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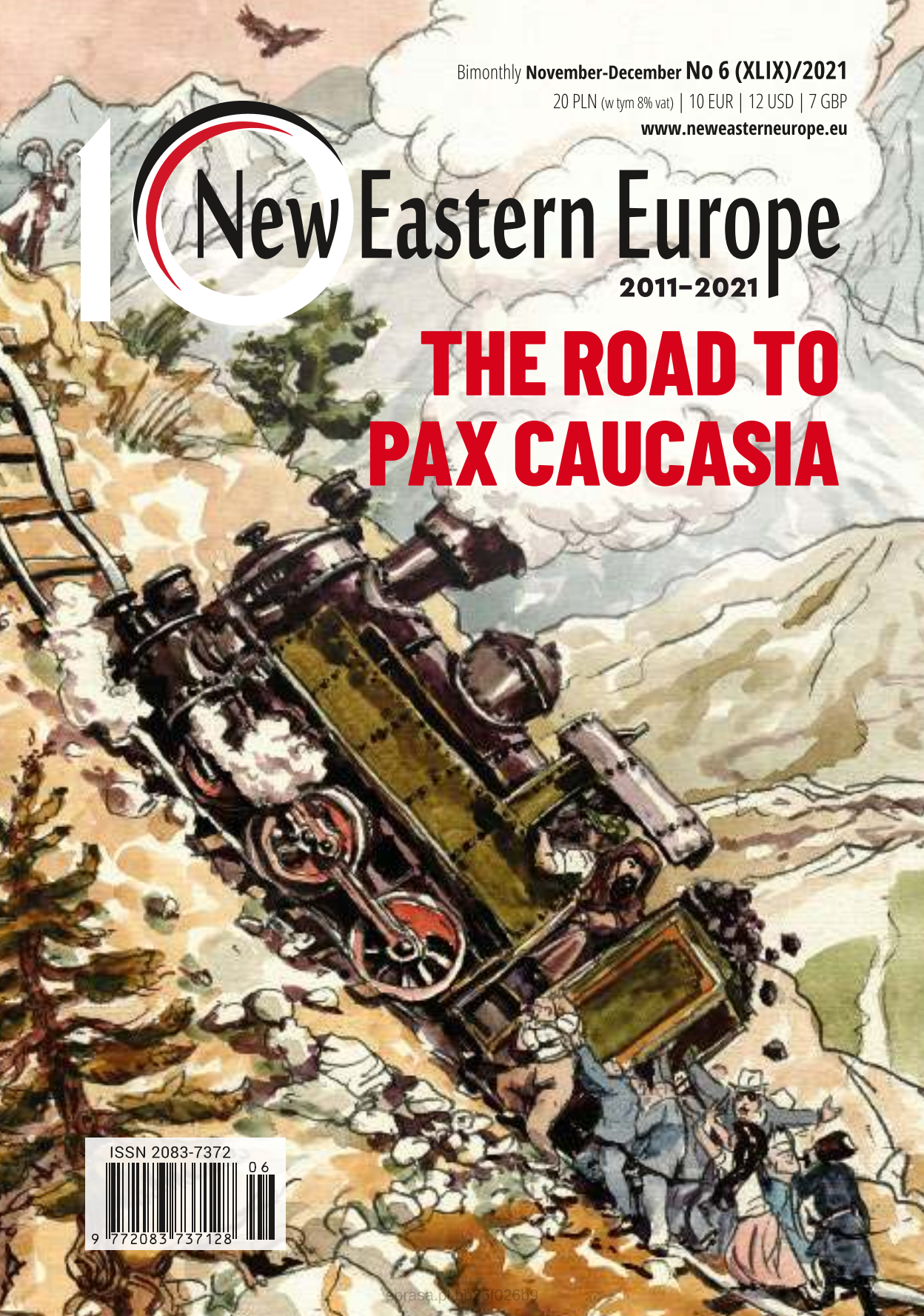
THE ROAD TO PAX CAUCASIA



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DEAR READER,

As we close the year 2021 we once again see instability in the region of Eastern Europe. The extremely tense situation at the Polish, Lithuanian and Latvian borders with Belarus where thousands of migrants from the Middle East are being used in the most cynical way to put pressure on European Union is a gruesome reminder of why it is so crucial to pay attention to the developments in our region. Clearly, history has not ended on the post-Soviet space and conflicts continue to break out.

Only a year ago we witnessed the second Nagorno-Karabakh war between Armenia and Azerbaijan. It took at least 5,000 lives and significantly shifted the geopolitics in the South Caucuses. One year on, we reflect on this conflict and seek a chance for lasting peace for the people of Armenia, Azerbaijan and their neighbours. Upon the initiative of the Polish Ambassador to Georgia and long friend of the magazine, Mariusz Maszkiewicz, we gathered opinions from authors who argue that the way forward is through shared infrastructure and transportation links. We publish these essays believing that having such a debate is an important step, even if some analysts may doubt the success of Pax Caucasia.

Even more, the situation in Belarus and at the border, Nagorno-Karabakh, as well as the ongoing war in Ukraine, are elements in the long-term process of the collapse of the Soviet Union. The destruction of the empire indeed started 30 years ago when Boris Yeltsin, Leonid Kravchuk and Stanislav Shushkievich signed the now famous Belovezha Accords which formally brought an end to the USSR. The outcome of this decision is discussed and analysed by our authors in a special section which we publish in this issue in partnership with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Warsaw office) and where we pay special attention to social aspects of the post-Soviet transformation. To put it in the words of professor Serhii Plokhy: "the disintegration of the Soviet Union is still going on and it is not peaceful".

Yet, against all odds and the reflections above, we still hope and believe that peace and prosperity are to be enjoyed by the people of Eastern Europe and this is what we wish to all of them as well as you – our readers – in the oncoming 2022.

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Infrastructural connectivity of the South Caucasus

A chance for a community of interests?

MARIUSZ MASZKIEWICZ

The conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh has shown the world the anachronistic nature of the problems faced by the politicians, armies and citizens of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, this real and grim conflict that continues to cause tension in the region contrasts greatly with the hopes of many for peace and well-being. The prospects for development, prosperity and peaceful coexistence between the peoples of the Caucasus are still overshadowed by territorial and ethnic conflict. Despite this, they do not match the aspirations and dreams of the societies present in this region.

Is there anything that unites the diverse interests of these nations? How can we find values that could bring about such declared desires for prosperity and peace? Overall, it seems that perhaps a common platform could form a basis for prosperity and create a community of shared interests. One core interest that is shared by all countries in the region appears to be roads and infrastructure connections. These developments could provide a healthy foundation for building a community of values. At the moment, the construction of modern transportation infra-

structure that links the region with the wealthier western world could create opportunities to expand market access, investment, tourism and entrepreneurship.

As a result, the South Caucasus now faces a real opportunity to improve its socio-economic conditions. Just as European countries created the Coal and Steel Community after the Second World War, today in the Caucasus it seems vital to create an "Infrastructure Community".

The Polish embassy in Tbilisi organised a special seminar with the participation of experts from Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. This intellectual exercise encouraged debate on a potential economic concept of strategic importance for the South Caucasus region. Valery Chechelashvili's presentation argued that the South Caucasus as a region is a champion of missed opportunities. The three countries, therefore, should create a unique common space and develop conditions for joint development that would allow them to benefit from the area's natural advantages. The international community's interest in the region will grow many times over should the South Caucasus experience stabilisation. Serious entrepreneurs with billions of US dollars worth of direct investment, especially in relation to infrastructure, would also come to the region in such circumstances. Development could also benefit from billions of dollars of local funds, which today are being spent on military needs.

The international community's interest in the region will grow many times over should the South Caucasus experience stabilisation.

Ali Hajizade from Baku outlined the problem of regional infrastructural integration in relation to the scope of current conflicts and the ongoing disagreement over the "Zangezur corridor". This small part of the region's transportation system has also attracted the interest of great powers, such as Russia and China. Similar issues related to the Zangezur corridor from the Azerbaijani perspective were discussed in Murad Muradov's contribution.

Victor Kipiani concentrated on the role of Tbilisi within the South Caucasian paradigm, especially with regards to the country's bilateral relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan. Based on this, it appears that the quality of relations within the South Caucasian triangle is predetermined by the warmth of Georgia's links with Yerevan and Baku. It seems that these ties represent the "real politics" of the region and that it is difficult to ignore this reality. This state of affairs consequently underlines Georgia's important role as the core of regional integration, which should at least lead to a common economic space. In line with this, both the results of internal reform and the degree of progress regarding Georgia's integration with the civilised international community will prove to be significant. At the same time, Volodymyr Kopchak offered a short discussion on the Kremlin's understanding of

the region's transport and infrastructure projects, as well as its conflict management concerning Nagorno-Karabakh. Meanwhile, Vakhtang Maisaia talked about the area's geopolitical identity and showed how deep political and military conflicts have obstructed regional security at large. Lastly, Benyamin Poghosyan from Yerevan looked at the problem of opening up transportation links in the South Caucasus after the 2020 Karabakh war.

I hope that this set of discussions, presented here as articles on the pages of New Eastern Europe, can provide food for thought and ultimately encourage initiatives among politicians and economic actors both inside and outside the region.

Mariusz Maszkiewicz, the Polish ambassador to Georgia.

A new corridor, a new impetus

ALI HAJIZADE

The South Caucasus has serious potential to become a full-fledged logistics hub of regional significance. While opposition to developing a new corridor remains, the potential benefits for all countries in the South Caucasus and beyond will outweigh any costs or perceived risks.

The region of the South Caucasus is located at the intersection of logistics routes leading from north to south and east to west. Of course, the countries of the region are interested in increasing their logistical attractiveness. In this regard, significant funds have been invested in the development of logistics infrastructure over the past ten years. In particular, the Alat port in Azerbaijan was recently built and is now operational. In order to ensure the smooth functioning of the International North-South Transport Corridor, Baku allocated a soft loan to Iran of 500 million US dollars to finance the construction of the Astara-Rasht railway line. The investment was also used for the creation of logistics-related infrastructure to service this line. Azerbaijan took on a long-term lease of the Iranian section of the railway, as well as a railway station and a cargo terminal located there.

This year, Iran also plans to complete the construction of a railway line connecting the cities of Anzali and Rasht. Before the 44-day war between Azerbaijan and Armenia last year, the Iranian and Azerbaijani railway connection was also considered by Baku to be an economic opportunity for the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic (this territory of Azerbaijan is not connected to the rest of the country – editor's note). According to the Russian-negotiated ceasefire agreement from November 10th 2020, Azerbaijan should be allowed to develop a land transportation

Photo: Thomas Koch / Shutterstock

According to the Russian-negotiated agreement from November 10th 2020, Azerbaijan should be allowed to develop a land transportation link with the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic – a territory of Azerbaijan not connected to the rest of the country.

link with Nakhchivan, while Armenia is allowed the possibility of a land link with Russia. In the future, if transportation is fully restored, Armenia should also receive the possibility of a railway link with Iran.

Unique opportunity

The territory in the south of Armenia through which these transport lines will pass has recently been dubbed the "Zangezur Corridor". In Armenia many do not agree with this term and call it the "Meghri Corridor" but that does not really change anything. It is worth noting that back in Soviet times, railways and roads passing through this territory provided links between the Nakhchivan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and the Armenian and Azerbaijani SSRs. With the outset of the Karabakh conflict, these lines were blocked. The end of the 44-day war in 2020 presented a unique chance to unlock some of these links in the region. The Zangezur corridor will allow Armenia, which was previously isolated from regional logistics projects, to become part of a logistics hub, thereby expanding its export opportunities and receiving income from the transit of cargo.

However, not everything is as simple as it might look at first glance. Although the creation of such a corridor can bring benefit to the entire region – including Iran, Turkey and Russia – there is also serious opposition to this project. For example, despite the fact that the ceasefire agreement of November 10th was signed by Vladimir Putin, some circles in Russia do not approve of this initiative. In their opinion, the corridor would physically unite the Turkic world and this could undermine Russia's position in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Some circles in Iran also hold a similar opinion. A little fuel to the fire was added by Turkish officials who have claimed that Central Asia is a growing priority for Ankara.

Although the ceasefire agreement of November 10th 2020 was signed by Vladimir Putin, some circles in Russia do not approve of this initiative.

Despite the potential benefits it could bring to Armenia, the idea of the corridor is also not fully welcome, especially among the opposition to Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. Some Armenian experts believe that the benefits of the corridor are imaginary and that it may bring more harm than good. At the same time, it should be noted that of the three republics of the South Caucasus, Armenia is the most isolated and restricted in terms of logistics. Moreover, it is also worth noting that Armenia's railways no longer belong to the Armenian state and are instead controlled by Russia. Any potential corridor will be guarded by Russian border guards. As a result, the fate of the corridor will ultimately be decided via discussions between Baku, Moscow and Ankara.

Other perspectives

In Georgia, the corridor has also raised some concerns. Some Georgian experts believe that the opening of the Zangezur corridor may reduce the logistical attractiveness of Georgia overall. There are some grounds for such concerns but it is worth paying attention to a couple of very important points. In particular, Georgia is an important partner and an important link in the delivery of Caspian oil and gas to the European market. It is quite unlikely that these projects would simply be shut down and relaunched via Armenia. This is especially true as billions of dollars were invested in these projects and their implementation took years. Moreover, if at least some amount of gas from Central Asia passes through Azerbaijan and Georgia, then Tbilisi's revenues from the transit of energy resources will only increase.

Transit from Central Asia to the Black Sea coast (and vice versa) will continue to follow the same routes. The road and rail traffic on the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway may be slightly reduced but this will not cause any considerable problems. In ad-

dition, the BTK railway has decent potential in terms of carriage of passengers, in particular during the summer holiday season. Of course, this will become relevant only after the end of the pandemic.

It is also worth stressing the role and interests of Turkey in this issue. In the case of the full-scale functioning of the Zangezur corridor, Turkey would receive logistical opportunities for its exports to Central Asia. Currently, most Turkish exports to Central Asia are transported via Iran. However, since Turkish goods compete with Iranian producers on a range of items, the Iranian side gradually raised tariffs for the transportation of goods from Turkey to Central Asia. Hence, the opening of a shorter and more reliable route to Central Asia and Russia, and even further to China, could serve as a good incentive for Turkish exporters and increase the competitiveness of Turkish goods in these markets.

Naturally, the Zangezur Corridor is also of interest to Beijing. Through this corridor, China can receive cargo from the West and also send its exports to Turkish ports on the Black, Aegean and Mediterranean Seas. In an interview with the Azerbaijani Baku Tribune, Chinese Ambassador to Azerbaijan Guo Ming recently stated that China is willing to cooperate with all parties and seeks to connect the new corridor with its Belt and Road Initiative.

Lastly, it is important to remember the role of Russia in the development of the corridor. The Russian Federation actively uses opportunities offered by the north-south transport corridor. For example, the volume of freight traffic along this corridor increased by 15 per cent last year despite the pandemic. In the first quarter of 2021, growth was measured at 23.5 per cent. The new corridor could increase the importance of the north-south corridor for Russia and its trading partners. In this regard, its economic feasibility could compete with the "geopolitical risks" voiced by some Russian experts.

Ali Hajizade is a political analyst and the founder and director of the Greater Middle East analytical portal, www.tgme.org.

The South Caucasus after the Second Karabakh War

VALERY CHECHELASHVILI

The trilateral co-operation format – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia – has inexhaustible potential. Of course, not all external players claiming special interests in the region will be happy about this development. However, the time has come to encourage a radical increase in the culture of co-operation and pursue more ambitious goals. This will ultimately lead to the formation of a common vision of regional development as a space belonging to all three of these countries.

Despite the fact that the South Caucasus is undoubtedly a region with clearly delineated natural borders, it can hardly be called a full-fledged region. For almost 30 years after the restoration of independence, the states of the South Caucasus have not used the opportunity to create an integrated space of stability and security. Nor have they been able to provide their populations with decent levels of prosperity and opportunities for economic growth. Today, we instead face a reality marked by dividing lines and alienation. This is largely due to the fact that the success of these states is rarely associated with regional success. As a result, the prospect of creating conditions for harmonious development is still in decline. Today's reality gives no grounds for optimism. Nevertheless, this opportunity is closer today than it was before the start of the Second Karabakh War, which broke out last year.

Waiting for the future

Even taking into account the region's conflicts, it is enough just to look at a map to see the potential of the South Caucasus. Overall, it is difficult to find such a compact region with almost inexhaustible resources for development anywhere else in the world. Along with its huge geopolitical and geoeconomic opportunities, the South Caucasus has great potential regarding transit and tourism. The region also possesses natural resources of global importance and an educated, relatively cheap labour force.

It is clear that the area's ability to act as a transit hub has already been developed in spite of several conflicts. This has been achieved through the efforts of Azerbaijan and Georgia and their co-operation together with Turkey. Before the pandemic, tourism was also developing rapidly in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. For example, thousands of tourists from Japan managed to visit all three countries in one tour despite the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. For these groups, perhaps the greatest motivation for visiting the region was its cultural and civilisational diversity. Otherwise, it would be impossible for tour operators to spark interest in the area among these exacting Japanese tourists.

The region is also losing a lot in terms of foreign direct investment. In conditions of peace, integration and stability, the amount of FDI would naturally be several times higher. Considering the economic potential of its large diaspora, Armenia would perhaps benefit the most from increasing investment. These facts only further suggest that all the necessary prerequisites for the development of the South Caucasus already exist. In the future, the region may well take a prominent place in international relations. It would subsequently be able to ensure the average European standard of living for the population and prospects for further sustainable growth.

Unfortunately, the South Caucasus is still waiting for a better future. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the restoration of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia's independence, the South Caucasus was primarily associated with conflict, hostility, warfare, closed borders (still happening in the 21st century), tension and negative expectations. Why is this happening? Could all of this have been avoided before and what needs to be done to prevent this from happening again? Do these three nations have the vision, political will and resources to change this situation for the better?

The situation is complicated by the fact that the three states see their future differently. Georgia sees potential membership of NATO and the European Union as its main foreign policy priority. In contrast, Armenia has already become a member of the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), Eur-

asian Economic Union (EEU) and Eurasian Customs Union. It should be remembered that such projects naturally limit the country's sovereignty. This is especially clear in terms of Armenia's economic relations with third countries. If we imagine a hypothetical situation in which Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia agree to create a free trade zone, then Armenia will have to coordinate this with the bodies of the EEU.

The South Caucasus remains an arena for competition between major players at the regional and global scales.

Azerbaijan, meanwhile, is an active member of the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, which maintains contacts with both the EU and the EEU. At the same time, the South Caucasus remains an arena for competition between major players at the regional and global scales. These powers are often guided by their own values and principles of co-operation in pursuit of their goals. Of course, these players affect the development of the region in various different ways. Whilst some encourage regional co-operation and open up new development prospects for the South Caucasus, others act based on the "divide and rule" principle and attempt to minimise the possibility of integration and stability in the region.

Missed opportunities

What are the prospects for the South Caucasus to become a prosperous, attractive region capable of using its practically unlimited and unrealised potential? In general, it seems that the South Caucasus is a champion of missed opportunities. The area's three states could create a unique common space for joint development that would allow them to benefit from all of the aforementioned natural advantages. With regards to stabilising the political situation of the South Caucasus, the international community's interest in the region will grow many times over if steps are made towards this goal. Serious entrepreneurs with billions of direct investments will likely come to the region in such a situation. Billions of dollars from local states' own national budgets could also be spent on development. Today, however, they are forced to spend these funds on military needs.

The total volume of military spending in Armenia for the period 2010–18 amounted to 3.801 billion US dollars, ranging from 2.7 to 4.3 per cent of GDP each year. For Azerbaijan, this figure is 14.905 billion and, accordingly, between 2.2 and 4.6 per cent of GDP. For Georgia, it amounted to 3.041 billion, or 0.7 to 9.2 per cent of GDP. In total, between 2010 and 2018 the three countries spent almost 22 billion US dollars on defence. During the previous 20 years, at least an-

other 30 billion was used for military purposes in the region. All three countries are doomed to similar expenses in the following years. These are huge sums of money even for more successful regions.

In addition to these issues, it is clear that we, as a region, have lost both our authority and reputation in the international arena. We do not enjoy the confidence of international investors and this primarily concerns Armenia. As a result, the main investment projects in the region (the Baku-Supsa oil pipeline, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline, the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway and the Caspian Sea-Black Sea route) have been implemented without the participation of Yerevan.

Instead of regional co-operation, we were drawn into confrontation. External power, along with historical and emotional manipulation, have been skilfully used by various outside interests based on the "divide and conquer" principle. At first, Russia supported Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and helped it establish control over the disputed territory and seven adjacent regions of Azerbaijan. At the same time, Armenia's overall dependence on Moscow increased. We saw the most dramatic manifestation of this dependence in autumn 2013, when Yerevan refused to sign an EU Association Agreement. Under open pressure from the Kremlin, the state subsequently decided in favour of joining the EAEU.

We must pay tribute to Russian diplomacy – both Armenia and Azerbaijan have declared that they have excellent relations with Moscow. In years past Armenia, for obvious reasons, had more grounds to pursue close ties. Recently, however, Russia disregarded, if not the letter, then the spirit of its agreements with Armenia. This gave Baku a chance to regain control over its internationally recognised borders. Again, both countries talk about their good relations with Russia but now the difference is that Azerbaijan has more reasons to boast.

External factors

The situation in the region has changed radically in the past few years. There is no doubt that the ongoing process of restoring the region's internationally recognised borders should be assessed positively. This is good not only for Azerbaijan but also for Armenia and, naturally, Georgia. However, the deployment of up to 2,000 additional Russian "peacekeepers" in the region does not give cause for optimism. Georgians know better than anyone else what this means in reality, although Azerbaijan is now in a more advantageous position than Georgia. First of all, the Russian contingent is located in an enclave on the territory of Azerbaijan, having no land access to Russian territory and all the logistical consequenc-

es that come with it. This was not the case in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region (so-called South Ossetia). Secondly, the "peacekeepers" entered Nagorno-Karabakh to replace the outgoing Armenian military against a backdrop of good relations between Azerbaijan and Moscow. This reality should be definitely attributed to the success of Baku's diplomacy.

The Turkey factor is also becoming a very important part of regional politics. This makes the situation even more interesting as Russia has always treated our region as a sphere of its exclusive interests. Moscow has fiercely defended this position in all international formats, especially behind the scenes. Now Russia's position has changed and it is important to understand why this is happening.

Unfortunately, the EU and the United States lacked initiative and were unable to increase their influence in the region. From the Georgian point of view, this is a very unfavourable development. Tbilisi's pivotal foreign policy priority remains integration with NATO and the EU, with the ultimate goal of membership in these organisations. The strengthening of the transatlantic partnership and a greater presence of the US and the EU in the region will mean that European standards, traditions, practices and co-operation criteria will be introduced in the South Caucasus. These factors will only help long-term prospects for the final political settlement of conflicts in the region. The EU offers a great example of how this process can be achieved. Hundreds of thousands of French and German soldiers died for the right to possess Alsace-Lorraine during the two world wars. Today, the border has a positive symbolic meaning as Germany and France are strategic allies and form the core of the EU.

If the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is finally settled on the basis of political consensus, this will have a strong positive impact on the conflict settlement process on the territory of Georgia. This can be realised provided that Russia's ability to influence regional affairs is reduced. Ultimately, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia will be able to take full advantage of the benefits provided by regional co-operation.

Transport corridors

The November 10th 2020 statement of Azerbaijani President Aliyev, Armenian Prime Minister Pashinyan and Russian President Putin, among other things, refers to the unblocking of all economic and transport links in the region. This development can only be welcomed. The opening of transport corridors in the South Caucasus will help to increase the region's overall competitiveness in the wider international system. At the same time, the competitiveness of each individual route depends on three main criteria: security, capacity and freight rates. Therefore, there

is still a lot to be done regarding the routes controlled by Russian peacekeepers and FSB-controlled border troops if they are to become international transport corridors in the fullest sense of the word.

Perhaps the best outcome for the South Caucasus would be a future in which it can compete with other corridors. This is especially true regarding the northern corridor, which sees 130 million tonnes of cargo go from China to the EU and back every year. We should also consider Central Asia, Turkey, India, Iran and others. Each year, the potential for freight traffic grows by several million tonnes. This is worth fighting for and is being pursued by Azerbaijan and Georgia. If Armenia joins the process, it would help strengthen the entire region's potential to form a space of integration, stability and security.

Relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan are the most problematic due to the status of Nagorno-Karabakh.

The diversity of the South Caucasus is our common heritage and asset. Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Georgians, Jews, Russians, Ukrainians and many others have always lived and will live here. But the space of the South Caucasus will belong to three states: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. These three, not four, five or six, should decide what the region will look like in the future. In this triangle, relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan are the most problematic due to the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. However, Baku knows that Khankendy is not an ordinary regional centre of Azerbaijan, whilst Yerevan is well aware that Stepanakert will not become the capital of an independent state. It is necessary to build on these realities and reach a compromise.

Towards a new atmosphere of tolerance

Experience can be useful here as well in helping to encourage co-operation. More than 180,000 Azerbaijanis form the largest group living in the Georgian region of Kvemo Kartli. At the same time, more than 80,000 Armenians live in Samtskhe-Javakheti. Although these regions are adjacent to each other, there has been no conflict between these groups in the years since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Even the various phases of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict have not been able to change this situation.

There have never been any conflicts between these two national minorities in Tbilisi, where tens of thousands of Azerbaijanis and Armenians live mainly in the neighbouring regions of Avlabari and Abanotubani. This is a promising sign and a vivid demonstration that co-operation, good-neighbourliness and even friendship between Azerbaijanis and Armenians is possible.

Such centres of friendship and mutual understanding between different ethnic groups deserve special attention and support as a model that can play an important role in the formation of a new atmosphere of tolerance and co-operation in the region. At least, it will give us additional hope for the future.

The trilateral co-operation format – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia – has great potential. Not all external players that claim special interests in the region will be happy about such collaboration. However, the time has come to strengthen the culture of co-operation and improve regional ambitions. This will ultimately lead to the formation of a common vision of regional development as a space belonging to all three countries and their shared interests. Otherwise, the South Caucasus will lose the chance to integrate into global trends related, in particular, to the processes of pan-European co-operation.

Political leaders and the current generation of diplomats from these three countries must take on the responsibility of realising these goals. A stable and integrated South Caucasus will not only turn into a space of comfortable living for the citizens of our countries, but will also make a significant contribution to broader security and bring greater stability to adjacent regions.

Translated by Arzu Bunyad

Valery Chechelashvili is a Georgian politician and diplomat. He has served as Ambassador of Georgia to Switzerland, as well as the permanent representative of Georgia to the United Nations in Geneva. He also served as the secretary general of GUAM.

Understanding the Kremlin's logic after the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

VOLODYMYR KOPCHAK

The Kremlin's rationale for helping end the recent Nagorno-Karabakh conflict also explains its attitude towards transportation infrastructure projects that have appeared as a result of the ceasefire agreement. By understanding the Kremlin's strategy, as well as the subsequent challenges and risks, other states may be encouraged to develop their own effective counterstrategies.

Only a simplified comparison of the 44-day war in Nagorno-Karabakh with Russian aggression in Ukraine and other parts of the world could confuse readers more than a question of whether the Kremlin experienced a simple victory or defeat in Nagorno-Karabakh. After all, we first ought to know what criteria Moscow may use to judge its actions during the recent war.

The fact is that the Kremlin considers the current status quo around Nagorno-Karabakh not to be a defeat. Rather, it views the current situation as an open opportunity to pull the region into its sphere of influence. This situation has created a new system of challenges and risks for the South Caucasus. The Kremlin's rationale in moderating the conflict also explains its attitude towards transportation infrastructure projects that are now being talked about as a result of the ceasefire agreement. I would like to point out that I am not insisting that this logic will eventually succeed. Moreover, I personally wish it would not. Yet, understanding the Kremlin's strategy, as well as the challenges and risks resulting from this logic,

ensures that states may be able to create more effective counterstrategies. There are three major outcomes that the Kremlin may have planned for after deciding to help end last year's conflict. These include the effective "defeat of both parties" in the conflict, an absence of a de jure and de facto mandate for so-called "peacekeeping" activities on Azerbaijani territory, and a revitalisation of the OSCE Minsk Group with its old agenda.

Bet on defeat

Before, during and after the 44-day war, Moscow has built a regional policy that effectively views both parties involved in the war as on the losing side. This is despite the unconditional military victory of Azerbaijan. Such an approach is clear with regards to the Kremlin's interactions with Armenia during the conflict. Yerevan was de facto deprived of any possibility of having its voice heard regarding the agenda surrounding Karabakh. Having taken charge of ongoing talks on the region, Moscow is now attempting to control Armenia's domestic and foreign political discourse. Meanwhile, Russia has developed plans for various potential scenarios in the region and how it may subsequently increase its presence and power on the "Armenian front". These plans directly concern new transport infrastructure corridors and various old projects currently under renovation.

The implementation of these scenarios has already partly begun. For example, Moscow has started to enforce its military presence in Armenia and this is best seen in the Syunik region. With regards to the demarcation of the Azerbaijani-Armenian border, it appears that the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) may well be involved in securing the line along the entire Armenian border. This could also be a sign of potential escalation. Such actions hint at a possible worst case scenario, in which Yerevan is officially tied to Russia through a project such as the Union State. Recent escalations on the border only contribute to the expansion of Russia's military activities, especially the duties of its "peacekeepers". The Kremlin will certainly benefit from any situation in which the two parties attempt to escalate a conflict already under close Russian mediation.

Moscow has started to enforce its military presence in Armenia and this is best seen in the Syunik region.

It is important to understand that there is no unanimous opinion in Moscow regarding the South Caucasus in general and the Armenia-Azerbaijan agenda in particular. Different oligarchic power blocs are competing for their own visions. The Armenian front has provided fertile ground for

this internal Kremlin competition and the parliamentary elections in June only further revealed this fact.

As for Azerbaijan, Moscow will likely exploit various opportunities to support and exacerbate a "syndrome of high expectations" that has been provoked by the incomplete liberation of the Karabakh territories. This relates not only to the moderation of tendencies within Azerbaijani society and its influence on Baku's domestic agenda. Indeed, the Kremlin has taken a "show them who is the boss" approach, and this will soon become evident in international relations and geopolitics. Now it seems obvious that Baku, although strongly reluctant to have "peacekeepers" on its territory, knew from the very beginning that the implementation of this aspect of the agreement was inevitable. It understood and was ready to counter Kremlin hybrid expansion in the context of the new status quo around Karabakh. As a result, out of all three South Caucasian states, it is only Azerbaijan that can exercise influence on the regional processes and the approaches of regional and external players. Baku's power benefitted strongly from the military victory, but Moscow will systematically attempt to undermine it.

"Peacekeepers" mandate

The Kremlin has been planning to deprive Baku of any real leverage over the military aspects of the "peacekeeping" contingent, as well as any activities related to transport through the Lachin corridor, since the very start. Moscow still has not agreed to establish a clear definition of what its mission or mandate is on the territory of Azerbaijan. The reasons behind this are clear. Any clarification of the mission's purpose would limit the Kremlin's chances to control the politics of the separatist government in Stepanakert, which is now effectively a Russian military protectorate. Moscow will not waste its chance to exercise its influence over this issue, as well as the various infrastructure projects in the region.

Despite this, Azerbaijan is still attempting to respond to these steps and promote its own agenda. In particular, it has conducted a series of information operations, which is atypical when compared to the previous stages of the conflict. The case of the Iskandar-M missiles found in Shusha made the most headlines but this is not the only case. The fact that the results of these campaigns are questionable and the motives behind them are not straightforward is less important. What should be noted is the fact that Baku systematically refuses to play along with the rules imposed from the outside (i.e. from Moscow).

At the same time, Azerbaijan has experienced various problems in trying to turn the Russian military contingent into a cooperative peacekeeping force. For

instance, the Kremlin does not tolerate the participation of Turkey in this format. Aligning the activity of Russian "peacekeepers" with the activity of the joint Russian-Turkish monitoring centre has turned out to be an issue as well. This issue is not necessarily a decisive loss for Baku. However, it is clear that the Kremlin does not wish to consider the internationalisation of the mission in any way at all and especially with regards to Turkish participation.

Nevertheless, the Kremlin's strategy to pretend as if both parties in the conflict were defeated creates a legal uncertainty that benefits Moscow. The Kremlin aims to make Baku vulnerable in the face of its ongoing hybrid confrontation and destroy Azerbaijani national resilience, which was developed and fortified during the 44-day war for Karabakh.

Revitalisation of the OSCE Minsk Group and its old agenda

At this stage, the Russian-Turkish competition for influence in Karabakh is the only game in town. One can consider this a simplified point of view though this format is much clearer than the Astana talks over Syria and more effective than the stillborn OSCE Minsk Group. This situation has proven advantageous for Baku, not least due to Yerevan's current lack of opportunities. However, this does

not mean that the aforementioned approaches of the Kremlin might preclude attempts to revitalise the OSCE Minsk Group. There are already some clear signs that Moscow may be interested in restarting these talks.

The 3+3 framework of regional co-operation (Iran, Russia, Turkey – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia) was recently revived and has been presented as an alternative to the Minsk Group. In my view, these frameworks of co-operation do not possess the same influence and it would be wrong to view the Minsk Group and the 3+3 format as competitors. This is especially true given the new realities of regional security in the South Caucasus. The Minsk Group has already demonstrated its ineffectiveness. The 3+3 format is amorphous as it does not suggest realistic and consensual scenarios regarding regional defence and security. Proponents of this approach seem to suggest simply ignoring these issues but this is practically impossible.

The Kremlin maintains a military base in Armenia and could use the Minsk format in the case of confrontation with Turkey.

The enhancement of the three regional powers' positions has occurred at the exact same time. Despite this, it is not clear how it may be possible to maintain this reality given the substantial, profound contradictions they face in the region. The Kremlin's "peacekeeping" logic is not difficult to understand. According to it, the transportation infrastructure projects should be controlled by Russia and serve to pull Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia into its sphere of influence. This approach aligns with rhetoric surrounding the global US-China confrontation that has already been called a new Cold War. This includes Washington's opposition to Kremlin expansion, the transformation of American policy towards Iran under Joe Biden, and the revitalisation of transatlantic unity regarding policies such as approaches to Ankara. If confrontation proceeds, China (which is in no rush) may simply agree to more "military mediation by the Kremlin" in the post-Soviet space.

Due to this, Moscow's attempts to revitalise the OSCE Minsk Group with its old agenda of negotiations should not be surprising. The Kremlin maintains a military base in Armenia and could use the Minsk format in the case of confrontation with Turkey. In reality, however, it will likely prove difficult to revive the operation of the Minsk Group without completely changing its outdated agenda. Azerbaijan would not agree to such changes for obvious reasons.

So far, Washington has formally approved a renewed focus on the OSCE Minsk Group and expressed a call for restraint. Yet, there has so far been no sign that the US will be returning to the South Caucasus or Karabakh agenda in any meaningful sense. Whilst Vladimir Putin's regime becomes increasingly controversial on the international stage, Washington continues to treat the Minsk Group as prac-

tically the only platform for periodic discussions with the Kremlin about a wide range of issues.

As the most prominent public proponent of the Minsk Group, France could support Moscow's initiatives. This is not only due to Paris's solidarity with Armenia but also Turkey's continued infringement of the Total S.A. oil company's business interests in the eastern Mediterranean. Interestingly, President Emmanuel Macron has recently presented himself as someone who understands the Kremlin and not only with regards to the Karabakh agenda.

Under certain circumstances, especially in the case of escalation, the Kremlin could benefit greatly from the revival of the OSCE Minsk Group. This is because any changes would affect the current line of contact along the borders of the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast. Moscow understands very well that Baku could move quickly and decisively to repopulate and restore the infrastructure of the seven districts retaken by the country. This includes the cities of Shusha and Gandrut, as well as the settlements of the Khojavend and Khojaly districts. There should be no doubt that the Kremlin sees this new infrastructure and, most importantly, people as potential hostages in a possible new round of pressure and bargaining.

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Caucasian geopolitics

Finding a path towards stability and peaceful coexistence

VAKHTANG MAISAIA

The Caucasus region is a wealthy area in terms of its geopolitical position, strategic importance and history. Certainly, the geoeconomic relevance of the region has once again become clear following the end of the latest fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh.

The Caucasus is the name of a mountain range and geographical region that includes the southwest of European Russia, as well as the territories of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. This region encompasses a 440,000 square kilometre space between the Black and Caspian Seas and has a population of approximately 30.6 million people. As a result, the Caucasus faces its own distinct geopolitical realities that could become even more important given talks of a new Cold War.

According to some scholars and researchers, the geopolitical landscape of the Caucasus can be divided into three distinct areas: 1) the Central Caucasus, including the three independent states of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia; 2) the Northern Caucasus, consisting of the autonomous border republics of the Russian Federation; and 3) the Southern Caucasus, including areas of Turkey bordering Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia (the Southwestern Caucasus) and the northwestern provinces of Iran (the Southeastern Caucasus).

Approaches to integration

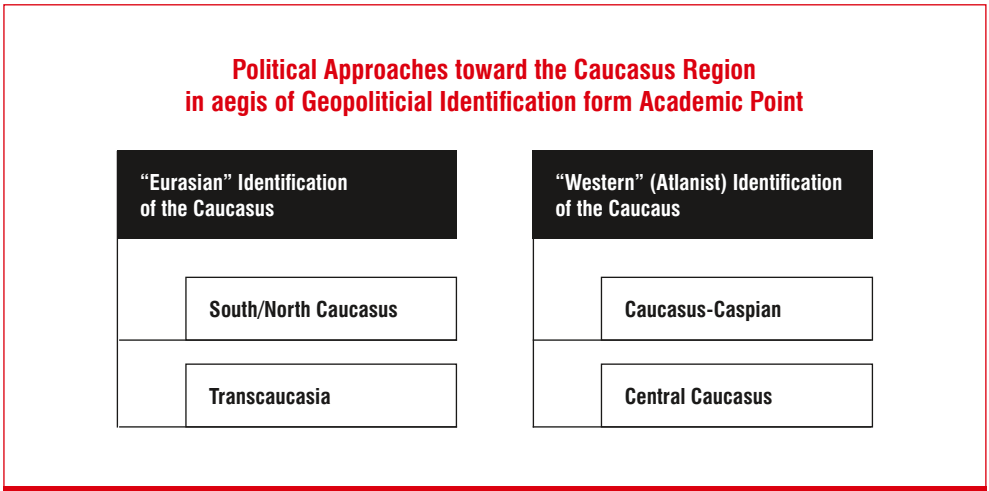
The identification of the Caucasus as a distinct geopolitical unit can be understood within the framework of contemporary integration initiatives. This is despite ongoing political and military conflicts in the region, which obstruct regional security at large. Examples of these conflicts include Georgia and Russia's ongoing tensions and Armenia and Azerbaijan's de facto war. As a result, regional integration projects aim to promote stability and resilience. These proposals can be grouped into the following approaches:

- The Caucasian Home model, which incorporates the autonomous republics of the Northern Caucasus (arguments have been made that these areas should participate in this integration model as autonomous actors) and the independent Caucasus states;
- Models uniting the independent Caucasus states of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia;
- The 3+1 model that unites the independent Caucasus states and Russia;
- Sub-global models, incorporating the three independent Caucasus states, three regional hegemons and global powers and international organisations (3+3+2);
- Modern regional security approach built on a 3+3 format, with involvement of local actors and three regional powers (Russia, Turkey, Iran).

Whilst limited regional integration occurred during the independence period of 1917–22 before the communist era, it is important to remember the Cold War divisions that continue to shape regional security. The confrontation between Russia and the United States at the regional level is happening not only in the military, political, economic, information and psychological spheres. Indeed, there is now even a linguistic aspect to these tensions. In other words, a bipolar linguistic competition has emerged between Russia and the US. This can be seen with regards to the fact that traditional understandings of the Caucasus region as a distinct unit come from a thoroughly Russian point of view. For example, the terms Transcaucasus and Transcaucasia in western languages are translations of the Russian expression Закавказье (Zakavkazje): "the area beyond the Caucasus Mountain Range".

Linguistic differences

It should, however, be pointed out that Transcaucasia is being increasingly replaced by the term South Caucasus (*Южный Кавказ*, Juzhnyi Kavkaz). This means that both Transcaucasus and South Caucasus can be found in Russian foreign



Political Approaches toward the Caucasus Region in aegis of Geopoliticial Identification form Academic Point

policy terminology. These terms are often used in relation to official documents that discuss the state's doctrine of Eurasianism, such as the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation.

On the other side, there is the American or Atlanticist point of view that promotes different ideas related to the identification of the Caucasus geopolitical region. A special institution was even created in the early 2000s in order to create a new geopolitical identity for the area. This "Caucasus-Caspian Region" identity was ultimately meant to help promote US national interests in the region. The name of the institution, the Caucasus-Caspian Commission, reflected this new approach and claimed that "the Caucasus Caspian space is not a precisely defined region either geographically or politically … the Caucasus-Caspian Commission has decided to look at three concentric circles: inner core, outer ring and global circle".

Around this time the term Central Caucasus was also introduced into the geopolitical lexicon. This concept of the Central Caucasus is more in tune with Central Eurasia and Central Asia than the concept of the Southern Caucasus. As a result, it seems that the current geopolitical dilemma facing the Caucasus region can be described as Eurasianism versus Atlanticism.

Geostrata

Having considered the ongoing geopolitical competition in the region, it is useful to also consider the area's geoeconomic perspectives and its position in the world

economy and global trade. The transportation connectivity of the Caucasus region occurs along both north-south and east-west axes. Overall, the north-south connection is very complex and this makes it more difficult for Russia to influence the region through a physical military presence. With regards to the region's connections with Anatolia and the Middle East (particularly Iran), the contemporary situation is somewhat better. After all, the Caucasus continues to play a significant role on the international stage for various historic, geographic, ethnic and geostrategic reasons. For world powers, its geographical position has been viewed as a natural bridge between regions. The area is connected to Central Asia via the Caspian Sea and to the Middle East through its border with Iran. Furthermore, the Black, Azov, Aegean, and Marmara Seas all connect the region to Europe. Even Africa can be accessed rather quickly via the nearby Mediterranean.

The north-south connection is very complex and this makes it more difficult for Russia to influence the region through a physical military presence.

The Caucasus region is a wealthy area in terms of its geopolitical position, strategic importance and history. Certainly, the geoeconomic relevance of the region has once again become clear following the end of the latest fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh. As a result, the fragile peace in the former conflict zone could provide a new stimulus for development of various corridor systems. These systems include the following transit routes:

1. West-East – EU-South Caucasus-Central Asia-China
2. North-South – Eurasia (Russia)-South Caucasus-MENA
3. West-South – EU-Black Sea Basin-South Caucasus-MENA
4. East-East – Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey (Baku-Tbilisi-Kars) railway
5. South-West – India-Iran-South Caucasus-Black Sea Basin-EU
6. South-South – Azerbaijan-Armenia-Turkey ('Zangezur' corridor)

These geoeconomic transit corridors should be promoted further to strengthen geopolitical stability. In order for these routes to perform at their best, some kind of institutional arrangement should be established. For example, a Caucasus Transport Union could be created that involves various regional actors. This would also provide an opportunity for local/regional societies to cooperate in the framework of the "European four principle". Such work could be based on the so-called Four Society development model, which would involve figures from the media, business and public diplomacy alongside various regional experts.

The dilemma of regional confrontation is by no means an easy one to solve. However, finding a solution remains the sole option available to the Caucasus region if it is to achieve peaceful coexistence as perceived by the geopolitical con-

cept known as the Caucasus Geostrata. As a "geostrata", the Caucasus is a region where geopolitical projects either synchronise or clash. This remains one of the leading theories of modern Georgian geopolitical thought. Peaceful coexistence should not be promoted among local states alone but also include international actors and representatives. This could result in the founding of a Caucasus Public Chamber, which could help coordinate regional NGOs, academics and media as a community aimed at directing dialogue that promotes rapprochement and open communications. This could lead to peaceful coexistence at the regional level finally becoming a reality.

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The Zangezur corridor

An Azerbaijani perspective

MURAD MURADOV

The opening of the Zangezur corridor will play an important role in the security of Azerbaijan's newly liberated lands. It would cement the implementation of the November agreement and signal that the former status quo is over. This would subsequently help Baku to pursue its most ambitious undertaking in years – rebuilding the war-torn Karabakh region.

The ninth and final clause of the November 10th tripartite ceasefire agreement stated: "All economic and transport links in the region shall be unblocked. The Republic of Armenia shall guarantee the safety of transport links between the western regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic with a view to organising the unimpeded movement of citizens, vehicles and cargo in both directions." In practice, this condition implied the opening of the so-called "Zangezur corridor" – a 43-kilometre stretch of land along Armenia's border with Iran. In Soviet times, this area used to provide a road and railway connection between Nakhchivan and mainland Azerbaijan. However, these routes were blocked after a war over Nagorno-Karabakh and its surrounding regions erupted in the early 1990s.

The inclusion of this condition into the deal was reportedly obtained with a significant pressure placed on Armenia. Naturally, the text is considered to be a great achievement for Azerbaijan. Recent tensions between the both countries' armies in the borderland regions are directly related to Baku's dissatisfaction with Yerevan and its alleged attempts to disregard any potential transport links. Indeed, Arme-

nian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan stated in April that "there can be no corridor for Azerbaijan". Although it was not entirely clear what exactly these words meant in practice, many Armenians believe that any corridor would effectively constitute handing over land to Azerbaijan. This is obviously not the case.

Connecting Asia with Europe

Growing tensions over the corridor appeared amidst repeated statements by Azerbaijani President Heydar Aliyev concerning the prospects of restored regional transportation links. For example, he stated that this corridor would constitute an important element in the transportation network connecting Asia with Europe during a session of the United Nations Economic and Social Committee for Asia and the Pacific. This was an important development as the restoration of links has traditionally been discussed as a matter of regional importance.

Despite this, the importance of restoring a direct link with Nakhchivan for Azerbaijan is rarely known to the wider public. This significance cannot be explained through purely economic considerations. Indeed, the railway line that had been connecting the areas before 1990 no longer physically exists, as the rails were most probably sold for scrap metal during the Armenian occupation. The restoration of the railway would not only involve laying track in the relatively short section that falls within the borders of Armenia. Certainly, a much larger section between Horadiz in Azerbaijan (which before 2020 had been the town closest to the line of contact with the so-called Nagorno-Karabakh army) and the border with Armenia would have to be created. This line would measure approximately 120 kilometres.

The importance of restoring a direct link with Nakhchivan for Azerbaijan is rarely known to the wider public.

A study conducted by International Alert in 2014 projected that the construction of the missing parts of the railway along the Kars–Gyumri–Nakhchivan–Meghri–Baku route (KGNMB) would cost USD 433.7. The group estimated that the re-establishment of the Azerbaijani section of the line would cost 277.1 million, while the Armenian and Turkish sections would require USD 104.6 million and 52 million, respectively. Even though the railway price tag now generally exceeds these projections from 7 years ago, a revitalised KGNMB line still seems to make more economic sense than its alternatives. Although Turkey's transport and infrastructure ministry has estimated that construction of the Igdir–Kars–Nakhchivan railway would cost less (USD between 180 and 240 million) than the KGNMB, it would take much longer (via

the more-than-1,000 kilometre Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway) for transport from Baku to reach Nakhchivan compared to the Zangezur corridor (426 kilometres).

Moreover, it must be remembered that Azerbaijan has already invested an amount exceeding USD 1.4 billion into the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway (USD 750 million of this amount was given as credit to Georgia to cover its construction costs). This was yet another project that was supposed to establish an efficient overland connection with Turkey that could be integrated into global logistical networks, such as China's One Belt-One Road, Turkey's Middle Corridor or the North-South line connecting Russia with Iran and South Asia.

Real opportunities lie in the expansion of trade between Turkey and Central Asian countries via the routes passing through Azerbaijan. Currently, this trade amounts to EUR 6 billion. Given Ankara's obvious interest in intensifying co-operation with the countries of the region on all levels, this figure could grow in a rather short amount of time. This is especially true in the case of the populous Uzbekistan, which is now experiencing an economic boom. Baku takes its potential transport capacity quite seriously. For instance, the capital's port registered an unexpected surge in traffic last year despite the pandemic. The throughput of large vehicles and containers using the port last year represented a 30-year record. In 2020 the number of trucks passing through increased by 28 per cent, whilst container exports increased by 15 per cent and the volume of cargo transported through the dry cargo terminal grew by an impressive 28 per cent.

Seeking a win-win

Given that there already are existing roads suitable for transport purposes, it is difficult to discuss the potentially expensive Zangezur corridor in purely economic terms. As a result, various political and security issues must also be carefully examined. First of all, it is clear that Aliyev has stressed the importance of the Zangezur corridor as it helps promote Azerbaijan's image as a state that supports win-win solutions capable of strengthening regional security and co-operation. Speaking at an international press conference on May 20th, Aliyev claimed that he is ready for a comprehensive peace with Armenia and hopes to pursue co-operation as quickly as possible. He even mentioned that the demarcation process can proceed even without the mediation of third parties (obviously, implying Russia).

Aliyev also declared that Azerbaijan stands ready to assist Armenia in its development policies. He has stressed that unblocking transport links would play an enormously positive role for Yerevan as well. "Two people must learn to live in peace side by side", he concluded.

At the same time, it is worth mentioning that Azerbaijan's president has not publicly touched upon the similar problem of the Lachin corridor. This corridor is made up of a stretch of Azerbaijani land between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh that is now controlled by Russian peacekeepers tasked with ensuring the free movement of Armenians. Issues such as the alleged use of the corridor by the Armenian military even after November 10th have remained a source of considerable irritation among Azerbaijanis. However, the fact that the Zangezur corridor is given much more attention and weight by Baku suggests that it hopes to represent itself as a champion of regional integration and development, prioritising such goals over short-term ambitions.

A publication by the government-affiliated Center for the Analysis of International Relations claims that "Azerbaijan is decisively committed to the creation of this corridor and restoration of transport links as it considers co-operation to be the main tool for creating durable peace in the region". The same source also stresses the benefits that Armenia could receive from a new transport line with Russia. After all, transit through Georgia remains unstable and irregular due to the lack of diplomatic relations between Moscow and Tbilisi. Baku's continued attempts to encourage the opening of the corridor in the face of Armenian uncertainty only further strengthens Azerbaijan's image as a benign and cooperative partner. According to a recent analytical paper on the corridor, the belief is strong in Baku that sustainable economic development and peace, spurred on by unblocked transport links, will prevent the spread of harmful nationalistic ideas and the creation of new conflicts in the future.

At the same time, the opening of the Zangezur corridor will play an important role in the security of Azerbaijan's newly liberated lands as well. It would cement the implementation of the 10 November agreement and show that there is a new status quo. By providing serious security guarantees to potential investors in the Azerbaijani territories undergoing reconstruction, Baku could well succeed in restoring the war-torn Karabakh region. Such a move would also signify another psychological victory over the "old foe", whilst demonstrating the country's ability to achieve its goals by non-military means.

Obstacles to a breakthrough

Yerevan seems unwilling to embark on this project despite its earlier agreement stipulated in the November ceasefire statement. Moreover, the timing of the deal is very important. It is hardly a secret that Russia and Turkey's ability to balance their interests was one of the major factors that made Azerbaijan's success possible.

However, there is no guarantee that the complex relationship between the two regional powerhouses will not deteriorate once again. This could possibly create obstacles for Baku and its reintegration strategy. Due to this, Aliyev will try to secure as many gains as possible during the current political climate in the region. Azerbaijan would also gain from decreasing its dependence on Iran, which up to now has provided uninterrupted overland connection with Nakhchivan. While Tehran generally maintained a benign neutrality during the war and officially welcomed Azerbaijan's success, it is unlikely that the fundamental mistrust that exists between the two capitals will disappear. It will be much easier for Baku to pursue relations if Tehran loses one of its major bilateral advantages (anecdotal evidence suggests that Iran has made use of the Nakhchivan issue during previous bilateral crises).

At the same time, Aliyev will also gain domestically if he achieves a breakthrough regarding the transportation issue. Such success would further marginalise the minority view that the 44-day war was not a victory and was imposed by Moscow, which simply replaced Armenia in Nagorno-Karabakh. These voices will face even more challenges should the president overcome these transport problems. Furthermore, Nakhchivan has to some extent long been detached from wider socio-political trends in Azerbaijan and recent reforms have barely touched the autonomous republic. With stronger links and an additional boost to his legitimacy, Aliyev will likely push to enact similar changes in Nakhchivan as well. NEE

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Author's note: this text was written in May 2021. Some details may have changed since then.

The Armenian view on the opening of the South Caucasus after the 2020 Karabakh War

BENYAMIN POGHOSYAN

The agreement that ended the 2020 Karabakh War called for transportation links to be put on the geopolitical agenda of the South Caucasus. According to the statement, Armenia should guarantee the security of transport connections between the western regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. However, recent tensions in the Syunik region will likely impact the success of these developments.

The 2020 Karabakh War has caused a significant shift in the geopolitics of the South Caucasus. Azerbaijan naturally strengthened its position, while Armenia was plunged into an acute political crisis without any clear solutions. Even the victory of Nikol Pashinyan's "Civic Contract" party in the June 2021 early Parliamentary elections did not put an end to the domestic instability. Russia and Turkey have also increased their influence in the region. Moscow achieved its crucial goal of deploying troops in Karabakh, while Ankara has sent a clear message that it is now a leading regional powerbroker.

The 2020 Karabakh War has established a new status quo. The Nagorno-Karabakh region is now a de facto Russian protectorate with significantly reduced borders. As a result, Armenia has lost its position as the main guarantor of Karabakh's

security. During the 26 long years of negotiations under the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group, several settlement plans have been created and offered to both sides: the package deal from the summer of 1997; the phased deal in December 1997; the union state in 1998; the Key West deal in April 2001; the Kazan document in June 2011; and the Lavrov plan since 2014. However, none of these plans were as disastrous for Armenia and the unrecognised Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR) as the trilateral statement of November 10th 2020.

New kingmaker

Previous deals firstly envisaged the gradual return of territories considered a security zone by Armenians against the Azerbaijani military. These proposals explicitly linked these moves to the future status of Nagorno-Karabakh. The status of these disputed regions would then be decided either through future negotiations (such as in the December 1997 deal or Lavrov plan) or through a legally binding referendum (Kazan document). At the same time, the Key West model called for Nagorno-Karabakh to be declared a part of Armenia in line with the 1988 borders. In return, Yerevan would provide a corridor from Azerbaijan proper to the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic via the Syunik region. Despite this, the November 10th deal envisaged the immediate return of all seven regions outside the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast to Azerbaijan. The agreement also accepted Azerbaijani control over 1,500 square kilometres of the former oblast. As a result, only 3,000 of the NKR's previous 11,450 square kilometres of territory now lies outside Azerbaijani control.

Overall, the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic lost approximately 80 per cent of its land area, while infrastructure was badly damaged in its remaining territories. Some 90,000 people have left for Armenia and at least 25,000 cannot return as their lands are now under Azerbaijani control. Others are waiting for the reconstruction of civilian infrastructure, which may take months, if not years. Meanwhile, the deployment of 1,960 Russian peacekeepers in Karabakh has effectively made Karabakh a Russian protectorate. Whilst the NKR's de facto government, president and national assembly nominally continue their activities, it is clear that the real kingmaker in Karabakh is now Russia.

According to the November 10th trilateral statement, Azerbaijan or Armenia may demand the withdrawal of Russian peacekeepers after November 2025. This has only caused uncertainty over the future of Karabakh and the nearly 100,000 Armenians still living there. If Russian troops leave the region, the Armenians will have two options: to flee or be massacred. No country or organisation, including

the United States, France, European Union or NATO, could possibly prevent this scenario. Given the severe damage imposed by the war on Armenia's army and economy, Yerevan is not in a position to change the new status quo in its favour over the next ten years. Thus, Armenia will take all necessary steps to ensure that Russian troops remain in Karabakh at least until 2030. During this period, Armenia will seek to revive the OSCE Minsk Group process, stressing that the war did not resolve the conflict and that negotiations should continue over the status of Nagorno-Karabakh. This, of course, was the most important topic during the 26 year-long negotiations between May 1994 and September 2020. Yerevan will likely offer to organise a legally binding vote to establish Nagorno-Karabakh's official status as stipulated in the 2009 Madrid Principles.

The potential opening up of links

The November 10th statement also brought up the issue of opening up transportation links in the South Caucasus. According to article nine of the statement, all economic and transport connections in the area should be unblocked by regional governments. Armenia should also guarantee the security of transport connections between the western parts of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic (this is a landlocked Azerbaijani exclave separated from the rest of the country by Armenian territory – editor's note). At the same time, the border guard of Russia's Federal Security Service (or FSB) has been made responsible for overseeing these transport connections. Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia signed another trilateral statement on January 11th, 2021, which focused on transportation issues. All three governments agreed to establish an intergovernmental working group under the joint chairmanship of the deputy prime minister of Azerbaijan, the deputy prime minister of Armenia, and the deputy chairman of the Russian government. According to the statement, by March 1st 2021, the working group should have submitted an approved list and timetable of activities designed to restore or build new transport infrastructure necessary for secure international traffic through Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Naturally, Armenian society has accepted these statements with surprise and suspicion. Almost all of the potential settlements offered by the Minsk Group included a reference to the opening of regional transportation. However, the November 10th document was not a comprehensive agreement to solve the conflict. Instead, it was only meant to stop the war.

In this context, the most pressing issue for Armenia is the security of its southern Syunik region, which provides the country with its only land border with Iran.

Photo: Sun_Shine / Shutterstock

Following the November agreement, the de facto demarcation of the Armenia–Azerbaijan border in the Syunik region (known for its beautiful mountainous scenery as seen above) was hastily completed. Azerbaijan and Turkey hope to establish de facto control over parts of the region to create an uninterrupted land corridor.

Before last year's war, Syunik bordered both Nakhchivan and Nagorno-Karabakh. Now, Syunik finds itself squeezed between Azerbaijan proper and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. At its narrowest, the region separates these territories by less than 30 kilometres.

Azerbaijan has claimed since the early 1990s that the Syunik region artificially separates the so-called Turkic world. Baku has pursued this line of argument within the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States, an intergovernmental organisation created in 2009 by Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkey and Uzbekistan. Interestingly, Hungary is the organisation's sole observer state. The council was officially founded during a meeting in Nakhchivan and this was accompanied by various statements arguing that Syunik (or as Azerbaijanis call it "Zangezur") separated the Turkic world. It should be noted that Turkey lacks a direct land connection with Azerbaijan proper despite the fact that it possesses a ten kilometre border with the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic.

Doubts in intentions

Even before the 2020 war, there was a clear perception in Armenia that Azerbaijan and Turkey hoped to establish de facto control over Syunik and create an

uninterrupted land corridor. Following the November agreement, the de facto demarcation of the Armenia–Azerbaijan border in the Syunik region was hastily completed without any legal process. This resulted in the deployment of Azerbaijani soldiers along the Goris-Kapan highway and several roads connecting Goris and Kapan (the regional capital) to several Armenian villages. This situation forced Armenia to ask Moscow to establish several checkpoints along the Armenia–Azerbaijan border, as well as two outposts of the 102nd Russian military base in the Syunik region. These all help to provide security for the roads that are now partly under Azerbaijani control.

This has led to a situation in which Russian border troops protect Armenia's borders with Turkey, Iran and partly even Azerbaijan. Without Russian support and protection, it would be impossible to drive from Yerevan to Kapan and further into Iran, as the Armenia-Iran international highway passes through the Syunik region.

Repeated statements by Azerbaijani President Aliyev regarding the "Zangezur corridor" and Zangezur's status as historical Azerbaijani land has only added to suspicions in Armenia. Yerevan has stressed that there are no mentions about any corridors, except for Lachin, in either the November 2020 or January 2021 statements. Due to this, both sides should rather be speaking about opening up general communications. Aliyev stated that if Armenia was not going to create a "Zangezur corridor", then Azerbaijan would open the corridor by force. This statement was naturally met with backlash in Armenia. It confirmed Armenian doubts that the real intention of Azerbaijan and Turkey is to establish de facto control over the Syunik region.

Azerbaijan demands that at least two routes be provided to Nakhchivan via the Syunik region. According to Baku's vision, a railway should pass along the Araks river and enter Nakhchivan. This would resemble the railway connection that existed during Soviet times. Azerbaijan has already started constructing the railway on the territories it took during last year's war. Meanwhile, Turkey has stated that it hopes to construct a Kars–Igdir–Nakhchivan railway. If implemented, this route will create another Azerbaijan–Turkey rail connection parallel to the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars route. In addition to the railway along the Aras, Azerbaijan has called for a highway connection to Nakhchivan that would pass through Syunik.

Negative perceptions

Experts in Armenia are now actively discussing other possible routes that could connect Azerbaijan with Nakhchivan. One option is to use the Gazakh–Ijevan railway to connect both areas by rail. Azerbaijani trains may enter Ijevan, then reach

Yerevan and enter Nakhchivan via the village of Yeraskh in the Ararat region. As for a highway connecting Azerbaijan with Nakhchivan, it may be possible to use the Vardenis-Sevan-Yerevan-Yeraskh highway. Azerbaijan's continued insistence that the Syunik region's territory be used to connect Azerbaijan with Nakhchivan has only strengthened Armenian concerns that Baku and Ankara ultimately hope to seize Syunik in the long term.

On May 12th and 13th, The Azerbaijani army made several incursions of up to four kilometres into the Syunik and Gegharkunik regions of Armenia. The Azerbaijani military still refuses to withdraw and this has only contributed to hostile attitudes present among Armenian society. Armenia officially applied to the Collective Security Treaty Organisation on May 13th to start consultations regarding Baku's actions. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan even sent a letter to Russian President Vladimir Putin asking for military support. However, after months of discussions, the CSTO described these events as mere border incidents, which did not require the involvement of the organization. The Russian foreign ministry has called for restraint and has offered to help Armenia and Azerbaijan officially start talks regarding delimitation and demarcation.

French President Emmanuel Macron demanded the withdrawal of Azerbaijani troops from Armenian territory, while the US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan spoke with Pashinyan and Aliyev. He expressed concerns over recent bilateral tensions and emphasised that military movements near disputed borders are irresponsible and provocative. He also underscored the need for both countries to conduct formal discussions to agree on their international border. Simultaneously, Azerbaijan launched a large-scale military drill that involved 15,000 troops on May 16th.

In late August 2021 Azerbaijan closed the Goris-Kapan highway for two days and established police check points. Then, since mid-September, Azerbaijani police have started to check Iranian vehicles driving through this route and to collect taxes. Azerbaijani authorities arrested two Iranian drivers for alleged illegal crossing of the Azerbaijan border. These actions disrupted the transport links between Armenia and Iran and ushered a crisis in Iran-Azerbaijan relations. The recent tensions in the Syunik region have bolstered negative perceptions in Armenian society regarding the opening up of transportation links. After winning the early parliamentary elections, Pashinyan is now forced to find a solution. In the end, he may decide to simply reject any possibility of providing transport routes between Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan via the Syunik region.

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The position of Georgia within the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict

VICTOR KIPIANI

Georgia has great interest in advancing peaceful and neighbourly relations with the other countries of the South Caucasus. Now, there is an opportunity to strengthen ties among the three countries. However, a realistic approach towards these relations is needed to achieve modest success in the short and medium-terms.

The main aim of Georgian policy in the South Caucasus is to sustain peace and stability while ensuring neighbourly relations with both Armenia and Azerbaijan. Tbilisi adhered to this approach during the so-called Second Nagorno-Karabakh War last year. In particular, the statement of the National Security Council of Georgia published on October 3rd 2020 serves as a proof of such a commitment. This statement stresses that the active armed conflict should come to an end as soon as possible.

Specifically, Georgia did not allow the transit of military supplies to either state and declared a willingness to take on the role of a negotiator between the conflicting parties. This announcement had two fundamental points. Georgia not only demonstrated its approach towards the conflict, but it also showed its readiness to actively participate in dialogue regarding the situation in the region. Moreover, this statement sent a message to Georgia's two largest national minorities that it aims to maintain stability and uphold the rule of law.

Regional realities

By briefly evaluating the security council's statement and Georgia's response to the conflict, it becomes clear that Tbilisi responded by doing as much as it could while being aware of regional realities. During the normalisation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the media frequently raised the question as to what extent Georgia's efforts had been coordinated with western partners. Addressing this question, we should not forget that every step taken by the Georgian authorities was made with regional realities and Georgia's potential in mind. It is also crucial to understand that the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict should not be the only reason for an alignment of western and Georgian policies regarding the South Caucasus. It is important to remember that the roots of this co-operation stem from large-scale transport projects, such as the South Caucasian natural gas and the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipelines, to name but a few.

A fair evaluation of the West's presence and influence in the South Caucasus matters as much as the quality of its activities. It is impossible to talk about Georgia's efforts to foster western presence in the South Caucasus without admitting that the West must maintain its presence in the region itself, first and foremost, and be willing to respond to Georgia's initiatives. The Nagorno-Karabakh ceasefire agreement signed on November 10th 2020 together with various associated documents discuss the creation of new transport corridors on the territories of Azerbaijan and Armenia. Although an evaluation of these projects does not lie within the scope of this article, I would like to discuss if they could hinder the transit and transport potential of Georgia. Overall, I believe that those who have a pessimistic outlook on the situation may be slightly exaggerating.

Firstly, no large transportation initiative can exclusively be subject to geopolitical ideas and an inflexible line of thinking. It is important to consider its investment model. In other words, any project can safely be set aside in the absence of a clear financial and investment plan. Otherwise, the whole project may come to nothing and be quite an adventure. Geopolitical considerations on their own would not be enough to implement projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, the South Caucasian gas pipeline or the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway. After all, they have to be financially profitable in the first place. Furthermore, developing trust in a new transport corridor takes years to develop. It also takes time and effort to develop and deal with the various geopolitical and geoeconomic characteristics of a specific project. Any issues associated with Georgia's transport corridors were already settled a while ago.

Moreover, some aspects of the agreement on new transport corridors involving Armenia and Azerbaijan lack precision. Certainly, it appears that various de-

tails have not been settled once and for all. It remains unclear how safe these transport connections will be and if the Russian Federation can guarantee their safety and stay neutral regarding both parties. It should be remembered that the transport corridors that go through Georgian territory guarantee the export of cargo traffic from a nearby seaport on the Black Sea shore. This aspect is also of great economic importance, especially with regards to investment. In general, there are two major reasons why Georgia's transit routes are so attractive. Firstly, the country's political system, although far from perfect, guarantees transparent legislation that creates a welcoming business environment. At the same time, the Georgian market is better integrated with the western markets than those of the other two South Caucasus states. Due to this, Baku and Yerevan could benefit greatly from closer co-operation.

During the conflict, the media frequently asked to what extent Georgia's efforts had been coordinated with the West.

A factor of regional powers

It is interesting to follow up on the role of Russia and Turkey in the region in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Russia's impact in this regard is peculiar. Moscow had to be very careful to maintain balance in its relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan. Neither of these states were hostile to Russia and this encouraged Moscow to adopt more sophisticated and complex policies compared to other post-Soviet military conflicts and wars. This could also be the reason behind the rather general and unclear wording of some of the ceasefire agreement statements.

Additionally, Russia had to consider its bilateral relations with Turkey, as their interests overlap not only in this region but in other parts of the world as well. Despite Moscow's tactical interest in cooperating with Ankara, Russia did its best to try and limit the role of Turkey after the end of hostilities. For instance, the November 10th agreement aims to limit Turkish military involvement in a ceasefire monitoring centre. Russia has also managed to neutralise attempts by Turkey and Azerbaijan to expand Ankara's role within the OSCE Minsk Group.

Turkey retains an important position in Georgia's regional outlook and remains one of its most prominent partners. Of course, Ankara is an essential regional security player and has consistently supported Georgia's NATO aspirations. As a result, Georgian-Turkish relations could deter Russian influence over the South Caucasus. While Turkey is mainly interested in a more profound partnership with Azerbaijan, it appears that it is also seeking to normalise its relations with Yerevan.

Is a tripartite alliance possible?

It is difficult to argue against the potential benefits that a tripartite partnership could bring to all the countries of the South Caucasus. In addition to strengthening peacebuilding and security issues, such a partnership would make the South Caucasus stronger and economically more attractive. Unfortunately, the reality we are living in today does not provide any ground to be optimistic about the situation from a short to medium-term perspective.

Overall, it seems that Tbilisi's individual relationships with Armenia and Azerbaijan are playing a key part in the politics of the South Caucasus region as a whole. Georgia, therefore, has an important role to play in maintaining the general quality of relations between the states in the region. This is the reality of the region today and ignoring it is not feasible. This shows the valuable role that Georgia is playing in the ongoing political processes in the South Caucasus, at least in relation to the economy. This makes domestic changes and the integration of Georgia into a civilised international community even more vital.

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Vladimir the historian

Putin's political revision of Ukrainian history

JOSHUA R. KROEKER

For roughly a half a decade now, there has been a radicalising shift in the Kremlin's understanding of its relations with Ukraine. As Ukraine continues to follow its own path, Vladimir Putin assumes an evermore extreme position that Ukraine, its peoples, language and culture simply do not exist. For Putin, Ukraine has always been and will always be a part of Russia.

Vladimir Putin, Russia's longest-serving president and champion of post-Soviet stability, has accomplished much over the past 21 years. He has delivered Russia from the economic turmoil left by Boris Yeltsin in the 1990s, fought and won two wars in Chechnya, and brought unprecedented levels of prosperity and technological development to Russia. He has also defended traditional values the world over, once again placing Russia on the map of the world's great powers at the expense of democracy and a fruitful relationship with the West. Putin has won many titles for this, including that of the most powerful man on earth, a modern dictator, or the greatest Russian.

Yet, in recent years it seems as if he is pushing for a both novel and surprising title. Putin has been preoccupied with matters outside of his political prowess and presidential duties. He is now increasingly busying himself with the writing (or rather rewriting) and construction of history, ironically yet unfoundedly earning himself the title of "Vladimir the Historian".

Dangerous narrative

In line with his fixation on Ukraine since 2014, Putin is using his personal understanding of Ukrainian and Russian histories to propagate and institutionalise a very dangerous narrative. For the second time in the past two years, the Russian president has taken to penning an official history of the Russian Federation. Previously, Putin wrote about Russia's role in the Second World War. In July, Putin wrote a nearly 5,000-word polemical history of Ukraine, titled "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians". This was published on the Kremlin's website, both in Russian and in English.

This "history", designed to discredit Ukraine's chosen path towards democracy and the West, is littered with inaccuracies, logical errors, politicised claims and ideology. It is reflective of the conspiratorial "Russia versus the West" way of thinking that is supported by Putin and the Siloviki – members of the country's vast security services. Throughout his lengthy commentary, Putin utilises revisionist historical narratives to disprove Ukraine's independence from greater Russia. Ultimately, as will be explored throughout the remainder of this article, Putin's treatise has little if anything to do with historical truth. Overall, it is a work of ideology, written by an ideologist unwilling to admit that Russia has lost Ukraine.

Vladimir Putin's treatise has little, if anything, to do with historical truth. Overall, it is a work of ideology, written by an ideologist.

In his article, Putin covers the intertwined history between Russia and Ukraine from the beginning of the ninth century until today. His argument for doing so is that "…to have a better understanding of the present and look into the future, we need to turn to history…". Naturally, his argument implies that anything that once was there, should and shall always be there. Accordingly, the article begins with analysing Kyivan Rus' and the interconnections between ancient Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. He proceeds to move to the fragmentation of these lands under the rule of the Mongol hordes, to the wars of "(re)unification" (written as "wars of Liberation" in his text) under a number of duchies and principalities between the 15th and 18th centuries, to the almost complete reunification of greater Russia (Galicia, today's Western Ukraine, remained a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until the end of the First World War) in the second half of the 18th century.

Putin then devotes a large segment of his text to critically analysing the "idea of Ukraine as a nation separate from Russians", claiming this to be unsubstantiated and a series of mere concoctions created by a (western-oriented) nationalist intelligentsia aiming to weaken Russia. Finally, within this comprehensive yet thor-

oughly brief history of Russia and Ukraine, he contradictorily argues that Ukraine enjoyed a special position within the Soviet Union. According to the Russian president, the nation's language, culture and identity were nurtured during this time. He also claimed that Russia was robbed by Ukraine in the 1990s, as the country was ever so eager to leave the Soviet Union as soon as the Communist Party that (forcefully) held the state together began to collapse. These examples are only the beginning of the motley collection of inconsistent narratives comprising his article.

Independent paths

The essence of Putin's argument is straightforward. Ukraine and Russia are inseparable, two parts of a larger whole. Throughout his penned history, Putin strongly laments the fractures that have developed between the two countries in the past three decades. In his eyes, Ukrainians "began to mythologise and rewrite history, edit out everything that united us [Ukraine and Russia], and refer to the period when Ukraine was part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union as an occupation". Ukrainian independence is viewed as a folly, a conspiracy first developed in Poland in the 19th century. Such ideas then became popular in Western Europe in the 20th century and are now headed by the United States (and Canada). What Putin's argument refuses to acknowledge, however, is that the "fractures" between Russia and Ukraine (in Putin's words: Russia and Malorussia [Little Russia]) have always existed to some extent. A 5000 word essay is not enough to disprove the existence of a nation, language and culture. Allow me to explain why.

Firstly, Putin is correct in underlining the interconnected histories between Russia and Ukraine. They are indeed intertwined and impossible to unravel from one another. The fates of both nations have for centuries depended on – or have at least been affected by – the other. Russians and Ukrainians have suffered together, fought together and conquered together. They have lived, existed and died together. This does not mean, however, that they are one and the same.

In order to demonstrate the problems with Putin's argument, it is necessary to offer a couple of examples in which Russia's and Ukraine's histories do not run parallel to each other. Firstly, Ukraine's experiences with the West, namely the Austro-Hungarian Empire and, even earlier, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, are cases in which the country underwent cultural, linguistic, historical and national developments that differed from Russia's. Ukraine (which today is more concentrated on the western regions of the country) forged interethnic and intercultural relations with non-Slavic peoples for centuries. Russia, on the other hand, did not have those same experiences. Indeed, Russia did have strong relations with West-

ern Europe, but Russians did not live alongside communities of Germans, Austrians or Hungarians in the same way that Ukrainians did.

The second issue concerns the Ukrainian People's Republic, which was founded in 1917, after the First World War. Though socialist in nature, the UPR was far less revolutionary than Russia's Bolsheviks. The UPR sought to create a national state for Ukrainians, not opposed to, but rather on an equal footing with Russia. The proclamation of the Republic of Ukraine from November 1917 declared that "Without separating ourselves from the Russian Republic and maintaining its unity, we shall stand firmly on our own soil, in order that our strength may aid all of Russia, so that the whole Russian Republic may become a federation of equal

and free peoples". A century ago, Ukrainians created their own state, which was at the time supported by the Russian provisional government in Petrograd (now St. Petersburg). The Ukrainian state created at the beginning of the 20th century was not done out of animosity towards Russia or Russians. Rather, it was created as a result of the Ukrainian people's recognition of their own cultural and linguistic uniqueness.

What defines a nation?

A logical parallel can be drawn here to better understand the historical unity and disunity between Ukraine and Russia by considering Canada and England, for example. Canada and England, similar to Ukraine and Russia, have a long shared history intertwined with one another, even within periods of great mutual dependence. Canada's democracy, legal system, and constitution are all products of the country's history as a British colony. Yet, no one would ever venture to claim that Canadians and the British are one people. Similar, yes, but de jure they are clearly different peoples. Ukraine and Russia share similar histories, have journeyed throughout the centuries together, but also have had their own, independent experiences. Their histories are not, as Putin would want to have it, merely the "hypotheses" of western governments and "Ukrainian fascists". Instead, they are well documented in history.

Putin ignores the fact that Russians and Ukrainians did not necessarily share "one common language".

Another mistake made by Putin throughout his arguments is that he is unable to (or unwilling to) define the concept of nation. Despite arguing that Russians and Ukrainians are one unified nation, he does not offer a definition of what exactly constitutes a nation. He prefers to base his argument on the premise that the Ukrainian language is simply a dialect of Russian and that both belong to one greater Russian language. He does concede that each dialect has further enriched the greater language. However, he still argues that there is no sense in differentiating between the two, as they both trace their origins to old Russian and that for centuries, Russians and Ukrainians shared a common language.

Putin, however, ignores the fact that all these peoples did not necessarily share this "one common language". Rather, the vernacular has played a much more significant role than the Church Slavonic that Putin perceives as the sole "Ancient Russian". Furthermore, he is wrong in suggesting that language is the defining characteristic of a nation. Allow us to return to the analogy of Canada and the

United Kingdom. Canadian English and British English are without a doubt more similar to one another than Russian and Ukrainian. Canadians and Brits can easily communicate with one another, whilst Russians often cannot understand the Ukrainian language. Once again, no one, let alone the British or Canadian prime minister, would assert that because Canada and England both speak English, they are one nation, unified on the basis of linguistic similarities. A nation and a people are made up of much more than just a language.

Finally, Putin concludes that Ukrainians have undergone and are still undergoing a "forced change of identity" that has resulted in them accepting an "anti-Russian identity forced upon them by western governments and right-wing radicals". Such ideas are reductionist and dangerous, the implications of which are now affecting Ukraine's statehood at the international level. Putin is now using this historical revision to create a new historical memory, in which Ukraine does not exist and which, after being bended and shaped to reflect the desired truth, will begin to constitute the collective memory and identity of both Russians and Ukrainians.

Paradigm shift

Arguing against this historical narrative in Russia is becoming impossible as the government systematically assumes authority over history. An example of such management over history at the state level are the "anti-Nazi laws", which Putin signed into effect in 2014. This law against the rehabilitation of Nazism legally protects the truth of the Soviet Union's deeds during the Second World War. This makes it possible for courts to punish anyone who spreads "false information" about the Soviet Union during the war, or who desecrates the memory or symbols of the war, such as referring to collaboration or vandalising statues. Those convicted could face fines and even jail time. A singular historical account has become law, whilst debating the historical facts has become a punishable offence. Historical fact has little chance against Putin's altered history, which is propagated in nearly all spheres of society. With Putin now rewriting the history of Ukraine, there may be significant consequences for those who acknowledge the independence (or share in the cultural/linguistic differences) of Ukraine.

Ultimately, if Ukrainians and Russians are not unified in language and history, then what makes them one "people"? The answer is simple. Ukrainians and Russians are not one and the same and they are not one people. A common metaphor often used for the relationship of these two nations and their intertwined history is that of the big and little brother. Though problematic in and of itself, this is a much more preferable understanding of Ukraine and Russia's independent state-

hoods. This was the preferred political notion in Moscow and Kyiv for much of the post-Soviet era until the 2014 EuroMaidan: Russia and Ukraine (and Belarus) were three fraternal though separate peoples, sharing similar yet ultimately different histories, languages and cultures.

For roughly a half a decade now, there has been a paradigm shift in the Kremlin's understanding of this matter. Whilst Ukraine continues to follow its own path upon which it began centuries ago, Vladimir Putin and the Kremlin assume the evermore radical position that Ukraine, its peoples, language and culture do not exist. For Putin, Ukraine has always been and will always be a part of Russia, a province in a larger empire. Now he is going even further. He is beginning to erase the lines between Russia and Ukraine and thus the lines between reality and imagination, between international law and ideology.

What Putin fails to understand, however, is that Ukraine has chosen a path no longer parallel to that of Russia. Ukrainians want democracy, truth and prosperity. Ukrainians want to be part of the European community with whom they have also shared centuries of collective history. Ukraine wants to be Ukraine, not Russia. Ukraine wants and is entitled to its own history, and it is the task of historians, not politicians and ideologues, to write the histories of Russia and Ukraine. NEE

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Who benefits from the CSTO?

TIZIANO MARINO AND TATEVIK HOVHANNISYAN

The CSTO has been promoted as a regional counterpart to NATO ever since its creation in 1992. Despite this, the purpose of the organisation remains unclear, with official talk of mutual defence often giving way to unilateral action in a region still dominated by Russia and its military.

Almost two decades after its establishment, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) remains a difficult entity to define. Although often described as a vehicle for Russian foreign policy and a security guarantee for member states, it is anything but clear how the CSTO serves these purposes. Indeed, Moscow has always preferred to act unilaterally in the face of tensions in the vast Eurasian region, while member states repeatedly invoking the organisation's support have never obtained it. Furthermore, the limitations of the CSTO and the lack of clarity about its actual objectives have made it incapable of attracting new member states. Now that NATO's dramatic withdrawal from Afghanistan has been completed, new challenges await Russia and its partners. Is the CSTO ready?

The limits of Russian leadership

The creation of the CSTO was generally perceived as a Russian attempt to re-establish a unified military bloc to fill the vacuum left by the collapse of the Soviet Union and, thus, balance the US-led unipolar system. The 2001 war in Afghanistan and the subsequent arrival of NATO in Central Asia thereby accelerated the

transformation of the Collective Security Treaty (CST), founded ten years earlier, into the CSTO. This organisation was formed by Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan.

Through the CSTO, Moscow aimed to maintain its role as a great power and hegemon over post-Soviet space. In addition, the CSTO was supposed to legitimise Russia's actions, geopolitical vision, and therefore, its intervention in regions considered essential to its national interests. In this context, the organisation was meant to help Russia keep neighbouring countries in its sphere of influence. This prevents these states from hosting foreign military bases and joining other international or regional organisations of which Moscow is not a member.

However, almost 20 years after the creation of the CSTO, its original ambitions have vanished. Russia seems to have become entangled in its own project. In fact, it has never really succeeded in transforming the CSTO into an effective and inclusive organisation. Moscow's leadership and the huge disparity in economic and military potential compared to other member states strongly influence the activities of the CSTO. Russian interests and priorities often dictate the organisation's agenda but have never won the hearts of its partners. Whilst the most volatile of these states have effectively made Russia wholly responsible for their defence, the more independent countries, such as Belarus and Kazakhstan, have moved to seek new partnerships. This includes military co-operation with states in the Far East and the West.

The vastness of the Eurasian region that the CSTO aims to cover and the absence of a common denominator among the member states make it difficult to find a shared strategy.

Russia's inability to impose its vision on all members of the organisation is not the CSTO's only weakness. Its geographic scope also undoubtedly contributes to its ineffectiveness. Indeed, the group cannot be defined as a truly regional organisation as it covers parts of Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Since these three regions present different challenges and geopolitical contexts, CSTO member states have divergent interests. Examples of the lack of internal coherence within the organisation include the inter-ethnic clashes in Kyrgyzstan in 2010 between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, as well as Belarus's support for Armenia's historical enemy, Azerbaijan. The vastness of the Eurasian region that the CSTO aims to cover and the absence of a common denominator (dependence on Russia aside) among the member states make it difficult to find a shared strategy. These differences between official allies were made clear in 2009 by Lukashenka, who publicly asked "Why should our men fight in Kazakhstan?" This idea holds true even now for many member states.

An alliance with no allies

While Russia's interest in the CSTO is easily understandable, the benefits to the organisation's partner states are less clear and deserve further investigation. Incentives offered by Russia to its "allies" include the opportunity to purchase Russian weapons at a reduced price and the chance for officers from member states to be trained in Russian military academies. These tools have allowed Moscow to create win-win relations and are viewed favourably by those states that cannot afford high military expenditures. Also, the sale of armaments to the neighbourhood allows Russia to maintain a strong grip on the CSTO states. For the smaller states this makes it possible to deploy a military potential that they could not otherwise have. The presence of foreign military officers in Russian academies allows Moscow to dictate its operational concepts as well as its worldview. This creates a kind of common thinking that facilitates interoperability and joint action. As a result, the CSTO can be defined as a perfect representation of Russian instrumental multilateralism.

However, an alliance is something different and requires a shared strategy and common goals. Instead, different foreign policy visions and priorities remain clear among CSTO countries. These differences have resulted in a sort of paralysis, as the group has never acted in the vast region that hosts it. Instead of developing a "Russian NATO", the CSTO has limited its activities to preventive and defensive measures.

The inconsistency of the CSTO has led Russia to disregard the organisation when the country pursues foreign policy objectives or intervenes militarily as it did in Georgia and Ukraine. The only case of support for Russian action by a CSTO member was Armenia's symbolic engagement in Syria. This was motivated more by newly elected Prime Minister Pashinyan's need to show loyalty after the Velvet Revolution than by obligations related to membership. Not even Turkey's shoot-down of a Russian Sukhoi Su-24M attack aircraft in 2015 led to a strong unanimous stance by CSTO member states. Similarly, the CSTO has always affirmed its intention to not intervene in internal crises or even international disputes, such as the recent border conflict between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The organisation has failed to act even when expressly invited to do so by clearly stating that it has no mandate to interfere in the internal affairs of its member states.

CSTO's failure to support Armenia

While the CSTO's decision not to intervene in regional crises over the years has always been justified by the fact that the conflicts did not stem from external

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While Russia's interest in the CSTO is easily understandable, the benefits to the organisation's partner states are less clear and deserve further investigation.

aggression, the organisation's position during the 2020 conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh was much more controversial. The decision not to intervene in the war that Armenia fought alongside the breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh Republic against Azerbaijan was motivated by the fact that the fighting was taking place beyond the borders of the member country. Although from a legal point of view the position of the CSTO was consistent with its charter, the decision surprised Armenian society, which had expected support from partner states. Anger and a sense of abandonment led to a decline in Armenians' overall trust in the CSTO from around 21 per cent in 2018 to 7.2 per cent in 2021, according to a recent survey.

After the ceasefire, brokered by Russia, the CSTO had a further opportunity to show its effectiveness by deciding to deploy peacekeepers in the region. Instead, Moscow opted for unilateral action and sent its own peacekeepers.

The CSTO then limited itself to carrying out consultations and issuing statements even when Azerbaijani troops encroached on Armenia's sovereign territory in May. Although the CSTO's failure to intervene in this case would appear to be a violation of the mutual defence clause of article four of the CSTO Charter,

even Armenia itself avoided invoking the support of its allies. Instead, Yerevan, most likely after consultation with Russia, requested the application of article two, which provides for the initiation of consultations against a threat of aggression. Interestingly, while article four would have entailed an immediate reaction, including the provision of military and any other necessary support in accordance with the right to collective defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter, it was decided instead to try to resolve the dispute by deploying Russian military personnel. This controversial decision taken to secure Armenia's borders has subsequently made the country even more dependent on Moscow.

Afghanistan: last call for the CSTO?

The attitude the CSTO has shown in dealing with recent conflicts that have destabilised the broader Eurasian region highlights how the organisation has systematically avoided any possible active involvement. While this rationale may be justified by a preference for diplomatic solutions and an attempt not to exacerbate complex situations, the CSTO's lack of large-scale operations casts a shadow over its actual ability to intervene if necessary.

In this context, a major new regional security challenge is now posed by Afghanistan after the withdrawal of US and NATO troops, as well as the subsequent return of the Taliban to Kabul. After two recent meetings of the CSTO's Collective Security Council on Afghanistan, a series of large-scale armed forces drills near the Tajik-Afghan border was announced. In addition, it was decided to accelerate the adoption of Tajikistan's special Inter-State Policy aimed at strengthening the border with Afghanistan.

Russia has again taken unilateral action and promised to strengthen the 201st Military Base in Tajikistan.

The practice of military exercises meant to deter aggression is not new to the CSTO. Recently, joint exercises have also taken place in Armenia with the aim of putting pressure on Azerbaijan. However, this kind of activity has proved ineffective in stopping conflicts because the CSTO's inability to translate its potential into an effective military response is well known. Aware of these limits, Russia has once again taken unilateral action and promised to strengthen the 201st Military Base in Tajikistan through the supply of dozens of new tanks.

The Afghan crisis poses at least two fundamental challenges to Russia and the CSTO. Firstly, it represents a decisive test for Moscow's leadership in the region. Since Afghanistan is a priority for Russia's security, it will be interesting to see

if Moscow will be able to impose its agenda on its "allies" and convince them to proceed together.

Secondly, Afghanistan could represent a major challenge for the entire CSTO. Indeed, if the threat of renewed Islamic extremism strikes in the region, it is uncertain whether the organisation will be ready to take action. After repeatedly rejecting requests for help from some of its members, states far from the centre of Asia or the terrorist threat may prove unwilling to support Tajikistan – or even Russia – should security conditions deteriorate. In other words, the Afghan crisis could prove to be both a challenge and an opportunity for the CSTO, which could take the chance to finally show its membership benefits. NEE

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The Central and Eastern European natural gas market 2013–19

Trends and implications

DWIGHT NYSTROM AND GEOFFREY LYON

Over the last decade, the natural gas market in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) has changed dramatically. Today, we are seeing more cross-border pipeline routes that are bi-directional and the possibility of greater LNG imports. These changes will bring increased economic opportunities for the full market chain under EU rules. Hungary, Slovakia and Ukraine are emerging as key players in these developments.

Not long after the fall of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, western policy-makers began to think about how to reduce European reliance on Russian hydrocarbon resources by expanding Europe's alternative sources. Much of the energy diplomacy undertaken since then has focused on building pipeline infrastructure designed to bring new sources of oil and gas to Europe that bypass Russia. Of course, this strategy has seen many large successes, with the development of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline and the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) perhaps the most notable examples.

However, other mostly market-driven changes have also played a role in transforming the energy landscape in Europe, especially in intra-European (and

Ukrainian) gas trade and markets. This includes the reversal of significant volumes of Soviet-era "east-to-west" gas flows, as well as increases in Europe's capacity to import Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG). The major changes in gas flows and their geopolitical implications presented below illustrate some of the most significant developments that occurred between 2013 and 2019.*

Ukraine

One of the most significant changes to the European gas landscape during this time period was the reversal of Ukraine's direct dependence on Russian gas imports, which were replaced with imports from the West. Ukraine has essentially stopped buying gas from Russia (it still allows the transit of Russian gas to Europe under a contract through 2024) and instead buys gas from the West. Admittedly, some of this gas is of Russian origin sold onwards to Ukraine through traders and transmission system operators in other places in Europe. Despite this, much if not most of the gas is no longer controlled by Moscow when it is imported into Ukraine. The country imported roughly 30 billion cubic metres per year (bcm/y) from Russia for domestic consumption in the early 2010s. Today, however, it does not import any Russian gas for the domestic market. During that time, the nation experienced a rapid increase in imports from the West, from about two to over 13 bcm/y. This gas was principally imported from Slovakia. The rest of Ukraine's natural gas consumption – down by some 50 per cent over the decade – is made up of gas produced within the country.

One caveat to this analysis is that we do not know how much, or whether, Russian gas is still used in the heavy industries of the eastern and southern parts of Ukraine that Russia occupies. Those industries in years past typically represented about 40 per cent of Ukraine's GDP and upwards of half of the country's exports. The metal and chemical industries in eastern Ukraine used to consume roughly half of the state's imported gas from Russia. A lack of transparency (even by historical standards) regarding the current gas usage and sources of assets in these regions make it difficult to understand how the system is working there now. Nonetheless, basic math suggests that, excluding the unknowns regarding east-

* We chose 2013 as a base year for data comparison because it was sufficiently after the energy supply/demand distortions resulting from the financial crash in 2008 and the subsequent recession, but prior to the energy disruptions in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) caused, in part, by the Russian actions in Crimea and eastern Ukraine in 2014. We chose 2019 as the final year for data comparison because 2020 was an anomalous year due to COVID-19 and the 2021 data are not yet fully available.

ern Ukrainian and Crimean gas usage, Ukraine uses no Russian gas and now only transits Russian gas to Europe.

These development suggests that Ukraine has become increasingly integrated into the European market trading system in a relatively short time. A major factor at play here is the fact that imports into Ukraine was enabled during the 2010s by effective and efficient EU gas-trading hubs. Regulations in Europe that permitted traders to, in many cases, undercut Russia's offering price encouraged Ukraine to buy from the West rather than exclusively from Moscow. It could be argued that subsequent political changes only strengthened the incentive to pursue this market-driven trend. In any event, this previous half decade or so witnessed dramatic change in Ukraine's reliance on direct economic support via gas from Russia, and a switch to integration with the European open market trading system. Clearly, this has been a small but meaningful win for those hoping to further Ukraine's integration with the West.

Slovakia and Hungary

Slovakia also offers an important story regarding changing the realities in the gas market. The country's gas imports remained essentially the same between 2013 and 2019, but its exports to Ukraine rose from zero to nine bcm/y. Some of this change is the result of Ukraine's transit contract with Russia to send gas west, as some is then returned to Ukraine after passing through Eustream (Slovakia's gas transmission system operator) and presumably gas traders. Slovakia also sends slightly more gas to Austria, presumably for storage at Baumgarten, a giant gasstorage site, or sells onward to other continental European countries. Slovakia also tripled its exports to the Czech Republic during the 2013–19 period and raised its exports to Hungary from zero to 1.3 bcm/y. As a result, Slovakia's growing importance in the CEE gas trading system is increasingly clear.

Hungary is another emerging player in the construction of a more flexible regional gas sector. During the period we examined, Hungarian gas imports rose from about 10.2 to 16.5 bcm/y, with the bulk of this increase coming from Ukraine. Imports from Ukraine rose from 6.3 to 11.3 bcm/y, accounting for about 80 per cent of the total increase of Hungarian imports. These increased volumes were likely Russian gas transited through Ukraine. While imports from Slovakia grew from 0 to 1.3 bcm/y, and imports from Austria and Romania remained relatively flat, Hungary has become somewhat of an export centre. Hungary increased exports to Croatia sevenfold and to Romania by a factor of six. Exports to Serbia also increased marginally and those to Ukraine more than doubled. While outside the

scope of this survey, Hungary is reportedly now receiving gas via LNG from the long-awaited Krk facility in Croatia and is even in talks regarding promising gas developments in the Black Sea. If Romania ever develops its offshore gas deposits, pipelines may bring more gas to Hungary that it can dispense into the European market. Finally, Hungary created in 2013 one of the fastest-growing gas trading hubs in CEE, CEEGEX, which accommodates both intra-Hungary and international trade. Clearly, Hungary is a country worth following regarding natural gas dynamics in Central and Eastern Europe, with both import and and export options and technical and market experience.

Nord Stream

The statements of senior political and commercial officials about Nord Stream 2 are likely well known to anyone reading this article.

The second Nord Stream pipeline will obviously increase Russian direct gas supplies to Europe and be a challenge for European, Ukrainian and American policy-makers concerned about energy source diversification on the continent. It will also pose a market challenge to the US and other LNG exporters. That said, it also presents an opportunity to build upon the last decade of gas market integration within the Central and Eastern European area and Ukraine. The more Russian gas that enters Greifswald in Germany via Nord Stream 2, the more there is for non-Russian parties to trade and export within Europe and to Ukraine, even if some of NS2-sourced gas will be sold by Gazprom-controlled traders.

Accordingly, western (and Ukrainian) leaders should pursue changes similar to those made over the last three decades in the Caspian Sea basin. These include increased diversification of sources and economic integration while remaining aware of the reality of Russia's role. In the face of yet more Russian gas supplies and high prices that may or may not be partly attributable to Russian actions, now is the time to capture a future that achieves the energy goals of European nations and citizens, especially including further diversifying sources. One of these opportunities for the CEE region and more broadly for Europe is LNG. LNG dynamics in Europe have and will continue to be a major developing story and are a positive development with regards to gas supply diversification. LNG imports to Europe (excluding Turkey) increased by 54 per cent between 2013 and 2019. Competition for the European market suggests that, in the long run, LNG should continue to be a competitive source of gas supply not only for the whole continent but also to the CEE region despite its land-locked position. New LNG receiving facilities in Poland, Lithuania, and Croatia (and in the future perhaps others such

as in Greece) have recently opened several CEE countries to access the global gas market, especially when more cross-border interconnectors are built and properly regulated under EU rules.

Lessons for the future

The natural gas trade market in Central and Eastern Europe has changed dramatically throughout the last decade, with more bi-directional pipeline flows and the possibility of greater LNG imports. There are now increasing economic opportunities for the full market chain under EU rules. Hungary, Slovakia and Ukraine are worth watching as key players in the future.

Central and Eastern Europe's changes in natural gas consumption, imports and exports should carry weight in international relationships. A CEE region working under EU rules and more integrated in a commercially viable way with Ukraine will only encourage the expansion of commercial transparency, investment, and opportunity throughout the area. Whatever the outcome regarding Nord Stream 2, governments and market players should continue to encourage gas pipeline cross-border integration as an important part of energy system resiliency and commercial flexibility. A key priority should be solidifying gas imports from non-Russian direct supply and finding further ways to tie Ukraine into transparent markets through energy trading and other sectors. CEE countries should be encouraged to continue building an interstate gas trading system based on commercial terms under EU regulations.

Applying the lessons learned from the three decades push to unlock Caspian oil and gas, western governments should further encourage the expansion of Europe's LNG import capacity. As in the case of the Caspian experience, it is crucial that governments and the private sector act in a coordinated and transparent manner. Finally, the West should actively move to secure gains and build diplomatic, financial, commercial and energy infrastructure that will withstand the challenges of the future. NEE

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UKRAINA | UKRAINE

Wzajemne spojrzenia | *A different angle on neighbourhood*

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IT HAPPENED IN GDAŃSK

fot. Jerzy Pinkas

EUROPA NOSTRA 2021 – THE EU'S MOST IMPORTANT AWARD FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE – WENT TO THE EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CENTRE

The permanent exhibition of the ESC is the only Polish winner of the European Heritage Award. According to the international jury, the exhibition emphasizes the importance of work, promotes activism in the field of human rights, labor and political rights, and civic engagement. It is an example of "how to preserve stories and make them relevant to the modern world." During the Venetian award ceremony, the following voices were heard: the director of the ECS - Basil Kerski: "Culture knows no borders, no ethnic identities, it does not sow hatred, it praises human creativity and is a source of defense for those values that lie at the foundations of Europe. Today we felt that there was something like a European spirit", and the Mayor of Gdańsk - Aleksandra Dulkiewicz: "The values that gave life to the peaceful revolution of Solidarity must remain alive. This is also our task, because Europe is us."

GDAŃSK

5. gdański tydzień demokracji

GDAŃSK DEMOCRACY WEEK

On October 11, the 5th Gdańsk Democracy Week started. After a pandemic break, we returned to the discussion on the state of our democracy and common European values. The state of democracy is influenced by the level of awareness of the society, which in turn is the result of our education. During this year's edition, we started from scratch, i.e. building a society aware of its rights, obligations and freedoms, without which democracy has no chance of survival. For the first time during the Gdańsk Democracy Week, the leitmotif of the event was the theme of youth and their education. The young people co-created, led the events and became their co-authors. It was also an opportunity for them to practice everyday democracy, because the Democracy Week coincided for the first time with the celebration of democracy in the form of elections to the Gdańsk school self-government.

GDAŃSK CIVIC LESSONS

The Democracy Week inaugurated the implementation of the project called Gdańsk Civic Lessons in our city. The project is aimed at preschoolers, and primary and secondary school students. The lesson plans for the classes were prepared by teachers belonging to the "Creative pedagogics" network.
The goal of the Gdańsk Civic Lessons project is to build a civic society - educating young people to be aware of their rights and obligations as the residents of Gdańsk.
The program is currently a pilot. In the first stage, it will go to selected institutions, with the objective to introduce it to all kindergartens and schools in Gdańsk.

GDAŃSK REMAINS IN EUROPE

On October 10, several thousand people took part in the Gdańsk demonstration against the Polexit. According to tradition, Gdańsk has joined the majority of Polish cities in solidarity, demonstrating their respect for the European community of values and the rule of law. In Gdańsk and in dozens of other places in our country, we clearly declared: "We are staying" – the place of democratic Poland is in the European Union.

ЖЫВЕ БЕЛАРУСЬ!

LONG LIVE BELARUS!

Fot. Dawid Linkowski / Archiwum ECS

NIECH ŻYJE BIAŁORUŚ!

This exhibition is for Belarusian women and men,
who paid for the dream of freedom
the price of a repression, prison, forced emigration
and even death and for ourselves,
so that we remember how fragile democracy is

/ open until the end of 2021
/ Gdańsk, pl. Solidarności 1
/ The European Solidarity Centre: the balustrade by the main entrance / the lobby / the Mesa Gallery
/ free admission

NEW LITERARY RESIDENCIES PROGRAMME IN GDAŃSK

For writers and translators from Poland and Belarus

This year's residents:

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The public diplomacy of the Associated Trio

Singing in unison?

MARIA PROTSIUK

This year saw the launch of the "Associated Trio" by Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Eager to pursue further European integration, the three states have prioritised public diplomacy as one of the key parts of these efforts. Yet, recent developments suggest much work is still to be done if the new group hopes to work together effectively.

Various hybrid challenges, as well as the foreign policy realities of the regions of Central and Eastern Europe and the Black Sea, have led Ukraine to increasingly promote itself as an independent and active actor in the international arena. The country's new projects, such as the large-scale Crimean Platform and a number of regional alliances, including the Ukrainian-Turkish "Quadriga" and the Ukrainian-Polish-Lithuanian Lublin Triangle, serve as evidence of this new assertiveness.

Another new foreign policy initiative of Ukraine is the "Associated Trio" format. A memorandum of understanding between the Georgian, Moldovan and Ukrainian foreign ministries regarding enhanced co-operation on European integration was signed on May 17th. This Associated Trio was signed into existence by the Georgian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs David Zalkaliani, Moldova's acting Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration Aureliu Ciocoi, and Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs Dmytro Kuleba. This format was presented on June 24th in Brussels to various EU com-

missioners and parliamentarians. Less than a month later, on July 19th, the group released the Batumi Summit Declaration, which was jointly issued by Georgia's President Salome Zourabichvili, Moldovan President Maia Sandu and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Wider ambitions

The Associated Trio's initiative provides for enhanced coordination in the field of European integration. Overall, the agreement emphasises the European aspirations of the three EU-associated partners and their ambitions for membership. Both the memorandum and presidential declaration identify the coordination of strategic communications as one of the initiative's main priorities. Since public diplomacy occupies a prominent position within the group, the question arises as to how this will work in relation to the Associated Trio's wider ambitions for European integration? Indeed, is such an approach even commensurate with the ambitious intentions of the tripartite initiative?

Overall, it seems that the three Eastern Partnership (EaP) states' steps towards integration would be incomplete without the use of public diplomacy tools that focus on two audiences. Whilst these states must promote a positive image of themselves in the EU (external dimension of public diplomacy), they must also encourage pro-European public opinion among their own populations (internal dimension of public diplomacy). This internal dimension ultimately relates to how European integration is discussed by these states within their borders and how the public is informed about the ongoing process. The formation of public opinion and feedback related to these state goals also play a key role.

In this context, it is important to identify the success indicators related to this public diplomacy. Studies that identify changes in public opinion over recent years may subsequently prove effective in understanding the success of this push for European integration. Among these studies there is the example of the annual survey in the EU's six Eastern Partnership countries, conducted by the EU Neighbours East group. According to the 2020 survey, 49 per cent of the Eastern Partnership countries' citizens have a positive perception of the EU. This represents a rise of four per cent from 2016. Around 57 per cent of this population are aware of the EU's financial support, whilst 53 per cent believe that the support is effective. Once again, this represents a rise since 2016 (ten per cent). More than half (53 per cent) of EaP citizens aware of the EU's financial support are able to identify at least one specific programme financed by the EU in their country. Compared to 2017, this represents a significant increase of 18 per cent.

The same survey shows that the EU is considered to be the most trusted international institution, as well as the only one trusted by the majority (60 per cent) of EaP citizens. Trust is higher in Georgia (69 per cent), Ukraine (66 per cent), Moldova (63 per cent) and Armenia (60 per cent), and lower in Belarus (45 per cent) and Azerbaijan (41 per cent). This is just one example of a survey that provides a fairly approximate and tentative answer to whether the Eastern Partnership countries in general and the Associated Trio, in particular, communicate effectively with their internal audience regarding European integration.

At the same time, last year's data raises another additional question, or even a methodological dilemma: is it possible to define the boundary between the influence of these states' internal public diplomacy and the EU's own external activities regarding the countries' populations? After all, the target group in both cases remains the citizens of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

The Kremlin's hand?

Apart from the EU and the Associated Trio, Russia remains a key actor in this "triangle" of soft influence. The most well-known actor of Russia's public diplomacy is "Rossotrudnichestvo" (the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Co-operation). The Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund is also an important organisation and has even helped organise the Georgian-Russian Civic Center in Tbilisi. However, the fund has recently been less active in all countries of the Associated Trio.

On the Rossotrudnichestvo website there is a subsection on "CIS countries, Abkhazia and South Ossetia", which contains information about Moldova and Ukraine. The Russian Center for Science and Culture operates in both states' capital cities. In particular, the Chișinău branch of Rossotrudnichestvo is quite active and, among other things, largely organises the recruitment of Moldovan youth to study at Russian universities at Moscow's expense.

The most well-known actor of Russia's public diplomacy is Rossotrudnichestvo.

In contrast, the Kyiv branch of Rossotrudnichestvo, which has been operating since 1998, was recognised by the European Parliament in 2016 as a propaganda tool. This move, however, did not affect its further functioning. The branch even declared that Taras Shevchenko was a "Russian-Ukrainian poet" during celebrations in early March. This caused righteous indignation within the Ukrainian foreign ministry. A month

later, in early April, Volodymyr Zelenskyy responded by issuing a decree enacting the decision of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine that imposed sanctions on a number of Russian companies, including Rossotrudnichestvo.

As for Georgia, the country is not present on the political map of the world according to Rossotrudnichestvo. As was already mentioned, however, the group appears to operate in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It should be noted that Georgia is also pursuing various public diplomacy initiatives related to the unrecognised republics. However, unlike Russia, Tbilisi is carrying out radically different activities aimed at easing the confrontation between both sides of the frozen conflict.

Chairs of ministries

In some way, public diplomacy has always been present in the foreign policies of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, but above all through the efforts of progressive civil society. As for the state sector, the strategic use of public diplomacy tools was for a long time not directly associated with state institutions or their structural subdivisions. Currently, the situation is gradually changing, yet are things moving at the same pace in all the Associated Trio countries?

Considering the state, official level of public diplomacy, without being distracted by the non-state NGO sphere, it is clear that one should focus on the three countries' foreign ministries and their institutional support for public diplomacy. Moldova's foreign ministry now possesses a separate structural unit called the public diplomacy, strategic communication and media interaction service. Whilst in Georgia, public diplomacy is headed by the General Directorate of Information and Public Relations. This consists of two departments – press and information and strategic communications – that answer directly to David Zalkaliani. Unfortunately, the websites of these foreign ministries offer little with regards to the details of their activities.

The website of Kyiv's foreign ministry is more eloquent in this respect. This is not surprising given that Dmytro Kuleba was one of the key thinkers behind the Ukrainian state's increasing embrace of public diplomacy. It is quite logical, therefore, that the politician was ultimately responsible for the formation of the foreign ministry's public diplomacy department. This move has been complemented by two dedicated documents – communication strategy and public diplomacy strategy.

It should also be noted that the Ukrainian Institute has for more than three years operated as a public institution affiliated with the foreign ministry. The orga-

nisation's numerous activities have not been significantly affected by either the coronavirus pandemic or subsequent financial cuts in the cultural sphere. There are currently no equivalent organisations in Georgia and Moldova.

Logos as new state symbols

The visual component of the state's communication about itself also plays an important role in strengthening public diplomacy efforts. In this context, the branding campaigns of all three countries are quite successful and generally aim to form (and maintain) a positive international image, attract foreign investment and develop each country's tourism potential. In Ukraine, since May 2018, the main logo of the state brand is a combination of the country's name with the communication message "now", i.e. "Ukraine NOW". There is also a corresponding icon in the colours of the state flag with the national top-level domain "ua".

This logo is widely used and has already become quite recognisable, including on the official multilingual website of Ukraine – www.Ukraine.ua. This website is administered by the foreign ministry and the aforementioned Ukrainian Institute.

Georgia is more experienced in terms of state branding. For example, a branding campaign under the slogan "Europe started here", complete with an artistic rendition of the cross of St George from the times of the Kingdom of Georgia, was officially used since 2011 as part of a campaign that promoted the state as a tourist destination.

Later, the logo changed to resemble fireworks. Since 2018 this symbol is accompanied by the slogan "Emotions are Georgia", emphasising the full range of positive emotions associated with traditional Georgian hospitality.

A large-scale campaign was also launched to create an "emotional guide to the country" using more than seven million publications about Georgia available on social networks. The current logo is mainly used by the Georgian national tourism administration, which operates under the auspices of the ministry of economy and sustainable development.

In terms of its state branding campaign, Moldova seems to be the most stable and has used the same logo since 2014. This consists of a stylised "tree of life" with elements of national embroidery based on the letter "M". In combination with the slogan "Discover the routes of life", the logo is used primarily for tourism promotion. However, it has also been used as part of investment forums and other events in line with economic diplomacy. During the celebration of the 30th anniversary of Moldova's independence, an explanatory campaign was conducted to interpret the symbolism of each of the elements of the long-used state logo.

At the same time, Ukraine decided to create a distinct logo in the form of a flower in national colours for its own 30th anniversary. Moreover, each of the Ukrainian regions has been given its own unique flower based on the region's flag, colours and symbols. Overall, it is clear that the visual identity of the state in the form of an official logo is considered to be important by all three countries.

(Inter)national broadcasting

Official state international broadcasting forms another component of the Associated Trio countries' public diplomacy tools. This strategy targets a wide range of foreign populations in order to promote the country's own interests, objectively inform audiences about national events, and form and maintain a positive image abroad. After all, if you remain silent, there will always be someone ready to speak for you.

Examples of these channels include Georgia's First Informational Channel, which operated until 2013. This channel was broadcasted abroad, spoke Russian, and had a wide audience. As one of the projects of the Georgian public broadcaster, the channel was ultimately closed due to funding cuts following a change of government in the country. Currently, the public broadcaster in Georgia transmits content in the Georgian, Abkhazian, Ossetian, Russian, Armenian and Azerbaijani languages. Programmes in these languages can also be heard on public radio. However, this is purely an internal project that targets ethnic minorities within Georgia.

The situation is similar in Moldova, where until 2013 the public broadcaster provided services in Romanian, Russian and English. Radio Moldova International also operated as an international network that included content in English, French, Spanish, Romanian and Russian. Currently, the public broadcaster Teleradio-Moldova broadcasts information and analytical programmes in Romanian and simply translates textual content into Russian and English.

As for Ukraine, the situation regarding international broadcasting is simultaneously better but more complex. Between 2015 and 2020, UA TV (satellite broadcasting with an additional YouTube channel) produced programming in Ukrainian, English, Russian, Arabic and Crimean Tatar. Last year, the channel no longer operated in a meaningful sense and was simply broadcasting old content. UA TV was then replaced by the channel "Dom", which during its short run has received a great amount of criticism. For instance, the channel showed a map of Russia that included the occupied Crimean peninsula. For now, "Dom" remains the only way to communicate with Ukrainian citizens living in the temporarily occupied

territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Due to this, it is one of the most important tools regarding the reintegration of these territories.

In March, UA TV was restarted as a kind of international version of the state Russian language TV channel "Dom". Its target audience is Russian-speaking foreigners abroad and a text version of the website is in English. UA TV covers almost 60 countries via satellite and also broadcasts through cable operators in Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Canada, Georgia, Germany, Israel, Latvia, Moldova, Poland and the United States. It is interesting to note that the beginning of the year saw both UA TV and "Dom" come under the control of the ministry of reintegration of the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine instead of the ministry of culture and information policy of Ukraine as it was before.

The information campaign launched by the Ukrainian foreign ministry and the British BBC to commemorate the 30th anniversary of Ukraine's independence allowed the country to rise one step higher than the other Associated Trio states in terms of reaching a general foreign public. The project is run between August and November and consist of four components: an advertising campaign on the BBC's official website, the creation of a special section on Ukraine, a promotional video for Ukraine on BBC Global News in four regions of the world, and research on audience perceptions of Ukraine.

Apart for Russian language content on UA TV, the countries of the Associated Trio do not currently conduct targeted international broadcasting outside their state borders and instead focus on their own populations. There are several explanations for this, including financial issues, lack of political will and a limited understanding of the need to assert state outlooks. As a result, questions may be asked as to who will counter the influence of RT?

Is the bare minimum enough?

As discussed above, changes in public opinion regarding European integration may among others depend on the effectiveness of the internal dimension of public diplomacy. In turn, the success of the Associated Trio's external dimension may be evaluated through an analysis of the country's positions in international rankings in terms of public diplomacy and soft power. So, how do the three countries perform in the five most important international rankings, such as the "Nation Brands Index", the "Good Country Index", the "Global Soft Power Index", the "FutureBrand Country Index", and the "Global Presence Index"?

In particular, the Brand Finance company is the creator of two international ranking formats. In their "Brandirectory" catalogues, the authors offer analysis of

Presidents of the Associated Trio together with Charles Michel (far right), president of the European Council.

the global soft power index and study nations as if they were global brands. The second one (considering nation as a brand) takes into account three groups of indicators: investment (business, trade, governance, international relations, media and communications, education and science, people and values), equity (familiarity, reputation, cultural heritage, etc.), and performance (GDP, well-being, tourist attractiveness). In the Nation Brands ranking, Georgia moved from 89th place in 2015 to 99th in 2020. Between these years the country was not even included in the list at all. Ukraine has steadily improved its performance, rising from 63rd position in 2015 to 55th in 2020. Moldova, unfortunately, did not get into the top 100 nation-brands at all.

The second of the Brandirectory rankings – the Global Soft Power Index – appeared for the first time in 2020, so it is only possible to compare the country's position in terms of the last two years. Only Ukraine made it into these rankings out of the Associated Trio. Overall, Ukraine weakened its position from 46 to 61 over the past two years but in terms of numerical score still – gained a few tenths of a point. This was because the rating expanded to 100 countries this year, while in 2020 there were only 60. Moreover, in the final report for 2021 there are two separate columns devoted to Ukraine. These offer a detailed analysis of the country's soft power level and contain a description of certain areas where progress is being made. It also offers suggestions as to where the country needs to make reforms. The annual report includes an interview with Volodymyr Sheiko, the general director of the Ukrainian Institute, about the specifics of the institution's activities, its regional component and difficulties faced during the coronavirus pandemic.

In the year of its first publication, the Global Soft Power Index ranking was based on the analysis of four indicators, including the state's familiarity, reputation, influence in the world, and seven soft power pillars. These pillars include business and trade, governance, international relations, culture and heritage, media and communication, education and science, and people and values. This year, the state's response to COVID-19 was also included as an indicator.

However, this is not the only ranking by which public diplomacy can be analysed and where only Ukraine among Associated Trio is represented. A similar picture is observed in the FutureBrand Country Index, which is produced by the global company of the same name. The groups of indicators here closely resemble those already mentioned above from other ratings and include tourism, heritage and culture, quality of life, business potential, value system and "made in" indicators. According to the rating results from 2020, Ukraine was in 71st place (among 75 countries), rising by three positions compared to 2019.

Despite poor past ratings performances, Georgia and Moldova are present in the Good Country Index and Global Presence Index. The Good Country Index is directly related to the work of Simon Anholt, a researcher of brands and state branding. He has suggested placing countries in accordance with their proportionate global contribution to areas such as science and technology, culture, international peace and security, world order, planet and climate, prosperity and equality, and health and well-being. During the period of 2016–19, all the countries of the Associated Trio in the Good Country Index moved sporadically in the rankings. This indicates the countries' very weak claims to stability. For example, over the four years Ukraine ranked 78th, 54th, 76th, and 72nd, whilst Moldova was ranked 35th, 31st, 27th, and 42nd. Finally, Georgia scored 45th, 57th, 38th, and 43rd. It is worth noting that despite being absent from the other rankings, Moldova occupies the highest positions according to this ranking.

Despite poor past ratings performances, Georgia and Moldova are present in the Good Country Index and Global resence Index.

The final rating is the Global Presence Index, which was developed by the Spanish Elcano Royal Institute of Strategic and International Studies. In addition to country rankings, the rating provides a global presence index. This is derived from three components, including the nation's economic, military and soft power as a percentage. Each of these components is divided into a range of even narrower and more detailed parts. During the period 2015–20, the results of the Elcano Global Presence Index proved to be a triumph for Georgia, which rose from 95th to 88th. Moldova dropped from 101st to 120th, whilst Ukraine experienced a minimal decline from 45th to 48th place.

Amateur approach

These rankings appear to employ indicators that could be of real use in analysing the still imperfect and underused tools of public diplomacy of the Associated Trio. At the same time, it is clear that countries are often placed in radically different positions despite the use of similar indicators. Without going into an in-depth analysis of the methodological approaches chosen to compile these lists of countries, it should be understood that they do not provide an objective picture when trying to assess the success and effectiveness of public diplomacy in each country.

Moreover, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine are jointly presented in a number of other international rankings, such as the World Bank's "Doing Business" ratings and those produced by Freedom House related to democratic freedoms. Of course, each state's place in these rankings is determined not by issues of public diplomacy and soft power, but by completely different areas. Yet, it could be argued that the state's position in such rankings may have a positive effect on its international image. As a result, these ratings may serve as a means of determining levels of soft power. At the same time, the state's successful objective and transparent public diplomacy may also contribute to the presentation of the state in other areas.

The Associated Trio initiative is undoubtedly an appropriate response to the complex challenges faced by Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine on their path to European integration. In this context, however, the effectiveness of each state's public diplomacy can be regarded as amateur rather than professional. Issues such as different national circumstances and differing approaches to the role and place of public diplomacy have all affected the individual performances of each state.

At the same time, the development of the three nations' strategic communications has been influenced by a variety of domestic and international factors. Internal instability and various external threats must subsequently be confronted in a methodical, comprehensive and systematic manner. It is clear that under these conditions the countries of the Associated Trio will not be able to sing in unison. Despite this, it is still better to organise a powerful, ambitious and promising group, in which all three states are able to bring their own strengths to an increasing complex initiative, rather than going it alone. NEE

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The new Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Centre is a Trojan horse for Putin's hybrid war

An interview with Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, a historian, philologist and essayist. Interviewers: Aleksander Palikot and Jerzy Sobotta

ALEKSANDER PALIKOT AND JERZY SOBOTTA: You've been visiting Babyn Yar since you were very young. The 80th anniversary has just passed. Was it different this time?

YOHANAN PETROVSKY-SHTERN: Most importantly this time there were two different commemorations. Between September 29th and 30th, there was an unofficial or semi-official event. I would have been there too, if not for my Northwestern University teaching commitment. Many people came, including representatives of various public organisations and representatives of different Ukrainian Jewish communities. They paid tribute to the 33,771 Jews massacred at Babyn Yar over two days in September 1941 during the Nazi occupation of Kyiv.

There was also a different celebration. The representatives of the Ukrainian political elite had their official ceremony on October 6th, something never done before. They were joined by individuals such as Ilya Khrzhanovsky and Max Yakover, managers of the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Centre (BYHMC) – a notorious project that includes building a huge Holocaust museum at the site of Babyn Yar. Top political leaders from Israel and Germany joined them too. This second commemoration, privatised by the Russian-sponsored institution continues the Soviet-style official commemorations that turns the Babyn Yar trage-

dy into a pop-show with the superstars of political beau monde participating. They might reach out far and wide and help make the Babyn Yar massacre more visible, but I have always preferred the depth over the width. This kind of commemoration requires a modicum of humility. But perhaps Russian oligarchs and pompous politicians and historians in Ukraine who bow down to them consider humility a nuisance, particularly in this case.

Why do you see it this way?

From the 1960s onwards, the popular rallies commemorating the Babyn Yar victims were unofficial. Relatives of Jewish victims conducted their unauthorised rallies until 1967 when the communists hijacked the idea and sought to replace the rallies into an official commemoration of victims of the Great Patriotic War. The authorities euphemistically referred to these victims as "peaceful Soviet citizens" murdered by the Nazis at Babyn Yar. The unofficial and official commemorations merged in the post-Soviet times and successive Ukrainian presidents – Leonid Kravchuk, Leonid Kuchma, Viktor Yushchenko and even Viktor Yanukovych – all showed up on September 29th at Babyn Yar to commemorate the tragedy.

So what has changed now?

The split between the official and unofficial became acute again because the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Centre, which was established in 2016, turned out to be a part of Vladimir Putin's hybrid war against Ukraine. In order to gain prestige, money and visibility, influential politicians in Ukraine decided to support the Russian nouveau riche, who are willing to invest huge amounts of money into the establishment of the centre. However, most of the Ukrainian public opinion and civil society do not support this project. Instead, they support a Ukrainian project approved by various levels of national authority. However, any prospect of supporting local projects has been ignored by Volodymyr Zelensky's administration.

What exactly do you find so outrageous about the project that is now being realised?

I do not find it ethical to place a museum on the site of mass execution. Besides, this grandiose project promoted as the most spectacular Holocaust memorial in Eastern Europe is an insult to popular memory. Russian filmmaker Ilya Khrzhanovsky and the startup-manager Max Yakover who lead the project seek to build a Disneyland-type attraction on the site, where 100,000 people had been massacred. They are constructing a Holocaust amusement park with installations and role-playing games exactly at the place where people were brought in packs, undressed, thrown into the pits, shots by bullets or machine-gunned. Their undertaking is disgusting.

A number of Ukrainian intellectuals who signed an open letter criticising the project share your criticism. But on the other

hand, isn't it also problematic that Ukraine has not managed to build a commemoration complex at the site after 30 years of independence?

Let me remind you that the creation of the menorah monument, which I saw as a very significant move, was carried out in 1991 on the initiative of the mayor of that particular city district. That testified to the willingness of the Ukrainian authorities to reverse the antisemitic policies of the previous regime. Moreover, many new memorials have appeared. The memorial to Roma victims was transferred from a different site to Babyn Yar. The memorial to the mentally ill people from the Saint Cyril hospital who were shot there was established at the site as well. There is also a new memorial to several hundred Ukrainian nationalists executed at the site, although we do not know where exactly they were shot. It is important to understand that the Jews created a kind of a blueprint for the commemoration of different victims of the Second World War and Babyn Yar became the site where other groups began to place their monuments.

Can you tell us a bit about your personal connection to Babyn Yar? Why is this place important for you, and why do you believe it is such an important symbol for Ukraine?

I am directly linked to the Babyn Yar massacre through my family on both sides. My father's grandmother remained in occupied Kyiv in 1941. She was struck by a rifle and killed on the spot by a Nazi guard on her way to Babyn Yar. Her name was most likely Esther. That's how the title of my sister Katja Petrowskaja's novel, *Vielleicht Esther*, came to be. On my mother's side, Anna Krzevina, my mother's grandmother and Liolia Krzevina, my mother's aunt, were taken to Babyn Yar and shot there on September 29th 1941. My grandmother's brother Arnold Krzevin managed to escape because he was an albino: blond and blue-eyed, and did not look like a Jew. I remember Babyn Yar from the time when I was a kid. Every September during the 1960s my grandmother Rosa took her brother Arnold and they went to the Babyn Yar rally. I started to go there a little bit later.

When was that?

My own Babyn Yar story started in the 1970s. In 1972, 11 Israeli sportsmen were shot by Palestinian terrorists during the Munich Olympic Games. Next August, several Kyiv residents wanted to commemorate them at Babyn Yar. Among them was David Miretski, my art mentor. Together with a dozen friends, he was detained by the KGB and sentenced to 15 days in prison. After that, he lost his job and had to leave the USSR. I lost my teacher. Since the mid-1970s, I have been bringing people to Babyn Yar. These were family friends from Moscow and Leningrad. I took them there as I knew Kyiv well, although the authorities were unsympathetic to those kinds of unsupervised visits. During these visits, I was mostly silent. The people who were coming knew much more than I did, they did not need a guide.

An interesting case happened in 1992, when I took Rabbi Moshe Potolsky, the head of the yeshiva in Kyiv, to Babyn Yar. We were standing in front of the huge Soviet-style monument established in 1976, which had nothing to do with Jews as it showed robust Soviet soldiers and Slavic-looking people falling into the pit. In front of the monument, there were three memorial plaques: in Yiddish, Russian and Ukrainian. I remember standing there with my rabbi while a young couple looked at the statue. The girl pointed to the Yiddish plaque and asked her boyfriend: "What is this language?". The boy replied: "I have no idea, probably Armenian". Those two probably heard something about the Armenian Genocide, but they knew nothing about the Holocaust, the Jewish genocide. I was in deep shock. Living through this kind of story gives you an excellent idea of what the wider population knew and did not know about the site. Yet for Jews, Babyn Yar was the major site of Jewish memory, a symbol of the Holocaust in Ukraine.

To many people in the West, the name Babyn Yar does not even ring a bell. What can be done to draw more attention to the history of the Holocaust in Ukraine?

There is no doubt that Ukraine needs its own Holocaust memorial. The Ukrainians need to incorporate the memory of the Holocaust into their national historiography. I support the vision of Ukrainian history that incorporates ethnic minorities: Crimean Tatars, Czech Mennonites, Jews, Poles, Roma, Russians and others. This vision has been developed in academic discourse but it needs to be brought into education and public commemoration. The Holocaust should be taught at schools and universities, not just as a separate topic, but as part of any course on the Second World War.

It is crucial to reach out to Ukrainian thinkers, public figures and politicians and explain to them that Ukraine deserves its own version of the 20th century's key events. They need to understand that Putin and Vladislav Surkov are ultimately using three or four Jewish oligarchs, who are investing their money into the Holocaust memorial centre. By allowing this to happen, Ukrainians are allowing imperial ideologists to impose their own – misleading and harmful – vision of events on Ukraine.

What is exactly wrong with the narrative they are trying to impose? To what extent does the essence of the problem revolve around the issue of collaboration and Ukrainian nationalism?

Research about the issue of collaboration is only in its initial stages so to take any kind of definitive line would be disingenuous. To say that the Ukrainians collaborated as a whole or that all Ukrainian nationalists participated in mass executions is misleading. What needs to be done is that people who represent the Jewish side of the story and the Ukrainian nationalist side of the story need to work to reconcile the two historiographies, even if it takes a century.

Who loves to talk about Ukrainian collaboration at the expense of other significant aspects of the Holocaust on the Ukrainian territory? Those who want to impose a Soviet-style narrative of the Great Patriotic War on Ukrainian public opinion. That conversation is their favourite subject matter, although they know nothing about the topic, do not draw on studies based on serious archival research, and do not understand the complexity of the issue. They do not know, for example, that the Hilfspolizei, the auxiliary police formed by the Nazis from local inhabitants, was called the Ukrainische Hiltzpolizei because it was formed in Ukrainian lands. It was not called this because it was made up of Ukrainians. As a matter of fact, this formation included many Hungarians, Poles and Russian POWs on top of Ukrainians. But to call it ethnically Ukrainian is wrong. People who are planning to create this new "Holocaust Disneyland" are not interested in such nuances. Focusing on Ukrainian nationalists' collaboration with the Nazis remains crucial for them because it obfuscates a broader historical perspective, which people at the BYHMC simply ignore.

Photo: Anastasiia Simferovska (CC) commons.wikimedia.org

What is the main bone of contention here?

Russian propagandists and their puppets ignore that the war started on September 1st 1939, not on June 22nd 1941. They do not want to recognise that the fate of European Jews was sealed by the partition of Poland between the Nazis and the Soviets when Hitler and Stalin put the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact into practice. The entire fate of Eastern Europe's Jews would have been very different if not for the situation Timothy Snyder calls a "double occupation", which unfolded between 1939 and 1941. First, the Soviets came to the western regions of Ukraine and Belarus, then they occupied the Baltic states. Two years later, the Nazis reoccupied these territories and smashed any remaining vestiges of social institutions that had not been crushed by the Soviets. This double destruction created a void, a black hole in which violence skyrocketed and mass murder became feasible.

Any discussion of this period is impossible without addressing Nazi-Soviet collaboration between 1939 and 1941. The SS learned how to establish the concentration camps directly from the NKVD. The purges of the class-based groups declared the enemies of the people in the pre-war USSR prepared the population to the purge of groups based on ethnicity that were also declared, now by the Nazis, the enemy of the people. As a result, the Soviet authorities share responsibility with the Nazis for what would become known as the Holocaust.

The more people learn about the importance of about a million Soviet POWs who joined General Vlasov's army and other German units to fight the Soviet army on the Nazi side, the more they will hear from the hardliners of Russian official historiography about those Ukrainian troops who fought as part of the Wehrmacht. Russians cannot bear to hear this story to the point that last year Putin's administration introduced a paragraph into Russian criminal law incriminating anybody who publicly discusses or revisits the Soviet role in the destruction of Nazi Germany.

Do you think that this agenda will be reflected in the historical narrative pursued by the Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Centre?

They will work out how to present it in a hybrid way. They will talk about the Soviet attempts to help the marginalised Jewish minority in Western Ukraine from 1939 onwards. They have professional historians ready to create their own narratives in line with the ideas of hardliners. They will know how to go about twisting historical narratives to please their Kremlin sponsors. But they would never say what I have just said because they absolutely deny that the Soviet Union bears any responsibility for causing the Holocaust.

Why does the front line of this hybrid war lie in historical memory?

Any historical discussion today is highly politicised, particularly on what Ukraine was and is today. This poses a big issue for Russia. The official Russian historiography says that Russia has its roots in the Kyivan Rus' and thus Ukraine is a strange entity that should be incorporated into the Russian lands as it allegedly has always been.

The Ukrainian story is much more complex. Whether Kyivan Rus' was Russian or Ukrainian is essentially a modern question and an issue for discussion. There is a definite continuity between the Kyivan Rus' and the Duchy of Halych–Volhynia, as well as the 16th and 17th century Cossack state and early Ukrainian autonomy in the times of the Hetmanate. The modern part of this story begins with Ukraine's short-lived independence from 1917 to 1920, the relatively autonomous Ukrainian Socialist Republic in the 1920s, and what independent Ukraine has been since 1991. Thus, we are talking about absolutely irreconcilable visions of what Ukraine is and was. The attempt to curb the Ukrain-

ian narrative is very visible in the Russian media. The idea of Ukrainian independence is unacceptable for the Russian liberals too.

If the BYHMC is part of Putin's hybrid war, why did people such as Belarusian noble laureate Svetlana Alexievich, long-time German Foreign Affairs Minister Joschka Fischer, Polish ex-president Aleksander Kwaśniewski, Israeli politician Natan Sharansky or President of the World Jewish Congress Ronald Lauder join its supervisory board?

The answer to your question is very simple: ignorance, prestige and money. The distinguished people who you mention such as Kwaśniewski, Lauder and also Patrick Desbois, who recently joined the club, simply do not know what we are talking about. They are completely ignorant about what Babyn Yar has been for the last 80 years for ordinary Kyivans, Ukrainian Jews and Ukrainian dissidents. Others added their names to the supervisory board because they seek prestige.

What about the people who run the project? Ilya Khrzhanovsky isn't known to be a supporter of Putin.

As for Khrzhanovsky and his ilk, the issue is money. We are talking about 90 to 120 million US dollars invested into this project. It is more than what has been invested into the Polin Museum in Warsaw, which raised about 80 million US dollars. I think that Khrzhanovsky and Yakover are extremely cynical about what they are doing. They could be knowledgeable and talented, and even good professionals, but they are first-rate cynics. Ultimately, they are affordable puppets in the hybrid war of Putin and Surkov against Ukraine.

And what about Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the Klitschko brothers and the Ukrainian state?

In their case, it is mostly a question of prestige, although there is also money involved. Through such costly projects, Ukrainian politicians always manage to enrich themselves, either in terms of commodities or connections. I do not see any kind of serious understanding or deep reflection about what they are doing.

What would you say if Germany also decided to finance the project?

Who knows how to wage a hybrid war? The Germans? The French? The Americans? No, the Russians. It is Russian know-how and since it is theirs, they know how to use it very well. They are cautiously exploring ways to wage hybrid war elsewhere, but first and foremost in Ukraine. Because without Ukraine, there is no Russian empire. They have been extremely successful in what they have been doing so far in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Their territorial acquisitions in Ukraine created buffer zones preventing Kyiv from joining the European Union.

The Babyn Yar museum is a major part of this hybrid war. It is sponsored by influential oligarchs, Michael Friedman, German Khan, Pavel Fuchs and

Victor Pinchuk, some of whom are significantly dependent on Putin. They have attracted big names that you mentioned to the project and use them to promote it. In result they convinced the German government to support what is practically a Russian hybrid war tactic against Ukraine. If the German government agrees to support it with money, this will only help Putin promote his horrible, imperialist, aggressive, "Russia Today"-type ideas in Ukraine.

Do you see any positive way forward in this situation?

Yes, I do. I think governments that are planning to participate in the BYHMC project, most importantly the German government, should support the Ukrainian project. It has been developed over years, approved by numerous academic and administrative bodies and seeks to carefully navigate the different narratives about Babyn Yar. I also think a group of people capable of re-evaluating their actions should step down from this project. The Ukrainian government should stop ignoring the massive protests against Russian participation in the project. The mayor of Kyiv should abandon the subversive idea of leasing the entire site to the BYHMC. We need to turn Babyn Yar into a decent and respectful place that will be visited by Ukrainians, Jews and everybody else. It has to remain a place for commemoration of the victims and not a Holocaust Disneyland. NEE

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Aleksander Palikot is a journalist and researcher focusing on Central and Eastern Europe. He has an academic background in philosophy, history and sociology.

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Novgorod, violence and Russian political culture

MIŁOSZ JEROMIN CORDES

The themes of violence, plots and suspicion are integral parts of Russian political culture. Although it is not easy to trace the origins of these issues, they appear to partly stem from the times of Ivan the Terrible. His oprichnina and the sack of Novgorod marked the beginning of instutionalised oppression on an unprecedented scale.

Every autumn, the city of Veliky Novgorod hosts the Valdai Discussion Club. Introduced 17 years ago, these talks have focused on the country's present and future and provide an arguably open and democratic environment for expert dialogue.

Meanwhile, Russia's political system has been evolving into an autocracy where basic civic freedoms are greatly limited and state violence is on the rise. Poisoning of those proclaimed foes and defectors, long prison sentences for peaceful protesters, and intimidation have become everyday realities for those who oppose the current state of affairs in the country.

It is often said that the tradition of mass oppression in Russia dates back to the Mongol invasion of Rus' in the 13th century. Although I do not question the importance of this event, I believe that these issues really began after the sack of Novgorod in 1570 by Ivan the Terrible and his repressive oprichnina policy. The factors that drove his actions against the city have been paramount to the emergence of Russian political culture. As a result, what many call Putinism today is ultimately a system that draws heavily from the seeds of violence, distrust and fear of foreign conspiracy that Ivan's oprichnina planted 450 years ago.

No fourth Rome will emerge

Novgorod holds a special place in the history of Russia. Along with Kyiv, it became the cradle of medieval Rus'. In 862, the city's citizens summoned the Scandinavian warrior Rurik to put an end to domestic quarrels and establish a strong state that in the centuries to come would be able to withstand the pressures of Livonia, Sweden and nomadic tribes.

Novgorod was a powerful regional player. In the late 15th and early 16th centuries, however, it was clear that the city was past its heyday.

Novgorod also managed to survive the Mongol invasion in the early 13th century. The Mongols sacked Kyiv and razed vast parts of Rus', which contributed to the rise of Moscow. Initially part of the Grand Duchy of Vladimir, it quickly became independent. In 1325, the Orthodox Metropolitan Peter transferred his residence to the modern capital. Moscow gained a powerful ally in uniting Rus' under its auspices.

As the process gained pace at the turn of the 14th and 15th centuries, Moscow's dukes sought to use ideology to strengthen their rule. They ultimately found it in the fall of Constantinople in 1453. Many in Europe this event a sign of Doomsday, a punishment for the betrayal of the real Christian faith just like in Rome a thousand years before. For many Eastern Orthodox clergy, it was a sign that Moscow represents the sacred truth of Christ and his followers. "Two Romes have fallen, the third stands, and there will be no fourth", wrote Philoteus, a monk from Pskov in the early 16th century.

Although it was purely a religious prophecy, Moscow's dukes soon forged it into a political weapon against any internal forces that might deny their power.

Novgorod, on the other hand, was a merchant republic. Its livelihood relied as much on trade as on a delicate balance of power between the main trading families, the Orthodox Church and the wider population. Only a direct military threat would lead to a gathering of all the city's citizens, the Veche, to choose a prince. This procedure had a proto-democratic dimension and stood out in a world that had just been ransacked by the Mongols. At this time, anyone who aspired to receive an investiture from the Golden Horde risked being murdered.

Unlike many other Rus' principalities, Novgorod was able to remain a powerful regional player. In the late 15th and early 16th centuries, however, it was clear that the city was past its heyday. The source of Novgorod's wealth – the Hanseatic League – was in terminal decline. Northern Europe's commercial centre was increasingly shifting from the Baltic to the North Sea. Trade routes to the east either crossed south-eastern Poland and the Black Sea or the Mediterranean.

Novgorod became vulnerable to external pressure. In 1478, Ivan III conquered the city. He dissolved the Veche and deported many of Novgorod's aristocrats, merchants and landowners to what is now central Russia. Yet Moscow's reign was not completely repressive. Since Ivan III strived to benefit from Novgorod's trade ties, he retained elements of the local political system. The conquest was decisive but its consequences did not turn out to be extremely violent, at least not immediately.

Conspiracy and paranoia

Things began to change decisively during the reign of Ivan IV. Due to personal experiences, he remained suspicious of his counsellors and their backstage influence on state affairs throughout his reign. He particularly despised the mestnichestvo, a traditional system of seniority between the aristocracy that even went so far as to describe the seating order at the tsar's table. Ivan also never trusted the zemshchina, an institution that allowed for vast parts of Russia to be ruled by boyars, not the state. Driven by his anxieties, Ivan created a masterplan to get rid of his real or imagined opponents once and for all. In 1564, he left Moscow and announced his abdication. He wrote two letters, one to the aristocracy, in which he accused its members of treason. Simultaneously, he wrote another to the citizens of Moscow, in which he declared that he held no grudge against them. This event provided the origins for the famous "good tsar – bad boyars" dichotomy in Russia.

Ivan created the oprichnina and zemshchina that was a completely new style of rule for the whole state.

Ivan's move left the boyars in dismay. They feared that the people of Moscow might organise a popular uprising directed against the noblemen so they asked the tsar to return. He agreed upon the condition that he would be given a free hand in persecuting traitors, which he believed were everywhere in the country.

In short, this is how Ivan created the oprichnina, a system outside of the traditional mestnichestvo and zemshchina that was a completely new style of rule for the whole state. This system created a separate territory within the country that was ruled directly by the grand duke and his henchmen – the oprichniki. They were recruited mostly from ambitious low and middle-grade noblemen, whose desire for power only encouraged their willingness to commit atrocities.

The initial role of the oprichnina was to weaken the old landowning and merchant families, as well as the Orthodox Church. Only Ivan himself decided who would be suspected and accused of opposing his rule. Until 1568, the oprichnina relied on various mechanisms embedded into the zemschina. From then on, however, it

was free of any restraints. Oprichniki were free to do whatever they wanted and were restricted only by their imaginations.

The deadliness of Ivan's invention was showcased in the town of Izborsk, just a few kilometres away from Pskov. In 1569, a small Polish-Lithuanian regiment seized the local fortress. Even though Muscovites retook it with little difficulty, Ivan was convinced that the whole incident happened as a result of treason. His oprichniki executed not only the local garrison, but also those from the surrounding fortresses.

This, however, was not the end of Ivan's wrath. The tsar was convinced that the loss of control over Izborsk was orchestrated by local elites in neighbouring Pskov and Novgorod. The incident gave him a convenient pretext for taking decisive steps against both his real and imagined opponents.

The cradle of Russia on fire

Shortly thereafter, Ivan IV decided to march against Novgorod in early 1570. Having arrived on the eve of Orthodox Christmas, he directed his first attacks against the surrounding monasteries and Archbishop Pimen. The tsar's oprichniki beat several hundred monks, as Ivan believed the church was involved in plotting with Poland-Lithuania.

Ivan then set out his camp in Gorodishche, just outside of Novgorod's city walls. Initially, it served as a trial place for the clergy. The hell of the oprichnina, however, was soon unleashed and affected the whole population of the city. First, the oprichniki arrested and tortured boyars and merchants. They threw their families off the bridge over the frozen Volkhov river. Then, they pillaged the city's churches and richest houses. A few days later members of the city's lower and middle classes met the same fate.

The tsar and his butchers eventually departed in mid-February, leaving Novgorod devastated and its population massacred. The city never regained its former glory and importance. Its centuries-old institutions were destroyed and so was its population. Novgorod subsequently became a simple regional centre with little to no influence.

Ivan IV's punishment of Novgorod resonated across all of Russia, as many of those who survived were resettled in other regions. The country was deeply torn and shocked. Ivan IV ruled until his death in 1584 and historians subsequently called him Ivan the Terrible. The following decades showed that the oprichnina and the sack of Novgorod laid the foundations of the Russian political culture that we know today.

Since Ivan's sons were unable to rule and the Rurik dynasty died out, Russia experiences two decades of turbulence known as the Smuta. For a short while, Moscow was captured by Polish-Lithuanian forces. The customs that were brought to the city were frowned upon and even regarded as the work of the devil. After the Smuta had ended the mere suggestion of collaborating with invaders could lead to someone being brutally murdered.

Wariness of external interference rose after the young tsar Peter introduced reforms that were supposed to modernise Russia. Rumours even spread that he had been replaced by a Western doppelganger. This theory was further strengthened by the presence of foreigners in the tsar's vicinity in charge of the reforms.

Foreign actions have also been used to explain defeats experienced by the Russian army. Two large-scale military conflicts of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the Crimean (1853–56) and Russo-Japanese Wars (1904–05), were supposedly lost as the enemy had successfully infiltrated Russia's intelligence network. Enemy plots provided a convenient explanation for any humiliation.

Conspiracy also became an important way of justifying military interventions in areas that Russia considered its sphere of influence. When the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth adopted its constitution in 1791 and attempted to set itself free from Russia, Catherine II accused the state of plotting with Turkey and breaching the extraterritoriality of the Orthodox church in Warsaw. She gave herself a pretext to start a war that would liquidate the Commonwealth in 1795.

After the assassination of the rather liberal Alexander II in 1881, the counterreforms of Alexander III were adopted.

For Russian rulers, accusations of foreign connections were also a way of dealing with internal opposition. Right after the Napoleonic Wars, parts of the Russian aristocracy and gentry were repressed because they expected reforms in the spirit of enlightened absolutism. Attempts to abolish serfdom in the late 18th and 19th centuries were often presented as "un-Russian" and non-traditional, aimed at weakening the Tsarist autocracy.

After the assassination of the rather liberal Alexander II in 1881, the counterreforms of Alexander III were adopted with slogans about going back to Russian roots. These were contrasted with the supposedly pro-Western changes introduced by his predecessor. Alexander III sought to remain true to the "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality" triad. Everything foreign was suspicious to him, including Russia's inhabitants of different ethnic and religious background. As a fierce antisemite, he brought about the forced migration of Russian Jews to the United States.

Throughout the 19th century and up until 1917, Poles living in Russia were believed to be constantly conspiring against the tsardom. As Russian nationalism was gain-

ing strength in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Poles were often considered a Western element who betrayed their Slavicness in favour of Latin civilization.

Furthermore, at the end of World War Two, soldiers returning from the West were imprisoned in large numbers as they were seen as possible revolutionaries. Nobel Prize winner Alexandr Solzhenitsyn was sentenced to eight years in the gulag for having shared some critical remarks with his friend in a letter from the field. The famous wartime poster with a shushing woman and the caption "don't gossip" greatly exemplifies this attitude.

The post-war spy hysteria was also artificially exaggerated by Soviet state propaganda to a striking extent. In Kaliningrad Oblast, a region freshly conquered by the Soviet Union, inhabitants were warned of the presence of many NATO spies during the late 1940s and early 1950s. This is despite the fact that this territory was saturated with Red Army soldiers and security forces.

The suspicion of today

During the winter between 2011 and 2012, Vladimir Putin published a series of articles in preparation for his presidential campaign. He painted a gloomy picture of Russia in the 1990s, which was seen as a time of malevolent elites, corruption and paralysed state institutions. At the same time, Putin presented himself as a leader taking steps to restore order.

In the following years, the ruling elite has consolidated its power, introduced new forms of domestic oppression and pursued a belligerent foreign policy. Yet, the system they have created is not entirely new. It draws heavily upon existing mechanisms deeply embedded in Russia's state institutions and its citizens. In many ways, they resemble patterns introduced by Ivan IV.

In 2011 and 2012 Putin published a series of articles in preparation for his presidential campaign.

In order to see these parallels, we need to consider two paradigms that are followed by the Kremlin. The first is of a quasi-constructivist nature: Russia is a unique (almost civilisational) entity that needs a strong central power to survive. The second is the ultra-realist notion of the "besieged fortress": the country has been surrounded by enemies ready to wreak havoc, just like they did in Izborsk.

Such perceptions have far-reaching domestic consequences. They justify limiting civic liberties, controlling the information space and imposing narratives on issues of vital interest to authorities, such as history. These moves have been made under the auspices of the "sovereign democracy" doctrine. As a result, these be-

liefs have weakened or effectively annihilated most of the civil society institutions that began to function during the late 1980s thanks to perestroika and glastnost.

This culture of suspicion also helps us to understand why Russia is predominantly a destructive force in international relations. The conquest of Novgorod in 1478 and its sacking nine decades later stemmed from the conviction that Russian territory exceeds Russia itself and spans over the historical Rus'. The Kremlin therefore has the right to defend its interests whenever and wherever it deems necessary.

Such philosophy has been visible in Russia's actions towards Belarus and Ukraine. Whereas the tradition of negating the idea of a separate Belarusian nation is deeply rooted among Russian political elites, underlining the historical unity of Russians has become increasingly important since the Euromaidan. This feeling was expressed in Putin's essay published in July this year.

Thanks to both paradigms, the Kremlin has given itself the right to denounce the enemies of Russia and persecute them no matter who and where they were. Sergey and Yulia Skripal and Alexei Navalny are perhaps the most prominent victims of this policy in recent years. Similar victims can be traced back to the 2000s, such as Anna Politkovskaya.

Moreover, today's Russian elites use the system they created in the name of the nation but above the heads of the people. An almost autarkic sense of sovereignty allows them to deny international obligations they deem uncomfortable, partly because they have got used to applying domestic law selectively. In this sense, they are very much alike Ivan's oprichniki.

In the struggle for autarky, the Kremlin also aims to become independent from the global digital space, testing cutting off the internet under the pretext of external interference in Russia's internal affairs.

Indeed, the web has demonstrated its abilities to support transparency and openness. Thanks to webcams present at polling stations, foreign observers were able to uncover the Kremlin's election tactics. With TV and traditional media under control, the time has come to deprive Russians of access to independent, non-partisan media. This is similar to Ivan's suppression of Novgorod's more inclusive political system, which was influenced by trade interactions with the outside world.

Epilogue

In 1862, the Monument of the Millennium of Russia was erected in Novgorod. Russian emperors and historians declared the city the birthplace of Russian statehood. This was an interesting take, considering that the tsars owed their absolute power to the forces that crushed the Novgorod Republic and its democratic institutions.

Today's Russia portrays its history as unbroken despite many ruptures. In the official narrative, the dukes of Moscow, tsars, emperors and Bolshevik commissars form an uninterrupted succession of national leaders. Although the elements of this story seem to have very little in common, the legacy of Ivan the Terrible links them together more than anything else. It is thus a striking paradox that the Valdai Club meetings first took place in a city that was crushed precisely because of its openness.

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Blindspots in Second World War History

KRISTINA SMOLIJANINOVAITĖ

Historical memory related to the Second World War is too complex for there to be a single version recognised around the world. This is because historical "truth" is by no means a simple matter of black and white. Addressing various blindspots and imbalances in understandings of the past may subsequently help tackle difficult historical legacies at political, legal and civil society levels.

The Second World War, with its unprecedented death toll, is the most painful and widespread armed conflict present in the collective memories of nations in the modern era. It was in fact many wars in one, with different front lines, enemies and consequences that can still be felt today. In an attempt to bridge the gap between different perspectives across the continents, the EU-Russia Civil Society Forum and its history programme "Confronting Memories" held the third discussion in its series on the Second World War in May 2021. This is part of various ongoing socio-political debates on postwar memory-making. This series of discussions aims to broaden understandings of the war's history beyond the mainstream narratives and to draw lessons from human suffering and injustice that are often overlooked.

The online meeting "'Blindspots' in WWII History" looked at three geographical areas – North Africa, the Middle East and South America – for topics of historical memory that have not been dealt with adequately in academic and public discourse. Professor Joseph Bahout from the American University of Beirut, Lebanon, Morocco-born Professor Aomar Boum from the University of California, United

States and Professor Ernesto Bohoslavsky from the National University of General Sarmiento, Argentina, shed light on these historical "blindspots" in their respective regions. This text is an attempt to present various perspectives as discussed in the online session for the sake of future reference and reflection. The discussion was moderated by Professor Alexis Dudden from the University of Connecticut. She began with an observation that history tends to be weaponised in line with an agenda to promote preferred national memories. For instance, in Poland it is now possible to witness an increasing erasure of history. She noted that some colleagues who stated that Poles participated in the genocide of Jews and other victim groups have recently stood trial for their beliefs. Dudden also made the point that the end of the war did not mean the end of conflicts, as made clear by the actions taken by the US in East Asia.

The legacy in Argentina

Some Eastern European countries would consider the conflict to have ended only in 1989 following the end of the Cold War. This year proved to be a turning point in political history, as seen through the wave of revolutions that swept across the Eastern Bloc in Europe. These started in Poland and Hungary and were later seen in Czechoslovakia during the Velvet Revolution and the overthrow of the dictatorship of communist Romania. This process culminated most symbolically in the fall of the Berlin Wall in November. Following a similar argument, Bohoslavsky suggested that the long shadow of the war remained cast over Argentina until the 1990s, despite the fact that the country played only a peripheral role in its history. According to the professor, Argentina has attracted global attention due to its role as a sanctuary for various Nazi war criminals during the dictatorship of Juan Domingo Perón, sealing Peronism's complicity with the actions of the Third Reich. Concerns have also been directed at entrenched antisemitism and pro-Nazi feeling in regional intelligence agencies. Political denunciation of these beliefs was only partly triggered by the Hezbollah bomb attack on the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires in 1992. Another attack soon after in 1994 on the AMIA Building of the Jewish community killed more than a hundred people in all with many more injured. Relevant archives were subsequently opened, and the Commission for the Clarification of Nazi Activities in Argentina (CEANA) was set up in 1997. Many researchers from Europe, Argentina, Israel and the US also got involved, providing well documented information on the arrival of various Nazis in Argentina.

In that sense Argentina only closed its chapter on the Second World War in the 1990s. According to Bohoslavsky, this is "because since then we have very well

documented information on the arrival of war criminals [in Argentina]". Interestingly, the professor has noted that Nazi officers constituted only a small percentage of the thousands of arrivals in Argentina with Nazi or fascist links, as a much bigger number appeared to be made up of collaborators from France, Belgium and other countries. In any case, remembrance of the war in Argentina has become inextricably tied to anti-Peronist discourses that insist on Perón's sympathy for the Nazis. Despite this, there were arguably other issues related to this historical period, such as Perón's interest in using German scientists and engineers.

Furthermore, the judgement of Nazi leaders in the Nuremberg trials was effectively "assimilated" as a model for Argentina's pursuit of justice following the end of the military junta (1976–83). What that may mean in the popular imagination, however, is that the Argentine dictatorship becomes virtually synonymous with not just fascism, but also Nazism and all its associations with antisemitism. These soon became common words to describe evil in general beyond their original contexts in the country.

Bohoslavsky says that many victims of the dictatorship, such as members of the judiciary, NGOs and many artists including León Ferrari, have adopted the language of justice from the Holocaust experience as a frame of reference for discussing and prosecuting perpetrators. This has also influenced their approach in interpreting memories of persecution. There was subsequently an extensive discussion among scholars and the judiciary on whether the term "genocide" can be legitimately used in the courts and in the study of history in order to understand what happened during the last Argentine dictatorship. "You have a lot of legal problems [in using the] word 'genocide' in Argentina", the professor said.

Presenting oral history: Memories of Refugees in North Africa

For Aomar Boum, the challenge in uncovering stories of the Second World War lies not so much in opening up archives of secret state documents, but most crucially in oral history. This is especially true since his focus is on refugees, people displaced by war. The topic he shared during the discussion involved the wartime French Vichy Regime, which appeared at a time when all of North Africa had been colonised by European powers: Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia by France, Southern Morocco by Spain, and Libya by Italy.

"One element of the 'blindspots' relates to a project that arises from my interest as an anthropologist in oral history and stories and narratives of individuals, in particular refugees who fled the war in Europe and other parts of the war and ended up in North Africa before they went to the Americas via Lisbon, Portugal", Boum

Remains of the trans-Saharan railroads system.

explained. After Vichy took over in the summer of 1940, General Philippe Pétain decided to revive the dream of a greater France by connecting the Mediterranean to the rest of the Sahara and West Africa through a railroad system. France resorted to using forced labour and many of these people were refugees from Europe.

Boum illustrated the impact of the war period on refugee communities with maps and photographs of various detention, labour and concentration camps. He said that "There were no death camps in this region. These camps were meant for either refugees – women, children and men included – or they were used for the railroad system project. There were at least 100,000 refugees such as Spanish Republicans, Jews and North Africans". For him, it is interesting to think about what a railroad may well signify in the history of Europe and how it either leads to death or hard labour.

He emphasised the importance of oral history and also biographies as part of his research. "Individual stories should not be neglected because they give a broader picture about history and the stories from the past", he said. But his own work extends beyond research into creative projects. In one project, Boum worked with Nadjib Berber to create a comic story titled Undesirables, which focused on refugees in North Africa who fled the war in Europe. "These stories include Jews, Muslims and Christians that should not be marginalised and silenced in order to

write history. The reading among students of the young generation has changed, so the teachers should try to present history in a different way", Boum says.

Rivalry in the Middle East

While reflecting on historical memory of the Levant in the Middle East, Bahout pointed out that the First World War was more crucial in the collective memory of the region and in the formation of states. However, the Second World War could also be interesting due to three "blindspots" relating to the political independence and emancipation of Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. The first relates to the competition between the Vichy regime and Free France as led by Charles de Gaulle over Lebanon and Syria. "We do not know a lot about the transfer of powers between Vichy France and Gaullist France which might be interesting for scholars to examine", Bahout said. According to him, it is interesting how the allegiance and loyalty of the local elite class shifted easily from one occupier to another within as little as a month. This lack of political integrity is arguably seen even today in Lebanon.

The second "blindspot" pertains to French-British competition between 1942 and 1943, which effectively became a sideshow to their battle against Nazi Germany and Italy. This is best seen in the letters sent between Churchill and de Gaulle. Unlike most other states in the region, Syria and Lebanon gained their independence at a time when the official status of France was in question.

The third "blindspot" partly concerns the question of Zionist emigration to Palestine and its impact on the creation of Israel in 1948. "We tend to forget that some dynamics were already at play during the Second World War", Bahout remarked, referring to the presence of a Jewish community that was living in Palestine around the time that was not subjected to the persecution in Europe. His words also hinted at the interest of some Arab elites in fascist tendencies in Europe and beyond. He highlighted the founding of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party by Antun Saadeh, who came from a Greek Orthodox family previously living in South America and was influenced by right-wing ideology. "This is a page of history that is still enduring and ongoing in this part of the region and really traces back to exactly what was happening during the Second World War in other parts of the world and was imported to this part of the world in the Middle East", he said. Bahout suggested that one should compare different temporalities in order to reflect on which periods have been more formative to one region or another.

There were a range of responses to a question on how to learn from history and thereby enhance global awareness on issues such as genocide. These included pointing out the limitations and suggesting possible ways to build bridges. Bo-

Courtesy of Aomar Boum

Propaganda Flyer National Revolution Ideology.

hoslavsky began by expressing pessimism over human capacity to learn from the past and argued that the history of war for many people simply did not begin with the Second World War. For Latin American people for instance, the Spanish Civil War was more relevant in inspiring a sense of global and ideological solidarity. As a result, one has to expect global solidarity to remain a contested field among different political projects, instead of a universal consciousness shared by all.

Boum argued for the importance in understanding what each experience of war and trauma means to each group of people. He also saw challenges in not only ascertaining facts from the archives, but also in translating such experiences as part of the efforts towards discussion of commonalities. Meanwhile, Bahout noted that there have been different forms of denialism in Europe, as well as in the Middle East. For example, it is clear that Holocaust denialism is often coloured by the Arab-Israeli conflicts. He also shared his observation of teaching young people history, stating that since different people have not experienced the same political events in similar ways that they might minimise or even deny such events. Due to this, creating global awareness would require a lot of energy.

Further food for thought

Readers may be interested in some English language publications released by the panellists as food for thought. For example, the 2019 book *The Holocaust and North Africa*, which was edited by Aomar Boum and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, sheds light on a major blindspot with regards to Jewish life in North Africa during the war. Holocaust and genocide literature has tended to be dominated by stories of Nazi camps throughout Europe. Similar camps in North Africa as established by other governments during the war have subsequently fallen into historical amnesia among the complexities of wartime reality.

According to Boum and Hatimi, North Africa's Jewish and Muslim communities coexisted mostly peacefully during the war. One anecdotal story from a local noble tells of how his community protected their Jewish neighbour. This shows that the Jews were seen as belonging to a larger community that otherwise mostly identified as Muslim. Once again Boum suggested that oral history no matter how minuscule or anecdotal might carry an important aspect of the past that supplements archival documents. Muslims and Jews of the rural Sahara interestingly saw the war in Europe as less important and "largely as a confrontation between 'Christian' nations".

Holocaust and genocide literature has tended to be dominated by stories of Nazi camps throughout Europe.

As Boum explained, there were no death camps in North Africa but internment centres. Yet it is curious to note that North African camps under Vichy control were not a matter of interest for American and Allied forces, at least during the first stages of the war. When they landed on the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts of Morocco and Algeria, they left the camps to French authorities. This is despite the illegal internment of Jewish and non-Jewish refugees.

In a 2016 paper titled "The Unravelling of Lebanon's Taif Agreement: Limits of Sect-Based Power Sharing", Bahout discussed political complexities in Lebanon and its historical roots in the sectarian division of constitutional powers and administrative positions. He also noted this issue's connections with the "National Pact" that was made during the independence movement in November 1943. The three top positions in the state were allocated to specific communities, with the Maronites especially receiving "the lion's share, especially in vital sectors of the state" in comparison to the Sunni and Shia communities.

Such power sharing had its shortcomings and corruption virtually become acceptable behaviour in Lebanese politics. The country's political system was also challenged by a lack of redistributive mechanisms among different socio-economic classes. By the 1970s, contestation by Muslim political forces regarding participa-

tion was evolving into a demand for a democratic one-person, one-vote system, which eventually led to political change in the country. All in all, domestic sectarian tensions and regional dynamics, such as the Arab-Israeli conflict and the rise of Palestinian militancy, played a key role in the roots of Lebanon's civil war in 1975.

To take discussion back to Europe, discourses in official or popular media in some countries may also be skewed or highly selective in their representation of history. For instance, the topic of collaboration and antisemitism has remained inadequately addressed in Poland. In 2000, a book by Jan Gross entitled *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*, was published in the Polish language and an English edition followed the year after. A short essay in this book about the mass killing of Jews by locals led to adverse reactions and tension in public and political debates about Polish wartime actions.

Final reflections

The traumatic effects of the Second World War were far-reaching enough to prompt the creation of the United Nations as a global organisation focused on international peace and security. However, historical memory has remained too complex for a single version of its story to be recognised around the world. This is because historical "truth" is not a simple matter of black and white. Due to this, addressing blindspots or imbalances in the understanding of history would rely on constant discussions to help tackle difficult historical legacies at a political, legal and civil society level.

It should also be remembered that history curriculums related to the war and its consequences, as well as teaching methods, from formal lessons to youth education activities, have to be constantly updated and reviewed. We should be careful when discussing grand narratives that look at the present through a historical lens and vice versa. This may lead to distorted understandings of the present and skewed interpretations of history that in turn only encourage further conflicts. There is no single set of temporalities in history that would be equally relevant to all nations and communities. Despite this, reflecting on historical legacies for the sake of promoting peace remains a necessary task, requiring great attention and sensitivity. NEE

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Lithuania fumbles with 4,200 migrants, pushing human rights aside

LINAS JEGELEVICIUS

As of September 28th 2021, 4,163 migrants have illegally crossed Lithuania's border with Belarus. To deter migrants – now and for good – Lithuania has pinned its hopes on a fence along the frontier.

Rudninkai, a sleepy Lithuanian settlement of 500 inhabitants in the Salcininkai district along Lithuania and the EU's border with Belarus, has been in both the local and international media spotlight this summer. Over 700 illegal male migrants had been placed for nearly three months in a makeshift tent camp, which is now eerily empty. All the migrants, mostly Iraqis, Kurds, Afghans and Sri Lankans, have been moved from the settlement to a former correctional facility in Kybartai, in the south-western district of Vilkaviskis near the Russian border. At the same time, around 400 vulnerable migrants have been moved to a refugee reception centre in Rukla, which is located in the central Jonava district. Some others are still living in municipal shelters, mostly crumbling dormitories in municipalities located along the 680 kilometre border with Belarus.

"Lithuania is clearly unprepared for a situation like this. Yes, Belarus is waging hybrid warfare against us, but do not get me wrong – the number of illegal migrants we have in the country is relatively insignificant and not a challenge for a state with resources like ours. But we're acting – and overacting – as if we had been flooded by thousands and thousands of migrants", says Dainius Zalimas, a former judge and former president of Lithuania's Constitutional Court.

State of emergency

A couple of years ago, when Lithuanian border guards and the military held an exercise aimed at handling an imaginative deluge of 40,000 migrants, they claimed the drill was successful, Zalimas recalls. "From today's perspective, the drills look inadequate to me", he concludes.

Faced with the unprecedented emergency, Lithuania has largely managed to stem the migrant flows. The country has forcibly pushed many migrants back, a practice questioned both by national and international human rights watchdogs. The liberal-conservative Lithuanian government has defended its chosen tactics, maintaining that only harsh measures will work. Vilnius has also hinted that just a battle – not the whole war – had been won against the malicious Belarusian president, Alyaksandr Lukashenka.

The liberal--conservative Lithuanian government has defended its chosen tactics, maintaining that only harsh measures will work.

"This is a hybrid weapon being used against Lithuania and the European Union… Most likely, Belarus will reroute the migrant flows towards Lithuania and work to find new means of provocation", says Agne Bilotaite, the country's interior minister. Bilotaite had been appointed commander of the national emergency operation during the summer. To cope with the migrant crisis, she has proposed building a fence on the border and her ministry has also introduced a state of emergency that has been in effect since early July.

Yet Zalimas, who is a law professor at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, the country's second largest city, cautions that the legal status of the emergency does not legitimise the Lithuanian government's current actions. "Many omit one important thing: Lithuania has declared a state of emergency along the border municipalities. Not a countrywide emergency or a state of war, which, legally, would exempt the authorities from adhering to the country's constitution and European human rights legislation. Although migrant pushbacks may work efficiently, it is plausible that Lithuania's support for collective migrant detention and expulsion can backfire in the form of lawsuits (by the detainees) being filed against the country and losses through litigation", the former constitutional court judge underscored. He added that "I am sure we will have cases of the kind".

The interior ministry has informed New Eastern Europe that as of September 28th, 4,163 migrants have crossed Lithuania's border with Belarus illegally. Around 2,800 of these migrants have applied for asylum. The number of registered migrants does not include those who have tested positive for COVID-19, who are

subject to quarantine. Another 512 migrants remained unregistered because they refused to submit asylum applications. As of writing, a total of 164 migrants have been returned from Lithuania to their countries of origin.

Meanwhile, the Lithuanian state border guard service has noted that the flow of illegal migration into Lithuania this year is nearly 50 times higher compared to 2020. Last year, only 81 migrants were detained on the Lithuanian border. For comparison, in 2019, just 46 illegal migrants were caught by border guards. This figure was 104 in 2018 and 72 in 2017.

Lithuania estimates that the flow of illegal migration into the country this year is nearly 50 times higher compared to 2020.

Iraqi or allegedly Iraqi citizens represent the majority of detainees on the border with Belarus this year. The rest of the detainees include citizens of Belarus, Guinea, Iran, Russia, Sri Lanka, Syria, Turkey and others. With the recent sharp rise in the number of such cases, the border guard has tightened security along the border with Belarus. Apart from a number of organisational measures, officers from other border guard units have been mobilised to this area and extra technical resources have been sent there. The public security service, the national riflemen's union and the military have also come to the aid of the border guards. The European Border and Coast Guard teams (FRONTEX) are also working together on the border with Belarus.

Border fence

To deter migrants – now and for good – Lithuania has pinned its hopes on a fence to be built along the border. However, this endeavour has faced problems from the outset. It appeared that barbed razor wire was not readily available in the country. Reluctant to spend its own money, Lithuania appealed to Brussels but was told that funding cannot be earmarked for such purposes. However, in early August, EU Commissioner for Home Affairs Ylva Johansson visited the border and said that Lithuania can expect 20 to 30 million euros by 2022 to bolster border security. In the end, it was Estonia, Slovenia and Ukraine that offered Lithuania a helping hand, sending supplies of barbed wire. Meanwhile, the Czech Republic has pledged 530,000 euros to Lithuania to help secure its border with Belarus.

Lithuania also did its share of work, issuing an international tender to purchase 3,000 kilometres of barbed wire and all other necessary parts for installation. The interior ministry has said that the plan is to spend up to 16.15 million euros on 3,000 kilometres of barbed razor wire, which will be put up in several layers, and

up to 12.5 million euros on installation works. The government says that, in all, 34 companies from Estonia, India, Israel, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Ukraine and the United States have expressed interest in the upcoming tender. Suppliers involved in the construction of the US-Mexico and India-Pakistan border barriers have also reportedly taken interest in the project. On September 14th, Epso-G signed a contract with Tetas, a Lithuanian firm, for the construction of the first 100 kilometre section of the border fence, with work expected to start at the end of the month. The fence will measure around 500 kilometres in total. It will not be put up in wetlands and other naturally impassable areas. Lithuania and Belarus share a border of 680 kilometres, including more than 100 kilometres of frontier along rivers and lakes.

The hawkish foreign policy of the conservative--liberal government will cost Lithuania nearly one billion euros.

Polls show that a third of Lithuanians support the border fence to stop irregular migration. But the fence has been a bone of contention among Lithuanian politicians since its inception. Dainius Kepenis, a member of Parliamentfrom the opposition Farmers and Greens Union (LFGU), is doubtful whether the fence will be enough to stop migrants from trying to get into the country. "Unless we erect a fence like the Great Wall of China, the fence [will] not be impenetrable… I hear some very weird things being said by the Lithuanian government. First, the ruling conservatives scold Hungary fiercely for building its own wall and now, look, what a U-turn – we are consulting with them on how to build our own wall", he told *New Eastern Europe*.

Referring to Lithuania's earnest support for the opposition in Belarus, he says that the country has ended up "paying a heavy price" for what he calls Vilnius's role as a "pushy exporter" of democracy. He says that the hawkish foreign policy of the conservative-liberal government will cost Lithuania nearly one billion euros. This includes millions for temporary housing and roughly 150 million euros for the fence project.

"Very sadly, the crisis arose after the presidential election in Belarus in August 2020, when the Lithuanian government allowed Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya (the symbol of the Belarusian opposition) to flee to Vilnius. It did so without consulting even our closest allies. It could not have made a bigger mistake than this. Secondly, we not only supported sanctions against Belarus, but also encouraged others to apply new ones, which, again, was against our core interests".

Remigijus Zemaitaitis, a Lithuanian MP, said that "it would be naïve to believe that the fence will do the job the government expects [it to do]. With the chaos in Afghanistan, which followed the US troops' chaotic withdrawal from the country,

it is just a matter of time before we will see hordes of Afghan migrants stomping on our border".

Plight at the border

Speaking to *New Eastern Europe*, Saulius Skvernelis, prime minister of the previous LFGU government, says that Lithuania missed a "good chance" in the summer to speak directly to Minsk about the migrants. "The new government was too hesitant and did not introduce a state of emergency at the border, which would have allowed the mobilisation of all state resources in tackling the issue", Skvernelis added.

He is also convinced that the fence will not root out the problem stemming from increased illegal migration. Yet Laurynas Kasciunas, a Conservative MP and head of the influential parliamentary committee on national security and defence, believes that the fence is necessary to protect Lithuania from migrants now and in the future. "The two-layer fence with various engineering solutions is what we need to protect our border against an unpredictable regime like that of the tyrannical ruler over the border. We intend to finance the whole fence project from the state coffers, but we will ask Brussels to help us with it too", Kasciunas said. According to him, the completion of the fence will cost around 150 million euros. So far, however, Lithuania has made a slow start to the project.

As of September 27th, a mere 40 kilometres of the barbed wire has been installed. The Lithuanian government says that the first 110-kilometre-section of fencing along the Belarusian border, topped with razor wire, should be finished by April next year. When Lithuanian border guards recently observed migrants crossing the already laid barbed wire barrier by simply cutting it, Agne Bilotaite quickly responded without providing any details that it would be improved with "various engineering solutions".

Whilst many ponder what concrete measures the border guards are using to deter migrants from the border, the interior ministry has vehemently denied rumours that specially trained hounds, whips, beatings with rifles and any other form of physical and verbal coercion are being employed at the frontier. Despite this, five Afghan migrants maintain that they were helped by a local family after being wounded during an altercation with border guards. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has issued an interim measure preventing Lithuania from removing this group from the country whilst their legal case is heard.

Zalimas says that Lithuania has "clearly" favoured state security issues over human rights throughout the emergency and that this will ultimately backfire on

them at the end of the day. "Who knows – Lithuania could find itself in an unfavorable situation someday. The Belarusian regime can afford to do anything it deems necessary, but we cannot allow those people to die at the border. We seem now to be sometimes forgetting that there is a minimum level of compassion that has to be shown", Zalimas added.

Caring for migrants' safety

Until very recently, the Lithuanian authorities, citing security concerns, banned journalists from covering the situation at the border. However, the authorities have been carefully watching how local and international media have been reporting on the country's handling of the crisis. In September, many major Lithuanian news rooms appealed to the country's President Gitanas Nauseda, the Seimas (parliament) and the government in the hope that they would abide by the constitution and allow journalists into the country's hotspots.

"The constraints for journalists cannot be implemented under the regional state of emergency we are still in. These measures could only be put in place during a general state of emergency or a state of war. Both can be declared only by the Seimas", Zalimas emphasised. Only after widespread backlash did Lithuanian politicians reverse their decision to authorise mass detention of migrants and limit their right to appeal.

The interior ministry has reported that all the migrants from the infamous Rudninkai camp have been relocated to facilities with more amenities as of September 24th. Prior to the move, Lithuanian media had reported that male prostitution, sexual exploitation and extortion were taking place in the tent camp. Lithuania's Red Cross has partly confirmed these findings to *New Eastern Europe*, stating that the situation in the tent camp was much worse than in the country's other temporary migrant shelters. "There is a shortage of both tents and sanitary facilities to ensure the minimal conditions needed for dignified living in the Rudninkai camp", the Red Cross said. The most vulnerable refugees, in all, 400 people, mostly families with children, were recently placed in the refugee reception center in Rukla in central Lithuania, where new modular housing units were quickly built.

Yet on September 25th, riot police rushed to the facility to quash unrest, which, reportedly, appeared out of the blue and was unrelated to the death of a child in the centre that night. When speaking to me during the summer, Beatrice Bernotiene, director of the Rukla refugee reception centre, confessed that she "sometimes" is more worried about the safety of migrants than of local inhabitants. Zalimas agrees with this feeling and says that Lithuanian social media is "ripe" with incendiary

anti-migrant rhetoric. "I cannot fight my gut feeling that this (allowing it) is being done purposely – keep all migrants at bay at any cost", he ponders.

Notably, Lithuania's foreign minister, Gabrielius Landsbergis, made a trip to Iraq in the summer in an attempt to get the Iraqi authorities more actively engaged in solving the migrant crisis. He specifically hoped to stop Minsk-bound flights with Iraqis on board and has said that highlighting the "unbearable" conditions of migrants in Lithuania on social media is very important. Since Iraq suspended all flights to Minsk in early August, Lithuania has recorded a significant drop in attempts by Iraqi nationals to enter from Belarus. The foreign minister also hopes that the EU will review its migration policies. The EU should not make the redistribution of migrants among member states a priority in discussing the bloc's common migration policy, Landsbergis said in early September. The European Commission proposed a New Pact on Migration and Asylum back in 2020. Concerns about a possible new migration influx from Afghanistan has now brought a new impetus to the discussion about new migration rules in the EU. The growing burden of migrants weighs heavily on the government, as it could well face economic and reputational consequences should it not handle the crisis in a responsible manner.

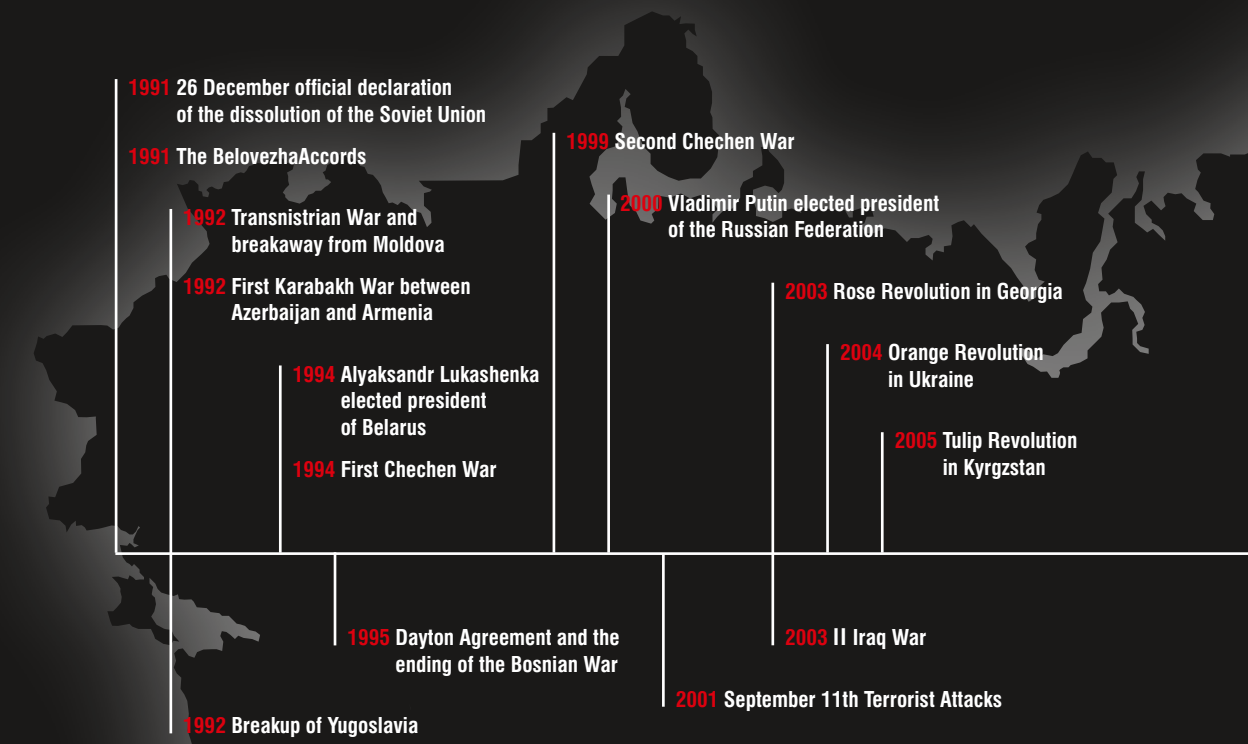
Lithuanian analysts now argue that political fallout from the emergency is perhaps imminent. "Contrary to what the authorities say, the [migrant] crisis has not been handled fully. Many of the decisions, like passing a resolution on hybrid warfare [against Lithuania], constructing the trope of Lithuania as of an unattractive country [for migration] and some other decisions were rather successful, but they, as many more others, came belatedly and this has only increased the severity of the problem", argued Jurate Novagrockiene, a professor of political science at the Military Academy of Lithuania. She says that it is difficult to say what impact the crisis will have on the ruling party. But with over three years until a new parliamentary election, the internet is already teeming with the posts of nationalist political wannabes and their supporters.

At the end of September, Evelina Gudzinskaite, director of Lithuania's migration department, stated that asylum requests made by illegal migrants who have crossed the border should be fully processed by November. Of the 2,800 migrants who have already lodged asylum requests, only 600 have seen their cases processed. Despite this, not a single migrant has been granted asylum so far. In all, 320 requests have been rejected and asylum procedures have been discontinued in the cases of another 325, the Lithuanian official emphasised.

Linas Jegelevicius is a Lithuanian journalist and editor in chief of *The Baltic Times*.

Thirty years after the fall

The legacy of the Soviet Union



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FRIEDRICH EBERT STIFTUNG
PRZEDSTAWICIELSTWO W POLSCE

In this section in co-operation with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (Warsaw office) we present a series of essays on the long-term consequences of the collapse of the Soviet Union. We publish these texts 30 years after the signing of the Belovezha Accords which brought the official end to the USSR and started a new reality for the millions of people living in the republics.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union is still going on and it is not peaceful

A conversation with Serhii Plokhy, Professor of Ukrainian History at Harvard University and director of the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute. Interviewer: Adam Reichardt

ADAM REICHARDT: This year we commemorate the 30-year anniversary of the fall of the Soviet Union, an event that brought an end to the Cold War as well as what Francis Fukuyama called "the end of history". Yet, this event also led to social, economic and political instability; nation and identity building; the creation of new states and divides; and conflicts and wars among neighbours, just to name a few of the key processes. But let's start maybe with the positives. When you look back over the past 30 years, after the collapse of the USSR, what would you say were the most important achievements or milestones throughout these past decades for the post-Soviet space?

SERHII PLOKHY: I will start with something that on the surface sounds controversial but in reality is not. The collapse of the Soviet Union signalled the "end of history" – but the history that I am talking about is not associated with the victory of liberal democracy. It was the victory of private property and market economics. With democracy we have a mixed record at best, but certainly the late 1980s and early 1990s really signalled the end for economies that were not based to one degree or another on the private property and market. Even China, which survived as a party run state and preserved a form of communist ideology, did so by adopting the principles of the market economy. So that is certainly one very clear turning point of global significance, as throughout most

of the 20th century that the economic model was often directly challenged. If we look at different countries, the degree of the state limitations to the principle of private property and control over the market is different, and the way it is controlled is different, yet the foundations are basically the same. We have to have some form of private non-state property and some form of market in order to survive and move ahead.

The fall of the USSR signalled another change of global significance as it brought an end to the history of European empires in the modern era. The disintegration of these modern empires started with the First World War and the Soviet Union was the last major European empire to fall. This process started even earlier if we include the gradual collapse of the Ottoman Empire which began in the 18th century, and which underlines even more the importance of the Soviet collapse as the last chapter in that part of history. It can of course be claimed that the empires did not disappear, per se, as empires can exist in a metaphorical sense. Yes, the core countries of these empires, which are now often great powers, did not disappear. However, it is clear that empire as a form of organisation of a multi-ethnic space with centralised control did not survive the 20th century. The strongest signal that this era receded in the past was made during the fall of the Soviet Union.

So we can look at the USSR as a continuation of the Russian Empire into the 20th century – in the sense that it had this central control and many different nations within its territory?

The most obvious continuity between these states is the shape of their borders on the map. If you compare the map of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, there is huge overlap. But there are also differences on the map and otherwise. These are related to the fact that many borders were adjusted to fall along ethnic lines. The Curzon Line in particular is present on today's map and certainly was there before 1991. This is really an indication that the Soviet Union was an empire that integrated and accumulated some elements of nationalism and recognised some of its claims in order to manage it. The last Soviet leaders, including Mikhail Gorbachev, till the very end did not see the collapse coming because they were absolutely convinced that the USSR had solved the nationality question. They believed that the level of accommodation given to each nationality was sufficient and that the multi-ethnic state would continue. Well, history proved that this whole line of thinking was wrong.

I mentioned in the beginning some of the processes that took place immediately after the declared end of the Soviet Union, some of which were quite negative. I wanted to ask from your perspective what can we say have been the most tragic consequences of the collapse?

The most tragic outcome of the fall of the Soviet Union is the violence and

Photo: Aleksandr Medvedev / Courtesy of Serhii Plokhy

wars, which continue till today. For a long period of time there existed a belief or mythology of a peaceful disintegration of the USSR. In my opinion, it was mostly the result of the surprise of the western leaders and publics that Eastern Europe was allowed to leave the Soviet bloc without conflict and that coloured the perception of what was really happening within the borders of the Soviet Union before and after the collapse. The exodus of Russian and other Slavic populations from non-Slavic republics was provoked by the fear of violence and it started even before the fall. There were major inter-ethnic clashes in Baku, as well as the larger Azeri and Armenian conflict. Meskhetian Turks had to flee Uzbekistan after the Fergana massacre of 1989. The fact that Gorbachev ordered troops onto the streets of Vilnius and the Baltic states was conveniently overlooked. Russia not having enough political will or the resources to

use force at the moment of disintegration was another reason why the whole thing was viewed as peaceful. In reality, Boris Yeltsin had already ordered troops to Chechnya in the autumn 1991. The problem was that those troops were actually immediately surrounded by Chechens. They were simply not able to fight and so the conflict was postponed by a few years. The subsequent two Chechen wars fit the paradigm of the violent fall of empires and certainly do not resemble peaceful disintegration. The frozen conflict in Moldova and the frozen conflicts in the Caucuses that deteriorate in the hot wars like the Russia invasion of Georgia and Azeri-Armenian war in Nagorno-Karabakh do not fit the model of the peaceful disintegration. The Russian aggression against Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea are basically a part of the long-term consequences of this collapse. So, the disintegration of the Soviet Union is still going on and it is not peaceful.

You mentioned these long, drawn out processes of conflicts and wars. Is this in line with historical precedence, if we look at the fall of other empires? Does this match up with the Ottoman Empire or the British Empire, for example? Can we see some historical similarities?

The Soviet Union is collapsing along ethno-national lines and borders are drawn and redrawn on their basis. From that point of view there is no doubt that it is dying the death of a classic empire. What is not present, or less obvious however, is a collapse of an imperial polity in the middle of a major war with other empires or great powers. This partially explains the myth of the peaceful disintegration of the USSR. The First World War spelled the end for Austria-Hungary and Ottoman empires. The Second World War set out the path for the disintegration of the British and French empires. Even before that, it put an end to the Japanese Empire in the Pacific and the projected German empire in Eastern Europe and parts of Russia. The USSR arguably lost the Cold War, but it never lost a military confrontation with the United States. That is because the fall of the Soviet empire took place in a different context, and that was the context of the nuclear age. This was an era of nuclear weapons, which made it difficult for any leader to believe that there could be another world war and that any country had good chances of surviving it.

We talked about this long process of the collapse, with the conflicts in the South Caucasus, Ukraine and Moldova. I am curious at what point can we say that this process is over? Will there be a point where we can say this collapse has finally ended?

Everything comes to an end at some point. If we continue this line of comparing the history of the Soviet collapse with the collapse of other empires, it is very clear that at some point the former metropolis will decide that the costs are too high to continue. The former imperial centre will then adjust according-

ly. Plus the new colonies can become over time more powerful than the former metropolis. The best known case of this change is of course the relationship between Britain and the United States. The tensions associated with the disintegration of the British Empire persisted on a psychological and cultural level all the way up until the Second World War, when the United States replaced the United Kingdom as the dominant power that controlled the world's waterways. At that point, resentment of the imperial nature of Britain became much less central to the American identity. So things change. Former colonies or peripheries become new centres in their own right, and this is what will happen in the post-Soviet space as well. It is difficult to say when exactly it will happen, but it will happen. Russia after all emerged as an empire after conquering the Tatar khanates that had ruled over it.

I would like now to shift focus a little bit and look specifically at Ukraine – one of the countries that you specialise in and which in August celebrated its 30 years of independence. Various events that unfolded soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union were crucial in forming the system that Ukraine has today, which has elements of a strong oligarchic presence, as well as an inherent system of corruption. I wanted to ask you from your perspective, what is the Soviet legacy there today?

One of the key international issues related to Ukraine in the last few months has been the controversy over Nord Stream 2. One of the major issues that comes with Nord Stream 2 is that Russia will be making less use of the Soviet infrastructure that goes through Ukraine. So we are still dealing with the issue of the Soviet legacy in very practical terms, with the physical pipeline that is there. This line goes to Europe and is at the centre of international debate. Overall, the pipe really can serve as a metaphor for Ukraine being tied to the Soviet legacy. In a sense, the pipe is to a great degree also responsible for the creation of the oligarchic class, whose money in one way or another has been associated with gas and oil since the start of the 1990s. A lot of corruption is also associated with that oil and gas. So, again, this is just one but maybe the most obvious example of the country being a hostage of Soviet legacy.

Another big issue associated with the Soviet legacy is certainly the creation of Ukraine in cultural terms as a Russo-Ukrainian condominium. The Second World War, the Holocaust and Stalin's policy of forced resettlement and state-sponsored ethnic cleansing made Ukraine less multi-ethnic than it was before the war. As a result, it was turned into a Russo-Ukrainian entity to a degree that it was never before, largely through the processes of industrialisation, labour force migration and so on. In the last decades of the Soviet Union, state policies were really promoting the ethnic, linguistic and cultural unity of Russia and Ukraine, with cultural unification being a major factor. All of these issues are now at the centre of the ongo-

ing Russian-Ukrainian war in Donbas. None of these issues can be understood just in the context of the last 30 years, there are deep roots to these processes.

Last but not least, I will return to the critical infrastructure associated with the Soviet Union in Ukraine. Overall, the war in Donbas reminds us of another part of the legacy of Soviet industrialisation. It is the pipe so to speak that stopped working a long time ago and by that I mean the coal mining industry that has not been profitable for decades and decades. This is the fate faced by many "rust belts" all over the world, which are often associated with social dislocations, drama and tragedy. However, Ukraine offers perhaps the only case in the world in which the rust belt goes down by producing not only social tensions but also facilitating a war, creating conditions for a foreign invasion. The social issues produced by the collapse of old infrastructure of the 19th century, which was exploited by the USSR and then passed on to an independent Ukraine are an important component of the war in Donbas.

Certainly there is this physical element that is very interesting to consider. You mentioned Russification during the Soviet period – this promotion of Russian unity with Ukraine. I am reminded of the recent essay from July that Vladimir Putin penned that was titled "On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians", where he made the argument that "modern Ukraine is entirely a product of the Soviet era … that it was shaped – for a significant part – on the lands of historical Russia". Is this still the attempt of the metropolis to maintain an imperial narrative? As a Ukrainian historian, what was your reaction when you read this essay?

Well, certainly there are two levels to this issue. One involves the actual policies conducted and the other relates to the arguments used to justify such actions. Russia historically, for centuries and centuries, linked the concept of national security or imperial expansion to the creation of "friendly" states on its periphery. No state was friendly enough not to be integrated or incorporated into the empire and eventually the next candidate for a friendly state would emerge. So there is no difference in that sense between Uzbekistan and Ukraine, for example. Yet, on another level there is a huge difference between these two countries and that is what Putin's article was mostly about. For a long period of time, especially in the 19th century, Ukrainians, Russians and Belarusians were viewed as parts of one big Russian nation. Due to this, people like Prince Vladimir or Bohdan Khmelnytsky were imagined as key figures in Russian history. Go to Kyiv today and there are monuments to these personalities, who are now perceived as Ukrainian national figures. But they were built in the 19th century by the Russian imperial authorities. They were built on the initiative of people who believed in one indivisible Russia.

What Putin says in fact is that he wants to go back to the pre-1917 model of the big Russian nation. He rejects the

Soviet experience and blames the Soviet nationality policies for actually creating today's divisions. Of course, this is just the result of Putin's rejection of the parts of history that do not fit his paradigm. The Soviet Union was trying to preserve the empire by accommodating the national movements that were already there. It is not that the Soviet Union appeared first and the Ukrainian national movement or the idea of Ukrainian independence came second. It was the other way around and anyone who has even a cursory knowledge of the history of the region understands that. Otherwise we would have to assume that the USSR was also responsible for the creation of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists.

Looking at the trend in Ukraine's political development since the Soviet collapse, we can see this back and forth between a more pro-western path versus a kind of stepping back, which can be characterised as more pro-Russian. That was probably the case up until Petro Poroshenko's victory after the Revolution of Dignity. But I was wondering how we should understand Volodymyr Zelenskyy's rise in this process. Zelenskyy seems to lie a little bit outside this East/West tug of war…

There are really two Ukraines – one before the war that started in 2014 and then another one that is currently being forged by the war in Donbas. If you look at the presidential elections before 2014, you see that Ukraine was almost divided down the middle. This division was very clearly defined in geographic terms between east and west Ukraine. The electoral border could move a little bit here and there and different presidents would be elected with the support of one of these sides. But the war changed that, as well as the entire political map of Ukraine. First of all, the loss of Crimea and a part of Donbas resulted in the absence of millions of voters who had a post-Soviet identity and would be oriented toward Russia. Another difference came with the fact that the rest of Ukraine that remained under Kyiv control became increasingly mobilised in an attempt to protect itself against Russian aggression. So both processes contributed to Ukrainian society and the electorate becoming much more homogeneous than they were before. The first sign that this was really happening came in 2014, when Petro Poroshenko won the presidency with an unprecedented majority. It was not clear whether this was the start of a new trend or not because there was of course the shock of war and many unusual things were happening at that time. The election of President Zelenskyy actually demonstrated that we are probably dealing with a new tendency in the country because he also gained an absolute majority. Whilst Poroshenko lost a little bit in the east, Zelenskyy lost a little bit in the west. But basically we have had both presidents since 2014 elected by an overwhelming majority of the electorate. That is the new reality. This increase in homogeneity also resulted in the fact that for the first time

in Ukraine's history since Soviet times a majority in the parliament belongs to one party. Because of that, accusations of authoritarianism are becoming a part of Ukrainian political vocabulary to a degree that they were not before. It is the new reality formed by the changes in Ukrainian geography and society that came with the war.

Certainly the war played a huge role in consolidating Ukrainian society and identity and pushed Ukraine even further away from the Soviet legacy and the imperial past…

Ukraine is being pushed away from Russia to a degree that was really unimaginable before 2014. And there is a real disconnect between what Vladimir Putin is saying in terms of Russian-Ukrainian unity and the impact that his actions have on Russian-Ukrainian relations.

In the context of our conversation about the consequences of the collapse of the Soviet Union, it seems that Belarus is a bit of an outlier in terms of developments. Yet, something has changed with the most recent forged election and the outbreak of mass protests and demonstrations. Is this also part of these processes that we have been talking about?

Belarus in many ways is catching up basically with the rest of the region. The original push there for a more nationalising state that started in 1991 and 1992 was stopped partially by the arrival of Alyaksandr Lukashenka. The refusal to nationalise led to Belarus becoming a kind of relic of the Soviet period. The others in the neighbourhood – Russia and Ukraine in particular – were progressing on the path of nationalisation. Ironically, Belarus was becoming more and more different to those republics by refusing to nationalise. What we see now especially in the last year or two is actually a major step in this nationalisation process, which has been triggered by two factors. The first factor is the rejection by the society of Lukashenka's authoritarian regime, which is associated with this "anti-national" position. Almost by default the pre-Soviet national flag of Belarus became the flag of the protesters brining along all the values, myths and other things associated with Belarusian national project. This is somewhat similar to the Ukrainian story and political importance of national symbols and elements if national culture. The Ukrainian language was quite marginal on the streets of Kyiv through the 1990s to early 2000s. However, Ukrainian would always be the language of the revolution, the opposition and Maidan. Now we are dealing with a form of Belarusian Maidan. Various Belarusian national values and symbols are closely associated with this movement. The second factor is Russia. Russia continues to be a very important factor in the whole post-Soviet space, influencing the processes that are taking place there. Russia's backing of the discredited Lukashenka regime has now created disillusionment in the circles of Belarusian opposition, who were oriented in one way or another to Russia. Now they have

little choice but to embrace the Belarusian identity. Again we will see in time whether current events turn out to be just a moment in history or this is the beginning of a trend, which will set that country onto the same track as the rest of the region.

For the last question I wanted to ask about terminology and approach to the region. It is now 30 years since the collapse of the Soviet Union and I wonder what you think about this expression "post-Soviet"? This is something I have been asking myself and others… Do you think this term is outdated? Is it time that we abandon this expression "post-Soviet"?

Like Soviet, post-Soviet is becoming – and this should be encouraged more and more – part of the vocabulary of historians. Post-Soviet and Soviet legacies are still with us, but they become less and less important with each passing day. Just look at the different former republics of the Soviet Union, with various groups embarking on very different tracks and directions. On the one hand, you have the Baltic states, which are a part of the European Union and NATO. They are successful democracies and, at this point, even more successful than some democracies of the former Eastern Bloc, including Poland and Hungary. Then you have mostly Authoritarian Central Asia and a mix bag in terms of democracy in the South Caucasus. Ukraine and Moldova are democratic, but have huge economic challenges. In many ways, all of these countries have a common Soviet legacy but have chosen different paths of development. Less and less things can be explained now by reference to the Soviet legacy alone. What we also see now is that pre-Soviet history is becoming more and more important in explaining what is happening in the region and the choices that are being made today. So I would not say that the term is illegitimate, but it loses a lot of legitimacy when it comes to explaining contemporary developments in the region.

Serhii Plokhy is the Mykhailo Hrushevsky Professor of Ukrainian History at Harvard University and the director of the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute. He is the author of numerous books, including The Last Empire, which received the Lionel Gelber Prize for the best book on international relations.

Adam Reichardt is the editor in chief of *New Eastern Europe*.

Legacies of the real and imagined Soviet Union 1991–2021

ALEXANDER LIBMAN AND ANASTASSIA OBYDENKOVA

Over the past 30 years, Soviet legacies have persisted in many former Soviet republics and it remains unclear under what conditions they will disappear. Furthermore, the various real and artificially created images of the Soviet Union seem to reinforce each other.

Thirty years have passed since the end of the Soviet Union in 1991. The majority of those born immediately after the end of the USSR have already completed their education, joined the labour force and started a family. As a result, it appears less and less appropriate to refer to countries like Armenia, Kazakhstan or Ukraine as "post-Soviet" countries. Does this mean, however, that we can forget about the Soviet past while trying to understand the political, economic, cultural and social realities in countries that were once part of the USSR? Overall, the legacy of the Soviet Union appears to be more durable and complex than one would expect.

The complexity of the Soviet legacy can probably be attributed to the fact that it involves two distinct entities which, while sharing the same name, have little to do with each other. One of these entities is the real Soviet Union not discussed in state propaganda, with its planned economy, omnipresent shortage of goods, dominance of informal networks, authoritarian regime and powerful security services. Soviet rule changed the lives of people across Eurasia and some of these changes seem to persist not only among the generations that directly experienced com-

munism. Indeed, these changes are also present among those born after the end of the USSR and this is sometimes not even realised by this group. Another entity is the imagined USSR, which remains for many the subject of nostalgic admiration. Interestingly, many of those born after 1991 or who were very young during the Soviet era express a longing for the communist period. This imagined USSR is associated with social justice, high-quality food, excellent public medical services, great scientific advances and friendly people ready to help each other. While this imagined Soviet Union never existed in reality, it remains an important part of official state history for many authoritarian regimes in Eurasia.

The real Soviet Union: ideology and opportunism

As of 2020, there were more than 12,700 "Soviet" streets in Russian cities, as well as more than 7,600 "Lenin" streets and 7,000 "October" streets. From this point of view, Soviet legacies are visible and present throughout many countries of the former Soviet Union. Only some states pursued a systematic "decommunisation" programme, which was most recently seen in Ukraine. Indeed, the Soviet Union introduced so many changes in its citizens' physical environment that many still exist 30 years later. Eurasian cities are still dominated by giant panel buildings housing hundreds of families, whilst Soviet architecture remains very visible from Minsk to Vladivostok. Key elements of modern Eurasian infrastructure (railroads and pipelines) were constructed during the Soviet era and, contrary to early expectations, trade ties between Eurasian countries did not dissipate over time. In some cases, new market-based social norms emerged that were deeply rooted in Soviet history. For instance, Russia became a magnet for labour migrants from Central Asia. This would hardly have been possible without the Soviet Union's effort to spread knowledge of the Russian language throughout its territory.

More importantly, the Soviet Union appears to have deeply influenced the behaviour and values of people across Eurasia. Whilst somewhat simplified, there are two main views on these behavioural legacies left by the USSR. On the one hand, some point to the fact that the Soviet Union made substantial efforts to indoctrinate people with the values of communism. Due to this, it would be logical to expect this indoctrination to last in the form of greater demands for redistribution and equality. Some evidence in favour of this argument certainly does exist. As of September this year, according to a survey by Levada Center, 62 per cent of Russians preferred redistribution and a planned economy over the free market (this is the highest reported number since 1992). It should be remembered, however, that genuine belief in Soviet ideology and communism hardly existed during the

period of stagnation that began under Brezhnev. On the other hand, another view regarding these legacies believes that the generations that lived through the Soviet Union were also forced to develop coping strategies in response to the intrusive and omnipresent state. These strategies included keeping as much distance from the state as possible, retreating into the private sphere (relying on informal networks and contacts) and cynical opportunism (paying lip service to Soviet ideology and rhetoric for career advancement).

These coping strategies seem to have a strong influence on how Eurasian citizens act even today, as well as on political developments in their respective countries. In our past research, we documented the legacy left by one particularly powerful Soviet institution – the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. We were able to show that regions of Russia that were home to more communist party members during the Brezhnev era were also more likely to develop authoritarian political practices and have corrupt and inefficient bureaucracies. This appears to be the result of unchecked opportunism, as post-Soviet bureaucracies saturated with former party members are more likely to maintain historical patterns of behaviour. This includes a willingness to adapt to the current political environment and leadership, with many regional leaders using these norms to consolidate their power. Despite this, the legacies of cynical opportunism are evident outside bureaucracy and can be seen in the ordinary lives of Eurasian citizens.

Attitudes that existed during Soviet rule appear to be more persistent than the physical manifestations and symbols of the communist past. Streets and cities can ultimately be renamed, new pipelines can be (and are) built and factories can be equipped with new machines. However, attitudes and behaviours survive and are inherited across generations. In addition to the family, schools and universities also play an important role in maintaining these outlooks. In most post-Soviet countries there was substantial continuity with regards to both teaching staff and their curriculums. Both the content of teaching and the practices students observe at schools may therefore contribute to the persistence of Soviet legacies. In Russia, teachers often play an important role in practices that are related to regime preservation, such as electoral manipulation.

The USSR as a rhetorical construct

Feelings of nostalgia with regards to the communist past have been rather strong in many post-Soviet countries. This is hardly surprising since many people associate the transition of the 1990s with significant loss in status and economic hardship. In Russia, the loss of the country's great power status was especially painful

and early positive attitudes towards the US very soon gave way to widespread anti-Americanism. Under these conditions, the Soviet past became an object of extensive mythology. Overall, this mythology had three sources. The first source was Soviet propaganda, which presented the USSR as a country of technological progress, equal wealth distribution and peaceful coexistence between its many peoples. Another source was the simple nostalgia of older generations, who looked to the Soviet Union as the country of their youth. By the 2000s, members of these generations remained in power in many post-Soviet countries. Finally, Soviet art, literature and especially cinema massively contributed to myth-making. In Russia, Soviet movies are still widely popular (far more than Hollywood or new Russian films) and play an important role in how people perceive the past.

The idealised image of the Soviet Union did not develop spontaneously within societies across Eurasia. Certainly, it plays an important role in the stabilisation of authoritarian regimes, including that of Vladimir Putin. Autocrats strategically borrow elements of Soviet rhetoric and symbols to legitimise their rule. It was no surprise, then, that one of the first steps that Putin took as president was to restore the old Soviet anthem (although with new lyrics) in Russia. President Vladimir Putin himself continues to capitalise on Soviet nostalgia and even called the collapse of the USSR "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century".

At the same time, post-Soviet leaders are very selective in what aspects of the Soviet past they refer to in line with contemporary policies. In Russia, for example, the authoritarian regime is by no means left-wing and has gradually dismantled the remaining elements of the Soviet social security system. Putin is subsequently more likely to refer to aspects of the Soviet past related to geopolitical greatness (and the greatest achievement of the USSR – victory in the Second World War) than redistribution or state planning. In contrast, Belarus's Alyaksandr Lukashenka preserved the state-led economy and large redistribution system. These aspects of the Soviet past have often been highlighted by Minsk as a means of contrasting the country with Russia and its liberal reforms.

Will the Soviet legacies disappear?

Over the last 30 years, Soviet legacies have persisted and it remains difficult to imagine under what conditions they will disappear. The main reason for the persistence of the Soviet legacies is that they are ultimately self-enforcing. For example, while there are very few people in the modern Russian bureaucracy who personally remember the Soviet past, today's civil servants are still socialised in line with old values and practices. These bureaucrats will subsequently pass on these

norms to newcomers in the future. Therefore, it seems that the legacies of the Soviet Union appear to reinforce each other.

Generational change, international (academic and/or youth) exchange programmes, and (to a lesser degree) tourism could all potentially weaken the influence of these legacies over time. Travelling abroad would give new generations the opportunity to witness and experience radically different social realities in terms of behaviour, attitudes and values. Some recent research from Russia has shown that the youngest generations differ substantially from their older counterparts when it comes to their values and behavioural attitudes. In general, they appear to closely resemble their western counterparts. From this point of view, Russia now appears to be a modernising (or even modern) society ruled by an archaic repressive regime unable to understand its citizens.However, whether the Russian (and, generally, the post-Soviet) youth is now indeed free from the Soviet legacies remains a matter of debate. In the political sphere, youth socialised in the Eurasian authoritarian regimes can often be even more loyal to the existing (inherently post-Soviet) system than people who have experienced the more pluralist era of the 1990s.

In contrast, major external shocks, such as a deep economic crisis, may further strengthen beliefs in an external enemy (be that the US or the European Union) attacking from the outside. Rhetoric related to the Second World War may subsequently be used by governments to encourage distrust of the West. However, the consequences of such potential changes remain uncertain. In the turmoil of the 1990s, the opposition Communist Party became particularly successful in Russia. Crisis can further reinforce communist nostalgia and strengthen the image of an external enemy. To some extent, this process is already happening in modern Russia.

The Soviet past still maintains a firm grip on the societies of most post-Soviet countries and this is particularly true in Russia. Whether this will change in the future, however, remains to be seen.

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Russia's young generation and the Soviet myth

VICTORIA ODISSONOVA

Young people in Russia today generally possess a complicated relationship with the Soviet past. Having no direct experience of the communist state, this group continues to inhabit an uncertain middle ground with regards to historical understandings. The government makes everything more confusing as it continues to offer no clear alternative with regards to national identity.

September 2021 was marked by the elections to the State Duma in Russia. Of the 14 parties on the ballot, only five actually overcame the minimum five per cent threshold to gain representation in parliament. The country's traditional "party of power" United Russia (UR) scored a record low of 49.82 per cent. Previously, the party had easily gained more than half of the votes and was for a long time the only party in a position to independently push through new bills in the Duma. Despite this recent shift, it does not seem like the situation has changed a lot in Russian politics. UR still achieved a greater number of votes than any other party and, consequently, the most seats in the Duma.

The party that came second after UR was the Communist Party, which won 18.93 per cent of the votes running on the slogan "Russia, labour, democracy, socialism". However, it should be remembered that this vote for the communists by no means represents a conscious desire to return to the Soviet Union and the idea of rebuilding socialism.

Nostalgia and myths

A key factor that explains this outcome is the "Smart Voting" strategy, created several years ago by Alexei Navalny and his team. This strategy is based on opinion polls and automatically chooses the most popular candidate according to the list who is not from UR. Due to this, the main goal of voting "in the Navalny way" is to knock out as many UR candidates from the Duma as possible and replace them with the second most popular party from any region that can compete. Neither the liberal party Yabloko, which has existed in Russia since the 1990s, nor the Liberal Democratic Party fit this role, as the popularity of Communist Party candidates remained comparatively high in many areas of the country. Overall, UR received 324 seats in the Duma while the communists gained 57. Certainly, it is impossible to call this an absolute victory for the Russian opposition.

On the other hand, voting for the communist party in modern Russia can be quite a natural choice for many voters. A kind of nostalgia for the past exists, especially among the older generation, who were born and lived during the Soviet period. Among the middle-aged generation (those in their 30s and 40s), the Soviet myth may also be appealing in the face of modern Russian reality.

The Soviet political myth died with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Despite this, its symbolic legacy continues to this day. The legacies of the political myth are embraced by a significant part of the population, who use it to understand the special meanings behind certain events that are comprehensible only to those who share this outlook. Overall, the myth is devoid of contradictions and is based on a simplified model of reality. In order to perceive the myth, you do not need to have special skills. The translation of a myth into reality is based on an appeal not to the human mind but to individual and collective emotions, which become "infected" with this myth. A political myth is useful for people facing societal insecurity, as well as manipulation of the population by the ruling elite.

The Soviet political myth died with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Yet, its symbolic legacy continues to this day.

In his essay titled "The Soviet political myth: causes of death, meaningful and symbolic legacy", Sergey Belov writes that the main reason the Soviet myth exists today is a "lack of an effective alternative". In fact, the last 30 years following the USSR's collapse have not offered any events that could become new national symbols for Russia. The Soviet period generally offers an excellent "cement" for identity, including the Great Patriotic War of 1941–45 and a collection of "firsts" in areas such as the space race. These are the two topics that the modern government is trying to build on to create a kind of "self-identity". However, the Kremlin

does not wish to go into all the details and circumstances of the Second World War and only embraces the symbolic meaning of this period.

Five years ago, my colleagues from the Russian opposition newspaper Novaya Gazeta and I created a special project dedicated to the 25th anniversary of the collapse of the USSR. Our project was called "The Last Emperors", which consisted of 25 stories of young people born in the same year as the Soviet Union's collapse. Twenty-five years is the period in which the previous generation is replaced and a new one comes of age. In the project, 25 photojournalists from all over the former Soviet space (including CIS countries) contributed stories about those born in 1991 in the context of a "place of power" close to each young person. These places included the Chernobyl reactor, the 101st kilometre boundary outside major Russian cities, the Turkmen cotton plantations, the fields of Kuban, and Akademgorodok in Novosibirsk. These places were known to every person who lived in the Soviet Union, and until today remain strong symbols of the USSR. As a result, it seemed interesting to us to ask what has happened to these places? What did people who were born and grew up outside its temporary boundaries think about a project like the Soviet Union? We asked the same questions to our project participants. We began with simple questions about dreams, happiness, fears and wishes. We then asked the young people to try to compare their own lives at the age of 25 with the lives of their parents at the same age. Participants were then finally asked whether or not they would have voted "yes" or "no" in the 1991 referendum concerning the preservation of the USSR.

The Kremlin does not wish to go into all the details and circumstances of the Second World War.

Having collected all of the answers, we then pieced together a picture of the first post-Soviet generation and their thoughts on such matters. Many of our participants even spoke Russian poorly, such as in the Baltic States or Central Asia. Despite this, they often repeated statements about the "friendship of peoples" when talking about the Soviet Union. Overall, many answered negatively to the question about the possibility of preserving the USSR in 1991. All 25 of these people, while no longer being Soviet people, still carry the "Soviet gene" or "Soviet myth" – a sign of a shared past.

The image of Stalin

Anastasia is 24 years old. She graduated from the Higher School of Economics several years ago. When I asked her to say five words she associated with the

Photo: Andrei Stepanov / Shutterstock

A Monument to Vladimir Lenin in Magadan. Soviet traces are very visible throughout Russia.

Soviet Union, she said "Stalin" and "war", among others. Anastasia was born six years after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Ksenia is 15 and is still at school. "Censorship" and "Lenin" were among the words she offered when asked about the USSR. She was born 15 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Despite their lack of direct experience with the Soviet period, the modern generation of Russians is still aware of various historical figures that the current authorities are trying to promote. There is a new kind of system of self-identification and recognition: Yuri Gagarin as the first man in space, and Lenin and Stalin as ideologists of the communist era.

In 2013, the Laboratory of Ethnic Sociology and Psychology at St Petersburg State University conducted a study that asked city residents about their perceptions of various historical Russian figures. In particular, about 16 per cent of respondents singled out Stalin and Lenin as those who gave them a sense of pride. Almost one

in six survey participants viewed Stalin in a positive light. Almost three quarters (73.9 per cent) of those who admired Stalin were between 18 to 29 years old and had at least a secondary education. About 20 per cent of people who admired the former Soviet leader were over 60 years old.

Today, the existence of these young Stalinists raises a lot of questions. Despite ambiguous attitudes to the role of Stalin in Russian history, more and more people either agree or completely agree that "Stalin was a great leader" (56 per cent, according to polls by the Levada Center in May 2021). Since 2016, this approval has doubled from 28 to 56 per cent. The survey was conducted in Russia among people over the age of 18. It is worth noting that a similar survey in Ukraine resulted in the exact opposite outcome. There, the attitude towards Stalin is rather indifferent or hostile.

In response to the Kremlin's current willingness to label people and organisations as "foreign agents", many people have made comparisons with the events of 1937 – a year which corresponds with a period when mass repressions, restrictions, and deportations began across the country. Many people then were also labelled as "unreliable citizens". Discussing the repressive measures of the Soviet government of the 1930s was not accepted and generally was quite dangerous.

According to Alexey Levinson, head of the Levada Center's department of socio-cultural studies, negative attitudes towards Stalin were strong in Russia after the collapse of the USSR. This time saw the leader's crimes become widely known during a period of transparency. Later, the ideas of perestroika and glasnost simply fell out of favour in the country. Russians have increasingly demanded a new "great leader" to create a sense of stability with regards to the country's past, present and future. Levinson believes that this attitude in modern Russian society reflects a symbolic identification with the Soviet Union which, as we know, is highly encouraged in the Putin era. The ruling elite continues to use the symbolism of the Soviet myth as a means of self-identification. It is also used to mobilise and unify citizens who were not offered an alternative identity after 1991.

Today, of course, it cannot be said that the Russian authorities mythologise the figure of Stalin. However, the Russian government continues to stray far from the European norm of equating the crimes of Nazism and communism. During the 2015 edition of Direct Line, an event in which Vladimir Putin talks with citizens and answers their questions, he stressed "the impossibility of putting Nazism and Stalinism on the same level". This was because the Nazis destroyed entire ethnic groups, whereas even with all the repressions, there was no such thing in the Soviet Union. In July, the president signed a law banning public comparisons between Stalin and Hitler, as well as the overall role of the USSR and Germany in the Second World War.

Memorials and memory

In every Russian town it is almost certain that you will find a street named after Lenin. In small towns, it is usually the largest and the main street. Thirty years after the fall of the Soviet Union, such names do not just remain in these settlements. Indeed, they continue to be a clear memorial of the Soviet Union for the modern generation. A Lenin statue is likely to stand in the main square of the city and is often at the centre of attention for locals, as it is usually located opposite various local administrative buildings and public institutions.

According to the Russian ministry of culture, 1,085 monuments to Vladimir Lenin have been erected in Russia. There are also more than 4,000 monuments in the country dedicated to the Great Patriotic War of 1941–45. As the "cement for identity", memorials of the Second World War remain a key means of reminding the younger generation again and again about the importance of the conflict for Russia. This is especially true as an increasing number of young people do not have grandparents who participated in the war. Instead, they may learn about their ancestors' experiences through the words of their parents. Today's schoolchildren are often very well informed about the main events of the Great Patriotic War. This is partly because of the need to take exams. However, it is also partly due to the annual Victory Day celebrations on May 9th, which take place in schools as well as on the main streets of cities.

Memorials of the Second World War are a means of reminding the young generation of the importance of the conflict for Russia.

Describing their attitude to monuments and memory (for example, about veterans), many young people note its circumstantial nature. For example, the Russian authorities usually remember to focus on veterans' issues and erect monuments closer to May 9th and other important dates. For example, a few months before the Duma elections, pensioners and veterans received about 110 additional euros to their basic pension (the average pension in Russia is about 230 euros, whereas war veterans with various bonuses can have up to 800).

While not so many people oppose building and maintaining monuments to the heroes of the Second World War, Stalin's role during this period is still actively debated. A few years ago, about 60 per cent of people approved of the idea of building monuments to Stalin. Around 77 per cent of young people between 18 and 24 years old were also in favour of this move. However, people aged between 25 and 34 were more actively opposed to any new monuments to Stalin (70 per cent). Last year, a monument to Stalin was unveiled in the small town of Bor, located on the other side of Nizhny Novgorod, Russia's fifth largest city. This three metre statue

was unveiled to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the country's victory over Nazi Germany. The monument was funded by private money from the first secretary of the local branch of the Communist Party. According to party representative Vladislav Egorov, "It is necessary to honour the memory of the head of state who led the country to victory in the Second World War. This is important from a historical point of view."

It also seems that the relative victory of the Communist Party in the recent Duma elections is important from a historical point of view. After all, if most of the candidates had not been supported by the opposition's "Smart Voting" strategy, the party's results would have been significantly lower. It seems that for the new generation, the communist past of Russia, represented by the modern Communist Party, is seen as the only alternative to a "democracy" that has effectively turned into the authoritarian rule of one person.

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Like in Russia, the Soviet victory over Nazi Germany is celebrated on May 9th each year in Belarus. The symbolism and imagery that accompanies the commemorations are often reminiscent of Soviet celebrations.

Photo from Minsk this year by: Tricky_Shark / Shutterstock

A Lenin Statue in Komsomolsk-na-Amure (Khabarovsk region). As of 2020, there were more than 12,700 "Soviet" streets in Russian cities, as well as more than 7,600 "Lenin" streets and 7,000 "October" streets.

Photo courtesy of Victoria Odissonova

Busts of Joseph Stalin and Karl Marx found along with rugs and other antiques at a market in Baku. Traces of the Soviet past are harder and harder to spot in Azerbaijan.

Photo: Marc C. Johnson / Shutterstock

The statue of Vladimir Lenin stands in front of the parliament building of Tiraspol – the self-declared capital city of the Moldovan break away republic of Transnistria. The Soviet legacy is celebrated strongly among the elite there.

Photo: Dan70cz /Shutterstock

Demonstrators destroy the monument of Vladimir Lenin in the centre of Kyiv during the Revolution of Dignity in December 2013. Ukraine has undergone a systematic "decommunisation" programme since then.

Photo: snig / Shutterstock

History never ends

ANDRII PORTNOV

People never know exactly how to change history. But they should try, and try hard. This is because history is very much unpredictable, it loves to surprise and is often ironic, sometimes in a bitter or even cruel way.

Forty years ago, when I was two, a young artist named Arthur Fredekind did something unusual in my native city of Dnipropetrovsk (modern Dnipro). Together with his colleague, he produced a couple of flyers with only one word and a question mark on them: Solidarni? It was a clear allusion to the Polish social and political movement that started in Gdańsk. Arthur scattered several flyers in the mailboxes of various blocks in the neighbourhood. It happened in a closed Soviet city under special KGB surveillance far away from the Polish border. Despite this, some newspapers from then socialist Poland were available. Even these served in some way as a window to the West… Pretty soon, Arthur was arrested and convicted on defamation charges.

At the same time, West Germany watched the Solidarity movement not with admiration, but rather with fear and disapproval. Leading politicians, journalists and writers spoke about "the Polish crisis", and complained about "a very Polish remoteness from reality" (eine sehr polnische Realitätsferne). They viewed Solidarity as a danger to Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik and peaceful relations with Moscow. From this perspective, Poland was denied full historical subjectivity or, at least, subordinated to "strategic relations" with the Soviet Union.

Prophecy

In 1985 Timothy Garton Ash ended his essay "The German Question" with an observation: "anyone can see that the road to an eventual European reunification

must lead via Germany… We must be serious about overcoming the division of Germany. But how?" Interestingly, the Russian dissident Andrei Amalrik already approached this issue from a different angle in 1969. In his provocative essay "Will the Soviet Union survive until 1984?", he amazingly foresaw the reunification of Germany and the inevitable "de-Sovietisation" of the socialist bloc. He even correctly diagnosed the increasing "passive dissatisfaction" of Soviet citizens with the regime and its decision to "rely on Great Russian nationalism". Amalrik predicted the collapse of the Soviet Union as a result of a war with China that he expected to break out "between 1980 and 1985".

As we know today, the Soviet Union deliberately engaged in another war, which happened in Afghanistan. This brutal and senseless war began in 1979 and lasted until 1989. Together with the Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe in 1986 and growing economic problems, the conflict contributed enormously to the USSR's loss of legitimacy. Societal dissatisfaction also became less and less passive.

How could Amalrik come so close to foreseeing the tragic events to come? Perhaps, among other things, he learned a lot from watching Soviet movies. Since the

late 1960s, a careful observer could see a vague sense of impasse in many new releases. It was not a coincidence that in Gennady Shpalikov's incredibly sad *A Long Happy Life* (1966), a central motive was the theatrical staging of *The Cherry Orchard*. It was Chekhov's screen adaptations that were particularly good in late-Soviet cinema. They generally seemed to correspond to the mood of hopelessness and deadlock pervading the air. It is no surprise then that the psychological drama Success (1984), starring the remarkable Leonid Filatov, revolves around a staging of Chekhov's *Seagull*. Filatov's character, an experimental theatre director, notes in the film that it is Chekhov who is "strikingly in tune with the present day". One might add that Chekhov, like no one else, subtly described the crisis present in Russian society on the eve of the 1905 revolution – a revolution that the playwright did not believe in and did not live to see.

Andrey Amalrik was also destined not to see most of his bold predictions about the dissolution of the Soviet Union come true. He died in a car accident in Spain in 1980. In 1985 (just one year before Amalrik believed that the USSR would experience a turning point) the newly appointed Secretary General Mikhail Gorbachev proclaimed that Soviet society would be reconstructed on the basis of "socialist values", a self-sustained and competitive economy, limited political pluralism and peaceful foreign politics. The word perestroika would soon become an internationally recognised term.

Sovereignty from whom?

For a lot of analysts, the so-called "nationalities problem" in the Soviet Union seemed to be non-existent. This ultimately proved to be more than just wishful thinking. Indeed, it seemed to resemble blindness. As early as April 1978, Soviet Georgia saw massive (and successful) protests in favour of preserving Georgian as the sole official language of the republic. In 1983, the former head of the KGB, Yuri Andropov, who replaced Leonid Brezhnev as leader of the Soviet state, famously confessed that "We barely know the society we live and work in." Apparently, Andropov was aware of the numerous failures and internal contradictions of the Soviet system. One of Andropov's unrealised ideas was a plan for a "new slicing up of the country", in particular, the division of Ukraine into two republics along the Dnipro river.

In December 1986, Kazakhstan experienced youth protests against an attempt to appoint an ethnic Russian with no ties to the republic as the first secretary of the local branch of the Communist Party. In August 1987, the three Baltic republics witnessed the first demonstrations that condemned the 1939 Molotov–Rib-

bentrop Pact. This agreement's secret protocol enabled the Soviet annexation of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. In February 1988, an anti-Armenian pogrom broke out in Sumgait in Azerbaijan. How could this have happened in a country that had proudly proclaimed to have solved the national question, and to have established "friendship among the people of all nations?"

Scholars of the collapse of the Soviet Union agree, as Serhii Plokhy put it, that it was the insistence of Ukrainian elites on the independence of their republic, as well as the inability of the Russian elite to offer an attractive alternative to complete domination by Moscow, that led to the dissolution of the "last European empire".

The Russian elite gathered around Boris Yeltsin played an important role in the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

One should not forget the important, if not decisive, role played by the Russian elite gathered around its first president, Boris Yeltsin, in the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The Supreme Council of the Russian Federation adopted its own Declaration of State Sovereignty before Ukraine on June 12th 1990. Who did this body declare sovereignty from? Ultimately, they were separating themselves from the Soviet centre that was, and still is, often equated with Russia itself. But the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) was one of the 15 Soviet, formally equal, republics. Certainly, it was one of the 15, but not exactly the same as the others. The RSFSR was a federation inside a federation and this crucial point explains the logic of the Chechen wars, as a significant section of the local elites claimed that Chechnya would like to enjoy the same level of independence as Estonia or Tajikistan.

As Yuri Slezkine put it, the Soviet Union could be described as a communal apartment with no proper room for Russia itself. One could add that the apartment itself was often treated and perceived as "just Russia".

Imaginable future

It is often forgotten that in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the miners of Donbas – the industrial region in eastern Ukraine – were among the most devoted protesters against central planning and centralised Soviet economic policies. In July 1989, up to 500,000 miners took part in protests whilst their leaders maintained rather good relations with the national movement and the leading Narodnyi Rukh group. Future economic prosperity was viewed as closely linked to Ukraine's state sovereignty and independence from the planned economy with its centre in Moscow.

The myth of immediate economic prosperity promoted by the national democrats appeared to be one of the principal traps of early post-Soviet development in Ukraine. Instead of "reaching the level of West Germany" (as the proponents of independence promised), the country experienced a full-scale backsliding of the economy and infrastructure, a gradual loss in population and a decline in national income. Another issue came as a result of the fact that an independent Ukraine emerged from a compromise made between the national democrats and a large part of the communist nomenklatura. This compromise made a complete change of elites impossible, but it contributed immensely to the peaceful nature of the country's post-Soviet transformation.

People never know exactly how to change history. However, they should try, and try hard. History is very much unpredictable, it loves to surprise and is often ironic in a bitter, even cruel way. But – and this is the good news – history never ends. It does not matter that some distinguished philosophers may want it to end.

Back in 1981, something like the European University Viadrina, with buildings on both the German and Polish sides of the Oder river, was simply unthinkable. Even when I came to Warsaw to do my second master's degree in 2001, it was unimaginable for me to become a professor of Ukrainian history at a German university with my office in Poland. But that is where I work now. I cannot stop thinking of a similar university that could one day appear on the Polish-Ukrainian border, which will be as easy to cross as our bridge in Frankfurt (Oder). In the spirit of making this future possible, it is clear that the word "solidarity" still has profound meaning today.

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A History of Europe Fraught in Contradictions

1989–2021

WOLFGANG EICHWEDE

The peaceful revolutions of 1989 created a new Europe. This Europe is threatened to be lost today – 30 years later. Within the European continent national intolerance and the use of violence are part of everyday life. Politics is becoming more and more intransparent. Are there chances for change? Anyone who subscribes to the values of the Enlightenment is always at the beginning.

On New Year's Eve 1989 I was standing on Wenceslas Square, Prague, in the midst of a crowd of hundreds of thousands. We were celebrating the country's recently won freedom and chanted "Václav Havel to the Hradčany" – as president. Only four years earlier, I had been arrested and expelled from the country due to my contacts with civil rights activists. Later, I was in Poland and kneeled at the grave of Jerzy Popiełuszko, the priest who had been murdered by members of the secret police in 1984. In 1988 and 1989 I lived for many months in perestroika Moscow and there, at the very centre of the Soviet empire, I witnessed an exhilarating freedom movement across all countries of the "Warsaw Pact". Already in December 1988 I had meetings in Riga and Tallinn, albeit in secret locations, with female activists fighting for their countries independence. Andrei Sakharov who only a short while ago had been vilified and exiled to Gorky (today renamed Nizhny Novgorod) challenged the communist's one-party-rule. In Poland, the campaigners for civil

liberties forced the authorities to agree to the Round Table talks, which led to the negotiated but lightning-quick abdication of the communist party. Adam Michnik later told me that normally the Archangel Gabriel would have climbed down from heaven and, his sword drawn, would have driven the Soviets out of Poland. However, a miracle occurred and the Soviets simply withdrew. The Polish elections in June 1989 were another important turning point. Only a few months later the Berlin Wall fell. My children, who were toddlers at the time, chiselled little pieces from it; I keep these to this day.

Words instead of bullets

Europe, all of Europe, changed after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Nations and societies that were previously considered powerless developed irresistible strength against regimes that had seemed invincible. Power relations were reversed. The drama of events was only surpassed by the self-discipline of the actors, who for their part were able to refer back to the political philosophy of the civil rights and dissident movements of the past decades. Personified in the names Larisa Bogoraz and Sergei Kovalev in Moscow, Lech Wałęsa and Solidarność in Poland, the philosophers Jan Patočka in Prague and Ágnes Heller in Budapest (to name just a few), by renouncing violence they worked out a strategy of "evolutionism" (Adam Michnik), of "anti-politics" (György Konrád), of the "power of the powerless" (Václav Havel) or of the "self-limiting revolution" (Jadwiga Stanizkis) that would write world history. The revolutionaries of 1989 had no guillotine. Their weapon was the word, not the bullet. In this respect, they added a civil, a peaceful option to the concept of revolution. France's great historian François Furet said that exactly 200 years after the French Revolution, the events in Central and Eastern Europe carried the message of the European Enlightenment further, other social scientists, however, spoke of a new figure of thought in history: a negotiated revolution. For me personally, the fact that I was an eyewitness to these developments and talked to many of those who shaped them is one of the most exciting experiences of my professional life.

Mikhail Gorbachev

Of course, looking back at the historical upheavals of these years, at their almost inexhaustible social creativity one cannot and must not lose sight of the change in the centre of the Soviet empire. Mikhail Gorbachev, who became the general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1985, wanted – in his

own words – to fundamentally modernise the rule of his communist party, even to "democratise" it, but he also wanted to hold on to the Soviet system. To achieve this it was necessary to give back freedom of speech and to create room for a society that had been bullied into silence for decades – hoping to use criticism "from below" to pressure the sclerotic and degenerate power apparatus into accepting the necessity of reform. This concept of socialism as a self-correcting system completely failed. While societies (and peoples) used their unexpected freedom at their own discretion and not according to the general secretary´s calculations Gorbachev remained trapped within the power structures. In desperation he accumulated more and more formal power which at the same time de facto slipped from his hands. The initiator of change became a hapless mediator between spheres that he could not hold together.

Gorbachev was more successful on the international stage. The initiative in world politics passed to Moscow. Gorbachev managed to stop the murderous arms race between the East and the West. It was not without good reason that he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1990 – 15 years after Andrei Sakharov and seven years after Lech Wałęsa. Above all, however, he realised that the peoples of Eastern Europe, who had been regarded as "satellites" of his country for almost half a century, were entitled to self-determination and to their own choices. As the Soviet Union withdrew its guarantee to back the communist regimes, their abdication was a foregone conclusion. Fifty years after the outbreak of the Second World War and the onset of foreign domination, Central Europe was able to decide its own fate. In Germany the Berlin Wall came down.

But more than that: The USSR itself – albeit a superpower armed to the teeth – fell apart. Gorbachev had no answers to the national question in his own empire. While his reform project was thwarted by the very power structures he wanted to rebuild, it set free movements that pursued different goals from his own. The prospects of freedom were more tempting than the promise of reforming socialism which obviously could not be reformed. Indeed, Gorbachev's claim to historical greatness lies not only in what he started, but more importantly in what he did not undertake to do. Although the bloody events in Tbilisi and Vilnius, for which the Soviet military was responsible, occurred during his term in office, Gorbachev ultimately did not violently oppose history when it passed over him.

A new world and the legacy of the old one

The Cold War was over. Already in 1990 the "Charter of Paris" laid the foundations for a new Europe that no longer would be divided in "East" and "West".

The collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991 resulted in the emergence of a multitude of new (and old) states that began a networking process with the idea of "One World" in mind. My generation who grew up in the Federal Republic under the conditions of the "Iron Curtain" and ignorance about the eastern half of the continent, had to rearrange their mindset.

The euphoria did not last. All too often politicians of the (old) West celebrated the achievement of freedom in the East as "their" victory. When we spoke of having won the race between the systems, we in the West were usurping the performance of those nations who, in a historically unique mixture of desire for freedom and self-discipline had risked everything. At the same time the parameters shifted. High costs had to be tackled, i.e. the costs resulting from the legacy of the old order and, added to this, the costs of building the new order. Millions of people with biographies however fractured, but who had worked hard throughout their lives broke under these conditions. Following 1991/92 everyday life was no longer dominated by ideals of freedom but rather by the economy. Shock therapies, the flooding of the market with (cheaper) western products and the careers of new oligarchs swamped the freedom surge. The bloody Balkan Wars revealed a terrifying potential for violence as well as the equally terrifying powerlessness of the new order.

Following 1991/92 everyday life was no longer dominated by ideals of freedom but rather by the economy.

The EU – and the nations in Eastern Europe

Nevertheless, NATO offered an American perspective to the Central European countries, and the EU a European one, i.e. goals that were either desirable or indispensable. They promised security, influence and a substantial amount of money. On the other hand, already soon after Poland was admitted to the EU, I met with concern in Warsaw that Brussels might compromise the country's newly gained sovereignty. This resulted in tensions between Europe and Polish national pride, which continue to this day. Given the economic preponderance of reunified Germany, historical resentment could easily be whipped up. This could happen even though neighbourhood links between the two countries today are closer than ever before. In more general terms: with its enlargement the European Union has lost its homogeneity and appeal. Through infighting and internal rivalry it forfeited much of its external attraction and influence. The curtailment of universal human and especially women´s rights and the partial abolition of the separation of powers in individual member states substantially endanger the European project, which

traces its origins back to the European Enlightenment. Poland and Hungary, i.e. those societies that were especially active in bringing about the changes in 1989, today put the brakes on a Europe of tolerance and openness. Their governments and supreme courts, which are dependent on their respective government, increasingly challenge the unified Europe. Even some of the European founding members in 1957, among them the Federal Republic after the unification of Germany, lost some of their unconditional orientation towards Europe. Nobody can predict whether the EU will regain its momentum.

Russia after 1991

Today's Russia poses no less of a problem. Although it is not a member of the European Union, it nevertheless is part of Europe. While Gorbachev's Soviet Union had made a significant contribution to peaceful change in the world, and even initiated this in "high politics", Putin's Russia today furthers power politics, even including military actions. In internal politics the president's monopoly is expanded, the instruments of repression against dissenters are tightened and the West is being redesigned as an ideological enemy. In foreign policy Putin is increasingly willing to use military means to assert Russia's interests. This policy is justified by the insinuation that the country is being encircled. In reality, however, Russia has to face the devastating record of Soviet politics. That it oppressed its neighbours over many decades makes it seem understandable that these countries want to place themselves under the protective shield of the US or of the West, the former opposite side. Who is entitled to negate the emphatic vote of the Central European nations? The enlargement of NATO was not a western strategy against Russia, but the will of peoples living there and a consequence of their bitter experiences with the collapsed Soviet Union and earlier with the Tsarist Empire. It is not for the first time in history that the costs of imperialism have to be paid at a later time.

Russia's two Chechen Wars in 1995 and 1999/2000 severely damaged Russia's image as a reforming country.

Russia's two Chechen Wars in 1995 and 1999/2000 which were both started by Boris Yeltsin, severely damaged Russia's image as a reforming country, and NATO's war against Serbia in 1999 called the Western alliance's claim to peaceful aspirations in question. Nevertheless, it seemed that the new Russia which emerged after Putin became president in 2000, while gradually establishing internal autocratic rule, might in its external relations come to an arrangement with the West: modernisation was the magic word.

The social protests in 2011 represented a turning point. Putin stabilised his regime with increasing repression, but above all he unleashed a Russian nationalism that was meant to neutralise potential opposition on the part of civil society. With success. The annexation of Crimea earned him high approval ratings. The covert war against Ukraine and the support of Alyaksandr Lukashenka's terror against his own people in Belarus reveal new as well as old imperial features in Russia's policy, which are incompatible with the "Charter of Paris". By making the use of force a "legitimate means" in Moscow's politics the principles of détente are nullified. The economically weak Russia triumphs as a military power and strengthens its international influence through the use of force. Are those not Soviet patterns? Bombardments of hospitals and the use of mercenary troops in Syria and the eastern Mediterranean bear witness to this. The hunt for Alexei Navalny and internal voices of opposition increase the risk of a presidential dictatorship. Thirty years after the peaceful revolution, how is this dismal situation to be dealt with?

The hunt for Alexei Navalny and internal voices of opposition increase the risk of a presidential dictatorship.

A review: the German policy of détente in historical perspective

Germany today claims that there is no alternative to a policy of dialogue in line with Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik half a century ago. Even then, it is said, the Soviet Union was not a democratic state, but détente contributed significantly to the change in Eastern Europe up to 1989. In 1972, just 30 years old, as a young scholar I fought enthusiastically for Willy Brandt's policies, but with arguments that were completely different from those that are interpreted into it today. Willy Brandt, an emigrant in the resistance against Hitler, now West German chancellor – that equalled liberation. His so-called "opening to the East" continued Konrad Adenauer´s policy of rapprochement with the West: for the first time we, the Germans, admitted our historical debt to the peoples of Poland and the Soviet Union and declared our willingness "to pay" for it.

Brandt´s foreign policy revolutionised German domestic politics – it liberated us and gave us a new perspective on our history. By not only dismantling enemy images within Germany but also signalling to the countries of the Warsaw Pact, that the Federal Republic no longer had any territorial claims and, being aware of German atrocities, was looking for an understanding, Brandt´s foreign policy gave Warsaw, Prague or Budapest more room to manoeuvre vis-à-vis Moscow. Even under the conditions of Soviet domination it eroded discipline within the

Eastern bloc. The Ostpolitik of the former détente provided a liberating stimulus both internally and externally. In conversations with Willy Brandt I realised that he always also paid attention to the struggle for civil rights and freedom within the communist-ruled countries. He always remembered his own resistance to the National Socialist dictatorship. Basic ideas of this dual strategy of change – increased co-operation between states as well as their internal opening up – were reflected in the Helsinki conference in 1975.

But I do not want idealise Brandt's politics. It was based on "hard facts" and on interests. Economically the West was vastly superior, and it was infinitely more attractive in terms of its way of life, whereas the East could not overcome its crises. Reforms that were imperative from an economic point of view were not risked because of the political hazards associated with them. The Prague Spring of 1968 was the writing on the wall. Therefore import of capital and technology from the opposing side was meant to compensate what the own system was unable to provide for. The West (especially the Federal Republic of Germany), conversely, was looking for new markets; détente therefore took place against the background of a tremendous imbalance of capabilities. While Willy Brandt forced post-war German thinking to open up, he at the same time demonstrated the superiority of western economic power. Nevertheless he remained convinced that the total renunciation of force in interstate relationships as well as in domestic relationships was imperative.

Détente in the 1980s – a commitment to the status quo

In the late 1970s and 80s politics shifted once again. The arms race accelerated, the USSR waged war in Afghanistan, in Europe civil rights movements questioned the sole right of representation claimed by their dictatorial governments; in Poland Solidarność formed itself as a democratic opposition movement. German politics, however, lost sight of the social dimension of détente as a strategy for change. What in the beginning was essentially conceived as a policy of opening up, was captured by the state and became a policy of leaps and lurches within the status quo. During these years I often visited Prague and Warsaw, Budapest and Moscow. What there emerged in intellectual and dissenting circles that searched for political alternatives, was not reflected in German foreign policy and had no impact on it. By unthinkingly holding on to the powers that be for a long time, it did not realise that these were already be-

> The fundamental change in Eastern Europe was not a result of western diplomacy, but East European societies themselves.

ing dismantled. As late as autumn 1988 a top Social Democratic delegation visiting Moscow refused to meet dissidents and independent thinkers of *perestroika* – because they had, after all, been invited by the Central Committee of the CPSU. No, fundamental change in Eastern Europe was not a result of western diplomacy, but an act of the East European societies themselves. Timothy Garton Ash was right in his criticism of German politics in particular.

Back to the present: what follows from this for today's politics?

The "dialogue" that is invoked over and over again cannot be the solution, even though it seems reasonable to continue to talk. Unconditional commitment to nonviolence is essential for every partnership. Russia's policy towards Ukraine is an existential issue for Europe. Anyone who uses force to assert their interests is not a "difficult partner", as diplomats like to put it, but challenges the partnership and ceases to be a partner. We cannot want that, but we must not ignore reality. With this in mind, North Stream 2 is a mistake.

As much as the EU achieved in its almost 65-year history, and continues to achieve – its internal discord is enormous, common European values are not only violated by individual governments, but openly denied. In the European Council (the heads of government) the interests of individual member states often dominate. As a teenager I was firmly convinced that one day I would live in a "European state". Loving French or Russian literature, European cities like Prague, Kraków or Venice I dreamt of Europe as a larger nation. Today this seems simply utopian. By its lack of transparency the Brussels bureaucracy, even though it works tirelessly, stirs up unease. How do we get out of this predicament?

The European Parliament provides an anchor of hope, but is too weak in its institutional structure. In the decades ahead it might therefore be an important mission to create a European general public out of the different societies – a European general public referring back to the values of Enlightenment. There still exist 27 different publics most of which are defined by their national frame of reference. What we need is a movement of citizens of all nations of this continent, who converge, take interest in events beyond their own frontiers and mutually support the struggle for self-determination. Take the example of the women in Poland: where could we witness powerful solidarity actions in Germany or in France? In 1968, during his very first visit to New York, Václav Havel demonstrated his solidarity with the ongoing revolution in American theatre. Did we join demonstrations in Warsaw last summer? As a historian scepticism is part of my profession. I realise that we have to think in long periods of time. But we can learn from the experi-

ences of Solidarność in Poland in the 1980s or of Charter 77 in Prague. When they began to fight for their rights without resorting to violence, no one would have given them a chance. In fact, they have rewritten history. Nowadays we see Europe in its entirety. We can learn a lot from the women in Belarus and from Memorial in Moscow while the European Solidarity Centre in Gdańsk is a source of ideas and a junction where open-minded people, independent critical thinkers meat to discuss and promote new political concepts.

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After the Soviet Union

A melancholy of unwanted experiences

BAKAR BEREKASHVILI

When *perestroika* emerged and the Soviet Union gradually collapsed, a lot of people fell prey to great illusions. Many believed that the disintegration of the Soviet Union would bring the "American Dream" to the desert of post-communism. Inspired by Hollywood movies, they saw capitalism as the road to becoming rich, powerful and independent. But what they missed is that not everyone is happy in Hollywood films.

On the eve of the post-Soviet era, there was a strong belief that everyone would be happy in the new capitalist "paradise". However, it is clear now that this paradise of capitalism does not and cannot exist. I was a child when communism failed in the Soviet Union and I remember the horrors of the new capitalist order that emerged after communist rule. Of course capitalism produces wealth, but it also has dramatic side effects, such as inequality, social injustice and poverty. In short, capitalism is not a paradise for the many but it certainly is for the few. This is something that was overlooked by most people, but not by the late Soviet nomenklatura and those behind *perestroika*, who gained materially and politically from the collapse of the Soviet Union. In this context, perestroika was rightly labelled as *katastroika* by the great Russian sociologist and philosopher Alexander Zinoviev. Indeed, it was this *katastroika* that created a new social order in which capitalism benefited the ruling class and challenged the livelihoods of the majority of people.

Disintegrated society

Unsurprisingly, post-Soviet capitalism also strengthened antagonistic social relations that encouraged a "war of all against all". This process created two archetypal stories in post-Soviet life: stories of those who survived and won, and stories of those who lost.

Since post-Soviet capitalism enforced this new social order, it also generated a morally degraded form of individuality. If observed closely, it is clear that one of the ugliest and probably cruellest achievements of the post-Soviet social order was the creation of a thoroughly dangerous form of freedom and individuality. This is something that has caused the ethical degeneration of many new societies in the post-Soviet space. But the question of freedom and individuality is generally the major problem of our epoch. Today, in a postmodern society we have a form of individuality that Zygmunt Bauman calls "privatised individuality", which has nothing to do with freedom. The post-Soviet form of individuality in a way echoes the form that is characteristic of a postmodern society. The social and cultural consequences of the post-Soviet transformation are most clear in the tyranny of this privatised individuality, which attacks the principles of collective interests and action.

The cruel reality of survival under post-Soviet capitalism has created a new class of arrogant individuals.

In this context, the post-Soviet form of individuality echoes the neoliberal theory of society, which supports the decline of the very idea of society as such. Moreover, this understanding of the private individual encourages people to sacrifice themselves to ignorance and narcissism. By taking this road, the post-Soviet individual is captured by an illusion of freedom. It is tragic that ignorance and narcissism are ultimately viewed by this model of private individuality as the key determinants of an individual's freedom. Hence, the more narcissistic you are, the freer you are; or the more ignorant you are, the more trust you will have in yourself.

The socio-economic dimension of this post-Soviet individuality only encourages another illusion. Namely, the belief that under capitalism everything is possible and that you will inevitably become rich and successful. This irrational belief works in a very simple way and is directly related to the neoliberal capitalist narrative. As a result, if you fail to reach happiness, you alone are responsible for it. So, if you are unhappy and/or unsuccessful you must blame yourself as you are the one who made the decisions that put you in that position. This cruel reality of survival under post-Soviet capitalism has created a new class of arrogant individuals who are undeservingly proud of themselves.

Democratic delusions

Expectations that the "American Dream" would appear in the post-Soviet world also had a political dimension. On the eve of the post-Soviet transition, it was also believed that there was a real chance for a genuinely democratic system. Here again, we see the naïve belief that the disintegration of the Soviet Union would naturally bring prosperity and democracy. What was forgotten here is that democracy is much like a flower, as it needs to be taken care of under specific conditions. Similarly, democracy also needs a strong immune system to survive. Democracy could never be the natural consequence of the fall of communism. Ironically, almost everything that has since happened has challenged this democratic vision.

This so-called "democratic transformation" turned out to cause nothing but troubles and drama. Of course, it is possible to list dozens of factors that threaten democratic perspectives in the post-Soviet realm. However, by investigating the nuances of such factors, we often overlook important issues. These issues are ignored either knowingly or unconsciously. Overall, I am speaking here about the problems of capitalism. Can democracy survive under capitalism? The renowned political theorist Harold Laski believed that the main principle of capitalism is not harmonious with the principle of democracy, as while capitalism seeks to create inequalities, democracy strives to abolish them. Laski's idea is generally useful when discussing the current crisis of democracy across the globe. However, it is especially helpful if we hope to understand the main reasons behind democratic stagnation in the post-Soviet world. A wonderful democratic future simply cannot exist in the neoliberal post-Soviet world, where the current political and societal climate creates many obstacles for democracy.

For example, in today's Georgia, inequality, poverty and social injustice continue to restrict Georgian democracy, which remains in constant crisis and uncertainty. Georgia's unsuccessful reform has largely been caused by the process of transition to neoliberal capitalism, as well as the immoralities encouraged by this transition. The country's thoroughly mixed democratic transition has only encouraged various democratic delusions. Due to this, democracy in Georgia is discussed using particular political and ideological narratives by both the local and western liberal classes. This approach says that Georgia will remain a major bastion of post-Soviet democracy only if it maintains its pro-western orientation and loyalty to free market capitalism. This is simply wrong and is something that I call the "ideological flagellation" of democracy. This is a condition under which

Inequality, poverty and social injustice continue to restrict Georgian democracy, which is in constant crisis.

democracy is hijacked by neoliberal ideologues, while the ideals of equality, welfare and socio-economic justice are marginalised and ignored as major factors in any democratic future.

A damaged transition (as was expected)

Generally speaking, the so-called post-Soviet dual transition (transition to capitalism and liberal democracy) caused problems for many post-Soviet societies and the legacy of this transition can still be felt today. This process was challenged by several issues, including historical-ideological and socio-cultural problems, right from the very beginning of the 1990s. At the same time, if we look at the socio-economic dimensions of this dual transition, it is clear that the society previously focused on industrial socialism would naturally find it difficult to conform to the mental structures of capitalist society. The transition to capitalism also meant that many ordinary people were deprived of social status. This includes the loss of economic rights and much of their cultural life. Unsurprisingly, many people subsequently lost their jobs and struggled to survive. In the end, capitalism in the post-Soviet world has only been a good thing for those who were able to establish control over the wealth once created by Soviet society.

Also, when we speak about the region's transition to a new democratic order, it is clear that this process has also failed. In the post-Soviet world we either have abnormal forms of democracy, such as neoliberal democracy, or authoritarian and the so-called hybrid political regimes. All of these forms of government have been captured by right-wing ideological narratives both in an economic and a cultural sense. This was partly caused by the ideological poverty and homogenisation faced by mainstream political parties that consolidated around a right-wing ideological agenda.

In Georgia the idea of a modern state vanished and was replaced by an older concept of rule.

The post-Soviet transition naturally caused many economic, cultural, social and political changes. Economically, the transition to capitalism revived certain archaic ideas. For example, in Georgia the idea of a modern state vanished and was replaced by an older concept of rule that has nothing to do with equality and social justice. As a result, state power was marginalised and a new economic class began to appear. This became the dominant practice in the post-Soviet world generally. In some states, it was the oligarchic class (in Russia for instance), while in others (like in Georgia) it was a quasi-oligarchic class of bankers who established control over the state and defined the political agenda

either independently or together with the established ruling class. Capitalism in the post-Soviet world has ultimately helped form what has often been described as a "disintegrated society". It also created the conscious and unconscious ideologisation of cultural life along capitalist lines. Finally, the post-Soviet epoch caused political anarchy and then reorganised the political order in line with money and big capital.

Human consequences

In Georgia, post-Soviet neoliberal capitalism has caused many human consequences, such as poverty and migration. Georgians, one of the richest and most flourishing nations of the Soviet Union, immediately experienced impoverishment after the collapse. Even after 30 years of transition, many in the country still struggle to overcome poverty issues. This is especially painful because Georgians experienced well-being and economic prosperity under industrial socialism. Today, according to official figures, 21.3 per cent of Georgians live under the absolute poverty line. Poverty in Georgia is a direct human consequence of political and economic decisions made in line with neoliberal strategies. Sadly, but not surprisingly, no Georgian government in the last 30 years has questioned neoliberal capitalism and its methods of organising the country's social and economic life.

Post-Soviet neoliberal capitalism has caused many human consequences, such as poverty and migration.

Migration is another human consequence of neoliberal capitalism in Georgia. Often disenchanted with this "new life", many Georgians have decided to move to other countries. Georgian citizens now constantly move abroad simply because they need to survive. Some migrate because they need to pay bank loans back in Georgia, whilst some move because they cannot find a job. Some also choose to change countries because they need to help their families in Georgia. A large percentage of Georgians live abroad, including in the West where the vast majority of them work in poor conditions. Georgian migrants do not have to deal with economic issues only. Indeed, nostalgia for their homeland and the challenges of socio-cultural adaptation to their host country are key problems as well.

Generally, immigration is a phenomenon of great complexity. The French-Algerian sociologist Abdelmalek Sayad considered immigration a process or phenomenon that includes many personal, cultural, social and spiritual factors. For Sayad, immigration means that one moves with traditions, feelings, religion, lifestyles and understandings. As a result, immigration creates many new difficulties and challenges in the life of an immigrant. In this context, Georgians usually feel

like strangers as it is difficult to quickly adapt to western culture and society. Even if someone wants to adapt to the western world, this requires certain skills, compromises and abilities that are not so easy to find. Georgian labour migrants who seek their fate in the West illustrate the dramatic human consequence of neoliberal capitalism in Georgia, which has forced Georgians to become poor workers abroad.

The story of Georgia is not an exceptionally unique story with regards to the post-Soviet neoliberal transition. Ultimately, there are similar stories in the vast majority of post-Soviet societies. The neoliberal transition has not only caused various consequences, but it is also an ongoing process. Considering this, intellectual and political resistance against this process is not only a right but also a moral obligation of citizens.

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Society vs the elite

Belarusian post-Soviet experiences

ANTON SAIFULLAYEU AND MAXIM RUST

After the collapse of the USSR, opposition groups in the republics found themselves unprepared for the new political and economic reality of independence. The anti-Soviet elites were expected to present a concrete socio-economic programme for the country. This was despite the fact that the group was deprived of earlier political or administrative experience. Its political capital was only limited to a vision of nation-building.

More than anything else, revolutions and social resistance movements in post-Soviet states show a large disconnect between authorities and society. They reflect differences in perceptions of reality as they are experienced by globalising societies and post-Soviet leaders. This disconnect can be explained by the fact that political elites, as well as some of the intellectual elite, are simply out of touch with a civil society that is now made up of a young generation of digital natives. Clearly, they do not understand this generation's cultural needs or the global technological change that has taken place. This has brought about a variety of new tools that are also useful for bringing political change. We can observe these processes today in countries such as Kazakhstan and Russia. We can also see similar trends in Ukraine and the Central Asian states. The authorities and representatives of the opposition keep their societies in a kind of a lethargy, or turn them into hostages of a bipolar language of political division.

Making a choice without a choice

Belarus is also an example of such a disconnect, which reached its peak in 2020. Before we look at events surrounding this divide, we would like to point out that our use of the term political elite in the Belarusian context is not limited to the ruling authorities. Our perspective is broader and thus this term refers to both the opposition and those who hold state power. Clearly, none of these groups have yet proved capable of presenting a social programme that would be acceptable to Belarusian society. How and why have these groups both failed? To answer this question, it is worth taking a closer look at the behaviour of the Belarusian political and intellectual elite throughout the post-Soviet transformation.

The Soviet Union was an empire that collapsed in 1991 with all the logical consequences of such an event. However, the empire was already experiencing a serious crisis by the 1980s. At that time, the state's peripheral areas were increasingly home to "anti-Soviet elites". These groups were focused on national rights and this was justified at that time. In a highly centralised Soviet state, nationalism was the only way to consolidate opposition in the peripheral republics.

In line with the social science theory of orientalism, this moment should have marked the beginning of the republics' anti-colonial struggle. Yet, in the USSR things did not turn out this way. Instead, these local national elites were still in the early stages of formation. It would still be several years before such groups would play an important political role following the empire's collapse. This was also the case in Belarus, where this process was halted by the fall of the Soviet Union.

The anti-colonial movement was necessary for the republics to get out of the centralised Soviet empire. Opposition groups needed this time of consolidation to delegitimise their local centres of power. In Belarus that was the case, just like in the other republics. The initial process of institutionalisation of the anti-Soviet national elites was interrupted by the disappearance of the empire. The Belarusian Popular Front, which emerged in the late 1980s, united the national intelligentsia, which was just beginning to accumulate symbolic capital for future political acceptance by society. That is why in 1991 these unconsolidated elites found themselves unprepared for the new political and economic reality of independence. Despite the fact that they were deprived of earlier political or administrative experience, they were expected to present a concrete socio-economic programme for the country. Their political capital however was limited to a vision of nation-building.

On the other side of the political spectrum were representatives of the young and part of the old Soviet nomenklatura. Some of them had already been in power before, while others aspired to such positions. For this group, the collapse of the Soviet Union did not mean political marginalisation. On the contrary, by nation-

alising various assets after independence they were able to keep their pre-1991 positions to a large degree. The political and administrative experience, know-how and connections of its members gave this group an upper hand over the unconsolidated national elite.

The third, and most important, political player in the early stage of the post-Soviet period was the society. At that time, its position can be described as "having to make a choice without a choice". Putting aside the fact that most post-Soviet societies (Belarus was no exception) had no prior experience of free media, free elections or political programmes, it is worth noting the various mental and psychological issues faced by the population during the uncertainty of the 1990s. Due to this, it is not surprising that many people who had lost their entire capital and whose life experiences were strongly shaped by the previous system of values and symbols, were influenced by the language and narratives prepared for them by political candidates. Overall, the only thing the society could do is listen to what the politicians were saying.

Intelligentsia versus the people's man

The political strategies of the post-Soviet elites were primarily focused on language and image. As such they were geared towards voters who had earlier experienced protectionism of the Soviet state which was much more based on materialism than ideals, including in their private lives. Thus, Lukashenka's coming to power in 1994 can be explained in a rational way. His promise of immediate stability was widely accepted by Belarusian society, especially in small towns and rural areas. Specifically, the programme of immediate stability was seen as a more attractive offer than the vision of a national enlightened western-style future. At that time, the division between post-Soviet and anti-Soviet was still visible and very clear. However, with time the anti-Soviet elite also became a thoroughly post-Soviet actor, just as much as the old ruling class that increasingly turned its back on the idea of national independence.

The image of the brave intelligentsia vs the (post)Soviet man of the people was strengthened by the authorities after 1994.

The anti-colonial image of the brave intelligentsia vs the (post)Soviet man of the people was diligently strengthened by the authorities after 1994 and shaped the Belarusian political discourse for a long time. However, it was not only the "work" of the authorities. In the post-Soviet context, the anti-colonial nationalism, which served as an ideological foundation for the not yet fully politicised post-Soviet

Photo: Troshina / Shutterstock

Anti-Lukashenka demonstration in Minsk in September 2020.

intelligentsia, was a natural reaction. Yet, in the context of the fast disappearance of the empire, it had little chance to succeed.

This setup has been characteristic of much of the political competition in Belarus since 1994. Things changed somewhat during the campaign in 2006. Specifically, this was the first election in which Belarusian millennials were able to vote. At that moment, however, there was still no generational conflict within society or mass confrontations with the authorities. Instead, this election showed the clear disconnect between the power elite and society and a relative political consolidation of the opposition, which was then acting as the only alternative to the authorities. In 2006 the official narrative of a conflict between "treacherous westerners" (the opposition) and "a strong kolkhoz manager" (Lukashenka) began to lose its political charm and became part of the closed ideological concept used by the elite. This change occurred as a result of rapid technological development, as well as the various "colour revolutions" in other post-Soviet states. These developments made it increasingly more difficult for the authorities to censor the socio-economic and cultural discourse of the young generation. This in turn led to a greater ideological divide between the elite and a changing society. Even though

the Belarusian counter-elite was experiencing its heyday of consolidation, for the population as a whole, however, the narrative built on the dichotomy of "national democracy" versus "bloody tyrant" became less convincing.

As a result, 2006 was an important year not only for Belarus's political history. Indeed, it was also a turning point for its social development. It was the first moment in the country's post-Soviet history when society started to better understand the existential challenges of the outside world than its internal political players. At this time, both the authorities and the counter-elite became tangled in the pro-Soviet versus anti-Soviet rivalry paradigm. Society subsequently chose an apolitical position, which allowed it to distance itself from both sides and which was characteristic for the generation born or coming of age in the post-Soviet period.

Whilst the counter-elite attempted to strengthen its internal unity in 2002, it did not achieve much success in this regard. The Belarusian post-Soviet experiment brought on an actual destruction and near complete marginalisation of the counter-elite by the authorities. From that period on the public sphere was completely controlled by state structures, which in turn determined the development of Belarusian society in the decade to come.

The next two presidential elections took place in 2010 and 2015. However, they did not generate much interest and went almost unnoticed. The ruling elite, centred around Lukashenka, strengthened its grip on power by repressing any expression of discontent and limiting freedom of expression. The counter-elite did not have any real impact on the country's social and economic life, as its existence was now dependent on Minsk's tactic of appeasing the West by showing that there was some political pluralism in the country. This meant that opposition representatives got completely cut off from real life, which only damaged their ability to run effective national political campaigns. This cast-like structure of the counter-elite was to the authorities' advantage and lasted until 2020.

In-between zone

The society's response to this change was to enter a kind of in-between zone. The goal was to avoid engagement with either side. This disconnect to a large degree worked to the advantage of the authorities, who continued to control elections by heavily exploiting the image of Lukashenka as a guarantor of stability. Only the repressive tactics that they used to eliminate political rivals hampered their ability to further strengthen their position.

As mentioned above, both the authorities and the opposition operated in their own worlds, while society found its own niche. This feature of the Belarusian real-

ity is also characteristic of many post-Soviet societies. Those who are in power stay there thanks to the logic of "if not us, then who?" At the same time, the opposition turns from being anti-Soviet into simply anti-government. This disconnect between the society and the elites became visible only in 2020.

Yet, a few positive changes took place in Belarus prior to 2020. This includes the liberalisation of Belarus's foreign policy towards the West, which Lukashenka allowed after the 2014 revolution in Ukraine. The potential regional consequences of Ukraine's Maidan were likely his biggest nightmare. Equally important was the policy of soft "Belarusianisation", which the authorities introduced out of fear of Russian influence. Another example was the mass protests against the so-called "parasite law" which were organised throughout the country in 2017. In early 2020 the authorities also did not stop demonstrations in Minsk that were directed against the strengthening of Belarus's integration with Russia.

The biggest breakthrough and a new window of opportunity for the counter-elite came with the outbreak of COVID-19. The old opposition regained hope for quick social mobilisation as it became clear that the authorities were simply ignoring this public health issue. At that moment, society was still keeping its distance from both sides. Also, the social mobilisation process that took place then and which was independent of the activities of political players should be regarded as a natural process than something extraordinary. The society, which became "left alone" in its fight with the coronavirus pandemic, was consolidating not because it wanted to manifest its discontent politically, but because of the disconnect that existed between the people, the authorities and the counter-elite.

The breakthrough and a new window of opportunity for the counterelite came with the outbreak of COVID-19.

As a result, no matter what name we use to describe the social mobilisation in Belarus in 2020 – be it a "revolution" or "social uprising" – these protests should first and foremost be viewed as the Belarusian society mobilising on its own. This process is a consequence of the young generation's breaking free from the earlier cemented political discourse in Belarus. Indeed, for the first time in Belarus's post-Soviet history people realised their autonomy and the society became an independent political actor separate from both the authorities and anti-Lukashenka opposition. Initially, this protest mobilisation was used by the new political players.

However, can we really say that Siarhei Tsikhanouski and Viktar Babaryka, who ran against Lukashenka in 2020, were indeed representatives of a new kind of Belarusian politician? If we look more closely, we can see that Tsikhanouski adopted the image of an independent blogger with revolutionary spirit, whilst Babaryka

took on the role of a "smart and experienced manager". Interestingly, these personas offer a mirror reflection of Lukashenka in the mid-1990s. Back then, Belarus's current president presented himself as a young counter-revolutionary, a people's man who wanted to bring an end to corruption and chaos. The similarity between the image of Lukashenka in the 1990s (a strong kolkhoz manager) and the 21st century image of Babaryka (a smart manager) is a perfect illustration of the generational evolution of Belarus's post-Soviet society.

Not surprisingly, Lukashenka quickly recognised Tsikhanouski and Babaryka's popularity and jailed them as a preventative measure. The society continued to protest against these and other decisions made by the authorities and by doing so proved its ability to speak up. Tsikhanouski and Babaryka managed to encourage a new social energy that was no longer based on political or ideological preferences, thereby showing that the people were no longer alone in their desires to have their voices heard as loudly as possible. Tsikhanouski and Babaryka managed to spark a large social reaction not because of their political or ideological appeal, but because they were stressing out that the society is not alone in its attempt to speak up.

Again left alone

The events of 2020 also showed a large generational difference within Belarusian society. This gap is not only measured in time but also in outlooks and ideas. The truth is that while the authorities and the democratic opposition operated in two parallel worlds over the last decade, a new generation came to be and showed its independent power in 2020. This more open-minded social group's world can be found largely in the digital sphere. In a sense, this group is a product of internal autocracy and external globalisation. Outside factors especially helped the Belarusian people free themselves from both the socially conservative authorities and the equally unrealistic opposition. This fact was not yet recognised by either side. In our view, it is this generation that could possibly bring the biggest social and political change to the country.

This challenge yet remains for the new opposition leaders who emerged in 2020. Today, they are mostly regarded as alternative centres of power. The question that we would like to ask here is whether they will pursue long-term change or fall into the trap of the bipolar division of Belarus's political life? For the moment, they are naturally very limited in their actions and can only operate from abroad, which is completely understandable and justified. However, it is already quite evident that society is again getting tired with politics and politicians. We can see its increasing disappointment with them and their actions. This is the result of the fact that

the new political actors are also losing touch with the changing social dynamics. Unfulfilled promises and increased repressions are also pushing society away from politics. Representatives of the opposition who were forced to flee abroad had no choice but to start co-operating with the old opposition. This may lead them to a dead end and marks a return to political tactics from 30 years ago.

Also, many of the "more modern" leaders of the opposition ended up in prison. Those who are still free are joining the fight against the regime and thereby only deepening the disconnect that exists between the two elite groups and society. This could result in a permanent loss of the social capital that was gained over the last year. As no political system tolerates a vacuum, it is highly likely that a more controlled systemic opposition will emerge after the constitutional referendum planned for next year.

Can we say that since 2020 Belarus has undergone a special post-Soviet experience? It was not that long ago that western discourse on Belarus stressed the passivity of its society as a feature of its post-Soviet identity. However, the disconnect that this text discusses and which came to light in 2020 shows that these old stereotypes are no longer valid. Despite this, it is clear that Belarus's political scene is returning to its old tricks following a year of protests. This is mainly but not only the work of Lukashenka's repressive regime. This dichotomy is also the result of the behaviour and decisions of the new and old counter-elite. As a result, we can talk again about a political scene that is based on the outdated post-Soviet division, with "courageous pro-western supporters of democracy" facing off against a "stable, yet bloody dictator". The society has yet again been left alone in this remote corner of Europe, with no alternative on the horizon.

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

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EASTERN CAFÉ

The pain of Gongadze's unsolved murder

CLÉMENCE LAVIALLE AND IWONA REICHARDT

The murder of Gongadze: 20 years of searching for the truth. A documentary film produced by the Public Interest Journalism Lab.

The murder of Gongadze: 20 years of searching for the truth is a 50-minute documentary created by the Ukrainian journalists Nataliya Gumenyuk, Maxim Kamenev and Anna Tsyhyma. It was released in English for World Press Freedom Day on May 2nd 2021, while the Ukrainian-language premiere took place in September 2020. This release marked the 20th anniversary of the gruesome murder of Georgian-born Ukrainian journalist Georgiy Gongadze. This event shocked Ukrainian society at the time and is the main topic of the film. The documentary is the work of a Ukrainian NGO called the Public Interest Journalism Lab. The work's English translation was supported by European Union funds and is now available on the organisation's YouTube channel.

Household name

The film discusses the essential facts surrounding Georgiy Gongadze's murder on September 16th 2000, as well as the subsequent investigation. To put it bluntly, two months after his disappearance in September, Gongadze's headless corpse was discovered near the provincial town of Tarashcha in Kyiv

Oblast. At the time of his death, the talented reporter and co-founder of Ukrainska Pravda was only 31 years old. Prior to this, he had worked for many years in the world of Ukrainian television, where he became known for his uncompromising frankness.

It is no wonder that his reporting and uncomfortable questions bothered the authorities. "Look at that bastard, that fucking Georgian, that Georgian", then-President Leonid Kuchma allegedly said about Gongadze in audio recordings made public after the murder and heard during the documentary. We also hear Kuchma say that "Someone must be sponsoring him." Until today, the role of Ukraine's former president in the journalist's murder remains unexplained.

Despite his young age, Gongadze was a household name in Ukraine. Outrage was immediate and widespread once the news about his brutal murder reached the public. Protests were organised in Kyiv and lasted for months. Calling for the resignation of Kuchma and the key members of his cabinet, this movement became known as "Ukraine without Kuchma". This development is widely regarded as one of the main factors that contributed to the outbreak of the 2004 Orange Revolution.

Twenty years on, however, the investigation into Gongadze's case has brought no concrete results. Instead, it has been plagued by intrigue, suicide and blackmail. Even more disturbingly, the film and other sources have made it clear that Gongadze was neither the first nor the last journalist in Ukraine to fall victim to corrupt politicians, businessmen and criminal organisations. His fate was shared by Oles Buzina (2015), Pavel Sheremet (2016), and Katerina Handziuk (2018). They all sought truth and asked uncomfortable questions. At the same time the country's oligarchic system has continued to reward those with personal connections to the world of business and politics.

Twenty years on, the investigation into Gongadze's case has brought no concrete results.

That is why we should praise those behind the film. By returning to Gongadze's murder, they have not only helped draw Ukrainian and international attention to the unsolved case. Indeed, they have also managed to ask questions regarding the consequences of this tragic event for Ukrainian politics and media. These topics are discussed in various stories told to the camera by Gongadze's friends, fellow journalists and family members. Put together, they make a very poignant picture.

Evidently, as we can gather from the voices in the film, Gongadze's murder has left a deep mark on his fellow jour-

nalists. It took place at a moment when freedom of speech was gaining greater importance within a more politically emancipated Ukrainian society. New media outlets were constantly being set up and a whole generation of journalists was experiencing the most formative years of their professional development. Yulia Mostova, the editor in chief of the now defunct *Dzerkalo Tyzhnia*, talked about this situation in the film: "Gia Gangadze's death was our generation's burden. It's our pain. We've remembered about him for a long time. We did not manage to end this case. I think merely because we bumped into a wall made of adhesions between law enforcers and special forces in Ukraine and Russia and where the denominator was. The SBU, the FSB, the interior ministry, the bandits, the common denominator was the Soviet KGB."

An examination of freedom of speech

This and other testimonies that you can hear in the film hint at questions about whether or not Ukraine has even built a proper democracy. This is especially true with regards to freedom of speech. For those who knew Gongadze, it is quite clear that attempts to reform the country's politics have come at a high price, with his murder marking a substantial step back on the path to democratisation. This is also true regarding the killings of other journalists, who like Gongadze, asked difficult and uncomfortable questions of the authorities.

We wrote the review of this film not only because of the release of its English version this year. Certainly, it is also important to remember that October 7th 2021 marks the 15th anniversary of the brutal murder of Anna Politkovskaya, a prominent journalist at the Russian newspaper *Novaya Gazeta*. The Norwegian Nobel Committee decided to award this year's Nobel Peace Prize to two journalists – Maria Ressa and Dmitry Muratov. The committee explained that both Muratov and Ressa were chosen as representatives of all journalists who stand up for freedom of expression in a world in which democracy and press freedom are increasingly under pressure. In our view, the late Georgiy Gongadze was truly one of these journalists. NEE

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Deconstruction on the (semi)periphery

MICHAŁ PRZEPERSKI

Postkolonialne historiografie. Casus jednego średniowiecza (*Postcolonial historiographies. The case of a certain medieval period*). By: Anton Saifullayeu. Publisher: Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR, Warsaw, 2020.

Anton Saifullayeu's book is truly one of a kind on the Polish market. Authors who are able to provide Polish readers with such high-level intellectual analysis regarding the fundamental problems concerning Eastern Europe are truly scarce in numbers. The book discusses Belarusian historiography related to the Middle Ages and tells an engaging story about what Belarusian, as well as Russian and Soviet, historians wrote about the lands of present-day Belarus. First of all, it offers a very detailed, in-depth analysis of academic texts by discussing their findings and situating them in wider discourse. The work also reveals various continuities and discontinuities within these texts. It is certainly a book that deserves respect for its intellectual rigour.

The long rule of the Russian and Soviet empires serves as one important context for the story of the book. Another is the "birth" of post-Soviet Eastern Europe. This is often contrasted with post-communist Central Europe, a concept often used by local states to stress their break with the communist past. This process provides the author with a chance to acknowledge the circumstances in which Belarusian nation-building took place and its impact on historiography related to the country. A deep analysis

of texts that present visions and interpretations of the past are subsequently used by the author as a pretext for a wider discussion of civilisational perspectives, the conditions in which society functions and how images of the past are being created and expressed today.

A strong dose of theory

Postcolonial historiographies. The case of a certain medieval period is based on a doctoral dissertation supervised by Professor Jerzy Pysiak, a medievalist at the University of Warsaw. Saifullayeu undoubtedly has a brilliant grasp of the empirical material. It is worth emphasising that he has learnt about the historiography of Belarus not only as a researcher but also as a young Belarusian citizen. He was subsequently taught various official narratives about the extensive history of the Belarusian lands during the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century. It is to the author's credit that he is simultaneously able to distance himself from his own personal experiences but also use them in his analysis. In the course of his writing, he unravels the narratives' details with surgeon-like precision. There is no doubt that the author knows what he is talking about.

Writing about postcolonial historiography Saifullayeu provides us with a considerable dose of theory and this is not surprising in such a work. From the very beginning, we get an overview of the concept of post-colonialism. This is based on discussions of mostly English and French language classics of the genre, as well as various authors from Central and Eastern Europe. Authors discussed subsequently include Paul Ricoeur and Frank Ankersmit, as well as Mykola Riabchuk and Dorota Kołodziejczyk. This, of course, showcases the author's extensive knowledge and justifies his consistently applied post-structuralist approach. This allows him to expose hidden layers to the story, as well as the structures responsible for its details. Such discoveries are contrasted with the intended goals related to the production of historical narration.

To a certain extent, Saifullayeu's work resembles Adam Leszczyński's research on the policy of growth in peripheral countries (Adam Leszczyński, *Skok w nowoczesność. Polityka wzrostu w krajach peryferyjnych 1943–1980*, Warszawa 2013). Most of all, one can spot the similarity of their adopted perspectives. Leszczyński also positioned his work as a story told by a historian from a semi-peripheral country about other semi-peripheral and peripheral countries whilst using the methods of a researcher from the centre. What is most important, however, is not so much the method employed but the book's culture of argument and reasoning. By this I mean the work's structure, language

and the positioning of the author himself. After all, Saifullayeu is both from "here" (that is from Central and Eastern Europe) and from "there" (from the Anglo-Saxon tradition of poststructuralist research). It is hard not to notice that this position is quite peculiar. It is indeed an interesting position but also one that potentially results in various inconsistencies.

Risky interpretations

Overall, Saifullayeu's argument is indeed consistent throughout the work. Traditionally understood Ranke-style historiography is directly challenged in *Postcolonial Narratives*. This is at least true in the sense that when subjected to enormous pressure from the theory applied by the author, such a traditional outlook loses its value. To simplify Saifullayeu's argument, works that appear essentialist and anachronistic are often in fact influenced by changing meanings, rather than lasting values. If questioning the domination of the classical narrative, rooted in the tradition of German Romanticism, allows room for (self) analysis, then I am in favour. But then the question arises: what comes next?

Despite its interesting approach, in many sections of the book it is simply difficult to follow the overall argument. Indeed, the author's assertions effectively grow out of proportion in too many parts of the work. This is especially true when he argues that the connection between fact and power is a manifestation of "postcolonial male emancipation of the lust for power".

It is hard not to get the impression that the author is making, to put it mildly, quite a risky interpretation here. Unfortunately, there are other parts in this book that I would also call "overanalysed". I get the impression that the author wants to take his argument further than is reasonably possible, since the layers of discourse he ultimately finds himself in seem to be very remotely connected not only to the historiography but to more general phenomena like nation-building. Only the author himself knows the ultimate goal of his argument and it would be inappropriate to try to impose my own point of view on him. I only wish to ask if it was worth going this far with the argument?

In my opinion, I do not think it was worth it. The deeper we go into Saifullayeu's narrative, the more the theoretical frame becomes difficult to understand. In addition to the aforementioned classics, there are a whole lot of other influential texts used in the work. For example, the influence of Jacques Derrida is very clear, as well as the work of Freud. I do not question the very reasoning behind using such works. Instead, I question the excessively syncretic nature of the theory employed. The author's knowledge becomes, paradoxically, an

obstacle in several respects. First of all, the text becomes more and more difficult to read from page to page, so dense that it requires maximum concentration from the reader. Secondly, the conclusion drawn from all of the book's arguments turns out to be unfortunately rather disappointing. It is probably not advisable to expect an intellectual earthquake at the beginning of a scientific dissertation, with increasing tension in the following chapters and an exciting conclusion at the end. Nevertheless, the conclusion is disappointing, especially from the point of view of the sociology of knowledge.

Not an objective observer

In the end of the book we read that "the phenomenon of post-Soviet Eastern Europe is hidden and unrecognisable". I take this as a far-reaching self-criticism of the author. Whilst he has turned the entire available tradition upside down through a critical approach, he still refuses to present his own positive vision. Here, of course, the problem is more complicated, as Saifullayeu adheres to a post-structuralist approach of which I remain largely sceptical.

Nevertheless, I must admit that, from my point of view, the lack of a constructive conclusion constitutes a real setback for this work. This is all the more disappointing as Saifullayeu is indisputably able to leave the role of someone "revealing" history to actually becoming somewhat of a "constructor". I believe that the author's arguments could prove to be more convincing than many others in the discipline. This is especially true as he is not in the position of an objective observer from the outside.

Postcolonial historiographies offers a strong, important contribution to ongoing debate. It is clear that a great specialist has appeared on the analytical and research scene, combining empirical skills with a good grasp of recent trends in the humanities. The unquestionable value of this work lies in combining reflection on very diverse and intertwined official narratives with a knowledge of popular culture and the functioning of discourses in everyday life in Central and Eastern Europe. Among the book's weaknesses, the biggest are perhaps its hermetic nature and the complexity of its argument. Nevertheless, this book is undoubtedly a must read for professionals.

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Happiness in small doses

ADAM REICHARDT

Moments of Happiness. By: Alex Dubas. Publisher: Academic Studies Press, Brookline (United States), 2021.

What is happiness? This is a question which has baffled civilization since nearly the dawn of time. How to achieve happiness and stay happy has caused even more confusion, with self-help books and psychologists constantly trying to tell us the best ways to find and maintain our happiness. Is it money? Success? Good looks and popularity?

In Plato's *The Euthydemus*, Socrates describes happiness as the desire of all men; and to achieve this, one needs to be wise. Wisdom, thus, is the path to happiness. The Dalai Lama, on the other hand, says that the purpose of life is to achieve happiness. He defines it as a sense of deep satisfaction. Nevertheless, happiness is a very personal emotion – each individual experiences it differently. While each culture, language and society views this feeling uniquely, it is still something that we can consider universal. Happiness can be seen without language, without context. We recognise it in everyday situations – a small child on the street laughing, a sport player celebrating a victory, or a couple getting married.

As a result, happiness is a small moment in time when all seems right with the world, when everything around you seems insignificant and when nothing else matters. These moments stay with us and comfort us during difficult times. It is an essential part of our humanity. These are exactly the lessons I took away from a recently published book by Cherry Orchard Books/Academic Studies Press, titled *Moments of Happiness*. The book is a loose compilation of real stories collected by Russian radio personality Alex Dubas and was first pub-

lished in Russian as *Моменты счастья* in 2016. The English edition was published this year and was translated by Yvonne Howell, who also includes an introduction and important contextual commentary (to some stories).

From nothing to happiness

The background behind *Moments of Happiness* is as fascinating as the book itself. As we first open the book, we learn right away how the idea for it came about. Like many great achievements, the work was created entirely by accident. Dubas, who is the well-known host of an evening rush hour radio programme in Moscow, had a guest cancel on him at the last minute. With little time to come up with a new idea, Dubas improvised and made a quick (and probably random) decision to talk about happiness. How did his listeners define it? What did it mean to them? He asked his listeners to call in and tell a story about when they found happiness. There were no other rules; the callers could provide any story they wanted.

Dubas was overwhelmed with the level of engagement shown by his audience. When he chose this idea, it was really off the cuff, he had no idea that his audience would become so involved. Dubas even admits that it was the only time he was brought to tears on air. Soon after, he came to realise that in spite of our oftentimes dark reality, there are moments of brightness and happiness that people wanted to share. Hence, he decided to expand on this idea. He asked his audience to continue to share their stories. He collected them as emails, text messages and social media posts. Finally, he curated these stories and put them together in a book, which was then published in Russia in 2016. Dubas also asked various celebrities to share their own stories and these pieces are included with the others. The book quickly became a bestseller.

The fact that the book was originally published in 2016 in Russian is of little consequence. The stories that are shared span time and do not all take place during this period. However, what is unique is that Dubas asked his respondents to tell their stories in the present tense. In this way, the reader is given a sense that the event is currently taking place, while the writer is able to revisit the story as if it is happening now. In this way, each of the contributors are able to relive their moment of happiness.

Another unique aspect of the book is the fact that you do not need to read it from start to finish. Unlike the Russian original, the English edition of the book is organised into six chapters. The original just listed the stories in Dubas's chosen order of one to 947. As the translator Yvonne Howel notes, the English edition applies a "light hand of organisation". There are themes to the chapters,

but in reality, the reader can organise or reorganise the stories as he or she wishes. You can even skip around the book and read the stories at random (I recommend doing this, especially on days when you need some cheering up).

The personal touch

Moments of Happiness is not a self-help book. It is a compilation of people's own recollections of when they are happy. Yet, when reading these stories, one cannot help but feel a therapeutic nature to the publication. The stories bring the reader into the author's own state of happiness, and when reading them you start to visualise yourself in the stories. In fact, you often start to relive your own moments of happiness. It is very difficult to describe the power that these stories have on the reader, but it really is a unique experience.

There is of a course a very Russian flavour to some of the stories, as many are set in specific towns or landscapes. But the details are less important. The experiences described in real time, as mentioned before, have a strong effect on the reader. Latvian pop singer Intars Busulis's story, for example, was one that struck me: "Lightning just flashed in the distance. It's already very, very dark. We are sitting on a blue bench near the sea, in Jurmala. It's raining to the left of us, and to the right. My wife, my kids, and I sit there watching the lightning. There is nobody else around. We can hear the raindrops hitting the ground all around us; but right above us – none. That's the moment: sitting with those closest to me in profound darkness, at one with the elements."

The stories' themes vary. There are stories about love, kids, travelling, family, reunions, friendships and even loneliness. Konstantin writes about the time he took off for two weeks, hitchhiking from Moscow to the Black Sea and back. He has nothing but a tent, sleeping bag, tea kettle and a bottle of cognac. One evening, he decides to set up camp and turn on his phone. Immediately, he receives dozens of text messages wishing him a happy birthday. Despite this, he could not have found better company to share it with than the thousands of stars above him. Olga describes the time she takes off by herself to visit Barcelona.

Moments of Happiness is a compilation of people's own recollections of when they are happy.

She gets lost, but it does not matter. She watches people, smiling and feeling completely free.

One contributor writes that "happiness is an ephemeral and inexplicable thing. It can last from a few seconds to a few years. It can be felt as a quiet, even illumination, or as a sudden flash. It can come out of nowhere or out over strange circumstances. Happiness can even arise in situations that are not conducive to it at all." In essence, this summarises the stories one can find in Dubas's *Moments of Happiness*.

Universal moments

As mentioned earlier, the book was published originally in Russian with contributions from a Russian audience. What really strikes the non-Russian reader, however, is the book's ability to break down cultural stereotypes. As the translator admits in the introduction, we often have the stereotype that "Russians and happy do not usually go together". Yet, what is surprising is that dozens of stories from the book take place in Soviet times or immediately after the fall of communism during the so-called "Wild Nineties" – a time most of us would not think of as "happy". Due to this, these stories are testament to the fact that happiness is universal. It is not dependent on or related to politics, geopolitics, or economic systems. It is a basic human emotion that spans time and space.

At the same time, and this is what Dubas admits in the beginning, the book acts as a type of "historical document" that provides insight into Russians and their feelings at certain times. Here, there is great added value for sociologists and anthropologists, who can gain a new awareness of events thanks to the sharing of these personal experiences. Nevertheless, however one approaches the book, it is certain that it will help evoke images of your own moments of happiness. This is truly the value for all readers – we are reminded how to appreciate these little moments of happiness at a time when there seems to be so much negativity in the world.

Adam Reichardt is editor in chief of *New Eastern Europe*.

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fot. Jerzy Pinkas

IT HAPPENED IN GDAŃSK

EUROPA NOSTRA 2021 – THE EU'S MOST IMPORTANT AWARD FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE – WENT TO THE EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CENTRE

The permanent exhibition of the ESC is the only Polish winner of the European Heritage Award. According to the international jury, the exhibition emphasizes the importance of work, promotes activism in the field of human rights, labor and political rights, and civic engagement. It is an example of "how to preserve stories and make them relevant to the modern world." During the Venetian award ceremony, the following voices were heard: the director of the ECS - Basil Kerski: "Culture knows no borders, no ethnic identities, it does not sow hatred, it praises human creativity and is a source of defense for those values that lie at the foundations of Europe. Today we felt that there was something like a European spirit", and the Mayor of Gdańsk - Aleksandra Dulkiewicz: "The values that gave life to the peaceful revolution of Solidarity must remain alive. This is also our task, because Europe is us."