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New Eastern Europe

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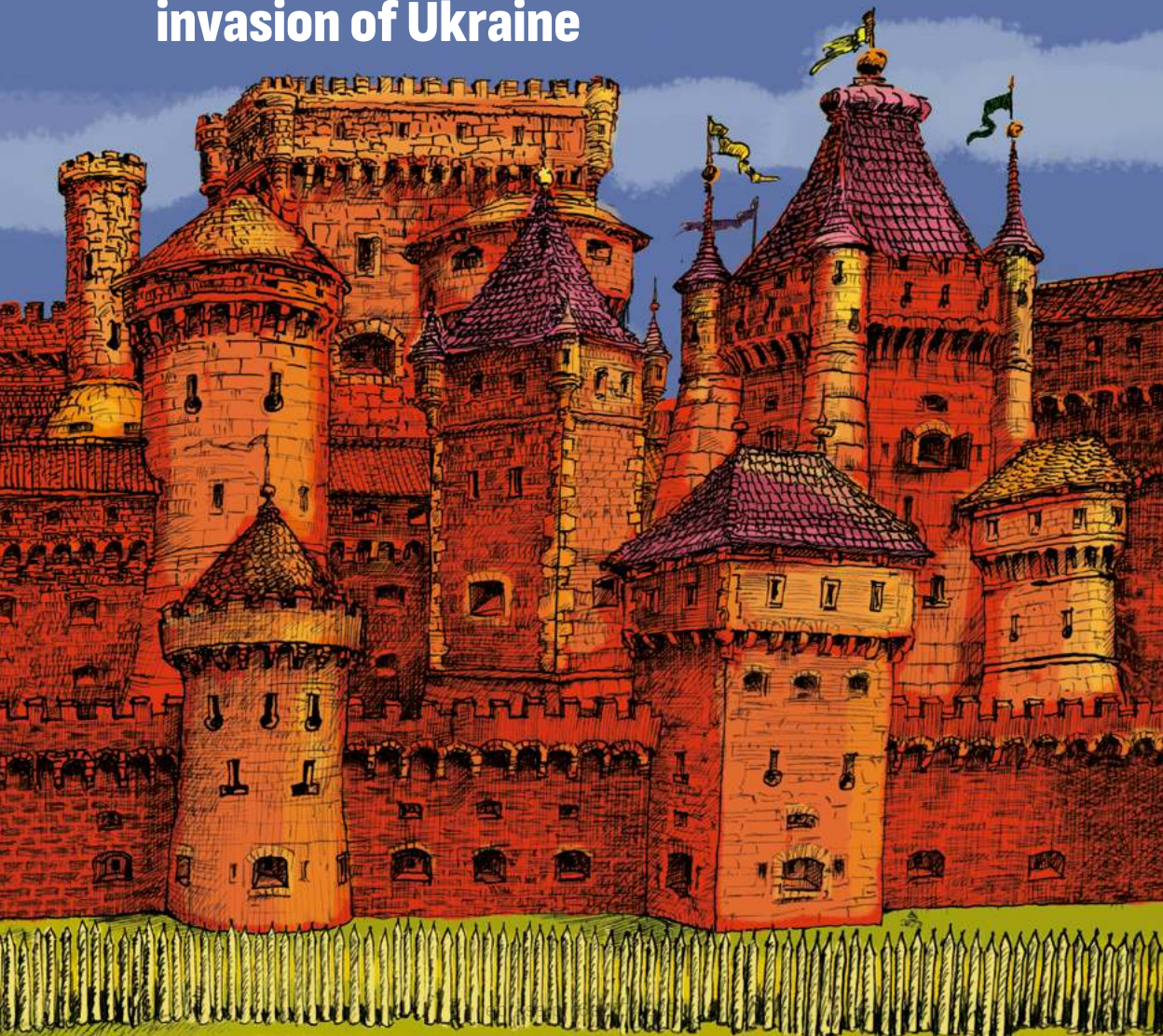
BEYOND THE FENCE

What has Europe learnt from Russia's invasion of Ukraine



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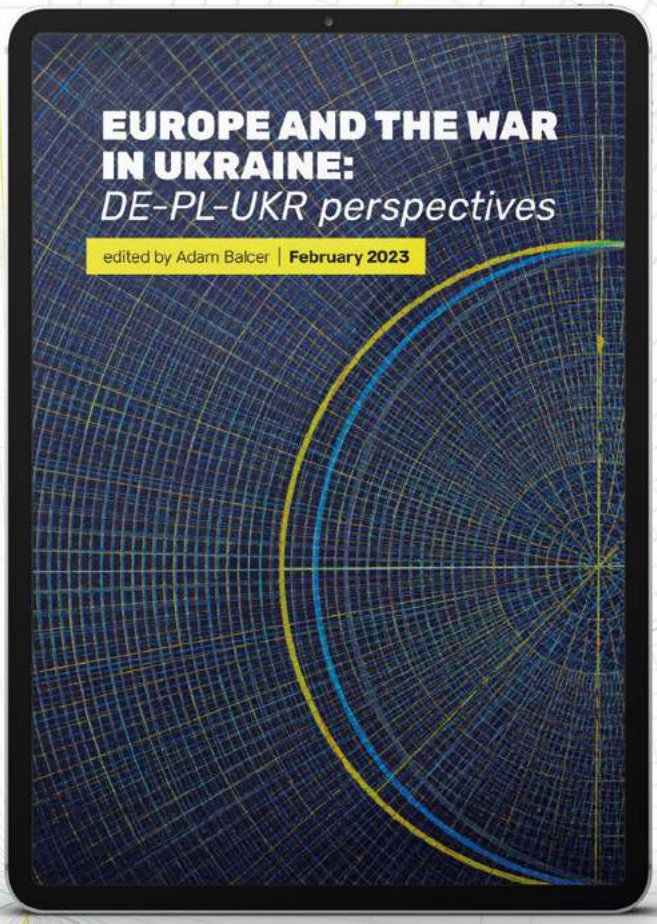
The report is published within project titled the German-Polish Roundtable on the East. Every autumn, it gathers experts, journalists, scholars, diplomats, politicians, local government officials and NGO activists from Germany, Poland and other countries to discuss German and Polish policies towards Eastern Europe.



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DEAR READER,

On July 11th and 12th this year, NATO will hold one of its most consequential summits in recent history in Vilnius. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has compelled the NATO Alliance to reassess its defence strategy and find ways to assist Ukraine in defending itself against the aggressor. While some realists argue that NATO provoked the attack and Russia intervened to counter the threat posed by NATO, such arguments are clearly false or based on a misunderstanding of reality. Nevertheless, following the aggression, NATO now faces the challenging task of not only addressing the Russian threat but also contemplating the future of the Alliance.

This issue of *New Eastern Europe* provides the context and recommendations for tackling this task. In April of this year, we collaborated with our publisher, the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, and LSE ideas (LSE's foreign policy think tank) to organise an expert seminar. The seminar aimed to examine the lessons learnt on behalf of NATO and formulate recommendations ahead of the Vilnius Summit. The results of the seminar, along with insights from various experts on different aspects of the challenge, are published here.

Beyond the Russian threat, the most significant open question revolves around the nature and extent of NATO's relationship with Ukraine. Our authors generally agree that the Vilnius Summit should herald a new era in NATO-Ukraine relations and potentially outline a future plan for Ukraine's membership in the Alliance. While Ukraine cannot immediately become a NATO member during times of war, a clear path towards membership should be established.

As the summer progresses, the war in Ukraine enters a new phase. The anticipated counter-offensive is now underway, but its results will likely not be immediate. Time will reveal whether the support provided by the West to Ukraine is sufficient to give an advantage and enable it to reclaim the territories currently occupied by Russia. If the counter-offensive does not yield successful results, the war may prolong, requiring additional support from western leaders and societies.

We encourage you to follow our website and listen to our podcast, *Talk Eastern Europe*, where we continue to analyse and enhance our understanding of the broader picture.

Sincerely,
The Editors

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NATO and Ukraine

Recommendations and reflections

WOJCIECH MICHNIK, ADAM REICHARDT

On April 25th 2023, *New Eastern Europe* hosted an expert roundtable discussion on the current lessons learnt from Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and to prepare recommendations for NATO and its member countries ahead of the July 2023 summit in Vilnius. The summary of this roundtable, with some important lessons and recommendations, is presented here.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has become a defining moment in European security for this generation. For the second time in the post-Cold War period, Europe has witnessed a full-scale war on the continent, yet this time one of the belligerents (and the main aggressor) is a state possessing nuclear weapons. In February 2022, the Kremlin strategy was to quickly invade Ukraine and set up a pro-Russian government in Kyiv, which would not only end Ukrainian sovereignty but also further destabilise the security situation in the region and beyond. Russia's actions, however, failed to achieve such a result. This was largely thanks to Ukrainian resistance but also the mass support, including weapons, money and humanitarian aid, provided to Ukraine by the West.

As the main organisation that represents military cooperation between countries in Europe and North America, NATO did not respond to Ukraine's call for help directly as a whole. Instead, it has only provided medical supplies, as well as non-lethal and financial aid. However, NATO members are the largest supporters of Ukraine on a bilateral or multilateral basis. According to the Kiel Institute for the World Economy, the total amount of support, which includes military aid,

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amounted to 143 billion euros in government-to-government commitments from January 2022 to January 2023. This does not include the most recent commitments made since then. Yet, it does illustrate that external support – with almost all of it coming from NATO countries – for Ukraine has been a key factor in its defence against the ongoing Russian aggression. More than one year since the full-scale invasion, *New Eastern Europe* decided to gather a group of experts in security, geopolitics, international relations and political science, to sit around a table and discuss the key issues that have emerged as a result of this defining moment, and what recommendations should be put forward on behalf of the journal ahead of the 2023 NATO Summit in Vilnius. The results of these discussions are presented here and in the subsequent texts published in this thematic section.

NATO's approach towards Russia and Ukraine

One key theme that emerged during discussions is that the West does not fully understand how Russia works and how it formulates its strategy. This is an important lesson for western governments, especially those that have been more "friendly" to the Kremlin in the past. Russia's invasion of Ukraine should prove once and for all that there should be no return to "business as usual" as long as the current regime is in power. It is important to also keep in mind that the Russian authorities do not play by the same rules as the West. The Kremlin certainly believes that its conflict is not only with Ukraine, but with the so-called "collective West" – a term often used in Russian discourse to describe NATO and western countries. While the active and kinetic conflict is taking place in Ukraine and against Ukrainian troops, other battles and conflicts are taking place elsewhere, primarily in the information space. This will remain a challenge for NATO and its unity and cohesion, as it is difficult for the Alliance to both support Ukraine and avoid a direct military confrontation with the Russian Federation. There have definitely been some signs of wear and tear within some NATO member states with regard to maintaining a united front in the political and diplomatic standoff with Russia.

In many ways, NATO's approach to Russia has been very delicate, as there are fears of escalating the conflict beyond Ukraine. That is why officially, NATO as an organisation as such provides only non-lethal aid to Ukraine. At the same time, there is no question that NATO member states provide the weapons, training and strategic consultations to the Ukrainian side that are needed to defend against Russian forces. This response to Ukrainian needs from many countries was initially slow. However, since the end of 2022 and the beginning of 2023 there has been a marked acceleration in providing certain types of weapons to Ukraine. This has

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enhanced the country's abilities to not only defend itself – such as in the case of air defence systems – but also to carry out a successful counter-offensive strategy. There is no longer a question of providing main battle tanks, such as the German-made Leopards and American Abrams, to Ukraine. The next discussion relates to equipping Ukraine's air force with F-16s, and at this moment it seems that that the main (diplomatic) obstacles to providing the Ukrainian military with these fighter jets have been resolved. As NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg underlined, "It is clear that we are in a race of logistics. Key capabilities like ammunition, fuel, and spare parts must reach Ukraine before Russia can seize the initiative on the battlefield. Speed will save lives." If there are any lessons for NATO and for individual states supporting Ukraine to learn, it is that decisiveness in sending certain weapons to the Ukrainians could and should have been improved. NATO understanding its own limitations (political sensitivities and depleted military stockpiles) is one thing, but prolonging decisions out of fear of so-called escalation definitely did not serve the purpose of ending the war any quicker on Ukrainian terms.

Many experts argue that these decisions should have been made a year ago. At the same time, this slow course illustrates the cautious approach by many larger NATO member states, who fear escalating the conflict beyond Ukraine. Unfortunately, the price of this approach has been paid by Ukrainian lives and territory. This might be even more important now as the Ukrainian counter-offensive is underway. It could last for weeks or even months and will likely encounter some setbacks that will definitely be used by Russia's propaganda and disinformation campaign. That is why it is so crucial for NATO to stay resilient and maintain a unified response to the war in the months to come.

Prolonging decisions out of fear of escalation did not serve the purpose of ending the war any quicker on Ukrainian terms.

NATO unity and resilience can help Ukraine's victory

Nevertheless, the NATO Alliance has shown a remarkable sense of unity in the face of Russia's aggression in Ukraine. This unity, however, is being challenged by political pressures at home and possible battlefield challenges in Ukraine. That is why it is even more important that Ukraine's counter-offensive is successful this summer. Symbolic victories, such as liberating villages and towns in the east and south of Ukraine, will validate the western public's support and make it easier for political leaders to convince their populations that there are returns on their investments.

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NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg (left) meets Ukraine's defence minister, Oleksii Reznikov, with Lloyd Austin, US defence secretary, in the background, during a recent meeting of NATO Ministers of Defence in Brussels. NATO as an organisation provides only non-lethal aid to Ukraine. At the same time, there is no question that NATO member states provide the weapons, training and strategic consultations to the Ukrainian side.

Detailing the reasons behind support for Ukraine is equally important in maintaining unity and is not discussed often enough. The argument should be crystal clear: support for Ukraine is support for its fight for freedom and democracy. NATO and its members have the credibility and clout to forge a strong narrative about why it is important to stand up for democracy – as an alliance of democratic and free states. As Ukraine has taught us, free and democratic societies are also resilient ones. Hence, NATO also needs to focus on tools for democracy building at home, including supporting investments in public diplomacy efforts, education, media literacy and teaching populations to understand threats and security better.

Defining victory

US President Joe Biden, together with other top officials in NATO states, including Stoltenberg, have all declared that they are going to support Ukraine for as long as it takes. However, there is no clear understanding as to what this really means. It can be assumed that such discussion refers to a victory for Ukraine. However, even this leads to further misunderstanding. If NATO declares that it supports a Ukrainian victory, then NATO should clearly define what that Ukrainian victory will look like. This victory could mean a recovery of territory matching the coun-

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try's 1991 borders. Yet, this victory could also mean a complete Russian defeat on the battlefield, or even the collapse of the current regime.

Defining and communicating NATO's desired outcome can be tricky for some countries. As mentioned above, there are some member states who fear escalating the conflict with Russia beyond Ukraine. At the same time, Russia already believes that it is in a conflict with NATO, considering how much support Ukraine already receives from NATO member states. Therefore, clarifying the desired outcome related to this support should not be something to shy away from. Rather, we should talk about the general desired outcome – Ukraine's regaining of its full sovereign territory. At the same time, there should be a discussion about "specific scenarios" and how NATO should address them and prepare its populations for these various scenarios. This is not to advocate for NATO's confrontational stance towards Russia. Instead, we should advocate for strategic signalling and sending a strong and repeated message to the Kremlin that the Alliance is here to stay and defend the transatlantic realm. Unfortunately, as we have seen, only this kind of firm stance is understood by Moscow.

Defining NATO's relationship with Ukraine

There is no doubt that Ukraine's relationship with NATO will be at the heart of many conversations during the Vilnius Summit and beyond. This debate goes back to 2008 when NATO declared that Ukraine will one day be a NATO member, if it so wishes, while not providing any specific details as to how this process will work. NATO's unclear approach to Ukraine's membership has often been interpreted as a lack of political will at best, and political weakness in the face of Russian pressure at worst.

Today, the situation is completely different and NATO needs to acknowledge this fact by advancing the conversation about the future of Ukraine and NATO. While Ukraine does not have a chance to become a member while at war with its neighbour, these discussions can and should be started in the very near future. What is more, Ukrainian support for membership in NATO has reached a record high. According to a poll from earlier this year, 86 per cent of Ukrainians declared that they wanted to be a part of the Alliance. The same survey found that if Ukraine held a referendum on joining NATO now, only three per cent of Ukrainians would vote against it. Considering this, together with the fact that Ukrainians are fighting and dying on the battlefield to defend the same values NATO claims to uphold, it would be more than justified to concretely define the path for Ukraine's membership. What NATO can do – at least for the time being – is to

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elevate its official relationship with Ukraine and form a NATO-Ukraine Council, which would reflect the very close and cordial relations that the Alliance has with Kyiv. And even though it would not be enough for Ukrainians, such a gesture would reinforce NATO's commitment to working closely with Ukraine. It would also lay the foundations for the future incorporation of Ukraine into NATO's political and military structures.

NATO should be supporting steps and initiatives to quickly integrate Ukraine when the time is right. For instance, Ukraine is a member of the Lublin Triangle – a regional cooperation platform made up of Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine – as well as the Three Seas Initiative. This could mean assisting some countries willing to enhance cooperation or providing certain guarantees between them and Ukraine. Turkey has a similar relationship with Azerbaijan, as does the United States with Japan, hence there are precedents for such approaches.

There are at least three major topics that NATO member states will discuss in Vilnius. Firstly, they will discuss NATO's enlargement, especially in the context of Sweden's accession. This still has to be ratified by Hungary and Turkey. Preferably for the Alliance, it would be great if Sweden could join during the summit. However, any possible timelines now do not leave much hope for that scenario. Secondly, Ukraine and its potential cooperation status with NATO are already the subject of intense talks. As providing Ukraine with the MAP (Membership Action Plan) does not seem to be a viable option at the moment, NATO might move – as we advocate – to strengthen cooperation in the form of a NATO-Ukraine Council. Last, but definitely not least, defence and deterrence will be at the centre of talks between the Allies, including boosting military spending and strengthening NATO's military presence among front line states in the Eastern Flank.

The upcoming summit in Vilnius will be an opportunity for NATO to reiterate its support for Ukraine. However, more needs to be done so that NATO can clearly define what it believes is at stake in the conflict, as well as what outcome it sees as ideal and its future relationship with Ukraine in the Alliance. These recommendations together with the ongoing developments on the ground are crucial for shaping a comprehensive strategy and approach which will ensure a stable and more secure future for both NATO and Ukraine. EE

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Russia's war has changed NATO's learning curve

DOMINIK P. JANKOWSKI

In light of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, NATO has come to a realisation that irrespective of circumstances, the present leadership of Russia will persist in its revisionist approach and become increasingly agitated in the event of a potential loss in the conflict. Consequently, NATO must proactively ready itself for an extended deterrence strategy vis-à-vis Russia, and be prepared to implement a defence strategy if the need arises. These are the key lessons already learnt over the last 15 months.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine was a wakeup call for NATO, forcing the Allies to rethink their strategy and be prepared to respond to a direct threat to its members. The Alliance has already drawn several lessons from Russia's war, many of which are already being implemented. Certainly, it will take great political will and resources to strengthen NATO's deterrence and defence capabilities, however, no time is being wasted. Likewise, Ukraine's experiences in defending against a more powerful aggressor shed new light on how to adapt 21st century technology to 20th century warfare. The upcoming Vilnius summit will be a chance for NATO to showcase what it has learnt, reassure its own societies that it is prepared to defend all of NATO, and finally address what needs to be done to support Ukraine, especially after Russia's loses its war.

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A bigger boat

One of the best quotes that depicts what NATO countries have learnt from Russia's invasion comes from Steven Spielberg's *Jaws*. In particular, it is the scene when Chief Brody sees the shark for the first time. He basically says, "We're going to need a bigger boat." Well, we have discovered that we are going to need a bigger boat! Of course, the boat in this metaphor relates to our thinking on security and defence.

In January 2022 when we were sitting in the last NATO-Russia Council, talking to the Russians and trying to give a last chance to diplomacy and convince them not to invade; I think nobody really believed it was going to happen. This is both worrisome and reassuring. On the positive side, we really believed that we could deter the aggression. The scope, scale and intensity of this aggression and the level of barbarism and war crimes being committed in Ukraine were unthinkable before the invasion. The negative side of course is that we were unable to stop it.

Hence, the bigger boat in this metaphor means a different approach to security, to defence and our relationships with Ukraine and Russia. This is of course not going to happen simultaneously or overnight, but the critical element is that more countries in NATO and beyond now understand that there is a need to shift our strategic thinking. Right now, for the first time, we are seeing that there will never again be "business as usual" with Russia.

What has NATO learnt since February 2022? Certainly the fact that Russia is a threat. This is clearer now than ever before. Prior to the invasion, many Allies, especially those on the Eastern Flank such as the Baltic states, Poland and Romania, were sounding the alarm as to Russia's aggressive potential. The invasion proved that those countries were not alarmist or "Russophobic". However, at this point, it is not enough to say, "yes, you were right." NATO now needs to make sure that this does not happen again. The first lesson identified by NATO is that we need more forces on the Eastern Flank. We need to boost our deterrence and defence by deploying forces closer to the actual threat.

> More countries in NATO and beyond now understand that there is a need to shift our strategic thinking.

When you look at the key guiding document which was adopted last year, the NATO Strategic Concept, there are two new approaches that NATO has re-introduced. First is "deterrence by denial", and second is "forward defence". Deterrence by denial refers to a strategy in which there is no possibility for an enemy to occupy NATO territory. NATO now understands that whatever the outcome of the war will be, Russia is going to stay aggressive. Under the current leadership,

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Russia is going to stay revisionist and Russia is in fact going to be more frustrated if it is going to lose the war. Thus, we need to prepare for a long deterrence strategy against Russia, and if necessary a defence strategy. Before 2022 many in the Alliance were of the mindset that there is no need to ever consider the defence of NATO territory. After all, Russia might have been a problem but it still operated in line with established rules. Last year proved otherwise. It is now clear that Russia disregards rules and that the Kremlin has a completely different vision of the world than NATO.

Holistic thinking

Certainly, the war has militarised our thinking and changed our perspective. We now understand that without sufficient military forces it will be difficult for us to have a proper deterrence and defence strategy. One more concerning element of this equation is that there is a nuclear component as well. Unfortunately, we have found ourselves now in a situation where we need to have a discussion about potential scenarios in which NATO has to respond to escalation coming from Russia's side concerning the use of nuclear weapons. Of course, this is a delicate issue.

We cannot base our deterrence strategy only on sanctions but we can impose costs, which should be the goal.

Yet, there is also a non-military part in this equation of deterrence. This includes sanctions and economic leverage, which can also play a role in the conflict. Yet, in reality, sanctions are not meant to stop the invasion, it is not a silver bullet. Sanctions can hurt or slow the Russian economy but they will not win the war. Instead, sanctions are a response to concrete action. We cannot base our deterrence strategy only on sanctions but we can impose costs, which should be the goal. Will they lead to a Russian collapse? The answer is most likely no. They will also not stop Russia from continuing its war against Ukraine. Certainly, there is hope that they can isolate the Russian economy and hurt Russia's ability to quickly rearm. However, we need to understand that from a deterrence perspective, sanctions are not enough. This means that we need to be careful as to how we design the non-military component, so that it also includes societal resilience.

Some Allies are more advanced on thinking about societal resilience. These include Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. They are smaller, which makes it easier. But it is our collective responsibility to make sure that all our societies have this discussion on resilience. At the same time, it is not NATO that is the first responder

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when it comes to the societal level of resilience, as the responsibility lies with national governments.

Nevertheless, the example of Ukraine demonstrates the importance of resilience. If you have a resilient society that is not afraid, no one can pose a threat to you. Back in February 2022, many in the West did not believe Ukraine would resist for more than a few days. The bravery of Ukrainian soldiers, the resilience of Ukrainian society, and the ability to adapt and use new technologies show us that it is possible to successfully defend against a powerful aggressor. This means we need to keep investing in hard resilience, like energy and cyber security, but also in soft topics, like media literacy, the fight against disinformation and propaganda, and external interference. Russia's reach in this regard goes far beyond Ukraine and already threatens our societal and political processes.

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As long as it takes?

The second lesson is that western support does play a critical role in Ukraine's defence against the aggressor. While NATO as an organisation does not supply lethal arms to Ukraine, many of its members in the West do. Indeed, the West has declared that it will support Ukraine for as long as it takes. What does this mean in practical terms? It has not been fully defined but I believe that this means until Ukraine is in NATO.

In this sense, however, the West needs to define the steps between now and Ukraine's NATO membership. Those steps will be defined in line with current military support to Ukraine, especially throughout the counter-offensive. However, we must also think about the long-term deterrence and defence strategy of Ukraine, which will be the interim strategy before full membership. The Allies all agree that Ukraine will eventually become a member of NATO, however, there is no agreement on when or how that will take place. Nevertheless, the trajectory is clearer now than ever before.

NATO members are also looking towards Ukraine to learn from its experience and how that can be integrated with the activities of their own armed forces. Ukrainians have proven to be capable, and the know-how they have accumulated over the last year is very valuable for the Allies. The use of modern technologies in a conventional warfare scenario has not been the area of application for most western military strategists over the last few decades. Instead, they were largely focused on terrorism, counter-insurgency and non-state actors. Thus, Ukraine can teach us a lot about upgrading our defence capabilities.

Finally, the West needs to start thinking about the reconstruction of Ukraine in a way that provides the country with the ability to fully re-enter global and European markets. NATO will play a small role in the reconstruction, concentrating on the military aspects. However, it will support the members' efforts in rebuilding Ukraine through aid and creating a strategy, which should be done sooner rather than later.

Global context

The third key lesson for NATO is that our understanding of the war is actually in the minority in the global context. Votes in the UN are important signals, though in practical terms most countries actively supporting Ukraine are largely found in the West. In the conversation about reconstruction, we need to keep in mind that a larger group of countries will need to be involved, like those in the

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Middle East, Latin America and South Asia. This is the only way to bring Ukraine back onto the global stage.

Certainly, we did not do enough to engage these countries in the early days of the war. Meanwhile, the global aspects of this war only became clearly visible when Russia began to weaponise everything – from food to the consequences of sanctions for the Global South. The West began to reach out to those countries only as a secondary step. Now, we are slowly starting to implement measures to help mitigate the financial and economic consequences of Moscow's actions. Hence, we have to admit that some countries, far away, have a decent relationship with Russia, including China.

Yet, for NATO there is a difference between China and Russia. China does not pose a direct military threat to NATO. At the same time, China has opted for strategic competition in selected areas. We need to be mindful of the fact that China is growing more powerful and is closer than we think. That is why the West has increased its cooperation with Allies in the Asia-Pacific, such as Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

No matter how this war ends, NATO has come to the understanding that Russia's invasion of Ukraine has forced a shift in perspective to a new approach based on deterrence and defence. These lessons will help the Alliance not only be better prepared for the threat coming from Russia but also pave the way for greater engagement with Ukraine. The Vilnius summit in July 2023 will both demonstrate NATO resolve and start discussions regarding a new level of cooperation with Ukraine. It is worth remembering that the country has a lot to offer in terms of experience and understanding modern warfare. EE

This article is based on a talk given by Dominik P. Jankowski during the seminar titled "Critical Assessment of the Lessons Learned from the war in Ukraine", which took place on April 24th 2023 at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland. The views and opinions expressed here are the author's and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the institution he represents.

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Ukraine and NATO

Five lessons after Russia's full-scale invasion

MARIIA ZOLKINA

The upcoming NATO summit in Vilnius will be dominated by discussions on the Russian invasion of Ukraine. While member states have continued to provide all manner of aid to Kyiv, the Alliance has yet to take concrete steps on Ukraine's potential membership. Guidelines are now needed more than ever to strengthen both the security of Ukraine and the region.

Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine not only radically changed the security situation for the Euro-Atlantic space, but also affected the global balance of power and the interests of both individual states and the alliances they belong to. NATO, which directly borders Russia, had to respond to a qualitatively new security and political landscape in the region. And this reaction will not be comprehensive without political lessons, which should be drawn from Russia's full-fledged war against Ukraine.

Lesson 1. Fast accession track

Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine has made NATO politically reconsider the accession track for countries with membership aspirations, namely Finland and Sweden. The Membership Action Plan, which appeared to be the established political instrument for the domestic transformation and preparation of

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candidates to join NATO since 1999, was consciously omitted in this process. This was directly explained by two major factors. First, the main political trigger for this quick accession option was the new stance of military forces in Europe because of the unprecedented scope of the war started by Russia. Second, this decision was technically backed by both Finland and Sweden, who were already being integrated into many of the Alliance's mechanisms. There were no real obstacles related to the state of democracy, functioning of political institutions or military standardisation between these countries and general NATO requirements.

The rapid NATO reaction to the applications from Finland and Sweden has created a fundamental political precedent.

Though it was not Ukraine who immediately benefitted from the decision to accelerate NATO accession, this option should remain crucial for the future consideration of Ukraine's NATO aspirations. The de facto integration of Ukraine's defence capabilities with NATO will inevitably ease at least the technical side of its membership and help Ukraine militarily integrate with the Alliance before fully joining. Thus, political decisions regarding institutional capacities, as well as the political decisiveness of NATO members concerning Ukraine's accession, will likely be the leading factors in the case of Ukraine. The rapid NATO reaction to the applications from Finland and Sweden has created a fundamental political precedent, suggesting that Ukraine will not have to go through the action plan process.

Lesson 2. Defence at the borders

Russia's unprovoked large-scale invasion has forced NATO to reassess its overall strategic vision of the security landscape in the Euro-Atlantic space. Russia is now being treated as "the most significant and direct threat to the Allies' security", which was stressed at the NATO Madrid summit in 2022. Also, following this political signal, NATO was in essence pushed to reshape its defence and military strategy in case of any Russian aggression against one of its member states. In particular, NATO is shifting from the so-called deterrence by retaliation to deterrence by denial.

The atrocities carried out by the Russian army in temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories, like in Bucha, Irpin and other towns, were the main reason why NATO started to focus on preventing the occupation of any territories in case of invasion. This is designed to stop Russian forces from potentially moving somewhere deeper into their territories. The military and political logic behind this reevaluation is directly drawn from the fast movement of Russian forces within the

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first months of their large-scale invasion of Ukraine. Consequently, NATO as a single actor, as well as its member states, will have to concentrate troops in border areas on a constant basis, increase their defence and military budgets, and synchronise most of their plans more than ever before.

Lesson 3. Intergovernmental defence cooperation should encourage NATO's policy as a collective actor

Another lesson in light of Russian aggression is that defence spending, as well as defence strategies, can differ from one member state to another depending on how serious the threat for them is from either conventional or hybrid aggression. A NATO of various speeds is highly likely to emerge in the near future. This could mean that defence and security policies will be upgraded in countries bordering Russia and Belarus, in contrast to less significant changes in the respective policies of other NATO member states.

In particular, while Poland, for instance, has been rebuilding its own defence capacities and learning how to implement territorial defence forces as an instrument of resilience in case of aggression, the majority of NATO member states have not even increased their military spending.

However, the securitisation of foreign and partially domestic policies in countries bordering Russia will most likely encourage changes at the subnational level of NATO, rather than affect only the national level in these states. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has proven that even if some NATO member states were not interested in upgrading their own military and defence capacities, they will directly or indirectly contribute to it at least in NATO border states.

> If Ukraine fails to liberate the occupied territories, the defence spending of NATO member states will inevitably increase.

Another aspect in this regard, is that there must be a clear understanding of the correlation and interdependence between financial support to Ukraine now for its victory, on the one hand, and the future scope of defence spending for NATO and EU member states, on the other. Thus, if Ukraine fails to liberate the currently occupied territories and no sustainable peace is found in the region, the defence and military spending of NATO member states will inevitably increase for years to come. This rise will be dramatically beyond the NATO guideline of two per cent of GDP, and will involve not only the Eastern Flank of NATO. In 2022 only seven NATO member states met this defence expenditure guideline and exceeded a two per cent share of their GDP.

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Lesson 4. Security through inclusion

The policy of keeping Ukraine out of NATO has failed to guarantee security in the region and prevent Russia from territorial expansionism. This is one of the most crucial political lessons which is not still fully understood by all NATO member states. Viewing Ukraine's probable accession to NATO as a factor that would lead to potential Russian escalation proved to be a strategic miscalculation both before and after 2014.

The escalatory plans of Moscow have no direct connections to Ukraine's ambitions towards NATO. Thus, at the beginning of 2014, when Russia occupied Crimea and one-third of the Ukrainian Donbas region, Ukraine was still a neutral state. This was in line with the respective changes made to Ukraine's domestic and foreign policies in 2010 by then President Viktor Yanukovych. The official elimination of this neutral status took place only in December 2014, when decisive battles in Donbas were taking place. Moreover, in 2021 before the large-scale invasion, Ukraine was no closer to NATO membership than it was in previous years.

The fear of a possible Russian reaction has proven to be one long-lasting counter argument against Ukraine's possible NATO membership.

This is why keeping Ukraine outside of NATO both failed to deter Russia from invasion and to a certain extent even created favourable conditions for it to attack. Despite the official arguments of western countries regarding the lack of compliance on the side of Ukraine, especially concerning a number of technical and political standards for NATO membership, NATO's policy towards Ukraine was constantly affected by some members' policies towards Russia. The fear of a possible Russian reaction has proven to be one long-lasting counter argument against the acceleration of Ukraine's possible NATO membership. Starting at least since the Bucharest summit in 2008, this approach has allowed Russia to essentially treat the invasions of both Georgia and Ukraine as actions without serious consequences. Yet, in contrast to the lessons mentioned above, this did not lead to NATO learning from its past. In particular, because of tough discussions between Ukraine and NATO members in light of the upcoming Vilnius summit, Kyiv faces rather similar obstacles today. Some members are reluctant to either start the accession process of Ukraine, or even give a clearer signal beyond the already existing formulations from the Bucharest summit declaration. This is despite the fact that circumstances have crucially changed and the former policy of politically deterring Russia by keeping Ukraine in the NATO waiting room has proven to be fundamentally wrong.

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That is why Ukraine not only started its NATO application in 2022 but also insisted that NATO's overall approach should change. Of course, Kyiv is hoping for clearer guidelines that will help it join the Alliance after Sweden.

As of now there are not only political, but also security arguments behind this push. First, a sustainable peace not only for Ukraine but for the entire region seems to be impossible without the liberation of all the Ukrainian territories currently occupied by Russia. This includes Crimea and the parts of Donbas occupied since 2014. Any piece of Ukrainian territory left occupied will serve as a military base for Russian forces and a starting point for new assaults in the future. Moreover, the continued occupation of Crimea will prevent any free navigation in the Azov and Black Seas, not only blocking Ukrainian exports but also harming the security and economic interests of other Black Sea countries.

Second, the post-war security architecture in the region must react to this new aggression of the Russian Federation by providing Ukraine with security guarantees. Despite ongoing discussions of bilateral or multilateral security guarantees provided by certain countries to Ukraine, none of these options are likely to work better than a collective defence guarantee offered by NATO membership. Consequently, from Kyiv's point of view, security in the region should be guaranteed by including Ukraine in NATO, rather than keeping it outside the Alliance.

Lesson 5. Defence capacities must be backed by the resilience of society and state

The potential resilience of local communities is frequently underestimated, although this factor proved to be of crucial importance in the case of Ukrainian resistance against Russia. The general lesson and conclusion in this regard is that while preparing for deterrence by denial at the very borders of NATO member states, this strategy should include not only upgrading militaries and territorial defence forces, but administrative measures. This would strengthen the resistance and rapid crisis-management capacities of local communities.

Ukraine's experience with front line communities in the period of 2014–22 provides several recommendations in this regard. First, there should be a legal basis for a rapid switch from a civil form of governance at the local and regional level, to a civil and military, or purely military, mode of administrating local communities. This procedure must be secured in advance and made as fast and easy as possible in the case of a direct external security threat. Second, it is clear that decentralisation, including in terms of administration and financing, helped to develop the respective skills of governance and self-sufficiency in local communities

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and increased their resilience potential in relation to the large-scale war. Third, there should be updated and upgraded working plans for the evacuation of civilians from high-risk zones, as well as crisis response plans for every object of critical importance. Thus, the resilience of local border communities does not necessarily mean their militarisation, but to a greater extent means the advancement of the administrative and self-governance capacities of local communities. This will help them operate in the case of an emergency or security threat.

How to move forward

Though Ukraine has been receiving unprecedented political, military and financial support from its western partners, one of the main security issues important for post-war arrangements in the Euro-Atlantic space remains unanswered. This involves clarity on when and how Ukraine will become a part of the pan-European and Euro-Atlantic security architecture. Clarity in this regard has fundamental significance not just for Ukraine and Central Europe, but for broader norms in the system of international security.

Thus, the first priority for Ukraine is to liberate its entire territory and prevent the conflict's continuation. After all, this could lead to a decrease in support and the further entrenchment of Russia's occupation. The second priority is to set up a path towards the inclusion of Ukraine in a post-war security framework. This could potentially include the bilateral or multilateral cooperation of Ukraine with certain partners, as well as the development of Ukraine's own defence capacities and capabilities. Yet, only NATO membership would make all this truly comprehensive and complex.

> Security guarantees, if provided to Ukraine, must be in the form of international agreements that are legally binding, unlike the Budapest Memorandum of 1994.

Security guarantees, if provided to Ukraine by some of its partners, must be in the form of international agreements that are legally binding, in contrast to the Budapest Memorandum of 1994. It will be critically important that such guarantees are not treated as a substitution for NATO membership. They should play a role both before and alongside Ukraine's accession to the Alliance, but not instead of it. At the same time, Kyiv should not only be asking for temporary security guarantees, but offering its own contribution to the security of those states who will provide these guarantees to Ukraine. This would ease both domestic and international discussions about the scope and content of such guarantees for Ukraine.

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While negotiating any future security architecture and Ukraine's membership in NATO, there should also be an acceleration in NATO policy towards Russia and the Alliance's relations with Moscow in the mid-term perspective.

While all these tasks still require some time, giving Ukraine a clear signal on the practicalities of its accession to NATO is a necessary political step, preferably to be made at the upcoming NATO summit in Vilnius. This is true even if the main decision of the Alliance on relations with Ukraine is consciously postponed to the period after Ukraine's counteroffensive and closer to next year's summit in Washington. EE

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NATO should reconsider its policy on Ukraine's membership

YULIA KAZDOBINA

NATO and western countries have pledged to support Ukraine for as long as it takes. At the same time, the United States and other countries have abstained from giving Ukraine long-range weapons and talk about Ukraine's victory without aiming for a Russian defeat. This approach leaves Ukraine in a situation where it is expected to win with its hands tied.

One of the key questions facing NATO on the eve of the 2023 Vilnius summit is whether to offer Ukraine security guarantees, while Ukraine insists that it should be given a clear path to membership. In June 2022 the NATO Alliance defined Russia as the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. However, it has been careful to avoid a direct confrontation. NATO's position has been that Ukraine belongs to the NATO family but formally will join only after the war ends. The policy, however, risks prolonging the conflict and leaves the decision on Ukraine's membership in Russian hands with possible negative consequences.

Different approaches to war

After over nine years of war against Ukraine, Russia has shown an approach to war which is significantly different from the West. The West tends to compartmen-

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Photo courtesy of NATO

Ukrainian soldiers training in the United Kingdom with a British AS90 artillery. One of the key questions facing NATO on the eve of the 2023 Vilnius summit is whether to offer Ukraine security guarantees, while Ukraine insists that it should be given a clear path to membership.

talise and concentrate on deescalating a conflict situation. It values human life and peace, and its goal is to reach peace talks and resolve the conflict at the heart of a war diplomatically. The West generally resorts to force only if there is no other way.

Russia, on the other hand, takes a systemic approach and treats force as an instrument of statecraft. It launched its unprovoked aggression against Ukraine despite all preceding diplomatic efforts. It continuously uses non-military and subthreshold means against Ukraine and western countries, and even holds African countries hostage to the related food crisis to advance its war aims. At the same time, Russian diplomacy speaks in ultimatums. Some researchers even describe the Russian negotiation style as "war by other means".

The hope among western analysts that Ukraine's victory on the battlefield will end the hostilities and lead to peace talks rests on the assumption that Russia thinks the way the West does. However, eight years of negotiations within the Minsk process together with recent moves, such as the annexation of four additional Ukrainian oblasts, forcing Russian passports on residents of occupied territories, annulling the Ukrainian citizenship of Ukrainian children abducted to Russia, etc., suggest that Russia is not looking for a resolution to the conflict. In the words of NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg himself, "President Putin doesn't plan for peace, he's planning for more war."

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It is also important to note that China has become a lot more active in the conflict recently. A year into the war, Beijing presented "China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis". The West tends to look at China and Russia as two different problems. However, a notable indication to the contrary is that China fails to condemn Russian aggression in Ukraine and does not call for Russia to withdraw its troops. There is clear overlap in Chinese and Russian interests when it comes to NATO. Both countries are interested in weakening the West, although each of them for their own reasons. Nevertheless, their methods often go hand in hand. Hence, it is no surprise that the Chinese proposals, just like the Minsk deal before them, are inherently contradictory and are likely to lead to years of fruitless talks and allow Russia to reconstitute itself.

Nuanced policy

NATO has stressed that it is not at war with Russia on the one hand, and that it is helping Ukraine win on the other. "The main focus of the alliance, of NATO allies now, is to ensure that Ukraine prevails. It is to ensure that Ukraine continues to be a sovereign, independent democratic nation in Europe," *Politico* quoted the NATO secretary general as saying during his visit to Kyiv on April 20th 2023, "Because that is the only way to also have a meaningful discussion about Ukraine's future membership."

NATO's policy of avoiding direct confrontation with Russia does not make confrontation any less likely.

It is worth stressing that in many ways, Ukraine has already prevailed. Russia's efforts to quash Ukrainian statehood have failed. Ukraine has also made its sovereign choice to join NATO. A symbolic joint application to NATO was signed by the Ukrainian president, prime minister and chairman of the Verkhovna Rada (Ukraine's parliament) on September 30th 2022. The decision also has unprecedented popular support among the country's society. According to an IRI poll made public on March 22nd 2023, 82 per cent of Ukrainians expressed record support for their country's membership in NATO.

NATO's policy of avoiding direct confrontation with Russia does not make confrontation any less likely. NATO may claim that it's not at war with Russia but Russia is at war with it. One needs to keep in mind, though, that Russia defines war differently. It does not draw a line between military and non-military means. The nuances of a policy in which lethal aid is provided via the Alliance members rather than via the Alliance itself seem to be completely lost on Russia. The policy does not prevent it from hybrid and sub-threshold attacks on western countries.

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But does this mean that Russia is likely to go over the threshold? It will not. Since 1991 Russia has never attacked an equal or a stronger enemy. Its aggression against Ukraine was not even planned as a full-fledged military operation because it expected no resistance. The war in Ukraine has significantly degraded its forces. The sub-threshold attacks are meant harms the West but to avoid serious retaliation. It also has a record of backing down when it's met with force.

NATO and western countries have pledged to support Ukraine for as long as the support is needed. At the same time, the United States and other countries have abstained from giving Ukraine long-range weapons, refused to take it under the NATO umbrella and talked about Ukraine's victory without aiming for Russia's defeat. This approach leaves Ukraine in a situation where it is expected to win with its hands tied. In addition, under this policy Russia will remain intact and capable of carrying on after a reconstitution. With little prospect of serious negotiations, as explained above, Ukraine will remain a low hanging fruit for Russia. With China's backing, Russia will unfortunately be able to sustain the conflict for a long time.

Long-term consequences

There are two significant consequences of this policy that is aiming for Ukraine's victory without a Russian defeat. The first is that such a policy places the decision about Ukraine's NATO membership – which should belong to Ukraine and NATO – alone in Russian hands. The other is that it increases the likelihood of Ukraine's defeat in the long run since the West is likely to lose interest. This is what Russia and China are banking on. Given how invested the West is in Ukraine's victory, such a situation will also constitute a western defeat. Lastly, it could even pave the way for Ukrainians to fight against NATO as part of the Russian army, should Russia manage to occupy and annex more territory and later decide that an opportune moment for an attack on Europe has arrived.

Ukraine joining NATO on the other hand would be a final defeat for Vladimir Putin and Russia's imperial policy. Despite the extensive use of threats, Russia is highly unlikely to attack a stronger enemy, especially now that its forces are significantly weakened. It also tends to back down when it is faced with force. Hence, instead of escalating the existing conflict, Ukraine's NATO membership would actually end it. This is the outcome that both Ukraine and NATO should be striving for. EE

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NATO summit in Vilnius

Waiting for a strategic roadmap for Ukraine

ANTON NAYCHUK

During the upcoming Vilnius summit, NATO will need to form a clear and consistent position and specify its own understanding of how the war will end. The Ukrainian side expects NATO to declare the steps necessary to guarantee its security and achieve the complete restoration of control over all its territories, ultimately leading to Ukraine's membership in the Alliance.

Russia's military aggression against Ukraine made the question of creating a new security architecture in Europe a priority. The stabilisation of the situation requires the development of a detailed strategy to contain the Russian threat on NATO's eastern borders, with clear solutions and practical measures. Otherwise, the systemic threat of a constant escalation in the conflict will persist and a sustainable peace will not be ensured. The current statements and assessments regarding events in Ukraine by representatives of the political establishment and expert circles raise several fundamental questions. Without an answer to them, it will be impossible to find a common denominator.

Real prospects of Ukraine joining NATO

The discussion organised by *New Eastern Europe* between April 24th and 25th 2023 initiated a number of practical reflections regarding the upcoming Vilnius

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summit and Ukraine's membership. First, Ukraine's full integration into the Alliance will take place only after the end of the war – this looks like an axiom for Ukraine's western partners. At the same time, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has put forward clear conditions for the cessation of hostilities and the final victory of the Ukrainian side – the restoration of Ukraine's constitutional borders as of 1991. Hence, if we synchronise the indicated approaches and positions, the entry of Ukraine into NATO seems to be possible only in the case of the expulsion of Russian troops from the entire Ukrainian territory, including Crimea.

Second, the final victory of Ukraine over Russia requires the preservation of the consolidated military-technical and political support of the Allies, including overcoming barriers in the supply of long-range ATACMS systems and F-16 fighter jets. In this case, the United States and other countries of the Alliance need to demonstrate a clear readiness to "go all the way" and ensure the final success of Ukraine, or publicly admit that neither Ukraine nor the Russian Federation will achieve their strategic goals.

> The US and allies need to demonstrate a clear readiness to "go all the way" and ensure Ukraine's success.

Third, from the side of Kyiv and Ukrainian society, there is a clear request for specifics – the provision of clear, official answers regarding the terms and conditions of full integration into NATO already within the framework of the summit in Vilnius in July 2023. Positive and detailed signals can play an important role for the Ukrainian nation in a state of war and outline a framework of true prospects. However, the political situation gives reason to believe that the partners are not yet ready for such important and principled steps in July.

Thus, NATO will have to find the necessary formulations or develop a long-term roadmap that will provide the Ukrainian side with an understanding of the Alliance's approaches and NATO's strategic vision for the country.

In search of a common understanding of how the war will end

While the position of Ukraine is clearly articulated, this is not the case in terms of many NATO members, who have yet to define their strategic vision. Analysing political and expert declarations, the following conclusion can be made: The US, the United Kingdom and the European Union will support Ukraine as long as the Ukrainian people are ready to fight for their own independence.

At the same time, such wording leaves room for interpretation. For example, if Ukrainian goals cannot be achieved within the framework of the 2023 military

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campaign, will the integrity of the positions of the NATO countries be preserved into the future? If a stalemate situation suddenly arises on the battlefield or after the counteroffensive, Ukraine will not be able to free all the temporarily occupied territories. Will the NATO coalition then increase support for Ukraine or unofficially call for the start of the negotiation process?

> If we "freeze" the conflict now, a new stage of military actions against Ukraine will resume again in a few years.

In this context, a clear agreement on the final goals and their definitions is required. In other words, is what Ukraine considers a victory (restoring the 1991 border) actually perceived as a single goal for the Allies, or can they potentially be satisfied with alternative scenarios? In particular, at the expert-political level, we can also find opinions about the need to stop hostilities after the 2023 military campaign and start negotiations with Kyiv in a stronger position. Sanctions on Russia will also not be lifted until a decision is made on the complete withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukrainian territory. Promoters of such proposals should remember that events may unfold in a similar way to what happened in 2014–15. As a result, the conflict could be "frozen" for a longer period, accompanied by the looming threat of a new escalation.

The example of the two Chechen wars demonstrates a threatening trend that may partially repeat itself on a much larger scale: if Russian troops do not achieve their goals during the first offensive, they may resort to aggression again. Sanctions cause significant damage to Moscow's technological potential, but do not block the work of the military-industrial complex. Russia retains the ability to modernise old military equipment and produce some new items. If we "freeze" the conflict now, with the preservation of the positions of Russian troops on Ukrainian territory, and without finding effective mechanisms to prevent the Russian threat in the future, a new stage of military actions in Ukraine will resume in a few years. Europe will once again have a war on its eastern flanks.

Security guarantees

The NATO summit in Vilnius should bring consolidation among the member states regarding the provision of security guarantees to Ukraine as a mechanism for deterring Russian aggression. If this fails to happen, we can expect not only new waves of escalation, but it will hardly be appropriate to talk about the implementation of programmes for the economic recovery of Ukraine. It is difficult to ensure sustainable economic development and foreign investment in the conditions of a

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constant military threat when Russian missiles can hit an infrastructure object or a factory in any part of the territory of Ukraine.

Guarantees could positively change the situation. Yet, given the current circumstances, one possible approach could be to divide them into those that will be formed after the end of the war (such as joining NATO) and those that are needed at the current stage of continuing hostilities. In the second case, an important practical step on the part of the Alliance could be the approval of a new "security formula". This would be based on the ideas of the Kyiv group of international advisers, led by Andriy Yermak, the head of the Office of the President, and former NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen. Their draft document provides an adapted version of the "Israeli model" of guarantees, which consists of providing Ukraine with expanded access to the technologies and weapons of NATO countries. Such an approach would become the basis for the continuation of the active phase of hostilities.

Fixing the provisions of such a treaty at the level of the Alliance would be an intermediate step towards Ukraine's expectations, but only if it would ensure the following: removing restrictions on the supply of new models of weapons, including aircraft and long-range missiles; establishing the large-scale production of ammunition for air defence systems and artillery for Ukraine; developing and financing the joint production and maintenance of military equipment, to be transferred to the Ukrainian side; searching for additional opportunities for new supplies of heavy weapons (for example, tanks) not only for a counteroffensive military campaign, but on a long-term basis; and systematic training of the Ukrainian military within NATO training programmes.

If a NATO country lacks the political will to "close the sky" over Ukraine due to fears of a direct conflict with the Russian Federation, it is necessary to provide Ukraine with all the opportunities to independently protect its own airspace. Undoubtedly, the current level of support from western partners represents significant progress, which was achieved thanks to long and joint diplomatic work. Overall, this is guaranteed to satisfy the minimum needs of the Ukrainian side when it comes to armaments, taking into account the continued superiority of the Russian armed forces in artillery, heavy weaponry and combat aircraft.

Roadmap

Victory on the battlefield and the implementation of a concept that would see Ukraine as the shield of Europe is possible only if the Allies expand the supply of military equipment. Otherwise, the Russian Federation will be able to conduct

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further military operations against Ukraine. Enshrining such guarantees at the official level would become a temporary compromise between the expectations of Ukraine and the capabilities of western partners.

From the point of view of Ukrainian expert circles, an important recommendation for NATO countries on the eve of the summit in July would be to determine the terms of Ukraine's accession. If full-fledged integration is not possible in the current conditions of war, establishing the provisions for Ukraine's accession the day after the war's end would be a clear signal and the most effective reference point for the Ukrainian people.

Ukraine's clear roadmap should include the following provisions:

- Maximum support until the Ukrainian army reaches the 1991 border.
- The implementation of programmes for the synchronisation of military potential and common technical standards.
- The achievement of the goals declared by Kyiv, with the subsequent full accession of Ukraine to the Alliance as a guarantee of security in the post-war period, and the consolidation of the Ukrainian state as an outpost of the eastern flank of Europe's defence.

If the specified strategy will not be agreed upon, this will only increase the risk of "freezing" the conflict with unpredictable consequences. The threat of a resumption of the active phase of military operations will only grow in the future. Thus, all members of the Alliance need to form a clear and consistent position and specify their own understanding of the accepted model of ending the war. The Ukrainian side expects that based on the results of the summit in Vilnius and in the future, NATO will declare and take as a basis one single scenario for the development of relations in Ukraine – the final and complete restoration of control over all territories.

> Ukraine expects decisions from the Vilnius Summit which will ensure Ukraine's ability to achieve its goals.

In this case, Ukraine will count on the decisive actions of the NATO Alliance, which will be aimed at achieving a faster victory on the battlefield and consolidating its results. Of course, such an approach will provide additional arguments for political circles that fear an excessive escalation in relations between NATO and Russia, with the possible use of nuclear weapons.

However, the likelihood of such actions on the part of the Russian side still seems unlikely, so there are reasons to believe that the Kremlin has no real intentions to go beyond the conventional framework of waging war. Certainly, a lack of decisive actions will contribute to the war's transition to a long-term conflict, which seems to be the best option for the Russian side. Moscow expects that over

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time Ukraine's ability to resist will decrease due to the reduction of support from western allies.

Thus, it is important to emphasise that Ukraine expects strategic decisions from the summit in Vilnius and if full integration into NATO is not a real option during the war, it is important for the Ukrainian people to receive consistent guarantees, such as those that will ensure Ukraine's ability to conduct offensive actions until its goals are achieved. The creation of a "Ukraine-NATO Council" will be an important step. But more importantly, at the organisational and tactical level, the Alliance needs to demonstrate its strategic vision for a new security architecture in Europe, including the participation of Ukraine as its eastern shield. EE

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NATO 2023

Embracing a paradigm shift

PAVEL HAVLÍČEK

While it is clear that there are a number of challenges and pending issues, the newly established sense of solidarity with Ukraine and urgency when it comes to territorial defence are driving domestic processes regarding NATO's adaptation and flexible response. Even if it is yet to be seen how quickly NATO states will adapt to the new environment and collectively share new commitments within the bloc, the new mentality is clearly being felt.

In the run up to the NATO Vilnius summit in July 2023, the Alliance is facing new challenges, but at the same time is benefiting from several opportunities stemming from the newly created sense of relevancy. The Russian aggression against Ukraine and the West has helped to revamp and restore the original purpose of NATO dating back to the post-Second World War period, especially in terms of the principle of collective defence.

Within the next couple of weeks, some tough negotiations can be expected among the 31 NATO members (which now include recently joined Finland), focusing on the Alliance's internal adaptation to the new security environment in Europe and the world. At the same time, NATO will be expected to react more robustly to the Russian aggression against Ukraine, whose status should be enhanced – not only as a solidarity measure but also as part of a long-term NATO goal dating back to 2008.

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Internal challenges and dilemmas

Beyond the two large sets of tasks outlined at the previous NATO summit in Madrid, the Alliance is in dire need of more robust internal dialogue and discussion about its future, its values and internal operations. There is also a need for continuous adaptation to old-new threats and challenges with a new sense of urgency. This has been caused not only by the Russian leadership but also some of the Alliance's member states with increasing authoritarian tendencies.

Following the start of the new wave of Russian aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, the Alliance had to start thinking about new ways of coming to terms with its original mission – territorial defence, concentrating primarily on deterrence and defence posture, namely on its eastern flank.

In that regard, the NATO Madrid summit in the summer of 2022, outlined a number of ambitious tasks and new missions, which meant a fundamental shift from the previous era of so-called "out of area operations". This led many NATO members to focus on specific sets of capabilities concerning the War on Terror and fighting outside of the Alliance's territory.

The new security environment, as well as the swift withdrawal from Afghanistan, meant that the Alliance had to embark on a new journey, focusing on the protection of its members, boosting their capacity to defend themselves and enhancing cooperation and coordination when facing external enemies at its borders. This has particularly been the case with Russia and the Eastern Flank of NATO, which has made the Alliance promise that it would deliver for its eastern regions neighbouring Russian territory, namely Central and Eastern Europe, South-East Europe and the Black Sea region.

> The Alliance is in dire need of a more robust internal dialogue and discussion about its future, values and internal operations.

NATO's promise to increase the battalion-sized force operating in the region, with the Enhanced Forward Presence increasing to the level of brigades, has been a tangible expression of this new trend. A recently established presence in Slovakia, Hungary and on the shore of the Black Sea region has emerged as well. Nevertheless, a number of tasks and pending challenges still remain. The issue of costs and efficiency plays a key role in the decision-making process regarding whether the forces in the region should be kept there physically on a permanent basis or continue with rotations. It appears that the first option would be strongly preferred by the most exposed members when responding to Russian aggression. In that regard, the Alliance's command and control structure is being seriously tested and adapted. The same is true when it comes to the military mobility potential of exchange between the Western and Eastern European pillars within the Alliance.

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Long-term military spending deficits also hamper the swift adoption and implementation of the new level of ambitions collectively promised in Madrid. The rapid efforts to boost military capacity and equipment further make the situation worse when considering the competition among the members. This may remind members of the times of vaccine diplomacy, with the prices of commodities and other equipment skyrocketing.

External dimension of NATO

Today, substantial expectations towards NATO are articulated not only by Ukraine but also a number of other actors still standing outside of the transatlantic community. Sweden is still waiting for a positive answer from Turkey, which has just witnessed another victory for the President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his political party. These forces are important in gradually helping to unblock the situation but some serious problems are still present.

Most importantly, however, is Ukraine – a highly divisive case for the Alliance, with many wishing for a recommitment to the country's NATO future and concrete steps towards such goals at the summit. At the same time, several influential members rather resolutely opted for a careful position and no radical solutions, at least for now. Some influential ideas, including establishing a NATO-Ukraine Council as a replacement for the previously operating and less equal committee, are currently being floated. This looks to be a more feasible solution when compared with the Membership Action Plan or any kind of other concrete plan involving deadlines and sets of tasks for Ukraine's integration into NATO.

> Internal debates about China and the Indo-Pacific region are also taking place within the Alliance now.

For many, including Czech President Petr Pavel, it is the end of the war and large-scale hostilities on Ukraine's territory that would open up the path towards membership in NATO. It would benefit not only Ukraine, but also the Alliance to have such an experienced army among its ranks. Nevertheless, it is the difficult in-between period that is most cumbersome, requiring a more serious debate among the members. In any case, the upcoming NATO summit in Vilnius will certainly set the course and determine the new strength of Ukraine-NATO relations.

Finally, internal debate about China and the Indo-Pacific region is also taking place within the Alliance now. This is due to pressure from Beijing's assertive posture in the region and the new dilemmas that this opens up in the transatlantic community.

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Ukrainian soldiers train on a Leopard tank in Poland under the auspices of a NATO training mission. Today, substantial expectations towards NATO are articulated not only by Ukraine but also a number of other actors still standing outside of the transatlantic community.

While it is clear that there are a number of challenges and pending issues, the newly established sense of solidarity with Ukraine and urgency when it comes to territorial defence are driving domestic processes regarding NATO's adaptation and flexible response. The emerging rapid response force and practical need for swift deployment might put pressure on the members and their available capabilities, but at the same time they will force them to really deliver and seriously review their potential and capacities at hand. Plans currently in development for a more efficient regional security structure, alongside deployment, enhanced deterrence, military investment and adaptation will put into practice a new set of opportunities and response measures in case of an emergency situation.

Stronger than ever

One outstanding area of deficiency and unfulfilled potential is clear in relations with the EU, its economic might and potential investment into resilience or military mobility, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. While all members realise that this needs to change, much more political will needs to be mobilised in order for this to succeed.

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Even if it is yet to be seen how quickly NATO states can adapt to the new environment and collectively share new commitments within the bloc, the new mentality is clearly being felt, as coined by the Germans with the term *Zeitenwende* – representing a clear change from what it used to be in the past inside of the Alliance.

While there are still some question marks, including who will lead NATO after next year or when exactly Ukraine could enter the Alliance, or on domestic issues especially in France or the United States, it is clear that NATO is here and stronger than ever when facing the Russian threat in the East. This is also true with regards to more and more pressure from China in the Indo-Pacific area.

Again, NATO will require adaptability, flexible solutions and political will to support the Alliance's resilience and help it overcome difficult times. These necessities, however, will in the end come about as they always have in the past, as crises have made NATO stronger and more prepared to face threats from the outside. EE

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Is NATO prepared to collectively defend its allies?

MARTA PROCHWICZ-JAZOWSKA

NATO wants its member states to spend more on their militaries, but governments need public support. While Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a pivotal moment for both East and West, threat perceptions continue to differ. For current and future western governments to get public support for increased military spending, they need to explain the new threat environment now.

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has brought about a paradigm shift in western security and defence policy. A new kinetic war on the European continent has revived NATO. Its member states are adapting strategies and strengthening the Eastern Flank. We are witnesses to historic changes. Whether allies are willing and able to defend NATO territory depends on capabilities and political willingness. However, preparing for war tomorrow means investing in military capabilities and public awareness today.

NATO is preparing for large-scale war in Europe

Shock at the scale, intensity and brutality of the Russian invasion has caused a shift in perceptions of Russia. In its new strategic concept adopted in Madrid in 2022, NATO identified Russia as a primary threat. The document states that "We

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cannot discount the possibility of an attack against Allies' sovereignty and territorial integrity." Therefore, the Alliance is now gradually working to re-enable its capabilities to be able to act immediately in response to any aggression. This requires more boots on the ground in sensitive areas in Eastern Europe, an improved command and control system, the storage of equipment and ammunition, and the ability to rapidly reinforce front line troops with additional forces. According to current plans, the NATO Response Force will be increased to 300,000 troops. It will be linked to 800,000 more soldiers in three tiers of combat readiness, capable of defending allied territory against Russia.

NATO and its member states moved fast. Four additional battlegroups were set up in Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. Existing ones have also been reinforced. Germany sent 350 additional troops to Lithuania. Canada and Spain deployed 200 and 250 troops respectively to Latvia. The United Kingdom increased its presence in Estonia to 1,700 troops and moved an extra 350 on a bilateral basis to Poland. The number of US soldiers in Poland doubled, and in Romania tripled. The US army garrison in Poland is the first military institution of this type set up by the US on NATO's Eastern Flank.

Aside from manpower, defence spending is going up across the entire continent. Poland is gearing up to spend over four per cent of its GDP on defence and wants to become a "provider of security" that can repel a Russian attack from the very first moments of a conflict without any allied support, which would likely come with a delay. What is more, the Alliance is stronger and better prepared thanks to its newest member, Finland.

Only as strong as the sum of its parts

The Madrid document, however, is only a framework which needs to be filled with more specific actions. We need a bigger boat and member states are not moving fast enough. Eastern Europeans are hoping for further decisions and announcements of more deployments at the upcoming NATO summit in Vilnius. Years of defence cuts have led to lost capabilities. Munition stockpiles and weapons are low. While the United States and the European Union plan to acquire more and produce more, the replenishment process will take time. Getting industry tooled up for wartime production will be a long process that will take years.

In every member state, except the US, the process of producing the necessary forces to deploy on the Eastern Flank will be lengthy and may encounter staff, equipment and financial challenges. Currently, only eight out of 31 NATO countries spend the agreed minimum of two per cent of GDP on defence. Defence

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budgets will not be pulled out of thin air. With a deteriorating economic situation, societies are more reluctant to make sacrifices after the pandemic. This necessitates two things: governments in Western Europe need to explain to their publics why investing in military capabilities is necessary and those further east need to do a better job at maintaining good bilateral relations with their key NATO allies.

Collective self-defence is enshrined at NATO's very core. Article Five of the North Atlantic Treaty directly states that "an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all." Declared political willingness to defend "every inch of NATO territory" has gone hand in hand with developments in member state rhetoric vis-à-vis Russia, the strengthening of the Eastern Flank, sanctions and the severing of ties with Russia. The United States has returned as a transatlantic player and guarantor of European security. The new US National Security Strategy, on top of its commitment to Article Five, declares that the United States will "deter and, as necessary, respond to Russian actions that threaten core US interests, including Russian attacks on our infrastructure and our democracy". Its nuclear deterrence strategy assumes that US nuclear weapons will serve to defend the vital interests of its allies.

The 2024 election in the United States will be a serious test of the country's resolve for supporting Ukraine.

The 2024 election in the United States will be a serious test of the country's resolve for supporting Ukraine and maintaining forces in Europe. Europe needs to be able to defend itself. Germany's announcement of a *Zeitenwende* and its delivery of weapons to Ukraine are a fundamental shift in military doctrine and foreign and security policy. Yet, the plan to revive Germany's military is very ambitious and has yet to materialise. NATO wants its member states to spend more on the military, but governments need public support. While the war in Ukraine is a pivotal moment for both East and West, threat perceptions continue to differ. For current and future western governments to get public support for increased military spending, they need to explain the new threat environment now.

Are NATO member states in danger?

Assessing the threat environment requires looking at the facts on the ground, the enemy's military doctrine as well as past behaviour. In the short term, NATO member states should mostly be prepared for spill over from Ukraine. Ukraine has managed to push the invader back from part of its territory, but the fight continues and there is potential for escalation. Polish citizens were victims of stray missiles

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landing in NATO territory late last year. A Russian cruise missile fired at Ukraine in December 2022 landed in Western Poland. Luckily, it contained no explosives.

Ukraine is not the only hot spot in Europe. Thousands of Russian troops are also stationed in Transnistria and pose a threat to Romania. The leader of Belarus is controlled by the Kremlin. And as soon as Finland joined NATO, Russia reinforced its troops near its Finnish border. Assessing the threat level also means evaluating Vladimir Putin's intentions. Some experts say he may at some point use an "escalate to de-escalate" strategy, which involves non-conventional warfare tactics. Chemical weapons could either be used in military actions or on civilian targets in Ukraine. Although highly unlikely, Russia could use tactical nuclear weapons.

The study of Russian foreign policy shows us that Russia is trying to establish a European sphere of influence. To achieve its goals, the state wages a hybrid war and has repeatedly invaded its neighbours using kinetic warfare (Georgia 2008, Ukraine 2014 and 2022). Sadly, the threat of direct aggression from the Russian Federation to NATO member states will increase in the long term. If there is a stalemate and some Russian troops remain in Ukraine, over a period of five years or more, Russia will reconstitute its forces and attempt another incursion into Ukraine. In the case of a Ukrainian victory, Russia will be destabilised, perhaps even fragmented, and continue to jeopardise security in the region. Especially if China is supporting it economically and therefore controlling it politically.

On paper and in rhetoric, western countries are committed to NATO and the defence of its territory. The level of preparedness and readiness to engage in war over NATO allies on the Eastern Flank will depend on the scale, timing and type of potential attack. February 22nd 2022 was a wake-up call. Yet at NATO's upcoming Vilnius summit, NATO's new strategic concept and model of deterrence and defence needs to turn from plan into action. Member states will only be able to muster resources for defence if people understand Europe's new threat environment. This is the role of current and future governments. EE

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Baltic voices

From the fringes to the fore

STEFANO BRAGHIROLI

The Baltics' painful historical relationship with Russia and their memory of occupations, along with first-hand experience of Moscow's interference and aggressive tactics, have increasingly emerged as a precious resource for NATO and the European Union in understanding Putin's strategies and countering them effectively. The Baltics have moved from being on the margins to the foreground in the collective policy-shaping and decision-making process.

Voices of small states often go generally unnoticed in times of trouble, when grand geopolitics prevails over diplomacy. When the temperature heats up, both observers and decision-makers tend to focus on power dynamics and the *imperium* of the strong. In the context of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have proven that their small size does not automatically equal irrelevance.

Over the last year, the Baltics have shown that a good combination of geopolitical understanding, clear and consistent objectives and a high degree of credibility can help overcome marginality. They have also helped to amplify their small voices to achieve unprecedented centrality and influence in terms of policy-shaping and decision-making.

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Understanding Russia

Since February 2022, both in the context of NATO and the European Union, we have witnessed the progressive emergence of push and pull dynamics generally involving a reactive "Old Europe" and proactive Central and Eastern Europe. In the European context, this implies that the political energy and primary impetus that led to many key collective decisions have first emerged and taken shape in Riga, Tallinn, Vilnius or Warsaw, and then spilled over to Paris or Berlin, towards a broader western consensus. From a policy-making perspective, the Baltic states have moved from the margins to the centre of the debate and of the agenda-setting process. They have ultimately left a tangible and lasting impact both in terms of concrete policies and the periphery's power of agency.

While usually considered among the most reliable EU and NATO members, the Baltic states have traditionally had only limited luck in shaping these organisations' collective Russia policies, given the countries' uneasy relationship with Moscow shaped by painful historical path dependency. Traditionally, Russia has reinforced these dynamics by consistently depicting the Baltic states as immature and radical antagonists, thereby shifting the blame onto them for the icy relations between Moscow and the Baltic capitals. Since the mid-1990s, Russia's paternalistic approach and post-colonial diplomatic contempt have prevented both a change in these dynamics and a reduction of geopolitical tensions in the Baltic Sea region.

Before February 2022, a number of Western European states were not completely immune from this narrative, sometimes portraying the Baltics as hawkish and overly obsessed about Russia. This convergence of misperceptions and misconceptions has often undermined the Baltics' capacity to successfully affect Brussels' Russia policy, and contributed to the gap between "old" and "new" Europe.

Moscow's full-scale invasion radically changed this state of affairs. The Baltics' painful historical relationship with Russia and their memory of occupations – along with first-hand experience of Moscow's interference and aggressive tactics – have increasingly emerged as a precious resource for NATO and the EU in understanding Putin's strategies and countering them effectively. Alongside the painful experience of Soviet occupation, the Baltics have been long-time targets for different aggressive hybrid strategies, cyber-attacks and massive disinformation campaigns initiated by the Kremlin. These are designed to undermine public trust in state institutions. In addition, Estonia and Latvia are home to large Russophone minorities that Russia has traditionally attempted to weaponise through the instrumentalisation of language and historical memory.

Following the failure of all western attempts to "bring Russia back to reason", exemplified by the countless trips to Moscow by western leaders before February

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Estonians with Ukrainian flags protest in front of the Russian embassy in Tallinn. The Baltics' painful historical relationship with Russia has increasingly emerged as a precious resource for NATO and the EU in understanding Putin's strategies.

24th 2022, the Baltics propose a different experience-based approach towards the Kremlin – a radical alternative to appeasement. This approach is based on three postulates that have gained increasing traction both within NATO and the EU: 1) Moscow's appetite can only grow; 2) Moscow sees every concession as a sign of weakness; and 3) Moscow understands only the language of power.

Consistent objectives

Since the start of the full-scale invasion, the objectives pursued by the Baltic states have been consistent with these assumptions. Instead of blaming Berlin and Paris for assigning them the uncomfortable role of ignored "Cassandras", there has been an emphasis on learning from past mistakes. Accordingly, the lessons learnt by the Baltics show us that no middle ground approaches are possible and only a defeat of Russia in Ukraine can stop Moscow's hegemonic aspirations in the region. The new geopolitical reality implies the necessity to strengthen a defensive security framework against Russia. Unlike many in Western Europe, who fear the unpredictability of a weak and wounded Russia, the Baltic leaders have no doubts that the only suitable exit strategy for this war is Moscow's defeat, followed by the development of credible security guarantees without (or against) Russia.

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In the words of Estonia's Prime Minister Kaja Kallas: "It is important to not make that mistake again like we did in Crimea, Donbas, Georgia … We have done the same mistake already three times saying that negotiations, negotiated peace is the goal … The only thing that Putin hears from this is that "[He] can do this because no punishment will follow.""

With this in mind, the Baltic states have stated since February 2022 that the goal of the western allies should be to support Ukraine until its final victory, implying a full Russian retreat, the prosecution of war crimes and reparations for Russian victims. This uncompromising position has gained ground both inside NATO and the EU as a direct result of the growing centrality of Baltic (and Central and Eastern European) voices. Given the clarity of these desired outcomes vis-à-vis the more nuanced positions of Western European partners, the Baltic position can be more easily translated into clear and quantifiable policy objectives.

When it comes to direct support to Kyiv, the Baltics' key objective is proactive, focusing on lasting and timely support for Ukraine both economically and in terms of materiel and weapon systems. It is worth noting that the Baltic states have been advocating for deliveries of western tanks and aircraft to Ukraine since the summer of 2022.

With regards to Europe's collective security and deterrence of Moscow's imperial appetites in the region, the Baltic states have been consistently advocating for a more incisive role for NATO, and growing interoperability with the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy. All the Baltic governments also advocate for a more substantial and permanent presence in the region, both in terms of weapon systems and boots on the ground. In order to make NATO fit to respond to the challenge of Russia's aggression and expansionist appetites, the Baltics have stressed the need to make NATO's two per cent pledge a baseline, rather than a final target. The three countries have led by example and are committed to raise the bar. The new Estonian government has committed to increase, over the next years, defence and security spending to six per cent of GDP, consisting of three per cent to military defence and three per cent to non-military aspects – mostly relating to holistic societal resilience.

> The lessons learnt by the Baltics show us that only a defeat of Russia in Ukraine can stop Moscow's hegemonic aspirations.

Strengthening a defensive security framework against Russia implies widening, along with deepening. Such awareness made the Baltics among the strongest supporters of Finnish and Swedish NATO membership, which is key to increasing the overall strategic depth of the Baltic Sea region and broadening burden sharing efforts across the Gulf of Finland. The realisation that widening is key to western

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resilience and to containing Russia's imperialist appetites has been also an important reason for the Baltics' steadfast support for Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration.

Enhanced credibility

When size does not help, credibility might prove to be a key factor for states to be taken seriously. In the case of the Baltics, this has been fundamental. In supporting Ukraine, the Baltic states have not only "talked the talk", but very much "walked the walk". Among the first to travel to Ukraine as a visible show of solidarity, the Baltic leaders have committed very relevant national resources to support Kyiv's struggle, both in military and non-military terms. All the three Baltic states have welcomed a very significant number of refugees from Ukraine since February 2022, ranging from the 80,000 now present in Lithuania to the 43,000 in Estonia (more than three per cent of the country's population). Additionally, they have been pioneering significant military assistance to Ukraine, with Estonia donating more than one per cent of its GDP in direct military support to Ukraine.

The credibility of the Baltic voices vis-à-vis the broader western community is enhanced also by the fact that – unlike other partners in the region – they have been able to combine their unwavering support with a strong adherence to the values of liberal democracy. Looking around a Central and Eastern Europe increasingly characterised by rising illiberalism, the Baltics' weight and policy-shaping potential are likely to grow even more in international circles as some of the strongest liberal voices in the region. This provides the Baltics with a solid moral ground to counter Russia's imperialist expansionism not only in terms of security, but also in terms of values, through the prism of liberal democracy versus illiberal authoritarianism. Unlike Poland – the heavyweight of the region – they are also seen as rule-abiding, committed and, generally, pro-integration EU members.

In contrast to other western allies, the Baltic states have shown a very close alignment between public and elite understandings of Europe's new geopolitical reality. Supporting Ukraine factually, increasing defence budgets, talking about rearmament and bearing the related (tangible) costs have never been a taboo; and Baltic societies have proven extremely resilient. Such widespread societal support does not show, so far, significant signs of fatigue.

Estonia, which had general elections in March 2023, provides a very good example of societal resilience. The current prime minister, Kaja Kallas, confirmed as the country's leader in what can be defined as a liberal electoral wave, made no mystery of Russia's aggression in the campaign. Indeed, the country's security was the key electoral issue. Kallas did not hide the price of security, saying: "Gas may be

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expensive, but freedom is priceless." She stressed how stopping Russia in Ukraine is the only way to guarantee the country's long-term security.

Despite the populist right's attempt to electorally weaponise the cost of Tallinn's support to Ukraine and the large number of Ukrainian war refugees in the country, the voters have rewarded Kallas's determination and clear words and triggered the formation of the most liberal government in Estonia since 1991. The strong popular support for Kallas's leadership was confirmed by the record number of individual preferences received – the highest among any elected parliamentarian in modern Estonia.

New Iron Lady

The combination of a deep understanding of the geopolitical context, clear and consistent objectives and a high degree of credibility has allowed the Baltic states to exert very visible and tangible influence on NATO and the EU's new Russia policy, and in shaping western support for Ukraine. The Baltics have moved from being on the margins to the foreground in the collective policy-shaping and decision-making process. Their stance has been very much strengthened and amplified by the Baltic leaders' unprecedented global visibility. Kallas's highly respected voice both in EU and transatlantic circles has gained her the title of Europe's "New Iron Lady" and made her a potential candidate to succeed Jens Stoltenberg at the helm of NATO. The growing centrality of the Baltic narrative was recently exemplified by the visit of EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg to Tallinn in February 2023 on the occasion of the first anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion, which coincides with Estonia's Independence Day.

As mentioned above, the combination of strong liberal democratic credentials, a robust commitment to Euro-Atlanticism and unwavering support for Ukraine makes the Baltic states the best ambassadors of New Europe's priorities in the transatlantic and European arenas. While more will probably be seen at the forthcoming Vilnius summit in July 2023, very tangible results directly initiated by Tallinn, Riga or Vilnius include the EU joint arms procurement for Ukraine and changes in EU visa policy towards Russia and Belarus. There is no doubt that the magnitude of what has already been achieved by three of the smallest EU and NATO members far outweighs their geographical size. EE

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The price that Ukraine is paying to join Europe is unbelievably high

A conversation with Bernard Henri-Lévy, French philosopher and public intellectual. Interviewer: Arkadiusz Szczepański

ARKADIUSZ SZCZEPAŃSKI: I remember the debate you had with Aleksandr Dugin which took place in 2019 in the Nexus Institute and which, from today's perspective, looks prophetic indeed. It was a discussion between two thinkers who are at two extreme ends. On the one side there was a believer in humanism, while on the other was a fascist and proponent of Eurasian imperialism. You described Dugin's philosophy as being saturated with sick nihilism and collectivism. Dugin's ideas, which are now seen as representative of almost the entire Russian political elite, reject the idea of human rights, individualism and liberal democracy. That is why they can only lead, as you said, to war, death and destruction. I assume that after February 24th 2022 you must have returned in your thoughts to this discussion…

BERNARD HENRI-LÉVY: I often think about it. However, at that time it was an unusual experience. I accepted the rules of this discussion not fully knowing who was my interlocutor. At that time not much was known about Dugin. In France his books were published solely by niche publication houses of the extreme right. Hence, I unexpectedly realised that I was faced with a real fascist. One who has no complexes but who is also not an ordinary thing. And he was exactly like that, without any complexes. It was the first such experience for me to talk to a person like that! I could feel it almost physically. Instinctively, I was appalled by everything this man represents. But what was more important is that I realised that I was sitting across from a person who impersonates political Putinism.

How did you react to that?

People in whom I confided at that time kept repeating: "No… not entirely… additionally, this guy is not as im-

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portant as you are saying, the role he is assigned to in Putin's circles is largely overestimated." But that was not the point. I realised that I possibly met somebody that Giuliano da Empoli would, a few years later, call the "Kremlin's magician". But let us say it one more time; something else was important. Not the people, but the ideas. And for the entire hour I could see the whole panorama of fascism that was developing in Russia at that time. I left this debate convinced, more than ever before, that Putin will implement the ideas and thoughts that I heard then – be it in Ukraine or somewhere else. I knew it already then. I was talking about this starting with the 2014 Revolution of Dignity. In that year I gave two speeches on the Maidan in Kyiv: one in February, and one in March. I said then that Putin is the name of an ideological and political monster that will attack Ukraine and Europe. But when listening to Dugin I heard something more than only slogans, I was given the rhetoric, the programme, everything.

Did you have any other encounters with Dugin after the debate?

No, of course not. I made no gestures on my part. He, on the other hand, did something incredible. It was either in March or April 2022, in the early weeks of the war. I was on my way back from Odesa where a price was offered for my head by a group of self-proclaimed "Russian patriots". At the same time, a French magazine *Causeur* published an interview with Dugin in which he literally said this: "This war is not a war with Ukraine, but with Bernard Henri-Lévy." I do not agree with the viewpoint of the magazine, but this is a serious magazine. Evidently, I was still haunting him…

The anti-liberal atmosphere in Russia and geopolitical dreams of people like Dugin have, in the end, led to the full-scale war. We are now witnessing a return to the times when the destruction of a whole culture is a real threat. What in your view does this war mean to Ukraine? And what does it mean to Europe?

I think that in the last year Putin has made the most incredible political mistake that a state leader can make. I think, and I have kept saying it since the first days of the war, that he cannot win this war! The only open question that remains is how long it will take until he understands that. Looking from this perspective, we can also say that the war has definitely contributed to a greater solidarity between Ukraine and Europe, while it drove Europe to an unprecedented level of unity. As Europe is faced with a common enemy, all our other internal disputes seem secondary.

Just like in the case of other earlier conflicts, you were also on the ground and spent a lot of time in Ukraine. Your new, already second, documentary film about this war has been released. What was the reaction to it in Kyiv when it was first shown to the public?

I have to admit, the premiere in Kyiv was extraordinary. It was incredible to

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see so many of my protagonists in one place: the families of those whom I met and who later died on the frontline; the commanders and soldiers as well as the ordinary people, women and men, the defenders of Azovstal; officers from the Charles de Gaulle battalion, etc. My film talks about this battalion and how and why it was created in Zaporizhzhia. This of course is a documentary which presents real events. I am, on the other hand, first and foremost a writer and for the writer this is not an ordinary experience to see a gathering of the protagonists that you presented in one of your works. But what did the Ukrainians think about it? I think they were touched. This picture by a French writer who travelled along the frontline and who shared time with the defenders, risking his own life, to provide a testimony and convince the world not to forget about them but to help them more. I think they were moved by that.

What do you remember the most from your time filming?

I cannot answer that. Everything. And everyone. Making this movie was from the very beginning both a painful and passionate experience. One that was not deprived of – do I dare say – moments of intense happiness.

Such as?

There were moments of real brotherhood, when I felt that the people I was talking to were literally ready to sacrifice their lives for European values, which in our Western European countries seem so pale and exhausted. I experienced something similar in 1990, when for the first time I came to Poland. Then I also felt this fascination. With the difference that Poland had left communism without a war, without bloodshed. This was a certain political miracle. In Kraków or Warsaw there was a democratic euphoria. In Ukraine this is not the case. There, the moment of euphoria took place ten years ago, but it was quickly covered in blood. The price that Ukraine is paying to join Europe is unbelievably high…

Indeed, Ukraine is not only fighting now for its sovereignty but also for its political and cultural belonging to Europe. At the time of the 2014 Revolution of Dignity not many people in the West wanted to accept this dimension. What are the expectations of the people you met during your travels in Ukraine? When they talk about Europe, what do you tell them?

The values that we believe in so little and so feebly, get their real power and sense there! Since the Maidan in 2014, I keep telling Ukrainians the same thing: it is them who are the real Europeans. That they are more European than the majority of French politicians. The day when they join the European Union will be a special day for us – it will not be the EU that will give them a present, but it will be them who will provide a gift to us – it will be a blessing and an opportunity. Thirty-five years ago I said the same to the Poles, the Czechs, East Germans, Bulgarians and Hungarians. At that time, I was tasked by President

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François Mitterand to investigate the conditions needed to transform Central and Eastern Europe towards democracy. I was also asked to see what France could do to help. I was saying then the exact same thing I am saying now. Yes, Ukraine today is in a similar situation, with the exception that it is paying the highest price for its European aspirations.

You are one of the few intellectuals who actually risks their life to go to the warzone and show what is happening, to morally appeal to those who live in the free world. How do you assess the support that Europe offers to Ukraine?

Of course we should do more. Much more. I also do not think it is a normal situation where the Baltic states or Poland provide Ukraine with greater assistance than states such as France or Italy. I know that the real support for Ukraine is not when we say in Kyiv: "We will give you the time that you need," but "We will support you to such an extent that things go faster and the time of war is reduced". The point is to quickly end this nightmare. The real obligation on our

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part is to collectively enter this economy of war. And turn Putin's aggression into Putin's failure.

Large and sustained US military assistance has allowed Ukraine to avoid "the black scenario", it did not find itself at Russia's mercy. Surprisingly the military assistance was criticised by some parts of western societies. The disputes taking place in Germany still show us how strong anti-Americanism is, which is deeply rooted in both the extreme right and extreme left. Russia is thus presented as NATO's victim, especially regarding "American interests", while Ukraine is seen as an "instrument" used by the West. This results in a reversal of facts in which an aggressor is presented as a victim. How can we explain this phenomenon?

Here we have two classic cases of defamation. First, there is the reversing of roles: that of the hangman and that of the victim (this is for example one of the sources of today's antisemitism). Second, there is anti-Americanism, this new policy of fools, which has become the opium of the masses and the foundation of two totalitarianisms. In France this was a shared programme of both the fascists and the communists in the 1930s. In Germany the communists did not want to take part in the war which, as it was then said, was "being pushed by Wall Street and the City". This was, in this or a similar spirit, one of the motives for Heidegger's grand political visions, which saw America as an English-speaking Russia and Russia as a Slavic America. The fact that today we are seeing a similar thing is indeed depressing. The return of anti-Americanism is proof that Europe has not freed itself from the phantoms of the 20th century.

This special pacifism is not only naïve but also morally inappropriate, especially when we are facing Russian aggression and brutality, when we are witnessing crimes against humanity that Russia is committing in Ukraine…

Pacifism is more than being naïve. Bear in mind what took place in the 1930s, important also in this context, that it was in the ranks of the pacifists where the Nazi regime found so many "useful idiots". Today we are seeing the same. I do not understand why after Bucha, Mariupol, and Izyum that there are still calls for peace, and peace would take place immediately and without any conditions.

Many people in the West, also influential politicians and intellectuals, are often promoting an image of Russia that is highly idealised. In the famous exchange of letters that you had with Michel Houellebecq (*Ennemis Publics*, 2008) this was one of the most interesting points of disagreement. Houellebecq's pessimistic diagnosis was shared by many critics of liberal democracy and is based on the assumption that the liberal West has reached its final stage. It has lost its life powers, while the Russian society is full of vitality. You, on the other hand, had no illusions and responded to Houellebecq, stating that "Putinism was and prob-

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ably still is a training ground for our future." How do you explain these and other false perceptions about Russia that persist, despite the fact that Putin's real face has been well known since the Chechen wars, the assassination and poisoning of political opponents, the war in Georgia, the annexation of Crimea or, finally, the war in Donbas?

I explain these by the fact that people today have a peculiar idea of "vitality". Does the destruction of Grozny have any vitality in it? What about the gassing of Syrian children? Would anybody dare say that the Russian soldiers, or the Wagner Group, are "full of vitality"? These are rapists, paedophiles and murderers. These are people who live by desiring death. People who have no values and no norms. People for whom ideals such as morality or patriotism or even politics are completely foreign. If this is to be the vitality admired in western civilisation, then I would call those who believe in it senseless fools.

The interview was first published in a Polish opinion journal Przegląd Polityczny, no. 178/2023.

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GDAŃSK

IT HAPPENED IN GDAŃSK

MACIEJ BUCZKOWSKI

Gdańsk supports Ukrainian local governments in the process of preparing Ukraine for membership in the European Union

On April 19th 2023, a memorandum of cooperation in the process of preparing Ukrainian local governments for integration with the European Union was signed in Lviv. On that day Gdańsk Mayor Aleksandra Dulkiewicz and Lviv Mayor Andriy Sadovy signed a document aimed to express support to Ukraine's European ambitions.

It is very important that now, despite the ongoing war, the standards that are the glue of the European family of values to which Ukraine aspires are pursued and promoted. "The goal of the Council of the European Union is to strengthen local democracy, good democratic governance, and public administration in times of war. It is also one of the top priorities of the European Committee of the Regions, which implements its policy of support for Ukraine through the Working Group on Ukraine," reads the agreement.

The memorandum was an overture to the establishment of the Lviv office in Brussels, which took place in the first days of May. Thanks to the hospitality of the Committee of the Regions, the nucleus of Lviv's representation in the political capital of Europe is already in place in Brussels. Gdańsk and the Pomerania Voivodeship in the European Union association, which is the representation of our region in Brussels, offered to our Lviv partners assistance in their first stages of getting acquainted with EU affairs.

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The mayor's visit to Lviv was also an opportunity to see the Lviv-based UNBROKEN Rehabilitation Center, which helps people who lost limbs during the war. UNBROKEN is a very unique project. It offers services to war victims from all over Ukraine, providing them with comprehensive medical assistance and psychological support.

Gdańsk, just like Warsaw and Wrocław, has declared its readiness to provide financial assistance to the development of the Center.

Virtual Administrator will help Ukrainians deal with official matters back home

In May, a joint Gdańsk-Lviv project called the "Virtual Administrator" started to operate in Gdańsk. At the point which runs the "Gdańsk is helping Ukraine" campaign, Ukrainian citizens living in our city can already arrange a variety of official matters by connecting online with officials in Lviv. All this is a result of an agreement that was signed between the Gdańsk Foundation and the Department of Administrative Services of the Lviv City Council.

Marta Fedorchak of the Lviv Department of Administrative Services admits that this is a very important project for the Ukrainian community. "We will be able to help not only Ukrainians who lived in Lviv before coming to Gdańsk, but also those coming from other places. If we manage to help even one person, it will already be very good."

These virtual sessions offer consultations and assistance in completing and submitting online documents for more than 500 different administrative procedures, including:

- passport applications;
- real estate related matters;
- child benefits;
- lost documents (diplomas, certificates, legal documents and others).

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Gdańsk will support the Lviv UNBROKEN center

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By a unanimous decision of city council, Gdańsk will donate one million zlotys for the expansion of the UNBROKEN Medical and Rehabilitation Center in Lviv. A resolution in this regard was passed during the City Council session on May 25th.

The UNBROKEN Center is a unique project. Its mission statement is to restore hope, joy and at least a partial return to normality for those who were injured by the war. It is also an opportunity for thousands of war victims from across Ukraine to receive adequate care. Thanks to prostheses, treatment and psychological care, victims can not only regain their physical fitness, but also independence, self-esteem, dignity and a desire to live and work for a free and independent Ukraine. The center began to operate in the first months of the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

UNBROKEN provides comprehensive assistance to victims of war: from urgent surgery for gunshot wounds, burns or amputations, to physical and psychological therapy and prosthetics. The medical team's experience is already being used by doctors around the world who come here to gain experience in war medicine. The UNBROKEN Rehabilitation Center has become the most important place in Ukraine where help is provided to civilian victims of war as well as soldiers.

The decision was upon the initiative of Gdansk Mayor Aleksandra Dulkiewicz, who justified the need for support, stemming from Gdansk's DNA of solidarity, as follows: "In April, a delegation and I visited Lviv, where we viewed the UNBROKEN center under construction, a treatment center for people who lost limbs as a result of warfare. It is responsible for both the preparation of prostheses and the psychological care and rehabilitation of patients. The Lviv authorities are working on this, as well as doctors who have come there from various areas of Ukraine

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where they cannot work because their hospitals have been destroyed. People are also being saved there by doctors from other parts of the world. I ask that, following the example of other Polish cities, Warsaw and Wroclaw, we support the construction of this center for the treatment of civilians as well as military personnel after the loss of limbs due to warfare."

The mayor of Lviv, Andriy Sadovy, who remotely attended the City Council session, thanked the city council members for their decision and the people of Gdańsk for their gesture of solidarity by saying: "I would like to thank all Poles for the help we receive from you on a daily basis. This includes military aid, assistance to refugees, but also to people who are left behind in Ukraine. We feel your support every day. I thank the people of Gdańsk for their warmth and help. The Mayor of Gdańsk was the first politician to come to us after the Russian invasion began. We are building an ecosystem of the UNBROKEN in Ukraine. Nearly 13,000 wounded have received care in our city hospital alone. Among them are: children, women, elderly, soldiers … Anyone who needs help, receives it. I am not a doctor, but I have to make sure that the best possible surgeries are performed and that people receive good prostheses as well as physical, social and psychological assistance. We are starting to build housing for the injured and looking for new jobs for them. Every person who is fighting today is fighting for democracy, for a free Poland and a free Ukraine. The system we are building is unique and we want to inspire other cities. I am optimistic and believe that we will win. Poland is our partner which helps the most. I thank the people of Gdańsk for their continued support." In addition to Gdańsk, the Lviv center has also received support from two other Polish local governments. Warsaw has donated two million zlotys, while Wrocław donated one million.

Declaration of Solidarity with Mariupol

The mayor of Mariupol, Vadym Boichenko, visited Gdańsk in May. He came to our city to sign the Declaration of Solidarity with Mariupol and to discuss the perspectives of rebuilding Mariupol from destruction once it is liberated from the occupiers and returned to Ukrainian control.

The Declaration of Solidarity with Mariupol includes a message of creating initiatives in support of Ukraine, which are aimed at ending the suffering of the Ukrainian people, the victory over the invaders and assistance in the reconstruction.

The needs are bound to be enormous, because, as the mayor stated: "Fifty per cent of Mariupol no longer exists." He later added: "Today we are refugees, but we are already planning to rebuild our city. (...) Today, the residents of Mariupol are scattered; about 150,000 people live in various cities in Ukraine, about 120-150,000 still live in Mariupol, and about 120,000 are scattered throughout Europe."

Work on maintaining relations, providing support to Mariupol residents and planning for its reconstruction is being

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carried out by an agency called Mariupol. reborn which has been specifically created for this purpose. There are already 21 support centers for Mariupol residents in 16 Ukrainian cities which offer them social, legal, psychological, humanitarian and medical assistance.

The mayor of Mariupol, during a meeting with Aleksandra Dulkiewicz, the mayor of Gdańsk, and Agnieszka Owczarczak, the chairwoman of the Gdańsk city council, talked about current activities and plans for rebuilding the city which was destroyed and annexed by Russia last September (along with the entire Donetsk region and three other oblasts).

The agenda of Mayor Boichenko's stay in Gdańsk included a visit to the construction site of the Clean Energy Port, where he discussed modern technologies of waste management systems and EU environmental requirements in this regard. "It is important that from the outset, rebuilding Mariupol will lead to the creation of a modern and environmentally friendly city. That is why we would like to share our experience with you," said Sławomir Kiszkurno, the president of the Clean Energy Port.

The most touching moment of the Mariupol delegation's visit to Gdańsk was the joint lighting of candles at the Heroic Mariupol Square. At this ceremony the Mayor of Mariupol was accompanied by Mayor Dulkiewicz, Chairwoman Owczarczak and a large delegation of the Gdańsk City Council.

Contacts between Gdańsk and Mariupol were initiated in 2014 by the city's late Mayor Paweł Adamowicz. The flagship project, which was carried out jointly with the European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA) Gdańsk and Mariupol, resulted in the establishment of the Local Democracy Agency (LDA) in Mariupol in 2017. Its mandate was to support the emergence of civil society and strengthen the efforts of Mariupol NGOs in building local democracy, fighting corruption and educating the public on the need for the climate of transparency. Until today LDA remains active, however since the Russian occupation of Mariupol it has been operating in exile. Gdańsk continues to support LDA Mariupol financially.

Do not sleep or you will be voted out! Gdańsk celebrations of the Freedom and Civil Rights Days

The Freedom and Civil Rights Days are celebrated on the anniversary of Poland's breakthrough June 4th 1989 elections. These were, since the end of the Second World War, the first partially free elections to the lower house of the Polish Parliament (Sejm) and completely free to

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the upper house (Senate) of the Polish parliament. As a result of the elections, the communists were made to share power with opposition forces and the process of Poland's transition and democratization began.

The Freedom and Civil Rights Days are a civic event. It gathers representatives of NGOs from all over Poland who come to Gdańsk. This year we hosted 150 organizations, civic movements and informal groups. In the vicinity of the Gdańsk Accords Square a special "social zone" was set up where various events prepared by NGOs were held. Over 26,000 people participated in the events and took part in the programme prepared by the European Solidarity Center.

During the Freedom and Civil Rights Days a concert performed by best Polish artists was held as well as public debates during which both the past and the future were discussed and analysed. There were also meetings with former dissidents as well as seminars and conferences. A total of 79 different events were held and attended by over 66,000 people in 13 different locations. However, the main location of the events was the birthplace of Solidarity – the former shipyard area.

On June 3rd, at noon, a new initiative titled "Don't sleep or they'll vote you out" was announced in the social zone. It is aimed at encouraging people to vote in the autumn parliamentary elections. The name of the initiative dates back to 1989, which was the turning point in Poland's democratic history. It turns out that today this phrase has not lost its meaning and on the eve of Poland's parliamentary elections it gives us hope that a real "good change" could take place in our country.

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

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

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The dream of sanctions stopping wars

SVENJA PETERSEN

Despite various sanctions put in place against Russia for its invasion of Ukraine, the Russian economy is surprisingly doing much better than expected. It appears for now that at least in the short term, the Russian economy is able to bypass sanctions as long as other countries are willing to pursue business as usual with Russia. Whether or not the sanctions will have a longer-term effect and have any impact on Russian aggression remains to be seen.

When western countries adopted sanctions against Russia in response to Putin's war of aggression against Ukraine, western politicians promised nothing less than the complete breakdown of the Russian economy. The French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire spoke of the "collapse" of the Russian economy, while US President Joe Biden said that "We will keep raising the economic cost and ratchet up the pain for [Vladimir] Putin and further increase Russia's economic isolation."

After more than a year of comprehensive sanctions against Russia, this collapse is still yet to come. On the contrary, Russia's economy recently grew by 1.2 per cent in April 2023, which is higher than the current economic growth rate of the European Union. The Russian rouble, which was massively devalued in the meantime, is now even stronger than it was before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which began at the end of February 2022. The key interest rate, which was raised to 20 per cent by the Russian central bank to ward off the consequences of the sanctions, is now at its February 2022 level of 7.5 per cent. At the same time, Russia's financial cushion is growing. Therefore, one should not be under any illusions: sanctions will not win wars. Yet, the right conclusions must be drawn from this realisation.

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The state of research on the success of sanctions

The research on the success of sanctions is extensive and almost always comes to the same conclusion: the closer the relationship between the sanctioning state and the sanctioned state, the more likely it is that sanctions will achieve their goal. But more crucially, the smaller the target of a sanctions policy, the higher the probability that the sanctions policy will achieve its goal. In practical terms, this means that sanctions are more successful when they involve, for example, simpler offenses such as violations of trade treaties on a smaller scale, or the internment of a country's citizens in a second state. In these example cases, the probability is relatively high that an agreement will be reached to resume compliance with the applicable trade treaties, or to release interned prisoners.

However, when the target of sanctions is of existential importance, such as issues like rearmament, wars or military conflicts, sanctions almost never fulfil their objective. Therefore, they are a difficult tool to use when it comes to serious issues of international security policy. For example, there are extensive western sanctions regimes against North Korea and Iran, as both states are accused of pursuing their own nuclear weapons programmes. Coupled with the anti-western sentiment and threatening gestures of these two states, the western community of states sees itself existentially threatened by this scenario. These two examples confirm the aforementioned theories derived from research: the worse relations between two states and the more relevant the target of sanctions is to security policy, the lower the chances that sanctions will be successful. As a result, the regimes in North Korea and Iran have withstood sanctions for decades.

This suggests that a similar scenario for sanctions against Russia is unfolding. Relations between Russia and the West have been strained since the Russo-Georgian War in 2008 and openly belligerent at least since the war in Eastern Ukraine in 2014. The goal of stopping the full-scale war in Ukraine through sanctions is certainly not an unambitious goal of security policy. Of course, according to sanctions literature, the chances of stopping the war are extremely slim. So, just how does Russia manage to generate economic growth despite the sanctions?

The reasons for the apparent stability of the Russian economy

Deliberations on the EU's 11th sanctions package against Russia have recently begun, but the consequences of the sanctions are far less visible than initially expected. One of the main reasons for this is sanctions evasion. This means that goods that are no longer allowed to be delivered to Russia are re-exported to Rus-

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sia via third countries. These new supply chains for sanctions evasion have helped quite a few countries to achieve a recent economic boom. This evasion can be most clearly seen in the non-sanctioned states of the Eurasian Economic Union. These countries are in a free trade zone with Russia and are namely Armenia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Other states whose trade with Russia has increased conspicuously in 2022–23 include Turkey, Georgia, China and the United Arab Emirates. A clear indication of sanctions evasion is a sharp increase in trade balance with Russia, as well as the export of previously unseen goods to the country.

A closer look reveals that the Central Asian republic of Kyrgyzstan exported two and a half times more to Russia in 2022 than in previous years. This does not necessarily indicate sanctions circumvention, as Russia is now naturally looking for new supply chains and increased trade with different partners than before, as trading with western states is no longer possible. For example, more textiles are now exported to Russia than before. More relevant in the context of sanctions, however, is the fact that in 2022 Kyrgyzstan started to export car parts to Russia – a commodity that was never exported from Kyrgyzstan before. Why is this relevant? It is likely that these car parts, which may now no longer be exported from the EU to Russia, found their way to Russia via car manufacturers exporting from Europe to Kyrgyzstan. This is also indicated by the fact that trade between Kyrgyzstan and the largest car manufacturing country in Europe, Germany, has recently grown by as much as 561 per cent. Moreover, last year Kyrgyzstan became Russia's number one trading partner.

> Car parts are especially relevant for Russian warfare in Ukraine as they can be used as replacement parts for war machinery.

The example of car parts is not accidental, as car parts are especially relevant for Russian warfare in Ukraine and can be used as spare parts for war machinery. However, this can also be the case with less obvious commodities. Refrigerators or washing machines, for example, which are imported from the West to Russia via Kazakhstan (a threefold increase in imports) and Armenia (more imports than in the two previous years combined), may also be indicative. The fear is that these will then be further exported to Russia and the inner workings of the home appliance imports will be used for Russia's war equipment. In this way, microchips from Texas Instruments or Ethernet cable connections from the German manufacturer Harting have already made their way into Russian Iskander missiles.

Another interesting example is Georgia, which 15 years ago was still fighting a war with Russia and whose state territory has since been partially occupied by the country. At the same time, and to the surprise and criticism of the West, Georgia has not joined the sanctions regime against Russia. On the contrary, it seems

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that Georgia is benefitting significantly from the sanctions. Trade between Russia and Georgia grew by 46 per cent in 2022; and this includes goods such as food products which even find their way from Ukraine to Russia via Georgia. Above all, however, Georgia appears to be benefitting from Russia's reduced export goods prices, as imports from Russia in particular grew by a full 74 per cent in the first ten months of 2022. Natural resources from Russia in particular, which are being purchased less and less by the EU, are now seemingly being bought up by Georgia. Georgian imports of oil and petroleum products from Russia increased by a full 179 per cent year-on-year. Increased purchases of Russian natural resources, which are now no longer being taken by the West, naturally continue to boost the Russian economy.

This brings us to the next factor in Moscow's economy remaining relatively stable despite extensive sanctions. Russia is one of the most resource-rich countries in the world. The reality is that if the West stops buying natural resources from Russia, other countries will. Even though Russian commodity prices have fallen in the face of sanctions, causing a deficit for the Russian state budget, it is true that Russia will always find new buyers, thus keeping the Russian economy at a certain level. The main buyers of Russian crude oil now include China and India, which

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now buy 91 per cent of Russian crude oil. Turkey also bought twice as much crude oil from Russia in March 2023 as it did a year earlier. In addition, mainly North African, Middle Eastern and Latin American countries increased their imports of Russian crude oil.

Despite the sanctions, many of these Russian natural resources make it back to the European market. India, for example, processes Russian crude oil into diesel fuel, which is then further exported to the EU. Even more unpleasant for the EU should be the suspicion that Russian gas is being exported to the EU via Azerbaijan. Brussels proudly announced a new gas deal with the Azerbaijani regime in 2022 to become less dependent on Russian gas. At about the same time, however, Baku concluded a gas deal with Moscow, indicating that Russian gas is likely to find its way to the EU via Azerbaijan.

The Russian autarky

Even when it comes to Russia's basic supplies, there should be no illusions. Russia remains the largest country in the world in terms of territory with a variety of natural resources and climatic zones. Due to its natural resources and the territorial vastness of the country, Russia's basic supply is secure. Rather, the potential is not yet exhausted. Already in 2014 when the first sanctions were imposed on Russia due to the annexation of Crimea, some economists commented that the sanctions may be "in the long run, the best thing that can happen to Russia". This is because they strengthened domestic production and thus the domestic market. Indeed, prior to 2014 the Russian economy relied heavily on imports coming from the West. Since the sanctions on western food, Russia has significantly expanded its potential and become more self-sufficient. Food production sprouted like mushrooms in Russia after 2014.

However, the sanctions that have now been imposed in 2022 affect other areas, such as the IT sector or financial markets. Russia will not find comparable substitutes here as quickly, and yet these sanctions do not hit Russia as hard as expected. On the one hand, Russia has once again made itself relatively self-sufficient with the *Mir* payment system. On the other hand, Russia has made itself independent from the influence of western currencies by basing its National Wealth Fund on gold and the Chinese yuan. With this step, Russia has clearly contributed to the appreciation of the yuan and de-dollarisation in an increasingly multipolar world order.

Last but not least, not all western companies have disappeared from the Russian market, as originally announced. The Ivy League University Yale maintains a list of companies that are still active in the Russian market and their number is not insig-

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nificant. Even those that have left Russia have often been rebranded by Russian entrepreneurs. The most famous examples are probably a large number of McDonald's branches, now rebranded *Vkusno i Tochka* (Tasty and That's It), and the new Russian soft drink brands Cool Cola, Fancy and Street, which come packaged in a very similar way to the US originals Coca Cola, Fanta and Sprite. Both the foreign companies that are still active in Russia, and the Russian copies of western brands, naturally boost consumption and thus Russia's economy.

Sanctions and Russia's war in Ukraine

Declarations about imminent state bankruptcy in Russia therefore have more to do with western wishful thinking than with reality. Especially because of its many natural resources, Russia will always find buyers on the international markets who are not as concerned about the war in Ukraine as their counterparts in Europe. But how to deal with these facts in the future without deluding ourselves?

The stated goal of the sanctions is to end Russia's war in Ukraine. In the short term, this will probably not meet with success. Yet, as long as the western sanctions do not harm the West more than they harm Russia, according to economists such as Alexander Libman, they can be expected to limit Russia's financial sources to wage this war in the medium to long term. In addition, the EU's 11th sanctions package will seek to close various loopholes in sanctions evasion, so that no war-related IT technology can be used in Russian war equipment. After all, what will ultimately decide the outcome of the war is not the sanctions, but the weapons on the battlefield. EE

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From workers to refugees to workers again

What's next for Ukrainians in the EU?

LESIA DUBENKO

Europe's active response to the millions of Ukrainian refugees who fled Russia's invasion has often been viewed as a positive approach to migration policy. Despite this, the future remains uncertain for these new residents. Government decisions across the continent will now play a role in deciding not just the economic future of the EU but Ukraine itself.

Russia's decision to launch a full-scale war in Ukraine has resulted in millions of Ukrainians fleeing the country via its western border. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of April 2023, 8,174,189 people have been recorded as refugees from Ukraine across Europe. Exactly 5,044,039 of them registered for temporary protection schemes in Europe. Some have already found employment. Others are struggling to do so due to a host of barriers. This is despite the EU's recurring mantra of the bloc's ageing population and the need to attract an external workforce. Meanwhile, Ukraine is facing a possible shortage of people in the long term for rebuilding the war-torn country.

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"Ukrainianised" EU

In spite of the widespread emigration of Ukrainians already in the 19th century to North and Latin America – as well as the mass repatriation of Jews to Israel in the late 1980s – Ukrainian migration flows have only recently become subject to scrutiny. Traced to the 1990s, the greatest emphasis in studies is placed on the Ukrainian workforce abroad that emerged when Ukrainian women went to work in Italy as caretakers and menial workers. This was a move much demonised in Ukrainian society, with the then President Leonid Kuchma suggesting that these women are sex workers.

Over the years, the host countries for the Ukrainian workforce varied due to the accession of the Visegrad countries to the EU in 2004 – a popular destination for menial workers and traders alike especially from western Ukraine. Russia, the top country for Ukrainian workers for many years, served as an alternative, especially – but not exclusively – for people from the eastern regions. The situation drastically changed after Russia instigated a war in Donbas and seized the Crimean Peninsula in 2014. As a result of both political reasons and restricted transportation means – Ukraine terminated direct flight connections with Russia in 2015 – Ukrainians from all over the country once again have started to look to the Visegrad states and beyond.

According to the 2021 International Centre for Migration Policy Development report "Ukrainian Labour Migration to the EU State of Play, Challenges and Solutions", during 2014–19, Poland, Czechia, Hungary, Slovakia and Lithuania were the top EU destinations for Ukrainians. These countries issued all types of permits that range from three to 12 months mostly for seasonal and menial work. Some of these involved a special visa for countries with stricter immigration rules.

While the outbreak of COVID-19 slowed down Ukrainian labour migration, it did not fully stop it.

While the outbreak of COVID-19 slowed down Ukrainian labour migration, it did not fully stop it, as exemplified by the 2020 Atlantic Council article "Ukraine needs a whole new approach to labour migration." The trend continued in 2021, as 600,000 Ukrainian workers left the country, the highest number in 11 years. As a result of such migration flows, already before the full-scale war, the presence of Ukrainians, documented and undocumented alike, in the EU was sizeable. According to the *Economist*, in Poland the Ukrainian diaspora has reached 1.4 million people, while in Italy it now amounts to 250,000. This is one of the likely reasons why the EU's response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis was coordinated and strong in comparison, for example, with the 2015 refugee influx.

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When Russia launched the full-scale war on February 24th 2022, millions of people, foremost women and children, crossed Ukraine's western border with Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania. Different agencies provide slightly varying data as to the number of people registered in each EU member state. However, the consensus is that the main host countries include Poland, Germany, Czechia, Italy, Spain and Bulgaria, with Poland and Germany hosting over a million Ukrainian refugees each.

As of April 2023, over five million Ukrainian refugees have registered for temporary protection schemes in Europe.

To deal with such a great influx, on March 4th 2022, the EU home affairs ministers unanimously agreed to activate the Temporary Protection Directive, which allows Ukrainians (as well as some other groups of people defined in the document) to receive a temporary residence permit, the right to work and live, social protection, the right to receive asylum in the future, and the right to return to Ukraine anytime. As of April 2023, 5,044,039 Ukrainian refugees have registered for temporary protection schemes in Europe, receiving the right to work.

Some of them have already found employment. Data from the European Central Bank indicates that in Estonia, around 55 per cent of working-age Ukrainian refugees with temporary protection have found a job, while in Lithuania this share is around 50 per cent. In Poland, nearly 750,000 Ukrainians have been employed, while in Germany an estimated 65,000 Ukrainians have found employment. Meanwhile, the Polish Economic Institute revealed that almost 14,000 businesses were created by Ukrainians in Poland in the first nine months of 2022.

As a result of such prompt employment, some countries like Poland, Czechia and Germany saw slightly reduced unemployment rates thanks to the newcomers, as noted by the Ukrainian think tank "Europe without Barriers" in a special report.

The mantra of an ageing EU

Labour migration from Ukraine to the EU, as well as from other non-EU states, did not happen by chance. It is the outcome of societal dynamics in the Union that have long been the focus of researchers and politicians alike due to the dwindling working-age population. In 2020 Germany, which belongs to the group of countries with stricter immigration policies, relaxed its work permit rules in the hope of attracting much-needed professionals, including highly-skilled ones, from third countries via dedicated platforms. In 2021, Volt Europa's Member of the European Parliament Damian Boeselager wrote an op-ed for *Euractiv* titled "Don't forget

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the 95% – why Europe needs to seize opportunities of labour migration," where he indicated that an ageing society will result in huge skill shortages and hamper the EU's productivity and economic relevance in the world. "Over the next 30 years, our active workforce will decrease by almost 50 million," he indicated.

Already in March 2022, Poland introduced a simplified procedure to grant Ukrainian refugees easier access to the labour market.

The latest assessments only serve to reinforce the narrative. According to Eurostat, the EU's statistical arm, the proportion of people of working age in the EU is shrinking, while the relative number of those retired is expanding. The agency states that the share of older people in the total population is poised to increase significantly in the coming decades.

The ramifications of these changes are already felt throughout the bloc and are currently best exemplified in France, where protests against pension reform, which looks to increase the retirement age, have been ongoing since mid-January. The retirement age in other EU member states is slated to increase too, with Sweden, for example, planning to raise the age limit in accordance with increasing life expectancy starting in 2026.

To tackle the problem and preserve, among other things, the robust social welfare systems in Europe, in January, the *EU Observer* reported that the European Commission is looking to launch of a new mechanism encouraging migration from third countries to the EU, hoping to mitigate regional and industry-specific labour shortages. Yet the prospects of this endeavour are questionable as it is becoming increasingly clear that not all EU states, in spite of worrying societal dynamics, are ready to truly tackle the problem. The case of the Ukrainian refugees in the EU only serves to underscore it.

While it is both true that many Ukrainians have been working in the EU for decades and others have found employment after February 24th, it is also true that only some EU countries chose to capitalise on the potential of such a great influx of people who, as noted by the OECD, have an educational profile, existing social networks and immediate access to employment. Already in March 2022, Poland introduced a simplified procedure – with employers simply having to notify the authorities of their employment – to grant Ukrainian refugees easier access to the labour market. According to Poland's Family and Social Policy Minister Marlena Maląg, this process has already been used over 900,000 times.

In Germany, which also hosts over a million Ukrainian refugees, the situation is not as straightforward. Although in June 2022, Germany's Federal Labour Agency reported almost 900,000 job vacancies, especially in transport and logistics, sales, service, and healthcare, language and the hesitation to employ people who are in

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the country for a short period of time is proving to be a serious obstacle. Furthermore, to work in a regulated industry in Germany, for example, as a truck driver or pharmacist, applicants need to have their professional qualifications recognised.

In France, according to Didier Leschi, who heads the French authority in charge of hosting refugees, the situation is likewise complicated, with access to housing and employment remaining arduous. This is more so due to the language barrier.

Other states also seem to view Ukrainian nationals as only temporary residents. Svitlana Odynets, a migration researcher who is part of a University of Nottingham project in Poland, Romania, and the UK that looks to compare policies and practices of integrating displaced Ukrainians, says that Sweden is one of the main countries in this regard. In 2022, in her article for *Sydsvenskan* titled "Give Ukrainians a chance to contribute to society," she emphasised the advantages of a better and long-term strategy for integrating Ukrainians into Swedish society that would be both beneficial for the host country and the refugees. Asked why Sweden is not keen on doing it, she responds that the current government – led by the centre-right Ulf Kristersson with backing from the far-right anti-immigration party Sweden Democrats – is focused on integrating people who are already in the country rather than the newcomers who are often leaving. Data from the Swedish Migration Agency confirms that while around 50,000 Ukrainians came to Sweden after February 2022, many of them are already leaving for other destinations in the hope of better integration conditions and job opportunities.

> Some EU states seem to view Ukrainian nationals as only temporary residents.

What about Ukraine?

It is unclear how the EU and the member states will go about integrating Ukrainians under the Temporary Directive or some other means, including member states' national legislation or attracting a new workforce from non-EU member states, which is arduous due to paperwork, waiting times and language barriers. Still, for Ukraine the discussed migration flows play an equally paramount role. Undoubtedly, labour migration has had a positive impact in some areas. According to World Bank Data, during the period of 2014–19, Ukraine received 67.914 billion US dollars in remittances, with this source of income accounting, on average, for 9.5 per cent of annual GDP.

This, alongside other types of migration such as study permits, also resulted in the transfer of skills and the less measurable yet nonetheless tangible transfer of

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values – an aspect that is likely to have played a serious role in changing Ukrainian societal dynamics that have often involved Russia, which views Ukraine through a colonial lens. However, while these advantages certainly carry weight, Ukraine cannot afford in the long term for people not to return from refuge abroad. To that end, some data is worrying.

According to a recent survey carried out by several bodies, including the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, 37 per cent of Ukrainian refugees would like to stay permanently or at least a few years. Though the percentage of those who want to return is almost similar – 34 per cent – this does not bode well for Ukraine, as 37 per cent means that roughly 340,000 currently living in Germany people do not wish to go home.

> Thirty-seven per cent of Ukrainian refugees in Germany would like to stay permanently or at least a few years.

Data from a survey by the Polish employment agency Gremi Personal show somewhat similar results. While 55 per cent of Ukrainians are planning to return home, with the majority stating that they will do so after their country's victory, 38 per cent plan to stay in Poland while another seven per cent are planning to relocate. Relying on remittances as a means of funding the post-war reconstruction of Ukraine, though viable, is not optimal. Ukrainian society is a somewhat mystical creature, not least because the last nationwide census was carried out in 2001 and is thus long outdated. However, it is well known that Ukraine suffers from low birth rates and low life expectancy.

Furthermore, before the full-scale war, the forecast was that by the end of 2030, the number of working-age Ukrainians will have shrunk by three million people. The war losses are likely to further increase that number as young men and women continue to die on the front. With that being said, we return to the question of what's next for Ukrainians in the EU?

Will Ukrainians return?

Although there is no clear answer, several factors need to be considered. First, temporary protection is obviously not permanent and can be extended to up to three years. If Ukraine indeed manages to liberate its territories or the intensity of combat is reduced, then temporary protection may be revoked. It is unclear what status the remaining Ukrainians will possess and for how long this will be the case. It is also uncertain how easy it will be to gain this new legal status. The German government's recent endeavour to relax citizenship rules does, however, suggest that at least some EU member states are mulling over these issues.

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Second, even though over 8,174,189 Ukrainians are now in the EU, many indeed have returned. According to the UNHCR, since February 24th 2022, 20,421,761 Ukrainians crossed the border, meaning that at least some proportion of people has returned home. If there is momentum for return, there is a chance that only a small proportion will choose to stay abroad. Finally, once the war is over, reconstruction and investment will inevitably take place, which translates into jobs, and this prospect may heavily entice Ukrainians to come back.

Whether it plays out like this or not is unknown right now. One thing, however, is clear: both the EU and Ukraine will have a hard time fixing their economies in the long run. EE

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Russia's golden thousand and the last days

TOMASZ KAMUSELLA

Russia's propaganda, which is largely aimed at the so-called "global south", denigrates the West as degenerate, poor, and being in "satan's power"; while Vladimir Putin is portrayed as their representative and saviour. Never mind the fact that the Russian onslaught on Ukraine triggered a worldwide food crisis and made automobile transport and education once again unavailable for hundreds of millions in the global south.

Walking directly into the defunct Soviet Union's ideological worn-out shoes, neo-imperial Russia of today poses itself as a friend of the poor and oppressed masses outside the West. The Kremlin's top rashists criticise the "golden billion" (золотой миллиард *zolotoi milliard*), or the West's inhabitants who enjoy peace and prosperity across the rich global north. On this platform, the Russian government usurps for Moscow the right to speak on behalf of the world's poor and huddling seven billion, living the so-called global south. But who is Russia's golden thousand (золотая тысяча *zolotaia tysiacha*) whom this rhetoric benefits and who literally owns Russia?

Moscow: abusing the global south

It is comforting for the Kremlin to propose that seven billion people support the unjustified Russian war on peaceful Ukraine. It does not matter that the claim

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is unsubstantiated and hardly believable. The rashist propaganda is for domestic consumption in Russia. All is fine, as long as the leading countries of the global south do not confront the Kremlin on this mendacious opinion and usurpation rolled in one. Even better, leaders of the global south have not been asking any uncomfortable questions about how much the war costs Russia and their own people. After all, the Russian onslaught on Ukraine triggered a worldwide food crisis, which made automobile transport and education once again unavailable for hundreds of millions in the global south, while spelling certain death through the starvation for millions.

In such a situation, should non-western leaders continue to fawn over Moscow at the expense of their own populations? Who cares? Dictators do. In the wake of the devastating pandemic, the war and alimentation crisis have contributed to the worldwide plunge in democratic accountability and to the strengthening of autocracies and dictatorial tendencies across the global south. Autocrats of all stripes have the time of their lives. The fellow Russian dictator aspires to become the world's leader of the global south's autocrats, and militarily comes to the aid of his colleagues endangered by democracy. Thankful dictators kowtow to Moscow and pay extra premiums on Russian mercenaries and their bloody services, further impoverishing and endangering their countries' inhabitants.

Staying in power is worth it, until death parts the dictators from the throne. In this approach they closely emulate the Russian president-de facto-for-life who behaves like a tsar, and whom many Russians would like to see crowned as tsar. Absolute power corrupts absolutely. It often wins high approval ratings for dictators, all and sundry being hopeful that "he" – always, an alpha male (no women among dictators) – would give them richer alms than to others. The life is even better for a given dictatorship's governing elite, who in practice own the state and rob the inhabitants both of their work's fruits and prospects for a better future. It is the main political and economic mechanism that prevents the poor of the global south from joining the West's "golden billion". Democracy breaks this vicious circle of autocracy, and offers a perspective of stability and prosperity, which, for instance, came true in the case of South Korea.

Despite Russia's propaganda that denigrates the West as degenerate, poor, being in "satan's power" or without any future, refugees and economic migrants from the global south head for Europe and North America, *not* Russia. Actually, with Belarus's complicity and willing assistance, the Kremlin profits from mostly Middle Eastern migrants, who seek better life in Europe. Russia enables and weaponises these migrants for not so hybrid rashist attacks against the European Union and NATO. The goal is to destabilise Europe and undermine democracy by turning voters to far-right populists and autocrats on the Kremlin's bankroll.

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Until the Russian invasion of Ukraine, every year 100,000 to 400,000 migrants came annually to Russia. But almost exclusively all of them stemmed from the poorest post-Soviet (CIS, Commonwealth of Independent States) countries, from Moldova and Armenia to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The number of *all* migrants from non-post-Soviet (non-CIS) countries to Russia is paltry. It varies between 10,000 to 50,000 each year. Any substantial flow of non-CIS migrants to the tune of a couple of thousands, arrived only from the two fellow and still communist states of China and Vietnam. Neither do refugees from friendly Syria nor nearby Afghanistan consider Russia (or Belarus) as attractive destinations. They realise that it would be swapping a known autocracy for a foreign one, meaning even worse prospects of achieving a normal (that is, western-like) standard of living. In contrast, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a million (and counting) Russians have fled their country, fearing instability, poverty and draft.

Let's talk money

Russia is spending around one billion US dollars per day on the ongoing war which causes damages of half a billion dollars in Ukraine daily. During the initial months of the Russian invasion, despite the sanctions, each day the Kremlin continued receiving from Europe one billion dollars in payments for oil and gas. Hence, the rashist regime could easily afford to wage the destructive war on Ukraine. However, by mid-2023, the daily stream of petrodollars had shrunk by two-thirds to $0.3 billion. For a while it will not matter, as the Kremlin still has at its disposal the piggy bank of the Russian National Wealth Fund with the holdings of $200 billion (as of August 2022) to fall back on.

Had the Russian president decided to spend this financial spree on his own people, each Russian citizen could be handed a cheque of $150 every second day, or $2,200 monthly, meaning $27,000 per year. A family of four, with two children, on top of their salaries, would receive $108,000 per year! Meanwhile, the average monthly salary just skirts $800 in present-day Russia. Taking the aforementioned family of four as a point reference, the Kremlin spends on the war three times more than the median income per family member in a relatively well-to-do Russian household. At the same time, a fifth of Russians (28 million) have no access to indoor toilets or running water. What is more, 3,400 Russian schools do *not* enjoy toilets on the premises. The construction expense of a good quality public toilet in Russia amounts to $14,000. Hence, the paltry 50 million dollars would be sufficient to ameliorate the dire sanitary situation across the *glubinka* (глубинка, or provincial Russia) by providing each Russian school with a state-of-the-art indoor

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toilet. The financial outlay needed for this not so monumental a task equates what Moscow now spends on a mere *one hour* of waging the war in Ukraine.

Yet, maybe by skimping on its own population Russia provides more development aid to the poor and friendly countries across the global south? Prior to the Russian attack on Ukraine, the Kremlin earmarked around one billion dollars for this purpose yearly. Hence, per day Russia spends as much on the war as it would spend on helping poor countries per year. Moscow's war price tag for the whole year is as much as Russia would be ready to spend on its non-Western friends for three centuries and a half. At the same time, the West – or the OECD countries – distribute $186 billion in development aid annually. With 28 times fewer inhabitants than Russia, Finland contributes for this purpose $1.5 billion, or 50 per cent more than the mighty Russian Federation of 11 time zones. Russia likes criticising Britain and the United States as the "rotten core" of the world's selfish "golden billion". Yet, the two countries alone spend, respectively, 15 and 50 times more than Russia development aid for the global south.

Russia's own divisions

If, in reality, Moscow does so little for the world's seven billion poor living outside the West, who then profits from all the largesse? The answer is the "new Russians" or Russia's new rich. Who are they? Russian society is a steep pyramid. The basic ethno-racialised division is between ethnic Russians (*Russkie*) and ethnically non-Russian citizens (*Rossiiane*). Those who live in the European section of the country see themselves as better than those "exiled" to the inhospitable but much larger Asian part that accounts for more than three-quarters of the country's entire territory. The cleavage between urbanites and the countryside is complicated by towns that are village-like. On paper three-quarters of Russians live in towns and cities. But in the Russian view of things, only Moscow and St Petersburg are deemed to be "real cities". With 21 million and six million inhabitants, respectively, in their urban areas, both the current and former capital account for a quarter of the country's population. The Muscovians and Petersburgians lumped together almost equate Asian Russia's populace of 37 million.

The Muscovians and Petersburgians lumped together almost equate Asian Russia's populace of 37 million.

Living in one of the two cities, enjoying well-paid jobs, being fully literate in Russian and at best praying to the Orthodox god is the first indispensable step towards becoming part of the Russian elite. Then what follows is a daunting vertical

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socioeconomic climb through an almost impossible to navigate maze of power, fraught with criminal and political dangers. The pyramid's top is pointy and tiny. In the times of tsarist Russia, the elite of nobles amounted to 1.2 million people, or a full one per cent of the inhabitants in the then Russian Empire. Present-day Russia's political-cum-economic elite, including their immediate family members, count not more than 4,000 members, or a mere 0.003 per cent of Russia's population of 145 million. But the genuine movers and shakers are the group's 1,000 paterfamilias. Women need not apply. "Traditional values", that is the patriarchy which underpins the system and rules supreme, is an "example" to be emulated by the entire world.

Present-day Russian elite count not more than 4,000 members, or a mere 0.003 per cent of Russia's population.

These alpha males of business, politics and the military constitute neo-imperialist Russia's "golden thousand". The convinced rasishsts govern and own the country. These individuals, their services and companies run Russia and enable the Russian president to conduct his pet war against Ukraine. Real competition for power and influence, becomingly red in claw and tooth, takes place only among the golden thousand's members. A single top dog at the head of the pack, or the Russian president, keeps all the golden thousand under control, tamed. Stop toeing the line and you are dead, alongside your whole family. Each member of the pack is at the ready to tear at another's throat. Everyone is waiting and pines for this moment when he may get a rare chance to replace the current top dog. No hostages are taken in this continuous battle for the throne. Expect no mercy. It is a world of stratospheric riches and lavish living on the monies stolen from the rest of the Russians. To live it you need to gamble your own life and your kin's. With this war on Ukraine the dice has been thrown again. Expect the unexpected in Russia, but not more than a reshuffle at the top.

The world's sole future?

After the Kremlin-ordered attack on Ukraine, the West almost immediately sanctioned all of Russia's golden thousand. Their names have been conveniently gathered and made known in numerous online reference databases. They emulate nobility catalogues of yesteryear. Yet, then nobility obliged, while now notoriety does. At present, the lists of sanctioned individuals increasingly cover the golden thousand's family members and consiglieri to the tune of 10,000 individuals. Further, 17,000 of the rashist golden thousand's other enablers and collaborators of

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secondary importance are now under investigation to decide whether their activities and crimes require sanctioning.

With the war against Ukraine, the golden thousand, led by the Russian president, have taken on the "golden billion" with little thought spared for the sad fate dealt to Russia's population at large or the poor seven billion across the global south. According to the Kremlin's ruler, life is overrated. Nuclear war and the entailed destruction of the world is fine with him, because in this line of thinking all (Orthodox) Russians will go to heaven, while others (non-Orthodox infidels) will die like animals. The Russian Orthodox Church fully agrees and supports the Kremlin's rashist civilisation of death. According to the Patriarch of Moscow, whoever opposes the Russian president and his war belongs to the "forces of evil".

Hopefully, unthinking friends of Russia (aka useful idiots) in the global south may take note. The Kremlin does not care about them – these seven billion poor who hope for a better life (at best in the global north). With nonchalant abandon, Russia's golden thousand abuse the global south for Russian propaganda's needs, as a mere pawn in this self-perceived eschatological in scale stand-off with the West and its supposed "golden billion". Meanwhile, Russia's golden thousand fully agree with the Russian president that Russia has a natural right to be a superpower and that the world does not deserve to exist, if it does not feature a great Russian empire. Eventually, all of the globe must see light and join Holy Mother Russia, this worldwide country, whose borders are limitless, as once upon a time Lenin planned. That is the crux of what the not so novel neo-imperial ideology of rashism is about, a new all-Russian world. EE

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Can North Macedonia survive another painful sacrifice?

JOVAN GJORGOVSKI

Five years ago, North Macedonia and Greece signed the ground-breaking Prespa Agreement, paving the way for North Macedonia's accession to NATO and the European Union. However, the provisions of the agreement proved to be difficult for the Macedonians to accept. Now, Bulgaria has erected new barriers by vetoing North Macedonia's progress towards EU membership unless it agrees to Bulgaria's equally challenging prerequisites, further adding to the Macedonians' hardships.

Five years have passed since the signing of the Prespa Agreement between North Macedonia and Greece. It was, and still is an agreement that left no one indifferent, Macedonian or Greek alike, and the consequences, both positive and negative, are felt to this day. The agreement was praised throughout the world as a visionary, modern and progressive way to solve the name issue, which plagued bilateral relations between the two countries for almost three decades. It was heralded as a way for North Macedonia to continue on the Euro-Atlantic path, which was previously blocked by Greece. However, five years since the promises of a bright and shining European future, the country is still in the Brussels waiting room.

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The political price of the Prespa Agreement

The signing of the document in June 2018 was followed by a feast and a celebratory mood on the shores of Lake Prespa. The then Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras even described the atmosphere as something akin to a wedding – although it was unclear who the bride was. Tsipras and former Macedonian Prime Minister Zoran Zaev jointly received a number of awards for their roles in reaching the of agreement. Almost all politicians from the European Union and NATO were elated with the news. The former EU commissioner for enlargement Johannes Hahn called the agreement historic, while NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg welcomed it as part of the path for North Macedonia to join the Alliance. Even Boris Johnson, the British foreign minister at that time, called it "fantastic news".

The agreement, however, had to still be ratified by referendum in North Macedonia, a referendum with an ambiguous question: "Are you in favour of EU and NATO membership by accepting the agreement between the Republic of Macedonia and the Republic of Greece?" The referendum failed to reach the necessary consensus, but nevertheless the government decided to push through the name change by changing the constitution. Visits from high-level EU politicians followed, all in an attempt to convince the opposition and the people to accept the process. Stoltenberg, Hahn, Federica Mogherini and even Angela Merkel came to Skopje. Promises of a European future from European and even US politicians were regularly made. In the end, the government succeeded in gathering enough support in parliament, and with the votes of eight opposition MPs the amendments passed. Many have called this a rotten deal, since some of those that voted were and still are facing charges for crime and corruption.

> If the goal of North Macedonia's name change was NATO and EU membership, then the agreement can be judged as only a partial success.

The vote was preceded by protests that were at times violent. One of the leaders of a pro-Russian fringe political party even climbed on top of an armoured truck with a Russian flag in his hands in an effort to convince the protesters to side with Moscow. The next day Zaev, the former prime minister, declared at a press conference "Long live Macedonia, long live North Macedonia", as a fait accompli. The name of the country was changed and the agreement went into force several months later, in February 2019 when both North Macedonia and Greece notified the United Nations of the agreement's completion. Greece was even the first country to ratify the protocol for the country's entry into NATO.

Yet, if one of the goals of the name change was both NATO and EU membership, then the agreement can be judged as only a partial success. While North

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North Macedonia's Prime Minister Dimitar Kovachevski during his visit to Bulgaria in 2022. Bulgaria remains the largest barrier on North Macedonia's EU path and demands that Skopje takes measures which many argue will have a negative impact on the Macedonian identity.

Macedonia has joined NATO, the country is still as far from EU membership as it was before. The people behind the agreement, Zaev and Tsipras, paid a political price and are no longer in power. Now, five years and several vetoes later, North Macedonia is preparing another change to its constitution for its EU future, and the start of this process coincides with the anniversary of the Prespa Agreement. High-level visits are already taking place, and in all likelihood, they will continue until the country changes its constitution once again. The only difference is that this time good words and promises might not convince the populace.

The "traumatic process" and the benefits from it

A lot has changed in the five years that followed the Prespa Agreement and many still have mixed feelings about it. It lifted the Greek veto for North Macedonia and allowed the country to join NATO, something that has added value since

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the start of Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine. Above all, it recognised the Macedonian language and its national identity. This was no longer an issue for Greece, and the two neighbours who for years viewed each other as adversaries, became allies. For the first time a Macedonian language centre was opened in Greece and a Greek court recently rejected lawsuits from far-right groups demanding its abolition, citing the articles of the Prespa Agreement. In this sense, it was a big win for the progressive powers in both countries. However, this was not just about language or identity, the economic impact was also immense. Greece is one of the country's largest trade partners and is ranked among the top three investors in North Macedonia. Five years on, the two countries enjoy good and amicable relations, something which was almost unimaginable in the past.

The process of the name change, however, was quite traumatic for a lot of Macedonians. Since its signing, the agreement has touched every inch of Macedonian society. It was not just the name that was changed, but a whole way of life. History and geography books, birth certificates, licence plates and even money are now different. Almost immediately the public institutions that had "Macedonian" in their name were changed. For instance, the "Macedonian Opera and Ballet" become the "National Opera and Ballet", and "Macedonian Television" became "National Television". Buildings that had "Macedonian" on their façade even had the respective letters taken off them in public, creating a lot of anger in society.

At the same time that this process was going on, road signs in Greece still point towards FYROM (the old abbreviation for North Macedonia) instead of using the new name, North Macedonia. "Skopia" is still the capital of the country, which some Greeks use as a derogatory term for Macedonians, whom they call "Skopianos". Many politicians and journalists, myself included, asked why this has not changed? The answer from the politicians in Athens was that it was down to the local authorities and bureaucracy. Bear in mind that Greece is amongst the top places for Macedonians to spend their summer holidays, hence the road signs are viewed as offensive. While all this was happening, another problem was growing on the horizon, and the possible solution coincides with the five-year anniversary of the Prespa Agreement.

Constitutional amendments

North Macedonia and Bulgaria have a Friendship Agreement that was signed before the Prespa Agreement, and since then some Bulgarian politicians have complained that Greece got a better deal vis-à-vis North Macedonia – as if it was a sort of competition. Bulgarian politicians claimed that the friendship agreement

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was not respected by Skopje, and for that they have vetoed North Macedonia's EU accession negotiations. To lift the Bulgarian veto, the French developed a compromise – the so-called "French proposal".

The French proposal puts this bilateral issue in the negotiating framework for EU accession. Hence, in order for North Macedonia to continue on its EU membership path, it has to place protections for ethnic Bulgarians in its constitution. The passing of the constitutional amendments, as mentioned above, coincides with the anniversary of the Prespa Agreement. However, unlike Prespa, this is seen by the majority of the population as pure blackmail.

A recent report from Freedom House found that only 56 per cent of Macedonians saw EU membership as a benefit for the country. An inquiry by the Macedonian Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" yielded similar results. According to the institute, support for EU membership has fallen to 64 per cent, with almost 80 per cent of Macedonians against constitutional changes even if that means stopping on the EU accession path. The EU and the United States are still viewed as the country's primary partners, but Serbia, Russia and Turkey are right there next to them. According to a different poll by Eurothink, most Macedonians consider Bulgaria as their biggest enemy. Greece, on the other hand, is not even in the top ten and is seen as a favourable partner. The data from inquiries like this show that in the eyes of the public, the EU still cannot retrieve the credibility that it lost after the vetoes from Bulgaria. The results also show the inability of Brussels to keep to its word and start accession negotiations with North Macedonia after the Prespa Agreement.

Only 56 per cent of Macedonians see EU membership as a benefit for the country.

The key problem is that no one can guarantee that the Bulgarian demands will ever stop. As mentioned above, the promises from the past were not kept. This time it feels like giving an unfaithful girlfriend another chance. Many in North Macedonia fear that changing the constitution again might open a Pandora's box for further Bulgarian demands.

Is this fear justified? On the one hand the EU cannot risk another disappointment, which would impact the whole Western Balkans. On the other hand, Bulgaria in the past two years has had five elections and four caretaker governments. The only winner in this situation is Russia, since the unstable political environment is ripe for Russian malign influence. The election results show just that. The pro-Russian, anti-NATO and anti-EU political party "Renewal" has doubled its votes in just several months. Supporters of this political party recently attacked the EU's office in Sofia for its support to Ukraine. The party is led by Kostadin Kostadinov, a politician who openly denies the Macedonian nation and language, calling it a

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construct of Stalin and Tito. This is not very different to the rhetoric coming out of the Kremlin regarding Ukraine.

The difficult road ahead

The road ahead for North Macedonia on its EU integration path is indeed difficult, especially if Macedonian politicians make it that way. After all the sacrifices made regarding the implementation of the Prespa Agreement, the population is weary of new compromises. The feeling is that "we have given enough", and the possibility of new constitutional changes is viewed with suspicion. Unlike the Prespa Agreement, this time, the votes in parliament might be difficult to find. The agreement with Greece was indeed historic; but in the end, it had only partial success. It did however show that two countries can achieve a compromise even over an issue that some might consider a matter of life and death. It can be, and it is, used as a good example for countries in the Balkans as a way to overcome disagreements, especially in the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue.

Whatever the legacy of the Prespa Agreement is in the future, its value is even more appreciated since the war in Ukraine. The hope is that it can be a good guide for the rest of the countries of the Western Balkans, showing that talking and making compromises on difficult issues can have a positive outcome. Yet for that to happen, the EU must be present and stand by its word. FE

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The Balkans face a harrowing wake-up call over its fragile cybersecurity

BOJAN STOJKOVSKI

Recent cyber-attacks against institutions throughout the Western Balkans have demonstrated a serious vulnerability that exists throughout the region. As a result, it has become clear that these countries now face a critical choice – either prioritise investments in the development and enhancement of cyber capacities or face much harsher consequences.

On a seemingly ordinary February day, the tranquillity of North Macedonia and its citizens was shattered, as the country fell victim to a harrowing cyber-attack which struck at the heart of its state-run Health Insurance Fund. The attack, for which authorities have yet to name a culprit, rippled through the healthcare system, plunging insured individuals into a state of vulnerability, devoid of vital medicine, while also leaving health workers without their hard-earned salaries.

The distressing incident that went on for days and weeks before being resolved revealed the alarming frailty of cybersecurity in North Macedonia. And it was not the first time that such an attack has taken place. A few years ago the country saw its election day disrupted by large-scale online attacks, which paralysed its state electoral commission and delayed the announcement of the official results.

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However, this small country is not the only one from the Western Balkans that has failed to deal with cyber-attacks targeting institutions. Last summer, neighbouring Albania and its critical digital infrastructure was heavily targeted by Iranian hackers. In September 2022, the website and the servers of the Bosnian parliament were brought down for more than two weeks. At the beginning of the year, Serbia's defence ministry became a target of the hacker collective Anonymous. Last September, Montenegro's government also suffered a massive attack that was allegedly carried out by pro-Russian hackers and crippled its online government information platforms.

Critical infrastructure under massive threats

Many of these cases show that the consequences of cyber-attacks can be staggering. They can disrupt financial systems, paralyse government operations, compromise sensitive data and undermine public trust in institutions. The interconnectedness of critical infrastructure and the reliance on digital systems have created fertile ground for cyber-criminals to exploit vulnerabilities and wreak havoc on a national scale.

Thus, in the face of increasingly innovative and sophisticated cyber threats almost on a daily basis, the Balkan countries now have a choice to make – either prioritise constant investments in the development and enhancement of security institutions' capacities, or face much harsher consequences. This process also includes strengthening the protection of digital infrastructure, recognising the evolving nature of cyber threats.

As the North Macedonia case illustrates, it only takes one attack to completely shake a nation to its core – and to nearly cause a complete collapse of a healthcare system. As each new cyber-attack unfolds, it exposes a widening chasm in these countries' cyber security infrastructure. The lack of robust defences and a coherent strategy to combat cyber threats highlights an urgent need for governments to take a stand when it comes to strengthening cyber security. At the same time, it is becoming imperative for the region to fortify its defences and bridge the gap between its current vulnerabilities and the ever-evolving tactics employed in the region by malicious actors such as Russia and Iran.

One glaring issue that demands immediate attention is the inadequacy of measures to protect sensitive data and critical systems. The recent onslaught of cyber-attacks across the region has also laid bare the vulnerability of these governments in safeguarding crucial information, leaving it susceptible to exploitation by various types of cyber-criminals. This revelation also warrants a comprehensive over-

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haul of existing protocols. For example, this could involve focusing on bolstering encryption mechanisms and enhancing access controls to prevent sensitive data from falling into the wrong hands.

Furthermore, Balkan governments must also urgently prioritise increasing cyber security awareness among both government and private sector entities, citizens included. The current landscape has also showcased a need for a unified effort to cultivate a culture of "cyber hygiene" and promoting a collective understanding of the evolving threat landscape.

A broader perspective

Although the focus here may be on individual countries like North Macedonia, a broader perspective is required to address the cybersecurity challenges faced by the entire region. Strategic investments in various areas can significantly enhance the collective resilience of Balkan nations against cyber threats. While equipping institutions with state-of-the-art technology and technical facilities is important, the key issue lies in securing and retaining high-quality specialised staff – a rare resource in itself, especially within the public sector. Therefore, investing in professional staff emerges as a crucial aspect in bolstering cybersecurity capabilities. The recruitment and education of cybersecurity specialists should be a priority for each of these countries.

Governments can incentivise and retain skilled personnel through attractive employment packages and develop comprehensive training programmes to bolster the cybersecurity skills of existing employees. By nurturing a highly competent workforce, the Balkan region can also cultivate a pool of experts capable of identifying and mitigating cyber dangers effectively.

> Investing in professional staff emerges as a crucial aspect in bolstering cybersecurity capabilities.

Strengthening cybersecurity capabilities also calls for the establishment of robust programmes and systems. This includes implementing security processes to identify vulnerabilities swiftly, regularly updating software and hardware, and conducting routine security audits. By proactively addressing vulnerabilities and patching them promptly, the Balkan region can fortify its cybersecurity defences and stay one step ahead of potential attackers.

Spreading awareness through targeted campaigns can also be a pivotal step in countering cybersecurity threats effectively. Educating the public, businesses and government workers about the risks and recommended practices is essential. A

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strong culture of cybersecurity awareness through comprehensive training programmes and well-designed campaigns can motivate and empower individuals and organisations to adopt proactive measures. In turn, a collective understanding of cybersecurity threats and promoting best practices will allow the Balkan region to elevate its overall cybersecurity posture. Finally, collaboration emerges as a vital pillar in the fight against cyber threats. The Balkan nations should actively pursue collaboration between the public and private sectors and foster international partnerships with organisations specialising in cybersecurity.

Using NATO's capacities and expertise

The escalating frequency and sophistication of the attacks have also underscored the urgent need for these countries to confront cybersecurity deficiencies head on. For the institutions that are at the forefront of dealing with such attacks, challenges now lie not only in restoring faith in the security of critical systems but also in adopting a proactive stance, bolstering cybersecurity practices and fostering a culture of resilience.

The escalating frequency and sophistication of attacks have underscored the urgent need to confront cybersecurity deficiencies.

Moreover, there is also the fact that most of the countries in the region are also a part of NATO. With the help of the Alliance, members such as North Macedonia, Albania or Montenegro must seize this opportunity to forge a robust cybersecurity framework and enable the protection of critical infrastructure. Recognising the significance of this region, various US agencies have also recently stepped forward to provide support on multiple occasions, as illustrated following the attacks on the Montenegrin government. Such collaborative efforts involve sharing information on malware, cybersecurity training, and joint exercises, presenting avenues for bilateral or multilateral cooperation.

In this sense, NATO can play a crucial role in assisting its Balkan members in this critical endeavour. Acknowledging the ever-evolving cyber landscape, NATO officially designated cyber as an operational domain in 2016 and has since made significant strides in developing centres and platforms that facilitate coordination and the sharing of cyber capabilities among member nations and partner countries. By leveraging collaborative mechanisms, the Alliance can actively support the Balkan nations in their efforts to strengthen cybersecurity through its expertise, resources and collective defence principles. The Balkan nations, in turn, stand

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to benefit greatly from NATO's support. By leveraging the expertise and resources available within the Alliance, they can strengthen their cybersecurity infrastructure, improve incident response capabilities and enhance their overall cybersecurity capacities.

Building long-term resilience

A collaborative approach would not only mitigate immediate risks but also build long-term resilience, enabling the Balkans to adapt to the evolving nature of cyber threats effectively. Another approach that the region could also take is to establish a unified protection framework for all government electronic services. This would involve agencies, ministries, local governments and any legal entity or state body operating within the region. One effective solution that could come out of this approach is the creation of state-wide Security Operation Centres (SOC) with a mixed ownership structure. These would favour the state at 51 per cent but remain open to collaboration with the private sector.

This SOC model would centralise and streamline cybersecurity efforts, enabling coordinated defence systems managed by the SOC's operating company. This approach has proven successful in various EU countries and can serve as an exemplary model for the Balkan region.

While recognising the importance of these alliances, it is evident that international cooperation in the field of cybersecurity remains limited, even among EU member states. The differences in legal frameworks, qualifications, and readiness levels pose obstacles to effective collaboration. The same goes for the Balkan countries and addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts to bridge gaps and establish common ground for information exchange and joint initiatives.

Moreover, understanding the frailties exposed by such attacks, these countries can emerge stronger, more resilient and better equipped to confront the ever-looming spectre of cyber threats that pervade our interconnected world. However, for now the scars of these attacks remain a stark reminder of the glaring vulnerabilities that persist within the region's cybersecurity landscape. EE

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How Fidesz's irredentism strains neighbourly relations

GABRIELA GREILINGER

For years, Hungary's Fidesz government under Viktor Orbán has employed historical revisionism and irredentist symbols in domestic politics. The notion of "Greater Hungary" and grievances over the loss of territories due to the Treaty of Trianon, as well as referring to it as a national trauma, are central to this. While the strategy may help Orbán domestically, it negatively affects Hungary's relationships with some neighbours.

"Greater Hungary", also known as "Historic Hungary", refers to the territory of the Kingdom of Hungary as part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire before the First World War. Today, the notion of Greater Hungary involves an irredentist political idea and refers to territories Hungary lost through the Paris Peace Treaty, in Hungary more commonly known as the 1920 Treaty of Trianon, which ended the First World War between the Allies and Hungary.

The so-called "Trianon Trauma" after the dissolution of the Kingdom of Hungary is an often-referenced cornerstone of Hungarian history, politics and identity. It expresses the sentiment of over three million Hungarians who suddenly found themselves in foreign lands due to the loss of two-thirds of Hungarian territory. While this experience left deep marks in Hungarian collective memory and traumatised an entire generation, it is important to note that the majority of the population in those lost territories was not Hungarian. Nonetheless, some of these regions are still home to Hungarian minorities today, who speak Hungarian and

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uphold Hungarian culture and traditions. As a result, a deep-seated feeling of responsibility for these Hungarian communities still exists.

Revision via commemoration

Already in the 1930s, irredentist, revisionist ideas and the desire to recover the lost territories were revived, leading Hungary to form an alliance with Nazi Germany in the Second World War. Although Hungary managed to temporarily regain some of its former territories, the end of the war led to the restoration of the borders laid out in Trianon. During the communist period, Trianon and the question of minorities in the neighbourhood disappeared from Hungary's political agenda. The issue resurfaced only after the fall of socialism.

The Trianon Trauma still serves Hungarian politicians today, more than 100 years later. Hungary's populist right-wing Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, in particular, exploits nostalgia around Trianon for his ethno-nationalist politics and political gains. By reinvigorating the trauma brought upon the Hungarian people in various ways, he not only perpetuates the nation's self-victimisation but furthermore ensures that Hungarians do not forget the perceived injustices done to them. The commemoration practices introduced by Fidesz are one stringent example of this.

In 2010, shortly after the Fidesz takeover, the Hungarian parliament introduced "National Unity Day" as a remembrance day to commemorate Trianon and its consequences for millions of Hungarian families. This day of "National Unity" is held annually on June 4th, the day the Trianon Treaty was signed. According to a government website, it "is a day of mourning and remembrance, and a historical lesson at the same time".

For the commemoration of the centenary of Trianon on June 4th 2020, church bells rang throughout the capital, while a moment of silence was held and public transport stopped at 4:30 in the afternoon. Additionally, the government commissioned the construction of a monument, the "Memorial of National Unity", that was placed near the Hungarian parliament. The construction consists of a downward-sloping 100-metre-long ramp, which represents the 100 years since the signing of the Treaty of Trianon, leading to an eternal flame. The black granite walls hold the names of around 13,000 places that formerly belonged to historical Hungary and have been lost.

Considering the memorial's triste and mournful aesthetic, it represents an exclusively Hungarian interpretation of the consequences of the Treaty of Trianon. Moreover, it sends a revisionist message that could be interpreted as a provocation to Hungary's neighbours, according to experts like the late Gáspár Miklós

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Tamás, who came from Transylvania and was part of the Hungarian minority in Romania. In an article in the Hungarian weekly *Life and Literature* (*Élet és Irodalom*), he pointed out the hypocrisy and one-sidedness of the interpretation of Trianon in Hungarian national debates, as well as the lack of focus on the root causes of Trianon. Furthermore, he explained that while June 4th has been a day of mourning in Hungary since 2010, it is a day of joy in Romania. This juxtaposition demonstrates the one-sided and exclusively Hungarian interpretation of Trianon in Hungarian commemoration practices and national debates.

Citizenship law

Besides the national commemoration and mourning over Trianon, the Fidesz government introduced other laws and practices that are emblematic of its revisionist, irredentist political idea of "Greater Hungary". Perhaps most controversial for Hungary's neighbours was the introduction of the new citizenship law.

Already during its first period in power from 1998 to 2002, the Fidesz party introduced the "status law", which granted special rights to ethnic Hungarian minorities and caused anger among Hungary's neighbours. After the renewed Fidesz takeover in 2010, the government once again attracted attention with the intro-

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duction of its citizenship law, according to which ethnic Hungarians abroad can now apply for Hungarian citizenship through a simplified procedure. Once they have received Hungarian citizenship, they are also allowed to vote in Hungarian elections, which they do – and overwhelmingly so for Fidesz.

The law's irredentist underpinnings caused alarm among Hungary's neighbours, however, the matter proved to be particularly contentious for Slovakia. Robert Fico, back then prime minister of Slovakia, argued that the law presented a security threat to the country and considered it an attempt to revise history. Romania, another EU member state, and Croatia, an EU candidate country at the time, reacted in a more placid way. Romania allows dual nationality and likewise provides Romanians in other states with the opportunity to obtain Romanian citizenship, thus rendering the issue less controversial.

Serbia is a special case in this regard, as it is an EU candidate state. Members of the Hungarian minority in Serbia who receive Hungarian citizenship thus subsequently have access to the EU single market. The same goes for ethnic Hungarians in Ukraine, who benefit from receiving Hungarian citizenship as they henceforth enjoy the EU's freedom of movement. Thus, the possibility of obtaining Hungarian citizenship is overall more consequential for the ethnic Hungarians in Serbia and Ukraine than for those in EU member states. Still, the law was heavily criticised by Ukrainian politicians, who considered it a threat to their national security. Ukraine also prohibits dual nationality, unlike Serbia. Although the matter has been condemned by some neighbouring countries, the law seems to be welcomed among the Hungarian minority populations. Between 2010 and 2019, over 1.1 million ethnic Hungarians acquired citizenship through this "simplified naturalisation", the majority of them being from Romania, which has the largest share of ethnic Hungarians outside of Hungary.

Overall, however, the commemoration practices, as well as the simplified naturalisation process for ethnic Hungarians abroad, serve a more symbolic purpose. The Orbán government's display of irredentist symbols are tangible instances and open demonstrations of irredentism in practice. The frequent depiction of the map of Greater Hungary is a prominent example of this, with the "scarf affair" being a recent and representative case in point.

The scarf affair

During last year's FIFA World Cup football tournament, Orbán's revisionism once again made international headlines, when he was seen with a football scarf that depicted the pre-Trianon map of imperial Hungary. Although Orbán later in a

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Facebook post stated that "Football is not politics. Let's not see what is not there," the political message of the scarf was obvious and was promptly criticised. Romania and Ukraine were especially not amused, and both countries condemned this behaviour. Slovak members of parliament called it a "senseless provocation", and the Slovak Prime Minister Eduard Heger stated that he had noticed Orbán had "an old scarf", and gave him a new one.

Contrary to this, the Austrian foreign ministry responded with humour to the affair, telling *Politico* that "A quick glance at historical maps in the Viennese ministry of foreign affairs has confirmed initial suspicions, according to which Translithania (the Kingdom of Hungary) ceased to exist around 100 years ago," adding that "we will inform our Hungarian neighbours of this development at the earliest opportunity."

That Austria is less sensitive about this issue can be explained by two facts. The first is rooted in the history of Austria and the Austrian Empire. During the time of the Habsburg monarchy, Vienna ruled Hungary. Only with the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 which established the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary, did the Kingdom of Hungary receive full sovereignty and equal status. Second, Austria was admitted to the EU almost ten years prior to Hungary, which could be another explanation for why it did not perceive its eastern neighbour's revisionist ideas as a security threat. Despite the inappropriateness of Hungary's behaviour, Austria is able to shake it off with humour.

Perhaps the most controversial for Hungary's neighbours was the introduction of the new citizenship law.

For other countries in the neighbourhood, specifically those who were subject to such revisionist claims before joining the EU, the issue hits differently. Croatia, for example, only joined the EU in 2013, almost a decade after Hungary, and experienced a brutal war in the 1990s. Such irredentist behaviour, therefore, strikes a nerve, which is exemplified by an incident in May 2022. In a statement, Orbán tried to justify the blocking of EU sanctions on energy imports due to Hungary being landlocked. Referring to the part of the Adriatic coast that was part of Hungary before Trianon, he stated that "Those who have a sea and ports are able to bring oil on tankers. If they hadn't taken it away from us, we would also have a port." The statement which once again aimed at presenting the loss of Hungarian territories as continuous tragic injustice, caused outrage and was condemned by the Croatian foreign ministry. In Ukraine, a country already facing irredentist claims by another neighbour – Russia – the Hungarian government's repeated claims over Transcarpathia are alarming. This is even more so since the Russian annexation of Crimea and the full-scale invasion in February 2022.

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Yet, the "scarf affair" is not an isolated incident of the Hungarian government clearly demonstrating its irredentism. In fact, Fidesz politicians are time and again found to perpetuate their revisionist claims and show off the map of Greater Hungary instead of modern Hungary. For example, in 2020, Orbán wished students luck for their final exam in history and posted a globe that depicted Hungary with its pre-Trianon borders. Similarly, the government spokesperson Zoltán Kovács has been photographed in his office, with a huge map of Greater Hungary displayed behind him. Maps depicting historic Hungary are also hung on walls in other offices, as a picture taken during a presidency meeting in a different room proves.

> Time and again Fidesz politicians perpetuate their revisionist claims and show off the map of Greater Hungary.

These incidents have time and again been pointed out and criticised by journalists and politicians in the neighbourhood, which are later ridiculed and then any specific motives are denied by the Orbán government. Most recently, during an event under the motto of "peace and security", when the Orbán government reiterated its support for Ukraine's territorial integrity, a banner depicting the map of Hungary also showed the outline of Greater Hungary around it. The incident not only once again demonstrated the Hungarian government's unabated and unabashed irredentism but also its insensitivity. This is because it was displayed during an event in support of "peace" in Ukraine, with the outline of Greater Hungary including Transcarpathia, which belongs to Ukraine. While this behaviour is frowned upon by Hungary's neighbours who were also handed territories from Greater Hungary, the issue is particularly sensitive for Ukraine and strained relations with Kyiv further, as the country finds itself in its second year under attack from Russia.

Hungarian irredentism in the context of Russia's war in Ukraine

The relationship between Hungary and Ukraine has been marked by tensions for years, not least due to Orbán's irredentist claims over Transcarpathia, where ethnic Hungarians live, as well as over Ukraine's treatment of Hungarian minorities. Already in 2014, Orbán called on Ukraine to grant the country's ethnic Hungarians autonomy and dual citizenship. As inappropriate as the demand might have been, it was particularly untimely as it came on the eve of referendums in Eastern Ukraine. These were followed by Russian separatists declaring independence from Ukraine and subsequently calling for their regions' incorporation into Russia.

In 2017, tensions flared up again when the Fidesz government harshly criticised the Ukrainian government over its language policies, specifically legislation stat-

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ing that Ukrainian shall be the only language of education in state schools, an attempt to mitigate the influence of the Russian language in the country. According to Hungary, the law discriminates against and violates the rights of the Hungarian minority in Transcarpathia and threatens their existence.

Since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Hungary's continuous Russian-friendly course, despite Russian aggression and its constant undermining of EU support to Ukraine, further complicated their relationship. The Fidesz government in part justified its lack of support for weapons deliveries due to the danger the war poses to the ethnic Hungarians in Western Ukraine, also claiming that they are being called to fight and die in this war. Although Orbán's lack of support for Ukraine was explained by some as part of his Russia connection, his attempt to position himself as a "protector" is also in line with the Hungarian political elite's rhetoric on the need to support and protect ethnic Hungarians in the neighbourhood.

Given the Hungarian government's history of irredentist talk, rumours circulated that the Hungarian government hopes that, in the case of a dissolution of Ukraine, they would regain Transcarpathia. In February 2023, then Slovak Foreign Minister Rastislav Káčer even argued that Hungary could make territorial claims over southern Slovakia, where most of the Hungarian minority lives, in case Russia conquers Ukraine. He added that "had Vladimir Putin succeeded in Ukraine, Hungary would have already made territorial claims against Slovakia." While the comment only referred to Slovakia, it is in line with the previously voiced suspicion by, for example, former Polish foreign minister and current member of the European Parliament, Radosław Sikorski, or Ukrainian politician Oleksiy Danilov, that Orbán would try to strike a deal with Russia over Transcarpathia if Putin wins. Orbán's behaviour towards Ukraine and his Putin-friendly policy are among the main reasons for these accusations. Ukrainian Vice Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk in a Facebook post also questioned the Hungarian government's behaviour, saying, "is this because of cheap gas or because Hungary is still secretly dreaming of the Carpathians?" According to a survey by the *Kyiv Independent*, over 40 per cent of Ukrainians think that Hungary could make territorial claims against Ukraine.

A short "documentary" on Greater Hungary by the Russian propaganda channel Russia Today, which describes the historical importance of Transcarpathia for Hungarians, presenting it as the "cradle of their nationhood", further feeds these fears. The short film also argues that regaining these native Hungarian lands is a prominent idea in Hungarian public circles and features pro-Russian Orbán propagandists who further reinforce the symbolic significance of this region for Hungary. Overall, it not only emphasises the Orbán government's irredentist narrative about Greater Hungary in relation to Transcarpathia but further bolsters the

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false view that Ukraine is a "fabricated country", and that other states like Hungary also have territorial claims against Ukraine. Hungarian officials obviously refuted claims that Hungary plans to take over Transcarpathia. Nonetheless, the Hungarian government's past and present actions sadly justify such presumptions.

Whither, Greater Hungary?

Trianon and the dissolution of Greater Hungary are central focal points of Hungarian history. The perceived injustice done to Hungarians is deeply embedded in the country's society and political culture even today. This self-image of Hungary as a victim also supports Orbán in his rhetorical battles against the EU and "global elites", by presenting Hungarians as a people persecuted and wronged over centuries. Over the years, the Orbán government time and again reinvigorated the "Trauma of Trianon" and perpetuated irredentist claims and politics. The telling of Trianon as a one-sided story of the dissolution of Greater Hungary and as an injustice done to the Hungarian people helps Orbán unite the people behind him and his politics.

Whether politically useful at home or not, this policy course has angered allies and neighbours, who perceive this type of language and politics to be inappropriate in the 21st century. While neighbouring EU countries may perceive the Orbán government's revisionism as an annoyance, it can pose an actual danger to neighbours that are not a part of the EU, such as Ukraine, a country under attack due to Putin's own irredentism. Moreover, it has the potential to hamper existing cooperation between Hungary and its neighbours while also complicating the living conditions and integration of the Hungarian minorities in the neighbourhood.

Knowing that the notion of "Greater Hungary" and the well-being of ethnic Hungarians are still of relevance today, Orbán's populist right-wing government will continue to exploit the issue and the emotions it evokes for personal domestic gains, regardless of criticism from abroad. In fact, condemnation by Hungary's neighbours and the EU further underlines the Fidesz government's narrative about Hungary as a misunderstood and wronged country. This makes it a successful strategy after all. EE

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Behind the steppes

How Mongolia has responded to Russia's war against Ukraine

JOSEPH ROCHE

As one of the only democracies in Central Asia, Mongolia remains a relatively small country surrounded by two geopolitical behemoths. Yet, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has shown Mongolia that nothing can be predicted and that it must be ready to face any situation. The support it provides to Buryats and others fleeing Russia indicates that it does not see eye-to-eye with Moscow's aggression.

Former Mongolian President Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj spoke out on September 23rd 2022 about Russia's invasion of Ukraine, calling on Vladimir Putin to end the war. Elbegdorj condemned the "killings" and "senseless destruction" caused by the conflict. His statement does not represent the official position of the Mongolian government, which is more restrained in its condemnation of Russia. However, the comments highlight the complexity of Mongolian-Russian relations and the conflicting voices within the country.

Despite the Mongolian government's current policy of neutrality, civil society in Mongolia is increasingly voicing opposition to Russia's actions. Notably, the Mongolian population has expressed solidarity with the Buryat ethnic minority, a group with a Mongolic language and culture that primarily resides in Russia and has been heavily recruited into the military since the beginning of Russia's full-scale war. The Buryats' plight has garnered attention and sympathy from the Mongolian population, leading to a growing anti-Russia sentiment among Mongolian civil society.

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Why are so many Buryats in the Russian army?

Estimating the number of Buryat fighters and casualties on the front is challenging. However, the French think tank Le Grand Continent has noted that soldiers from southern and eastern regions of Russia are overrepresented on the frontlines of Moscow's war against Ukraine. Several factors contribute to this mass recruitment, including the difficult economic and social conditions in Buryatia.

In her remarks for *New Eastern Europe*, the Buryat activist and founder of the Free Buryatia Foundation Alexandra Garmazhapova explained that Buryat soldiers primarily join the Russian army for economic reasons. "Unfortunately, they joined the army because Buryatia is a poor region," she says. "You only have a good life in St Petersburg and Moscow. That's all. And in many other regions like Buryatia, Yakutia and Chechnya, people, because of corruption and the absence of opportunities, are not having a good life. That is why so many young men (even before the full-scale invasion) either joined the army, to have a good salary, or emigrated to the United States, Moscow, St Petersburg and South Korea."

Researcher Ksenia Pimenova points out that the Republic of Buryatia, located in a remote corner of Siberia, faces high levels of unemployment, constant wage instability and low income. Wars reveal the links between recruitment rates in the army, ethnic categories and poverty. While the Russian army does not provide recruitment figures by region, the proportion of victims suggests that there has been mass conscription in Russia's poor regions and its so-called "ethnic" republics.

According to official data from Rosstat (the Russian Federal Statistics Service), the Trans-Baikal region, including the Republic of Buryatia, has an unemployment rate two to five times higher than the national average of 5.2 per cent. Another factor at play is a policy of militarisation that has been implemented in "ethnic" republics for several years. This policy aims to prepare non-Russian teenagers for regular military service and entices them to pursue a military career. Furthermore, among the Mongolic populations of Russia, "the ideals of masculinity promoted by the military align with traditional 'manly games' such as wrestling, horse racing, and archery," Pimenova writes.

Purve Dambiev, a former history teacher from Ulan-Ude, the capital of the Republic of Buryatia, and a Buryat who fled to Mongolia during the full-scale war, is speaking out against the widespread militarisation of Russian society. Dambiev is currently volunteering at the Buryat Centre in Mongolia's capital, Ulaanbaatar, which provides refuge to Buryat people who have fled Russia. In his comments for *New Eastern Europe*, Dambiev shed light on how the Russian government has been promoting militarism to people from a very young age, starting with kindergarten and primary school.

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He recalled participating in military games, such as *Zarnitsa*, where students were taught how to throw dummy grenades in physical education classes, and how to disassemble and assemble a machine gun in life skills classes. Military personnel often visited schools as guests, and marching was a part of everyday life. "In school, the history lessons were dominated by stories of wars in which Russia was always victorious, creating a pervasive sense of militarisation," Dambiev says.

Finally, one should note the importance of work in defining a person's social status in Russia. "Work is not just a means of earning a living, but it also constitutes one's honour," Dambiev says.

Ksenia Pimenova stated that "work is every man's dream, and unemployment is his worst nightmare. It is only when one has a job that they can start a family and provide for their loved ones." However, Dambiev emphasised that those who are sent to Ukraine today have no choice and are afraid to go. They would rather return wounded than disobey orders and compromise their future.

Growing reluctance

After a year of war, with Russia entangled in Ukraine, the Buryat minority has grown increasingly hesitant to join the frontlines. Many opted to flee the forced mobilisation, while others deserted to neighbouring countries such as Kazakhstan and Mongolia. According to Garmazhapova, the defection of Buryat soldiers can be attributed to the disproportionately high number of deaths among their ranks. "While the exact number is difficult to ascertain, the Free Buryatia Foundation estimated that around 700 soldiers have died in combat according to open sources," she says.

Additionally, due to their history and geography, Buryats are less susceptible to Russian propaganda regarding Ukraine. For instance, the concept of "denazification" leaves them perplexed. However, Garmazhapova points out that the psychological impact remains significant. "If a Buryat dies in Ukraine, the family may not want to accept that their loved one died only for Putin's ambitions," she says. "Instead, they may prefer to believe that their child is a hero fighting against Nazism. This is a more comfortable belief."

Garmazhapova notes that one of the most significant issues with Russian citizens is their reluctance to take responsibility for their own lives. "In Buryatia, this mentality is also prevalent, and propaganda on Viber (which is more popular than Telegram in the region) only reinforces it," she says.

However, Purve Dambiev recalls the first days of the war: "I remember how shocked everyone was in February 2022, regardless of their political views. Spon-

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taneous protest actions, the burning of Z and V symbols (symbols of this military campaign), comments on the internet, arson against military enlistment offices – all of this indicates that the society does not approve of the government's actions. That is why emergency repressive laws on military censorship were hastily adopted, a series of fines were put in place and demonstrative court cases were held against pacifists."

Finally, as a minority in Russia, the Buryats face daily racism and discrimination from ethnic Russians. "We often hear phrases like "go back home," and when you explain to them that you are Russian and that you have a Russian passport, they say that you bought it and ask how much you paid to get Russian citizenship," she says.

This everyday racism also affects how the Russian army is organised. "When I went to Kazakhstan last September," says Garmazhapova, "I met Russian soldiers who fled, and most of them were of Buryat origin. When I asked them where are the ethnic Russians, one guy told me that Buryats are always the first ones to be sent to the frontlines … He told me a story about one of his friends who is of Buryat origin but has a Russian name and was not sent to war. The recruiter thought he was Russian. If a Buryat has a Buryat name and surname, he will have a higher chance of being sent to war."

As a minority in Russia, the Buryats face daily racism and discrimination from ethnic Russians.

According to Dambiev, the war was a wake-up call for many Buryats. "I want to separately note that Russia discriminates against the languages and culture of indigenous peoples. Any Asian person often faces racism and xenophobia in Russia. We are often denied apartments, some companies do not hire non-Russians and federal media and media do not include Asians," he says.

With the sudden declaration of war for the "Russian world", using non-Russians and prisoners as expendable resources, the national issue has become increasingly critical. Over the last year, the Buryat people have made remarkable progress as a political nation, marked by the emergence of public associations such as Free Buryatia, supporters of independence like Tushgar Buryad, and a thorough re-evaluation of culture and history through a decolonial lens. This stands in stark contrast to the non-existent progress made in 2021.

Russia, Mongolia and the Buryats

All of these reasons combined with Russia's successive failures in Ukraine may explain the gradual defection of soldiers of Buryat origin, both to Kazakhstan and

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Mongolia. In his address on September 23rd, Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj also promised asylum to all Russian soldiers, especially Buryats, who wished to flee Russia. This decision must be understood in the context of significant support from the Mongolian population since the start of the war.

For now, the government has not officially announced this policy, but it has been well-received by the Mongolian people and civil society. This deep divide between the Mongolian government and the war against Ukraine can be highlighted. On the one hand, the Mongolian government is aware that it must take into account the economic, geostrategic and geopolitical realities imposed by its geography. Mongolia, the only democracy in Central Asia and free economy since 1992, remains a relatively small country surrounded by two geopolitical behemoths, Russia and China. But above all, Mongolia is deeply dependent on Russia for its gas and electricity supply. In addition, these closer ties are facilitated by a pro-Russian Mongolian elite, who speak Russian and many of whom have studied in the former Soviet Union, as reported by *Foreign Policy*.

The Mongolian government must contend with a strong civil society that is challenging its inaction in the face of Russia's aggression.

On the other hand, the Mongolian government must contend with a strong and organised civil society that is challenging its inaction in the face of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. At the beginning of the war, for example, Mongolian youth deeply criticised Mongolian Foreign Minister Battsetseg Batmunkh for waiting until March 2nd to speak out on the war and not condemning Moscow, only calling for a "peaceful resolution". This popular opposition to Russia is reflected in significant support from the Mongolian population for Russian deserters in general and Buryats in particular, with whom they share cultural, religious and linguistic affinities.

According to Dambiev, who himself fled to Mongolia at the beginning of the invasion: "Several tens of thousands of people left for Mongolia … a large number settled here, learnt the language, went to school and found work. We are a Mongolic people, even if we were forcibly Russified. The Mongolians welcomed us as their own, and that was the most touching moment of my life. We did not expect such a warm reception, sympathy and solidarity," he says.

Strong in spirit

Nevertheless, it is unlikely that Mongolia will change its foreign policy toward Russia profoundly for now. However, it is important to note that, even if cautious in its declarations towards Moscow, the Mongolian government has sent human-

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itarian aid to Ukraine and abstained from voting in favour of a UN resolution demanding the withdrawal of Russian troops. This is instead of voting against the resolution in the context of Russia's complete control over its resources.

Above all, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia has shown Mongolia, which has invested very little in its defence over the past 30 years, that nothing can be predicted and that Mongolia must be ready to face any situation. Thus, on July 10th last year the Mongolian government organised probably the largest annual military parade in 30 years, and it is expected that the government will drastically increase its defence budget.

As the only democracy in Central Asia, Mongolians cannot help but feel solidarity with the Ukrainian struggle. However, they are aware that they must juggle their relationships with their two neighbours and learn to coexist with them peacefully. As Dambiev admits, "Mongolians are strong in spirit, and our bitter experience is indicative that trampling on freedoms guarantees many disasters. Mongolians are ready for decisive action and protect their values. I believe in Mongolian society, it is much healthier than the Russian one, much more united and active."

As Russia's war against Ukraine continues, Mongolia is faced with the challenge of making tough decisions that may appear paradoxical or even contradictory. Despite these challenges, one thing is certain: Mongolia will remain a sanctuary for deserters from the Russian army, with the government unlikely to take any action against them. The Buryats, Russians and others who seek refuge in Mongolia will continue to do so, finding shelter in a nation that has historically been a crossroads for many cultures and peoples. EE

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Ukraine, Mayday

NIKODEM SZCZYGŁOWSKI

While Russia's war in Ukraine has become a regular story in European and world media, its physical connections with the wider world have become severely restricted. Now reliant on railways and roads to transport both people and goods, the war-torn nation now dreams of a future in which airplanes will no longer bring destruction and death.

My last visit to Kyiv was on February 16th, 2022. It was the day that American intelligence determined to be the day of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities an initiative called "Reconciliation" was held on that day as well. It was meant to "strengthen the consolidation of the Ukrainian society, increase its resilience when faced with growing hybrid and propaganda threats as well as the psychological pressure that was being put on the Ukrainian society", as stated by the president's decree "On urgent means to consolidate the Ukrainian society"' issued two days prior.

The atmosphere was already quite tense. From conversations overheard in cafés one could hear forced laughter among mentions of the threat of an invasion. One week later, Kyiv was bombarded for the first time. My flight departed from Boryspil Airport, located near Kyiv. This is the largest airport in Ukraine and an important hub for domestic and international flights. Just a few years ago it was paralysed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Kyiv was in fact a popular transfer point for passengers heading, with Ukrainian or foreign airlines, to such destinations as the South Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Middle East.

Things yet started to change already in 2014, when the Russian Federation annexed Crimea and started an undeclared war in the eastern parts of Ukraine. This year marked a watershed in the history of Ukrainian aviation, mainly because before both the number of flights and passengers between Ukraine and the Russian

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Federation clearly exceeded other destinations. This was specifically true regarding flights between Kyiv and Moscow, with journeys operated by both Ukrainian and Russian air carriers taking place almost on an hourly basis.

MH17 and its consequences

Undoubtedly, one of the most dramatic turning points that took place in 2014 after the start of the war in Donbas was the downing of Flight MH17 operated by Malaysian Airlines. Evidence shows that the crash took place in Ukrainian airspace and was the result of military activities. It took place on July 17th, 2014, in Donetsk Oblast, near the village of Hrabove in the vicinity of the city of Torez (Chystiakove). The debris from the plane landed on Ukrainian soil, around 40 kilometres from the Russian border. The investigation that followed the crash showed that the plane was hit with a BUK M1 surface-to-air missile, which was shot by the 53rd Rocket Anti-Air Brigade of the Russian army. All passengers and crew members lost their lives: 298 people in total. Since the crash, the airspace over eastern Ukraine has remained closed to air traffic. This in turn pushed foreign carriers to re-direct their routes to avoid the risky parts of Ukrainian airspace.

In addition, in autumn 2015 the National Security Council of Ukraine imposed sanctions on some Russian airlines, while on September 25th of the same year the Ukrainian government banned Russian flights to the country. The list of sanctioned carriers included Russia's largest airlines: Aeroflot, Utair, Transaero and S7. The ban went into force on October 25th that year. The rationale for this decision was that some Russian airlines had continued to use Ukrainian airspace to fly to Crimea, disregarding the 2014 Eurocontrol ban on all flights to Sevastopol and Simferopol. Although Ukraine's state aviation administration financially punished some carriers for breaching Ukrainian airspace, Russian carriers continued to ignore the ban, claiming that both airports belonged to Russia, even though they were not internationally recognised as such. That is why all global ticketing systems showed these destinations as belonging to Ukraine.

In response, the Russian authorities banned Ukrainian airlines from using their own airspace. Consequently, not only were all air connections between the two countries stopped but Ukrainian airlines also encountered difficulties with their flights to Asia and the South Caucasus. For example, any flight from Kyiv to Tbilisi became one hour longer because the route required avoiding the airspace over Crimea, the Russian part of the Azov Sea and Kuban (this is the shortest route that was used earlier). Thus, planes from Kyiv to Georgia flying over the Black Sea had to enter Romanian airspace and then turn east along the Turkish coast. For the

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same reason, flights from Kyiv to Baku, Yerevan, Almaty, Tel Aviv, Tehran, Beijing, New Delhi and other eastern destinations became longer. This caused a crisis in Ukrainian aviation but at the same time brought about new business opportunities, especially with regards to expanding flights to westwards.

Shift to the West

Early 2020 brought another tragic event in the history of Ukrainian aviation. On January 8th, 2020, a Ukrainian International Airlines (UIA) plane (Flight PS752) destined for Kyiv was shot down shortly after take-off in Tehran by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. All passengers and crew members lost their lives. At first, the Iranian authorities denied shooting down the plane. It was thanks to different western investigative agencies and the pressure of the Iranian public opinion that information confirming the plane was shot down by two Iranian surface-to-air missiles was released. On January 11th, 2020, the Iranian government admitted that the IRGC had targeted the Ukrainian flight after erroneously identifying it as an American missile.

At Boryspil airport a farewell ceremony was held to commemorate the victims. Terminal D was decorated with their photos, candles were lit, and flower wreath arrangements laid out. I remember a note with "PS752 – Mayday" written on it. Only later did it turn out that this grieving for the victims was a forecast of what was to come two years later.

> Gradually, the Ukrainian aviation market almost entirely redirected its offers towards flights to the West.

In late May 2020 another turning point took place in the region's airspace. This time something unexpected happened over the territory of Belarus. On May 23rd, 2020, Ryanair Flight FR 4978, operated by the Polish branch of Buzz Airlines, was on its regular route from Athens to Vilnius. However, once the airplane had entered the airspace of the Republic of Belarus, it was redirected, upon the request of the Belarusian authorities, to land at the airport in Minsk. There, two of its passengers, the opposition journalist Roman Protasevich and his girlfriend, Sofia Sapega, were arrested by the Belarusian authorities.

This act of air terrorism, carried out by the Lukashenka regime, which used legal means but abused all safety procedures, was something that Europe had not seen in decades. As such, it was condemned by the European Union, NATO, the United Kingdom, and the United States, as well as the civil aviation organisations of many other states. The European Commission and the EU aviation safety agen-

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cy issued directives forbidding European airlines from flying through Belarusian airspace. Ukrainian airlines followed suit. As a result, all flights from Kyiv to Baltic or Scandinavian states were to avoid, from now on, the territory of Belarus. This, again, meant longer flights.

In a way, it can be said that a certain restructuring of the Ukrainian airline market took place as a result of these aforementioned events. Overall, they forced it to depart from its earlier close ties with Russia, which was the number one destination for Ukrainian flights and passengers, as well as a transit point for flights from Ukraine to Asia and the South Caucasus. Gradually, the Ukrainian aviation market almost entirely redirected its offers towards flights to the West. As a result, before the full-scale invasion, the majority of the airline connections offered in Ukraine were to EU countries. This change was possible thanks to the liberalisation of the airline market, which allowed airlines such as Ryanair to offer flights between Ukrainian and EU cities.

Rapid development

Changes also took place in the domestic Ukrainian airline market. Specifically, prior to 2014 the most frequented routes were those from Kyiv to Donetsk and Simferopol in Crimea. In the case of the first route, the situation changed after Donetsk airport was completely destroyed by the Russians and so-called "separatists" in January 2015. The airport in Simferopol, in turn, is now a part of annexed Crimea, which means it has lost all connections outside Russia. All this explains why the most popular connections within Ukraine prior to the full-scale invasion were Kyiv to Lviv and Kyiv to Odesa.

> In just a few years, the airport in Lviv became the third largest regional airport in Ukraine.

In just a few years, the airport in Lviv became the third largest regional airport in Ukraine. It was only bested by two airports in Kyiv: Boryspil and Zhuliany. While describing this new trend two years ago, at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, Tetiana Romanovska, the director of Lviv Airport, told me that "In 2019 we reached 2.3 million passengers. This means that we have exceeded the symbolic threshold of two million passengers per year, which is a certain indicator in the development of the regional airport. For us this is an even greater achievement considering that we were starting from a very low position – for example ten years ago we had only half a million passengers per year and incomparably fewer connections. Now (in 2020 – author's note) we are the leading regional airport

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in Ukraine, and when it comes to the number of passengers only two airports in Kyiv are ahead of us. However, we are already coming very close to Zhuliany and hope to pass it in 2020."

A larger number of flights to EU countries made Ukraine a more popular destination for both tourists and business travellers. Poland, for example, started offering flights to Ukraine from large cities such as Warsaw, Modlin (which also counts as a Warsaw airport – editor's note), Kraków, Katowice, Gdańsk, Bydgoszcz, Wrocław, Poznań and Lublin. These flights were bound for the main Ukrainian cities such as Kyiv, Lviv, Odesa and Kharkiv. In summer 2021 there were even plans announced for flights to Zaporizhzhia (on the Ukrainian side) and Szczecin (on the Polish side). In 2022 flights from Kyiv to Łódź started to operate, as well as from Lviv to Olsztyn. In terms of the number of passengers, Ukraine was one of the main destinations for passengers flying from Poland and Lithuania.

The majority of Ukrainian airports were bombarded by the Russians in the first stage of the full-scale war.

Overall, from 2018 to 2020 the Ukrainian airline market was among the most rapidly developing in Europe. Not only were Ukrainian passengers offered many new connections, but also low-budget airlines, such as Wizzair and Ryanair, began to set up bases in Kyiv and Lviv. All this made Ukraine a destination for more and more flights. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic new connections were offered, such as the airBaltic flight from Vilnius to Kyiv or the Wizzair flight from Szczecin to Lviv.

The majority of Ukrainian airports were bombarded by the Russians in the first stage of the full-scale war. To some degree, all the airports were damaged (or became temporarily dysfunctional), including Kyiv's Boryspil and Zhuliany. On the second day of the full-scale war, the airport in Ivano-Frankivsk was bombarded, while the infrastructure of airports in Kharkiv and Kherson was destroyed as a result of almost constant shelling. The airports in Odesa, Mykolaiv and Zaporizhzhia were also seriously damaged. Among the larger airports, only Lviv was almost untouched. While among the smaller ones, no damage was done to the airports in Uzhhorod and Chernivtsi. They are all located in western Ukraine.

There are also different, but not less tragic, people's stories that are related to Ukrainian aviation. When on February 16th, 2022, I was walking through the departure hall in Boryspil, I had no clue that in just a few days it will not be available to any civilian passengers. My friend, Bohdan, who always smiles and can solve just about any problem, worked as a passenger service manager at this airport. In January 2022 he joined a territorial defence unit and was seriously wounded while defending his homeland. He was sent for long-term treatment and rehabil-

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Photo: Real_life_photo / Shutterstock

Before the Russian invasion: Boeing 737 passenger planes from the fleet of Ukraine's International Airlines stand on the platform near the runway at Kyiv's Boryspil Airport. Since February 2022 no civilian aviation has taken place.

itation in Latvia. Olena, who had worked at Zhuliany, was in Finland on the first day of the invasion. She was there representing her airport at an international aviation conference. Now she works at an airport in Modlin, near Warsaw. Similarly, many Ukrainian flight attendants are now working for Polish and other airlines in the neighbouring states. Some of the employees of Lviv Airport found employment at the Rzeszów-Jasionka airport, which has now become a hub for the shipment of military equipment to Ukraine.

Iron diplomacy

At the time of the shooting down of the Ukrainian plane in Tehran, I was heading from Budapest to Ukrainian Zakarpattia. Early in the morning I left the beautiful Budapest train station, Keleti, and my train headed eastward. Once we passed Debrecen and Nyíregyháza, my compartment became almost empty. Behind the window I could only see the snowy scenery of eastern Hungary's landscape. I left the train at a small station in Záhony, located right next to the Ukrainian bor-

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der. Here, I transferred to a small three-wagon MÁV train, which slowly crossed the bridge over the Tisa River. After a journey of half an hour I found myself in a spacious yet empty hall at the train station in Chop, which is the first city on the Ukrainian side. This place used to be the largest, after Brest in Belarus, Soviet railway gate to the West. There, my passport was stamped with the new – just introduced – Ukrainian border stamp. It resembled EU stamps, finally replacing the old Soviet-style ones that looked more like those from Russia and Belarus. At that moment, I could not even imagine that after February 2022 these stamps obtained at railway and pedestrian crossings would outnumber the earlier stamps I had obtained at the airports in Kyiv or Lviv.

Throughout 2022, after the initial chaos of the first weeks of the full-scale invasion, the Ukrainian railways established dozens of new connections to western states. To the Polish city of Przemyśl there are many daily trains from Lviv, Kyiv, Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhia and Odesa. The aforementioned Chop is also a transfer station for many trains heading to Budapest or Vienna. They depart from cities such as Lviv, Kyiv or Mukachevo. At the same time, trains from Zakarpattia to Romania that were for a long time not operating were quickly re-established and resumed regular operations. There are now connections available from Rakhiv to Valea Vișeului, Uzhhorod to Sighet Marmației, and Chernivtsi to Suceava. The express train from Kyiv to Chișinău allows passengers to make connections to Bucharest through Iași.

Railways play an important role both in war-torn Ukraine and – even more – trans-border transport and communication. Thanks to the Ukrainian railways, hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians managed to escape from dangerous areas to safer locations in western Ukraine or abroad. The Ukrainian railways also reacted effectively during Ukrainian counter-offensives and de-occupations, first of the northern parts of Ukraine in spring 2022, then the Kharkiv region in September, and finally Kherson in November. All these places that saw the return of Ukrainian administration, and also saw the return of Ukrainian trains.

> Thanks to the Ukrainian railways, hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians managed to escape from dangerous areas to safer locations.

Interestingly, Ukrainian trains transport around 40 per cent of goods that are transported in Ukraine, which is a high number, given that in neighbouring Poland railway transport accounts for around only ten per cent of goods. Thus, it seems very reasonable to connect both railway systems, which are responsible for the majority of the trade exchange taking place between these two states. Recognising this potential, the Ukrainian railways have already announced an ambitious plan to build new narrow lines, which are com-

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patible with European standards. They have also declared plans to build the first European railway from Lviv to Rava-Ruska/Hrebenne (a border crossing with Poland) by the end of this year. Plans have also been made to build a similar line from Lviv to Medyka, (a border crossing with Poland next to Przemyśl) and in the north from Kovel to Dorohusk.

Not surprisingly, with the closing of Ukraine's skies, railway travel became the choice of the absolute majority – if not all – of the official delegations that wish to visit Ukraine. We can see this in the photos of many European state leaders and members of the European Commission, who now arrive in Kyiv by train. The same mode of transportation was taken by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the foreign minister of Saudi Arabia, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud. US President Joe Biden, who made a highly anticipated visit to Kyiv since the beginning of the full-scale war, also took this form of transport. For the same reasons, railway transport is the choice (at least to the Polish border) of the Ukrainian delegations that are now travelling abroad.

The majority of these trips start (and end) at the railway station in Przemyśl, where Platform 5 has a separate "wide" rail that is used by Ukrainian trains, as well as the special VIP trains used by government officials and other delegations. The popularity of rail travel has allowed the Ukrainian railways to declare that they are pursuing "iron diplomacy". This witty statement contains some truth indeed.

Lastly, Ukraine is connected to Europe by thousands of bus connections, which are offered from the majority of Ukrainian cities, as well as the pedestrian border crossing in Medyka (Shehyni on the Ukrainian side), which is located near Przemyśl. From these places, travellers can take Flixbus to Vienna, Berlin, Amsterdam, Prague, or Brussels. In addition, there are also Polish, Czech, Austrian, and Hungarian trains and buses which offer options for travellers to and from Ukraine.

Ukraine – close and far away

While waiting for my train at Przemyśl train station, after having come from Ukraine through the pedestrian border crossing in Medyka where I got another stamp from the Ukrainian authorities, I observe passengers arriving from Ukraine. I am listening to the stories that they are sharing, together with the information about their travel destinations. This rather small train station, which is located 12 kilometres from the state border, has become an important stop on many people's journeys to other places in Europe and throughout the world. It shows the way of travel that is used by many refugees, who are running away from the continued shelling, which takes place even in the de-occupied cities and villages. It also

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shows the route used by many journalists (both Ukrainian and foreign), doctors, volunteers, members of international missions and official delegations, ministers, and presidents. This place is thus used by people who are travelling to a country where the sky, instead of civilian airplanes, is full of Russian rockets. They return from it in the very same way.

Since the Second World War, there has not been such a large country in Europe that has gone without airline connection for such a long period of time. Even besieged Sarajevo (1991–96) had an operating airport for the running of the so-called "airbridges" which allowed for the provision of food to the besieged city and the transport of people.

All this makes me think about many things. First that since its beginning, aviation was aimed at making the world smaller and bringing people closer together. However, also since the very same beginning, airplanes were used to inflict pain and suffering and bring death to people. This was the case during both world wars. Lastly, with the growing popularity of aviation in the last decades, it is clear that we have become the true inhabitants of a global village. As a result, Ukraine too became closer to us. Now, it is again drifting further away, as the only transportation channel we have with it is through its border crossings with Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Moldova. Instead of taking a flight from Warsaw to Kyiv, which takes around an hour and a half, people now have no choice but to spend long hours travelling to and from Ukraine. For example, the shortest trip between Kraków and Lviv requires at least six hours, while prior to the full-scale invasion it lasted less than sixty minutes.

The Przemyśl train station has become an important stop on many people's journeys to other places in Europe and the world.

Looking at the passengers in Przemyśl as they are catching trains to Kraków, Wrocław, Warsaw, Prague, Vienna, and Berlin, I ask myself how many of them had earlier used the airports in Kyiv, Lviv, Odesa or Kharkiv. I imagine them now with their empty halls and corridors and damaged runways. More than anything else, however, I think about the people whom I met when I was working with the Ukrainian aviation industry. The absolute majority of them had to stop their professional careers (I do not even want to think about those who could have possibly lost their lives). Now many of them live somewhere else because they had no choice but to abandon their homes that were under enemy shelling. Not all will be able to return home.

Even worse, while some people lost everything they had owned, others lost their loved ones. Among them are also those who have been fighting for their home and those who are doing their best to support the Ukrainian defenders, keeping the

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hope that one day, normal life will return to Ukraine, which also means a return to regular civilian air connections. One day, the sound of an airplane will no longer bring associations of destruction and death.

I am also thinking about the piece of paper with "PS752 – Mayday" written on it that I spotted at Boryspil airport in January 2022. "Mayday" is a term used by pilots to warn others about the dangers that occur during flight. Its creator was Frederick Stanley Mockford, who worked as a radio connection officer at Croydon airport in England in the 1920s. He was tasked with coining a phrase that would indicate danger and be understood by all pilots and land personnel during an emergency. As at that time the majority of air traffic took place between Croydon and Le Bourget Airport in Paris, Mockford suggested the term "Mayday". This new English word was phonetically identical to the French term *m'aidez* ("help me") or *m'aider* (the short form for *venez m'aider* or "come help me").

Now, over 100 years later, a large European state has been sending its "Mayday" message for over a year, warning that almost every day its inhabitants are experiencing death coming from the sky. EE

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Ukraine's Lviv, a city of life and despair

TEXT AND PHOTOS: OMAR MARQUES

At first glance, life in the Ukrainian city of Lviv appears to be just as it ever was before Russia's invasion. Despite this, even a few days in the area reveals a city irreparably changed by the conflict.

As I arrive at the Polish-Ukrainian border crossing of Korczowa by bus, an unusual scene unfolds next to my window. Together with Ukrainian women on the bus we see dozens of Ukrainian soldiers boarding buses exiting Ukraine. Passengers whisper about what is the reason behind all this, but after more than a year of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, there is just one logical answer. These men are leaving for training with NATO troops in order to learn about the new military equipment given by western powers.

In Lviv, a city far from the frontlines that is often seen as the heart of Ukrainian architecture, with traces of its Polish and Austro-Hungarian heritage, everything continues at a normal pace. Restaurants are full, while street musicians and children play around water fountains. This is the image that can be seen by an outsider who is just passing by. And for a moment it feels like a city outside of a war-torn country. Yet, at least three times a week, by the entrance of the Saints Peter and Paul Garrison Church, dozens of people stand holding blue and yellow flowers, as a last goodbye to fallen Ukrainian soldiers takes place.

On April 14th 2023, a funeral service was held for three fallen Ukrainian soldiers. The relatives of one fallen soldier, Andrii Dovgan, could not help but show their pain to the crowds. His wife, mother and children grabbed the coffin before it left the church as no other way to express their pain was available. Later, the coffin was buried in the "Field of Mars", a plot of land outside the Lychakiv Ceme-

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tery. As the invasion continues, the number of casualties has often been discussed, though the real number is unknown to us. The Field of Mars was opened last year, just two months after the start of the Russian invasion. One year later, hundreds of graves decorated with flowers and Ukrainian national flags are visible from hundreds of metres away.

On the outskirts of Lviv, possibly next to a mining site, I was driven by my Ukrainian translator. TARGET, a civic-military initiative part of a broader group, continues to train people in urban assault tactics, as fears of a possible new front in the war by the Belarusian border remain among the population.

The group I spent time with is made up of ordinary citizens, including a surgeon from Lviv's hospitals. As they continue their target practice, their leader invites me to ride with them on a nighttime curfew patrol. TARGET cooperates with Lviv's police and other security agencies, as part of the territorial defence and army units that are engaged in the fight against the Russians to the east. After midnight, civilians must stay indoors as martial law comes into force all over the country. At night, most of the streets are empty, yet the fear of Russian sympathisers walking the streets and revealing the locations of checkpoints looms large.

UNBROKEN is a word that describes well the Ukrainian nation, as they continue to resist and fight back against one of the most powerful armies in the world. It is also the name of a centre that has been set up by the First Medical Union of Lviv and the Lviv City Council. Here, thousands of soldiers who have lost their limbs during battles with the Russians can find a calm environment to recover and receive a prosthesis. Ruslan, age 20, who lost both legs in the Donetsk region during a reconnaissance mission, participates in a physiotherapy session with a few comrades. They all smile and try to keep a positive spirit, even joking how Ruslan cheats during the session as his legs are shorter. Every single one of the soldiers who lost limbs states that they just wish to get back to the frontlines and help retake their land from the Russians. Spirits remain high, despite the hard path ahead of them.

As the Russian invasion of Ukraine continues on after more than a year, western powers have found a way to remain united and back Ukraine militarily and economically. A suspected counter-offensive by the Ukrainians is yet to happen and the question remains as to how much more this nation can endure. EE

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Cemeteries in Ukraine are covered with the graves of thousands of fallen soldiers. Hundreds of Ukrainian flags, while beautiful and lofty looking in the wind, testify first and foremost to the dramatic situation in which the Ukrainian state and its society find themselves, but also to the scale of the challenges Ukraine has faced since 2014.

The fallen soldiers are heroes for Ukrainian society, thanks to whom Ukraine can still believe it will win the war. The intensity of the conflict and the predictions of what will happen next make us reconcile with the thoughts that many more defenders of Ukraine will sacrifice their lives to defend their country and their families.

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Life in areas that have been or are being affected by warfare is often still very difficult. Many people face a lack of safe shelter and inadequate supplies of in food and other essential products.

News of those killed as a result of the war is now a daily occurrence for Ukrainians. Although news of more casualties is becoming common, the loss of a loved one is always a great tragedy for friends and immediate family.

Ukrainian refugees fleeing war battle with French bureaucracy

CRISTINA COELLEN

Ukrainian refugees who arrive to France face the daunting task of not only coming to a new country where they do not speak the language but also of trying to understand the complicated bureaucracy. In many cases, additional help from volunteers and online community groups is the only way to fully navigate the process.

When Olena Kondratova arrived in Paris in August 2022 after having fled the Russian invasion, she found shelter in temporary accommodation provided by French social services. The small apartment, where she lived with two other Ukrainian women, was two hours away from her new university, but it meant safety from the bombs raining down on her native city of Kharkiv in eastern Ukraine. Yet, a few months later, when a necessary trip back to Ukraine for administrative reasons took longer than expected, she was told that she could not come back to her accommodation in France. Social services told her that she was in fact only allowed to be absent from it for a week at a time.

"They forced me to move out. I don't know if they were allowed to do this or not", she says. She was then brought to an emergency refugee accommodation which she described as essentially a "big tent with around 20 beds inside", until she finally found an apartment in Paris where she could stay for longer. This experience is only one among a whole list of administrative problems that she has experienced as a Ukrainian refugee in France.

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Language barrier

More than a year after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, almost six million Ukrainian refugees who fled the war remain spread across countries of the European Union, according to the UN Refugee Agency. In France, around 100,000 Ukrainians are currently registered as temporary residents or refugees. From applying for health insurance, opening bank accounts, finding a job to sending children to school, France's administrative system already represents obstacles for its own citizens. Yet it becomes even more challenging for the Ukrainian refugees, who do not always have French contacts and face language barriers.

"Overall, we really appreciate the help and the possibility to stay here", Kondratova adds, but "there are a lot of questions that we want to ask the French government".

Not – yet – speaking French has only made the situation worse for many Ukrainians. For Kondratova, this language barrier has complicated much of her life in France, including accessing healthcare. "To help you in hospital, they will say that 'Ok you do not speak French, I will not help you until you come with a French-speaking guy or girl'. And I said that 'Ok, I do not know French-speaking people here, what do I do?' and they did not want to communicate via Translate", she says, referring to the Google translation service.

Natalia Kotok, who studies at the business school ESSCA with Kondratova, agrees with the picture painted by her friend of their new life in France. "The biggest problem is the lack of clear explanations and help in case of difficulties", Kotok says, who is also still struggling with the French language.

The OFII, the French Office of Immigration and Integration, is the central institution organising the first steps of most Ukrainian refugees in France. Its tasks notably include providing a first place to stay if required by the respective person – such was the case for Kondratova – and also offering language courses. While the language courses proposed are adapted to each learner's level, many of the refugees cannot progress fast enough to achieve the linguistic skills that are required to sort out their administrative problems.

Unexpected help

Not everyone has struggled this much. Alina Prokopenko, a 22-year-old pastry artist, is enjoying her new life in Paris after having fled Kyiv over a year ago: "I found work by myself through Instagram", she says. Her Instagram page of pastry creations, which more often resemble art pieces than food, has tapped into the taste of a Parisian culinary audience. Banana and dark chocolate tarts mimicking

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Photo: BooFamily / Shutterstock

A scene from 2022, with volunteers helping Ukrainian refugees at the railway station in Paris. Ukrainians rely on the volunteers not only for housing but also to navigate the complicated bureaucracy.

the supremacist artwork of Malevich or matcha and raspberry pastries inspired by Monet's water lilies have allowed her to start out in the French capital relatively easily. She first participated in a Ukrainian cooking pop-up in the restaurant La Bourse et la Vie in central Paris before becoming a resident pastry chef at the gallery-doubling-as-an-artistic-restaurant Mater.

For housing, Alina also found her bearings quickly through some unexpected help: "For the apartment, I wrote to a girl who lives in Paris and studies history of art at the Sorbonne. I just asked her about a possibility to continue my education and she was like: 'Oh, I already found an apartment for you for two months'", she says.

The French owner of the apartment then also helped Prokopenko out when it came to understanding the rent contract and getting documents ready. The pastry artist is still deeply grateful to her landlady, calling her "the best in the world".

While Alina managed to avoid the struggles that Kondratova and Kotok experienced with immigration institutions, she highlights that she could not have done so without the help she received, both from French citizens and Ukrainian self-help groups on Telegram and Facebook.

Indeed, faced with the daunting prospect of coming to a new country where they do not speak the language and might not have anyone to rely on, many Ukrainians have taken the initiative in informing each other and helping others online navigate French bureaucracy. Groups such as "Bizhentsi" (Refugees) or "Ukrainians in France" on Telegram have several thousand members and allow newcomers to

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ask questions about any issue from how to get a "pass Navigo", the Paris region transport card, to applying for a social security number.

Private citizen support

Another important helping hand comes from French citizens, such as Prokopenko's landlady. The French government estimates that around 11,000 Ukrainians are currently hosted privately by French citizens who have volunteered to take them in after arrival. Many of these volunteers are not only providing shelter, but also accompanying the refugees in their administrative journey in France.

This help has been crucial, as especially long-term housing options are not necessarily available to every Ukrainian immediately. Although there are no collective data for all of France, several cases of Ukrainian refugees waiting for long-term housing for months or even over a year as it was the case in the city of Lyon in eastern France have been recorded. Kondratova and Kotok spent several months waiting for it, too. This comes despite France taking in a relatively low number of Ukrainian refugees in a European context: in Poland and Germany, two million and over one million refugees, respectively, were registered in the first year of the invasion, ten times the number of refugees registered in France.

Yet, even for the French citizens well versed in the intricacies of French bureaucracy, hosting Ukrainians and helping them find their bearings can be a struggle. Frenchwoman Jany Mouillaud from Pessac, a suburb of Bordeaux in south-western France, has been hosting between three and five refugees at her home since the start of the invasion. The Ukrainian couple and their daughter currently still staying with her are trying their best to integrate themselves into French society, she says: "The little seven-year-old girl is now bilingual and perfectly integrated".

> The French government estimates that around 11,000 Ukrainians are currently hosted privately by French citizens.

As for the girl's parents, who are working as an architect and a civil engineer, they have already held the so-called CDD, a limited-time work contract, but are currently unable to find a CDI, an unlimited French work contract which provides more stability and increases their chances when it comes to finding an apartment to rent. For Mouillaud as a host, this situation is just as frustrating as for the Ukrainian couple: "They don't speak French perfectly, but they're well on the way to autonomy."

To support the refugees living with her in their struggles for housing and jobs, she has contacted every government department, non-governmental organisation

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and social agencies imaginable and even met with the deputy of her constituency. With little help resulting from this process according to her, she has mostly been turning to a Facebook group dedicated to helping and supporting Ukrainians in France for advice.

Mouillaud is also still waiting for a one-time financial aid of 150 euros, which was put in place for citizens hosting Ukrainian refugees privately in October 2022. "The civil service is not coping with the number of applications [for financial aid]", Mouillaud says. "It's a real year-long struggle", she adds, about her hosting experience. "I think that the government's idea to put in place a hosting system by citizens is not working."

For the refugees themselves, most of their administrative struggles have been solved – for now. But after fleeing airstrikes and invading troops, their experience of settling down in France has been "painful", as Olena terms it. EE

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How a Belarusian crowdfunding initiative provides relief for the repressed

MARYIA HRYTS

The civic campaign "By_Help" started as an online initiative to help repressed Belarusians back in 2017. Little did the founder expect that both the success and need for the programme would only grow in the coming years. Despite all the challenges, By_Help is still working, providing the much needed aid that so many Belarusians require in the face of extreme repressions.

The story of an initiative that has raised over five million US dollars to help victims of repressions in Belarus began in a British pub in 2017. At the time, after a comparatively long break in cracking down on dissent, the hard-line authorities had started rounding up people to head off possible protests on Freedom Day, an unofficial holiday in Belarus celebrated on March 25th to commemorate the declaration of independence by the Belarusian Democratic Republic in 1918. Activist Alaksiej Lavoncyk got a message from Andrei Stryzhak, a well-known human rights defender, saying they should launch a campaign to help those being arrested.

"We had done a fundraiser for Ukrainian hospitals before, but there had never been any successful cases of political fundraisers in our country," Alaksiej recalls. "I felt so shitty about what was going on in Belarus, I went for a walk. It was

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pouring rain in London – I went to a bar and wrote a Facebook post about collecting money to help those arrested for political reasons." He listed an account number, as well as the possibility of sending money through the Belarusian payment system ERIP.

By the time Alaksiej left the pub three hours later, people from various countries, including Belarus, had donated 8,000 US dollars. The total went up to 25,000 the next day, and eventually reached over 50,000, which shocked the organisers and prompted them to create a formal initiative called "By_Help".

From one-off to longer-term

Since then, the By_Help civic campaign has become much better known, through its multi-million-dollar fundraisers to paying the fines, legal expenses and medical costs of those whom the authorities have persecuted, as well as to raise funds for independent media. Over 80,000 individuals and organisations have donated, benefiting over 18,000 people. The initiative has served as inspiration for BYSOL – a similar initiative that Stryzhak later co-founded – which has also raised millions to help those who face political repression, as well as other, more narrowly focused funds in the areas of sport, medical care, cultural solidarity and others.

The funds raised in that first call for help were enough to cover the fines of those detained on the eve of Freedom Day. People who were later detained and fined started contacting the initiative as well. "When we exhausted our resources, the criticism started [that we were not continuing]. But we sincerely stated: 'We raised this amount of money, gave it away, and that was it,'" Alaksiej says. "We never had any intention of making it permanent. We thought at the time that it was pure luck to raise so much money."

Over 80,000 individuals and organisations have donated to the By_Help campaign, benefiting over 18,000 people.

Events on the ground, however, pushed the group to resume the initiative in 2019 after the authorities accused Belarusian independent media of stealing information from the state news agency, fining them and seizing their equipment. By_Help launched a specific fundraiser for the media, collecting around 10,000 euros – the largest crowdfunding campaign for Belarusian media at the time. Again, however, By_Help went quiet – until the protests that spread through the country in the run-up to the 2020 presidential elections. As the August elections approached, the authoritarian government of Alyaksandr Lukashenka started arresting some of his main competitors and their supporters. On the first day after By_Help relaunched in

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late June 2020, the campaign collected about 70,000 euros, and by the time of the August elections, the figure had swelled to 200,000.

Back in 2017, the fund had relied on the Viasna Human Rights Centre to screen applicants seeking money to pay their fines. Founded in 1996 in response to an earlier wave of repression, Viasna provides financial and legal assistance to political prisoners and their families. Its founder, the Nobel Prize-winner Ales Bialiatski, recently received a ten-year sentence for various crimes, drawing international condemnation. In the early weeks of the 2020 crackdown, Viasna again took care of verifying the identities of those who received assistance, using its contacts and databases, but even before the elections – with the number of detainees skyrocketing and 300 people turning to By_Help – the task became too great for the organisation to handle on its own. By_Help then introduced its own system of verification, requiring victims to provide a ruling from the court about fines or proof of arrest from the prosecutor's office.

> Today, By_Help is back to its basic function: helping those prosecuted to pay legal fees and fines.

"Then election day came around, and the internet was shut down throughout Belarus. After a couple of days, we got together and decided that we should raise more money for the injured who had been tortured," says Alaksiej. "It made a big splash when we wrote a post that we were adding the injured [to the list of those receiving assistance, beyond just those arrested and fined]. Then we got about a million British pounds in one day."

Delivering the money

This time, it was not only the diaspora and people still in Belarus who pitched in, but also companies and organisations abroad, such as the Lithuanian public broadcaster LRT, which raised over 250,000 pounds through its own fundraiser for By_Help, and Libereco, a German-Swiss NGO, which took in around 100,000. A Russian artist sold his work, while others held concerts or collected money at rallies. "We did not register the fund at the time because we thought that we would again raise some money, give it away, and go off into the sunset. No one thought it would last so long, and we would have to rearrange all our activities," Alaksiej admits.

At first, the By_Help team transferred the victims' money directly into their bank accounts, but in November 2020, the Belarusian authorities moved to freeze the accounts of those who had been fined (and allegedly even siphon off funds, though officials deny it). Then By_Help had to come up with new ways of transferring cash, including to foreign accounts and using cryptocurrencies.

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The team also devised a third method. "There are people who need to take money out of Belarus, I need to bring it in. So we've come up with a scheme where the money doesn't cross the border," Alaksiej says. A trusted person inside Belarus will provide money for distribution to volunteers of the initiative inside the country. By_Help then puts the same amount into that individual's account in a bank outside Belarus. The money does not physically flow abroad, which also benefits people who might want to send funds out of the country, but fear doing so because the authorities have also been known to monitor such transfers.

Such methods to counter the authorities' repression carry risks, including questions about the transparency of By_Help, which receives complaints every few months. "We were approached by a group from Canada, where the people said that we must pass their audit; otherwise they will forbid all the members of the diaspora in the world to donate to us. This is ridiculous," Alaksiej says, noting that LRT, in Lithuania, has had to prepare reports to their donors, and his team has always provided the necessary documentation. "We have paid out money to more than 18,000 people, and we work with every complaint if the money does not reach them. Some of the claims on the internet that By_Help had abandoned them were scammers," he adds.

"There have also been scams during pay-out where we have been sent deepfakes," says Alaksiej. "Yes, there have been cases where scammers have tried to get money for someone else's torture." To counter such fraud, By_Help has asked suspicious applicants to speak on video. Today, By_Help is back to its basic function: helping to pay fines. Although the authorities are arresting fewer people than in 2020, the verdicts that end with a fine have multiplied. In addition, the initiative, together with BYSOL, launched a programme to get victims of repression out of Belarus, though this is now on pause due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. With the focus of public attention now shifted to the war, it has become much more difficult to raise money for Belarusian causes, but the diaspora, especially previous donors, continue to help. Key to such support, says Alaksiej, is that he was trusted during the first wave of fundraisers and has managed to maintain that trust.

By_Help volunteers

At the peak of the crackdown the initiative was receiving up to 1,000 applications a week. Around 125 volunteers were working with this large number of victims, processing applications or redirecting people to other organisations if By_Help could not help them. The team only dealt with monetary payments, but when the situation dramatically worsened, they also worked in conjunction with other

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initiatives that were providing psychological, legal, medical and food assistance for the victims and their families. Through this cooperation, it was also possible to track down fraudsters who had submitted requests to different initiatives several times. Now, 30 people regularly cooperate with By_Help, and many have faced persecution themselves.

Polina joined By_Help in August 2020. She admits that she suffered greatly from survivor's guilt at the time. "I was donating, but I felt like it wasn't enough and needed to do something more. I saw Alaksiej's post that they were looking for volunteers and since August 2020 I have been a part of By_Help. It was one of the main reasons why I had to leave Belarus, because they started to hunt us down around November 2020."

Difficulties have arisen at every stage of the work, Polina says. "By the end of October 2020, the challenge was the number of applications – each Sunday protest march, another 700 new applications. There were a lot of volunteers and a lot of donations, but still not enough hands. Personally for me it was very difficult to communicate with the wounded. I am not a psychologist by training, and it seemed to me that after the horror that people had gone through, this communication was like touching a person whose skin had been flayed. I was scared, uncomfortable. How do we talk? We have to ask him for some kind of proof, documents, photos, history to prevent fraud. It seemed to me that because of this the person would go through all this horror again. The psychologist who worked with us on the topic of burnout and how we should behave with different types of victims was very helpful. She then said that if a person has already asked for help, it means they are more or less ready for dialogue."

If, however, applicants were seeking psychological care, By_Help referred them to other initiatives. At first, people opposed to the regime were not too stressed about the fines, as they thought it would all soon be over. In November 2020, however, Polina saw a change in attitude – both protesters and volunteers had lost their strength.

"Our team began to shrink as some of them burned out. I burned out too, went away to catch my breath for a week and came back. I couldn't and can't give up until the goal is achieved. And people were counting on a sprint, volunteering around the clock. Not surprisingly, after two or three months, they were no longer physically able to work, but their contribution had been simply enormous by the time. Unfortunately, they left because the passion had passed and the situation was not getting any better. It was difficult until the summer of 2021, when we got into some kind of rhythm with work procedures, security issues and a stable team."

Reflecting on her experience, Polina says she is proud of her fellow Belarusians and their courage and resilience. She has kept in touch with some of the victims

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for more than a year. Although By_Help volunteers, for security reasons, do not give their own names or show their faces, they have such a level of trust with the aid recipients that these people turn to them for all sorts of issues and sometimes just to talk.

The victims

Olga had been detained at marches and fined twice (her name has been changed to protect her identity). The second time she turned to By_Help for assistance. "To be honest, it was embarrassing to write and ask. All the time the thought was throbbing in my head that it might be worse for someone else than for me. The first fine we paid ourselves. It seemed at the time that it [the repression] was about to end. But when the second [criminal] sentence came, my brother and some friends were already in prison, so I wanted to support them and another fine was a serious burden for me," Olga recalls. "It was like angels taking care of you," Olga admits. "I felt so warm inside that unknown Belarusians from other countries took care of me."

Vitaly was badly beaten first on the street during the protests, and then in a police van and at the police station [his name has also been changed]. They finally left him at a hospital and when no one was looking he took off and found his way to a private clinic, where doctors diagnosed him with a fractured rib, a traumatic brain injury and numerous bruises.

"I don't know if I can say it, but I was lucky," Vitaly says. "There were so many injured that they just forgot about me and so I managed to escape. It didn't occur to me to deal with the paperwork in the hospital at the time – I was glad I had survived. I had doubts about whether By_Help would help me. But yes, they did." EE

Maryia Hryts is a Belarusian journalist who works with Belsat TV.

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The nightingales singing to the wounded

How Ukrainian medical staff save lives under fire

KATERYNA PRYSHCHEPA

Ukraine's military has set up special medical stabilisation points (stabs, for short) near the frontlines to provide immediate treatment for wounded soldiers. These points, which are just a few kilometres from the front, are manned by dedicated medical staff and volunteers who work to save wounded soldiers coming out of Bakhmut. A recent visit to one of these points tells the story of these harrowing moments of sacrifice and hope amidst the chaos of war.

At the time of writing, the Battle of Bakhmut, reportedly the deadliest so far since the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, is far from over. Even though there have been reports about Ukrainian forces pulling out from Bakhmut, the city continues to be the centre of military activity. Ukrainian forces still held some segments of the city for at least several days after the international media announced the Russian takeover in late May 2023. By the beginning of June, Ukrainian army units began a pushback, trying to encircle and lock Russian forces inside the city. The night when I visited the stabilisation point near Bakhmut was one of the calmer ones, I am told, which saw the treatment of a several dozen soldiers mostly with shrapnel wounds and concussions.

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Evacuating the wounded

Given the concentration of the army units in the area and the high number of casualties, there are several stabilisation points operating in the proximity of Bakhmut. Each one is managed by a larger army unit. In the majority of cases, the staff is reinforced by medics from several different units, who also perform tasks in the area but currently do not have resources to operate their own stab.

The evacuation of a wounded soldier begins on the battlefield, where personnel first provide pre-medical aid by applying tourniquets and bandages. Afterwards, the wounded soldier is carried to an area where he or she can be put in a military vehicle. Several kilometres from the combat line, the wounded soldier is picked up by the medical staff of his unit who then transport the wounded to a military stabilisation point. The main purpose of the point is to give a chance of survival for the soldiers with grave injuries. To raise the chances of survival for soldiers with severe injuries, it is necessary that a soldier gets to a point where they can get the required medical treatment within an hour and the trip from the battlefield to a proper hospital can take hours. Even with the stabs located midway between the battle line and the hospital, getting the soldier to the doctors within an hour is not always possible. Russian forces often shell the evacuation teams, which make it difficult to reach the wounded or get them out of the combat zone.

On May 22nd 2023, Oleksandr Yabchanka, the former speaker of the Ukrainian health ministry who joined the army in February 2022, published a post on his Facebook profile about his unit's experience. From Yabchanka's account, an attempt to evacuate one wounded soldier in the Bakhmut area led to 11 more casualties among the evacuation teams, including himself.

> Russian forces often shell evacuation teams, which makes it difficult to reach the wounded or get them out of the combat zone.

With the medics being targeted by the Russians, the army units take precautions not to disclose the exact locations of the medical aid points, as they are often shelled. The windows in the point I visited are covered with plywood to keep the staff safe from broken glass, and to avoid revealing their location at night by blocking out the light. There is also a big shed at the entrance to hide the cars that transport injured soldiers. The shed is also a place where the staff can take a break, get some air and have a cigarette while taking care of the wounded.

I arrived at the stab with two colleagues after 10:00pm and walk to its doors in complete darkness. Some of the medics smoking inside the shed ask if we were not injured. The brigade's press officer says we are press and we are allowed inside. The first thing I notice inside is that like most Ukrainian army locations, the stab

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Medical staff tend to the ones of one of the injured soldiers brought to the stabilisation point from the front lines near Bakhmut.

interior is decorated with children's drawings. These range from simple blue and yellow-coloured hearts to detailed drawings of the city battle, suggesting that the child witnessed military action him or herself.

The stab I visit is run by the 93rd Mechanized Brigade "Kholodnyi Yar", but medics from three different brigades are working here. They are assisted by the staff of the First Volunteer Mobile Hospital (FVMH) – a volunteer organisation that has been active in Donbas since 2014, helping with medical evacuations of army personnel and civilians. Most casualties from the Battle of Bakhmut are the result of shrapnel wounds or concussions of various severity.

The access roads to Bakhmut are shelled constantly, so the wounded soldiers come in groups as soon as the evacuation cars manage to slip through the heavily shelled areas. A soldier with the call sign "Jesus" assisting at the stab tells me that usually more soldiers are brought to the stabilisation points at night, as there is a higher chance to avoid shelling. This is why some soldiers get to a stabilisation point only hours after being injured. During my time there, one of the wounded soldiers with shrapnel wounds was brought to the point almost two days after being injured in combat. Heavy shelling made it impossible for the evacuation group to reach him earlier.

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Treating the wounded

The staff in the stab work 24-hour shifts. There are surgeons, anaesthesiologists, nurses and some soldiers serving as assistants, cleaners and drivers. The army personnel are assisted by FVMH volunteers. Most of the doctors working at the stab have not been in the army prior to February 2022. One exception is an anaesthesiologist named Luba, a local from Donbas who joined the army before the full-scale invasion. Some of the soldiers helping at the point are also Donbas locals, who joined the army after the first Russian attempt to take over the region in 2014. During a short pause Luba points to one of the surgeons, a white headed and bearded man who looks like a Santa dressed in an army uniform, and says: "You know he lost his son just few weeks ago. Killed in action here in Bakhmut".

The staff finish bandaging one wounded soldier and turns off the light to get some rest. Soon a new group arrives, mostly with shrapnel wounds. Their faces are black with dirt the soldiers look like the miners on the old photos. They receive anaesthesia and fresh bandages. Broken limbs are treated with casts and the soldiers are changed into clean clothes and prepared for further transportation to hospital. There are four tables for such activities in the stabilisation point, so four soldiers are treated simultaneously.

When the next evacuation car brings a larger group, the less seriously injured soldiers wait their turn. While waiting to be treated, the soldiers with concussions provide an account of the combat they just experienced. Some try to focus and come back to their senses. The assistants check the soldiers' blood pressure and heart rates, writing the numbers on their arms with markers.

While disposing the clothes belonging to one injured soldier who sustained a shrapnel wound, the cleaner finds a fragment of shrapnel roughly the size of half a carrot. This had miraculously become stuck in the soldier's equipment, saving his body from more harm. Someone suggests the soldier should keep it as a souvenir, while one of the doctors argues to throw it away, superstitious it could bring more injuries. Having received his treatment, the soldier who luckily escaped the carrot-shaped shrapnel falls asleep while lying on the stretcher. One of FVMH nurses starts chatting with him to keep him awake, before he is sent to hospital.

Between the arrivals of injured soldiers, the staff at the stab try to get some sleep, lying down on the same stretchers the soldiers are treated on. I come outside to have a breath of air in the shed and ask one of the soldiers who is having his cigarette there if he has seen the television series MASH. The stab interior and communication between the staff sometimes feels like the its re-enactment.

Despite it being a relatively calm night for the stab, the shelling of the area where the aid station is located does not stop. At some point between two and three in

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the morning, the shelling becomes so intense that the staff retreat from the treatment room into the corridor inside the building. The corridor has no windows and provides "two walls", better shelter from the shelling. It has two walls for cover – the outer wall of the building and the inner wall of the corridor.

The staff spend at least 40 minutes in the corridor until the shelling becomes less intense. No wounded soldiers are brought to the stab during that time. I ask what would happen if an evacuation car managed to get to the aid station during the shelling. Luba, the anaesthesiologist, tells me that in such cases the wounded are treated in the corridor.

The work goes on

Not all the staff are happy about journalists visiting the stab. Luba complains that the journalists are careless. Several months ago following the visit of a journalist, a stabilisation point which was then located even closer to Bakhmut was targeted during shelling. Luba suspects it was because of an article published by the journalist which inadvertently revealed the stab's location.

The shelling from the enemy was met with a response from Ukrainian units. As one of the soldiers explains, a high-pitched rattling noise we hear while taking a breath of air in the shed outside the stab is most likely made by a HIMARS rocket launcher system from a place nearby. When the shelling calms down, I go outside the shed to take a look at the marvellous night sky. There has been no rain for days and the sky is clear. The absolute absence of light in the village makes it a perfect observation point for the stars, it seems I can touch one just by stretching out my hand. Between the sounds of distant explosions, the crickets chirp in the grass outside the building, a nightingale sings somewhere close by and only artificial lights come from the cars arriving from Bakhmut.

> The absolute absence of light in the village makes it a perfect observation point for the stars.

Several more groups of wounded soldiers come to the stab from Bakhmut between three and eight o'clock that morning. Many have concussions caused by grenade explosions. One of the wounded soldiers has a piece of shrapnel in his abdomen and the surgeons are worried whether his spine is injured as well. His treatment requires almost all the available staff and demonstrates their impressive level of coordination. When the soldier is placed on a stretcher and taken outside to be transported to hospital by the FVMH car, it is already light outside, something that is difficult to notice while being inside the stab, with its closed windows and

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artificial light. The FVMH volunteers get ready for the road by putting on helmets and protective vests. The patch on one of the nurse's vests says "The Lord protects me and gives victory".

By eight in the morning soldiers with concussions make up the largest portion of the new arrivals at the stab. As the current group of soldiers receives the necessary assistance, the FVMH group who have returned from their trip to the hospital some time ago complete their shift. They bid farewell and head towards a town nearby for their two days of rest. Having treated the latest group of wounded soldiers, the personnel remaining at the point go to get a morning coffee and a cigarette. Some are hoping for a bit of sleep before a new group of wounded arrives. The work goes on. ~~EE~~

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

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Lina Kostenko and her world

OLEKSII LIONCHUK

Most Ukrainians today learn about Lina Kostenko during their Ukrainian literature classes at school. Her deep philosophical poetry is filled with love for her country, its people and humanity in general. As a result, it rarely leaves the reader indifferent. Kostenko belongs to the era of the "sixtiers", a young rebellious generation that shook the world with its protests.

The generation of the 1960s has for a long time been and still is a great topic of debate for researchers. And there is nothing surprising here, as this was the generation born after the Second World War. They did not know all its horrors but they heard about them from those who survived the war. This was the period when the "hippie" movement was born in the United States. They were pacifists, loved rock and roll, took soft drugs and promoted the idea of free love. In Europe, they were a generation of rebels and supporters of communism and socialism, until the moment Leonid Brezhnev stifled the Prague Spring. The invasion of Czechoslovakia cured many of these "red illusions" among western intellectuals and their young followers.

There was also a sixties generation in the socialist camp – people who initially shared socialist and communist views. Eventually they observed the system's work from within, became disillusioned and turned from support for the "people's democracies" to outright criticism. Some famous names among them were Jacek Kuroń, Leszek Kołakowski, Adam Michnik, Włodzimierz Mokry and Václav Havel. They were well aware that the communists would not give up power, and

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Moscow would not allow them to do so. Due to this, they demanded reforms and the introduction of "socialism with a human face".

Defending cultural autonomy

There were shortwave radios in many homes on both sides of the Iron Curtain, which marked one of the key periods of the era's information revolution. Those radios made it possible to listen to The Beatles and Scorpions for people like the Czechs, Poles, Ukrainians and Tatars. At that time, it was not just Radio Liberty or Voice of America that were blocked on the territory of Soviet Ukraine, but also Polish radio. This is despite the fact that Poland was meant to be a friendly socialist state. Even during Khrushchev's thaw, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic was the most isolated republic when it came to access to information. However, this information vacuum could not hold. At night, young members of the Ukrainian intelligentsia, like many other citizens, tried to catch transmissions from western radio stations with their receivers. As a result, the generation of the 1960s was open-minded and creative, no matter where they lived. The only thing that distinguished young hippies from young people in Eastern Europe was their attitude to socialism: western students were enthusiastic about the ideology, while their peers from the socialist camp were fed up with it.

Khrushchev's thaw revived cautious hopes in young Ukrainians that change in the Soviet Union was irreversible, and that it was finally possible to write not only about the party and its leaders but the eternal values of humanism. There were several cities known for their artistic activity but the two most important centres were traditionally Lviv and Kyiv. Historically, the Ukrainian elite in times of statelessness have always been represented by writers, artists and members of academia. The 1960s were no exception, and young writers, artists and even historians took up the cause of defending Ukraine's cultural autonomy as much as possible at the time.

The generation of the 1960s was open-minded and creative, no matter where they lived.

At that time, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic was led by the First Secretaries of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine, Mykola Pidhornyi and his successor Petro Shelest. This second figure was himself actively interested in Ukraine's past and its culture and was one of the first ethnic Ukrainians to hold such a high position. At the beginning of Khrushchev's thaw, he actively supported the talented youth. At Pidhornyi's suggestion, the Club of Creative Youth was created in Kyiv's Zhovten Cinema Palace under the supervision of

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the city's Komsomol committee. This initiative was aimed at overseeing artists and intelligentsia in the capital. Shelest also initially supported it. However, the club's activities started to threaten the very foundations of the Soviet regime and so the first wave of repressions and arrests was launched against the group's most active figures. It all began with applying relatively mild methods of influence: a conversation at the Writers' Union, condemnation of one's work (as such that it did not meet socialist standards), and so on. The next stage would be a dismissal from work and a ban on publications, which was especially painful for artists. When these methods of influence did not work, the artists were arrested, put on show trials and sentenced to real terms in prison for "anti-Soviet propaganda".

The rebellion of the younger generation against the system was something natural and understandable, but resistance to the totalitarian machine, even if it was somewhat liberalised, was a difficult choice even for the strongest of minds. These people were later called the "prisoners of conscience". The poet and writer Lina Kostenko can certainly be named among these unbroken personalities of that era.

The phenomenon of the era

Most Ukrainians today learn about Lina Kostenko during their Ukrainian literature classes at school. Her deep philosophical poetry is filled with love for her country, its people and humanity in general. As a result, it rarely leaves the reader indifferent. Kostenko belongs to the era of the "sixtiers", a young rebellious generation that shook the world with its protests. Lina Kostenko's protest, however, was quiet and uncompromising at the same time. The worst thing for an artist and writer is to be banned from talking to their supporters. This is how the Soviet system had punished the young poet. She was probably the only one who was not arrested and sent to the terrible Soviet prisons. However, her works were not published for a long time.

> Kostenko's philosophical poetry is filled with love for her country, its people and humanity in general.

Kostenko was born in 1930 into a family of teachers in the village of Rzhyshchiv in the Kyiv region. Her father spoke 12 languages and in 1936 was named by the Soviet authorities as an "enemy of the people" and sentenced on a completely trumped-up charge. Lina Kostenko and her family lived through the hardships of the Second World War and experienced all the "benefits" of the Nazi and Soviet occupation regimes. Later in life, she would write about this in her autobiographical poem "My first poem was written in a trench…"

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Kostenko's life was quite successful, especially given her father's biography: the future writer graduated from high school in Kyiv, was a member of the literary studio run by the famous *Dnipro* magazine, continued her studies at the Kyiv Pedagogical Institute (now the Mykhailo Drahomanov National Pedagogical University), and later moved to Moscow, where she continued her studies at the Gorky Institute of Literature. The Moscow period was very productive in her literary and personal life. During that time, she met her first husband, the Polish writer Jerzy Jan Pachlowski. She got married and had a daughter, Oksana.

The KGB and Communist Party of Ukraine could not have ignored the activity of the young writer. The entire system started to pressure Kostenko.

Kostenko's early works were created at the very beginning of the Khrushchev thaw period. And also, paradoxically, Moscow offered more opportunities for career and artistic work than other Soviet republics, especially in science and literature. Kostenko's first poetry volume, entitled *Prominnia Zemli* (*The Earth Rays*), however, was published in Kyiv in 1957. It was received favourably by readers and critics, and the first edition instantly sold out. Her next two volumes, *Vitryla* (*The Sails*) (1958) and *Mandrivky Sertsia* (*The Heart Journeys*) (1961) met with similar success. That period also marked a time when poets were involved with the Kyiv Club of Creative Youth. She blended into the capital's artistic circles, held poetry readings together with her peers and like-minded people, and helped organise thematic events commemorating Ukrainian poets like Ivan Franko, Taras Shevchenko and Lesia Ukrainka. She was among the members of an expedition to Bykivnia, a place (in the outskirts of Kyiv) where the graves of Stalin's 1930s repressions were discovered.

Repressions

The KGB and the ideological department of the Communist Party of Ukraine could not have ignored the activity of the young writer. The entire system started to pressure Kostenko. The transformation initiated by Khrushchev was half-hearted and the repressive apparatus was simply put on standby. Therefore, Khrushchev's era ended up with renewed repressions against the intelligentsia, which spread in Ukraine on a huge scale when Leonid Brezhnev came to power.

Lina Kostenko's persecution started on April 8th 1963, during a party meeting on ideology, when the secretary for ideology of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine, Andriy Skaba, spoke unequivocally: "Formalist tricks with

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words inevitably obscure the ideological and artistic content of the work. And some works by young poets Vinranovsky, Drach and Kostenko prove that this is the case."

Following that criticism, Kostenko's new collection of poetry, *Zoryanyi Intehral* (*The Stars Integral*), was withdrawn from publication. The writer did not give up, however, and she continued her creative and social activities. Despite the ban on her works at home, they were published abroad, in Poland and Czechoslovakia, for example. A volume of translations titled *Young Soviet Poetry*, which included poems by Kostenko, Vasyl Stus, Vitalii Korotych, Ivan Drach, Vasyl Symonenko and others, was published in Czechoslovakia as the Prague Spring neared. Thus, the works of Ukrainian dissidents reached the countries of the free world via the nations of the socialist bloc.

In Soviet Ukraine, repressions of dissent did not stop for a moment. In 1966, when a closed trial of the Horyn brothers was held in Lviv, a group of like-minded people from Kyiv – Kostenko, Viacheslav Chornovil, Ivan Drach and others – came to show their support. As Chornovil later noted in his memoirs: "Lina Kostenko and Lyubov Zabashta decided … to create a record (of the verdict). The "public" literally took these recordings from them by force. Lina Kostenko also threw flowers to the convicts after the verdict. The flowers, of course, were immediately seized and Lina Kostenko herself was subjected to a "passionate" interrogation in the room next door, but the solemn ceremony at the end of the closed trial of "particularly dangerous state criminals" was completely spoiled."

The Writers' Union of Ukraine served as another instrument of influence on the rebellious writers. In 1966 a meeting was held and the persecution of writers began to grow in intensity. The poet expressed her solidarity and support for her colleagues who had fallen out of favour with the regime. This finally led to a full ban on her works in Soviet Ukraine. Kostenko became an unpublished author for 16 long years – from 1961 to 1977. She continued to write for herself, developing her skills and sophistication.

During her forced creative pause, Kostenko also tried working as a screenwriter.

During her forced creative pause, Kostenko also tried working as a screenwriter. Together with Anatolii Dobrovolskyi, they wrote a screenplay for a documentary about Ukrainian poets who died on the fields of the Second World War. The film was originally titled *Check Your Watch*, and work on the film spanned about a year (1963–64). However, the censors and their subordinates altered the film and changed the title so much that Kostenko herself refused to be listed as an author, and the film was never released.

The proud and unbreakable author returned to her readers in 1977 with a new volume of poetry titled *Nad Berehamy Vichnoi Riky* (*Over the Banks of the Eter-*

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nal River), and in 1979 her outstanding historical poem "Marusya Churai" was published after six years of waiting. The first edition of only 8,000 copies sold out instantly, as did the second edition of 100,000 copies in 1982. She later received the Taras Shevchenko Prize in Literature for this poem and the volume *Nepovtornist* (*Uniqueness*) during Gorbachev's perestroika.

The nation's conscience

After Ukraine's declaration of independence from the Soviet Union, Kostenko continued to work on new literary masterpieces. Her civic position remained unchanged and her relations with the authorities were not easy. In the Leonid Kuchma era the government tried to present her with the Order of Yaroslav the Wise of the V degree. However, she politely refused, saying, "I do not wear political jewellery." She reacted similarly to Viktor Yushchenko's attempt to bestow upon her the title of Hero of Ukraine. In 1999, she published her second historical poem, "Berestechko". The poem was brought to life at the Rivne Music and Drama Theatre, and in 2008 the theatre was awarded the Taras Shevchenko Prize for this production.

Kostenko's silence is much louder than the thousands of words of Ukrainian politicians and public figures. She speaks up at critical moments in Ukraine's modern history, and it is up to the public to appreciate these words. After the illegal annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of war in Donbas, she wrote these famous lines, which sound especially poignant and relevant after February 24th 2022:

Horror, and blood, and death, and despair,
And the clamour of the predatory horde,
The little grey man has caused that black sorrow.

It is a beast of a hideous breed,
the Loch Ness of the cold Neva.
Where are you looking, people?
It is us today and tomorrow it's you.

The author recently turned 93, one of the few survivors of that generation of sixtiers and dissidents. One can read her poems on Telegram pages. Today, Kostenko remains one of the moral authorities of the Ukrainian people, who continue to fight for their right to live in a free and sovereign Ukraine.

In 2011, in an interview for *Ukrainska Pravda* – a rare occasion – she gave an assessment of her work and the work of her fellow sixtiers: "we were young then

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and did not know that we were sixtiers. One cannot self-categorise or award titles to oneself. This was the case with the "Executed Renaissance" (a term used to describe the generation of Ukrainian language poets, writers and artists of the 1920s and early 1930s – editor's note). These were the people who were the pillars for the high-voltage line of the spirit. The sixtiers were a cohort. They were united by common beliefs and honesty. They really loved each other and had a respect for each other. I don't know another generation like that. Well, maybe the Kyiv school, maybe the "eightiers". And after that there is no such thing." EE

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Memory sites in Tirana provide a deep connection to Albania's recent past

KINGA ANNA GAJDA

Albania's relationship with its communist past remains a difficult subject today. Often forgotten in the transition to democracy, these decades are remembered in different ways in the country's museums. This article looks at how three institutions engage with this past, reflecting on their effectiveness and how they may ultimately preserve this historical memory for the future.

Historical narratives often treat a place as a witness to traumatic events. Three Tirana-based museums recounting difficult periods under Albania's communist regime vividly illustrate this process. These include the National Historical Museum (1981), located in a building designed and designated as a cultural institution, Bunk'Art 1 and 2 (2014), located in authentic bomb shelters built as part of the "bunkerisation" of the 1970s, and the House of Leaves (2017), housed in a building that served as the headquarters of the Sigurimi state security service. Although they all depict the same story, each does so in a different way. The narrative is determined not only by the time the exhibit opened, but also by where it is displayed.

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Memory and amnesia

The National Historical Museum in Tirana was established during the communist regime. It tells the story of the Albanian nation since pre-historic times. The collection involves a chronological presentation, starting with the history of Albania from late Neolithic cave paintings and the history of the Illyrians. These people are the ancestors of modern Albanians and came from Central Europe to settle in the Western Balkans. The very fact that references are made to Illyrian culture shows that the museum's narrative has succumbed to propaganda. Showing the connection between antiquity and the present is strategic, as it justifies the existence of a country surrounded by "hostile" Slavs and Greeks. It also promotes the "glorious" origins of the Albanian people and their right to territory.

The museum weaves a tale involving eras such as the Komani-Kruja culture, and the medieval period with its barbarian invasions. It also presents the 15th century history of the Kastrioti family, which was the oldest noble family in Albania, as well as Skanderbeg – the Albanian national hero who led the uprising against the Ottomans. The museum offers a detailed story of Skanderbeg and his ancestors, who ruled over Macedonia and Epirus for more than 100 years. The 19th century National Revival movement is also discussed alongside the Albanian Declaration of Independence on November 28th 1912. Finally, the museum addresses the world wars, while the topic of communism is barely noted.

Bunk'Art 1 and 2 and the House of Leaves are museums that, according to Péter Apor, can be considered museums of communism. However, the National Museum hardly discusses the subject of the regime. It is included in this analysis because it was opened in 1981 and therefore under communism. In itself, it is a relic or artefact of the past.

The National Museum is housed in a monumental building in Tirana, designed specifically for the institution. It is located in the city's main square – Skanderbeg Square – on the site of a former neo-Renaissance town hall built during the Second World War. The building itself is already a relic of its time. In the words of Walter Benjamin, it can be said that the museum played a role in the "aestheticisation of politics". This involves physically depicting political ideology, with the monumentality of buildings and spaces seen as a means of making the regime visible. The museum is disproportionately large in comparison to the square, thus reflecting the importance of history and art in society. On one of the museum's walls is a mosaic depicting, in typical Socialist Realist style, thirteen figures from different periods of Albania's history, with "Mother Albania" standing in the middle.

The angular, solid interior of the building and the way the walls are designed is a reminder of the socialist realism so familiar to audiences from Central and East-

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Photo: roibu / Shutterstock

The National Museum is housed in a monumental building in Tirana, designed specifically for the institution. It is located in the city's main square – Skanderbeg Square – on the site of a former neo-Renaissance town hall built during the Second World War. The building itself is already a relic of its time.

ern Europe. The National Museum in Tirana itself is therefore a museum object, a place of memory. It can be regarded as a product of the Albanian cultural revolution, and as a tool of memory appropriation and amnesia. It also shows how national museums seek to transform historical memory into an ideological tool, and how interpretations of the past shift after the impact of political change. In the case of the Tirana museum, it reveals how historical narratives under the communist regime changed to better fit the period of Albanian society's shift to capitalism.

Cleansing of memory

In 1991, the "cleansing of memory" began which, in the case of the National Museum in Tirana, involved only a select part of the museum. The exhibition depicting the construction of socialism in Albania, as well as the monuments to Stalin and Enver Hoxha, were all removed. Five years later, the museum unveiled the "Pavilion of Communist Terror" to tell the story of communism through the photos of the period's victims, alongside personal items, documents and press clip-

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pings. It also recreated a cell in a labour camp at 1:1 scale. In this sense, this exhibition takes on the characteristics of a communist museum, as it introduces a vitriolic narrative, focusing on the victims. Minor modifications were also made to the "Hall of Albanian Independence", where references to Marxist-Leninist symbols were eliminated and a room was added to show the story of Albania's independence from a different perspective. The mosaic was also redesigned and the large red star next to Mother Albania was erased.

Despite these fragments of the past being eliminated, there has been no change in the way the nation's history is told. The museum's decision to change a fragment of the historical narrative can be seen as an attempt to interpret actions in a political manner. As a result, the institution attempts to control the process of remembering and forgetting, disrupting the "natural passage of time".

Two important facts are worth mentioning at this point. First, the communist regime in Albania was different from that in other countries. Enver Hoxha himself distinguished "Eurocommunism", which he viewed as a form of anti-communism, from "pure" Albanian communism. Some 18,000 people were imprisoned for political reasons in Albania under the dictatorship, nearly 8,000 of whom were women. More than 1,000 people died in political prisons. Daily life was constantly under surveillance and control. The state outlawed religion altogether, making Albania an atheist country. In 1967 Hoxha boasted that Albania was the first atheist country in the world.

Communism in Albania lasted for more than 40 years until 1991. In the 1970s the ideology emphasised the "people's war". Albania was then portrayed as the only socialist country in the world, under siege from the two superpowers and their allies. Ultimately, self-isolation kept Albanian society under total state control. Moreover, there was never an organised opposition in Albania and all cultural institutions were used for propaganda purposes. It was only in 2006 that the Albanian government officially admitted that the communist regime had committed human rights violations, murder, individual and mass executions (with or without trial), death in concentration camps, death by starvation, slavery, physical and mental terror, and genocide. The Hoxha regime was also guilty of committing violations of freedom of conscience, speech, religion, press and political pluralism. For more than a dozen years after the fall of communism, no coherent memory policy emerged, nor was it decided to establish an institution to conduct research into the communist period. Paul Connerton wrote that "societies in which democracy is restored after a recent undemocratic past, or in which democracy is just

> Albania portrayed itself as the only socialist country in the world, under siege from the two superpowers.

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being born, must establish institutions and make decisions that foster both forgetting and remembering." It was not until 2010 that the Institute for the Study of the Crimes and Consequences of Communism was established.

Narratives from the bunkers

Bunk'Art 1 was established in 2014, while two years later Bunk'Art 2 was launched. Both institutions are located inside former shelters. Indeed, as part of the bunkerisation project in the 1970s and early 1980s in Albania, the communist government built more than 173,371 fallout shelters. They were built on the slopes of mountains, complete with underground corridors and buildings covered with several metres of concrete. In the event of a nuclear attack, key figures such as Hoxha and Mehmet Shehu were supposed to take refuge in such buildings in Tirana. During the eight years in which the bunkers were built, hundreds of soldiers and civilians died. They are among the most forgotten victims of communism. Yet, the bunkers themselves were never used and today the bunkers located in Tirana are home to a cultural institution that allows visitors to explore the traumatic past, opening the door to the vault of collective memory and the underground world of the dictatorship.

Bunk'Art 1, located in the Hoxha shelter, features artistic installations, a historical exhibition depicting the history of Albania from 1939 (from the entry of the fascists) to 1990 (the liberation of the country). It also features a museum exhibition that is made up of the rooms of Hoxha and Shehu, who personally supervised the construction of the structure. In other rooms, you can see a communications room and the interior of a store, and learn about the value of home and family for Albanians. In Albania's national culture, the home represents the heart and symbol of multi-generational families. Even the communist regime, which plunged the private property system into deep crisis, never dared to deny this principle.

The exhibit also addresses the subjects of education and sport and highlights the interesting topic of surveillance of athletes, who were allowed to travel outside the country. Of course, they had to be given permission by members of the notorious Sigurimi.

The Bunk'Art 2 exhibition also follows the theme of the Sigurimi and freedom. Bunk'Art 2 is located in the heart of the city near the National Museum and ministerial buildings. It is a museum of communism which tells the story of the victims. The exhibition consists of a historical exhibition (*Ekspozita Historike*), which presents the history of the gendarmerie from independence to the Second World War, and the police from the fascist invasion to liberation. There is also a section

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on the police and the Sigurimi during the communist dictatorship. The last part of the exhibition describes the security service's methods of investigation and operations, surveillance, internment and exile, confinement of citizens in labour camps and prisons, and execution. It even discusses incidents of secret rebellion against the regime. The museum exhibition shows part of the bunker which housed the office of the interior minister. The room was never used by any minister but was considered part of contingency planning. Subsequent installations show the apparatus and means by which the Sigurimi photographed and recorded citizens in their homes and outside. An interrogation room is also recreated. In a museum room illuminated by strobe lights, there is a list of 35 different types of torture used by the security service. This was compiled by the Institute for the Study of Crimes and Consequences of Communism in Albania.

House of Leaves

In the case of Bunk'Art 1 and 2, it is not so much the description of past events and the artefacts collected in the rooms that impact visitors the most, but rather the historical and real location of the site itself. In Bunk'Art, as in the House of Leaves, the idea is not only to preserve history but also to indicate the roles people played in it and to clarify who was who. This idea led to the creators of the House of Leaves, also known as the Museum of Secret Surveillance, being honoured in 2020 with the Council of Europe Museum Award. This museum is entirely dedicated to restoring the memory of the period of the communist regime in Albania from 1944 to 1991, a time in which citizens were the victims of total governmental control and psychological violence. The museum is housed in a unique, romantic and historic building called the House of Leaves, where vines cover the exterior.

The building was built in 1931 as Albania's first private maternity clinic, founded and overseen by the prominent physician and healthcare pioneer Janu Basho. The clinic operated throughout the 1930s. During the Second World War and the occupation of Albania, the building housed a Gestapo unit. Until the end of the war, the House of Leaves served as a unit for health workers and was later converted into a detention centre, where prisoners were tortured. During the communist era, the building housed some operations of the Sigurimi intelligence agency. The unit there specialised in the interception of communications and the surveillance of foreigners.

Like the history of Albania under communism, the story of the House of Leaves remained untold for a long time. The mysterious, abandoned building was a place about which various stories were told. The adaptation of the building for Tirana's

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newest and certainly most intriguing museum in 2017 made it possible to tell the story of the darkest period in Albania's history. The museum at the House of Leaves is divided into nine sections and consists of 31 connected rooms, each with a special function. One key section is devoted to the subject of surveillance, where technology is discussed as a political tool that can control people.

The museum also highlights the theme of Albania's self-isolation under communism and discusses life under the regime, reminding us that everyday life was also subject to surveillance that included representatives of all social strata. Every action, such as a word, a song or a meeting, could be treated as a form of hostility against the state. In the section titled "Voices of the Past", visitors have the opportunity to listen to voices captured years ago by electronic systems, designed to encourage the visitor to reflect on the past. The documents presented there are from the Albanian interior ministry and show what methods were used to capture various types of messages.

Outside, visitors encounter a wall exhibit depicting the photographs of those responsible for human rights violations and repression. The photographs are of those who showed no remorse and were not punished, including members of political-communist offices, directors of the security services, judges and prosecutors, investigators, heads of internal military units, and commanders of prisons and camps. The creators of the exhibition note that after the fall of the regime, no investigation was ever carried out and the perpetrators were never brought to justice. There has been no official public apology to the victims of communist crimes. This part of the exhibition ends with a quote: "Maybe I didn't think so at the time, but later I thought that those people who didn't apologise had brazen courage." These are the words of Amik Kasoruho, an Albanian writer, translator and publicist.

Making the experience real

The most important characteristic of the House of Leaves and Bunk'Art 1 and 2 is that they are located in places marked by history that have been preserved almost intact, with original furnishings and recordings stored in their archives. In all three, the way of telling the story of communism and earlier times is very simple. The narrative is served by artefacts and plaques informing us about past events, the content of which is reinforced by artistic installations. However, it is the original sites themselves that testify to the past and make the story credible and emotionally impactful.

Although the visitor is in a different temporal reality from the traumatic events that took place in the building or shelter, a direct connection to the past seems to

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be made through the experience of the place and contact with the original artefact. After all, these are signs of a very special nature – they are traces of the past, of what actually happened there. In this way, these museums shift the focus from guilt or collaboration to narratives of shared victimisation under communist rule. The visitor becomes aware that tragic events took place in this space and this awareness makes the experience real. It becomes a tangible experience.

The Tirana National Museum, on the other hand, is itself a site of memory. It is a relic of the times of the regime, as is the historical narrative spun there. The National Museum acts as a reminder of the communist past. The museum building therefore has the same value as a shelter built under the regime, or a private clinic building turned into the headquarters of the surveillance services. All three sites prove that museums commemorating the regime are sites directly exploring the historical and contemporary processes of negotiating or deconstructing a difficult heritage. Thus, all three tell the same story and prove that this difficult story should be presented. The narrative is determined not only by the time the exhibition was created but also by where it is displayed.

> The memory of the victims of communism is becoming a type of European heritage.

It seems that seeing all three stories about the regime allows for a full understanding of what communism was in Albania and the traces it left behind: in the architecture, in the ways of telling the nation's history, and in the politics of memory and commemoration. However, one must ask whether this form of storytelling determined by the original site is sufficient for a young audience. Is the fact that these museums stand in places where important events took place important going forward or is it only significant for representatives of the generation that lived or clearly remembers the communist era? How do we share today the memory of the victims of communism, which is becoming a type of European heritage? How do we pass on to future generations these memories, which are also a part of European identity? These are questions that museum professionals will soon have to answer. They will have to consider to what extent they want to defend the position of the place/witness to history, and how they teach the younger generation about the experiences connected to such places. They will also have to think about how they may replace the existing narrative with micro-histories, potentially deciding on a new form of expression. EE

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Lost in the labyrinth of possibilities

ANDRZEJ ZARĘBA

Soon after the news of the assassination plot against Archduke Franz Ferdinand reached Vienna, shock gave way to reflection. The would-be-king and next emperor was now dead, a gruesome fact that created a political vacuum and opened the gates for new opportunities.

The murdered Archduke Franz Ferdinand was not a person without flaws. His social talents were less than average, and he could not compare himself with an actual emperor like Franz Joseph I. The ruling monarch had come to power amidst the stormy circumstances of a people's revolution and the previous Ferdinand's forced abdication.

Franz Joseph I held a great love for the masses. This is despite his solemnity and elitism, which were presented fully in all possible ways. Yet in contrast to the liberal intellectuals, who perceived the emperor as a metaphorical dam against new fashions and trends, the lower classes appreciated his simple gestures of obedience to duty. They viewed him as an omnipotent imperial and royal father of many nations and tribes, who lived peacefully under his caring watch.

Franz Ferdinand, on the other hand, not only violated his marriage obligations – his wife was chosen for romantic reasons and not for the crown's interests – but he also had a dangerous taste for various political novelties. These included the federalisation of the state, which was a key downside of Hungarian equality with Austria.

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Revolution of the railway

The assassination in Sarajevo gave hawks in the Viennese political circles the much needed pretext to pacify the Balkans once and for all. One of the key figures in this group was Franz Conrad von Hoetzendorf, the Austro-Hungarian chief of staff – in other words, the army's real boss. Franz Conrad was a man of many talents and he was well respected in both civilian and military circles. Many years before such dramatic events, he devoted himself to the theoretical analysis of future wars. Being a modern man with up-to-date beliefs, Franz Conrad treated life as a constant fight for survival. His concept of philosophy was based on the theory of Charles Darwin, adapted to the circumstances of the dual monarchy. As an intellectual, Franz Conrad tended to overcomplicate even the simplest tasks, which for onlookers might have been seen as a sign of sophistication and deep thought.

Being a modern man with up-to-date beliefs, Franz Conrad treated life as a constant fight for survival.

After he first took office in 1906, Franz Conrad advocated for military action as the only practical solution to political problems. Meticulously planned military assaults were proposed by him at almost every meeting with the political bodies of the monarchy. The crisis of the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908 marked the 60th anniversary of Franz Joseph's reign. It also almost ended in bloodshed, which was only avoided through the careful work undertaken by the foreign ministries of the European powers. Franz Conrad warned his political superiors that the best moment for an invasion of Serbia had thus been lost. He was then sacked, only to return to office when his plans were truly ready. Fully aware of the weaknesses of the Austro-Hungarian war machine, he thought he had found a real game changer. The key to success lied in the railways.

Helmuth von Moltke the Elder – a German marshal and the real mastermind behind France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War – is believed to have whispered on his deathbed the following words: "Don't erect more fortresses, invest in railways instead." This anecdote gives us insight into the dilemma faced by most military planners at the end of the 19th century – whether to spend money on static defence or support the new network of fast transport.

Railways do not necessarily interconnect with military budgets. However, they may be crucial in times of war. They gave the victors an initial advantage during the Franco-Prussian War and also became a key part of operations during the American Civil War. Overall, these conflicts offered a blueprint for the coming future of war.

Franz Conrad never had enough money to pay for the development of his artillery, his ramparts, new uniforms for the cavalry, the motorisation of field trains,

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the army air service, or the spy network he needed to control the enemy's movements. Austro-Hungarian military spending was regularly cut by the treasury and what precious little was left was partially taken by the Hungarian part of the state. Meanwhile, the iron network of railways was only partially funded by the state budget, as private money provided an important part as well. Thus, this spending was a bonus for the military system, as transport can be used as part of defence.

Completely surrounded

The plan conceived by Franz Conrad was both simple and complicated. Although he saw enemies even among allies – he warned that sooner or later the empire would have to attack Triple Alliance partner Italy, and for sure preventively invade Romania – he was still mostly sympathetic towards the Habsburg monarchy. One key part of his outlook was Serbia, which changed rulers in 1903 following a palace coup. The Obrenović dynasty was replaced by the House of Karađorđević with full backing from Russia. As Russia was now the guarantor of Serbia's independence, Franz Conrad viewed the monarchy as being completely surrounded by enemies.

Thus, the military planners had to decide on which enemy to attack first. At the beginning of July 1914, political circles tended towards the old options, which were presented by Franz Conrad. He believed that Serbia must be punished and that a punitive expedition was now finally going to happen. The so-called "Echelon-B" plan, which involved enough troops to invade Serbia, included 282,000 infantry, 10,000 cavalry and 744 artillery guns.

Military strategists usually advise the attacker to use overwhelming numbers against a defender, preferably three to one, the more the better. Although defence is seen in military circles as inferior to attack, numbers still often favour the defender. Was Serbia so weak that it needed to be attacked with almost 300,000 men?

An April 1914 simulated invasion of Serbia conducted by the Habsburg General Staff ended in victory for the Serbian defenders.

Indeed, the Serbian forces were able to mobilise almost 250,000 soldiers with 528 artillery pieces. At first glance, it was apparent that something in Franz Conrad's plan was fundamentally off. Moreover, the proof was already available. In April 1914, a simulated invasion of Serbia conducted by the high ranking officers of the Habsburg General Staff ended in victory for the Serbian defenders.

Yet Franz Conrad would have lost face if he had withdrawn from his decades-old obsession with attacking his political enemies. He stayed silent when asked if he could guarantee a quick campaign in Serbia. Years of struggle against his Bal-

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kan enemies and his obsession with incorporating the restless Serbia into the stable monarchy, just like before with Bosnia-Herzegovina, gave Conrad no option but to stand firm behind his own recommendations. He had to believe that even if the defenders' numbers were nearly equal to the attackers, the imperial troops were still better equipped, better trained and disciplined. What then could go wrong?

After full mobilisation, both Russia and Austria had comparable strength of force.

There was nevertheless one thing that went unnoticed by the empire's chief of staff. This was namely Russia, which now possessed a new statist attitude towards politics. Following reforms in the armed forces, there was a clear feeling of strength between 1905 and 1914.

Long before Sarajevo, it was clear that there might come a time of war with this real and dangerous enemy, whose sudden backing of Serbia came as a shock for these "poker players" of 1914.

There were plans put in place in case Russia decided to attack the northern boundaries of the monarchy. The so-called "Plan-R" assumed that Russia would mobilise its troops and violate the northern borders of the empire. Franz Conrad's underpaid spy network closely cooperated with Polish revolutionaries, who were quite fervently preparing volunteers for the future. Yet political circles chose to believe that Russia would let Serbian independence be violated. Politics usually has no other proof than practice – being not a fully rational process like maths or chemistry. Russia let itself be humiliated during the annexation of 1908, so why not this time?

Change of plans

Franz Conrad's ambitions, however, did not go according to plan. The sophisticated schedule of military transport by rail did not take into account several drawbacks, which were omitted while drawing up the plans. First of all, no one expected Franz Conrad to implement a simultaneous war on two fronts – with Serbia and Russia. No one predicted that Russia would mobilise and concentrate its armed forces in such a quick time – less than two weeks. The reserve forces of Conrad simply did not have "bilocation" abilities, as the railways did not have enough locomotive engines, even if cars were standing at the ready at platforms. The real time needed for concentrating the forces of the dual monarchy was much longer than what Franz Conrad guaranteed. Instead of being fully ready for hostilities, the army could have reached full readiness only after August 4th. By then, the Serbian front became secondary. Russia with its full might had entered the scene.

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Despite this, Franz Conrad let his colleagues keep one more corps (the one from Prague) to engage Serbia, adding the Budapest VI Corps to be used there. Thus, the reserve forces so desperately needed in the north were seriously depleted by almost half before the main battle.

After full preparedness, both Russia and Austria had comparable strength of force. On August 17th the Russians concentrated 35 divisions of infantry and 12.5 divisions of cavalry. After the joyride from the north to the south and back again, Austria augmented its storm forces, which were supposed to be used offensively (again, the recommended proportion is three to one) with almost 37 infantry and ten cavalry divisions. After several days, the Russians would move more than 53 infantry divisions with 18 cavalry units.

Thus, before commencing hostilities, Conrad, in his sneaky way, announced that he would not rely on aggressive moves and attack anymore, choosing an operational defence on the Vistula and Dniester rivers. While combining and interfering with his own plans, mixing previous schedules and leaving worn-out troops hungry and thirsty in trains, Franz Conrad suddenly came to the conclusion that his soldiers would eventually engage the enemy. The Russian front divisions had to disembark in Western Galicia. They then marched in the heat and dust towards destiny. When the battle finally commenced, the dual monarchy's men were almost completely worn out, as if the all-so-precious railways never existed. EE

Andrzej Zaręba is the illustrator for *New Eastern Europe*.

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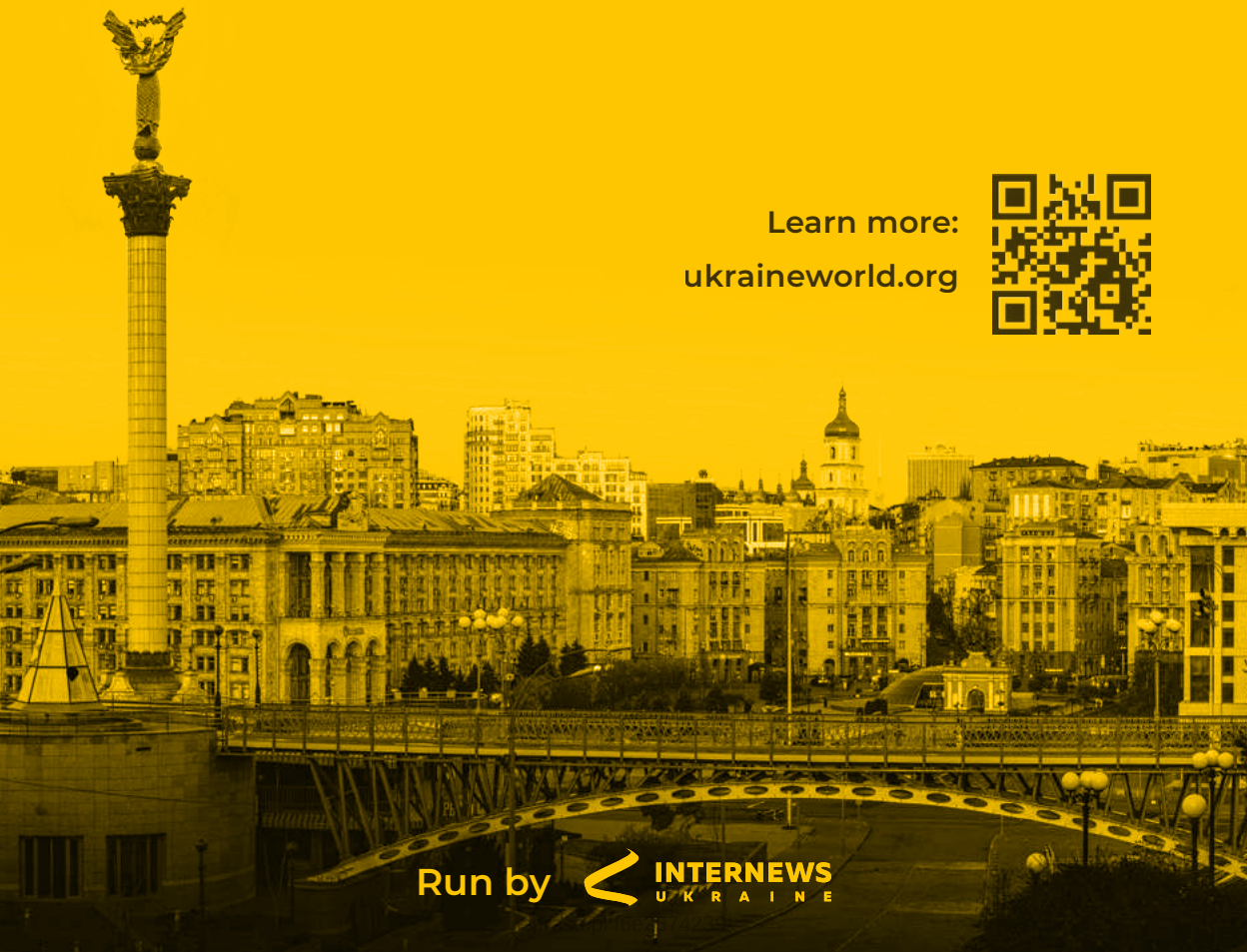

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NEW POLICY RESEARCH PAPER

PERCEPTION AND RHETORIC IN 'FRONTLINE STATES'

AN EARLY ASSESSMENT OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF RUSSIA'S WAR IN UKRAINE

Edited by Agata Mazurkiewicz and Wojciech Michnik

This policy research paper aims to serve as an invitation for a broader discussion about the political, social, economic, military, and security consequences of Russia's war in Ukraine from the perspective of Central and Eastern Europe. The paper introduces a 'frontline state' concept and focuses on reactions, narratives, and perceptions of the selected 'frontline states' towards Russia's war in Ukraine. Particularly it analyses initial responses to the war in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia, including societal and governmental support for Ukraine. The publication also attempts to shed light on propaganda and the cyber and disinformation domains of the war, looking not only into the strategies of but also into Ukrainian predominant narrative. The paper concludes with a brief assessment of the consequences of the aggression faced by the 'frontline states', with a special emphasis on regional and transatlantic security dynamics.

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