's circle loomed. The media started reporting on escalating tensions between Andriy Bohdan, a key member of Zelenskyy's team during his campaign and his chief of staff, and Andriy Yermak, then aide to the president. Bohdan focused on public policy coordination, worked with Servant of the People MPs for Zelenskyy, and was the one who proposed Oleksiy Honcharuk for prime minister, according to media reports.

Andriy Yermak was not in the spotlight as much, but he built his clout when dealing with the Americans during the Trump impeachment scandal and with the Russians during negotiations on Donbas. He appears more reserved in public and demonstrates full loyalty to Zelenskyy.

By the end of 2019, a poll by the Democratic Initiatives Foundation and Razumkov Center found that slightly more than 30 per cent of Ukrainians approved of Honcharuk as prime minister, and around 58 per cent disapproved (immediately after his cabinet's appointment, he enjoyed 57 per cent of trust). Andriy Bohdan's approval rating was twice as low.

Tossing the ballast of people and promises

Based on the confluence of these factors, Zelenskyy approved the resignation of Bohdan as his chief of staff in early February 2020, replacing him with Yermak. In less than a month afterwards, he reshuffled the government. The new cabinet was selected in haste as the COVID-19 emergency began to unfold. This time,

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Zelenskyy shifted away from "new faces" to more experienced managers. Some of the new ministers were actually tried and tested in multiple governments, including under the presidency of Yanukovych. When the new Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal presented his priorities, he mentioned decentralisation, a favourable investment climate, energy efficiency and industrial and agricultural development. Social policy rhetoric was in focus as well. In this context, the cabinet's plans included an increase of pensions, rehabilitation of depressed mining regions or pumping of public funds into road construction as a way to both demonstrate the government's efforts to the communities and create new jobs, especially in the face of the COVID-19 economic consequences.

Meanwhile, several reform processes have stalled under the new government thus far. Healthcare reform – which has been much needed but painful for patient, and medical staff – is now under threat as Zelenskyy has asked the new ministry team to "improve" it. It looks like the plan for the moment is to simply increase funding for hospitals, which will be a challenge given Ukraine's budget difficulties. The administration has not presented any plans for improving the sustainability and quality of healthcare services in the long run. The media has reported on the return of people linked to corruption and anti-reform lobbyism to the ministry of health.

> Healthcare reform is now under threat as Zelenskyy has asked the new ministry team to "improve" it.

Under the new minister of defence, the reforms project office, a group of civilian experts contributing to reforms in Ukraine's armed forces, was suspended and replaced with a new directorate of defence policy without any explanation. Observers are alarmed by the reluctance of the new defence minister to communicate his perspectives or action plans on further developments.

There are other alarming developments as well. The new prosecutor general proposed by Zelenskyy has been reversing reforms aimed at cleaning up the prosecutor's office, while expanding room for loyalism and non-transparent appointments. The president's initiative to reset the judiciary has largely failed. Developments in the energy sector favour Rinat Akhmetov's energy business, which he has developed into a monopoly under previous administrations. When the COVID-19 crisis broke out, Zelenskyy met with Ukraine's top oligarchs asking them for assistance in handling the pandemic and assigning them different regions to take care of.

This signals a time when the anti-systemic, anti-establishment campaign of populism faces reality, where actually changing the system is difficult, requires making unpopular decisions and leads to negative publicity. Someone who does not want to lose popularity needs to replace the promise of change rhetoric with the more traditional and realistic trade-offs. The result has been patchy politics of

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Photo: president.gov.ua (CC) commons.wikimedia.org

Despite the problems faced by Volodymyr Zelenskyy in early 2020, his popularity is still relatively high. Two polls conducted in late April this year shows that 40–45 per cent of Ukrainians would vote for Zelenskyy if the election were to take place now.

progress in some areas, backtracking on essential reforms and close attention to how the public responds to every single move.

This process is likely to intensify as local elections loom this autumn and the Servant of the People is preparing to take them by storm. This time no open calls for applications have been announced. What Servant of the People needs is well-known, local and experienced candidates capable of competing with the incumbent local elites – especially as mayors in some large cities across Ukraine, from Lviv to Dnipro, have strengthened their positions via their role of handling the COVID-19 crisis.

Interestingly, this has not yet affected Zelenskyy's personal rating. Two polls conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology and the Razumkov Center in late April this year shows that 40–45 per cent of Ukrainians would vote for Zelenskyy if the election were to take place now; and around 40 per cent would support Servant of the People. At the same time, Zelenskyy's approval has fallen from 70 per cent in September 2019 to just over 40 per cent. Several factors contribute to this. The benefit of the doubt and general enthusiasm about Zelenskyy

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remains high and many voters seem to dissociate him from the power institutions. Zelenskyy stirs this impression through public statements that draw on the popular dislike of the state bureaucracy, shaming or dismissing officials or MPs associated with controversies or inefficient work, while focusing on empathy and care for the public in his rhetoric. Voters do not see a comparably charismatic alternative. And there have been no serious economic shocks since the 2019 elections – this may change, of course, due to the COVID-19 quarantine and its consequences.

However, support for Zelenskyy is fragmenting in the activist and pro-reform community. He has lost support of some of those who showed enthusiasm right after the elections: while they expect him to invest into long-term institution building in Ukraine, he seeks more short-term results he could demonstrate to his voters. The activist community does not represent the majority of the electorate and it struggles to communicate with the vast swathes of the voters as effectively as Zelenskyy did it during the election campaign. And the pro-reform community is fragmented.

Foreign policy

The area where Zelenskyy moves more consistently is seeking a resolution to the war with Russia. This started with Zelenskyy's own contacts with Russia's leadership and communication between Yermak and his Russian counter-part, Dmitry Kozak. In contrast to the previous administration, Zelenskyy moves on the political, humanitarian and security tracks of the Minsk Agreements simultaneously, pledging repeatedly to accomplish a resolution during his term in office and to hold elections in the occupied parts of the Donbas this autumn. The latest developments towards that goal include political initiatives within the Minsk Trilateral Contact Group – from the idea of the consultation council to developing legislative and constitutional changes, to proposals on restoration of Ukraine's control over its border with Russia for elections, and the upgrade of Ukraine's representation in Minsk with high-profile political figures. In parallel, Zelenskyy and his cabinet have downgraded their rhetoric on Russia not to be seen as aggressive towards the Kremlin or Vladimir Putin. All these moves have thus far done little to deliver real progress in the conflict management process.

Meanwhile, relations with the West remain Ukraine's priority in official rhetoric. However, they have become more pragmatic in terms of speaking less about EU and NATO integration and more about co-operation in the economic, energy and digital spheres, as well as trade and access to the EU market for Ukrainian producers. At the same time, Kyiv eyes developing relations with other regions,

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such as Southeast Asia and the Middle East, which have not enjoyed as much attention in the past.

One of the important safeguards for Ukraine's co-operation with the West – and for the fulfilment of conditions envisaged by it – is its dependence on international organisations for financial support, especially now as the COVID-19 crisis begins to undermine earlier economic performances. It was under this pressure that on March 31st the parliament passed the long-resisted law on the sale of land for agricultural use, as well as the law preventing the return of the nationalised PrivatBank to the oligarch, Ihor Kolomoiskyy, on May 13th. MPs from Kolomoiskyy's orbit of influence, including those within the Servant of the People faction, tried to sabotage this by submitting over 16,000 proposed amendments. In early June the IMF announced it would approve an 18-month Stand-by Arrangement of around five billion US dollars for Ukraine.

There will be some other important areas to watch out for as indicators of Ukraine's political course in the near future: for example, possible changes at the ministry of defence under its new leadership; or policy in the energy sector. These are some of the key safeguards of Ukraine's security. Such developments can shed light on how the current administration sees its long-term prospect.

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Babyn Yar

When will the tragedy be finally commemorated?

SVITLANA OSLAVSKA

Babyn Yar in Kyiv is the site of the largest Holocaust massacre on Ukrainian territory. The Nazis executed around 100,000 people from 1941 to 1943 on the site, including the killing of 33,771 Jews over two days – September 29–30th 1941. Today it is a place where an appropriate memorial to honour the victims has yet to be created. Since the Ukrainian state has been unable to take responsibility for such a project for years now, private actors have taken it on.

It has been 79 years since the massacre of Babyn Yar. Naturally, commemorative initiatives have been intensifying in Ukraine in recent years, as they usually do before round figure anniversaries. At the moment, there are at least two memorial projects at Babyn Yar, and both have a common aim: to commemorate the Babyn Yar massacre.

The first project is the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Centre which was founded in 2016 and scheduled to open by 2023; and the second is the Babyn Yar Museum. The museum is a state initiative commissioned by the Ukrainian ministry of culture and developed by the Institute of History of Ukraine and the Ukrainian National Academy of Science. The Memorial Centre was founded by diverse set of actors, including Russian and Ukrainian oligarchs, the Chief Rabbi of Kyiv and Ukraine Rabbi Yaakov Dov Bleich, Soviet dissident and Israeli politician, Natan Sharansky, and even Alexander Kwaśniewski, the former President of Poland.

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Chaos

The two distinct projects of the museum and the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Centre have co-existed for some time without any clear vision as how they could complement each other. Both projects differ in scale. The museum is scheduled to occupy a two-storey building, which is a former Jewish cemetery bureau, and the Memorial Centre will consist of over 70,000 square metres. The budgets of both projects also differ: the Babyn Yar Museum was allocated around 900,000 US dollars in 2019, while the budget allocated to the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Centre is 100 million dollars.

Despite recent developments of memorial activity, the Babyn Yar site still looks like a neglected park with scattered memorial spaces. It is a place where locals go jogging, walk their dogs and drink beer. Even though Babyn Yar was recognised as a National Historical Memorial Sanctuary in 2007 and the administration facilities were located there, they did not do much to make the look any better.

One could easily be surprised that the authorities are now only taking an interest in the project with a desire to build a memorial as if they had no time to do it in the past. The truth is that the history of Babyn Yar was silenced during Soviet times. Ukraine has been independent for almost 30 years, and within that time some decisions to commemorate the tragedy were taken. But those steps were unorganised and left many unsatisfied. The first monument commemorating the Babyn Yar events was erected on the site back in 1976. It was hypocritically dedicated to "Soviet citizens and war prisoners, soldiers and officers executed in Babyn Yar by German fascists". Neither the Holocaust nor the tens of thousands of Jews killed on the site were mentioned.

In the Soviet times, Babyn Yar was not only silent about its Jewish victims, but survivors were also not allowed to visit the place where their families died since the police banned such visits. "The Soviets killed the memory of Jews in Kyiv," says Anatoliy Podolsky, head of the Ukrainian Centre for Holocaust Studies, whose relatives are among the victims of Babyn Yar. The Soviet Union eventually collapsed and the ban on visiting the site was lifted. On the 50th anniversary of the massacre in September 1991, just a month after Ukraine declared independence, a Menora monument dedicated to the Jewish victims was erected in Babyn Yar. Yet it was perceived as insufficient, mostly since it did not mention the non-Jewish victims of the Nazi massacre, such as Roma people, the mentally ill, Ukrainian nationalists or other targeted groups. The Menora monument was also deemed insufficient to commemorate the Jewish victims since many thought it was too small and too figurative, arguing that a high stone candelabrum did not represent the scale of the tragedy.

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Because of that, grassroots initiatives to honour specific groups of victims emerged. The lack of state memory policies in general, combined with the absence of a specific memorialisation policy for Babyn Yar, only worsened the situation. The site now includes around 30 memorials in total, dedicated to Roma victims, priests, Ukrainian nationalists and children. They have all been designed by different sculptors and therefore have different sizes and aesthetics. The overall picture is also completed with eclectic information boards, placed by different organisations, thus creating a very chaotic and messy memorialisation project.

Controversy

The Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Centre seems dedicated to accomplish the memorialisation work. The institution hired renowned historians from Ukraine and abroad, including Karel Berkhoff from the Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies in Amsterdam, who until recently led the historians' team. In an interview in 2019 Yana Barinova, then-CEO of the memorial centre, explained they planned to create an "iconic project, a benchmark not only for Ukraine but for the whole world, where the respectful attitude towards the tragedy will be the main feeling that the memorial will convey".

In 2017 the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Centre presented its first historical narrative which was highly criticised.

In autumn 2017, the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Centre presented its first historical narrative and opened a public discussion around it. The narrative was highly criticised. The main accusation was that it followed the Soviet-Russian propaganda discourse, since the project is largely financed by Russian oligarchs. The donors for the project included Ronald Lauder, president of the World Jewish Congress, Ukrainian businessman Viktor Pinchuk and three Ukrainian-born Russian businessmen, Mikhail Fridman, Pavel Fuks and German Khan. Many therefore wondered why these people decided to finance such a large project in Ukraine while Russia was waging war against it. The answer given by the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Centre was that those businessmen wished to honour the memory of their relatives killed at the site.

This justification does not satisfy a large number of Ukrainian historians and public figures from the Jewish community who refused to work with the centre as they feel it has a Russian colonial approach to the project. "Their heads remained in the Kremlin, and their concept is Russian, pro-Soviet" says Vitaliy Nakhmanovych, a historian and Babyn Yar researcher. He is a member of a group within the Insti-

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tute of History of Ukraine that created an alternative concept for Babyn Yar memorialisation, of which the above-mentioned Museum project would be a part of.

This group emphasises the need to include a memorial project for the memory of all the Babyn Yar victims in the future, which addresses the broader history of Babyn Yar, and is not limited to the events of the Second World War. Indeed, the site has lived through more than one tragedy throughout the years. In the postwar time the site became a dumping ground for a neighbouring brickwork factory, and in 1961 the embankment breaking at Babyn Yar led to a mudslide killing of at least 145 people. It is a striking example of how the Soviet Union dealt with the memory of Babyn Yar.

Therefore, renovation works have begun on a building of the former Jewish cemetery bureau that will be part of the future Babyn Yar Museum. The Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Centre has also started renovation works on the site: in cooperation with the National Sanctuary, they relocated over 70 gravestones from a small ravine nearby to an area alongside the Sorrow Alley. The Memorial Centre also held an architecture competition for the site of Babyn Yar last year, which was won by an Austrian team. However, last December the management of the Memorial Centre announced some changes. The architectural project therefore can no longer be realised as originally planned and should be "elaborated", says Max Yakover, the new CEO of the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Centre.

New faces, new vision

Yakover is a young businessman, engaged in several creative industries in Kyiv. The Memorial Centre also recently created a new artistic director role, a position held by Russian film director, Ilya Khrzhanovsky, since December 2019. There is also another remarkable new face in the supervisory board, namely, the Nobel Prize laureate Svetlana Alexievich.

Khrzhanovsky is best known for the film *DAU* which was initially supposed to be a movie about Soviet physicist Lev Landau and his years in Kharkiv, but has grown into "a multi-disciplinary project at the intersection of cinema, art and anthropology" as described by Berlinale-2020. Today, *DAU* has more than 700 hours of video footage. One of its films *DAU. Natasha* won the Silver Bear Prize for outstanding artistic contribution at the Berlinale this year, but critics who saw *DAU* performances in Paris last year called the project dehumanising and mentioned violence as an integral part of it.

DAU raised further controversies, during the production stage. Lidiya Starodubtseva from Karazin University in Kharkiv called it a "disgusting anthropological

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experiment" in an interview with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Interestingly enough, the Russian neo-Nazi leader, Maxim Martsynkevich, also participated in the project.

Khrzhanovsky is a man known for controversy, and will now be responsible for the Holocaust memorial at Babyn Yar. In an interview with Radio NV, Khrzhanovsky explained that Mikhail Fridman, one of the memorial's donors, asked him to make this project "more interesting, more emotional … according to how the world is changing". He also declared that the thing he learnt while making *DAU* was love and acceptance of different people.

The memorial centre's new CEO explained that the centre is now rethinking the concept they inherited. Even though the project is still in the making, the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Centre is already planning to focus on the use of modern technologies, such as augmented reality and virtual reality. Yakover says that the centre will be focused on the experience of future visitors. After *DAU*, he adds that "Khrzhanovsky understands how to immerse people into such a reality that allows seeing the mechanisms the system used to trample down people and the strength a person could develop if not succumbing to this pressure".

The first major initiative of the memorial centre's new team was to rename the Dorohozhychi metro station as Babyn Yar, as "a tribute to the memory and manifestation of respect for the heroism of all Babyn Yar victims", as explained on the centre's website. Some liked the idea, though others did not, arguing that the everyday usage of Babyn Yar as a metro station would erase the actual meaning and history behind it. This initiative still attracted public attention for the memorial centre and its new management. One of the current projects of the centre is interviewing witnesses and renewing the names of those killed in Babyn Yar. They are also working on the site itself, and cleaning the actual area.

In spring this year, during the pandemic, the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Centre distributed food packages for elderly people living nearby and financed medical equipment for the local hospital in the neighbourhood that is treating COVID-19 patients. In the precarious situation of 2020, the next developments for the Babyn Yar Museum are unclear. The state is not much involved in the Babyn Yar projects, and will probably be less so now due to the current pandemic. We can therefore only rely on public attention to develop both projects in order to finally create a decent memorial site at Babyn Yar. NEE

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A reality check for the realists

MATT JOHNSON

Putin's behaviour is not just an inevitable consequence of the fact that Russia is a great power – it is a combination of post-Cold War historical grievances and a zero-sum conception of the world that positions Russia in permanent opposition to the West.

During the third US presidential debate in 2012, then President Barack Obama mocked his opponent, Governor Mitt Romney, for a remark he had made several months earlier: "When you were asked what is the biggest geopolitical threat facing America, you said Russia. Not al-Qaeda – you said Russia. The 1980s are now calling to ask for their foreign policy back because the Cold War has been over for 20 years."

This joke got a lot of traction among Democrats who cited Romney's comment about Russia as evidence that he was clueless about the modern challenges the United States faces around the world. "Of the various weird things Governor Romney has said, his position on Russia is truly out of date," former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright observed. "We're living in the 21st century, and to think that Russia is our biggest geostrategic threat makes absolutely no sense."

This was before Russia's invasion of Crimea, the war in eastern Ukraine, its brutal bombing campaign to prop up the Assad dictatorship in Syria or its efforts to interfere in the 2016 US presidential election. It is now an article of faith among Democrats that Russia is a major threat. During a House Intelligence Committee hearing last year, Albright humbly embraced this new consensus: "I personally owe an apology to now-Senator Romney, because I think that we underestimated what was going on in Russia."

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Perpetual competition

Albright was not the only one who had to rethink the threat posed by Russia. After the invasion and annexation of Crimea, then Secretary of State John Kerry was incredulous: "You just don't in the 21st century behave in a 19th century fashion by invading another country on a completely trumped up pretext." The Obama administration was caught off guard by an act of aggression so brazen that seemed like it belonged in a bygone era.

Beyond the predictable attacks from Obama's Republican critics, there was a more substantive critique of the administration from academics like Harvard's Stephen Walt, who described Kerry's complaint about Putin's 19th-century behaviour as representative of a deeper attitude about the geopolitical reality in the post-Cold War era: "The comment captured the familiar idea that the world has supposedly moved beyond the 'cynical calculus of pure power politics,' as Bill Clinton once put it. The problem, at least in Kerry's view, is that leaders like Russian President Vladimir Putin haven't gotten the memo about proper 21st century behaviour – either Putin hasn't bothered to read it or doesn't agree with its message."

Like many of his fellow realists, Stephen Walt argues that great power competition will be a fact of life as long as great powers exist.

Like many of his fellow realists, Walt argues that great power competition will be a fact of life as long as great powers exist. While there are several different forms of realism, the theory broadly refers to the idea that states are in perpetual competition with one another due to the lack of a centralized supranational authority that can exert meaningful influence over them. States act in their own self-interest in accordance with how much power they are capable of wielding in an anarchic international system.

This is why realists argue that Russia's aggressive behaviour in Eastern Europe is perfectly intelligible. After years of eastward NATO expansion, the argument goes, Russia feels encircled and threatened, which has led it to defend its interests in the region by attempting to keep states like Ukraine in its orbit.

But is this really all we need to know to understand why Putin invaded Ukraine and has been waging a proxy war on its eastern flank for more than six years? If NATO hadn't expanded into Eastern Europe, would Putin be quietly minding his own business? As the United States continues to spend billions of dollars on military aid to Ukraine and the conflict with Russia grinds on, is it time for Washington to start listening to the realists?

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Breaking the status quo

When the EuroMaidan protests erupted in 2013, it was clear that the Ukrainian people were tired of being shackled to Russia. The first protest was held in November 2013 when the Ukrainian government suspended the Association Agreement with the European Union which would have established closer political and economic relations between Ukraine and Europe. Despite the passage of an anti-protest bill in December, the demonstrations intensified and confrontations with police and paramilitary forces turned violent (more than 100 protesters were killed and many more were injured in fighting on Kyiv's Maidan Square). After a political settlement was reached in February 2014, the pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovych fled the country and the Ukrainian parliament voted to remove him from office. Putin invaded Crimea a month later.

At the time, prominent realists like the University of Chicago's John Mearsheimer insisted that Russia couldn't really be blamed for invading and annexing its neighbour. Instead, Mearsheimer argued that the "United States and its European allies share most of the responsibility for the crisis. The taproot of the trouble is NATO enlargement, the central element of a larger strategy to move Ukraine out of Russia's orbit and integrate it into the West."

The first problem with this analysis is that it treats NATO and Russia as the only relevant actors, all but ignoring the Ukrainians. As the protests demonstrated, the Ukrainian people desired stronger economic and political ties to Europe. According to Pew's 2019 Global Attitudes Survey, 79 per cent of Ukrainians have a favourable view of the EU while just 11 per cent have an unfavourable view – much stronger support than any country in Western Europe, Eastern Europe (besides Poland and Lithuania), the United States or Canada. Meanwhile, just 11 per cent of Ukrainians have confidence that Putin will "do the right thing regarding world affairs," while 78 per cent say they have no confidence in him. This is the lowest level of support for Putin among any of the 33 countries in the Pew survey.

Popular discontent among Ukrainians is what led to the push for greater European integration and the removal of Viktor Yanukovych. According to Mearsheimer's view, the EU and Ukraine should have abandoned any hope of a productive relationship to placate Russia, which raises the question: Will the international system really be more stable if countries can forever be held hostage by their neighbours, even when the citizens of those countries desperately want to change course? The protesters in Ukraine were willing to stand up to sniper fire and riot police to protest the suspension of the Association Agreement, while the Ukrainian parliament voted unanimously to impeach the country's pro-Russia president. It is clear that the status quo was not sustainable. In fact, the overwhelming majority of Eastern

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European countries think NATO is keeping them safe. How many of these members does Mearsheimer think NATO should abandon before the proper balance of power with Russia is restored?

If Putin's goal was to limit NATO's influence in Eastern Europe, his plan backfired – Ukraine has now moved closer than ever to the West to counter Russian aggression. Russia's actions in eastern Ukraine led to what NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg described as the "biggest reinforcement of NATO forces since the end of the Cold War". This included the build-up of NATO forces in the Baltics (including increased defence spending among those states). Instead of deterring NATO, the annexation of Crimea and other forms of Russian aggression in Ukraine have mobilised it.

Zero-sum thinking

Mearsheimer's argument is based on the assumption that any state in Russia's position would behave similarly. As he put it in an article that warned against the United States providing arms to Ukraine: "Great powers react harshly when distant rivals project military power into their neighbourhood, much less attempt to make a country on their border an ally … Russia is no exception." But this generic view of great powers ignores everything we know about the unique historical circumstances that have led Russia to where it is today, as well as the characteristics that make Putin such an intransigent and dangerous actor in the international system.

In an address on March 18th 2014, Putin argued that Russia was entitled to absorb Crimea on the grounds that the original transfer to Ukraine was done "within the boundaries of a single state … Unfortunately, what seemed impossible became a reality. The USSR fell apart." Putin regards the collapse of the Soviet Union as the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe" of the 20th century and he longs to restore some semblance of transnational political and economic authority over former Soviet states. After the Cold War, he explained, "Russia realised that it was not simply robbed, it was plundered." The corollary to Mearsheimer's claim that Putin's aggression in Eastern Europe is a response to NATO expansion is the idea that he would have kept to himself in the absence of that expansion. But how do we know NATO's absence would not have emboldened Putin to make even stronger claims on his neighbours' territory?

Putin defended the invasion and annexation of Crimea in explicitly revanchist terms, condemning the "outrageous historical injustice" that was inflicted on Russia at the end of the Cold War: "Millions of people went to bed in one country and awoke in different ones, overnight becoming ethnic minorities in former Union

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republics, while the Russian nation became one of the biggest, if not the biggest ethnic group in the world to be divided by borders." Putin's behaviour is not just an inevitable consequence of the fact that Russia is a great power – it is a combination of post-Cold War historical grievances and a zero-sum conception of the world that positions Russia in permanent opposition to the West.

After the invasion of Crimea, Kerry argued that Russia's relationship with the West "does not have to be a zero-sum game. It is not Russia versus the United States, Russia versus Europe." Realists deride this view as hopelessly quixotic – of course it will be Russia versus the US and Europe until the end of time; that is just how great powers always have and always will behave. This view assumes that the characteristics of state behaviour are as immovable as physical laws, and it regards the idea of human progress (in this case, the creation of international norms and institutions that reign in great power competition) as a utopian fantasy. It is no surprise that realists hold this attitude – they believe states are part of an inherently anarchic international system in which power is always the dominant variable.

Shouldn't the realists be a little more modest about the permanent features and constraints of the international system?

But after three-quarters of a century in which we have seen greater international integration than any other period in human history, shouldn't the realists be a little more modest about the permanent features and constraints of the international system? Who could have imagined in 1942 that Germany would eventually be the anchor of a vast political and economic union that spanned the entire continent, as well as a member of a transatlantic defensive alliance founded by its enemies during the Second World War? Of course, the situation with Germany after the war is not analogous to the situation with Russia today – Germany was devastated and occupied. But the point is that great power competition was a permanent feature of Western Europe, until it no longer was.

Who's the victim?

The realists are right that NATO expansion has antagonised Russia. As Putin explained: "For all the internal processes within the organisation, NATO remains a military alliance, and we are against having a military alliance making itself at home right in our backyard or in our historic territory." However, Russia doesn't just act belligerently because it is conforming to some ironclad law of state behaviour – it acts belligerently because it's run by a kleptocratic authoritarian ruler who

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is afraid of being removed from power. After seeing what happened to Yanukovych in Ukraine, Putin immediately took drastic measures to prevent the same thing from happening to him.

But Putin is not Russia – his personal interests are not interchangeable with his country's. During his speech on the annexation of Crimea, Putin asked, "Are we ready to consistently defend our national interests, or will we forever give in, retreat to who knows where?" What does Putin imagine "giving in" will look like? Greater political and economic integration with Europe, the elimination of sanctions, and less need for NATO to build up its forces on Russia's western flank? Greater cooperation on nuclear proliferation and joint military exercises with NATO? Or what frightens him the most: democratic reforms in Russia?

Putin ominously warns of a "fifth column" working to "provoke public discontent" and he observes that "western politicians are already threatening us with not just sanctions but also the prospect of increasingly serious problems on the domestic front." We should never forget that the "us" in that sentence is Putin and his allies, not the Russian people.

Putin has a powerful interest in presenting the illusion that NATO would be aggressive towards Russia no matter what.

Putin argues that Russia is the victim of an implacably hostile West: "We have every reason to assume that the infamous policy of containment, led in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, continues today. They are constantly trying to sweep us into a corner because we have an independent position." In recent years, Russia's "independent position" has entailed blowing up hospitals in Idlib, invading its neighbours, murdering and imprisoning journalists and dissidents, and attempting to subvert democracy from Ukraine to the United States. These are the reasons the West is hostile to Russia, but Putin has a powerful interest in presenting the illusion that NATO would be aggressive towards Russia no matter what.

According to Mearsheimer, Putin's actions in Ukraine have been "defensive, not offensive." Defensive in what sense? Anne Applebaum argues that Putin and his allies do not "seriously fear western military attacks, but they do fear popular discontent, public questioning of their personal wealth, open criticism of the basic tenets of Putinism and, of course, political demonstrations of the sort that created the Orange Revolution in Ukraine" (she made this argument in 2013, before the EuroMaidan, the invasion of Crimea, etc.). According to Applebaum, this is why Putin's ire has been "reserved for those countries which have most successfully navigated the path from communism to democracy, and which maintain the most open and pro-western political systems."

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Managed system

This is also why Putin venerates the Soviet Union and laments its collapse – Applebaum summarises the version of history that he presents to the Russian people: "The hardships and deprivations which Russians experienced during the 1990s were not the result of decades of communist neglect and widespread theft but of western-style capitalism and democracy." Applebaum defines "Putinism" as a system characterised by "managed democracy" (which presents the illusion of electoral choice, civil society, etc. while ensuring everything remains under strict control); enough repression to silence critics of the government and prevent genuine political resistance from mobilizing; and a "rent-seeking oil economy … which resembles Saudi Arabia far more than that of the United States or Western Europe." In other words, Putinism bears no resemblance to real liberal democracies with functioning market economies – systems that provide their citizens with far greater freedom and economic opportunity.

It's no wonder Putin is so eager to keep as many countries as possible in Russia's orbit – the last thing he wants is a group of western-style liberal democracies next door because he knows it would put pressure on him domestically. The need to silence any talk of alternatives to the Putinist system is all the more important considering Mearsheimer's observation that "Russia is a declining power, and it will only get weaker with time." Russia's GDP is 1.6 trillion US dollars while the combined GDP of the United States and the EU is almost 40 trillion. Compounding the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic for Russia was an oil war with Saudi Arabia that has dropped oil prices to their lowest point in years. This increases the possibility of unrest within Russia even more.

Realists do not think personalities count for much in the global system, which is why Mearsheimer and those like him generically refer to Russia as a "great power" and argue that it behaves in predictable ways. Yet there is a reason Applebaum describes the decrepit Russian system as "Putinism" – one man has dominated Russian politics and society for two decades, and he cares more about what is good for himself than what is good for his country. If Washington wants to understand Moscow's position, that is a good place to start. NEE

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Ukraine as a key to Europe's energy security

Towards a US-Polish-Ukrainian LNG trading platform

MYKOLA VOYTIV

On August 31st 2019 a Memorandum of Understanding was signed in Warsaw to strengthen gas security in the region through LNG supplies from the US via Polish and Ukrainian infrastructure. This formal document may lay the foundations for developing a new natural gas trading market in Europe.

Free of political barriers, access to a diverse range of energy sources is necessary for effective industrial development. European economies have become increasing concerned with energy security. This is largely the result of growing desires to end a dependence on supplies of gas and oil from the Russian Federation. The diversification of energy sources guarantees supply and promotes market liquidity.

What actions should be taken in order to ensure this diversification? Will the Ukraine-Poland Interconnector and Baltic Pipe be able to guarantee a continuous supply of gas to the Polish and Ukrainian markets? What are the challenges faced by companies which manage infrastructural projects in the natural gas sector?

Ukrainian domestic gas production peaked at 68.1 billion cubic metres in 1975. It could be argued, then, that the country has the capacity margin to increase its national production. According to the Ukrtransgas, which operates Ukraine's natural gas pipelines, gas consumption in Ukraine last year amounted to 14.4 billion cubic

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metres for industry and 15.4 for households and district heating companies. As of today, national gas production is about 21 billion cubic metres.

Visible reforms

Ukraine's gas market is showing signs of reform and development. These changes aim to create a well-functioning market and a regulatory environment that is compatible with the European Union's gas sector and regulatory space. The reform's key objectives are as follows:

- The creation of a competitive market in the interests of consumers;
- The reduction in specific rates of gas consumption to the level of Central and Eastern Europe;
- An increase in domestic gas exploration and production;
- Integration of the Ukrainian transmission system operator into the ENTSOG (European Network of Transmission System Operators for Gas);
- The transformation of the country's natural gas transit capacity into a multi-directional, flexible system possessing security of supply;
- Promoting transparency among operators of natural gas distribution systems.

In relation to these goals, the reform's achievements are already clear. Ukraine has closed direct connections with Gazprom natural gas supplies and has switched to European traders. The market has opened up for new international traders and suppliers, while gas production is looking for more investment. The Ukrainian gas market is now tightly linked to the EU gas market and in particular Poland. Ukraine recently received its first deliveries of LNG from the United States via the country.

Ukraine has closed direct connections with Gazprom natural gas supplies and has switched to European traders.

Indeed, Warsaw and Kyiv have many reasons to co-operate in the energy sector. Current priorities involve natural gas (LNG) trading and its storage in Ukraine. In 2019 Ukraine imported around 1.4 billion cubic metres of natural gas from Poland. This is more than twice as much as 2018. The approximate value of this ongoing gas delivery is around 350 million dollars per year. This increasing trade of natural gas between Poland and Ukraine has only strengthened plans to construct an interconnector. However, Kyiv must approach this development strategically and continue to build the necessary transmission infrastructure. The ultimate goal of this project is to connect Ukrainian and Polish gas networks. This will help diversify Ukraine's gas supplies and strengthen the integration of transmission systems and markets in

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Eastern Europe. If this happens, the value of this market will increase from 800 million dollars to one billion dollars per year.

Storage and supply

Another important step will be increasing access to Ukraine's underground gas storage. The country today operates 12 sites with a total active capacity of 31 billion cubic metres. These provide gas storage for both suppliers and consumers. Ukraine's underground gas storage is still the largest in Europe. Their location, on the border with the European Union (less than 100 kilometres from the EU border), would allow for gas to reach consumers within a few hours. Approximately 81 per cent of the underground storage's capacity is located in the western part of Ukraine (five sites are located in Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk oblasts), which equates to around 25 billion cubic metres of gas. Using this infrastructure, Ukraine should be able to participate in further co-operation with the EU. Despite this, the creation of a Ukrainian gas hub at this point remains a project for the future. The idea was repeatedly voiced by Europe's energy ministers, but no concrete steps have been made. It is clear that simple support will not be enough to make this proposal a reality. Ministers will have to commit all their time and resources to the project.

The LNG issue

Poland's LNG imports (via the Świnoujście terminal) began with deliveries from the United States in July 2019. The volume of this flow is only set to grow in the next 24 years. Ukraine announced its desires to build an LNG terminal almost simultaneously with Lithuania's project. The project "LNG Ukraine" started in August 2010. On November 26th 2012 in Yuzhny, the construction of an LNG terminal began and continues today. Officially delays to this project are due to international legal issues. Apparently, LNG tankers are not allowed to pass through the Bosporus Straits (even though carriers with liquefied gas propane-butane and hydrogen nitride do pass through). The more likely answer, however, is that Ukraine's LNG terminal near Odesa is not operating for political reasons.

The budget of the Lithuanian LNG project was 128 million dollars. It has already provided Lithuania with gas and now allows the country to completely bypass Russian gas supplies. Today the country even supplies gas to Latvia, Estonia and Finland. Preliminary figures regarding the budget available to Kyiv's LNG project were over one billion dollars. It remains unclear as to why such a large amount of

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The LNG Terminal in Świnoujście Poland. LNG imports via the terminal began with deliveries from the United States in July 2019. The volume of this flow is only set to grow in the next 24 years.

money was viewed as necessary for the project. However, comparing the capacity of both terminals (four and ten billion cubic metres of gas per year for the Lithuanian and Ukrainian projects, respectively), the Ukrainian terminal should cost around 350–400 million dollars. Even with a price tag of over one billion dollars, however, since 2012 there have been investment proposals from the United States, Australia, Qatar and the EU.

The estimated capacity of Ukraine's LNG terminal is around 10 billion cubic metres of gas per year. This is slightly more than a third of what Ukraine needs on an annual basis. Taking into account the fact that the country extracts about 20 billion cubic metres of gas per year, it appears that Ukraine could even provide others with the surplus.

Trading platform

In August last year a Memorandum of Understanding to enhance the security of regional gas supplies was signed in Poland. This agreement may lay the foundations of a new natural gas trading market in Europe. The US is now the world's third largest seller of LNG, with exports of about 200,000 tonnes of LNG per day. Washington desires to become the largest LNG exporter in the world by 2023. It

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follows from the dynamic of the USA LNG import, which is increased five times from 2018 (8400 tonnes/day) to 2019 (42000 tonnes/day).

The European gas market may triple imports within the next five years. Given these prospects, the potential creation of a US-Polish-Ukrainian LNG/natural gas trading platform could significantly change the European gas market.

For Ukraine, developing such a platform would have additional benefits. For example, its national energy sector could potentially be integrated into Europe's own energy efficient market, which may allow the country to become a major regional player. At the same time, the country's partners would find it easier to access Ukraine's sources of natural gas. This may subsequently help attract foreign investors to the country's energy infrastructure. Such a platform could also operate in either the US or Poland in order to ensure the complete transparency of transactions.

A US-Polish-Ukrainian trading platform could unite markets in Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine.

There are also expectations that such a project would allow for Romania to export greater amounts of natural gas to Ukraine, as well as the expansion of transmission capacity between Ukraine and Slovakia. Due to this, a US-Polish-Ukrainian trading platform could unite markets in Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine. Such a regional market would be able to process transactions of four billion dollars a year. It is unclear when the Baltic Pipe project will start, but it is possible that Norwegian and Danish trading companies could also be interested in this new trading platform.

In Ukraine's *New Energy Strategy 2035*, the year 2020 is set as a deadline for creating a gas market in Ukraine. In addition, the government has planned a lot for 2019–20. Gas and electricity production should reach volumes that will allow the country to completely abandon imports. Looking at the gas market in Ukraine today, it appears that it only works in the industrial sector, although even now there is an opportunity to choose suppliers.

Undoubtedly, the gas market needs to be deregulated so that businesses can make money. If the gas market helps to increase liquidity, it will become more attractive for both national and foreign investors. However, the creation of a gas market should be primarily aimed at Ukrainian consumers, in order to make the country's natural gas sector more transparent, more profitable and less deregulated.

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The meaning behind Azerbaijan's forged elections

MATEUSZ BAJEK

In February 2020 Azerbaijan held early parliamentary elections for its National Assembly. Independent observers noted serious electoral fraud, including ballot stuffing, multiple voting and turnout manipulation. Yet the fraudulent activities around the election process were not the sole component of the Azerbaijani government's strategy.

The early parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan took place on February 9th 2020. Through these elections, the citizens of Azerbaijan elected deputies to the one-chamber National Assembly (*Milli Məclis*). The official election results announced by the Central Electoral Commission showed a significant victory for the ruling New Azerbaijan Party (*Yeni Azərbaycan Partiyası, YAP*), whose representatives are said to have won 72 out of 125 single-member constituencies (58 per cent of all districts).

Interestingly and uniquely for non-democratic post-Soviet states, YAP candidates, even though running in single-member districts, often placed second or third, and at times even last. Their poor placing was often the result of an agreement with candidates from parties who were loyal to President Ilham Aliyev, or with some formally independent candidates. Consequently, in many cases, YAP candidates did not run any campaign at all, which means they lost by default. In a number of districts, however, real political competition took place among candidates loyal to the authorities. These were usually the members of the so-called "old guard" or "reformist technocrats". Such form of political competition, which took place inside the system, did not yet lead to the creation of any strong parliamentary

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fraction. Thus, despite the defeat of many YAP candidates, all positions but one in the parliament have been filled by candidates who were loyal to the government.

What independent observers saw during the elections

The Azerbaijani elections were observed by both international observers, including the 356 short- and long-term observers from the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (PA), and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), as well as national observers from different states. The former, the ODIHR Election Observation Mission (EOM), published, a day after the elections, its "Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions" (the final report has not yet been formally published). In this Statement, the EOM stressed that "significant procedural violations during the counting and tabulation of votes on election day raised concerns over whether the results were established honestly". In addition, it stated that a "restrictive legislation and political environment prevented genuine competition in Azerbaijan's early parliamentary elections [and that] despite the large number of candidates, voters were not provided with a meaningful choice, due to a lack of real political discussion". It has to be noted though, that ODIHR EOMs' communiqués are always written in a diplomatic language balancing the seriousness of the observed violations and the wish not to offend the authorities of the host states, who do, after all, make up the OSCE.

More straightforward communiqués, which directly point to electoral fraud, were published by national observers. On the day of the elections they observed a systemic inflation of the officially reported electoral turnout. According to the Baku-based civil society group, Institute for Democratic Initiatives, the real turnout in 33 observed election districts was 20.6 per cent, as opposed to the officially reported 47.8 per cent. Another Azerbaijani group of observers, those linked with the Election Monitoring and Democratic Studies Center, also reported serious breaches of election law. These included ballot stuffing, multiple voting (by the same person), as well as illegal addition of ballots after ballot boxes had been emptied during counting. In a situation where the election turnout was drastically inflated, such activities were aimed to help the election administrators "balance out" the real number of voters who came to polling stations on election day (real turnout) and the significantly larger number of votes which was reported by election commissions (official turnout).

The aforementioned conclusions were further confirmed by the results of video-observation performed by a Polish NGO, the Political Accountability Founda-

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tion. In our work, we used the publicly available streaming from cameras installed in polling stations. In those polling stations (located in Baku and the north-west region Qax), we discovered cases of multiple voting (by the same persons). Most importantly, however, in as many as four out of the six polling stations we had observed, we noticed that the difference between the real turnout and the official one was more than twofold. The total number of the so-called "dead souls" we discovered (people who cast their ballots, according to official data, but never made it to the polling stations) was nearly 1,500.

Similar conclusions confirming the mass scale of electoral fraud were reached by Russian observers involved in the Golos Movement, who specialise in statistical analysis. They pointed out that in a number of electoral districts the official turnout and/or official support for the candidates in all, or nearly all, polling stations, was almost identical. Therefore, when presented on a chart the turnout and/or support in these elections follow a straight line, while in the case of "normal", democratic elections the picture should be much more diverse. This further confirms the thesis that the election results were manipulated.

Baku's reaction

ODIHR's concerns, as well as those expressed by domestic observers, were partially recognised by the Central Electoral Commission (CEC). Numerous inaccuracies were the reason why the CEC annulled the election results in four out of the 125 election districts, thus depriving two YAP candidates and two independent candidates of their mandates. Taking the CEC's decision into account a few days after the elections, Aliyev promised to investigate all cases of election irregularities. He also said that the ODIHR EOM's statement was "more objective than before", adding that nonetheless "we could not agree with some of their conclusions".

Clearly, the opinion of "alternative" international observers was more valuable for the Azerbaijani authorities. For this reason, they invited over 50 international observation missions, including many widely-known organisations which, nevertheless, have limited experience with election observations, or are known for publishing findings aimed at supporting specific political groups or state authorities. Such positions, which are in no way a truthful representation of reality, were presented by the election missions sent by the Parliamentary Assembly (PA) of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, the Commonwealth

Clearly, the opinion of "alternative" international observers was more valuable for the Azerbaijani authorities.

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of Independent States, GUAM, the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development PA, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and the PA of the Turkic-speaking Countries. These organisations recorded no election fraud even though it was not particularly challenging to uncover. Instead, the elections they observed were honest, competitive and free, and were carried out in accordance with democratic standards and national law.

In addition, the elections were observed by different observation missions, whose work is called by experts and international affairs professionals "fake observation". Participants of such missions often include politicians from the Russian Federation as well as some European states. The latter are usually representatives of extreme political parties, both on the left and right. Among these "observers" were some Azeri and Turks, holders of non-Azerbaijani and non-Turkish citizenship; as well as parliamentarians from European states – members of inter-parliamentary bilateral groups for the relations with Azerbaijan. Members of these "fake observation missions" were often guests of Azerbaijani media outlets where they parroted the same narrative as Azerbaijani authorities about the high election turnout, democratic standards and even declared that the elections had been conducted better than in their own countries. Their statements were later repeated by various Azerbaijani media and promoted by the Central Election Commission which published them on its website in English and Russian. The presence of such figures during the Azerbaijani elections was not unusual. "Fake observers" are a popular phenomenon in countries and regions where democratic standards are known to be low. In the post-Soviet space such missions are often organised by specialised oversight organisations and financed by the Russian authorities.

"Fake observers" are a popular phenomenon in countries and regions where democratic standards are known to be low.

"Quiet revolution"

The activities around the election process were, however, not the sole component of the Azerbaijani government's strategy for this year's election. Clearly, the authorities in Baku wanted the discussions on the election to be as far from the assessment of its conduct and outcome, as possible. From the very beginning Aliyev planned to use the elections as a show of support for the modernisation efforts he announced. The deputies of the National Assembly, who, by the end of November 2019, called on the president to organise early elections, wanted the schedule of the legislative works to be harmonised with the reform plan initiated by the president.

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A similar view, stating that the introduction of social and economic reforms will be possible only after a change in the National Assembly, was put forward by the ruling party's highest authorities. Their declarations were accompanied by very clear suggestions that the National Assembly should be made up of younger deputies, and that it should include more technocrats and fewer professional politicians.

A few days later, on December 5th 2019, Aliyev signed a decree on the dissolution of the National Assembly. The decision to organise an early election was made after a change of prime minister, which took place in October. The office of the PM was filled by Ali Asadov, believed to be a non-partisan technocrat, who replaced Novruz Mammadov who was nine years older than Asadov and affiliated with YAP.

The above narrative was repeated and expanded through Azerbaijani public diplomacy activities which were primarily targeted at foreign analysts and politicians specialising in the South Caucasus in particular and the post-Soviet space in general. As part of the pre-election PR campaign during private and public speeches, as well as through international media outlets, the thesis of a "quiet revolution in Azerbaijan" was promoted. This revolution, unlike others, was said "not to incline any violence". It was meant to symbolise a generational and mental change: as a result of the election, young Azerbaijani, educated at elite universities across the world, were supposed to enter the National Assembly and thereby accelerate the implementation of Aliyev's reforms.

These new deputies were to assist state officials who had been holding offices in public administration since 2019. This "new generation of politicians" was to secure the implementation of reforms which were said to be halted by older politicians from ministries and public offices. Materials promoting such messages were enriched by infographics illustrating "successfully implemented" reforms and investments which would allow Azerbaijan to advance in "international rankings". An analysis of a number of published op-eds and "analytical materials" shows a huge overlap in content, despite the fact that their authors came from different states and often did not come from Azerbaijan.

The results of the election, where 87 out of 125 deputies (70 per cent) retained their National Assembly seats, are the best evidence that no "quiet revolution" has taken place, though 30 per cent exchange of deputies between two terms of parliament is quite a standard number in many OSCE-participating states. This, combined with a large number of cases of electoral fraud, explains why – especially in the first days after the elections – the PR campaign of the Azerbaijani government stopped for a moment, to later come back – in a modified form.

In the weeks following the elections, international media outlets were widely declaring its big success. They talked about the achievement of Aliyev's earlier reforms, the need for evolution not revolution, and a broad and independent foreign

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policy. In addition, new ways of promoting these narratives were added. This time, analyses were mainly written by authors from Azerbaijan, including the well-known Esmira Jafarova who is a board member of the Baku-based Center of Analysis of International Relations. Also, because the new National Assembly was not made up of as many young people as it had been expected, the commentators started to point out how many young candidates with no connection to any of the political parties had run in the elections. The emphasis was not put on their victory, but rather on a sole fact that they ran. The statistics were jacked up by, among other things, the participation of young Azeri oppositionists in the early elections, who decided to participate in them after they had become convinced that the process would be relatively honest. In this second wave of publications, there was no mention of the destructive influence the "old guard" had on the state. Instead, they emphasised the need to respect those who had many years of service to the State, a breadth of experience that "should be used" for its good.

The significance of these elections is also shown by the fact that over 130 international media outlets from over 50 countries wrote about them. However, these reports did not mention the poor standards that characterised the majority of organisations present to observe the elections. They also did not pay attention to the high number of electoral fraud cases recorded.

What the election tells us

A thorough assessment of this year's parliamentary election is not a simple task, since, as it's been demonstrated, it was not based on democratic standards and the results were forged. Arriving at this conclusion was not extremely difficult. Neither was gathering sufficient evidence to support it – using available video footage from polling stations, as well as the information from the ground shared by professional observation missions. This way, one could easily conclude that both the Azerbaijani authorities and all international observation missions, with the exception of the ODIHR, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and PACE, presented a false picture, calling this year's election free and fair.

In terms of voter turnout, the officially announced 47.8 per cent was not particularly high, though the actual nationwide figure was near 20 per cent. This suggests that the propaganda that Azerbaijan will undergo huge reforms was not believed by many voters. The fact that the turnout in some polling stations was as low as 10 per cent can even suggest that Azerbaijanis decided to boycott the elections.

This is rather typical for some states in the region where results of elections have been falsified for many years and state propaganda is detached from reality.

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The same can be said about the low turnout (10–30 per cent) in the 2018 presidential election, as observed in Russia's North Caucasus. Even though there is no adequate sociological interpretation of this fact, it seems reasonable to say that living in non-democratic states, the people of Azerbaijan and of the North Caucus understand that their vote has no meaning whatsoever.

It is certainly a lot more difficult to interpret the support that characterised this year's election. Could it have been won by the opposition? Who really was endorsed by voters – the "old guard" or the "reformers" supported by the authorities? And who, among the pro-government candidates, was to win the elections in individual districts? Apart from the fact that the elections were forged, it is only certain that not in all regions of the country their results were known from the very beginning. Hence, the frustration of many young pro-government "reformist" candidates who were cheated and deprived of a chance to be elected. Any attempt to talk to them and discuss the reason for their failure brings no effects. Their active presence in Azerbaijani politics is still dependent on their loyalty to the regime and any discussion about electoral fraud with international media could end badly for them.

Will the new Azerbaijani National Assembly be able to start the large modernisation that was announced by Aliyev and promoted by his administration? Theoretically, yes, one could imagine a scenario in which the "young technocrats" are engaged in the reform process in a different, extra-parliamentarian way. However, in practice, it is hard to imagine that the reform programme of the country would be built upon the foundation of large scale electoral fraud, instead of the proclaimed modernisation of the National Assembly. NEE

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

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Corona in Kazakhstan

An authoritarian transparency offensive

OTHMARA GLAS

Kazakhstan continues to defy the COVID-19 crisis. Official figures remain encouraging following the government's harsh measures. However, these statistics do not only involve the virus, but also regime critics.

A lack of protective clothing, too few tests and no suitable treatment: Tolkinai Ordabayeva contracted COVID-19 and made some serious accusations. The 29-year old doctor is a specialist in infectious diseases and works in a regional hospital in Southern Kazakhstan. She wrote on Facebook that she had been infected by a patient because of the lack of appropriate equipment: "The hospital administration has forced the medical staff to sew their own masks because at work they do not provide masks or protective clothing."

By the end of May, Kazakhstan had more than 10,000 confirmed cases of coronavirus and 34 people have died. More than a quarter of those infected are medical staff. That may be why Ordabayeva's complaints received such a large response, with state media even reporting on her case. The first reaction of the authorities was to challenge the doctor's claims. Despite this, they announced soon after that they would open an investigation regarding the matter. During this investigation, officials surprisingly found 400 unused masks in Ordabayeva's office. She protested, claiming that the masks had not been in the room before the inspection. Her colleagues joined the protest and supported Ordabayeva's account. As a result, the authorities gave in and dismissed the hospital's management. Ordabayeva's case is a perfect example of how Kazakhstan is dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

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On the one hand, the government has reacted with harsh measures. On the other hand, however, they seem willing to discuss actual numbers and inform the public about their plans.

Controlling and tracing

Kazakhstan has managed the crisis relatively well. The government took the threat seriously from the beginning of the pandemic. After early reports of the virus at the end of January, Kazakhstan closed its borders with China. Nevertheless, there were already rumours of hospitals full of infected patients and a mysterious pulmonary disease in the country's east weeks before the first cases were officially confirmed on March 13th. Kazakhstan was the first country in Central Asia to confirm a case of COVID-19. Since then, there have been daily updates on the number of cases, yet many experts have expressed doubts regarding the official figures published by the government. After all, the virus, according to official reports, did not come from China, but from Kazakhstanis who returned from Germany. By time, even the most critical experts on Central Asia started to believe the numbers. As social media is widely used in Kazakhstan, high infection numbers or "mysterious" deaths would cause suspicion and it would not be possible for the authorities to silence these reports.

In order to be credible, the government attempted to improve its communications strategy. Ministers, who are usually barely visible in the presidential system, held press conferences on a regular basis, answering questions about education, social affairs and the economy. Officials have set up a website and a Telegram channel to provide regular information about new infections and statistics on the number of intensive care beds, ventilators and tests.

Officials have set up a website and a Telegram channel to provide regular information about new infections.

On March 16th, three days after the outbreak, a state of emergency was declared and three days later the country's largest cities, Almaty and Nur-Sultan, were quarantined. They have been the hotspots of infection for a long time. The quarantine was later extended to the entire country, leading to a national lockdown. Residents were only allowed to leave their house to buy food and medicine. Walks or exercise were not deemed valid reasons to go outside.

In order to enforce these measures, police and military personnel patrolled the cities. The president even signed an order to conscript Kazakhstanis who are in the appropriate age group for the army. Police questioned pedestrians about their

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Photo: Yakov Fedorov (CC) commons.wikimedia.org

Disinfection of the streets of Nur-Sultan in Kazakhstan.

general wellbeing and reasons for being outside. All around Kazakhstan's cities, checkpoints were installed to control the population's ability to travel. Within cities, several checkpoints were also installed for drivers. Authorities relied on staff workers but also technology: a monitoring system from China tracked car drivers to ensure that they did not depart from established routes. Interactive maps also monitored exactly where suspected cases and infected persons were being quarantined.

Relaxation despite rising figures

Economically, the pandemic hit Kazakhstan in two significant ways: first, due to lockdown most shops closed and companies suspended operations; second, the economic shutdown in China led to decreased demand for oil and gas. Revenue from the oil and gas industry accounts for a sizable proportion of the governmen-

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tal budget. In March, the local currency (the Kazakhstani tenge) collapsed due to the drop in prices. It hit a low point at the end of March when one euro was worth almost 500 tenge. Fortunately, the currency's value has now increased, with one euro converting to 450 tenge.

President Qasym-Jomart Toqayev, who had been active on social media for a long time, regularly addresses the nation. After introducing a state of emergency, he announced that the state would help all those affected by the quarantine. Employees and freelancers who lost their job due to the lockdown would be able to apply for a monthly payment of 42,500 tenge (around 100 dollars). Yet while more than eight million people applied for this scheme, only 4.5 million received the payment. Taxes and welfare contributions were also suspended or deferred for small and medium-sized businesses. In addition, all citizens will receive access to free health care treatment until July 1st. These precise measures stand in sharp contrast with the policy of Toqayev's predecessor, Nursultan Nazarbayev, who previously called on Kazakhstan's citizens to donate their own money to state companies in financial distress.

The government started to lift restrictions in May. On May 11th, Toqayev declared the end of the state of emergency. Businesses are now open again and trains and flights are operating on a daily basis. Even cafés and restaurants reopened. Mosques are also allowed to open in this predominantly Muslim country. With Ramadan falling in the time of quarantin the country's Grand Mufti urged believers to stay at home and celebrate the breaking of the traditional fast only within small family circles.

Hunt for critics

As the number of infections remained comparatively low in Kazakhstan, most people accepted the harsh measures. Yet human rights activists were worried about the intimidation of critics during the state of emergency. Several activists, opposition members and journalists were arrested for spreading false information and violating lockdown rules. Furthermore, as the right to assembly was not permitted, the protest movement that had started last spring came to a halt.

In Southern Kazakhstan, a judge sentenced an activist to ten days in custody for "actions provoking violation of the public order during the emergency situation". This was after the activist uploaded a video to Facebook showing long lines of people waiting to register for benefit payments at a bank. In West Kazakhstan, journalists were detained by police while interviewing doctors at a hospital in the Atyrau region and charged with "violating the emergency situation."

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One of the most prominent cases is the arrest of Alnur Ilyashev, a prominent blogger. In April, police raided his home in Almaty and he was detained for "spreading knowingly false information during an emergency situation". He was placed in custody for two months pending charges. Ilyashev criticised the ruling party, Nur-Otan, and discussed supposed links between various politicians and corruption cases in a couple of Facebook posts. He could receive a sentence of three to five years in prison.

Another well-known activist, Gennady Krestyansky, was sentenced to ten days of administrative arrest on charges of "undermining the public order during the state of emergency" on April 20th. In a live video stream, he showed how easy one could get through the checkpoints erected around the various cities by paying bribes. Krestyansky believes he was punished because he showed how widespread corruption is, even under a state of emergency.

Human rights activists also criticised the government's actions. Amnesty International, for instance, called Ilyashev "a prisoner of conscience". According to the data of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, alone in Almaty and the capital almost 7,200 people were charged with administrative offenses for violating the rules of the state of emergency. The NGO stated that "the legitimacy of these arrests is not always clear". The independent media watchdog, Adil Soz, published a statement saying, "it is difficult to interpret what is happening right now as anything other than the oppression of critical opinions through fear of imprisonment."

Several activists, opposition members and journalists were arrested for spreading false information and violating lockdown rules.

The director of Kazakhstan's Bureau for Human Rights, Yevgeny Zhovtis, told RFE/RL's Kazakhstan service, Radio Azattyq, that the government's main concern was the control of social networks. "Those who are now [affected by the arrests] are very active on social media. They influence public opinion, like to protest and make claims against the state", he said. Zhovtis believes, above all, that behind the government's harsh actions lies a fear of losing its power in the media. He is convinced that the only power the government now retains is that of intimidation: "we are an authoritarian state, and an authoritarian regime always tries to maintain control and minimise all threats."

A successful crisis manager

Toqayev and his government have shown an ability to act as crises managers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through offering detailed information and up-

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dates during the crisis and by introducing social benefits, the government may have gained more public trust. While the so-called "Elbasy – Leader of the Nation" (Nursultan Nasarbayev) has disappeared – as has often happened during crises – Toqayev visited laboratories and regularly addressed the population. State media opened up and even published articles criticical of the government. However, authorities have also used the state of emergency to detain journalists, human rights activists and regime critics. After all, Kazakhstan remains an authoritarian state. As most restrictions have been lifted by now, opposition figures are already calling for new protests. Despite this, the government now seems to be preparing for a second outbreak in the autumn. Harsh measures may have helped prevent a large infection rate, but they have not prevented the people from speaking out.

As most restrictions have been lifted by now, opposition figures are already calling for new protests.

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Great power competition returns to Central Asia

NATALIA KONARZEWSKA

The Russian-Chinese duopoly retains strong clout in Central Asia. Western overtures to Central Asian nations, however, are still worrisome to Beijing and Moscow, which treat the region as their own backyard. Even though the United States is unlikely to replace Russian or Chinese influence in Central Asia, Washington can offer a geopolitical counterweight and expand its ties with the region, where a western presence is limited.

In early February this year US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, paid a rare visit to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. The visit was yet another signal that Washington, under Donald Trump's presidency, wants to strengthen ties with Central Asian nations and challenge Sino-Russian domination in the region. Pompeo's visit was part of Donald Trump's administration broad effort to reinvigorate ties with Central Asian nations which has come ahead of the unveiling of the United States Strategy for Central Asia 2019–2025 in February this year.

The United States seeks to bolster its presence in the region, which is dominated by the Russia and China geopolitical duopoly. Even after the collapse of the Soviet Union Russia's influence in Central Asia somewhat weakened, Moscow remains an important security and political player in the region, and still retains significant cultural clout. Russia also hosts large numbers of Central Asian migrant workers who provide much needed financial assistance for their families at home and the status of these diaspora can potentially become a political bargaining chip between Moscow and Central Asian states. Due to geographic proximity, Mos-

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cow sees Central Asia as a buffer of instability coming from the Middle East and Afghanistan. Yet despite the fact that several Central Asian nations are members of the Moscow-dominated Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), Russian economic weight in the region is weaning at the expense of China, whose posture in Central Asia is growing.

Strategic co-operation and balancing

Beijing's rising economic clout in the region is tied to its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative which is largely unfolding in Central Asia. Massive Chinese investments in the region are accompanied by Beijing's cultural offensive which aims to promote Chinese culture and build people-to-people contacts between Central Asian nations and China. However Beijing's rising economic weight in the region has caused rapid deterioration of social attitudes towards China among Central Asian nations, which often results in mass protests. As a rule, Central Asian elites, which benefit from the Chinese model investment based on corrupt practices, have more favourable views of co-operation with China than the local citizens.

There is also a lingering danger that Central Asian states become overwhelmed and economically dependent on their powerful neighbour. The case of Turkmenistan can serve as a cautionary tale. In the last few years, energy-rich but landlocked Turkmenistan became dependent on China as its biggest gas client and its gas revenue has been limited by the debt it owes to China for the construction of the Central Asia-China pipeline and development of the Galkynysh gas field.

> The power dynamics between Russia and China in Central Asia is based on separate spheres of influence.

At first glance, the geopolitical configuration between China and Russia in Central Asia might lead to a fierce rivalry. However, Moscow prioritises its strategic partnership with Beijing and avoids overt competition with China because the latter is becoming increasingly important for Russia as a counterweight to the West. Also, there is a visible power asymmetry between Russia and China, particularly in terms of the economy. Moscow is unlikely to succeed in challenging Beijing's position in the region, but could benefit from partnership with China. The power dynamics between Russia and China in Central Asia are based on separate spheres of influence – Moscow dominates in terms of politics and military, while China is responsible for economic and infrastructural development. Chinese and Russian interests in the region overlap and their strategic co-operation is aimed at containing western (mainly US) encroachment. This might change over time

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though, as there are numerous predictions that regional competition between Russia and China will increase in security and energy. But for the time being, Sino-Russian duopoly is focused on minimising western influence in the region and the latest signs that the US wants to strengthen its presence have unnerved both Beijing and Moscow.

The US took a serious interest in Central Asia after the collapse of the Soviet Union and ascribed much geopolitical importance to the region which is located in the close neighbourhood of America's great rivals – Russia and China. American interest has grown stronger with the start of US- and NATO-led operations in Afghanistan, when Central Asian states provided their territory for military use and logistical arrangements as part of the Northern Distribution Network to and from landlocked Afghanistan. Since the US has started to reduce its presence in Afghanistan, the significance of these ties has also waned.

However Washington has not altogether lost its interest in this strategically important region. In 2015 the US established the C5+1 format, which is a vehicle for dialogue and co-operation between five Central Asian states, and it aims to foster co-operation on a number of issues, including security, facilitating trade and improving the business climate, and addressing environmental challenges. Lately Central Asia was put in the spotlight again after the US signed a landmark peace agreement in February with the Taliban after 19 years of conflict. The agreement lays the groundwork for withdrawing the remaining US and other NATO troops from Afghanistan.

Transitions as opportunities?

The official reason for Pompeo's visit to Central Asia in February was to reaffirm the US strategic partnership with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and to discuss trade and investment opportunities. The US also looks forward to positive results of economic and political reforms which have been undertaken in both countries, and to pave the way for more US investment there. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are energy-rich countries which seek to bolster their economy with foreign investment.

Both countries are also currently undergoing a political transition. After the death of long-time president Islam Karimov in 2016, Uzbekistan has been implementing political and economic reforms to end the Karimov-era isolationism. Kazakhstan underwent political transition last year when Nursultan Nazarbayev stepped down and his successor promised to conduct much needed reforms. Apart from that, proximity to troubled Afghanistan makes Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan important security partners for Washington, as both are vital parts of the US Northern

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Distribution Network and their governments are engaged in fighting terrorism. What is more, Tashkent is playing an increasingly important role in the peace process and stabilisation efforts in Afghanistan.

During his brief visit in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, Pompeo held several high-profile meetings. In Kazakhstan, Pompeo met with the new president, Qasym-Jomart Toqaev, Nazarbayev and Mukhtar Tleuberdi, the foreign minister. In Uzbekistan Pompeo met with President Shavkat Mirziyoyev and Foreign Minister, Abdulaziz Kamilov. During his visit in Tashkent, Pompeo also participated in the C5+1 meeting with foreign ministers representing five Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

At first glance, Chinese influence in the region was the most consistent topic during this trip, as the US Secretary of State called his hosts to eschew co-operation with Beijing. The anti-Chinese angle was particularly pronounced in Pompeo's speech during the joint conference with Kazakhstan's minister of foreign affairs, where he explicitly warned against close co-operation with China and straightforwardly praised benefits of partnering with US companies rather than Chinese ones. During the same event he also criticised China's crackdown on Muslim minority groups. This problem was even more highlighted during Pompeo's meeting with ethnic Kazakhs living in China, who are campaigning to bring attention to government-sponsored crackdown on Muslims in China's Xinjiang region.

In its effort to counterweight China in the region, the US focuses on two countries – Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan – which are predicted to offer promising political and economic outcomes. Trump's administration has already made overtures to Nur-Sultan and Tashkent. In 2018 Nazarbayev and Mirziyoyev made rare visits to the White House. Additionally, to date there have been several promising high-level meetings within the C5+1 format. Washington is looking for more progress in Uzbekistan, in terms of the rule of law and improving the business climate to create more opportunities for US companies to engage in the country. Nevertheless, despite undertaking bold market-oriented reforms, which aim to liberalise Uzbekistan's economy, the country's human rights record remains disappointing.

New old strategy

Pompeo's trip to Central Asia was a prelude to unveiling the US's Strategy for Central Asia. The updated strategy is based on the six core policy objectives which include supporting the independence and sovereignty of the Central Asian states, counter-terrorism measures, ensuring regional support for peace and stability in Afghanistan as well as developing connectivity between Central Asia and Af-

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ghanistan, and promoting political and market reforms in the region to facilitate US investment.

The action plan for 2019–2025 emphasises continuity in the US approach while acknowledging that the political and economic environment in Central Asia has changed, which prompts Washington to engage more in the region beyond traditional security interests. Pompeo's trip to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan shows that the US does not intend to shy away from stepping into competition with big powers in the region and wants to counterweight Chinese and Russian influence. The official visit to Kazakhstan was a clear effort to exploit anti-Chinese sentiments which have been present for many years among large swathes of Kazakh society. In the past year, anti-Chinese attitudes in Kazakhstan have grown rapidly and turned into mass protests fuelled by the plight of ethnic Kazakhs in Xinjiang and China's exploitative business model employed in the country. Kazakhstan is currently in a vulnerable period caused by crucial political transition in the presidential seat and general socioeconomic unrest, but authorities seem largely to ignore the public sentiments and opt for even closer economic co-operation with China. The Kazakh government must have agreed to a specific agenda with the US Secretary of State's visit, but carefully avoided any anti-Beijing statements and did not publicly respond to Pompeo's call for US partners to unite in order to end repressions in Xinjiang.

> Anti-Chinese attitudes in Kazakhstan have grown, fuelled by the plight of ethnic Kazakhs in Xinjiang.

Uzbekistan poses an even bigger challenge for US diplomacy in the region because the country is being pressured by Moscow to join the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and possibly renew its membership in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which Washington vehemently opposes. Debate about Uzbekistan membership in the EEU comes at a time when Russia is eager to speed up integration in the post-Soviet space under its own auspices and exerts not so subtle pressure on Uzbekistan and other post-Soviet countries to join Moscow-led integrative blocs. Uzbekistan has been in talks with Moscow about joining the EEU, but remains hesitant for several reasons. Taskhent wants to preserve economic and trade independence and to avoid pitfalls associated with membership of the EEU. The recent example of Belarus, which is relentlessly pressured by Moscow for deeper integration, serves as a warning to Tashkent about the possible implications of joining Moscow-dominated integrative organisations. In January, Mirziyoyev, for the first time, addressed possible Uzbekistan's co-operation with the EEU and said that his country opts not for the full-fledged membership but rather having an observer status. Having said all that, Pompeo's visit to Uzbekistan could not

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be more timely as Tashkent can use its partnership with the US as a geopolitical counterweight to Moscow and an opportunity to diversify its foreign investment portfolio away from Russia and China.

Geopolitical counterweight

The Russian-Chinese duopoly retains strong clout in Central Asia, but western overtures to the Central Asian nations are still worrisome to Beijing and Moscow, which treat the region as their own backyard. Even though the US is unlikely to replace Russian or Chinese influence in Central Asia, Washington can offer a geopolitical counterweight and expand its ties with the region, where a western presence is limited.

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are unlikely to join the US in openly challenging China, but would use relations with the country as a foreign policy and economic alternative, which would allow them to withstand pressure coming from China and Russia. However, US inroads into Central Asia can spark geopolitical competition between the big powers which the Central Asian political elites want to avoid in fear of becoming pawns in the "new Great Game" and being dominated by more powerful external actors. At the same time, US and NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan poses a security challenge for Central Asian states and raises fears about growing unrest in Afghanistan which could spill into the region. Washington will have to work closely with Central Asian partners to minimise any security risks. NEE

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Bosnia's others

ANASTASIYA ILYINA

Despite the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights, the political rights of the so-called "other" citizens are still hampered in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Today, we can observe the lack of effective mechanisms for the participation of minorities in public life.

National minorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina do not have effective access to their rights. The country is still deeply divided between the three constituent ethnicities – Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs – but also a fourth constitutional group, comprising more than a dozen other national minorities, called "the others". The others are subject to institutional discrimination and they cannot fully participate in the country's political processes and are treated as second-rate citizens.

Public life in Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to be marked by segregation, since members of constituent peoples living outside the territory which corresponds to their ethnicity still suffer from discrimination and, in some cases, violence and abuse. Political leaders and other public figures continue to divide, discriminate and exacerbate ethnic divisions. Since such actions are not condemned by public institutions, this further creates precedents of impunity.

Unjustifiable inequality

The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg has so far rendered several verdicts such, as the Sejdić-Finci case that should remove discrimination from the Bosnia and Herzegovina Constitution and the Election Law, to allow every citizen to have an active and passive suffrage. The problem is that the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina do not respect these judgments and therefore do not enforce

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them. Dervo Sejdić was the Roma Monitor for the Organisation on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, having previously served as a member of the Roma Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the highest representative body of the local Roma community, and was a member of the Advisory Committee for Roma, a joint body comprising representatives of the local Roma community and of the relevant ministries. Jakob Finci was then serving as the Ambassador of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Switzerland, and had previously occupied positions such as President of the Inter-Religious Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Head of the State Civil Service Agency. Ten years ago, the two men applied to the European Court of Human Rights. The applicants described themselves to be of Roma and Jewish origin respectively. Since they did not declare affiliation with any of the "constituent peoples", they were ineligible to stand for election for the House of Peoples, the second chamber of the State Parliament, and for the Presidency. According to the constitution, which was created after the Dayton Settlement, only those declaring affiliation with a "constituent people" are entitled to run for the House of Peoples and the Presidency.

According to the constitution, only those declaring affiliation with a "constituent people" are entitled to run for high office.

Despite the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights, the rights of the so-called "other" citizens to be elected and to hold high-level public office are still hampered by a lack of political will to amend constitutional and legal provisions. After the European Court of Human Rights ruled in favour of the Sejdić-Finci case, the Bosnian government agreed to take measures to implement the court ruling. It initiated, for example, the idea of a task force that has yet to be created. Today, we can observe the absence of any prescribed method for the participation of non-constituent minorities within the task force, the lack of effective mechanisms for the participation of minorities in public life, and the existence of 22 cases of segregation.

Clive Boldwin, the former defender of Finci, is convinced that this situation can be changed. The first step could be the decentralisation of decision-making. Bosnia and Herzegovina should start by taking responsibility for the unjustifiable inequality of treatment. According to the Dayton Settlement, the United States and the European Union took part in the creation of these mechanisms, so they could put pressure on Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to respect the ruling on human rights. It would be a big change to see international institutions and foreign states getting involved in solving issues met by national minorities, especially since Bosnia and Herzegovina is still interested in joining the EU. According to the current Bosnia and Herzegovina election law, national minorities only have representa-

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The parliament of Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to the Constitution, which was created after the Dayton Settlement, only those declaring affiliation with a "constituent people" are entitled to run for the House of Peoples, the upper house of parliament.

tives at local level. Recently, the Sarajevo Canton Assembly adopted an initiative requesting changes to the Bosnia and Herzegovina Election Law that would allow national minorities to have representatives in cantonal assemblies.

Institutional discrimination

Bosnia and Herzegovina has also made little effort to provide minority language learning. There are neither publications nor broadcasts in minority languages, nor are these languages used in daily contact with administrative institutions. While initiatives by civil society organisations show that there is a will to introduce integrated schools, experts have not noticed sufficient progress when it comes to eradicating segregation in education. The Roma population in Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to face serious difficulties and discrimination in terms of access to employment, health services, regular education and housing.

The latest report of the Council of Europe Advisory Committee, published in October 2018, concluded that in a country still deeply divided between the three constituent peoples, national minorities continue to be institutionally discriminat-

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ed against and are unable to fully participate in the country's political processes. Moreover, Bosnian women advocating for constitutional reform emphasise that the constitution does not have a gender aspect and suggest five priorities for gender and social protection: introduce gender-sensitive language, implement affirmative measures to ensure gender equality, universal health, social and family protection (e.g., better legal protection and better food protection), and ensuring that they are being provided. Still to this day, there are inequalities in the provision of medical services depending on where the woman lives and regardless of her ethnic background. One of the tasks is educating citizens about constitutional changes and explaining that the constitution is not treating everyone equally.

The Roma population in Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to face serious difficulties and discrimination.

Bosnia and Herzegovina, like other European countries, is facing the challenges of COVID-19. Educational institutions have been closed, public events cancelled and spots for public gatherings – malls, restaurants, museums and other non-essential public spaces – have been ordered closed. Sarajevo airport was closed to all passenger traffic on March 30th, while other airports in the country were already closed. In the federation, people are required to cover their mouths and noses when out in public, while in Republika Srpska there is a requirement to wear gloves. Throughout the country a 24-hour curfew is in place for those who are under 18 and over 65 years of age. All Bosnia and Herzegovina citizens and foreigners entering the country face mandatory quarantine at the port of entry or self-isolation for 14 days. The rhetorical question remains: during this difficult time, how will "the others" be treated by local medical services?

Anastasiya Ilyina is a graduate of the faculty of history of Brest State University, a graduate of Eastern studies at the University of Warsaw, and a graduate of the Human Rights Advocates Program at Columbia University. She has a PhD in humanities in the field of sociology from the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

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The memory and experience of 1980

An interview with Cezary Obracht-Prądzyński, sociologist and professor at Gdańsk University. Interviewer: Piotr Leszczyński

PIOTR LESZCZYŃSKI: What was the phenomenon of August 1989 in Poland? What took place at that time in the Gdańsk Shipyard, and what can this experience tell us now about Polish society of that time?

CEZARY OBRACHT-PRĄDZYŃSKI: It is not easy to talk about Solidarity. We do not have one position that would allow us to interpret the events, the causes and effects of the strike – both the experience and the memory of Solidarity have been very diverse. Solidarity was a very heterogenous movement from the beginning. It is remembered differently by people who worked and lived in Gdańsk and witnessed these events, who got to see what was taking place in the shipyard. Their perspective was unlike those who lived in other parts of the country and were forced to rely on information broadcasted by state media. There were many other approaches existing at the time in regards to the events, for example, the one from the communist authorities or the ambivalent attitude of the Catholic Church. I am therefore convinced that there is no such thing as one community experience of this event. Certainly, Solidarity was a protest movement, which was an expression of discontent towards the political reality, but it was also a movement that was strong, yet diverse, in regard to ideology and identity. It was a local movement, centred in big cities but also in peripheries. Thus, whatever interpretation you would like to apply is correct.

In August 1980 the intellectual elite became united with the workers over their dispute with the authorities. Yet today our society is strongly divided. Where did we lose this national unity that was built 40 years ago?

When we talk about a shared uprising, we stretch reality because we think right away about the negotiations and the signing of the 21 demands of the strike committee. We see the workers' leaders and the leaders of the intelligentsia working together. But it's an illusion to assume that they represented all Polish intellectuals. Many kept their

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distance during the events, and others stood beside those who were in power. The intelligentsia as a group was very diverse, as were the workers. We have to be aware of that when we look at society during the time of Solidarity, which was characterised by different positions and attitudes. For obvious reasons, they were not that visible to the public eye, but the reality was that we were very diverse back then and the divisions within groups were very strong.

Forty years later, we have been left with images of a mass movement and the large workers' strikes, and it makes it seem like we had an ideal community. Yet, a few months later, the Martial Law, introduced in December 1981, divided the groups once again. To this day there is no shared position on the interpretation of this decision by General Wojciech Jaruzelski – should it be analysed purely in negative terms, or as a lesser evil? Or maybe even as something positive? It does reflect the whole experience of Solidarity in a way, since opinions were also divided. Overall, the mass nature of the Solidarity movement as well as the assessment of attitudes tend to generate disputes to this day, and this is probably how things will stay.

And what about our collective memory? What does it teach us about the end of the 1980s and what took place then?

By the end of the 1980s, there were debates on the country's dramatic social and economic reality. The problem was not only the economic crisis itself, but the lack of ideas from the communist authorities on how to solve the crisis, as well as the outflow of energy coming from the opposition. Let us also not forget about the massive scale of emigration which took place. More than 100,000 Poles left their country for good in 1988; it was called a "migration out of helplessness". Both the opposition and the authorities understood that they were walking on quicksand – without social support, the authorities could not introduce reforms, while the opposition would not be able to organise a second mass movement. Hence came the idea of the Round Table. Those who criticise this solution today tend to forget about its context, which was hidden in its economic, social, but also mental significance. We were so worn-out and dead tired. This is the background of what took place between May 1988 and June 1989. In my view, these are the key months to look at in order to understand the dynamics of the situation. All participants of the Round Table talks understood that we had to sit down together and start talking, and it ended with an agreement and a new start. Most importantly, that allowed an awakening of society. Later came the June elections, and the first non-communist government, led by Tadeusz Mazowiecki and Leszek Balcerowicz's reform plan.

I recall these details to illustrate the state of our memory. It seems like we do not want to remember from what point we started. The memory of the Solidarity movement refers not only to the 1980

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August Accords, but to the events that took place in the late 1980s. We entered the transformation period with different experiences and we were deeply split, thus influencing our assessment of the events that came later. I am saying this to note that we should not be surprised with the current divisions and because we should not idealise the past so much. The current divisions within Polish society are clearly divisions that have derived from our assessment of the past, of the transformation, and the subsequent political changes.

Haven't we lost the collective wisdom that you mentioned before? Is there any chance for unity today?

Maybe things are still too good for us. I hope it won't be the case, but possibly the deterioration of the current situation – be it related to public health, climate change, the economic crisis or geopolitics – will push us to unite. Of course, I still prefer the current divisions over the ones the country experienced in the 1980s. But on the other hand, let us be careful not to think about a political dispute as a fight between two tribes with absolutely no chance for agreement. In fact, people can support one another and listen to one another, and do good things together. What is worrisome, however, is that the political dispute, or rather the two-party dispute, infects other areas of our lives.

For years we thought of the *Homo sovieticus* as an obsolete concept in Poland,

Photo courtesy of Cezary Obracht-Prądzyński

but now we hear it being used in public discourse. What went wrong? Were we pretending that Poland is "modern and western", or did something change in recent years?

The concept of *Homo sovieticus*, which was popularised in Poland by the late Józef Tischner, a philosopher and Catholic priest with close ties to the Solidarity movement, was trivialised for years. But let's put this issue aside for a moment and start with the evaluation of the transformation. We now hear criticism of this process from different sides, both the new left and the right-wing, as well as groups closely connected to the ruling Law and Justice party. I am a child of the transformation, as I started my adult life in 1989 and have always remained involved in discussions on the transformation and privatisation

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reforms undertaken first by Leszek Balcerowicz and later by Jerzy Buzek. It's important to recall that we did not take all of these changes with silent approval. There was no need to completely disagree with the introduced reforms. We see for instance the political right often suggesting that we never cared about history, but it's wrong. I think back to our great historical upheaval in the 1990s, when we were removing the white spots and opening previously closed archives. Those times also saw the great work of Polish historians, bookshops full of books and magazines that were specifically focusing on contemporary history. When I hear that there was no critical approach to the transformation, I think how short human memory can be. The problem is that everything can be turned around and moved in such a way that it would fit somebody's ideological and political goals.

We have also forgotten about those who built our new economy from scratch after 1989…

Yes, the true creators of the transformation were the Poles who "took matters into their own hands" and started building new institutions and social organisations. We owe our success to all these people who showed great determination. Poland looks so different today. Many cross this achievement out, as if it meant nothing, but we should never forget who worked for that to happen. This is something I can never come to understand. I think it is a positive thing to be able to make a critical assessment of the last 30 years. However, I also know that omnipresent criticism only makes some more stuck in their own views. Let's be open about it: we all participated in the process and contributed to the building of our state. All of us, including those who are being critical about it now. It would be much better for our society, and for the quality of our public debate, if we could realistically look at what took place and how we were writing and talking about it.

Is Gdańsk and our region overall some kind of an island on Poland's map?

No, we are not an island. Pomerania is actually Poland in a micro-scale. At least this is how I see it. We are, for example, quite diverse when it comes to election turnout. In our region, there are localities with record turnout slightly above 20 per cent, but there is also the city of Sopot with election turnout exceeding 60 per cent – this is a huge difference. The same can be said about political preferences. There are places where the left has its stronghold and gets good election results, and places where the Law and Justice wins – this trend is currently on the rise. However, there are also places where the Civic Platform is the unquestionable leader. Thus, looking at our political map, we are just as diverse as the rest of the country.

But you have to agree that the Pomerania region is nonetheless different from the rest of Poland?

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I would not agree with that, we are not any different here. It all depends on our perspective and whether we are talking about the whole region or just the metropolis, which in our case includes three cities, Gdańsk, Gdynia and Sopot. Overall, the region looks different because of the dominance of the metropolis: there are 2.2 million inhabitants in the region, but one million live in these three cities. This structure decides on the results. If we look at the results of the last elections, it would seem that the opposition party, the Civic Platform, won; but if you look more closely, at the level of counties and villages, you get a completely different picture. And you cannot say that the situation won't get reversed and that the Law and Justice will never win here. The word enclave sounds good, but it is not true.

"Everything started in Gdańsk". Are these words the dream of the Polish liberal elite, or are they a real chance for change in Poland, just like it was in 1980?

You are asking whether Gdańsk, widely understood of course, is able to propose something, a new idea, or to give a signal? I would really want that to happen, but what would it be? First, we need to connect the issues and value systems that we are attached to, embodied by our coat of arms, *nec temere, nec timide*, which means neither rashly nor timidly; the "self-governing Republic"; and the most important of all words for the city – "solidarity". The next thing is our engagement: we talk, engage and mobilise. This is the true ethos of public work. And the last thing is our mental attitude, which is related to the first two. In other words, we have ideas which are connected with some behaviours, and these behaviours entail certain positions.

We have a position of openness, understanding and empathy, and it seems to me that practice is a test of intensions. All these values together will be seen through our actions – it is the only way for us to convince ourselves and others that values and positions can be effective and socially accepted. This is a huge commitment. We are ahead of many commitments, which we should face and seriously treat, and we still have reserves as we have not yet achieved maximum engagement. Let us try to manage that.

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

Cezary Obracht-Prondzyński is a sociologist, anthropologist, historian and a professor at the Univeristy of Gdańsk and head of the Kashubian Institute.

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

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Siberia is a feeling to me

A conversation with Sophy Roberts, a writer, journalist and author of *The Lost Pianos of Siberia*. Interviewer: JP O' Malley

JP O' MALLEY: What brought you to Siberia and why did you write this book?

SOPHY ROBERTS: I spent a lot of time in Mongolia where I formed a friendship with a pianist. When you spend time in a place like Mongolia, certain things start to resonate differently. You see that there are less boundaries, for instance, than there are in Western Europe. Especially when it comes to [physical] space. In Siberia, just across the border from Mongolia, I saw an extension of that feeling. You feel like you are stepping back into a world before we became such a dominant species. As a traveller with a curious eye, that appealed to me. I find it compelling spiritually. Siberia as a place has always carried a certain kind of romance to it. I still remember looking at a map of it when I was a child and thinking about how big it was but not knowing what lay within it. I'm also a bit of a loner, so those environments are places I'm drawn to.

And the piano story?

I believe that music and its power transcend knowledge of it. You don't have to be a musician who can read a note of music to be able to feel its power. I don't like that elitism that can sometimes belong to a cultural phenomenon like literature or music. And I found it exciting in a place like Russia where they are far less snobbish about [culture] than in the West, where there is often an attitude among the top of society which has access to classical music. So with this book I felt I was able to explore the effects of music on everyday people. I started trying to find a grand instrument, but I understood that the humblest of instrument can have an equally profound effect on its owner, player or listener.

You also refer to Siberia as more significant than a place on the map, but as a feeling. What do you mean by that?

Siberia is a feeling to me. So many places have been defined by tourism, social media or really powerful voices. Siberia's cultural history is not definitive in the way that other places are. And I think of it as a place of potential and optimism. It's also exciting to be in places where people haven't always told their story before.

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Traveling across Siberia: what were your impressions of the landscape?

So much about travel is about how it stimulates your senses. The Siberian landscape in winter is a blanket of snow. It covers up a lot of things and takes it back to a white, prelapsarian state. It's easy to be seduced by its romance. The shamanistic history in Siberia and the high levels of spiritualism in the culture is firmly rooted to those sensory experiences of landscape. That's what I mean when I say Siberia is a feeling: to me that is where it all connects. The landscape of Siberia moved me emotionally before it moved me intellectually. And that is a really exciting thing in a world where we think there is nothing new under the sun as travellers. Siberia made me see a place that is not processed by tourism or overexposure.

How about the people you met?

What I found with the people mostly was a kind of quiet privacy. They don't have a constant need to be seen and heard like people in the West do. There is also a very strong sense of community. People get on with life. Yes, there is darkness. Yes, there is tricky politics. But they are profoundly humble people.

You mention how empathy has always been seared into the Siberian psyche from the start. That seems paradoxical considering that it has been a destination for prisoners for many centuries?

There is a sense there that people are in it together. There is a community aspect in Siberia where people know their neighbours. That isn't true in my culture. When you are in severe circumstances you need your community. Back in the Tsarist exile period, it didn't matter if you were guilty or innocent: you were in Siberia. That degree of human empathy and compassion still exists today.

Another interesting aspect to Siberia is how many people of significance in Russian culture and history have spent time there as prisoners: the Decembrists, Dostoevsky, Trotsky, Lenin, Stalin, and Solzhenitsyn to name a few. Presumably this was something that interested you when researching for your book?

Those particular characters you have listed, yes, because they are the rare individuals who left evidence of their time spent in Siberia, and they have the capacity as creative people to express it. But the vast majority of people only suffered and went to the grave with silence and hell. But the expression left from people like Dostoevsky is what remains for people like me to work with as a storyteller. I'm an optimist. And I look for the best in people. As a traveller that helps me. I was naturally drawn to stories where people made the best of a bad situation. That's why I like the Decembrists so much.

You dedicate nearly an entire chapter in your book to those Russian military officers and noblemen who organised the Decembrist revolt of 1825. You mention that they even had a music room for a piano in Siberia in political exile?

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Yes. Their exile was a privileged exile. For some of them at least. Some were sent to Yakutia without any of their fellow Decembrists. And others went mad. So everyone's story is not the same. But the Decembrists story that I focus on are the ones who end up in Chita, and the Volkonsky family in particular. They had the camaraderie where a few of them together could collectively make an academy. One was an astronomer. One was a painter. One was a musician. So they could benefit from each other's knowledge when they were in prison together. That is what made that particular group so interesting. Music was a really important strand of that academy they created in prison.

Photo: Michael Turek / Courtesy of Sophy Roberts

The Trans-Siberian railway began in 1891. How did it change Siberia?

Travel for starters. Travelling across Siberia prior to the Trans-Siberian railway was extraordinary. The rivers flow south to north, not east to west. So you are constantly having to traverse a piece of ground and then [move] your material over rivers. So you can never flow along a river. Prior to the Trans-Siberian railway, getting goods of any significance was difficult. You had to move goods when everything was frozen. The railway enabled that continuous journey all year round. So it completely changed the fortunes of Russia. But the railway is only one tiny thread through a vast amount of territory. And the decisions made on where that thread went affected the development of towns and the destruction of others. Only cities on that railway bloomed and blossomed. Most people's knowledge today of Siberia comes from hopping on and off that train. What I found interesting as a traveller was going beyond the train. And thinking about creative ways to get beyond into the back country into places that otherwise were not easily accessible.

The Russian writer Anton Chekhov pops up quite a few times in your book. What was it about his stay in Siberia that you found particularly interesting?

He's a huge resource because he made the trip to Siberia all the way to Sakhalin (a Russian island in the Pacific Ocean, north of Japan). His book *Sakhalin Island* is an incredibly brave piece of investigate journalism. He knew he was dying of TB at the time – was that what made him so brave? I don't know. But when I started

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to read his work on Sakhalin I began to see echoes of characters from his other works. I love his writing as a traveller. His sense of irony is very modern. You also trust him as a travel writer because he is not giving you the puff of the modern travel writing industry, which says everything is brilliant. I find his writing profoundly honest, amusing and sharp witted. He says he would rather die than spend another night in certain towns: where the brothels are grim and the women are ugly.

You also look at the Romanovs languishing in Siberia before their brutal murder at Yekaterinburg by the Bolsheviks in July 1918. Can you tell me about your search for a grand piano that was supposed to have made its way along with the family?

Finding records of instruments in history is difficult. There was one particular instrument that was noted in detail because it was present in the last home the Romanovs lived in where they were killed. It was documented because it was an official document that was made by the investigators. So that gave me a physical fact that this instrument existed. In trying to find out where it could have gone, I followed a number of false rumours, claims and leads. That was a really important moment for me in the research because it made me realise that the piano was a means for me to tell a bigger story about Russia. It was a mechanism to go into the history of a country over the last 200 years. Even though I didn't find that Tsar piano, I realised it didn't matter because it led me to deeper stories about what changed Russia.

How has Siberia's position changed since the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991? Did it become less relevant for Russia?

No, it has become more relevant to Russia, not culturally but economically. Siberia's relevance to Russia is huge and it's going to get even bigger. Over the next 20 years we are going to see a lot more developments in Siberia in the area of resource extraction. Its proximity to China is also important. Especially with shifting changing politics of Eurasia. It's a really interesting part of that world for that reason. It's a crucible. NEE

Sophy Roberts is a British writer and journalist. Her debut book, *The Lost Pianos of Siberia*, focuses on a quest to find an instrument for a talented musician she meets in Mongolia, whose family fled Siberia in the 1930s. The book subsequently explores 200 years of Russian history.

JP O'Malley is a freelance journalist and cultural critic.

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The COVID-19 crisis is generating far-reaching outcomes for culture

An interview with Jakub Kornhauser, a Kraków-based poet, literary critic and researcher of avant-garde. Interviewer: Grzegorz Nurek

GRZEGORZ NUREK: You are one of the co-founders of the Centre for Avant-Garde Studies at the Jagiellonian University's Department of Polish Studies. The work of the centre concentrates on avant-garde research, but is it limited to literature?

JAKUB KORNHAUSER: We established our centre a few years ago convinced that there is a need to get the story of avant-garde out of schoolbook charts and definitions. We are all victims of different clichés which are sold to us by school materials, which tend to repeat the same names and works and which are further spiced up by some remote anecdotes, as if avant-garde was a Sumerian phenomenon. Avant-garde is not only a shared name for numerous artistic searches which took place 100 years ago, but also a state of mind, an experimental potential, which can get activated regardless of the historical context. Obviously, we can add different prefixes to the term and hence talk about neo-avant-garde or post-avant-garde, but this does not change the fact that being an avant-garde artist means acting against the established schemes and conventions, seeking new means of expression, and avoiding work that is aimed at proving evidence to the already established theses. In this sense, avant-garde is anarchistic, revolutionary and heterogeneous.

At our centre we examine many different faces of the avant-garde movement, including the precursory ones as well as those from the more contemporary times. We analyse avant-garde as it developed in Western Europe, but also in Central and Eastern Europe. In regards to the latter, we mainly search for works that are harder to reach. Thus, we translate (into Polish) different manifestos and literary texts, we republish forgotten works of art, organise exhibi-

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tions, discussions and conferences. We do all of this to show the many different aspects of avant-garde. Clearly, the more we dig, the more we find. Such was, for example, the case with our discovery of Romanian Surrealism or Serbian and Hungarian concrete poetry. These experiences convince us of the great value of Central European avant-garde vis-à-vis its Western European cousins.

At the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic we saw some films showing empty public spaces and inscriptions such as "4.33 playing in an empty mall" or "This is the time of Cage". At the same time, there are also many who are afraid of avant-garde art. In your view, is this artistic trend still capable of expressing truth both about beauty and the problems of today's world?

Broadly speaking, some of the avant-garde artists were openly against engagement in daily activities and opted for the penetration of the irrational side of life. This, of course, does not mean that the avant-garde suffers from some Peter Pan syndrome, lacking seriousness and solely focusing on the mimesis. Conversely, avant-garde artists rebelled against the established forms to – more precisely and more painfully – diagnose the problems of modernity. Thus, Marcel Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel* or *Fountain* were not just boyish pranks, but actual criticism of bourgeois life and metaphysical utopia with their plethora of pompous slogans such as "beauty" which lost their meaning and appeal in the trenches of the First World War. The surrealists did not expect others to recognise their dreams and subconscious as more important than reality. They were doing their art and believing the end of civilisation was based on social inequality and the alienation of social groups. The avant-garde movements were always focused on delivering new social and political projects, not limiting their work solely to aesthetic ideas and values. The artists wanted their audience to realise what was missing in their lives.

On other levels and with different results, they were trying to point out to different paths of evacuation. The renunciation of "creatures of habit", as André Breton would have put it, was one of the most important paths. Others included solutions as the immersion of modern technologies or adherence to local beliefs or traditions. All of them, speaking against the elitism of old classics, were creating an illusion of universal access to art. The paradox of the avant-garde is that it has created a different type of elitism, one that, with time, has become painfully classical.

But this unpredictability of the future effects of art characterises the artists themselves. Like Edward Hopper whose paintings of lonely people in deserted American cities became so poignantly relevant at the time of pandemics. Yet these paintings are very realistic and not some kind of experiment.

This is true indeed, however Hopper's minimalism of presentation does put him among the avant-garde artists. Quite similarly were the works of such

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Photo courtesy of Jakub Kornhauser

proto-Surrealists as Giorgio de Chirico and the Surrealist René Magritte. In their works deformation takes place at a different level – not through shapes or colours, but the construction of the painting. The immobile, as if frozen, reality acts here against nature, undermining the assumption of fluid and linear movement. Details are very important; a small object – a fruit, the interior of a room – gains an additional dimension, revealing their secret identities which are ignored by people on a daily basis. Just like the pandemic which alienates us from our normal rhythm, even though it does not misshape our surroundings. And yet, it still makes us rearrange and build anew our relations with objects which are next to us; those that are behind our windows or in our homes.

Why was André Breton such an important person in the history of avant-garde?

Breton was the leader of an international group of artists who, in the 1920s, created the centre of the Surrealist movement in Paris. Naturally, like any leader, he was despotic and convinced of the accuracy of his judgements. This, in turn, led to a removal of some artists from the group. In the first place, however, he is the author of the movement's doctrine. In his numerous Surrealist manifestations, which have not lost their linguistic mastery and revolutionary bellicosity, Breton proclaimed a new reality. One that exists somewhere between being awake and dreaming. It is here where the artists claim the complete liberation of man from all social norm and etiquette restraints. It was here where the flag of imagination was to proudly wave. Today, when we read Breton's manifestos, which he wrote in the 1920s or 1930s, we notice their prophetic power. We read about the automation of objects and the objectification of subjects, non-Euclidean geometry, simulacra and civic disobedience as a meaning of life. We can find echoes of these ideas in the works of prominent postmodern philosophers such as Jean Baudrillard, Zygmunt Bau-

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man, Jean-François Lyotard, and Arjun Appadurai. In contrast to conventional wisdom, this shows how innovative the avant-garde movement was.

While Western European and Russian avant-garde movements are quite well-known, those that developed in Central and Eastern Europe are barely known at all. Could you outline a map of the most interesting phenomena which have developed in this region, along with the names of the artists who are worth discovering?

To answer this question, let me first state that we are talking about a very diverse network of trends which developed in Central and Eastern Europe after the outbreak of the Great Avant-Garde in the early 20th century. Thus, it would be quite difficult to compare, for example, Serbian Zenitism, whose main ideologue Ljubomir Micić was inspired by Balkan folklore and the Messianic depth of Pan-Slavism with Czech Poetism, which, through the works of Karel Teige, praised everyday life, ordinariness and a conviction that everyone is an artist. In the 1920s, 1930s, and even 1940s, many excellent artistic works, theories, and ideas were created in this part of Europe, breaking borders between different fields of art. These movements included Romanian picto-poetry, Hungarian image-architecture and the works of the Czech Group 42.

However, it was the post-war avant-garde which became the driving force for international conceptualism and now has the most to offer. I am talking here about the performative ideas of the Slovenian group OHO whose members included artists like Tomaž Šalamun and Franci Zagoričnik. They are known for combining reflection into material reality with inspiration on what is hidden within the subconscious. Hence, their plaster casts of a telephone, decorated match boxes, and strange and irrational poetic works. Other examples include the Czech poet, Jiří Kolář, who used texts and images from various different sources to create poems from strings and razors, and the Serbian artist, Miroljub Todorović, who is known for his poetry of gestures and computer poetry.

Many artists are now losing their job as a result of COVID-19 and are faced with an uncertain future. However, I am not sure if we can say the same about art as such. The avant-garde art came out of the turmoil of the First and Second World Wars…

Looking at the history of art and its development, we see that all large moments of turmoil became a driving force for new artistic movements, trends and ideas. In the early 20th century, avant-garde artists also profited from the demise of certain intellectual traditions. Their response to the failure of earlier narratives, which thought that life on earth was harmonious and rational, was of a new belief in the power of the subconscious, accidents and the irrational. This however did not translate into a complete resignation from references to reality. Conversely, Cubists, Dadaists and Surrealists, not to mention dozens

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of other local avant-garde groups, were using a deformed image of the world at war, showing the end of the old order and presenting a vision of something new. New in the sense of widespread access to art and the wide range of artistic interest (i.e. grand narratives were replaced by the fragmentation and subjectivism of messages). In so doing, the artists were using some unknown – or little known – techniques, such as collage. Today, one hundred years later, we are witnessing something similar. The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is generating far-reaching outcomes. These include greater access to culture in the form of "virtual" visits to art galleries, where collectively we can see, – although from a distance, artistic works. It is too early to tell whether this trend will permanently change our perception of reality. Yet the truth is that art reacts quickly to changes, which, on the one hand, takes the form of commentary to the new situation and, on the other hand, is a radical refusal of its context.

Given these changes that are now taking place, both in the sphere of art and other areas, how do you see the future of a united Europe? Would it take the form of greater integration or rather progressing isolationism?

Naturally, I would not like to see a reverse from the integration processes that have already taken place in Europe, but I also have a feeling that a vision of a super-state without borders might be a utopia. What I have in mind are not economic or defence issues. Rather I am thinking about the conviction that is common among European bureaucrats who claim that there are no differences between individual parts of the community. In my view, it is the differences, the local traditions, religions and languages – all these rims of the bureaucratic standardisation – that are the greatest value of Europe. Their cultivation enriches the repertoire of the means which can be used in the public sphere, as long as they are not used for the purpose of building chauvinistic bastions by the national know-it-alls. In other words, I imagine the European Union as a federation of culturally and politically diverse member states. I can even imagine an end of the Schengen myth of fluid borders, but it would be difficult for me to come to terms with a Europe which is an area for rivalry at every level and in almost every aspect of life. NEE

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

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Incident

Or three short essays on solidarity

MYKOLA RIABCHUK

In the absence of civic traditions and positive social capital, society often organises itself along mafia-style norms. Ukrainian society after communism developed in two different ways: it developed mafia structures centred on the post-communist authorities, as well as grass-root civic networks as an alternative to these hierarchies. Every Ukrainian revolution since then can be seen as a clash of two different projects of state-nation building.

"For the real question is whether the brighter future is really always so distant. What if, on the contrary, it has been here for a long time already, and only our own blindness and weakness have prevented us from seeing it around us and within us, and kept us from developing it?"

Václav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless* (1978)

Unexpected victory

In the last grade of high school, our class was "punished" by the introduction of a new supervisor. The school directors believed that the class was unruly and required a heavy handed approach to discipline. That role was assigned to Gennadiy Yefremovich Pavlov, a teacher of physical education who embodied crude force in various ways. Short in stature but pretty muscular, he always wore a tight-

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fitted tracksuit to emphasise his impeccable bodybuilding physique. He loved to scold inept pupils during training and slap us on the side of the head. Crucially, he only spoke Russian even though the official language of instruction in the school was Ukrainian.

On the very first day, he promised to make half of us *otlichniki* (A-graders) and the other half *gorbatyie* (hunchbacked). To turn this ambitious plan into reality, he started to visit our classroom between lessons at least twice a day – to "strengthen our brains" (*vpravit mozgi*), as he put it.

As long as this "brain-fixing" was purely verbal, the educational process moved smoothly. One day, however, in overexcitement, Mr. Pavlov (or Genka, as we called him) hit one of the boys, who pushed him back. This made him so furious that the situation turned into a physical fight. The girls squealed and the boys, five or six of us, attacked him from all sides like hunting dogs on a wild boar. Genka, in the end, broke free and ran away.

The school bosses had no interest in being the centre of a public scandal.

We seemed to have won, but had no idea what to do with our unexpected victory. Finally, the smartest of us suggested that we write a report to the school principal to explain everything and to request another class master, considering Mr. Pavlov's actions. That was a good move. The school bosses had no interest in being the centre of a public scandal. They eagerly agreed to our humble request, under the condition that the whole story would remain within our narrow circle. And it did.

We were happy like kids; it was our first victory against the system, our first experience of serious collective action. You may even call it an experience of mutual trust and solidarity. The system barely noticed our rebellion: Genka continued to physically and verbally abuse students and, as we learnt much later, write reports to the KGB denouncing the teachers as "Ukrainian bourgeois nationalists".

We did not make the case public or get him kicked out of school. We also did not mobilise other students to help remove similar "teachers" from schools. We were no revolutionaries. If the story had any significance, it was only for us, for the minor and powerless who gradually discovered that things can be different and that sometimes it is worth a try.

Prisoner's dilemma

A little later, I got the chance to relive this experience somewhat when watching Larry Peerce's film *Incident*. This was in some desolate underground cinema-club where such films were usually screened semi-legally. The main part of the ac-

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tion unfolds in a night subway car where two thugs block the door and terrorise a dozen terrified passengers. First, they go for the homosexuals, then the Jews, then the African-Americans and then the rest. They bully each victim joyfully and ingeniously with sadistic pleasure. What is most striking is the dozen adults in the carriage who watch in silence whilst the bandits go after another prey. Everybody still hopes that he or she will not be next and that the bandits will spare them for some unknown reason.

The solution to the prisoner's dilemma is simple and efficient, but requires each prisoner to fully trust each other.

Sociologists call this the "collective action problem". A dozen passengers could have easily taken on a couple of thugs, but to achieve this somebody has to actively resist and be confident that others will step in to help them. It seems rather simple, but for such confidence to exist a high level of mutual trust is needed, as well as a certainty that you will not be left to experience someone else's wrath alone. Sociologists and economists describe this problem as the "prisoners' dilemma".

This dilemma involves a simple story. Two prisoners find themselves under arrest and the investigator can keep them for as long as he has a good reason to suspect them. They may have committed a crime, but there is no clear evidence to persuade the court. So the investigator plays a game by keeping them in separate cells and persuading each to confess to the crime. The police officer knows that all human beings have an instinct of self-preservation focused on the primary need to take care of oneself. The investigator presents the two prisoners with a dilemma. They could rescue themselves by admitting that their partner committed the crime, believing that only their associate will receive punishment. There is, however, the third option – one which the investigator wisely does not mention. If both prisoners refuse to confess, he would be obliged to release them both, due to a lack of evidence.

The solution to this dilemma is simple and efficient, but to achieve it the prisoners must both fully trust each other. They must be fairly confident that their accomplice would not betray them. Only in these conditions can their relations be truly co-operative and mutually beneficial. For this to occur, they must have some form of shared experience that encourages mutual trust.

Social capital

In the early 1990s, Robert Putnam published a brilliant book titled *Making Democracy Work*. Its ideas reached me firstly via the Polish translation, *Demokracja*

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w dzialaniu ("Democracy in action"), and eventually through the Ukrainian translation, *Становлення демократії* (literally "Formation", or "Establishing of Democracy). Despite its title, the book is not so much about democracy but rather civil society – the network of formal and informal civic communities that actually enable the full-fledged functioning of democratic institutions.

Putnam and his colleagues explored the development of civic habits and attitudes at the micro-societal level in both the northern and southern regions of Italy. The juxtaposition of the "two Italys" was ultimately the intention of the author. Firstly, he assumed that the north of the country would enjoy a large amount of civic activism. This was due to the region's historic tradition of popular participation within the public life of its city-states. In contrast, it was thought that southern Italy's historical experiences under the rule of different authoritarian entities would discourage such ideas. This theory implied that public insititutions in northern Italy would prove to be more effective today.

The key idea in Putnam's book is "social capital". This describes the level of mutual trust, solidarity and readiness to co-operate for the sake of the common good within a society. This concept encourages equal, horizontal ties between citizens, rather than vertical patron-client relations. Social capital is very difficult to accumulate and very easy to waste. It is accrued through daily experiences of trust and co-operation, the honest fulfilment of contracts and obligations, and treating others as you would like them to treat you. In small communities where everybody knows one another, such as a classroom, a village, or an ancient Greek *polis*, the development of this "capital" is easier. This is because all transgressors are visible and can be easily sanctioned, abandoned by friends, excluded from a game or even expelled from the polis.

In small communities where everybody knows one another, the development of social capital is easier.

Problems begin to emerge in larger societies where most members are anonymous. We do not know these other people but must co-operate with them daily. This involves potentially risky activities such as depositing money in a bank hoping that we shall receive it back at some point, buying medicine with the hope that it really is the substance indicated on the label and electing a deputy in the hope that she or he will follow their declared political line. In some societies these expectations are almost always fulfilled and we call such polities developed nations. In some other societies, expectations are most likely to remain unfulfilled. We call these places failed states. In some societies, however, like ours in Ukraine, expectations are only met some of the time. And the degree to which expectations are met largely determines the fracture of the real value of our labour, skills and property

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that we can ultimately receive in the marketplace. The rest of the real value is lost as a kind of tax on corruption; an insurance against uncertainty.

Of course, lawbreakers can be found everywhere. This is because selfishness is as human as co-operation and free-riding is tempting for many people. All societies, to some degree, have mechanisms of control for punishing anti-social behaviour. But in civic communities, formal rules only play a supporting role to mechanisms of self-control and individual responsibility. Each citizen is supposed to be aware of the fact that free-riding is not a victimless crime, but rather something that affects other people's lives.

This understanding of civic behaviour stems primarily from bottom-up, daily experiences in society. Whilst at the top of the state, these ideals are simply maintained and encouraged or, in some cases, dismissed by lawlessness and corruption tolerated by the state. Putnam's evidence shows that Italy's northerners are more likely to actively participate in elections and protest actions, sign petitions and subscribe to local media, discuss local news and belong to various civic organisations. All these engagements strengthen people's "civility". It gives them experiences of interaction, planning and scheduling, discussing and compromising, and holding personal and collective responsibility.

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Soviet communism eroded those weak spots of civility that existed before. Totalitarian regimes never tolerate independent civic organisation, even if they are apolitical and lack influence. In fact, the only societal grouping that remains beyond the totalitarian state's full control is the family. It is only here that some mutual trust can be preserved. The regime eventually tried to take over this societal unit by infecting it ideas such as the myth of Pavlik Morozov – a young boy and exemplary Soviet subject who denounced his own parents to the KGB.

> Ukrainian society often appears to win the struggle for "civility" in the short run, but may lose it in the long-term.

In the absence of civic traditions and positive social capital, society will organise itself along mafia-style principles. Ukrainian society has experienced developments in both directions. On the one hand, it developed mafia structures based around the post-communist authorities and their "businesses". On the other hand, it created grass-root civic networks as an alternative to these hierarchies. Every revolution in Ukraine since then can be viewed as a clash between these two different projects of state-nation building. These ultimately amount to two different

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ways of self-organising and two competing visions of a desirable future. Our active society often appears to win the struggle for "civility" in the short run, but may be losing it in the long-term.

It is not power that we lack but the skill and ability to apply it in a coherent and consistent manner. Putnam's book is not about the emergence or development of democracy, as the Ukrainian translation implies, but about its functionality, its efficiency and its capability to work. One could say the same about our power in Ukraine. It is not something to be found outside, but is rather an intrinsic capability that must be strengthened. We merely need to develop some trust and determination. We ought to take one simple lesson from the prisoners' dilemma and the dilemma of collective action: that efforts to improve society only grow when mutual trust and solidarity dominate.

Mykola Riabchuk is a Ukrainian writer and scholar. He is the honorary president of the Ukrainian PEN Centre. He is also a member of the editorial board of *New Eastern Europe*.

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A Jan of all trades

PHOTOS AND TEXT: MARTA GRUSZECKA

During COVID-19 many people started to make masks and have turned their homes into mini-mask factories. With shortages of protective gear in hospitals, the demand for these products exceeds the capacity of many sewing machines, which needed a second life. In southern Poland it was given to them by Jan Wójcik. He is the only umbrella-maker in the country and a mender of broken sewing machines.

When asked about his age, Jan Wójcik says he is a war-time baby. Indeed, he was born in 1943 in the small village of Nieczajna in southern Poland. After having finished school, Jan left home to start his education in a bigger town. He became a mechanic and got his first job in a steel factory in Kraków's Nowa Huta metallurgy. At the time this was a new district on the city's outskirts built by the communists for workers and their families. Its goal was to counter-balance Kraków's bourgeois life. Jan later moved to other places and conducted his mandatory military service.

After getting married to an artist, who he knew from his childhood, he moved to Andrychów, a small town between Kraków and Bielsko-Biała, which is famous for its cotton and textile industry. There, Jan got a job at Andropol, a local textile enterprise, where he remained until 1996. He quit after his health started deteriorating from long-time exposure to harmful chemicals. First, he went on disability leave and then retired. But he never stopped working.

From dusk to dawn

Already in August 1985 Jan opened his workshop where to this day he fixes umbrellas and sewing machines. Located in Andrychów at Krakowska Street

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number 128, he had been making extra money on the side, complementing his salary from Andropol.

"Before I came, a different umbrella-maker had been working here. But he led an indecent life and the city kindly asked him to leave the premises. It was my wife who found out that they were looking for someone new and convinced me to take the job. I thought that in addition to fixing umbrellas, I could also mend sewing machines," Jan tells me.

From the very beginning demand for his services exceeded expectations. People started bringing tons of umbrellas and the line to his workshop, which is located on the second floor, would flow out onto the street. "There was a day when I got 60 umbrellas to fix!" he recalls, adding that, in the beginning, he did not know how to work fast and had to spend more time on each umbrella. Customers had to wait for some time, even half a year, for their umbrellas to be fixed. But with time, he learnt all the tricks of the trade. And his work would never end. On weekdays, he would finish work in the factory and go straight to his workshop where he would stay late, sometimes until 11pm. He worked Saturdays as well, fixing things from dusk to dawn: "I spent my whole youth fixing these umbrellas," Jan laughs.

In the last years of communism Polish shops were quite empty. People could not buy much stuff and they had to maintain what they already had. When something broke, it had to get fixed. This naturally ensured demand for Jan's services which remained high. "At times, I wanted to go crazy with the amount of work, but I never said no. I like my work too much," he explains nostalgically.

Satisfaction

Jan stresses that today he has much fewer clients. People throw umbrellas out, knowing that they can buy new ones. Yet in his view, those umbrellas you can buy fairly cheaply are simply junk. Not worth the money spent. One gust of wind will be suffice to break it. Yet, even now, Jan is not jobless. His clients bring in all kinds of umbrellas. Women's umbrellas – as he calls them – which are smaller, and men's umbrellas – the larger ones. There are also umbrellas that people use to protect themselves from the sun, as well as those for garden swings. They have holes or are worn and torn. Jan replaces the fabric. He repairs holes and sews fabric, or he replaces the broken metal pole, wires and tips. He sometimes has to first pull the umbrella apart and to then put it back together. This may sound like a lot of work, but Jan says it gives him a lot of satisfaction.

Half of his workshop is filled with tools, which includes all sorts of screwdrivers, wrenches and repair parts. Until recently, they all came from Częstochowa – a city

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in central Poland known as a pilgrimage site. In the first years of his workshop he had to go and pick the parts up himself. Later he began ordering them by phone. Today, they are harder to come by as the producer no longer exists. Jan uses the same tools he has used all these years. With them he has fixed thousands of umbrellas. The oldest one he repaired was 80 years old. It was beautifully embroidered. All Jan had to do was to slightly mend it and it was then brought back to life. "It should still work for quite some time," he says.

No shoddy workmanship

The COVID-19 pandemic has pushed many people to start sewing masks at home. As a result, some old sewing machines were taken out of the closets. When it turned out they did not work, they were brought to Jan to fix. The mechanism of a sewing machine is much more complicated than a watch. It is propelled by an engine, but also includes other smaller parts, such as, the needle case, the drum, the connecting rod, the lever, the band and the reel. A machine should not break needles, get stuck while sewing or be too loud. "To work without any interruption, it needs to be regulated and lubricated," Jan explains.

To repair a sewing machine, Jan takes a few hours to a few days, depending on what is broken. The problem is that many people try to fix their own machines and end up making it worse. Jan understands that and works on each machine as much as needed. He says he would "not give his clients shoddy workmanship" whether it was during a pandemic or not.

That is why his clients come from all over Poland: Kraków, Bielsko-Biała and other cities. He even had people come from Germany. This January, a client from nearby Bulowice brought a one-hundred-year old machine. This was probably the oldest machine that Jan ever worked on. It belonged to the client's aunt and was in the family since the man could remember. Propelled by foot, it could only do simple stiches, no zig-zags. The customer complained that the machine would break the fabric and that it was impossible to use. After examining it, Jan knew he needed to get the foot regulator fixed, fill up the tendon plate and then clean it thoroughly.

"Today, it works perfectly," he smiles with content. In his view, these old machines are much easier to fix than the newer ones which are made from cheap plastic. Thankfully, you can still buy, although with difficulties, the parts for the old machines, which – if well-kept – can last as long as half a century," Jan tells me. There is no need throw them away. Things only get complicated when there are no more parts to buy. Then, not even Jan can help.

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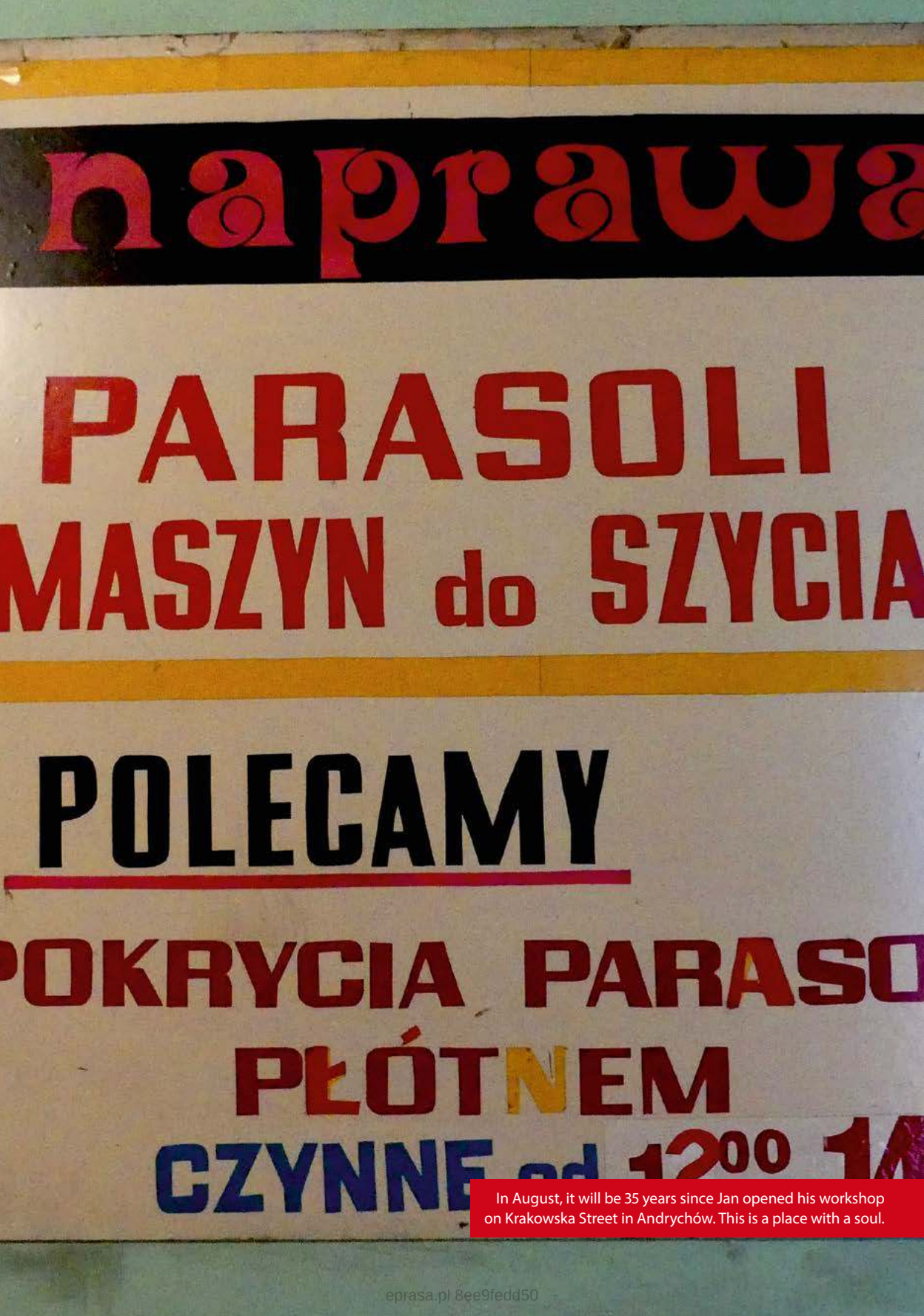

In August, it will be 35 years since Jan opened his workshop on Krakowska Street in Andrychów. This is a place with a soul.

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To repair a sewing machine, Jan takes a few hours to a few days, depending on what is broken. He says he would "not give his clients shoddy workmanship" whether it was during a pandemic or not.

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In today's automated world, people like Jan are hard to come by. An umbrella maker is a profession close to extinction.

The only one

In August, it will be 35 years since Jan opened his workshop on Krakowska Street. This is a place with a soul. It is probably the only one of its kind in this part of the world. Its operation is advertised by three different signs that are placed inside and outside the building. One of them reads: "Repair of umbrellas and sewing machines. Recommended. Opened from 12:00 pm until 2:30 pm." To enter the place, you need to take narrow, creaking stairs. As you climb, it is good to watch your head. The old building is very different from modern architecture. And yet the workshop charms you with its cleanness and colours. You get the sense that time has stopped when you are here. But not for Jan or his clients who did not allow him to close the workshop when the idea once entered his mind.

They said there was nobody else they could go to, if they wanted their stuff fixed. In addition to sewing machines and umbrellas, Jan also repairs handbags, luggage and baby prams. "I can fix everything that people need to get fixed," he laughs. Indeed, he has many skills, including small-object mechanics, plumbing, carpentry and electric work. Thanks to them he was able to remodel the place he works in by himself. Before he came here it was a murky cave.

In today's automated world, people like Jan are hard to come by. An umbrella-maker is a profession close to extinction. With sewing machines it may be a bit easier, as they can be sent for servicing, but to get an umbrella fixed, a bag or a suitcase repaired, you need to make a visit to Jan's workshop. Back in time, Jan would say there were a few umbrella-makers in the region, but today all of the workshops are closed. "Their owners were older than me," he explains adding that he will also work as long he has strength. In fact, not to give up on working was a recommendation he received from his doctor.

"Thanks to this work, I can be in touch with people and not just sit in front of TV with my feet on the coffee table," Jan laughs. His clients are interesting people. Among them are doctors, teachers, university professors, nuns, priests, you name it! Each brings a story from the outside world. Jan always learns something new from them. He even talks politics with some. He says that the money he makes is not great, but it is enough to help him pay his bills. It is more of a passion than a money-making business – he truly enjoys fixing things for others. NEE

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

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Volcanic vintage

The historic Hungarian wines of Lake Balaton

ERIC BRYAN

Writers and artists have long been attracted to the strange and romantic landscape of Badacsony, with its sharp volcanic hills overlooking smooth Lake Balaton. Stories about the wines from vineyards around Lake Balaton in west central Hungary go back over 2,000 years.

The fourteenth-century Hungarian King Charles Robert once travelled to Veszprém on the north shore of Lake Balaton to visit a bishop. Before dinner, the king noticed a gigantic cup in the monastery treasury. "The monks used to drink from it long ago," the bishop told him. As they sat down to eat, the king asked that the cup be placed at their table. The bishop announced that none of the canons at the table could possibly drain the massive tankard, with the possible exception of the formidable Father Eusebius. The king challenged Eusebius to take the cup and uphold the honour of the house, but the father declined and held his ground despite the needling and beseeching of the assemblage.

But then, after the fifth course, Father Eusebius rose magisterially to his feet, lifted the huge cup in a toast to the king, and swallowed its contents in one superhuman slug. The monastery resonated with cheers and applause. King Charles Robert questioned the father's initial reluctance.

"Your Majesty," Father Eusebius replied, "I was afraid that I would fail. But I had a try under the table and found that I could, and that gave me the courage to do it for you and in front of the company."

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Heritage and legends

The wine which shimmered in Eusebius' legendary cup would almost certainly have been one of what are known as Hungary's "historic wines": Badacsony Kéknyelű, Szürkebarát ("Grey Monk"), Zöldszilváni or Olaszrizling. These are the wines from vineyards around Lake Balaton in west central Hungary, the largest and shallowest lake in Central Europe. The heritage of these wines goes back over 2,000 years. What is now Hungary was then Pannonia, a province of the Roman Empire. The area's vineyards were created when Emperor Probus waged a vine-planting campaign in the Badacsony area of Balaton, south of the Bakony Mountains.

A thousand years later the first Hungarian monarch, King Stephen, rose to power and set out to Christianise his country. He granted most of the fertile northern Balaton land to church dignitaries and religious orders. The priests and monks, being partial to a jug or two themselves, produced some of the finest wines from the vineyards.

Hospitality seems to have been part of the wine culture. Legend has it that no vintner on the slopes of Badacsony could become mayor of any of the villages if he had failed to offer a passing stranger a glass of wine from his cellar. The Badacsony area is ancient volcano country, and the grape vines thrive in the lava soil and plentiful sunshine of the lower slopes. The Avars, whose empire in the seventh century AD stretched from the Black Sea to the Adriatic, used to bury grape seeds with their dead – an effort to ensure viniculture continued into the afterlife.

Writers and artists have long been attracted to the strange and romantic landscape of Badacsony.

Writers and artists have long been attracted to the strange and romantic landscape of Badacsony, with its sharp volcanic hills overlooking smooth Lake Balaton. In fact, a mansion in the nearby village of Szigliget is the private preserve of the Hungarian Writer's Union. The smallest Hungarian wine region is Somló, about 34 miles north of Lake Balaton. Somló is believed to boast the highest per-capita male population in Hungary. Traditional folklore tells that drinking a glass of any Somló wine – Juhfark in particular – on the eve of one's wedding day influences the odds in favour of the birth of a male heir.

The Habsburg royal family was alleged to have held to this belief, and from 1526 to 1918, as they ruled Hungary from Vienna, they consistently produced male heirs. Emperor Charles III was the one exception, whose daughter Maria Theresa reigned from 1740–80. But Duke Stephen, her consort, may have consumed his fair share of Somló wine: Maria Theresa had 16 children and was succeeded by her son, Joseph II, who ruled the Habsburg lands from 1780–90.

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Somló Hill

The Ezerjó, Olaszrizling and Mézesfehér wines come from vineyards on Somló Hill, an extinct volcano. The mild climate and volcanic soil combine to create a golden-green wine with a pleasing twang which is reputed to ease indigestion, cleanse the kidneys and treat anaemia. Saint Stephen founded a convent in Somló, and a statute in the 1511 *Urbarium* details the services required of the serfs who tended the convent's vineyards. They were demanded to pay annually one-tenth of the yield of noble Somló grapes, and twelve tubs of wine from surrounding districts.

Renaissance monarch, King Matthias Corvinus, who ruled Hungary and Croatia from 1458–90, also owned land on Somló Hill. He established the vineyards that provided wine to his renowned Black Army, an elite body of mercenaries who reputedly went into battle dressed entirely in black.

Other Somló Hill wine growers were the Benedictine and Cistercian Orders. Tamás Bakócz, a maligned humanist who rose from serf to cardinal, owned one of the largest vineyards. When the cardinal rode through Rome as a candidate in the papal election, it is said that he had his and his retinue's horses shod with golden shoes. Bakócz hoped the impression of great wealth would secure votes, but history suggests his ploy had the reverse effect. Gift barrels brimming with Somló wine may have been more politically effective.

The most famous white wines from the southern district are the Muscat Lunel, the Tramini and the Királyleányka.

The Eszterházys, descended from a swashbuckling captain who founded the family fortune by marrying a wealthy widow, became the biggest landowners in Hungary. During Maria Theresa's reign the family acquired some of the coveted Somló land. Their estate was a vast Eszterházys empire, with the Somló Hill vineyards the jewel in the crown.

The southern area of Lake Balaton also has its wines. Beyond the shoreline holiday resorts there lies a sizeable and variegated region of vineyards. These range from tiny individual holdings to large enterprises boasting their own laboratories and wine producing plants. The most famous white wines from the southern district are the Muscat Lunel, the Tramini and the Királyleányka. The popular red wines are of the lighter variety, notably Kékfrankos, Blue Oporto and Cabernet Sauvignon.

Fish is the specialty of the area and the lake beam, carp and perch are made into a number of dishes from fish soup to fish roasted on a spit. Fish is sometimes prepared by slicing in half, sprinkling with paprika and grilling until crisp. Balaton Cabernet Sauvignon, which has all the advantages of aromatic red wines made from grapes harvested when fully ripe, is the favoured wine to accompany the fish specialties.

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Wine and song go hand in hand

In modern Hungary, the country's finest wine-growing areas are divided into 20 wine regions as decreed by the Hungarian Wine Act. The act, valid as of September 1994, defines wine and carbonated categories as follows:

- Natural Wine: Table, quality or premium quality wine produced in accordance with legal resolutions with the following stipulation: Table wines are required to be produced from must containing a minimum of 13 per cent sugar by mass.
- Country Wines: Table wines made from the produce of certain wine growing areas and from the must of fully specified grape varieties approved of by the state with a minimum of 15 per cent sugar by mass.
- Quality Wines: Wines made from the must of a growing area's specific grape varieties with a minimum of 15 per cent sugar by mass, provided that they are the produce of a plantation with a maximum yield of twelve tonnes per hectare of a specific wine growing area and contain distinctive flavour and aroma substances specific to the area and grape variety, or possibly to the production technology used, or the vintage.
- Premium Wines: Special wine made from the must of a growing area, specific grape variety grown on a plantation yielding a maximum of ten tonnes per hectare in certain wine-growing areas, the crop of which has ripened or over-ripened on its wine-stock or has shrivelled or developed noble-rot, provided that the must contains a minimum of 19 per cent sugar by mass, as well as fragrance, flavour and aroma substances characteristic of that growing area, grape variety and the method of wine-making, and that it is worthy of special distinction due to the vintage and its place of origin.
- Museum Wines (particularly old vintage wines): Quality and exquisite wines aged for a minimum of five years and worthy of distinction due to a specific feature, the vintage and its character.

Since the reign of Saint Stephen, September has been vintage month in Hungary. Hungary's wines are presented annually in vintage festivals held in Budapest and every wine producing region. In Pécs, a city in the southwest portion of the country near the Croatian border, the vintage celebrations reach their peak in the European Wine Song Festival. Schubert's song in praise of wine, delivered by a 200-voice international choir, opens the festivities:

You friends and you golden wine
Make my life sweeter.
Without you bestowers of joy
I would live in fear and trembling...

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What is the hero without a friend?
What are the great men of the realm?
What is the master of the whole world?
They are all poorly counselled,
Without friends, without wine
I should not even wish to be emperor.

The festival is held on the final weekend of September. Celebrations are also presented in villages dotted along the Villány-Siklós Wine Road. Inaugurated in 1993, the festival's motto is "Wine and song go hand in hand in every culture." The aim of the event is to not only celebrate the link between music and wine, but to reinforce the traditions associated with wine and to represent Hungarian wines to the world through the arts. The festivities offer performances of male choirs from across Europe. Chorale groups from Croatia, Finland, France, Italy, Latvia and Spain as well as celebrated Hungarian ensembles have all sung at the event. The festival's host choir is the Bartók Béla Male Chorus. The next European Winesong Festival is scheduled to take place from September 25–27th 2020, beginning on the Villány-Siklós Wine Route.

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From the Great Patriotic War to the Second World War

Decommunisation of Ukraine's memory politics

SERHIY RIABENKO AND TARAS KUZIO

The EuroMaidan Revolution and Russia's military aggression set in motion radical changes in Ukrainian memory politics. Ukraine's decommunisation laws condemned communist and Nazi totalitarianism as morally reprehensible and the country replaced the commemoration of the Great Patriotic War with Ukraine's contribution to the European-wide defeat of Nazism in the Second Word War, emphasising the human tragedy of war.

Until 2014, all Ukrainian presidents except Viktor Yushchenko participated in the celebration of the Soviet and Russian myth of the Great Patriotic War (GPW). Presidents Leonid Kuchma (1994–2004) and Viktor Yanukovych (2010–2014) participated in official commemorations in Moscow attended by other former Soviet republics. President Yushchenko (2005–2010) did not attend the celebration but neither did he seek to remove the GPW from Ukrainian memory politics. Only during Petro Poroshenko's presidency (2014–2019) was the Soviet triumphalist and militaristic narrative of the GPW (1941–1945) replaced by commemoration of Ukraine's participation in Europe's victory over Nazism and the human suffering of Ukrainians during the Second World War (1939–1945) integrated into an overall European tragedy of the loss of millions of lives.

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Cult of Stalin in post-Soviet Russia

Russian nationalist émigrés, Soviet officials and dissident Russian nationalists had long praised Joseph Stalin as a great wartime leader. Émigré Eurasianism and Soviet national Bolshevism, which merged in post-Soviet Russia, united "Red" Soviet, "Brown" fascist, and "White" Tsarist and Orthodox fundamentalist Russian nationalism. This extremist coalition was behind the 1993 parliamentary uprising against President Boris Yeltsin. After its failure the Eurasianist-national Bolshevik coalition was temporarily marginalised, but its ideas were incorporated into the great power nationalism that has come to dominate Vladimir Putin's presidency. The "Red"-"Brown"-"White" coalition worked with Putin in the notorious "New Russia" (*Novorossiya*) project in 2014 to Ukraine's dismember eastern-southern regions from the remainder of the country.

Demands for a return to the glorious Soviet past were promoted by Putin's allies in the security services (*siloviki*) that had been indoctrinated with Soviet internationalism and Russian nationalism in the USSR. In Putin's Russia, Soviet symbols and the Soviet anthem were revived, and the GPW and a cult of Stalin were re-introduced. Under Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, the GPW had become a more important Soviet event than the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution and this was the era that Putin expresses nostalgia for.

Putin's rebuilding of Russia as a great power draws much of its legitimacy from the victory in the Great Patriotic War.

Russian *siloviki* viewed the West's export of "colour revolutions" as a continuation of the West's threat to Soviet youth which Soviet *siloviki* had been trained to combat. The 1956 anti-communist Hungarian Revolution is now described in Russian information warfare as the West's first colour revolution. One manner in which Soviet and Russian regimes fought back was by militarising the GPW. Military patriotic indoctrination was revived and implemented through "anti-fascist" NGO's *Nashi* (Ours), *Idushchiye vmyestye* (Walking Together), *Molodaya Gvardiya* (Young Guard) and the Eurasian Youth Movement. The GPW and cult of Stalin indoctrinated Soviet and Russian youth with great power nationalism and xenophobia towards the West and its local satellites, such as Ukraine. Today, as many Russians have a negative view of Ukraine as they do of the United States and European Union.

Putin's rebuilding of Russia as a great power draws much of its legitimacy from the Soviet victory in the GPW. Russian analyst Pavel Felgenhauer writes that, "Modern Russian state propaganda has for years been promoting Stalin as the main organiser of the victory over Nazi Germany in World War II." Felgenhauer continues, "And this victory is projected with more and more vigour as the defin-

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ing moment of Russian state history and a popular focal point uniting all loyal citizens around the flag".

Russian textbooks are imbued with "patriotic" Russian nationalist ideology that portray Stalin as an effective manager who industrialised a peasant USSR and created a nuclear superpower. Russians are told they bear no responsibility for Stalin's crimes and have nothing to be ashamed of. Forty-six per cent of Russians believe Stalin's repressions were less important than the Soviet industrialisation programme to modernise the USSR. Russian media and the countries educa-

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tion system marginalise and excuse Stalinist crimes against humanity such as the Ukrainian *Holodomor*, deportations from the three Baltic states and former eastern Poland (western Ukraine), the Katyń war crime of the murder of 22,000 Polish officers, the Gulag concentration camp system and treatment of Soviet prisoners-of-war. Russia under Putin no longer apologises for the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and declares it to be an example of successful Soviet diplomacy. Russia blatantly falsifies history by laying blame on the West and Poland for the war beginning in 1939. As for Katyń, there is a growing tendency to return to Soviet-era denials and blaming the Nazi's for this heinous crime.

After two decades in office, Putin has succeeded in increasing the number of Russians who hold a positive view of Stalin to 70 per cent; incredibly only 19 per cent hold a negative view of this arch criminal. The Levada Centre, Russia's only remaining independent sociological institution, found that "age does not differentiate respondents by the level of support for negative judgments about the leader – in all age groups the proportion of respondents with a positive attitude dominates over the share of respondents with negative evaluations, and the idea of the positive role of Stalin in the history of the country over the opposite opinion." What is most disturbing is the high number of young Russians born since the USSR disintegrated who also have a positive view of Stalin. The Levada Centre noted that, "the youngest category of respondents from 18 to 24 years old who fall into the sample, more often than others, expresses an indifferent attitude".

Ukrainian and Russian memory politics prior to the EuroMaidan

Russian and Ukrainian memory politics began to radically diverge under Yushchenko who emphasised the *Holodomor* (the Great Famine imposed on Ukraine by the Soviet authorities in 1932–1933 which killed millions of Ukrainians – editor's note) as a genocide against the Ukrainian people. This was enshrined in a law adopted in 2006 supported by pro-western political forces but was opposed by the pro-Russian Party of Regions and communists.

More controversially at that time, Yushchenko promoted a positive image of Ukrainian nationalist groups which had been active in the 1940s. This was not only controversial vis-à-vis Russia which has revived Soviet ideological tenets against Ukrainian nationalism but more importantly, Poland.

Modelled on its Polish namesake, the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance was established in 2006 to promote a new form of memory politics. Former Soviet secret police archives were opened. In 2008–2009, Yushchenko issued two decrees to remove Soviet monuments and plaques; although these were never

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implemented due to opposition from the Party of Regions and Communists. Yushchenko's limited transformation of Ukrainian memory politics was bitterly condemned by Russia. In the summer of 2009, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev sent a vitriolic open letter to Yushchenko blaming him for the "glorification of Nazi collaborators" and "exaltation of the role of radical nationalists". Medvedev also criticised support for a "nationalist" interpretation of the *Holodomor* as a genocide directed by Stalin against Ukrainians. It would be though wrong to believe that it had been Yushchenko who had launched the campaign for recognition of the *Holodomor* as a genocide; in fact, this had begun earlier, during Kuchma's presidency.

Ukraine's re-Sovietisation under Yanukovych, who was elected president in 2010, took place at the same time as Putin's shift to the nationalist right. Putin increasingly emphasised the "fraternal brotherhood" of Russians and Ukrainians, their age-old unity in the *Russkiy Mir* (Russian World), and joint suffering and victory over the Nazi's in the GPW. Russia actively used the GPW to mobilise its pro-Russian supporters inside Ukraine.

Ukraine's re-Sovietisation under Viktor Yanukovych took place at the same time as Vladimir Putin's shift to the nationalist right.

Yanukovych's election provided the correction to Ukrainian memory politics that Medvedev had demanded. There was a return to commemorating the GPW in Ukraine and jointly with Russia in Moscow. Yanukovych adopted Russia's position that the 1933 famine was Soviet-wide and not directed against Ukraine. The Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance was downgraded to a small government research centre and, to add insult to injury, a communist was appointed to lead it. Prior to 2010, Ukraine had not held military parades of Ukrainian soldiers, military equipment and veterans on Victory Day on May 9. This changed during Yanukovych's presidency. The 2011 law On Commemoration of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945 became a milestone in integrating Ukraine into the Russian narrative of the GPW and was celebrated with large military parades, as in Moscow.

As part of the re-Sovietisation of Ukrainian memory politics and integration into the Russian GPW narrative, the age-old struggle against "fascists" was militarised against contemporary enemies. Under Yanukovych, all pro-western political forces were described as "fascists". Russia's vitriolic information warfare, which drew on Soviet disinformation and ideological tirades, provided the guidelines that were used by Yanukovych's regime. Leading up to the Revolution of Dignity and especially since, pro-European Ukrainian political forces were described as "fascists", Nazi's and anti-Semites, a threat to Russian speakers and Russians in Ukraine. The Ukrainian army are *karateli* (punishers, a term used to describe the Nazi's) while

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Russian proxies fighting against Ukraine are *opolchentsy* (People's Militia, a term associated with Soviet partisans in the GPW).

Continued adherence to the legacy of the Soviet commemoration of the GPW provided Russia with the means to mobilise and secure the support of Ukrainians, especially in the south and the east. Opinion polls conducted in 2003–2011 found between 65–72 per cent of Ukrainians considered the May 9th Victory Day to be the most important national holiday. Even in western Ukraine, more than 43 per cent considered it as such. The re-Sovietisation of Ukrainian memory politics under Yanukovych was evident in the growth of popularity of May 9th to 83 per cent by 2013.

Radical programme of decommunisation

The EuroMaidan revolutionaries who came to power amidst Russian military aggression believed that the Soviet and Russian narrative of the GPW was a threat to Ukraine's national security as it emboldened and mobilised pro-Russian protestors and separatists. As the 2014 crisis and Russian information warfare has shown, Russia does not respect Ukraine as a sovereign country. Maria Domańska from the Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW) describes Russia's information warfare and the promotion of the GPW as a "quasi-Cold War proxy war" waged against the West but fought in Ukraine which Russia sees as part of its "traditional sphere of influence". Russian information warfare accuses Poland and the three Baltic states of being alleged allies of the Nazi's, the EU is bizarrely described as a Nazi brainchild and NATO supposedly represents the same threat to Russia as the Nazis did in 1941. Putin's revival of the GPW as a new state religion is part of a drive to legitimise Russia's status as a great power with a demand for a return to principles enshrined in the 1945 Yalta Agreement with great powers overseeing spheres of influence. Russia as a great power is understood as possessing full sovereignty. In a revival of the Brezhnev Doctrine which justified Soviet intervention in its sphere of influence, countries such as Ukraine are viewed as having limited sovereignty. As with the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968, Russia believes it had a right to intervene to "stabilize" Ukraine in 2014.

> Ukraine's new memory politics was aided by the disintegration of the Party of Regions and the unpopularity of the communist party.

Unlike in the Yushchenko era when decommunisation was blocked, Poroshenko successfully implemented a radical programme of decommunisation. Two key factors played a role in the willingness of the state and society at large to abandon

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the Soviet and Russian concept of the GPW. First, there is a new public demand from below for changes in Ukraine's memory politics, particularly a re-evaluation of the GPW and the role of Ukraine and Ukrainians in the war. Civil society, local government councils, democratic parties and nationalist groups had spontaneously removed Soviet monuments and symbols in 2014 in central Ukraine ahead of the adoption of the decommunisation laws a year later. Second, the president and parliamentary majority elected in 2014 were ready to react to this demand and for the first time introduce real decommunisation. The Revolution of Dignity, the disintegration of pro-Russian political forces, Russia's annexation of Crimea and Russian military aggression in eastern Ukraine, removed opposition while providing widespread support for changes in Ukrainian memory politics. The use of the GPW in Russian information warfare to justify Russia's fight against the revolution "fascists" backfired. Russian military aggression and information warfare repelled many Ukrainians, especially Russian speakers, who were forced to re-evaluate the GPW which they had previously known only through an exclusively Soviet or Russian interpretation.

Ukraine's new memory politics was aided by the disintegration of the pro-Russian Party of Regions and the unpopularity of the Communist Party of Ukraine (KPU) which failed to win support in the 2014 pre-term elections. In 2015 the KPU and two other communist parties were de-registered by the ministry of justice because they refused to comply with one of the decommunisation laws which banned communist symbols. As unregistered parties, they could not participate in elections.

Other important factors included the mobilisation of civil society, rise of patriotism in response to Russian military aggression, creation of volunteer battalions (often from EuroMaidan self-defence groups) and activism of nationalist groups who implemented decommunisation on the ground. Monuments of Vladimir Lenin in western Ukraine had been removed in the first half of the 1990s after democratic forces came to power in semi-free Soviet elections. In 2014–2015 Lenin monuments had been removed in central Ukraine during and after the Euromaidan Revolution. In 2014 two major Lenin monuments were pulled down in Dnipropetrovsk and then Kharkiv. Lenin monuments in eastern and southern Ukraine were mainly removed after the adoption of decommunisation laws in April 2015 in what was described as the "Leninopad" (Lenin fall). Of the nearly 6,000 Lenin monuments inherited by Ukraine in 1991, only a few hundred are left standing in Russian-occupied Donbas and Crimea.

These developments were also welcomed by Ukraine's Jewish community who do not harbour Soviet nostalgia and support Ukraine in the ongoing war with Russia. The Holocaust plays an important part in memory politics of the European history of the Second World War but has no place in the GPW, whether in the USSR

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or in contemporary Russia. In Dnipro, which has the most active Jewish community in Ukraine, Jewish leaders co-operated with civil society groups, local councillors and academic experts in making changes to topographical names that replaced communist with Jewish and Ukrainian historical figures.

Important legal changes

In 2014 the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance, led by historian Volodymyr Vyatrovych, was re-established by a government decree and became one of the most active drivers of the decommunisation of memory politics. A centre with Soviet secret police archives led by Orange and EuroMaidan revolution activist Andriy Kohut was temporarily housed in the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU). As members of the Reanimation Package of Reforms (the main post-EuroMaidan lobbying NGO for reforms) Vyatrovych, Kohut and other civic activists drafted the four decommunisation laws. The Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria had adopted similar legislation, but of the 15 former Soviet republics only Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania had followed suit. Ukraine's laws were on a par with these post-communist states; in pro-Western Georgia, access to Soviet archives still remains restricted.

Ukraine's decommunisation laws were on par with other post-communist states.

In the autumn of 2014, the issue of when to commemorate the outbreak of the Second World War was raised by Poroshenko and the Ukrainian government. Before 2014, commemorations of the beginning of the war was held on June 22nd. Somewhat later the "Day of Liberation of Ukraine from the Fascist Invaders" was added as a Soviet holiday. In reality, for Ukrainians the war began on September 1st 1939 when the city of Lviv (Lwów, then under Polish rule) was bombed by the German air force and the 120,000 Ukrainians and Poles serving in the Polish army began fighting the Nazis. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, speaking on the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, condemned the USSR and Nazi Germany for launching the war; Russia accused him of continuing in the footsteps of "nationalist" Poroshenko.

There was another important legal change in 2014; namely, the cancellation of the official holiday of the "Defender of the Fatherland Day" on February 23rd. Formally, this holiday was not related to the GPW, but its very existence was connected to former Soviet and later Russian celebrations of the Defender of the Fatherland. This holiday had been an additional instrument to integrate Ukraine within the Russian narrative of a common history.

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A new national holiday called "Defender of Ukraine Day" was introduced which would be celebrated on October 14th, the day Ukrainians have traditionally celebrated as one of the most important religious holidays, the Protection of the Theotokos (*Pokrova*). October 14th is also symbolically connected to Ukrainian Cossack traditions and launch of the nationalist Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) in 1942. By 2018, 62 per cent of Ukrainians supported this new holiday.

Soviet and Russian bombastic, triumphalist and militaristic celebrations of the GPW reserved no place for the suffering of Soviet soldiers and the nations of the USSR and national and religious minorities, such as Poles and Jews. In 2015 this was replaced with a new approach that commemorated the tragedy of war and the suffering of war victims. In March 2015 a presidential decree created the "Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation" to be held on May 8th to commemorate Ukraine's contribution to the victory against Nazism and honour Ukrainian human losses and victims of Stalinist and Nazi crimes. The new anniversary and holiday integrated Ukraine with the European tradition of commemorating the end of the Second World War on May 8th. May 9th would continue to be celebrated but it was renamed as "Victory Day Over Nazism in World War II." In May 2020, six years after the decommunisation laws were adopted, 39% supported celebration of both holidays on May 8th and 9th, 14% only on May 8th and 32% only on May 9th. Interestingly, 56% supported the statement that the USSR and Nazi Germany both began the war, with the difference of opinion between the west (63 per cent) and east (44 per cent) of Ukraine not so large. Sixty-one per cent of Ukrainians opposed their political leaders participating in GPW celebrations in Moscow.

A new national holiday called "Defender of Ukraine Day" was introduced and is celebrated on October 14th.

In April 2015 the Ukrainian parliament adopted the decommunisation package of four laws which fundamentally revised the country's memory politics. These included:

1. On Perpetuation of the Victory Over Nazism in the Second World War 1939–1945. This changed the Soviet and Russian commemoration of the GPW on May 9th to that of European victory over Nazism on May 8th. The "Day of Remembrance and Reconciliation" is an official holiday on May 8th. The Soviet and Russian Victory Day on May 9th was changed to the "Day of Victory against Nazism in the Second World War of 1939–1945". The law also declared that the main aim of official and ceremonial events during these two days is to commemorate all victims of the war (irrespective of their nationality) in Ukraine. Importantly, Soviet monuments to the war dead would remain standing but the communist symbols on them would be removed.

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2. On Access to the Archives of Repressive Bodies of the Communist Totalitarian Regime from 1917 to 1991. This has led to Ukraine becoming one of the most open of post-communist states in providing access to former Soviet secret police archives.
3. On Condemnation of the Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Regimes and the Prohibition of the Propaganda of their Symbols. This equates the two political systems as having both been involved in crimes against humanity and both ideologies as creating morally reprehensible totalitarian regimes. This law has been used to remove Soviet and communist monuments and plaques as well as removing Soviet and communist topographic names. Communist and extreme right parties which use communist and Nazi symbols are banned.
4. On the Legal Status and Honouring of the Memory of Fighters for Ukraine's Independence in the 20th century. This listed the organisations and political parties that had fought for Ukrainian independence. These included political forces representing the entire political spectrum ranging from social democratic, liberal to nationalist. Of the four laws, this was viewed as the most controversial because the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and UPA are included in the list of "fighters". Controversy surrounding OUN and UPA has though become less of an issue since 2014 because of changing attitudes brought about by Russian military aggression. By 2015, for the first time since Ukraine became an independent state, the number of supporters (41 per cent) of OUN and UPA was greater than opponents (38 per cent). This tendency has continued and by 2017, 49 per cent of Ukrainians held a positive view and 29 per cent a negative view of OUN and UPA.

Symbols

Russian information warfare portrays the ribbon of Saint George as a "traditional" symbol of the Soviet celebration of victory over Nazi Germany. In fact, this symbol was not used in the USSR and only appeared in Russia in 2005 as an asymmetric response to Orange Revolution ribbons. Later, the ribbon of Saint George became popular throughout the post-Soviet space due to its active propagation by Moscow on Victory Day and through the influence of Russian television and Russian information campaigns. The ribbon of Saint George has been used since 2014 by Russian proxies in eastern Ukraine.

Ukraine's adoption of a new symbol, the red poppy, was developed by Kharkiv designer Serhiy Mishakin with the support of the Ukrainian Institute of Nation-

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al Remembrance and the National Public Broadcasting Company of Ukraine. The symbol was reminiscent of the European and global emblem of the commemoration of war victims and Ukraine's own traditions. At the same time the new symbol was aimed at shifting the focus from Soviet and Russian militarist celebration of the GPW to recognition of the horrors of war and the need to commemorate all those living in Ukraine who had died during the war. The commemoration of Nazi Germany's defeat was accompanied by the new slogan "Never Again!" – meant to signify that the horrors of the Second World War should be never again be repeated.

In May 2015 the red poppy was presented on Ukrainian television and at official celebrations. It also appeared as street graffiti in Kyiv, Odesa and other Ukrainian cities. Furthermore, one could notice self-made red poppies on people's clothes and in public transport. The red poppy turned out to be extremely successful and was embraced by a majority of Ukrainians. In May 2015 the Kyiv city state administration held Poppy flower flash mobs which included demonstrations of various ways for making the red poppy at home. This was followed by a small concert and installation of red poppies prepared by young people.

On May 7th 2015 the red poppy was presented during an event in *Mystetskyy Arsenal* (Art Arsenal) in Kyiv with the participation of President Poroshenko, the First Lady and their children. The red poppy was introduced on anniversary coins, postage stamps, envelopes and on TV advertisements issued for the 75th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe. A wreath of artificial flowers was placed on top of the large Soviet-era Motherland monument (part of the Museum of the History of Ukraine in the Second World War) in Kyiv.

The ribbon of Saint George became popular throughout the post-Soviet space due to its active propagation by Moscow on Victory Day.

The Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance developed special guidelines how to commemorate the war for local government councils and the public. These highlighted the need to use correct historical terminology instead of Soviet and Russian propaganda clichés – for example, "expelling the Nazi occupants" instead of "liberation from fascist invaders" and Second World War instead of Great Patriotic War. Importantly, these guidelines pointed out that Ukraine was not liberated after the expulsion of the Nazis but re-occupied by another totalitarian state, the Soviet Union. Numerous academic conferences and other events were conducted during which historians and practitioners debunked Soviet and Russian myths about the GPW and discussed Ukrainian participation in the victory against Nazism in a wide range of armed forces – Soviet (seven million), Polish (120,000), US (80,000), Canadian (50,000), and OUN and

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UPA (100,000). These also discussed Ukraine's huge losses – civilians, Jews and soldiers – during the Second World War.

Breaking from the past

Commemoration of the Great Patriotic War as a state religion and cult of Stalin serves four purposes for the Russian elite. First, it rallies Russians around Putin and the ruling United Russia party in their self-appointed roles as defenders of Russian and Eurasian civilisation which are allegedly under attack from a pernicious West and its "fifth columnists" such as Ukraine. Second, authoritarian regimes such as Russia mobilise their population against domestic and external enemies who are portrayed as being in the pay of the West. These include the Russian opposition, "fascist" Ukraine, Poland, the three Baltic states, NATO, the EU, and the US. Third, it integrates "Red" Soviet, "Brown" fascist and "White" Tsarist and Russian Orthodox nationalism, which together, constitute the political base of Putin's regime. Fourth, commemoration of the GPW is impossible without a cult of Stalin who allegedly did the most to defeat Nazism and "modernised" and transformed the USSR into a nuclear superpower. Stalin's crimes against humanity are forgotten, minimised and excused.

Ukrainian memory politics had been diverging from those in Russia during Kuchma's and Yushchenko's presidencies.

Ukrainian memory politics had been diverging from those in Russia during Kuchma's and Yushchenko's presidencies. Research, publication and commemoration of the *Holodomor*, for example, had begun under Kuchma and became institutionalised under Yushchenko. At the same time, Presidents Kuchma and Yanukovych had continued to attend commemorations of the GPW in Moscow and Ukrainian memory politics had continued to include both national and Soviet narratives. Under Yanukovych there was a determined push to integrate Soviet and Russian narratives of history coupled with ideological denunciations of pro-western Ukrainians.

The EuroMaidan Revolution and Russian military aggression set in motion radical changes in Ukrainian memory politics that for the first time expunged Soviet and Russian narratives. The adoption of four decommunisation laws brought Ukraine closer to the decommunisation which had earlier taken place in the three Baltic states and Central and Eastern Europe. Ukraine's decommunisation laws condemned communist and Nazi totalitarianism as morally reprehensible (as had all European institutions up to then), replaced militarist commemoration of the

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GPW with Ukraine's contribution to the European-wide defeat of Nazism in the Second Word War and put emphasis on the human tragedy of war – rather than the Russian glorification of military victory irrespective of the loss of human lives. The infamous Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was condemned and the history of western Ukraine from 1939–1941 was included in Ukraine's history of the war. Soviet archives were fully opened. Ukrainian national liberation movements of all political persuasions were honoured.

Importantly, for Ukraine's leaders at a time when three-quarters of Ukrainians believed their country was at war with Russia, Ukraine's memory politics and decommunisation laws provided the basis for a Ukrainian history that was not integrated within Soviet and Russian narratives. This in turn supported Ukraine's movement from the Soviet past, integration into Europe and strengthening of its identity as a fully sovereign state outside the Russian World.

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The brief alliance, short memory

GRZEGORZ SZYMBORSKI

For a brief moment in August Poland will celebrate the centenary of the victorious Battle of Warsaw when Józef Piłsudski's army managed to stop and push back the advancing Bolsheviks. Earlier, the Soviets were faced with an unexpected alliance of Poles and Ukrainians, which liberated Kyiv under the leadership of Symon Petliura. In light of this surprising development, what is the history behind this military alliance?

At the end of 1919 the Ukrainian People's Republic was almost defeated by the Tsarist forces of Anton Denikin. On November 4th, some detachments of the Ukrainian Galician Army (UHA) switched sides and joined the "White General". This event severely weakened the position of the Ukrainian Directorate, whose representatives were simultaneously negotiating with the Polish authorities in Warsaw. A series of talks had been ongoing since the start of July, as both sides attempted to conclude an armistice in Eastern Galicia. A conflict had been raging in this region since November 1918. Eventually, a ceasefire in favour of Poland was concluded on September 1st 1919. Nevertheless, sovereignty over the area was set to remain a bone of contention in any further negotiations between the two recently reborn countries.

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Planning the resistance

In October 1919 Andrij Livytsky, Ukraine's Minister of Foreign Affairs, was appointed head of Kyiv's diplomatic mission to Poland. Almost immediately, he tried to conclude a pact against the Soviets. In order to increase the chances of such an alliance, Livytsky declared on December 2nd that Ukraine would accept Polish territorial conditions. Preparations soon began to resist the Bolsheviks. On January 2nd 1920, the former POW encampment in Łańcut was reorganised as a meeting point for Ukrainian soldiers. Kamianets-Podilskyi was subsequently established as a second recruitment base. By the end of April, the Sixth Division was training in Brest under the command of Colonel Marko Bezruchko and General Oleksandr Udovychenko had formed the Second Division. By the end of April, no more than 5,000 soldiers were ready to fight the Bolsheviks. At the same time, in Ukraine there were many uprisings against Soviet rule. General Mykhailo Omelianovych-Pavlenko, who commanded more than 10,000 men, was the most prominent Ukrainian officer at this time. He was also known for his great sense of loyalty to Petliura.

On April 21st 1920 Warsaw and Kyiv signed a secret border agreement in the spirit of the newly proclaimed right of self-determination. Poles acknowledged the Ukrainians' right to establish their own state and recognised the Directorate as the government of an independent Ukraine. Poland also recognised the eastern, southern and northern borders of its neighbour. In return, the boundary at the Zbruch River was acknowledged. On April 24th both parties declared a military agreement to be an integral part of their treaty. The deal was signed by Livytsky and Jan Dąbski, who presented himself as the head of the Polish foreign office despite the fact that he was only the deputy minister.

On April 21st 1920 Warsaw and Kyiv signed a secret border agreement in the spirit of the newly proclaimed right of self-determination.

The military convention was signed by Captain Wacław Jędrzejewicz and Major Walery Sławek, both close lieutenants of Piłsudski. On the Ukrainian side, General Volodymyr Sinkler and Lieutenant Colonel Maksym Didkovskyi signed the treaty. Generally, it could be argued that the Poles were the privileged party in this alliance. For example, it was the Polish text of the agreement that was deemed the international version. At the same time, the treaty's signatories were not of equal standing in their countries. The Ukrainians were represented by high-ranking politicians and officers, but the Polish government selected lower-ranking officials. From a contemporary point of view, this does not appear to be in line with the concept of *comitas gentium*. This strengthened Petliura's desire to treat matters of equality

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seriously. Overall, Polish attitudes appeared to somewhat disregard its ally, which was largely dependent on Warsaw's support.

The pact turned out to be a difficult agreement for both parties. Petliura found plenty of opponents. Nevertheless, the leader believed that there was little room for nuance in relations with Poland. The majority of MPs accepted Piłsudski's foreign policy direction. Nevertheless, the Polish parliament never ratified the treaty.

Swift victory

The Second, Third and Sixth Polish Armies had begun preparations for the offensive against the Bolsheviks. The Third Polish Army was strengthened by the Ukrainian Sixth Infantry Division, which was led by Colonel Bezruchko. The Sixth Polish Army was assisted by General Udovychenko's Second Ukrainian Division, who were now advancing along the Dniester. Piłsudski wanted to destroy Sergei Mezheninov's Twelfth Soviet Army and push back Ieronim Uborevich's Fourteenth. Despite the Red Army's success against Anton Denikin, the Bolshevik forces in Ukraine could not hold on to their offensive. Soviet command was well aware that the Poles could easily reach as far as Smolensk and Gomel in the case of an immediate offensive. By the end of April, allied forces still outnumbered the Soviets on the Ukrainian front five to one.

As a result of the Kyiv offensive, the Twelfth and Fourteenth Soviet Armies were left exhausted.

The offensive commenced on April 25th 1920. The next day, the settlements of Berdychiv and Zhytomyr were captured. The entire Bolshevik front collapsed rather quickly. Three Ukrainian brigades fighting on the Soviet side surrendered as they did not wish to be part of the Soviet Fourteenth Army. On April 26th, both Piłsudski and Petliura issued declarations describing their military aims. The Polish leader proclaimed that the army would stay in Ukraine as long as it was necessary for Petliura to take control. He also addressed his country's citizens, promising that Polish troops will withdraw after a successful war against the common enemy. On April 27th and 28th, the Bolsheviks suffered heavy losses. At the same time, the Soviet Politburo agreed plans for a further offensive towards Warsaw.

When the Polish command was informed that the Bolsheviks would not be supported on the frontlines, Warsaw's forces prepared for a final assault on Kyiv. After days of regrouping, the offensive resumed on May 6th. According to Colonel Pavlo Shandruk: "On May 6th the Army of the UNR, following in the glory of its legendary Winter March and brilliant victories, entered the Mohyliv regions from

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the rear of the Bolsheviks under heavy fighting. During this fighting, the army completely annihilated the Fourteenth Soviet Army in the Rybnytsya-Rudnytsi regions."

The Ukrainian Sixth Division was ordered to participate in the joint attack on the capital. Soviet forces surrendered the city without a decisive battle. On May 7th, the first detachments entered Kyiv and secured strategically important bridges. By the evening, the city was no longer in Bolshevik hands. Despite this, some fighting occurred on the left bank of the Dnieper the next day.

As a result of the Kyiv offensive, the Twelfth and Fourteenth Soviet Armies were left exhausted. The Polish command considered the operation a success from a military point of view. Despite this, Polish General Tadeusz Kutrzeba noted that for most of the fifteen-day campaign, the allied forces had been waiting for a Bolshevik attack. In other words, the Twelfth Army was not totally destroyed nor successfully pursued.

Changing tides

With the capital taken, the Poles tried to strengthen Petliura's governance over Ukraine. On May 8th the Polish command issued orders stating that the Polish occupation should end as soon as possible. As a result, a proper Ukrainian army had to be established in order to ensure that Polish troops could withdraw within a few months. The Sixth Polish Army was meant to assist the Ukrainians in their march towards Odesa. On May 9th, a military parade in Kyiv was organised and Bezruchko's Division marched on Khreshchatyk, the main street of the city. Then, on May 14th, the Soviets made advances on the Belarusian front, which forced most of the Polish troops to move north. On May 27th Sixth Ukrainian Division was sent back to the line of the Markivka river. As Shandruk and his brigade were about to leave their posts, he noted that a delegation of local Jews from the city of Ozaryntsi bade him farewell, claiming that after the 1917 revolution the local area was never as peaceful as under Petliura's regime. Unfortunately, this time was about to come to an end.

Early in June 1920, Soviet commander Semyon Budyonny gathered his forces in the region of Lypovets. He initiated his offensive in late May, but it was only after several attempts that he managed to break the defensive lines in Samhorodok. On June 6th, Berdychiv and Zhytomyr were recaptured by the Bolsheviks. A retreat began on June 10th as Ukrainian units moved to secure the rear of the Polish forces. The entire frontline from Kyiv to Dniester was retreating, but neither the Poles nor the Ukrainians were encircled. Nevertheless, on June 12th Kyiv was decisively reoccupied by the Soviets. Four days later the retreating forces returned to the

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same positions from where their offensive had begun on April 25th. According to Shandruk: "The situation was aggravated by desertions caused by our defeat. Yes, desertions were not on the same scale as the previous year because the people had already experienced the Bolshevik 'paradise', but nevertheless our ranks thinned."

Still, in the beginning of August Petliura's army had five infantry divisions and one cavalry unit. At the time of the Battle of Warsaw in August, Ukrainian forces were forced to resist the Soviets on the right flank in Galicia without assistance. Colonel Bezruchko was protecting the Zamość fortress in the hope that he could stop Budyonny's offensive.

Bitter victory

After the Battle of Warsaw, the Ukrainian army in Galicia hoped to use this turning point to prepare for a counterattack. On September 24th General Zygmunt Zieliński addressed the commander of the Polish forces, making reference to the military convention and Poland's obligation to equip three Ukrainian divisions. Up to that moment, Poland had managed to provide only half of the agreed resources. In terms of boots and arms only a quarter of what was needed had been delivered. In the end, Warsaw was unable to meet the expectations of its Ukrainian ally.

On September 21st, the Third Ukrainian Division reached the Zbruch River after four days of marching across 120 kilometres. General Udovychenko was still attempting to push back the Soviets in order to secure better negotiating conditions. The Ukrainians managed to take control of Podolia and reach the suburbs of Braclav. It was around this time that the joint Polish-Ukrainian cause ultimately came to an end. According to Shandruk: "We had to stop the fight for the liberation of our native land because the Poles had signed an armistice which included the entire front of our army. … It was quite clear to me that our struggle against the Bolsheviks, considering Red Moscow's potential strength, had entered into a new stage of crisis".

On October 12th a cease-fire was signed between Polish and the Soviet authorities. With the armistice concluded, Warsaw ended supplies to Petliura's army. Poland acknowledged the "independence" of Belarus and Ukraine by recognising their Soviet-supported authorities. The Ukrainians considered this decision to be a great betrayal. The government did not decide to disarm allied units which now had to leave Poland to make their final stand. By November 21st, most of Petliura's defeated forces crossed the Zbruch river and ended up in Polish-run internment camps. Shandruk was among the thousands of Ukrainian soldiers interned in these camps. Conditions were said to be horrific. Interventions by the Directo-

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rate's representation in Warsaw managed to secure some changes to the situation in the camps. Finally, the Polish authorities offered jobs to many former soldiers who left internment. Shandruk also praised the strength and will of the Ukrainian women who worked hard for little money: "Modest indeed, for example: an artistically embroidered tablecloth with 12 napkins, over which a woman had to work four to five weeks, including long nights with candlelight, fetched only five to six dollars in equivalent Polish currency".

In May 1921 Piłsudski visited the Ukrainians in the internment camps and apologised for the political defeat. In 1922 Bolshevik representatives met interned soldiers in order to encourage them to return to Soviet Ukraine. According to Shandruk: "In our camp all the residents were assembled in the square and in reply to the delegates' call for us to return to the homeland, there was deep silence, not one person came forward and this probably happened in all the camps."

In May 1921 Piłsudski visited the Ukrainians in the internment camps and apologised for the political defeat.

On January 27th 1923 the Polish parliament dissolved the internment camps. It was only in 1928 when Polish authorities started to properly take care of the Ukrainian soldiers. Disabled veterans of Petliura's army were placed on a "nearly equal footing with Polish veterans and after going through examination by a qualifying commission, they were granted modest pensions". Shandruk was proud of his comrades: "It can be stated generally that during the period to 1926, all our interned soldiers in Poland proved themselves to be of the best calibre in every respect. They kept their patriotic spirit, high morale, and military discipline, based, under existing circumstances, mainly on mutual confidence and respect".

Is there any legacy?

Polish-Bolshevik negotiations, which took place in Minsk and later in Riga in late 1920 and early 1921, overall proved that there was a distinct lack of Polish solidarity with Ukraine. Poland ended its support for Petliura when he tried to sit at the negotiation table. The Bolsheviks were surprised that the Polish delegation even recognised the authority of Soviet-Ukrainian representatives. In the Treaty of Riga, Poland accepted Russian domination in Ukraine and in return received control of Eastern Galicia. Shockingly, it was Jan Dąbski, who had earlier signed the Treaty of Warsaw, who accepted the protocol terminating the right of asylum for Petliura and his troops.

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In general, Polish public opinion did not support or even understand the idea of Ukrainian statehood. There was not much interest in eastern affairs at the time. After the war, the idea of an independent Ukraine disappeared from Poland's foreign policy goals. Only a small group of visionaries, like Józef Piłsudski and Leon Wasilewski, continued to believe in the importance of this question. Jerzy Stempowski, an officer of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and son of a minister in Petliura's Directorate, claimed that Poland betrayed the Ukrainians by signing the Treaty of Riga. Yet in the 1920s, Polish public opinion considered the Kyiv expedition to be a political disaster. Its importance was neglected and the first serious book focusing on the subject was only released in 1937. This book was written by General Kutrzeba, who claimed in its preface that the campaign was too important for Poland to erase from collective memory.

Kutrzeba tried to explain and justify Poland's decision. After a successful battle at the Niemen river in September 1920, most of the Polish army was deployed to Belarusian territory. They needed at least one month to be moved to Ukraine. Consequently, this meant that the Poles could have begun their offensive in the winter. Postponing military arrangements until the spring of 1921 would have been a disaster for a Polish state that required peace. Those several months could had been used by the Soviets to reorganise their forces.

Moreover, Vilnius, a strategic city for Poland, was under Lithuanian control by the fall of 1920. For these reasons, Kutrzeba claimed that the Ukrainians should not have considered the Treaty of Riga as a betrayal. This is because Poland continued to provide support to the Ukrainian People's Republic as long as it realistically could. As soon as Poland's fate was at stake, however, it decided to think of itself. Despite this, the general acted very naïvely in 1937, as he stated that in the end a Ukrainian state did in fact exist despite Petliura's failure.

Was this explanation fair? It is impossible to say. However, it is true that Petliura remained in Poland until 1923. Marko Bezruchko and Pavlo Shandruk also stayed in the country for the next 20 years. Due to further conflicts and misunderstandings between Poland and Ukraine, the memory of this ambitious and short-lived alliance has become a marginal and largely forgotten example of co-operation between the two Slavic nations.

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EASTERN CAFÉ

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The story of liberalism's fall from grace

MILLIE RADOVIĆ

The Light That Failed: A Reckoning.
By: Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes. Publisher:
The Penguin Random House, United Kingdom, 2020.

In 1891, Rudyard Kipling wrote *The Light That Failed*, a melancholy novel that tells the story of an artist gone blind and his unrequited love for his childhood friend. It is foreboding that Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes have named their new book, *The Light That Failed: A Reckoning*, after this novel. At its heart, the book aims to answer the question that has formed the basis of many political debates since 2016: Where did liberalism go wrong? In short, Krastev and Holmes posit that without its ideological counterpart, communism, liberalism has "abandoned pluralism for hegemony" and become a victim of its own success. This, they say, has been the defining experience of the exceptional three decades that the world experienced following the end of the Cold War, a time they call "the Age of Imitation".

The authors deliver their argument through three case studies: Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), Russia and the United States. Each of these three, they say, has experienced a profound rejection of liberal values for separate reasons – yet as everything in global politics, their experiences have been interconnected. While the focus on three seemingly so different case studies could make for a disjointed narrative, this structure combines Krastev's expertise in Eastern European politics – as seen in his earlier books, *After Europe* (2017) and *Democracy Dis-*

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rupted (2014) – and Holmes' experience as a law professor who has frequently questioned the liberal tenets of US foreign policy in his own books, *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism* (1996) and *Passions and Constraint* (1995). In that it enables us to jump between events both big and small and test their essential theory: that liberalism performs *within* a "market" of ideas instead of *as* one, and that in the absence of that competitive market the ideology lost its way.

While documenting the failures of liberalism's courting of Eastern Europe and its decline in the United States, *The Light That Failed* makes two broad arguments: that imitation inherently entails a power structure and that the new world order is rooted firmly in competition.

Imitation as a power structure

Power, long presumed to centre around military might, took on a different meaning after the end of the Cold War. After, as the authors say, "a military superpower capable of obliterating life on earth disappeared like an illusionist's mirage" overnight – it was soft power, comprising cultural influence and moral superiority that came into focus.

Krastev and Holmes explore several power structures that the Age of Imitation entailed. Moral superiority is the power of the imitator where CEE nations are "optimistic converts" to liberalism, keen to adopt western liberal democratic practices to attain what they called "normal lives". The very notion that another nation's way of life is normal ascertains the presumed weakness or inferiority of the imitator. As a direct result of the fall of communism, Central Europeans' determination to live the lives of Germans, Brits, Americans, and other westerners was so strong that many moved in search of them, rather than wait for those standards of living to arrive at home. And there we see a transfer of power again, as the migration from Central and Eastern European countries resulted in a serious brain drain for these nations. Off hurried those same domestic liberals who had emerged victorious in the velvet revolutions, leaving the not so converted dethroned political elite behind to govern.

At the same time, power is also inherent to imitation in Russia's post-communist experience – the authors argue that the Russian government cynically simulated political transition to a liberal democracy by organising rigged elections in order to appease and distract the West. All the while they are able to ensure that in Russia's economic transition to a market economy, the money and power itself remain in the hands of the few. At the same time, Russia's ironic mimicry of western foreign policy practices (e.g. their involvement in the war in Syria or funding of anti-EU political

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parties) are almost a parody of previous western actions according to the authors. This imitation is a power statement in itself – "you're no better than us" says the Kremlin allegedly putting a mirror to Washington, Brussels & co.

> The authors argue that Russia cynically simulated political transition in order to appease and distract the West.

In fact, power is even at stake for the imitated, according to Krastev and Holmes. The United States as the winner of the Cold War, was left alone at the centre of the global stage – an initially admirable position in which the entire world sought to learn their language and their "way". However, in the years that foreigners were looking to learn English, and thanks to the predominance of American culture, Americans have spent very little time learning about foreigners. In other words, today "[w]hile the world knows a lot about America, America knows very little about the world". This is a damning predicament in an age of economic competition and strategic geopolitical power play. It makes a nation like America fundamentally vulnerable. In the words of Donald Trump, it makes America "a loser".

Competition is the new world order

The authors conclude the book with a chapter that centres on China as the new leading global power. China, they argue, is the winner of the Age of Imitation. Selectively borrowing, rather than pretending or even trying to imitate the West, China has managed to preserve their domestic structure and stability while advancing their international economic interests. From their successful diaspora educated at elite western universities to leveraging western technologies, China is indeed "laying claim to the far side of the future".

As the world's fastest growing major economy, China has used its competitive advantages of cheap labour and raw materials in order to become the global supply chain powerhouse. Having long abandoned its 20th century attempts to spread Maoism, China has focused on promoting its economic and geopolitical interests at an international level. From the now infamous One Belt, One Road project, to the strategic infrastructure investments in East Africa, Central and Eastern Europe and even the construction of Beidou-2 – soon to be the most accurate global positioning satellite system in the world – Beijing has understood what liberals in the West have not. It is not co-operation, or even con-

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flict, but competition that is the main driver of global politics in the post-Cold War era. If Krastev and Holmes are right about their assessment of right-wing populists, then not only China but antiliberal Trump, Putin, and even Orbán and Kaczyński have long understood the rules of the game and began rolling the dice while liberals still try to understand the manual.

One thing has become clear in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Unlike ten, 15 or even 20 years ago, amid their biggest test of the century, governments are not co-operating the way we expect them to. While the EU is experiencing bitter internal squabbles over the so called "coronabonds", the United States and China are embroiled in an information war over the virus' origins, and the global public health watchdog – the World Health Organisation (WHO) – has been accused of currying favour with Beijing and had a major chunk of its funding cut by the United States.

What's next for liberalism?

At times demanding on the reader, the book's theoretical points about the forces driving the decline of liberalism are interwoven with popular culture references to relevant films, plays and prose that help contextualise the points being made. More impressively, the authors are able to place the local cultural works into each chapter, for example referencing Cristian Mungiu's *Graduation* in the CEE-focused chapter, Victor Pelevin's absurdist novella *Operation Burning Bush* in Russia's chapter and Spike Lee's critically acclaimed *BlacKkKlansman* in the US chapter.

However, while answering many burning questions that occupy the so-called liberal elites' dinner table conversations, the book also opens up a plethora of new ones. For one, what about the decline in liberal values in other nations, especially in Western Europe? And what about the divisions *within* the liberal camp? Can we really look at liberal democrats as one homogenous group? It takes only a few clips of recent debates in the European Parliament to see that they have frequently disagreed about what liberalism is in practice.

> Liberalism's inner struggles are a crucial factor in the failures of its courtship of Eastern Europe.

Such a discussion is complex enough to warrant another book. Nevertheless, liberalism's inner struggles are a crucial factor in the failures of its courtship of

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Eastern Europe. In their endeavour to be the beacon of tolerance internationally, not only have liberals, as Krastev and Holmes argue, "abandoned pluralism for hegemony" on the international stage, but they are consistently wrestling with it domestically. Whether it is the freedom to deny the Holocaust in Germany, get a religiously based education in the Netherlands, or to simply offend a holy text, western societies are consistently grappling with whether their tolerance extends to the intolerant. In that process, the United Kingdom, Italy, France, the Netherlands, and Germany have been among the many liberal democracies to see a rise in antiliberal politicians, many of whom have become formidable competitors in recent elections.

Rather than mourn this new era of competition of ideas, the authors argue that liberals should celebrate them. Indeed, if liberalism works best when faced with a market of competitive ideas, then rather than despair the present or the future state of affairs, liberal democrats ought to make their way back to the drawing board to try and shape them. Unlike Kipling's tragic tale, the future is brighter than it seems.

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We are in fact writing about the present…

ŁUKASZ JASINA

The Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution. Illiberal Liberation 1917–1941,
Edited by: Laura Douds, James Harris and Peter Whitewood.
Publisher: Bloomsbury Academic, London 2020.

The book this article discusses is a collective work, which means that the publication possesses various strengths and weaknesses. One advantage of such a book is the wide thematic scope. At the same time, they are usually not arranged in a totally natural manner, thereby presenting chapters that may appear random or loosely connected. This kind of book should not only be viewed as a resource to discover history, but as an artefact of our times. They help reveal networks of experts, intellectual trends and how today's historians think about the past.

Myth debunking?

The Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution. Illiberal Liberation 1917–1941 is not free from these kinds of flaws. Academia has the right to create an environment for publications according to its own criteria. This would not have been an issue, however, if not for the ambitious benchmarks set by the editors in the introduction. They want to see their collection as yet another resource that can be used to re-examine the "Cold War myth". This idea has entrenched itself in American

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historiography of the post-war period, as well as in general Anglo-Saxon historiography which the editors do not mention.

This "myth" has been deemed worthy of debunking, which poses questions with regards to the authors' academic intentions. Recognising a certain view of history and then setting out with the goal of arguing against it seems to contradict the principle that ought to guide historical research. This is namely the desire to find truth that is free from different kinds of intellectual issues. The attempt to revise historical views by researchers such as Richard Pipes, Zbigniew Brzeziński and Carl Friedrich has become common in America. Those continuing this trend, such as the "early revisionists" like Robert Tucker and Stephen Cohen, now find themselves in top positions in universities and research institutions focusing on the history of Russia and the Soviet Union. The approach of this new school of thought (called "neo-revisonism" by some) attempts to create a division between a "positive" Leninism and a "negative" Stalinism. It attempts to prove that Bolshevik rule did not have a totalitarian character in the beginning. It excuses decisions made by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union because of the state of society and the West's aggressive behaviour. These are not terms created by researchers in today's US, but rather in Soviet historiography. This issue has been discussed further by the Polish historian Andrzej Nowak in one of the most recent issues of *The Polish Diplomatic Review*.

The editors contradict themselves when they argue that the Bolsheviks were democratic and liberal, before arguing that Soviet authority was anti-liberal by definition.

Another ideological assumption of the editors is the forced attempt to recognise the Russian Revolution as an "illiberal liberation". The editors contradict themselves when they argue that the Bolsheviks were democratic and liberal, before arguing that Soviet authority was anti-liberal by definition. This is despite the fact that the revolution had liberal results such as national liberation. In the introduction, there is a discussion regarding the similarities between democracy and liberalism. The editors come to the conclusion that they were not always the same.

Democracy can be "illiberal". In this comparison, Soviet Russia and the USSR have a place alongside British or French democracy before the extension of voting rights after the First World War. In the French case, this only occurred after the Second World War. This debate

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is strongly reminiscent of the current debate on "illiberal democracy", which connects this work with more explicitly modern ideas. A book about history becomes a debate about our contemporary times. This therefore makes it difficult to believe in the objective nature of the contributors.

Forced connections

The book aims to show the transformation of an idealist regime into a brutal autocracy, regardless of whether it makes any sense or if the aim was actually achieved. The ideological introduction is quickly challenged by two essays in the first chapter: "Dictatorship Unlimited: Lenin on the State, March-November 1917," written by Eric van Ree, and "The Permanent Campaign and the Fate of Political Freedom in Russia," written by Lars Liha. Both researchers follow the tradition of Russian historian Dmitri Volkogonov. The Soviet Union is depicted as a country that is threatened by authoritarianism almost from the start because of the nature of its founder. The second essay showcases how swiftly political and social freedoms were crushed after the October Revolution. These ideas are not fully discussed in the three essays that follow, which include a chapter on how the Soviet state was built. One of the essays discusses the beginnings of post-revolutionary statehood, while the other two are loosely connected to the first one. These focus on more marginal issues, such as the international recognition of the Soviet government and other Soviet initiatives related to the concept of democracy in the 1930s.

The chapter on internal democracy consists of two texts that discuss the conflict between Stalin and Trotsky. At the same time, the two essays which attempt to measure political repression and moments of respite do not contribute much to the overall discussion. The authors largely ignored the differences between "Leninism" and "Stalinism", which contradicts the premise drafted in the book's introduction. The chapter on national issues and international conflicts contains brief outlines of national politics in Ukraine. This kind of text now appears in almost every volume of collective work on the USSR published in the English language, which is probably the result of a growing number of young Ukrainian researchers in Anglo-Saxon universities. This is followed by an essay which proposes a strange correlation between persecuted nations in the Soviet Union and Soviet authorities' anxiety in relation to the nations with which they were associated. Such an idea sounds similar to that of Vladimir Medinsky and the new Russian tendency to promote history propaganda.

The most interesting part of the book is devoted to Soviet canteens, the fight against prostitution, literary censorship,

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Soviet educational projects and combating illiteracy. These essays could easily be part of a collective work on Soviet lifestyles. Here, they are an interesting addition to an ambitious project, but lack a clear contribution to the field.

Overall, the book could be understood as a collection of essays put together in the hope of somehow forcing a connection between them. Even though a lot of effort has been put into the work, it will remain an example of an attempt to combine history with current trends. Furthermore, the book shows how gathering texts according to a certain theme does not necessarily work out. This book makes us understand, yet again, why the most interesting debates in historical research are increasingly occurring outside the academic system. Books such as *The Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution*, which are influenced by fashionable ideas, often do not leave the reader with much to think about. NEE

Translated by Daniel Glechgewicht

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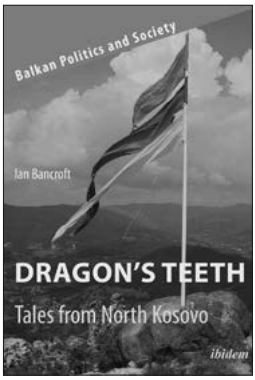
An alternative guide to Northern Kosovo

MAGDALENA REKŚĆ

Dragon's Teeth. Tales from North Kosovo. By: Ian Bancroft. Publisher: Ibidem Verlag, Stuttgart, Germany, 2020.



Kosovo, which has been independent since 2008, is one of the least discovered places in Europe. Consequently, a striking majority of publications which focus on this state, including academic ones, are based on oriental stereotypes and negative clichés that only reproduce images of it as a corrupt and failing mafia state. Even if we agree that these narratives bear some truth – due to the fact that the political, social and economic situation is more complicated there than in other states in the region, or because the activities of Kosovo politicians, who are absorbed in the fight for power and getting rich – we should also acknowledge that in Europe's youngest state, normal life carries on. People work, study, go to school and enjoy going to the cinema and theatre. They go for walks, meet neighbours and friends, even though it is more difficult there to overcome everyday challenges including poverty, high unemployment and corruption.

Northern Kosovo

The situation in Northern Kosovo is quite distinct. The Serbs inhabit the region by a large majority. It has parallel Serbian state structures and uses the

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Serbian currency, the dinar. Its people often travel to Serbia, have Serbian IDs, and use the Serbian health care system which is much better than what is available in Kosovo. Even if they wanted to accept the fact that they live in an independent Kosovo, the state's weaknesses are not encouraging. Politics have pushed an uneasy situation on the citizens and now they have to live with it. The recent book, *Dragon's Teeth. Tales from North Kosovo*, by Ian Bancroft, a writer based in the former Yugoslavia for more than a decade, discusses some of these everyday challenges faced by those who live in the northern parts of Kosovo.

Dragon's Teeth discusses some of the everyday challenges faced by those who live in the northern parts of Kosovo.

From time to time Northern Kosovo makes international headlines – either in the context of ethnic tensions or its hypothetical unification with Serbia which would return the Preševo Valley to Kosovo. In such moments, professional experts of the region claim that the exchange of territories is pointless, mainly because of the region's multiethnicity. Just as the Preševo Valley is not inhabited solely by Albanians, Northern Kosovo is not only populated by Serbs; while in other parts of the country there are areas where there are numerous Serbian communities. Thus, an exchange of territories (which would most likely incline their "nationalisation") is in nobody's interest.

This conclusion can be drawn from *Dragon's Teeth*, which shows complicated relations between the neighbours and big politics in the background. The Serbian narratives of a life on "the barricades of Serbness" and of being a "bulwark of Christianity", which are glorified in the nationalistic discourse, overlap with similar sentiments expressed by Kosovo Albanians, who live in the Serbian-dominated north and consider themselves a bulwark of Islam and Albanianess. The title of the book is based on these self-stereotypes (i.e. generalisations projected in regards to one's own group) which are present among both groups which consider Kosovo as their "holy land". They refer to the Greek myth of the Spartans, the fighters who were born out of a dragon's tooth and who, in the end, killed one another.

Separatist narratives

While Serbians and Albanians are not at war, clashes do take place in terms of identity, which is mainly expressed through an excessive show of national

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symbols, such as biased marking of a territory with flags and other emblems. Both sides believe that they have historical rights to this land. Separatist identity narratives are reproduced, and even enforced, through the education system, as the territories inhabited by the Serbs have Serbian schools with Serbian curricula, handbooks and academic materials. Young people acquire the Serbian version of history, read Serbian literature and learn Serbia's geography. The majority of people do not see the need to learn Albanian which results in cultural and mental barriers. While the older generations rather have no serious communication problems (in communist Yugoslavia, Albanians had to learn the old Serbo-Croatian language), young people have difficulties even though they live in the same state.

The wide spectrum of issues that Bancroft discusses in the book leads to one common denominator, namely, Kosovska Mitrovica (formerly known as Titova Mitrovica). This is the main administrative centre for Kosovo Serbs, and at the same time, a city divided between Serbs and Albanians. While the majority of researchers concentrate on tensions and conflicts, which make this city one of the biggest hot spots in the Western Balkans, Bancroft shows its different face. He describes both the cultural traditions and the potential of the city, which was once an important town with a centuries' long mining history; although today it has turned into a conglomerate of ethnic ghettos. Despite its numerous problems, Mitrovica continues to impress visitors as an academic centre (with a Serbian university, where Serbs from southern Serbia and other states of the former Yugoslavia also come to study). It is also a cultural centre, known for its achievements in music.

The wide spectrum of issues that Bancroft discusses in the book leads to one common denominator, namely, Kosovska Mitrovica.

Complexities and depth

Bancroft's vast, interdisciplinary knowledge on Northern Kosovo combined with his deep erudition and knowledge of both languages, and cultures have allowed him to outline the area's complex relations, difficult past, and desire for "normal" life. In so doing, the author does not take any sides. Instead, he tries to show the complicated reality that the inhabitants of Northern Kosovo have to live. His book shows many analogies to Bosnia and Herzegovina (e.g. the divided

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cities of Kosovska Mitrovica and Mostar) where Bancroft previously worked as a diplomat. Indeed both countries face numerous difficulties, yet foreign experts who analyse them often reveal a lack of understanding as well as no knowledge of local and everyday realities. Bancroft is different though. As a visitor from the West, he tries to show the readers the local specificity, systems of values and cultural heritages. For this reason, his story is a very significant source.

For sure, anyone interested in the Western Balkans will enjoy reading *Dragon Teeth*, particularly those interested in learning about the lesser known region of Northern Kosovo. The book will also be a good read for those who are interested in visiting and getting to know Europe's youngest state. *Dragon Teeth* can also be regarded as an alternative "guidebook" for advanced enthusiasts of the Balkans, as it is a guide to places burdened by a troubled history, and thus deserving the particular recognition.

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

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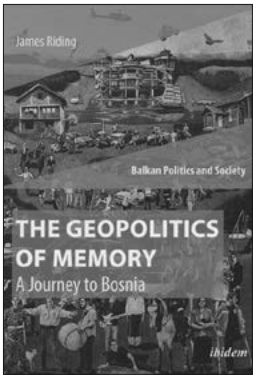
A deltiology of memory

KINGA ANNA GAJDA

The Geopolitics of Memory. A Journey to Bosnia. By: James Riding. Publisher: Ibidem Verlag, Stuttgart, Germany, 2019.

James Riding's book *The Geopolitics of Memory. A Journey to Bosnia* is an analysis of trauma memory and remembrance. These are two separate processes which should be analysed in a broader context that goes beyond the experiences of the Second World War or the Balkan wars. The book is not a publication in the category of so-called dark tourism, which is a term used to describe reports from the site of mass murder. Noticeably, the author, James Riding, a cultural geographer at Newcastle University in the UK, provides both an outsider's perspective and that of an eyewitness. Therefore, we read that those who experienced genocide do not see the sites as a place to visit. For them, these sites are not a destination, a monument or even a mass grave. It is rather, as Riding writes, "a photograph attached to a barbed wire fence by a strand of string, an arrow pointing at a patch of earth, a bombed out house with gaping windows in the background, the recurring images of a corpse, ethnic cleansing, the peeling wallpaper of the rape hotel".



No longer a Yugoslav

Clearly, a mass murder site is differently perceived by the witnesses and by tourists. The former not only looks at what has remained since the genocide, but also has to learn to live with the past and face its consequences. For them, as Riding writes, life after the genocide becomes a process which is "forever land-

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scaping over the mass grave, a frantic search for missing persons, the counting of skulls to work out how many bodies are dumped in this clandestine location, the knowledge that you may have to bury a loved one only in part". Thus, his book is an analysis of the way in which history has left a mark on the affected place and its residents, and how it links the present and past. Riding illustrates life between these two periods of time with the example of Dino's family.

The book resembles a collection of postcard-like images. They include elements of public and private places. These sites are seen as something static and as something that is subject to change.

Together with his mother, Dino emigrated from Yugoslavia to the United Kingdom where he became a refugee. There it was difficult for him to explain where he was from as he had been born in a state that no longer exists and his primary identity ceased to exist. In others' eyes he could no longer be a Yugoslav and his national identity moved into an imaginary world. Dino's story illustrates that, as the author writes, "to be a refugee is a non-identity, a failure of identity, a losing of an identity, yet being a refugee, and claiming asylum as a Yugoslav, enables this identity to exist into the future".

Riding adopts a deltiological approach to history which is based on his own collection of photographs taken in the cafés and streets of various Balkan cities. He observed people and their surroundings. He uses this approach to compare and contrast what the sites that he analyses looked like years ago and how they now are remembered. He inspects the case of Novi Travnik, a symbol of Yugoslavia in the view of Dino's father. Located 20 kilometres from the historic city of Travik, this small town was established in 1949 to provide housing to workers of the Bratsovo arms factory. In 1979, when Dino's father arrived there, it was a city of youth. Today, it is dull place, not interesting to tourists who prefer a rebuilt Sarajevo. However, when Dino's dad looks at it, he sees the prosperity of Yugoslavia, as well as its death and demise. Unlike Sarajevo, the buildings here have been destroyed were never rebuilt.

Riding photographed the remains of the Bratsovo factory. This is what interests him the most, unlike the city's residents who still find it hard to understand why their pride was destroyed. Thus, the city's residents are unhappy, feeling that they are just existing and that somebody has stolen 20 years of their lives. To better understand them, Riding compares his photographs of the destroyed factory and town with the perspectives of locals. This encourages the reader to look at different things. The book re-

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sembles a collection of postcard-like images. They include elements of public and private places. These sites are, on the one hand, seen as something static and, on the other, as something that is subject to change.

Cultural geography

Riding shows that the purpose of travelling is not only to admire scenery, visit monuments, discover culture, but to read the local history. In Riding's case the latter is based both on conversations with residents and deep observations of nature. Thus, the book is a clash of perspectives of trauma and nature. Riding knows that events change places and it is only through a comparison between today's landscape and images from the past that differences can be captured and the story of a place told. He enriches his writing with excerpts of reports, texts and films of others, as well as recreating the travels of former geographers.

In this way, Riding's work offers a "spectrum of cultural geography". He makes references to cultural texts, memory and emotional landscapes, as well as personal experiences of trauma. This combination, in his view, is the key to understanding the influence that the past has on the present. That is why Riding's perception of the landscape after genocide only seems to be calm. In truth, it is full of life, mainly because of the people who know what this place looked like before.

Riding is of the view that complete observation is possible only when different time perspectives are combined with different narratives. The latter includes outsiders who have a more distanced interpretation of a memory site and insiders who base their stories on memories and testimonies of witnesses. None of these narratives is fully complete. They rather present the past from specific perspectives which are under the influence of emotions and subordinate to regional, ethnic and national discourse. Thereby, they are highly subjective.

Only a shared narrative builds the more complete retelling of past memories. Thus, reading history from the experience of a place is tantamount to a personal and performative reading. In Riding's view only a performative exploration of memory sites and its personal experiences can contribute to building

In Riding's view only a performative exploration of memory sites and its personal experiences can contribute to building peace and reconciliation after conflict.

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peace and reconciliation after conflict. That is why his book is envisioned to present alternative remembrances of traumatic experiences. Riding points out that remembrance in the post-conflict space influences the discourse and shaping of collective memory, both at the local and European level. In his work, he ponders what way the co-existing narratives about the past are negotiated and how Europeans are forgetting Yugoslavia's collapse.

Commemoration of the republic

For Riding monuments and graves are expressions of memory that show its geopolitical, spatial and individual dimensions. Such is the grave of Yugoslavia's leader, Josif Tito, which, today, is the destination of many pilgrimages. It is a place where former Yugoslavs can openly remember their former state and cry over its collapse. Characteristically, the mausoleum is not only a place to commemorate the former leader but the former federal republic. It allows people to express their sorrow over the loss of brighter and better days when – as representatives of older generations say – the country was united and society based on social justice and workers' rights.

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Tito's grave is also a site for a collective expression of memory and nostalgia, showing the generational difference in regards to the phenomenon of Yugonostalgia. Clearly, like in many other former socialist states, older generations would like Yugoslavia to come back, although they also try to forget about what has taken place. In some way, they have learnt to live by the past. This is not understood by the youth who lives in the present.

Riding also analyses the remembrance of massacres, which were forgotten by the outside world. Among them, was the civic action of crying over the brutality which took place in Prijedor, a city in Republika Srpska, which housed the infamous camps that were established in 1992 for the Bosniak and Croat population. Each year, on May 31st, the city's residents adorn white arm bands. This is to commemorate the time when non-Serbs were forced to mark their hous-

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es with white flags or sheets and wear white ribbons. On the last day of May, residents with white roses go to the city centre where they exchange the last names and ages of children murdered – the victims of ethnic cleansing.

Such rituals turn these places of memory into places of interventions, where memory is a means to promote change, question the current political system, and the public discourse on memory. Riding believes that by describing these movements, images, texts and performative memory of the survivors, it will allow us to connect memory with the identity and landscapes, as well as to locate recollections with a specific space and social group, and thereby allow for an understanding of the impact on memory geopolitics on "(re)production of the (post)conflict landscape".

Riding describes the impact of geographic factors on politics and vice versa. He analyses co-dependencies between history, memory and geopolitics. He starts with a description of the consequences of the Davos agreement and its ambiguous assessment. On the one hand, the signing of the agreement ended the military conflict, but, on the other hand, it led to a situation where the political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina cemented the differences between the two parts of the country (e.g., Republica Serpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina). The war in Bosnia dramatically limited the level of multi-ethnicity. Exclusions, forced relocation, emigration, and murders contributed to the country becoming less ethnically diverse, with only homogeneous enclaves left. There are still visible geographic differences between the North and South, which makes not only the governance but the country's development and integration with the European Union more difficult. It also has built two separate discourses on history and memory and cements ethnic divisions. Riding claims that cartographic representation of the idiosyncrasy – or the cartography of Apartheid – has led to the nationalisation of memory and a never-ending transformation of the post-socialist era and a weakened democracy. This division also led to the Bosnian Spring – the most brutal riots that took place since the end of the war in Bosnia, thereby creating new memory sites and a new ethnic division in memory.

Redefining the past

Riding argues that collective memory, in terms of both a broad (state) meaning and a narrow (local) meaning takes part in an attempt to deconstruct, or reconstruct the ethnically socialist Yugoslavia, is a significant element in the nationalist narrative. The rituals of memory, in a broad sense of the meaning, are often a reflection and strengthening of the authorities' interests, and they imprison

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the past in the service of the new state and building of the nation.

Remembrance, in a narrow sense of the term, turns into a political act, which continues to strengthen ethnic division. Remembrance, in this understanding, explains why recollections are interpreted within one ethnic group, which enforces the categorisation and calling others Bosniak Serbs, Bosniak Croats, Bosniaks, Orthodox, Catholics, or Muslims and not fathers or mothers. Such memory becomes a political statement.

In the post-conflict landscape, there are also memory acts which subtly disturb the official state memory and shared understanding of collective memory. There are alternative acts of remembrance whose goal is to create a future outside ethnic divisions. Memory, hence, influences politics in contemporary Bosnia and Herzegovina, or perhaps even shapes it. Riding shows that in such places as Bosnia, it is impossible to talk about the present without making references to the past. The war in the Balkans is a scar of conscience both in the region and in Europe. Thus, Riding encourages everyone to not only start understanding the impact of discourse on the creation of the image of the country, but on internal relations. He believes that collective memory cannot be toxic. That is why he ponders whether it would not be better to forget, with time, about the wars and traumatic events.

Within the pages of *The Geopolitics of Memory* Riding shows that it is impossible to create a complete description of a place and conflict. Only selected excerpts of the past can be presented, moments of human experience of trauma and genocide captured. Each return to the past is only a story in which selected people and events survive. Riding is aware of this and undertakes a critical and creative attempt to redefine the past, with full conscience that its full picture is intentionally disturbed and the remains of collective memory are presented from the perspective of a specific ideology subordinate to a given state or ethnic narrative.

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

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Prof. Dariusz Stola
Named 2020 Irena Sendler Memorial Award Honoree

Acclaimed historian Dariusz Stola is being honored for his visionary leadership of POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, in Warsaw, a complex world-class public institution, whose success was lauded and honored throughout Prof. Stola's tenure (March 2014–February 2019). Prof. Stola is a historian of Poland under Communism, the Holocaust, Polish-Jewish relations, social memory, and international migrations in the 20th century. In 2013, he received the Knight's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta for his research on the legacy of the March 1968 political crisis in communist Poland. Author and editor of more than 100 articles and nine books, Prof. Stola was appointed by the Minister of Culture and National Heritage Bogdan Zdrójewski in early 2014 to head the POLIN Museum and oversee the museum's grand opening in October 2014.

About the Irena Sendler Memorial Award

The Irena Sendler Memorial Award was created in 2008 by Taube Philanthropies in memory of Irena Sendler whom Yad Vashem named a "Righteous Among The Nations." Each year, the award is presented to those who have been exemplary in preserving and revitalizing Poland's Jewish heritage. Nominations for the award are reviewed by a panel of Taube Philanthropies advisory board members and Jewish cultural leaders in Poland.

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