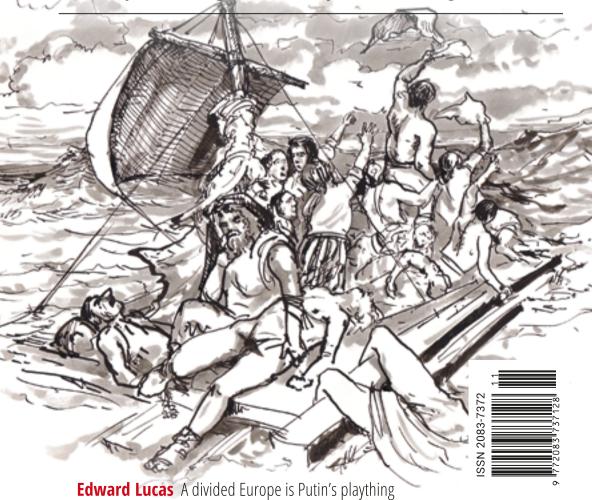
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New Eastern Europe

A SEA OF CHANGE

The Deeper Meaning Behind Europe's Newest Migration Waves



Aslı Erdoğan Refugees are neither a problem nor a question





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www.gdansk.pl



A city with over a thousand years of history, Gdańsk has been a melting pot of cultures and ethnic groups. The air of tolerance and wealth built on trade has enabled culture, science, and the Arts to flourish in the city for centuries. Today, Gdańsk remains a key meeting place and major tourist attraction in Poland. While the city boasts historic sites of enchanting beauty, it also has a major

historic and social importance. In addition to its 1000-year history, the city is the place where the Second World War broke out as well as the birthplace of Solidarność, the Solidarity movement, which led to the fall of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe.

The European Solidarity Centre

www.ecs.gda.pl



The European Solidarity Centre is a multifunctional institution combining scientific, cultural and educational activities with a modern museum and archive, which documents freedom movements in the modern history of Poland and Europe.

The Centre was established in Gdańsk on November 8th 2007. Its new building was opened in 2014 on the anniversary of the August Accords signed in Gdańsk between the worker's union "Solidarność" and communist authorities in 1980. The Centre is meant to be an agora, a space for people and ideas that build and develop a civic society, a meeting place for people who hold the world's future dear. The mission of the Centre is to commemorate, maintain and popularise the heritage and message of the Solidarity movement and the anti-communist democratic opposition in Poland and throughout the world. Through its activities the Centre wants to inspire new cultural, civic, trade union, local government, national and European initiatives with a universal dimension.

The Jan Nowak-Jeziorański College of Eastern Europe

www.kew.org.pl



The College of Eastern Europe is a non-profit, non-governmental foundation founded on February 9th 2001 by Jan Nowak-Jeziorański, a former head of the Polish section of Radio Free Europe and a democratic activist. The foundation deals with cooperation between the nations of Central

and Eastern Europe. The aims if its charters are to carry out educational, cultural and publishing activities, and to develop programmes which enhance the transformation in the countries of Eastern Europe. The organisation has its headquarters in Wrocław, Poland, a city in western Poland, perfectly situated in the centre of Europe and with a deep understanding of both Western and Eastern Europe.

Dear Reader,

Traditionally, with every year nearing its end we tend to reflect on the past 12 months trying to put together a bigger picture of what has happened and what is to be expected in the near future. We like to think of the future with optimism and hope. Unfortunately, the economic, social and political developments that have been taking place in the countries of the region this year offer a grim picture. Thus, instead of drawing a promising image of "a zone of prosperity and stability" being built on Europe's eastern borders we issue a warning statement: unless the situation improves and Eastern European societies see a change, Europe as a whole may be faced with another "crisis".

It is clear that the all recent European crises have been to the benefit of Vladimir Putin, mainly because of the divisions that they have created. What is more, while disagreements and differences of opinions are natural and welcomed, stereotyping and prejudice allow for dangerous illusions. For this reason, we devote this issue to migration, a topic that is not only limited to selected European states. While presenting insights from countries that have found themselves in the centre of the current migration debate (Germany, Hungary, Croatia and Poland) we also point to some important migratory changes taking place in Eastern Europe. Our authors analyse the situation of the internally displaced people in Ukraine, Russians who can no longer live in Russia and Belarusians who are exploited as sex and labour slaves. We encourage you to reflect on these voices from the region, as they too add to the deeper meaning behind Europe's newest migration waves.

Not to end the year on a solely pessimistic note, we bring to your attention the interview conducted with three scholars from Ukraine and Belarus who find inspiration and their second home in today's Poland. Their words are another confirmation of the thesis that the West, its value system and culture have strong admirers in the East. If we do not invest in this capital, it would be our greatest loss.

As always, we ask you to continue engaging with us online via our website (neweasterneurope.eu), Facebook, Twitter and our newly established Instagram account. Feel free to also share your thoughts and ideas with us via email at: editors@neweasterneurope.eu.

Wishing you a peaceful 2016.

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That is why I will always sympathise
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"If you start calling a certain group of people 'a problem', then sooner or later, they become a problem. Maybe this is how we should change the debate. Abandon formulations like 'refugee problem', 'refugee crisis' or the 'refugee question' and instead start talking about the influx of people who may enrich our culture."

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Making Sense of Migrants

FDWARD LUCAS

In the long run, migration is beneficial. But in the short-term, there are adjustment costs and these tend to fall most heavily on countries which have the most fragile societies. So any resolution of the migration crisis is going to require sacrifice. Politicians will lose popularity and resources will need to be found. This is not going to be simple.

Arguments about how Europe should deal with migrants, refugees and asylumseekers have provoked the worst divisions on the continent since the days of the Cold War. The clear winner from this is Vladimir Putin. A united Europe is a formidable adversary to his regime. A divided Europe is his plaything.

It is in this context that all the issues around the current crisis need to be addressed. If European decision-making is sabotaged or loses legitimacy on this issue, it will also be impaired on other questions, including how to deal with the security of the frontline states now being threatened by Russia.

The second point to make from the outset is that these problems are complicated. The issues are not purely technical ones that can be solved by money, fences and adept diplomacy. Nor are they simply moral ones, about showing compassion to those in need. They go to the heart of how Europe works and how it relates to the rest of the world. Any resolution of this crisis is going to involve sacrifice. Politicians will lose popularity: money spent on one thing cannot be spent on another. I strongly believe that in the long run, migration is beneficial. However, that does not alter the fact that in the short-term, there are adjustment costs, and these tend

to fall most heavily on countries which have the most fragile societies and limited economic resources. This is not going to be simple.

A dose of humility

The third point to acknowledge is that there is plenty of blame to go round. The causes of the conflict in Syria are deep. So are the failures of immigration policy in Europe thus far. Central and south-east European countries have a mostly lamentable record on integrating their fellow Roma citizens. So hurling accusations around does nothing to help resolve the current crisis. It is wrong to call the "east European" leaders stingy and racist and it is also wrong to call Angela Merkel reckless, bossy and naïve. A dose of humility on all sides is long overdue.

Nobody would have designed the system for migration that we have now. It favours the young and the tough, who are able to win the obstacle race through the Western Balkans and across the Mediterranean. It delivers huge profits to people-smugglers who sell flimsy boats and dodgy life-jackets at a vast mark-up. It stokes corruption inside Europe (especially in the provision of passports). It costs lives and creates untold suffering. Categories are hopelessly conflated. People flee persecution and land in poverty in a notionally "safe" country. If they try to improve their lives, are they refugees or economic migrants?

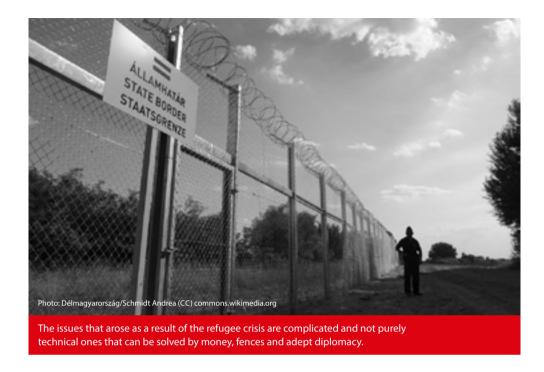
No single solution is going to work. Despite this, there are a few changes which, if introduced in tandem, will make things better. Firstly, the European Union needs to start behaving like the superpower that it really is. It has a bigger GDP than the

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United States and
a bigger population.

United States and a bigger population. It must stabilise its periphery. If it does not, then it will be destabilised by its periphery. That means an unprecedented level of foreign-policy toughness. We need a European army (I would suggest building on the French Foreign Legion). It should take control of and pacify territory, using lethal force if necessary, and then administer these territories in trusteeship. We need to police the EU external frontier in close co-operation with countries like Turkey.

This will not be a gentle process. A country that does not control its borders is not really a country. The

external Schengen border needs fences. Hungary was right to build one and the criticism it received was absurd. Nobody can look at the heavily fortified Spanish border in North Africa at Ceuta and Melilla and say that Hungary is exceptionally



cruel or ruthless. Secondly, Europe needs to be much tougher in establishing the identities of people who live within its borders. Social cohesion is the most vital ingredient of civilisation. Most people will pay taxes, obey the law and be kind to each other so long as they know that others are doing the same. Privacy zealots may find fingerprinting, retina scans and facial-recognition algorithms distasteful. However, faced with the movement of large numbers of people, biometric identification is crucial for establishing numbers and preventing abuse. European officials should be learning from Estonia to see how a system like this works safely, securely and cheaply.

Thirdly, we need to make sure that asylum applications are easy for those who are most in need and hard for those who break the rules. It makes no sense to privilege the photogenic people who have struggled (or paid) to cross long distances to reach the EU border, but to disadvantage those who are stuck in refugee camps because of frailty or family commitments.

Multi-cultural legacy

It is futile to expect the ex-communist countries to take migrants on the scale of Western European ones. Life there is not so attractive. Wages are lower and public

services are worse. Given the freedom of movement guaranteed within Schengen, any attempt to allocate migrants to specific countries will fail in all but the short term. It is quite likely that new arrivals in Germany will make an effort to learn German and to integrate into German society: the rewards are high and the cost relatively low. It is harder to imagine the same proportion of new arrivals making similar efforts to learn Hungarian.

However that should be a cause for sorrow, not rejoicing. The rhetoric from politicians like Viktor Orbán and Robert Fico is repellent, hypocritical and nonsensical. The ex-communist nations should above all remember their own history of migration, including fleeing Soviet and Nazi persecution. How would the Hungarian émigrés of 1956 have fared if Austria had treated them the way Hungary is treating Syrians now? Moreover, these nations were once the multi-cultural heart of Europe. Cities such as Budapest, Prague, Riga and Warsaw exemplified the success of a multi-lingual, multi-confessional culture. It would be paradoxical in the extreme if the leaders of democratic countries were to defend the legacies of Hitler and Stalin.

The most objectionable argument of all is that the Central European countries are defending "Christendom". It seems to have escaped the notice of those propounding this that Jesus was from the Middle East, was a refugee as a child and

Political leaders and opinion-formers could do a better job of explaining to their voters that ageing countries benefit from an influx of new workers and that racism is abhorrent and corrosive.

his followers spent a lot of time fleeing persecution. The teachings of St Paul (read the Letter to the Galatians) make it abundantly clear that Christianity is an inclusive religion, based on universal love, irrespective of national, ethnic or religious identity.

In short, Central and East European countries should benefit from migration. The adjustment costs are real, but so are the benefits. Migrants typically work hard, start businesses, pay taxes and do jobs that locals do not want to do. The problem is that the social capital needed for integration is in short supply, one of the unfortunate lasting legacies of communist rule. Trusting societies find it easy to integrate newcomers. Suspicious ones do not. Nevertheless, that is no reason not to try. Political leaders and opinion-formers could do a much better job of explaining to their voters that

ageing countries benefit from an influx of new workers, that national identity, culture and language are not under threat and that racism is abhorrent and corrosive (hostile attitudes towards migrants often echo those directed towards the Roma community).

A new architecture

Most of these changes are not going to happen anytime soon. However, some are already afoot. The crisis in the Eurozone offers interesting parallels. Like Schengen, the Eurozone was built on wishful thinking. It had a central bank that could not intervene in the event of a crisis. It allowed national governments to override fiscal constraints. There was no proper regime for supervising banks. The result was recklessness on all sides (by German lenders and Greek borrowers), followed by an almighty bust-up.

But now the architecture of the Eurozone has changed. We have an interventionist central bank, a fiscal authority which clearly overrides voters' choices (ask the Greeks) and the rudiments of a common banking supervisory system. Some elements remain incomplete (such as fiscal transfers) and the economic, political and social cost has been appalling, but it is now possible to see how the Eurozone, more tightly integrated than before, can survive and perhaps even flourish.

The same process is now under way in the Schengen zone. Germany is reluctantly and belatedly pushing for a common approach to migration and to the security of Europe's external frontier. Other countries are grumpily acceding to this. There is smoke and dust over the building site, but the outlines of a new structure are emerging.

It may not work. The political strains of this back-to-front approach are huge. Voters do not like change and uncertainty. Politicians do not like being bossed around by outsiders. The result may be a disaster. However, if that happens, the biggest losers of all will be the ex-communist countries, who will be plunged into a new Europe of bilateral deals, economic upheaval and social tension. More worryingly, there will be plenty of scope for outsiders such as the chuckling Mr Putin to meddle.

Edward Lucas writes for the *Economist* and is a senior vice-president at the Center for European Policy Analysis, a think tank in Warsaw and Washington, DC.

Fear It Not

BASIL KERSKI

Had I not been a migrant myself, I probably would not be alive today. That is why I will always sympathise with migrants and refugees and that is why I understand that integration is not just dependent on the migrants' efforts and readiness to adapt to a new culture. The prerequisite for successful integration lies in the goodwill and openness of the accepting societies and nations.

My personal biography and family history are the reasons why I will always sympathise with migrants and refugees. Many times throughout my life, I have crossed borders of cultures, nations and states. My mother is Polish and my father is Iraqi. I was born in communist Poland in the city of Gdańsk. There, I spent the first years of my life. One year, we went with my parents for summer holidays in Iraq. While there, we were stopped by the authorities. My father, who was a medical doctor, could not leave the country. Instead, he was conscripted into the army and sent to the frontlines of the Iraqi-Kurdish war. We were forced to stay in Iraq. It was a difficult experience for our family. Yet after the war ended, I made frequent trips between Poland and Iraq and I found myself functioning between the two cultures.

My childhood experience in Iraq was strongly influenced by its multiculturalism. On the playground, I would spend time roughhousing with both Christian and Muslim children. Baghdad at that time was home to many secular urban families, whose way of living was very westernised. Despite that, and Iraq's growing prosperity, my parents were convinced that there was no place for us in the country. They feared that Saddam Hussein, the leader of the ruling nationalist Baath party, would one day create a totalitarian system. It turned out that they were right.

Fear It Not, Basil Kerski Opinion & Analysis 1:

Great potential, not just threats

My parents dreamt of a life in freedom. To make it come true, they decided to leave Iraq, but it was not easy for my father to get out of the country. It was in 1976 when he was finally allowed to get a passport and we left for Gdańsk. To the regime, a family reunion was a legitimate reason for the trip. Also, as Poland at that time was under a communist dictatorship and the country was in a major economic crisis, the Iraqi authorities did not think that my father would give up his job in Iraq and move there. However, for my parents, freedom was more important than anything else.

We have never returned to my father's homeland. For me, this meant another process of cultural adaptation. I was enrolled in a Polish elementary school but after the time spent in Iraq, it was clear that I had to improve my Polish. However, this was not the only experience my family had of being migrants. After leaving Iraq, it soon became clear that communist Poland offered no opportunities for my father. In 1978 he went to West Berlin and a year later we joined him, together with my mother. Again, I found myself in a new culture and had to learn a new language.

These migration experiences have fundamentally shaped me and expanded my horizons. That is why, I have a feeling now that I can look at Poland, and Europe, from a wider, more global perspective. It allows me to see the great potential, and not just the threats, in the migrations and inter-cultural encounters that further await Europe. I am fully aware of how difficult it is to draw a demarcation line between the different causes of migration (political, cultural and economic) and how difficult it is to distinguish between a migrant and a refugee.

It is easy to judge the migrants who are coming to Europe and say that they are seeking shelter, not for political, but "purely" economic reasons. However, when making such statements we often forget that poverty and conflict in Europe's neighbourhood are a result of both our short-sighted policies towards these regions and our own protectionism — closed markets and post-colonial interests.

Open up to the Other

We cannot neglect the fact that integration is a long and difficult process. I have seen first-hand, migrants' determination to adapt to new conditions as well as the efforts they make to learn a new language and culture. I have seen how they respect their new homeland and its people. However, I also know that there are failures in this adaptation which can be a result of, for example, the fact that somebody decided to emigrate at an older age and thus cannot easily adapt to a new society.

Opinion & Analysis Fear It Not, Basil Kerski

I myself have experienced closed doors and a lack of acceptance. It is not enough for migrants to demonstrate their efforts and goodwill. This is just one dimension of the integration process.

The fear that societies feel towards the Other and the anxieties and resentment immigration stirs are universal. Thus, it was only for my own psychological comfort that I have tried to understand the humiliation which I experienced for being different and I still prefer to keep the positive experiences in my memories, including the openness and interest in my cultural backgrounds. With this in mind, I am not oblivious to the difficulties of encounters with the Other. Trying to understand the fears that surround these meetings, I am interested in how we can overcome them. The first step is to accept that they exist and treat them seriously. We can also help people to calmly express them and by doing so help them prepare to open up to the Other.

Had my family not escaped Iraq, and if I had not therefore been a migrant, I would probably not be alive today. In the last 30 years, Iraq has experienced wars which would have been my own personal experience had I stayed there. I am deeply convinced that we should not look at migration only from the perspective of the receiving countries and their capacities to take in migrants. In my view, we should attempt to understand the other side and look deeper to understand who these migrants are. Where do they come from and why? Many people are dramatically ill-informed in this regard. What we also lack is a long-term perspective.

Integration is not just a problem of the migrants' efforts and readiness to integrate with the culture of the states and societies that are hosting them. There is also another side to this process, one that is under-represented in our public debates. Integration is successful only when we want to integrate the migrants, accept them and support their efforts to integrate. Then, they quickly become a part of our society, contribute to our prosperity and their children become naturalised citizens of the nation that accepted them. This is the dominating dynamic. Thus, it should be remembered that the prerequisite for successful integration lies in the goodwill and openness of the societies and nations that are accepting the migrants.

A dangerous illusion

Again, let me make reference to my personal experience. After our return from Iraq, my beginnings in the Polish school were very difficult. In communist Poland, the cultural parochialism was depressing and the level of racism very high. Thus, my schoolmates would shout at me "Arab", "Arab". However, after half a year, I became an integral part of the class. This was an interesting experience: from initial

Fear It Not, Basil Kerski Opinion & Analysis 1

unwillingness to complete acceptance. For me, it helped me understand that there are hidden contradictory elements within Polish society which are not solely limited to fears and stereotypes, but also include great potential for tolerance and brotherhood. This positive energy needs to be further elicited and the responsibility for doing so lies largely with the authorities.

As mentioned earlier, in the late 1970s, we moved to West Berlin. This was a time when West Germany already had some experience of accepting migrants, but was still opposed to the idea of becoming a multicultural society. The obstacle against the creation of a multicultural society was the German understanding of the state as an ethnic, not political, community. For those who had German ancestors, it was easy to legalise their stay in Germany, attend German language courses and receive financial aid. In our family, we initially did not have much hope that the status of our stay would be legalised. In the end, we were saved by the martial law which was introduced in Poland in December 1981 and which extinguished the possibility of our return. The West German authorities could no longer deport us. In addition, my father, being an Iraqi, was allowed to obtain political asylum and a work permit.

Looking at Central Europe today I see that its thinking is still similar to that of West Germany in the late 1970s and 1980s. For its broadly homogenous societies, there is a natural aversion to multiculturalism. It is easy to divide people based on their ethnicity, but this is a dangerous illusion and I warn Poland and others against going down this road.

Neighbours for decades

In Germany, where the situation is still far from perfect, a few important changes have taken place over the last 30 years. Since the second half of the 1990s, the federal government (a coalition between the Social-Democrats and the Greens) has started to openly talk about Germany as a nation of migrants, a multicultural state that for decades has been accepting migrants. The first generations of *Gastarbeiters* (migrant workers – editor's note) had entered politics and as a result, reforms in civil liberties were initiated. The definition of the nation was broadened to include its political dimension. As a result, a person who does not have German ancestry can now also become a German citizen. There is also increasing acceptance in regards to dual citizenship. This represents a political and cultural revolution. Changes in German education have also led to an approach which has become more and more adjusted to the multicultural history of Germany. In school curricula, for example, there is more room for the history of Central Europe. Language instruction

Opinion & Analysis Fear It Not, Basil Kerski

has been expanded to include languages that are used by large groups of migrants such as Turkish, Italian, Spanish, and even – as is the case of the school attended by my younger son – Polish.

In German culture, media and politics, people with immigrant backgrounds but who were already born in Germany, are very visible. They speak German fluently and want to mark their presence in the public sphere. A good example is the leader of the Green Party, Cem Őzdemir, deputy mayor of Berlin Dilek Kolat, film director Fatih Akim and well-known German writers like Ilja Trojanow and Navid Kermani. Without a doubt, we are still in the very early stages of the process of culturally opening up the German nation. It is too early to talk about a positive German model. Furthermore, the process has generated some backlash within German society. The best-known example here is the xenophobic, anti-Islamic

For today's Germans, migrants are not phantoms. They are their neighbours and have been for decades.

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movement PEGIDA which, paradoxically, has strong levels of support in places where there are few foreignborn migrants, such as Saxony and the eastern parts of Germany.

Unquestionably, there are also some other positive aspects that could have been observed recently in the development of political culture in Germany. The wave of solidarity with the refugees from the south, which

we have been seeing in the last few months and which resembles the wave of unity with the Polish Solidarity movement in the 1980s, is not the result of "naïve" political correctness. Nor, as has often been written in the Polish press, is it a reflection of a "sense of guilt for Nazi crimes". Rather, it is the result of experience. For today's Germans, refugees and migrants are not phantoms. They are their neighbours and have been for decades.

Four sources of migration waves

Poles, on the other hand, are now involved in an absurd debate about the threats that migrants (especially from Muslim countries) generate. These fears are not the result of direct experience as Poland has had very little recent contact with Islam. In fact, only 0.3 per cent of Poland's residents are foreigners. That is why not many people realise, for example, that Syrian Muslims are escaping from radical Islam or the fact that the majority of the Muslim world condemn the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which is not a religious, but totalitarian movement. Germans are able to distinguish between Islam as a religion and the radical political organisations which only make references to religion. They are capable of making

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this distinction because they have had a positive experience of living with these migrants over the preceding decades.

It is also worth realising that Europe is a continent that participates in the dynamic migration processes to only a small extent. Massive migration waves happen in places where there is war and where states are collapsing. Regionally speaking, this includes places like the Middle East, Africa and South America. Today, 90 per cent of refugees from Syria have been accepted by that nation's neighbouring states. In Turkey, there are already around two million refugees from Syria. Hundreds of thousands fled to Lebanon, as well as Jordan, and only a fraction of them have attempted the journey to Europe. These statistics make Poland's debate over accepting a few thousand refugees seem churlish and uncompassionate.

Generally speaking, the European Union is faced with four sources of migration. The first is from Northern and Central Africa, where a combination of different factors – climate, ethnic and religious wars – have led to the collapse of some states. It is also important to note the partial failure of the Arab revolutions (except for Tunisia, which has opened the door to transformation), which led to a serious instability in Libya. The second source is the Middle East, with a shocking number of victims created by the civil war in Syria. The erosion of the Iraqi state and the increasing activities of ISIS, which has forced many people to flee the region, is also a key factor.

The third source is eastern Ukraine, as a result of the war currently taking place there. At the time of writing, the strongest migration waves are taking place within Ukraine, where the local governments of other regions are taking care of the refugees from war-torn Donbas and occupied Crimea. However, should the situation in Ukraine get politically and economically more unstable, there will be more migration from that country to the West.

Nonetheless, the greatest cause for concern in the EU is not the issue of political refugees fleeing conflict zones. To date, the reactions of Europeans to the refugees arriving from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan have been quite positive. The situation is different in regards to this fourth source of migration, the movement of people inside Europe. This is primarily referring to migration from the eastern (including Poland) and southern EU states to the richer northern and western countries – Germany, the United Kingdom, France and Sweden. This European migration wave, from the poorest regions to the economic centres of the EU, poses a huge political challenge for member states, as it is becoming a driving force for anti-European attitudes and nostalgia for a Europe that is exclusive and deprived of solidarity as well as a desire for a community of wealthy states, separated from their poorer European neighbours in the east and south. As a result, many EU citizens dream of new iron curtains to divide our continent. It is very ironic that just last

year, Hungary was celebrating the fall of the Iron Curtain while today, those same Hungarian anti-communist dissidents are the ones who are closing their borders and building new walls.

European solidarity

The concept of European solidarity is becoming very limited. And it is not only in the case of the wealthy EU member states, but also those who once cared the most about the effectiveness of the idea of European solidarity, including those Polish politicians who now argue against solidarity during the migration debates. As a matter of fact, they have done more harm than good weakening Poland's position on the international stage. Clearly, if Poland wants to maintain its strong standing in Europe, it cannot run away from being an active participant in shaping European migration policy. Make no mistake, the crisis of a European understand-

If Poland wants to maintain a strong position in Europe, it cannot run away from being an active participant in shaping European migration policy.

ing of solidarity will weaken Poland and strengthen the EU's opponents at the same time.

That is why Poles in particular should make sure that the concept of European solidarity does not lose its credibility, as the country's development and sovereignty are heavily dependent on it. Poland still needs significant financial assistance from the EU so it can continue to rebuild parts of the country that were destroyed by both the Second World War and the communist regime. Polish security policy needs solidarity with Europe to support Ukraine, which is still defending its own sovereignty. Finally, Poles are the authors of

the concept of the European energy union, which is meant to defend the EU from the neo-imperial energy policies espoused by the Kremlin.

All in all, to successfully implement its strategic goals, Poland should show solidarity with states that need assistance in integrating refugees. Poland's attitude towards the migration challenge has thus become a principal test of its European policy.

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

Building Coexistence

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Coexistence teaches us about our own insufficiency in establishing a community. Isn't it clear that during our encounters with strangers there is a need to lean towards the unknown and a different youth? This is something that we can either be spontaneously open to or rapidly turn our eyes away from. Regardless of which one of those two reactions we have, we are affirming our own emotional engagement.

Our community living is currently in a deep crisis. Europe increasingly resembles the village portrayed by Werner Herzog in his film *Heart of Glass*, where the secret to the life of the village inhabitants was lost and the prophets announced the end of the world. With the migrants in arm's reach, we are desperately looking for a scapegoat and are treating Muslims with suspicion. However, with this kind of reaction, we will not build a rational foundation for our future as we continue to entrench ourselves in our own fortress. Ethnic cleansings, deportations, ghettos, racism and xenophobia: we have experienced them all. Yet still we do not want to remember that apart from human misery, they do not bring any solutions and are completely irrational. We are now faced with many grave and very real problems, including environmental degradation, demographic changes and collapsing social cohesiveness.

Crucially, solutions to these problems need to be found on both moral and economic grounds. What links these together is the fact that none of them can be solved "individually". We can only resolve them by combining them, embracing them in the here and now, without escaping reality, in our neighbourhood and offering our hospitality to strangers. This statement should not be seen as an ad hoc justification for the need to face the challenge of a great wave of migrants that has caused the recent European crisis. What is at stake here is the centuries' long

secret of community living, which is completed only when it includes the presence of strangers. That is why this story will be about coexistence with strangers.

Li and Wu

Coexistence teaches us about our own insufficiencies in establishing a community. In Polish, this characteristic is called *obcowanie*, which literally means "being with the other". It is quite an unusual word, since to express the concept of being together, we are more prone to place emphasis on the things that we have in common, as is the case with other languages which derive the term from the Latin word *communio*. While looking for the equivalent of the Polish term in other European languages, it is better to look at the word *ksenopolis*, using it not just in reference to a community that is friendly to the Other, but also one that is constituted of Others (the Greek word *ksenos* means foreign – editor's note). The story of such a community could start like this...

A long time ago, two monks wandered the earth. The storytellers differ in their description. Some call them Li and Wu, others simply say "a smaller and a bigger monk" or "a younger and an older one", while others still say "one that was listening to his heart and one that was listening to reason". One thing is certain: they were brethren of a deeply traditional order. The two monks pledged troths, including a vow of silence during the day and sexual abstinence.

The road they travelled led them to a river. On its bank, the monks were met by a woman. There are different interpretations about this encounter as well. Some say that the woman crossed the river in the morning, when its water level was still low, and was cut off from her house because the bridge that connected the two banks had been destroyed by the monsoon rain and flood. She was dressed in expensive clothes and thus afraid of ruining her silk dress. One thing that the storytellers have no doubt about is that she was young and beautiful. It is also said that the first monk (let us call him the younger one) turned his eyes away from her and being faithful to his pledges, crossed the river without paying attention to the woman in need. However, the older traveller without thinking, took the woman in his arms and carried her to the other side. The woman thanked him and they parted. After this parting, the younger monk tried to initiate a conversation with the older monk but his sharp questions were met with deep silence. It was broken only upon nightfall.

Again the only thing that is certain is that since the encounter with the woman, the monks' journey changed. While the older monk continued in harmony with himself, enjoying the beauty of the landscape and paying attention to everything



he encountered, the younger one could not notice much in his surroundings as he was afraid of meeting another stranger and felt a certain burden being imposed on him. A burden that was invisible yet real, like the past, which is gone yet present. Another thing that is certain is that the younger monk was brimming with questions, which were full of accusations directed at the fact that the older monk carried a woman in his arms. This woman squeezed his hips with her smooth thighs, touched his back with her supple breasts, embraced his neck with her graceful shoulders and even possibly touched his cheek with her warm cheek. While the records of the conversation between the two monks do not include all the details, we can reduce it to a few simple questions such as: "how could you break the rules established by our tradition and betray yourself and your order? And for whom? A woman you did not even know? A stranger?"

Different lessons

Even if we accounted for all versions of this story (not only are they numerous but also quite different from each other) we can see that they all provide the unavoidable answer from the older monk: "Brother, I carried and left the woman to the other side of the river. Will you be carrying her with you for the rest of your life?"

The oldest tradition says that the monks were Buddhists, followers of Zen. They lived in China. Yet the truth is that they could have been followers of any religion, members of any community, or inhabitants of any country. The vows they pledged are like the vows we make to our faiths, homelands or values. There is no place in the world from which a road, sooner or later, will not lead us to the river on whose bank we will find the "Other".

To cope with the challenges that life brings, our mind needs to be open to different possibilities, which are significantly limited when it is burdened with bad memories and resentments from the past.

There are different lessons that we can learn from this story. Some people stress how disastrous it is for a man to collect negative thoughts and feelings. They do not allow us to solve life's problems. Instead, they distance us from the real world. We learn that the things that bring us closer to reality and allow us to effectively deal with it are rooted in spontaneous acts of heart and a life philosophy that allows us to follow our bliss.

Zen schools sometimes "teach" this story to their students as a *koan*, to point to the purity of the older monk. This quality enabled him to recognise the situation, adequately react to it and later continue his journey, fully prepared for its next stage. To cope with the challenges that life brings, our minds need to be open to different possibilities, which are significantly limited when they are burdened with negative memo-

ries and resentments from the past. In other words, mental dependence on ideas or earlier experiences prevent us from fully living in the here and now. One master of meditation put it even more plainly: "We get mad when somebody throws trash in our house, but we are not protecting ourselves from having our minds filled with trash." Similarly, the Arab mystic, Abu Hassan Bushanja, once said: "The act of sinning is not so harmful as the desire and the thought of it. It is one thing for the body to indulge in pleasure for a moment, and quite another for the mind and heart to chew on it endlessly."

For Hindu philosopher Jiddu Krishnamurti, the encounter by the river was, first and foremost, a story of solitude, as he claimed: "it is only when we give complete attention to a problem and solve it immediately – never carrying it over to the next day, the next minute – that there is solitude … To have inward solitude and space is very important because it implies freedom to be, to go, to function, to fly. After all, goodness can only flower in space just as virtue can flower only when there is freedom. We may have political freedom but inwardly we are not free…"

The Christian tradition also has a story about two monks on their pilgrimage to the relics of a great saint. On their way they are also surprised, not so much by the fact that they saw a beautiful woman as by the fact that the woman was made of flesh and blood. Interpreters of this story place emphasis on the internal value of a human being, which is decided by what takes place in the heart and contrast it with legalistic morality, which was symbolised in the early times of Christianity by the Pharisees. That is why while discussing this issue, they often bring up the words of Jesus Christ who, as Mathew the Apostle noted, said: "First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside will also be clean" or the words of the prophet Isaiah as quoted by Jesus: "These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules."

Act of heart

The deeper we get into the story of the two monks, the more we learn of its interpretations, the more we try to understand its meaning in regards to our own context, the more we get convinced that it is a story of coexistence. However, let us not be tempted to say that the encounter by the river lasted only for a very short period of time or that coexistence, as well as its impossibility, are a part of our everyday lives. Even our consciousness resembles this story, as it is written with an intense experience of borders and interactions with the Other, which transforms this story into a tale about life.

The older monk, with his natural wisdom and peaceful internal freedom, earns our respect, which is, nonetheless, mixed with some cordial jealousy. It is difficult to deny that there is a significant distance between us, and that we are looking at his path from our remote place in the world; a place which is much more problematic, laden with interpersonal complications, living conditions, burdened inheritance and cultural prejudices. It seems to us that while our roots are growing deeply into the earth, his have branched out towards heaven.

The distance that has been opened up to us by the older monk creates a space where, as Krishnamurti claimed, our understanding of coexistence can flourish. It allows us to experience a spontaneous act of heart, born out of a real life situation and a need to meet the Other. This pushes our earlier beliefs into the background, including our oaths and pledges. The situation also requires that, in order to break them, we need to have the courage to expose ourselves to accusations of betrayal and leaving ourselves and our own people.

This act of heart, which is the cornerstone of coexistence, finds tradition in one of the oldest books in the Bible. It is in the Book of Leviticus where we read: "But

the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself." This teaching of the Lord to Moses is mentioned several times throughout the Old Testament whereas in the Book of Leviticus, we read about the love of a neighbour in the sense of loving "your own people". In the Book of Deuteronomy, we are taught to love "those who are alien, for you yourselves were alien in Egypt". Furthermore, in the Book of Exodus, we read "Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt."

The first of these teachings is one of the oldest attempts, if not the oldest, in the Judeo-Christian tradition to establish relations with the Other, in other words, coexistence. It combines two commandments which, in other parts of the Bible, are treated separately, often in opposition to each other as belonging to two different orders: rational and irrational.

In the first part of the teaching, we are instructed to treat the newcomer (the other, a wanderer, an immigrant, a refugee, etc.) as our fellow countryman, a compatriot. This inclines both equality in the face of law and tolerance towards diversity (religious, racial, national, etc.). This legislative aspect is particularly important today, as most efforts at establishing a relationship of coexistence, instead of focusing on tolerance and other values that are "intangible" to our reason, rely on constitutional orders guaranteeing human rights. The Book of Leviticus does not, by any means, ignore this legal aspect of coexistence, but is not limited by it. Its teaching goes further, towards love; a love that means crossing, which is expressed by the phrase "as thyself". Such love towards a stranger encourages a change in you, leaving one's own self. This love is not given to us, as our love for ourselves is. That is why it can be implemented only by means of this crossing, in being with the other, which in Polish, we beautifully articulate with the expression *obcowanie*.

Crossing

This crossing reveals to us our spiritual development, but also the conflict that is generated by a border and our attempts at guarding it. It is symbolised by the two monks and the controversy that arose between them. Hence, the question for us is: Are we making laws, pledging vows, establishing borders in order to later break them, breach them and cross them? This conflict seems unresolvable as long as we treat those two monks separately, assigning separate paths to each of them and deciding that only one of their truths was the correct one.

It is not an accident that in the story, the monks take the same road and remain companions throughout their journey. Using the language of people who live in the borderlands and who are thus used to living with others, we could say that it is the road that borders them. What connects them and divides them at the same time determines their coexistence. The act of heart by the older monk would not be possible without the border, towards which the younger monk is so faithful to. The border makes us free not because it divides us from something or protects us, but because it creates opportunities for us to cross it.

Our coexistence is also constituted of encounters. Li and Wu could travel together, live under one roof in a monastery, quarrel and beautifully differ, but this is not coexistence. The space, whose "goodness blossoms" opens before them only

when they meet the stranger at the river bank. Only then can they become free, in the sense of Krishnamurti's "good solitude". The story talks about crossing the river. All three of them are on the other bank. Later on, as they go further, each takes their own way.

Our coexistence is also constituted by the encounters.

A return to the bank is no longer possible. After crossing the river (and let us not forget that this group included not only the older monk and the woman but also the younger monk who did not raise his eyes to look at her) they became different people who found themselves in a different place than they were before. Indeed, while building our coexistence, we all change and no one remains exactly like their old selves. Real coexistence is possible as long as we agree to leave our own bank, regardless of whether we agree to the circumstances that characterise our transfer.

A burden

Just as much as we admire, while also maintaining a cool distance from, the older monk, the younger monk for whom the situation seems to be overbearing comes across as somebody very familiar. We have all experienced the burden of an unfulfilled meeting with the Other, who remained a stranger to us as we lacked power, the fulgent luminous gift, courage and freedom to change the encounter into coexistence. This burden can be found in our sickly memory, misunderstood identity, false ideologies and traditions infected with blind pain or a disastrous sense of superiority, in the primitive instinct of domination, vows pledged by those who are enslaved by fear and their own weaknesses. We carry this burden in our own families where many choices, related to our views, religious beliefs and ethnicity, have been made and where the choices of the heart have mixed blood. We carry it in our closest neighbourhood and the borderlands of multicultural communities, where racism, nationalism and other forms of intolerance are people's daily problems. We carry it in empires which are built on slavery and colonial conquest.

This burden, which is so common that it seems to be a part of us, is inseparable and written into our own fate and the fate of our communities.

That is why the attitude of the older monk is so worrisome. We bombard him with our questions, which we answer ourselves to drown out his answer and to prove not only his departure from the teachings, which are human commandments, but also that it is us who know the real truth about life. Believing in our life choic-

We live in a world of post-modernist relativism, blurred borders and a policy of memory where there is a fetishisation of the past, a crisis of multiculturalism, and globalisation that generates unexpected encounters with strangers.

es, that we are pragmatic and, as a result of our conformism, in fear and false understanding of absolute values, we put up a curtain of illusion which prevents us from noticing the space that was opened to us by the older monk and his crossing. Believing that we are faithful to our vows, we breach them in the name of higher necessity, just like the younger monk, possessed by the thought of the sin of the older monk, breached the vow of silence before nightfall.

Let us admit that the attitude of the younger monk perfectly resonates with today's world. We live in a world of post-modernist relativism, blurred borders and a policy of memory where there is a fetishisation of the past, a crisis of multiculturalism and globalisation that generates unexpected encounters with strangers. It is justified to say that in our world, the encounter at the river bank would not have succeeded. Instead of

the liberation that comes from the act of crossing, it would have brought a neverending series of conflicts and tensions as well as a tool that would be used by all kinds of stakeholders, a pattern that has repeated itself throughout history.

The path of the younger monk

An additional crucial question is the fate of the younger monk. If his attitude is worryingly familiar to us, then we should not limit our story to the wisdom of the older monk, which implacably targets our weak spot, fundamentally undermines our image of ourselves and is difficult to access at the same time. The story about coexistence should thus follow the path of the younger monk, as it should search for wisdom in actions that are possible only after what has happened by the river bank. Just like the older monk needed the younger monk for the act of crossing, now the older monk should become a shoulder for the younger monk in his search for himself in the world, where the stranger stays at the same river bank.

The older monk was right when he said that from now on, Li will always go through life together with the Other. He would not get very far if he did not notice or denied this fact. Every radical "disposal of a problem", which has taken the form of different exterminations and cleansings, would have also killed him as they are now inseparable with the stranger. We also know that there is no return to the situation from before the encounter at the river, as the strange woman, who is no longer there, will always be among us, on our side of the river. Thus, the challenge faced by the younger monk is coexistence – building a community with the Other. Ahead, there is another river that he will need to cross. However, if this time he is up to the task, he will not leave the woman at the river bank and continue the journey by himself. He will begin a coexistence with her. His crossing will be completed if the stranger, symbolising the Other, becomes somebody familiar to him; not a burden, but somebody who is lovingly recognised as a part of him.

At the end of our story, let us also ask who the woman encountered by the two monks at the river bank was. She was unknown and different in equal measure, as she was beautiful and young. Does this mean that the ancient tellers of this story wanted to suggest some kind of correlation here, some kind of a magnetic pole? It is possible that we are wrong to see the gist of this encounter in the burden of collected frustrations and assumptions, which we are either able to overcome or not. Isn't it clear that during our encounters with strangers, there is also a need to lean towards the unknown and a different youth? Does the unknown not tempt us? Does it not arouse nostalgia or even a memory of something that we have lost? This is something we can either, like Wu, be spontaneously open to or, like Li, rapidly turn our eyes from. Regardless of which one of those two reactions we choose, we affirm our emotional engagement. Coexistence, the subject of this story, has something of a reminder for us: when it becomes real, we feel as though it brings forth the presence of both Eros and Mnemosyne.

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

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DOUBLETAKE: The end of the EU as we know it?

INSEF LANNING

While it may appear to some that the accountability of policy-making in the European Union has been strengthened, the top-level negotiations have so far shown a tendency to produce the least controversial solutions. If this trend is not overcome, the perspective of deeper European integration will be lost before we know it.

The most recent crises in Europe, such as the Eurozone crisis, the revolution and war in Ukraine as well as the massive inflow of refugees and migrants, indicate that the European Union is experiencing serious growing pains. Some EU member states in Central Europe are challenging a Brussels-centric approach to the refugee crisis, while the United Kingdom is calling to renegotiate its membership in the EU with the threat of a referendum on whether to stay in Europe or leave altogether. Common European solutions to these crises seem out of reach and with more challenges on the horizon, one can only speculate as to what a future European Union will look like.

With this context in mind, *New Eastern Europe* has asked Josef Janning from the European Council on Foreign Relations to challenge some common assertions currently being made about Europe and its future as a political union.

Assertion One: The concept of the "ever closer Union" is no longer at the core of European politics, which means the beginning of the end of the EU as we know it.

In contrast to the view taken by some policy-makers in the European Union, the expression "ever closer union" is more than just words. While some believe this item on David Cameron's list of re-negotiables could be compromised, Britain's prime minister has a point: To scrap that phrase would substantially alter the purpose of

integration in Europe, which is precisely what he seeks to achieve. What Cameron fails to see, though, is the fact that the biggest challenge to an ever closer Union will not be the United Kingdom, but the inter-governmentalist attitude that has infected the EU's political core.

In fact, the goal of building an "ever closer Union" remains at the heart of the integration process. Like it or not, the integration of European states ultimately is about forming a strong federation. The term "ever closer Union" describes the EU's *finalité politique* and defines the process towards that goal. The treaties, concluded under such a preamble, are to be understood as the legal foundation of a unidirectional process aiming to achieve more and deeper integration. Along these lines, integration was meant to (a) gradually extend to all policy issues with challenges on the national or regional level, (b) consolidate effective and democratic decision-making on such issues and (c) to eventually submit areas of intergovernmental co-operation to the community method.

Evidently, the current EU is not really following this prescription. The hybrid nature of integration has not been overcome through 15 years of reform since the Treaty of Maastricht. The current EU is more deeply integrated than ever, but at the same time it is increasingly shaped by intergovernmental politics. Alongside reforms, the intergovernmental layers of integration policy were also strengthened. Intergovernmental pillars were created, the European Council became the dominant institution and integration à la carte gained much room while avant-garde projects of deeper integration, (such as reinforced co-operation in the language of the treaties), became a rare exception. Though justice, home affairs and foreign and security policy now show some features of community organisation (through the EEAS or the role of the High Representative as permanent chair of the Foreign Affairs Council), policy-making in both areas remains essentially intergovernmental. There are no common goals beyond the shared member state positions and preferences, there is no common process beyond the procedural routines of the Council and there are but few political instruments on the level of the EU. Deepening has not led to a decision over what Europe should be.

Rather, it seems to have confused Europe's *finalité*. While it appears to some observers that the accountability of EU policy-making to member state interests has been strengthened, top-level negotiations so far have shown a tendency to produce the lowest common denominator. The level of testosterone in the room and the pressures of the national political agenda on the heads of government have mostly blocked an EU/member-state win-win. What the European Parliament won through co-decision with the Council of Ministers, it lost by the shift of gravity away from the ministers to the chiefs. The European Commission and its president have devolved from being the architect of integration to becoming the

implementation agency of Europe. Democratic accountability and parliamentary control rank below member state bargaining.

Be it the sovereign debt crisis within the Eurozone or be it the refugee crisis in the Schengen area, intergovernmental crisis management has not brought member states closer together in the face of severe challenges, but rather deepened the divisions among them, has emphasised the asymmetries of power and influence and has trended towards creating stronger commitments on member states in need, tilting the perceived balance of opportunities and costs.

If this trend is not overcome, the perspective of deep integration in a comprehensive and federal Europe will be lost before we know it. If it will be overcome, however, it would likely occur through differentiated integration, creating centres of deeper integration around specific policy issues and involving those member states willing and able to comply with the goals and procedures. In a way, such a Europe of several or one core would also mean the beginning of the end of the EU as we know it.

Assertion Two: Recent crises (financial, migration and the conflict in Ukraine) demonstrate Europe's weakness, or lack of ability to resolve common challenges.

In spite of the dismissive talk about Europe in some media, expert circles and parts of the political spectrum, the EU appears to be quite capable of responding to crises. A concert of European states would have seen much deeper divisions, more power politics and most likely increased severe consequences of crises for at least some European states. Without the EU's monetary union, the financial crisis would have hit harder in many places and much more private wealth would have been destroyed. Providing substantial financial assistance to countries with

Without political coordination within the EU, Russia might well have succeeded to split the Europeans on Ukraine.

no chance to refinance on the markets could be denounced as an "austerity dictate", yet the alternative to fiscal solidarity might have been disastrous. Without political coordination within the EU, Russia might have succeeded to split the Europeans on Ukraine. Without the EU's single market there would have been no Schengen agreement, allowing for border controls everywhere on the continent. Would that have eased the burden on countries such as Hungary, Greece or

Italy to deal with a massive inflow of migrants? Certainly not, and it would likely have been illusionary to believe in a burden sharing among European nations on migration. What Europe might have seen instead were practices of pick-and-choose and some humanitarian relief efforts, pledged in the face of human suffering, but delivered late and reluctantly.

In all likelihood, the existence of the EU as a legal and political framework, a process and a practice has helped the Europeans significantly in responding to major challenges. After all, integration does provide this large and heterogeneous group of states with a culture and a mechanism of interaction, which has helped political management even under the auspices of the massive loss in trust emerging from the sovereign debt crisis. This is not to say that the European response has always been adequate, on-time and sustained. Rather, European policy-makers have been slow to respond and keen not to react more strongly than seemed to be absolutely necessary. In recent years, European politics has not rushed to strengthen integration in the face of crises; rather actors have preferred to dare smaller and pragmatic steps, below the threshold of treaty change.

Much of that response pattern stems from the disillusionment over ambitious treaty reforms, which has grown over the struggles of successive intergovernmental conferences since the early 1990s. The European Union is a different political entity today — though more deeply integrated in some areas and/or for many member states, clearly more politically fragmented and visibly steered by the body of heads of state and government, which did not even exist under the treaties when the Economic and Monetary Union was decided upon in 1991 at Maastricht.

In operational terms, two trends have broken the previous prevalence of the "community method" as Europe's response mode to crisis: First, the EU has come to be dominated by a form of utilitarian politics. Short-term gains or preferences of member states outweigh longer-term common goals. Obviously, utilitarianism is politically contagious – it has long made its way from the periphery of the Union to the political centre. Practiced consistently, the manifest pursuit of self-interest by some members will trigger self-interest strategies in others. The EU has come full circle on this and in practice, all member states first and foremost pursue their own national interests

Second, the traditional political centre has eroded substantially. Traditional constellations and coalitions, such as the informal grouping of the founding members, have disappeared while the number of veto players has grown. Power matters more, but achieves less in such an environment, at least when it comes to advancing integration. Centrifugal trends have grown, but the centripetal effect of Monnet-style supranational integration did not follow suit.

Instead, the EU's former leadership structure began to disappear. At the turn of the century, fragmentation had won. With the rise of the European Council as the central decision-making body, a qualified majority voting – once called the nuclear option in European integration, has lost in significance. Now the major issues facing the EU always end up in the European Council and in intergovernmental bargaining because the prevalence of diverging national interests does not allow

for a community approach. Power politics and ad-hocery, unilateral moves and the semantic sabre-rattling that characterises crisis management have taken the place of intensive coordination among politically robust and more permanent coalitions.

With no defined common goal and process, EU policy-making has become a collective muddling in which member states large and small fiddle with issues and create externalities for other member states and prompting responses from them. This then creates a need for policy coordination. No institution and no one or two member states could successfully frame the debate or prepare a strong outcome. The handling of the refugee crisis comes as a perfect illustration of the current state of play. Member state overload does not trigger a common policy but leads to slow and ineffective solutions. A unilateral response forces action upon others, whether it be sending migrants further, building a fence on the border with Serbia, or sending a no-return-approach signal from Berlin. If Merkel had wanted to use the massive flow of refugees into Germany to foster member state agreement on a binding relocation scheme and a more common policy of asylum, the strategy was ill-prepared. Germany swings its weight around with too little effect because Berlin has not prepared the ground for more leverage, does not act with the support of a standing consensus group and does not have an incentive scheme prepared to win additional allies.

None of these gaps in consensus could be closed over the short term, so additional leverage is sought by threatening cuts in structural funds. This approach seems about as constructive as the British threat to pull out unless the other member states agree to a weaker EU. The other option, an "intergovernmentalism with teeth" and tested in Eurozone crisis management has also failed to be thoroughly successful, not least because it reversed the old logic of integration to diffuse the asymmetry of power among member states.

Assertion Three: Europe's stability is threatened by nationalist and populist movements that are determined to gain power in different member states and renounce EU integration.

Trying to make sense of the degree of change in European politics and societies since 1990 remains a fascinating intellectual puzzle. Who would have anticipated the depth of change the West is going through after the demise of the East? The extent of renationalisation inside NATO seems amazing, though comprehendible in light of the disappearance of the Warsaw Pact. In comparison, the political stratification of European democracies is nothing but a revolution, thoroughly shaking up the old cleavages of left and right, transforming the traditional role of political parties and upsetting the place and status of political actors in the eyes of the public. Almost everywhere in the EU, the level of discontent with policy-making

has risen; new parties have emerged (some of them as anti-party parties); and the practices of political communication and mobilisation have changed. The general trend in party politics seems to be less leader-centric, favouring a moderator-style of political management.

Against this background, the rise of populist parties with a distinctively national and even nationalist political agenda is irritating. On the one hand, these political movements appear rather traditional in their approach to society and politics, on the other hand they seem to capture the beliefs and desires of a growing faction of society. It is astounding to see this pattern emerging in otherwise distinctively different societies of Europe. Probably, the current divide between a populist left in the south and a populist right in the north will also be transitory.

A principal driver of these changes seems to be the way in which societies respond to the effects of globalisation. The economics of globalisation have transformed the industrial structure of Europe, generating wealth but massively relocating jobs. Income inequality has grown everywhere with disproportionate benefits for the rich. The transnational grip of global finance is felt strongly. Externalities from conflicts elsewhere reach Europe faster and more profoundly. On top of all that, world politics are shaped more by the rise of traditional great powers, lead by rather old-style leadership personalities, than by the logic of multilateral bargaining and global governance.

The rise of identity politics in Europe, and not just in the culture clashes of the Islamic world, the surge of regionalist movements and nationalist parties all seems to be part of dialectic compensation. Globalisation and its implications provoke its antonyms. The mainstream of European societies has now understood that the challenges transcend the territorial boundaries of their countries. Unlike the integrationists, however, many do not conclude from this to build and support transnational political structures. To them, pooling sovereignty on the European level is not a solution but rather an exaggeration of the problem. The EU's gap in democratic legitimacy, which populists often refer to, is just pretence in this context. Because its representative institutions are not built on national identity, they can never become truly democratic.

Populist parties all over the EU believe that powers should be repatriated to the national level and that non-binding co-operation is to be preferred over supranational integration. They are sceptical of greater interdependence and strongly opposed to transnational burden sharing other than strictly voluntary commitments.

The effect on European politics is stronger than the percentage of the vote populist parties are capturing in national elections would suggest. Mainstream political parties seek to undercut the rise of new parties by absorbing some of their political claims. The integrationist narrative has become much less vocal in the

political discourse in recent years. At times, EU rules are put into question to please national sentiments. Years ago, France and Italy quarrelled over Schengen rules because of migration into France from Africa via Italy. At some point, the Danish government announced the reintroduction of border controls as part of a compromise package among coalition partners to secure the populist party's support for a pension reform. Today, the size of migration flows threatens to break up the

The size of migration flows threatens to break up the Schengen regime because governments fear the populist backlash against a common approach.

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The most profound, though less visible impact of populism in Europe, however, has been the rise of "presidentialism" in EU politics. The desire to demonstrate control over Brussels has been a principle driver in the rise of the European Council from an informal gathering to reflect on the bigger issues (and overcoming some deadlock in the Council of Ministers on the margins) to the essential policy-making body of the EU, controlling both the work of the European Commission and of the Council of Ministers. Evidently, underlin-

ing the role of the "chiefs" does not convince the populist core, be it UKIP or Font National, the True Fins, or Podemos for that matter, but it is meant to control their rise. Ironically, the resulting intergovernmentalism might play into the hands of the populists mostly because of the effects intergovernmental power-bargaining has on public opinion: The sense for a common European interest is lost and the positive-sum nature of integration is confused by the "showdown orchestration" of bargaining at the Brussels table. In conclusion, populism does threaten the stability of the EU, but the misguided response of mainstream politics to it may turn out to be the bigger threat.

More than 20 years ago, two influential members of the German Bundestag, Wolfgang Schäuble and Karl Lamers, published a paper entitled "Reflections on European politics" calling for the formation of a "Kerneuropa". While core Europe did not materialise for lack of commitment among the countries of the core, their analysis, which prompted the concept, holds painfully true today: a growing diversity of interests and diverging priorities among the member states, a deep structural change of the economy, a "regressive nationalism", and over-burdened as well as weak national governments.

Anatomy of a Crisis: Not all migrations are treated equal

PRZEMYSŁAW ROGUSKI

Today, the EU faces three major challenges emanating from what former NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen called the arc of instability: Ukraine, the Middle East and North Africa and the Sahel. All these crises have led to massive population movements which are reflected in European migration statistics. In this situation the need for unified European action and solidarity is obvious. Hence, further bad blood between the eastern and western EU states needs to be avoided if a meaningful solution is to be found.

Europe is back in crisis mode. After the Eurozone debt crisis, the standoff with Russia over Ukraine and the third Greek bailout, Europe faces yet another challenge: hundreds of thousands of people streaming into the European Union in search of refuge, jobs and a better life. In what has now become a familiar pattern, we see calls to action, extraordinary summits and recriminations between member states, followed by more calls for unity etc. We also see the media hunting for the most powerful image to depict the crisis and finding it, depending on their views, in the tragic death of Aylan Kurdi, a Kurdish boy from Syria who drowned in the Aegean Sea on his way to Greece, or in the pictures of ungrateful refugees throwing away food distributed by the Hungarian authorities.

All this leads to a vivid and often morally exalted debate, where arguments about law and policy are supplanted by statements about morality and values. It is striking how fast a difference of opinions on how to tackle the refugee problem has brought up old East-West stereotypes. On the one hand, enlightened and progressive Western Europe, caring for European values and human rights, the "Europe of light", whilst on the other, xenophobic, backwards and occasionally anti-Semitic Eastern "dark Europe" (*Dunkeleuropa*). Alternatively, as seen from an eastern perspective: the realist East, enforcing European law and preserving its sovereignty and Christian heritage against a Muslim invasion versus the left-wing, politically correct West, blind to growing Islamic radicalism and social tensions between immigrants and locals in their own countries, all the while trying to impose its values on others by force.

Three major challenges

What is largely missing from this debate, both in the media and, unfortunately, sometimes also in politics, is a thorough and unbiased analysis of the roots of the crisis and the best instruments to fight it. Neither Angela Merkel's "we can do it" nor Viktor Orbán's "refugees are a German problem" are prime examples of a well

Neither Angela Merkel's "we can do it" nor Viktor Orbán's "refugees are a German problem" are prime examples of a well thought-out policy. thought-out policy. Nor is calling every migrant arriving in Europe a refugee or an Islamist radical a substitute for informed journalism. Instead, to fully understand the current situation, it is important to look at three key issues. Firstly, the scope of the present challenge, i.e. who is coming and why. Secondly, the legal background, including what our rights and obligations are. Finally, developing a strategy and deciding how to proceed.

Today, the EU faces three major challenges emanating from what former NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen called an arc of instability:

Ukraine, the Middle East and North Africa and the Sahel. The Russian annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Donbas have brought war back to Europe. Ukraine faces threats to its territorial integrity and has to cope with up to 1.5 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) fleeing conflict or political oppression. Many Ukrainians decided to migrate to Europe, the United States or Canada. However, thus far, the majority have done so through tourist, educational or working visa arrangements, rather than through a formal asylum procedure.

In the Middle East, the war in Syria and the rise of the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has resulted in large scale death and destruction, as well as enormous hardships for the population. According to estimates by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 10.8 million Syrians, out of a pre-war populace of around 22 million, were affected by the conflict. Six and a half million people are internally displaced, while over four million have fled the country. Most have fled to neighbouring countries, with Turkey (1.9 million), Lebanon (over one million) and Jordan (630,000) being their main destinations. However, more and more Syrians, both from Syria directly and from their places of refuge in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, have decided to seek asylum in Europe. Finally, in the Sahel region of Africa, oppressive regimes such as Eritrea, the Islamic radicals of Boko Haram in Nigeria and Al-Shabab in Somalia, as well as general economic hardship, have forced people to flee.

All these crises have led to massive population movements which are reflected in European migration statistics. Data provided by Eurostat, the EU statistics agency, show a steadily rising number of asylum applications within the European Union. In 2013 there were 432,055 applications throughout all 28 EU member states. This number has risen to 627,780 in 2014 and 422,860 in the first half of 2015. Germany alone is predicting it will take up to 800,000 asylum seekers by the end of 2015. Those seeking asylum in the EU come from all around the world, with Syrians, predict-

European statistics reveal that while the migration numbers are high and continually rising, the current influx should not have come as a total surprise.

ably, comprising the largest group. Applications from other war-torn or unstable countries such as Afghanistan, Eritrea, Pakistan, Iraq and Somalia are also quite high. However, the statistics also reveal quite a few surprises. For example, the third-largest group of asylum seekers in 2014 and the first two quarters of 2015 came from Kosovo, a country which is relatively safe, albeit poor and corrupt. Serbia and Albania are also high on the list, as is – surprisingly – Russia, with 19,820 applications in 2014 and 8,555 in the first two quarters of 2015, down from a record high of 41,470 in 2013. Ukrainian citizens have filed 14,060 applications in 2014, 14 times more than in 2013, but still a small number when compared to the 1.5 million Ukrainians who are internally displaced.

What these statistics reveal is that while the migration numbers are high and constantly rising, the current influx should not have come as a total surprise. Indeed, Spain, Italy and Greece have been asking for EU support in coping with the mass influx of migrants for many years, but to no avail. Instead of offering help, most other EU states, Germany prominent among them, insisted on adherence to

the so-called Dublin III Regulation, which stipulates that asylum claims must be made in and processed by the first country of arrival.

What the numbers also show is that not every person applying for asylum in the EU is coming from a war-torn country. Indeed, people from Kosovo, Ukraine, Afghanistan or Syria may be united in their wish to be granted the right to stay in the EU, but differ in the reasons and circumstances for their flight. These differences matter greatly for the legal qualification of the asylum claims made by migrants. This qualification in turn is decisive for whether a person will be granted protection within the territory of a state of which s/he is not a citizen. In order to decide who has and who does not have the right to international protection, we need to turn to international refugee and asylum law.

Who is a refugee?

Let us start with a rather obvious but nonetheless important observation: each state has the power to grant or deny a person who is not a citizen access to its territory. The fixing of borders and the exclusive control over admission to territory are core aspects of a state's sovereignty. Of course, in today's world, it is standard practice that foreign nationals may enter other states, but this must be done at designated border crossings, air or sea ports and with proper documentation to enable the state to identify the person who wishes to enter, i.e. a passport and in some cases a valid visa. Without these documents, a state may refuse admission and may even penalise illegal border crossings.

However, as with every rule, there are exceptions. After the terrible tragedy of two world wars and the wide scale persecution of specific groups such as the Jews, the international community agreed that people fleeing persecution within their own country need and deserve protection elsewhere. Prior to the Second World War, the League of Nations created the office of the High Commissioner, initially for Russian refugees and then later for Armenian, Assyrian and Turkish ones. In the aftermath of the Second World War, which had devastated a whole continent and displaced millions of people, the International Refugee Organization (IRO) was set up with the task of catering to the needs of war refugees. The IRO was later replaced by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and a permanent legal framework to determine the status of refugees. In addition, state obligations towards refugees were established in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its latter 1967 Protocol.

According to this Convention, a person is a refugee if s/he fulfils four distinct criteria. Firstly, s/he must be fleeing due to a well-founded fear of persecution.



Persecution in legal terms arises when there is a possible or actual violation of substantial rights of the person, such as most obviously the right to life or personal liberty, but may also affect other basic rights. To be recognised as a refugee, a person does not have to have already suffered persecution, but the fear which leads to his need of protection must be founded on real grounds. If a person is fleeing out of fear of harm emanating from other sources, such as climate change, natural disasters, drought, pollution and so forth, the element of persecution is not present and that person is not a refugee.

Secondly, the persecution a person is fleeing from must be based on one of five grounds: race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group

or political opinion. So, for instance, people fleeing from religious oppression by ISIS, like the Yazidis or Christians, or from sexual violence or racial hatred, fulfil this definition, whereas people fearing indiscriminate violence from militias or organised crime are not covered by the definition, unless other circumstances are present.

Thirdly, to have the status of a refugee, a person must be outside of the country of his/her nationality, which means that s/he must have crossed the borders of his/her home state. This is an important qualification, as it excludes those people who were forced to flee their homes because of persecution but who remain within the borders of their state. This subsidiary aspect of refugee protection is also evident in the final condition, which is that to be considered a refugee, a person must be unable or, owing to fear of persecution, unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of his/her home country. Only when the home country is unwilling or unable to grant protection to a person should other countries step in and offer international protection by recognising such a person as a refugee.

This very brief introduction to the 1951 Convention definition of a refugee – a definition which is accepted throughout the world, even if some aspects of it are interpreted differently – illustrates that not every migrant claiming asylum within the EU qualifies as a refugee. People coming from relatively safe countries such as Serbia, Kosovo or Albania will have a very hard time proving that they are persecuted by their governments. Indeed, the EU has designated those states as "safe countries of origin", which greatly reduces the chances of their citizens successfully claiming refugee status. Equally, Ukrainians only have a marginal chance of recognition as refugees, even though they might be fleeing genuine persecution on national or political grounds in Crimea or the Donbas region. Since most of the territory of Ukraine is still under governmental control and normal life goes on in places such as Kyiv, Lviv or Dnepropetrovsk, people fleeing Crimea or Donbas can still avail themselves of the protection of their home state in other parts of the country. This is legally called an "internal flight or relocation alternative" and usually serves as a bar to obtaining refugee status. On the other hand, people fleeing sectarian violence in Syria, Iraq or Afghanistan, or oppressive regimes such as Eritrea, have better chances of having their refugee status recognised.

Desperate need

It is notable that a strict application of the refugee criteria would leave some people fleeing real threats without the possibility of protection. If a person is fleeing civil war in Syria, but not because s/he is actively persecuted by one of the warring

parties, then technically, one of the five grounds of persecution may not be present. Regardless, clearly such a person would be in desperate need of protection.

In cases where the life or rights of a person would be in jeopardy if s/he would return, international law forbids the expulsion of that person. In Europe, this so-called obligation of non-refoulement arises from the European Convention of Human Rights and was later codified in the EU Qualification Directive (2011/95/EU). According to this directive, a person seeking asylum within the EU may qualify either for refugee status or so-called subsidiary protection, which is granted when a person faces serious harm, such as the death penalty, torture, inhumane or degrading treatment, punishment or a serious threat to life or health by reason of indiscriminate violence in situations of armed conflict. Accordingly, most people fleeing the war in Syria would be eligible either for refugee status or at least subsidiary protection. In practical terms, there is no difference between the two and a person granted international protection on either grounds will be protected and given residence permits, travel documents and access to education and employment.

Turning to the application of these rules in the current migration crisis, it is

important to examine the obligations of member states towards third-country nationals who attempt to cross their borders to claim asylum. Firstly, each EU member state is obliged to accept and process every application for international protection made within its territory at its borders or international transit zones. No person who has asked for asylum may be turned away or expelled without an examination of their claim. However, the Schengen rules, which govern the territory of the open borders of EU member states that are members of the Schengen agreement, require each state to control admittance into the territory and to

In the European Union, no person who has asked for asylum may be turned away or expelled without an examination of their claim.

admit only those persons who have a valid travel document and visa. With regard to migrants and refugees arriving at external EU and Schengen borders, this means that they can be admitted if they apply for asylum. There is no right of entry without a visa or without filing in an asylum claim and persons who do not do so may be denied entry.* Accordingly, states are not prohibited from discouraging illegal border crossings by making this an administrative or criminal offence, as is currently the case in Germany and, most recently, Hungary.

^{*} The European Court of Human Rights however decided that so-called push-back operations, that is the interception of migrant boats at sea and sending them back, for instance to Libya, before they reach European ports without giving the migrants a chance to apply for asylum is illegal.

The Dublin III Regulation stipulates that a single EU member state shall be responsible for examining the application for international protection filed by an asylum seeker. Generally, the responsibility falls on the country of initial entry into the EU. Countries not responsible for processing an asylum application may nevertheless do so voluntarily and in certain cases may be prohibited from returning an asylum seeker to the responsible country if the asylum procedure in that country is manifestly inadequate. Until very recently, member states have been very reluctant to process asylum applications if they are not obliged to do so under the Dublin III Regulation.

The country responsible for processing the claim is obliged to register the application, enter the applicant's data, including fingerprints, into a common EU asylum database and decide whether to grant or withhold international protection to the individual. While an asylum application is being processed, the state must ensure sufficient accommodation, food and health care is provided to the applicant. Each application must be considered individually and must conform to due process of law. The European Court of Human Rights is very strict in this regard and has declared in a recent case concerning the return of migrants who arrived by boat in Lampedusa that return orders issued after 48 hours to each applicant individually, but whose text was otherwise virtually identical, amounted to a prohibited mass expulsion (this judgment is hotly contested by Italy).

Disproportionate burden

Under the Dublin III Regulation, the countries of first entry are responsible for processing asylum claims. According to the UNHCR, 520,927 migrants have arrived in Europe by sea in 2015, with 387,520 arrivals in Greece and 131,000 in Italy. It is obvious that such a high number of arrivals would pose a tough challenge for any country and that the Dublin Regulation is putting a disproportionate burden on certain countries, especially in situations such as a mass influx of migrants. The Dublin system proves even more inefficient if we consider that the first country of entry is often Greece. However, Greece has failed to implement its duties under the Dublin system and does not register or process asylum applications. Instead, it sends the migrants onwards to other countries. Faced with Greece's obvious incapability of dealing with the migration influx on its own, a good European policy response would have been to help Greece financially and administratively to process the migrants and their asylum applications in a fast and appropriate manner when it first asked for help in 2012, rather than to simply insist that Dublin III must be adhered to.

The collapse of the Dublin system in Greece, which had already happened before the current crisis erupted in August 2015, led to an increased influx of migrants, particularly to two countries: Germany and Sweden. Although police and local administration had already issued warnings in 2014 that Germany was facing rising numbers of migrants and that the asylum procedures were inadequate, the government failed to react. The full realisation that Germany has to brace itself for a mass influx came only in the summer of 2015. Moved by genuine sympathy towards the plight of the migrants, especially after the scene of Aylan Kurdi's death on the front pages across Europe and the swift condemnation of right-wing and neo-Nazi attacks on asylum centres in eastern Germany, the German people reacted with a massive outpour of compassion and volunteerism to help the arriving migrants. In this way, the German "welcoming culture" (Wilkommenskultur) was born. Meanwhile, Angela Merkel was visiting facilities for asylum seekers, posing for selfies and calling for a German "we can do it" attitude. The political consequence of this attitude was a decision to temporarily resign from enforcing the Dublin III Regulation.

While this decision was legally correct and may have been intended as a simple acceptance of facts on the ground (i.e. most migrants wanted to go to Germany), the political signal it sent out was interpreted as an open invitation for all Syrian refugees to come to Germany. After a couple of weeks, the German government realised that it had made a mistake and began backtracking, temporarily introducing border controls. European tensions were exacerbated by the unilateralism of both German decisions. For a while, it started to look like "every man for himself", culminating in beggar-thy-neighbour policies being introduced in the Balkans.

A way forward

In this situation, the need for unified European action and solidarity is obvious. The first steps were taken in September during the Council and European Council meetings, but the decisions reached there can only be the start. Further bad blood between the East and West, such as during the decision to relocate 160,000 migrants, needs to be avoided. So what might be a way forward?

A good starting point may be to fully utilise and apply existing legislation. Each person arriving at an EU border has an unconditional right to be treated with dignity, to be provided shelter and to have his/her asylum application processed individually and with all the proper legal safeguards. In return, s/he has to co-operate with the authorities and must subject him/herself to registration and fingerprinting. The impression that migrants may freely choose whether to co-operate with the

authorities, travel throughout the European Union without hindrance and freely choose their country of asylum must be countered and the violation of these rules actively discouraged.

Next, Europe must get serious about managing the influx of migrants into Greece and organising their onwards journey. If the Dublin system is to be re-es-

Europe has to get serious about managing the influx of migrants into Greece and organising their onward journey. tablished, Greece should be helped in caring for and registering the arriving migrants, by ways of financial and technical assistance. Quick procedures should be established for those migrants who come from safe places and whose asylum applications stand little chance of being accepted. Furthermore, Europe needs to increase its involvement in the Middle East in order to facilitate an end to the conflict in Syria. It must also help the migrants in Syria's neighbouring countries.

Since the outbreak of the Syrian war, the EU and its individual member states have sat on the side lines and pretended that the war does not concern them. This approach must change.

In 2015 the EU and individual member states contributed around 150 million US dollars to the UNHCR Syria Relief Fund, which provides help to Syrian refugees in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and other adjoining countries. Despite this, the programme is still greatly underfunded, with a funding gap of \$750 million for 2015 alone. The UNHCR had to reduce rations in the camps, which has greatly contributed to the decision of many to flee to Europe. Unfortunately, some EU countries, such as Belgium or Poland, have not contributed at all. A generous contribution to the Syria Relief Fund may still be the better investment, since it is cheaper to provide help to the refugees in Turkey and Lebanon than to those already in Germany or Sweden.

Finally, politicians should understand that asylum procedures should not be treated as a substitute for a coherent migration policy. These procedures were designed to offer protection to those fleeing persecution and not to help countries overcome the problem of low birth rates. Applying the refugee law too liberally risks the erosion of popular support for the institution of asylum and, thus, does a great disservice to those people who are genuinely persecuted and need help from the international community. Instead, EU member states should explore ways to offer migrants legal avenues to find a job and relocate to the EU. This would release some pressure from the asylum system and enable states to steer immigration according to their demographic and economic needs.

The measures advocated above will not bring about an end to the crisis overnight, but might help manage it in a better and more efficient way. Above all, Eu-

ropean states and societies must realise that as long as the arc of instability exists around Europe, migration crises will happen. The best way to avoid them is to work to stabilise the regions where governmental authority and the rule of law is weak or collapsing. Investing in the rule of law, security and economic recovery in Ukraine and Libya is not utopian altruism or Western interventionism, but a sound policy based on self-interest. If Europe does not take its immediate neighbourhood seriously, be it out of stinginess, a lack of interest or the desire to be left alone, it may soon wake up with another million refugees from North Africa or Ukraine knocking at its door.

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The EU Can no Longer Afford To Be So Introverted

A conversation with Joerg Forbrig, transatlantic fellow for Central and Eastern Europe at the Berlin office of the German Marshall Fund of the United States, Interviewer: Adam Reichardt

ADAM REICHARDT: Let us start with the results of the EU response to the refugee crisis thus far, namely the distribution or "quota" plan, which reallocates 120,000 refugees to most EU member states. How do you assess this plan? Will it be possible to achieve on a political level?

JOERG FORBRIG: First of all, we have to understand what this plan is and is not. It was devised as an emergency response. It was meant to take the worst pressure off the three countries that have been most exposed to incoming refugees: Italy, Greece and Hungary. The plan was never going to be a sufficient or sustainable long-term response to the refugee problem. Between January and July 2015, 438,000 refugees have requested asylum in the European Union. That number alone is over three times the amount

that is covered by the 160,000 refugees to be distributed under the plan. If you remember, there was first an agreement concerning 40,000 in May of this year followed by a second agreement in September for 120,000. This is obviously only a fraction of the refugees coming into Europe and since then, these flows have only increased further.

However, even this modest plan has effectively hit a wall in the European Union. I think this is because it touches on a number of very sensitive questions in many of the member states. There is the question of state sovereignty and the degree to which European policies can be imposed on individual states. There are obviously differences in the impressions that societies have of themselves and the degree to which they are will-

ing to accept refugees from different cultures. The EU states vary in terms of development and prosperity, as well as experience with immigration. Moreover, there are different views of what Europe and its values should be. Clearly, there is no unanimity across the union. I think in this situation, it was a mistake that the EU pushed through the plan at such rapid speed without much discussion, by majority voting and under threat of sanctions. I am afraid this means that the current plan will only be partially implemented, as not all countries will participate. Furthermore, it will certainly make it harder in the future to come to any agreement on how to respond to the refugee crisis, which is not ending any time soon.

Indeed, Slovakia has already announced it will challenge the plan in EU court, calling it "nonsense". Do you believe that some Central European countries like Slovakia, Hungary or the Czech Republic could halt the implementation of this plan? And what will it mean for the future of European cooperation on other issues as a result of this growing divide?

The fact of the matter is that we have a larger number of refugees now than ever before. This group has already arrived in the EU and many more are on their way. These are real people, they will not disappear and they need to be taken care of. In this situation, there is hardly any time to wait for an EU court decision of the type being sought by Slovakia, or to wait for those countries

who do not want to participate in this plan. If there are opponents of the plan in Central Europe, or elsewhere in the EU, then the rest of the EU will have to go ahead and distribute the refugees without those critics. In terms of numbers, this should be feasible because the allocation numbers to Central Europe are relatively small. In moral terms, I might add, human lives should clearly take priority over the squabbles among EU member states.

In the long run, this situation will be detrimental to the perception and role of Central Europe in the European Union. Some have already diagnosed a "deficit of empathy" among Central Europeans, while others are calling for a reduction in EU structural support for the region. This may well end up being a lasting stain that taints the image of Central Europe. When it comes to issues that may require the Central Europeans to call on the EU for support and solidarity, such as increased refugee pressure on the EU's eastern border, requests for enhanced security by Central Europe, or renewed issues of energy security, there may be some backlash. Central European concerns may end up falling on deaf ears elsewhere in the EU.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel has come out as one of the leading voices in the crisis, calling for compassion and to welcome the refugees in Europe. However, she quickly changed her tone after some political backlash with the closing of the German-Austrian border. How do you as-

sess the German Chancellor's actions thus far?

Firstly, it is important to understand that Chancellor Merkel's response was consistent with the vast majority of German opinion. The response since the summer has been that these are desperate people that need our help. Merkel has stuck to this line until now; she is not wavering and has not changed her tone. To say that she has changed her position is a misperception.

This is remarkable because there is more and more doubt in the German public and media as to whether or not "We can do it", as Merkel said. If you look at opinion polls, there are more Germans who are now in doubt, and Merkel's ratings have dropped considerably. There are aggressive anti-immigration protests that are taking to the streets and growing in numbers. There are also a number of political players, from the Social Democrats to the Bavarian Christian-Social Union, who are demanding a tightening of immigration policies. In short, uncertainty and criticism are emerging.

That said, quite a large number of political responses have already been taken by Germany. An ambitious and comprehensive package of policies has passed through parliament with the support of all parties. The state administration is finally shifting into top gear to handle the flow of refugees. Border controls have been introduced and recently extended by a month. More of these measures will be necessary, and surely the jury is still out as to whether all of this will be suffi-

cient. Even government ministers admit that they cannot tell at this stage whether all these measures will be enough. Still, the position of the chancellor remains unchanged, as she reiterated recently in a much-discussed talk show.

During the crisis, Hungary's prime minister, Viktor Orbán, famously said that this is not a European problem, "this is a German problem". How do the Germans respond to this? It is clear that the vast majority of these refugees do consider Germany their final destination.

The government here, and Merkel in particular, is very clear that this is a European problem. Germany is willing to help as much as it can, but it cannot handle this crisis alone. I think the country is adamant in saying that it is willing to help the nations that are most exposed to the refugee crisis, such as Italy, Greece and Hungary. However, in doing so, it also needs solidarity from the other European states. It will continue pushing for a European way of handling this refugee crisis together. The second part to this, on which Merkel is also very clear, is that whilst we have an obligation to help the refugees, they do not have a choice as to which countries they are allocated to. As much as we understand the practical difficulties of a Europe that has open borders and also that the mobility of people is hard to control, there is a very clear message offered to the refugees: that we are all willing to help but you do not have a choice about the place in which you will be settled.

What about German society itself? You had mentioned some of the concerns of Germans and the drop in support, but there is an even stronger resistance growing, especially in the eastern parts of Germany. Will we see an even stronger political reflex that could strengthen nationalist or xenophobic activists like PEGIDA and enable them to gain greater influence on the political scene? And what does this say about a divided Germany?

It has already been a year since we saw the first wave of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim protests by a movement called PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Occident). We also saw an increasingly strong showing by a right wing populist party called Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in the polls. We had not seen a party like this in Germany for many years. Yet, this was well before the refugee crisis became as acute as it is now. In the meantime, these groups subsided. PEGIDA demobilised and the AfD quarrelled internally and split. It seemed both were a flash in the pan.

In the wake of the current refugee crisis, however, these expressions of discontent have been revived, both on the streets and in the polls. I would say that they are set to get stronger in the coming weeks and months. Next year, Germany has a couple of regional elections and we may well see a strong showing from the extreme right, who are basically encapsulated by PEGIDA and the AfD. That said, this is a small minority of Germans. Overall we are talking about



a constituency of approximately ten per cent, or slightly more. They are certainly stronger in eastern Germany but across the whole country, this is still a relatively minor political force.

If we look at eastern Germany specifically, I think the reasons underpinning this sentiment are, in some ways, similar to those in Central Europe. I think there is a broad transformation process that is still incomplete. There is a political culture that is very volatile. There is a lack of experience with immigration and this has created a search for easy answers to a very complex reality. There is also a feeling among East Germans of still being second-class citizens and some desire to confront the West Ger-

man establishment. So there is a whole complex set of reasons which stand behind the strong showing of the right wing in eastern Germany. Nonetheless, I would say this is unlikely to threaten German politics overall. I think German politics remains firmly anchored in the political centre. The success or failure of these extremists will ultimately depend on how Germany handles the refugee crisis. Yet, the chances are that Germany will manage this challenge and that this protest movement will be a passing phenomenon.

We often hear that part of the solution to the crisis is to address its root causes. How would you characterise the roots of this crisis? Moreover, what would it mean for Europe to seriously address these roots?

The primary root cause for refugee movements are conflicts in other regions of the world. At present, this is Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Eritrea, among others. Unless these fires are extinguished people will continue to be forced to leave their homes. There is a secondary root cause that is often brought up in these discussions and that is the situation of the refugees in countries neighbouring the conflict regions. In the case of Syria, a large number of war refugees have fled to Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. Yet these three countries are also stretched to their limits. It seems to me that on those two root issues, the conflict zones and the countries where the refugees arrive first, Europe has been doing way too little. The EU is not much of an actor when

it comes to conflict resolution and has not provided enough support to enable the neighbours of the conflict zones to accommodate the refugees humanely.

With the Russian intervention in Syria, it looks like the refugee waves could get even worse. A recent survey in Germany shows that a vast majority of those fleeing Syria are fleeing the regime of Bashar Al-Assad. What effects will the Russian intervention have on Europe's relations with Russia and how will this affect the refugee crisis, which seems to have no definite end?

It is important to understand why Russia is intervening in Syria. In my opinion, the Russian intervention is not to offer a solution to the war, but to demonstrate that no solution can be achieved without Russia. It seems that the Kremlin felt that it was at risk of being left out of future developments, and it forced its way back into the Middle East with planes and missiles. A secondary motive may have been to bolster the Assad regime, which was nearing the brink of collapse. If that had happened, it would have eliminated one of the few allies that Russia had left in the region.

Russia's intervention has fundamentally changed the playing field. Syria is now a proxy war on the regional level between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and on the global level between Russia and the West. This setting will very likely prolong the war in Syria, especially if the West takes the view that, for lack of a better description, they will "Let the Russians have their next Afghanistan". If this ap-

proach guides western policy in the foreseeable future, then we can definitely expect to see refugee flows increase. Furthermore, we cannot exclude the possibility that this conflict will spread even further and engulf other neighbouring countries, which would further increase refugee numbers.

If we put this all in the greater context of Europe's response to crises, adding to this the Eurozone crisis, the Greek financial crisis and the Ukrainian war, do you believe that the EU, and Europe as a whole, will emerge stronger or weaker?

I think there are two questions here. First of all, we have seen multiple crises unfold in Europe simultaneously. The sovereign debt crisis, namely the Eurozone crisis centred on Greece, may have been out of the headlines for a while but certainly has not disappeared. The war in Ukraine may be on hold for the time being, because of Russia's intervention in Syria, but it remains fundamentally unresolved. Finally, there is the refugee crisis. What we have seen with all these crises is that strong divisions in Europe have emerged. Interestingly these divisions have manifested themselves in very different ways. For example, Greece divided Europe between the north and the south. Ukraine divided the newer EU countries and set them against each other. There were some like Poland and the Baltic states that were calling for a more resolute response to Russia. Others like the Czech Republic and Hungary argued for some form of accommodation

of Russia. Finally, the refugee crisis has thus far pitted the eastern and western EU members against each other.

In other words, divisions in Europe can emerge in every which way, depending on the crisis and the issue under scrutiny. The big question is whether or not these dividing lines can become more permanent. My hunch, as well as my hope, is that the east-west divide which we have seen over the refugee crisis will not be a lasting one. There may be individual countries in Central Europe that may seek to insulate themselves from the European mainstream (Hungary is certainly an example of this) but others will be pragmatic. So overall, I am not convinced that we will see an east-west divide emerging from this crisis.

The second part of your question refers to European crises more broadly. When I think about the last 15 to 20 years, I can recall countless conversations with people who are much more familiar with European affairs than I am. They all effectively say that the EU has always been in a crisis of one sort or another. There were crises over the various treaties from Maastricht to Lisbon. There were crises over enlargement and subsequent enlargement fatigue. In other words, the EU is seemingly in a constant state of crisis. Yet, the very same people who observe this will say that the EU usually comes out of these crises stronger. I take this as grounds for principal optimism.

At the same time we have to admit that in the past, these crises usually originated in Europe. We are now increasingly facing crises which have their roots outside the EU. In the case of Ukraine, it is Russia and its revisionism. The war in Syria and conflicts elsewhere are affecting Europe more than ever before. This means that the EU can no longer afford to be as introverted as it has been thus far. It will have to turn to the outside world much more proactively with real

commitments, visions and resources. This relates to Europe's neighbourhoods to the East and South as much as to the regions beyond them.

If the EU manages to become this increasingly outward looking and proactive actor on the global stage, then this refugee crisis, as well as the one in Ukraine, may well result in a stronger Europe.

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Poland as a Country of Migrants?

IIISTYNA SEGEŠ-ERELAK

Public opinion surveys measuring the attitude of Polish society show that Poles have a very limited knowledge of migration and refugees. However, in the wake of the current European migration crisis, the society remains divided, with little more than half of Poles willing to accept refugees from countries with an ongoing military conflict. These attitudes, along with underdeveloped integration policies, create a significant challenge for Poland in becoming a nation of immigrants.

"A wave of refugees is on the way to Poland", "a tide of refugees from Ukraine", "immigrants are swarming Europe". These have been the typical headlines of Polish newspapers in recent weeks. The migrant crisis in Europe has sparked a heated debate on migration on a previously unknown scale. It has also become a crucial element of the current election campaign. After having a glance at the newspapers, one might conclude that Poland has joined a group of Western European countries where a large number of immigrants reside and the issue of their acceptance and integration has long been discussed.

It is true that since EU accession and especially after joining the Schengen zone, Poland's attractiveness as a target country for migrants has increased. This has resulted from the gradual implementation of policies that liberalise foreigners' access to the Polish labour market. However, we are still predominantly a country of emigration, with approximately two million Poles living abroad.

Who is coming to Poland and why?

In January 2015, according to official statistics, 175,066 foreigners held a residence permit in Poland. The highest number of them lived in the Masovian Voivodship (the region in which Warsaw is located). Ukrainians occupy the leading position among immigrant groups in Poland, with their number continuously growing. Other groups include Germans, Russians, Belarusians and Vietnamese. Thus, based on the official data, one may say that the phenomenon of mass immigration is not a large problem for Poland. And indeed, according to Eurostat, about one per cent of Polish society is born abroad. By comparison, typical migrant destination states, such as the United Kingdom, France and Germany, have percentages of 7.8 per cent, 6.3 per cent and 8.7 per cent respectively.

Foreign-born inhabitants make up about one per cent of Polish society.

However, the truth also is that we have been seeing a very dynamic increase in the number of people legalising their stay. For instance, in comparison to 2013, there is a visible growth of 53,847 people. Most migrants who come to Poland for work reasons. Over 60 per cent of work permits are issued to Ukrainians

(almost 29,000 in 2014), who are followed by the citizens of Vietnam (5.4 per cent), China (4.8 per cent), Belarus (4.2 per cent) and India (2.8 per cent). The Ukrainians who come to work in Poland, find it relatively easy to adapt. The countries are close geographically, linguistically and culturally. Ukrainians also have a well-developed migrant network, making it easier to find a job in big Polish cities. Migration from Ukraine has recently intensified is also related to the ongoing military conflict in eastern parts of the country.

Importantly, official statistics do not fully reflect the actual size of foreign employment in Poland, since a number of migrants are employed illegally. According to estimates, this number could be between 50,000 and 450,000. Economic migrants also include individuals who come to Poland for seasonal work (mainly in agriculture) on the basis of a simplified procedure. According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, in 2014, 387,398 declarations of intention to commission work for foreigners were registered. Out of those, 96 per cent were for Ukrainian citizens. Interestingly, in the first half of 2015, there was a record increase in the popularity of this type of employment (the number of declarations exceeded 400,000).

For a growing number of foreigners Poland is also becoming a popular country to study. The Central Statistical Office reported in November 2014 that 46,101 foreigners from 152 countries were studying in Poland. This number, however, constitutes only 3.14 per cent of all students enrolled at Polish universities. It com-

pares to the EU average of seven per cent, the Czech Republic (nine per cent) and Hungary (5.3 per cent).

Unprecedented scale

Another important point that can be made in reference to the current debate is the low percentage of migrants who are living in Poland as refugees, i.e. individuals seeking protection. According to the Office of Foreigners, in 2014 only 8,193 people applied for refugee status, which is approximately half the number of 2013, a record year. Traditionally, the highest number of potential refugees come from Russia (86 per cent with Chechen nationality). However, since the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine, there has been an unprecedented increase in the number of Ukrainians seeking protection in Poland. From 2009 on large numbers of Georgian individuals have also been seeking refugee status in Poland. In turn, over 100 individuals seeking refugee status came from Armenia, Syria, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Characteristically, there is a difference between the number of submitted refugee applications and the number of people being granted this status. In 2014 the Office for Foreigners granted protection to just 732 individuals. The highest number of decisions on refugee status was awarded to citizens of countries including Syria, Afghanistan and Kazakhstan. The majority of the dismissed cases were because of their applicants' leaving Poland. In comparison to other EU countries, Poland hardly ever grants protection. According to data from Eurostat, only 16 per cent of asylum seekers in 2014 were granted protection whereas the EU average is 40 per cent. Thus, it is clear that refugees from war-torn Syria are not arriving in Poland en masse.

For many years Poland limited foreign access to the domestic labour market, taking advantage of the rule of complementarity in terms of foreign employment. Furthermore, Poland's high unemployment rate did not encourage liberalisation of its restrictive immigration rules. Steps to facilitate access to the Polish labour market were taken only several years after the country joined the EU in 2004. This decision was taken primarily caused by demographic changes taking place now, especially after a major wave of Polish emigration in 2004.

Polish interest in searching for workers abroad has grown steadily since. The possibility for a business to declare its willingness to employ foreigners at the local employment office is one of the more liberal instruments that has been implemented. It is used predominantly to search for those undertaking seasonal employment. Another significant development has been the implementation of rules that enable full-time students and university graduates to undertake employment

under the same conditions as Poles. Nevertheless, seasonal migration remains the primary market for employers willing to hire foreigners.

Poland has not introduced any significant changes to the labour code to encourage employment of highly qualified workers from outside the EU. At the same time, due to a relatively low number of migrants and the temporary nature of their stay, no systemic integration policies have been implemented. The only direct incentives providing support for foreign integration are Individual Integration Programmes (IIP), accessible to individuals benefiting from international aid i.e. those who have been granted refugee status or supplementary protection. While the IIP has been somewhat successful, it has also been criticised for its limited effectiveness. This is because once it is concluded only a very small number of individuals are able to find a stable job or permanent housing. Nor are many of them able to communicate in Polish.

Hurdles and frustration

With regards to integration, another big issue is the lack of pre-integration policies for individuals awaiting decisions on their refugee status. This seriously hampers their ability to start a life in Poland once they have been given the green light. Foreigners can only rely on workshops or professional training offered by NGOs. Research by the Warsaw-based Institute of Public Affairs shows that a large number of the refugees staying in refugee centres declare that they find it difficult to communicate in Polish. This can seriously impair their chances of finding employment, including low or unskilled jobs. Furthermore, individuals staying in the centres are only allowed to look for a job for six months after submitting their refugee application. This creates another hurdle in becoming active on the labour market and often causes a lot of frustration.

Certain groups of people, such as EU citizens, are entitled to social benefits under the same conditions as Poles. However, foreigners holding a residency permit for a fixed period of time to look for employment are unable to seek aid. This group includes the highest number of foreigners staying in Poland. Studies of migrants in Poland demonstrate the necessity of implementing holistic solutions within the scope of economic migrant integration. Respondents stress the fact that they have encountered numerous barriers to their active participation in the labour market, including insufficient knowledge of the Polish language, legal complications and unequal treatment by employers.

Poland was ranked 32nd in the 2014 *Migrant Integration Policy Index* (MIPEX) which compared integration policies implemented in 38 countries. In this respect,



Poland needs a sound discussion on refugees and more broadly on immigration. Unfortunately, the peak of an election campaign is definitely not a good time for this type of debate.

Poland came ahead of Latvia, Cyprus and Malta. Even though its position has slightly improved, (compared to 2013) mainly due to easier access to the labour market, other areas are still in need of improvement. They include: integrating foreign children in Polish schools and making it easier for migrants to participate in political life.

Despite numerous national institutions responsible for integration policy, more often than not, specific action is primarily undertaken by NGOs, supported by funds from the European Union. Unfortunately, this does not ensure a stable environment for developing and strengthening integration policies in Poland.

Migrants are strangers

Public opinion surveys measuring the attitude of Polish society show that Poles have very limited knowledge of migration and refugees. According to a representative survey conducted by the International Research Group IPSOS on behalf

of the International Organisation for Migration, Poles have a greatly exaggerated idea of the number of foreigners residing in their country. Nearly 25 per cent believe that foreigners constitute over ten per cent of the population. In reality, as previously mentioned, the actual figure is almost one per cent. At the same time, only 19 per cent of those questioned have had any contact with foreigners during

Only 19 per cent of Poles have had any contact with a foreigner in Poland over the past year. the past year. When assessing the impact of foreigners on the labour market, 40 per cent of respondents stated that they thought this impact was negative, while 29 per cent claimed it was positive.

In another survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, Poles are divided into those who want less immigration and those who believe the level of immigration should remain the same. Only nine per cent of

Poles believe that the scale of immigration should increase. Approximately 50 per cent stated that immigrants are a burden on the country since they take jobs away from locals and receive social benefits. Only 24 per cent claim that immigrants strengthen their country. By comparison, the attitudes of Germans and British people are very different with 66 per cent and 52 per cent, respectively, agreeing that immigrants have positive impact on their countries.

Along with the escalation of the migrant crisis in Europe, Polish attitudes towards refugees are becoming more negative. The most recent study by the Public Opinion Research Centre showed that just over half of Poles support accepting refugees from countries with an ongoing military conflict. At the same time, the number of people opposing refugees coming to Poland has significantly increased (to 38 per cent). According to 50 per cent of respondents, they could come and stay in Poland, but only temporarily. Eight per cent of those surveyed said they knew or had known a refugee living in Poland, primarily from Ukraine.

Poland for Poles?

While no Syrian refugees have yet reached Poland, they are already becoming a heated topic of public debate. Poland, similarly to the whole Visegrad Group, has been subject to strong criticism by other EU member states for its strong opposition to the "Junker Plan", which includes quotas. After long negotiations, Poland supported the new system regarding refugees, which means that within two years, approximately 7,000 people will arrive in Poland.

In reaction to this decision the current opposition party, Law and Justice (PiS), immediately accused the government of betraying Poland and the Visegrad Group,

which disagreed with the proposed EU solution to the refugee crisis. During a parliamentary discussion on refugees, the opposition even made the argument that refugees are a German, not Polish, problem. Unfortunately, it did not take long before the opposition realised that the fears and concerns that Poles have towards refugees might help them build their electoral strategy and boost their chances in the October elections.

As reflected in the aforementioned survey results Poland is deeply divided about the refugee crisis. Consequently, while some Poles organise or join rallies under

the banner "Refugees Welcome", others join rallies that carry banners like "better repatriated than immigrated". The amount of hate speech on the internet is also shocking. Typical anti-immigration slogans (immigrants do not assimilate, they are terrorists, they are good for

Poland is deeply divided about the refugee crisis.

nothing, etc.) have once again become very popular. A side effect of this increased full of hate rhetoric is a tendency to confuse economic migrants with refugees, which further highlights the lack of knowledge on the subject.

Undoubtedly, seven thousand refugees is not a large number, especially when taking into account the population of Poland and the current low levels of migration. How these people are welcomed and provided with the appropriate conditions for adaptation in Poland remains yet a challenge. The lack of an efficient integration system encompassing all migrant groups is still a critical element of this problem. Evidently, Poland needs a sound discussion on refugees and more broadly on immigration as well as actions that raise awareness of this complex issue in society. Unfortunately, the peak of an election campaign, which is taking place at the time of the writing of this article, is definitely not a good time for this type of debate.

Translated by Justyna Chada

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Under the Veil

PAUL TOFT7KF

Germany has become the main destination for refugees in Europe. Between 800,000 and one million refugees are estimated to arrive there by the end of 2015. Thousands of refugees are still on their way and most of them do not have money for fake IDs or plane tickets. Yet what awaits them in Germany is far from paradise.

Mohammed is happy. After only three days of waiting, he picked up his asylum papers at the office in Berlin. "I guess I got lucky", he says and smiles. Despite the fact that he left everything behind, he has not lost his optimism. In a few weeks he has an appointment to make his asylum official. Until then, he receives a place in a refugee home and some pocket money – 438 euros for 70 days. It is not much, but Mohammed seems content: "I am just happy people are helping us here".

I met the 27-year-old Mohammed at a demonstration against racism and offered him and his friends a place to stay at our flat, where he now spends his nights. During the day, he usually helps other asylum-seekers who are waiting at the office with translation, plays with the children or learns German.

I accompany him to the Regional Office for Health and Social Affairs, called Lageso, in Berlin. As we arrive, I am struck by the amount of people occupying the small park in front of the administration building. A group of Syrians is dancing with their hands in the air to the roaring sounds of Arabic drums, drowning out the crying children. Some of them are wrapped in blankets and trying to sleep. Volunteers are distributing water and fruit, picking up trash and providing medical help for the sick. Without them, the conditions outside the administration building would be unbearable.

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Overburdened and understaffed

Behind the barrier the situation is tense. A crowd of men is staring at a sign displaying the number of the next customer, as if waiting for salvation. Security guards try to maintain order. Hundreds of people are here waiting for asylum; Afghans, Pakistanis, Iraqis, Serbs and Albanians. Only a minority are actually from Syria. Many of them come every morning and stay until late into the night. The system is striking. Some wait a few days for their papers, others for more than a month. Still others, mainly people from the Balkans, simply receive a letter asking them to leave the country. The asylum centres in Berlin are overburdened and understaffed.

Mohammed is just one of the many Syrian refugees who dream of a better future in Germany. Along with Sweden, Germany has become the main destination for refugees in Europe. Between 800,000 and one million refugees are estimated to arrive by the end of 2015, as predicted by the German vice-chancellor, Sigmar Gabriel. This has become a huge challenge for the local authorities. For too long, the German government has ignored the growing influx of migrants. Approximately 400,000 new flats per year are needed, not to mention language classes and jobs. Now, Chancellor Angela Merkel counts on the solidarity and willingness of the people to help. "We can do it!" she said in a press conference, emphasising

the economic strength of Germany and the responsibility of Europe to act.

This attitude has caused her to be heavily criticised, particularly by Central and Eastern European states, but also from within Germany. Merkel is a polarising figure. At the same time, she is seen as the patroness of the persecuted and suffering. "Mother Angela", reads the title of an issue of *Der Spiegel*, where she is portrayed in a veil, reminiscent of Mother Teresa. Other newspapers praise her as the last keeper of European solidarity.

Everybody wants a selfie with Merkel these days. In an asylum home near Hannover, a mother even named her new born baby Angela Merkel.

Everybody wants a selfie with Merkel these days.

In an asylum home near Hannover, a mother recently named her new-born baby Angela Merkel. The exultations do not seem to stop and Merkel clearly enjoys her new role. Yet while the German chancellor takes credit for Germany's new image, it is the enormous effort expended by the German public – NGOs, volunteers and the Church – that has prevented complete chaos. Thousands of volunteers welcomed the refugees at the main station in Munich when the German and Austrian authorities decided to provide special trains from Budapest. People donated sleeping bags, distributed water bottles and even some of the older Bavarians, who are

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usually rather hesitant when it comes to foreigners, helped prepare food for the newcomers (only afterwards did they realise that pork ribs were not entirely appreciated among the Muslim majority). In Berlin, more and more, mostly young, Germans have offered a place in their own flat to a refugee. A new *Willkommenskultur* is being born and is becoming admired around the world.

"Germany is full of great people," Mohammed says to me, "because they do not want anything for their help." We are sitting at a small plastic table outside one of the Muslim community centres in Berlin, drinking Ayran (a popular Turkish yogurt drink — editor's note) and eating Turkish pizza. I am here for the first time. Today is Eid al-Adha, the Islamic feast of sacrifice. "Usually, we kill a sheep on this day. It is always a big party," he explains. However, today the yard in front of the mosque is almost empty. Hesitantly, I continue to ask about Mohammed's life in Syria. It takes me a while to realise that he is happy to talk about it.

Life was beautiful

Around four years ago Mohammed left his hometown of Palmyra in Central Syria. Today the historical town is under the control of the Islamic State of Iraq

and Syria (ISIS). Only a few weeks ago they destroyed the famous Temple of Bel, which is on the UNESCO world heritage list. "What these people are doing has nothing to do with Islam," he says about ISIS. Before the war started Mohammed studied law and owned his own car business as well as a candy shop. "Life was beautiful," he emphasises. His eyes light up as he shows me a video about Palmyra on his smartphone. Clearly, Mohammed would not be here if the war had not taken all of this away from him.

With the onset of war, things changed and Mohammed was in danger of being conscripted for military service. He had extended his studies several times to avoid the two-year-long service in the army. Sunnites like Mohammed are especially targeted for military service, to fight on the front lines for the Shiite president,

Bashar al-Assad. Fortunately, in Damascus, Mohammed was able to continue his studies. His family stayed in Palmyra.

A few years ago two of his cousins, who still lived in Palmyra, were arrested without any legal grounds. "Probably because they are Sunni, that is usually enough," Mohammed adds. After one year without any sign of life, his uncle called him. He had bribed the police to see his sons. Unfortunately, it was too late. Like many others, they had died in one of Assad's death chambers. Mohammed decided to turn his back on Syria. He left everything behind and escaped to

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Lebanon, where he took a plane to Turkey. In Istanbul, he wanted to stay until the war was over. "But I think it will now take at least ten to 20 years before I can go back," he says with a gloomy look.

On our way back to Lageso, we meet his cousin Tarek, who has been waiting for his papers for 30 days even though he applied on the same day as Mohammed. "Nobody here understands this system," he tells me, "and when you ask them about it, they just tell you to wait." In the meantime, a new batch of donations arrived with clothes, blankets and cosmetics. However, the food distribution organised by volunteers was prohibited due to hygiene issues.

"The government has let us down," says one of the local volunteers. "On the one hand, they expect our help, but on the other, they make it difficult for us to work." Another volunteer tries to explain the consequences of the new asylum law that is about to affect some of the refugees.

A good deal

The conservative wing of the Christian Democratic Union is sceptical about the advantages the refugees can bring to Germany. The Bavarian Minister, Horst Seehofer, invited the Hungarian prime minister, Viktor Orbán, to a recent party convention to discuss the positive effects of the border fence; an affront to Merkel. Even the social democratic coalition partner of Merkel's government demands

Concern about Merkel's open door policy within her own party is growing. tighter restrictions. Calls for the introduction of an upper limit for asylum-seekers are growing louder.

So far Merkel has refused, but the new asylum law shows that her generosity has limits. Not everybody can count on Germany's helping hand. Starting in November 2015 it will be easier for asylum centres to deport asylum-seekers that have been denied asy-

lum. They can also withhold the subsistence minimum to seekers who have already been registered in other EU member states. In addition, it facilitates the application of prison sentences and entry prohibitions. This is especially aimed at refugees from the Balkan countries which are labelled safe countries of origin. Even refugees who have paid handsome sums to traffickers can be denied asylum. The question is: How are they supposed to reach Europe if there is no legal way to enter?

Mohammed too spent most his money on the journey to Germany. When his parents arrived safely in Istanbul, he decided that it was time to leave Turkey. For a 15 kilometre trip from the Turkish coast to the Greek island of Farmakonisi, stuffed on a small inflatable dinghy with 40 other people, he paid 1,200 US dollars. "A good deal", he tells me, as "other people pay up to \$3,000". On the island, a Greek military base, he and the other refugees were caught by the police and put in what Mohammed describes as a sheep corral. It was the hardest part of the trip, he says. Five days without real food, fresh water or a bed.

When he finally arrived in Athens, his friends told him about a Palestinian man who could provide him with a fake ID. "I will show you", he says to me and digs in his backpack. He then pulls out three different IDs with his photo on them, Polish, Czech and Italian. "Elmo Gaiazzo", Mohammed laughs, "this was my Italian name. With this ID I managed to get through security. Before they caught me twice." For \$3,500 he got a new identity and access to Schengen. Mohammed knows that he is one of the lucky ones.

Thousands of refugees are still on their way and most of them do not have money for fake IDs or plane tickets. Many come by foot. The stories they tell are incredible and nobody would take such a risk without reason. Despite this, what awaits Under the Veil, Paul Toetzke Opinion & Analysis

them in Germany is far from paradise; endless lines in front of migration centres, overcrowded refugee homes and bureaucratic barriers are everywhere. At the same time fights among the migrants are increasing, right wing radicals continue to set refugee homes on fire and volunteers are reaching their limits. Under the veil of "Mother Angela", one can see the real problems that are yet to come.

Why did you choose Germany, I ask Mohammed. Why not Poland, England or France? "I heard from some friends that you can live a good life here and that it is possible to get asylum for Syrians. I did some research online and decided to try my luck in Berlin," he smiles. "It was a good choice."

We can only hope that this image will remain. "We can do it", but it will take more than grand gestures. A system that is based on the commitment of the population cannot be sustained forever. In the same way that bigger, higher fences will not resolve the issue either.

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All Eyes on Hungary

DOMINIK HÉLI

Country name: Hungary. Official language: Hungarian. Head of the government: Viktor Orbán. These are three certainties about Hungary. Due to the hysteria in the media, it is difficult to understand what the current migration crisis truly is. Perspectives vary. One of them is Hungarian.

By mid-September 2015, more than 200,000 people had illegally crossed into Hungary. European public opinion, politicians and the media remain divided when it comes to assessing Hungary's actions during this crisis. Some have claimed that Viktor Orbán is the only European leader able to say what many Europeans are thinking. Others perceive him as xenophobic, someone who cares more about his populist agenda than being human and who is destroying European solidarity. As often, the issue is much more complex than this crude two-dimensional portrayal. There are three key factors that shape Hungary's policy under the current government: the role of Christianity in the survival of the nation, the issue of ethnic minorities and an encounter with Fidesz's biggest political rival – Jobbik. All these elements are a result of Hungary's internal dilemmas. What is, Orbán's foreign policy is aimed at reshaping relations within the European Union.

Preserving nationhood

Christianity is a religion with special significance in Hungary. It is reflected in the new constitution, adopted in 2011, which begins with the line "God bless the Hungarians" (a phrase that also appears in the national anthem). In the "national avowal", which acts as a preamble, there are also many references to Christianity. The second line reads: "We are proud that our King Saint Stephen built the Hungarian state on solid ground and made our country a part of Christian Europe one thousand years ago." The third line, which is crucial to understanding the roots of the current discourse in Hungary, founded on a fear of Islam, reads: "We recognise the role of Christianity in preserving nationhood."

This highly symbolic statement links the survival of the Hungarian spirit, "torn apart in the storms of the last century", with the Christian religion. Christianity has become one of the key state-building elements in Hungary, along with culture

and language. In this context, the influx of immigrants – largely Muslim – is unequivocally interpreted as a threat to the existence of the state.

To many Hungarians, Muslims are perceived as people who would violate the Hungarian lifestyle and legal order. Some have made comparisons between the current set of events and the invasion of the Turkish hordes that, under the leadership of Suleiman the Magnificent, defeated the Hungarian army at the Bat-

Christianity has become one of Hungary's key state-building elements, alongside culture and language.

tle of Mohács in 1526. Too far-fetched? Not long ago, Orbán indirectly compared himself and his isolation with John Hunyadi, the leading Hungarian military figure of the 15th century and a national hero. "A defence of the lifestyle" was also presented by the Hungarian prime minister in a television interview. He stated that if Muslims forced their way of life (e.g. polygamy) onto Hungarians and Europeans, it could result in the creation of a "parallel society". In such a scenario, Orbán argues, only mathematics will decide which society is more competitive and therefore victorious in the civilisational race. Orbán said "We [Hungarians] do not want to take part in such a rivalry and this is why we cannot let them in." Interestingly, he equated the Muslim religion and the Islamic lifestyle.

However, pompous declarations about Christianity only appear to be relevant on paper. According to a recent census from 2011, the number of Catholics in Hungary decreased significantly when compared with data from 2001. In that year, 54.5 per cent of Hungarians (5.2 million) declared themselves as Catholics while only 39 per cent (3.9 million people) did so in 2011. In the case of Islam, an inverse trend can be seen. Between 2001 and 2011, the number of Muslims increased from 3,201 to 5,579. Despite this, Islam is still only practiced by 0.1 per cent of Hungarians. the census question about religion was facultative. In 2001, 1.1 million people did not answer it. Four years ago, it was 2.7 million.

Less Hungarians, more "others"

Within a decade, the Hungarian population has decreased by 800,000 and has now fallen below ten million. This is equal to the disappearance of the five largest Hungarian cities after Budapest. There are now 9.9 million Hungarian citizens, including more than 550,000 residents with foreign nationalities. At the same time, around 1.5 million people in the most recent census refused to address a question on nationality. It is estimated that most of them are Roma.

Hungarian legislation recognises 13 nationalities. It is important to note that since 2011 the term "national minority" (*kisebbség*) has been replaced by "nationality" (*nemzetiség*). In the 2011 census, there was a significant increase in the number of citizens declaring themselves to be not ethnically Hungarian (or "other"). This includes Middle Eastern, Chinese, Russian and Vietnamese. The number of Arabs and Russians living in Hungary grew by 300 per cent between 2001 and 2011. Both of these groups are larger than some codified nationalities such as Polish, Bulgarian or Ukrainian. The Hungarian government has recently started to realise the significance of this issue. Its next step will be to discuss whether to expand its list of nationalities to 17, or replace the least populous nationalities with a broad "others" option. These are key challenges for the development of Hungarian ethnic policy, which is one of the most liberal in Europe. Nationalities have the right to be represented in parliament and there are 13 spokespeople, one for each codified nationality, working in parliament in advisory roles.

Many claim that the remedy to Europe's demographic crisis is an influx of immigrants who could shore up its population. However, in Hungary, the situation is different. There are hundreds of thousands of *határon túli magyarok* – Hungarians living in neighbouring states which were once part of Austria-Hungary who, following the Treaty of Trianon, found themselves living outside the borders of the newly-established Hungarian state.

The first government led by Viktor Orbán (1998–2002) made a point of taking proper care of these compatriots living abroad. However, more complex measures were only adopted after 2010. In July 2015 Zsolt Semjén, the deputy prime minister, announced that out of 750,000 naturalisation requests, 700,000 people had been accepted and had taken the oath of citizenship. It is estimated that by the time of the next parliamentary elections in 2018, this number will have grown to one million. Even though new Hungarian citizens learn the Hungarian language and Hungarian culture, this does not mean that they are not going to be strictly monitored by security services for administrative and public security reasons.

Relations with Jobbik is another factor influencing Hungary's immigration policy. Generally speaking, there are two actors on the Hungarian political scene:

Fidesz and Jobbik, as well as their two leaders: Viktor Orbán abd Gábor Vona respectively. Even though the polls suggest high levels of support for Fidesz (more than 40 per cent of voters back it), the party has lost by-elections several times at both the local and national level.

When the migration crisis broke out, Jobbik, a far-right party, criticised Orbán for not being radical and decisive enough. The situation was a chance for Jobbik to find a new electorate. In fact, the only party able to curb the growing support for them has been Fidesz. This is one of the reasons why Orbán sharpened his narrative, developed a coherent strategy and clarified his messages by strengthening the National Communication Authority (NCA). Although it cost him billions of forints, the NCA became a very effective tool. The Hungarian prime minister took control over the entire debate on migration. He also stole a well-known Jobbik line, "Hungary for Hungarians", using it several times in the debate on the refugees.

Orbán achieved a strategic victory when he created an informal coalition between Fidesz, the Christian Democratic People's Party, and Jobbik, during the vote on the proposed anti-immigration laws in September 2015. This is because one of the main outcomes of the coalition was that Jobbik's leader declared that he had no aspirations of becoming prime minister and hoped that Orbán's government would find a solution to the immigration issue, even if it meant greater popularity for Fidesz. However, although this successfully subjugated Jobbik, it is still too early to talk about pushing the party into a corner. This is not the case with Hungary's left-wing parties, which have essentially become non-actors on the political stage.

A message to Brussels

Among the factors shaping Hungary's immigration policy is a will to reshape relations within the EU. Fidesz's slogan from last year – "A Message to Brussels: Respect for Hungarians!" – was no coincidence. Hungary has been the EU's disobedient child since at least July 2013, when Orbán addressed the so-called Tavares Report which was critical of the anti-democratic tendencies of the Hungarian government. For the first time in his career, Orbán spoke explicitly about the unequal position of states within the EU. The Hungarian prime minister raised concerns about EU double standards being applied selectively to certain states. He emphasised that "Hungarians will decide their fate on their own" and that Hungary joined the EU because it chose a partner, not because it wanted feudal relations.

Viktor Orbán is a proud politician and he will not allow anyone to impose their views on him. The migration crisis has proved an excellent opportunity for Orbán to once again highlight the EU's shortcomings, something that he has been talk-

ing about for a long time. The migration crisis seems to be playing in favour of the Hungarian prime minister.

The government's first steps to tackle the migration crisis occurred in April 2015. A lack of interest on behalf of the EU states resulted in the launch of a "national consultation on immigration and terrorism". However, equating "immigrants" and "terrorism" was indicative of the authorities' views on the matter. The government stressed it needed the opinions of its citizens' in order to pursue an effective immigration policy. It sent over eight million letters to Hungarians, consisting of 12 questions. Among them were questions such as "Do you believe that in the next few years, Hungary may be the target of terrorist activities?", "Do you know that immigrants are illegally crossing the Hungarian border and that in recent years, the number of immigrants in Hungary has increased twenty-fold?" and "There are

A significant part of Hungarian public opinion was disgusted by the anti-immigrant attitudes of the government. Others were pleased that the government had "called the problem by its true name".

those who believe that immigrants are a threat to job opportunities and to the subsistence of Hungarian citizens. Do you share this point of view?"

At the end of July 2015 a government spokesperson announced a summary of the consultations results, concluding that a large majority of Hungarians (around 75 per cent) support the country's immigration policies. On some issues, levels of support were nearly 99 per cent. However, only around 12.5 per cent of citizens (one million) decided to participate in the consultation. If it had been a referendum, the results would not have been considered valid. The government spent nearly 3.5 million US dollars on the survey, although a referendum would have cost five times as much. However, in the current climate surrounding migration, the survey has become a significant tool for legitimising Orbán's

actions. If asked about the debate around the country's migration strategy, Orbán replies that a consultation was held and his citizens overwhelmingly support him.

"If you come to Hungary, don't take the jobs of Hungarians!", "If you come to Hungary, you have to abide by our laws", "You have to respect our culture". These are messages spread all across Hungary on posters that were put up on June 8th 2015. The poster campaign, which actually began during the national consultation, had a clear anti-immigrant tone. Since then, Budapest has been frequently accused of xenophobia. A large part of Hungarian public opinion was disgusted by the outspoken, anti-immigrant attitudes of the government. Others were pleased that the government had "called the problem by its true name". However, it appeared that the measures undertaken by the government were exaggerated. According to

data collected by the Office of Immigration and Nationality, just a fraction of all the immigrants coming to Hungary wanted to stay there. What is more, in June 2015, there were just a few hundred immigrants crossing into the country every day. These numbers could easily be accommodated in the immigration facilities at Debrecen or Győr.

When Jean-Claude Juncker came up with the idea of obligatory immigration quotas in September 2015 for EU member states, Orbán was the first to oppose it. The Hungarian prime minister argued that a decision on whether to take immigrants or not needed to be made internally by national governments. His position was backed by 75 per cent of Hungarians, according to one poll conducted by the Századvég research centre. In the same survey, 63 per cent of respondents declared their opposition to the quota system.

In mid-June 2015, as the influx of immigrants was increasing, the Hungarian government decided to erect a four metre-high fence along the 175-kilometre border with Serbia. The completion of the fence was initially scheduled for November 30th 2015, but as more and more migrants were crossing into Hungary, the government pushed the construction deadline forward. The total cost of the fence is estimated to be around \$35 million (10 billion forints). The fence along the border with Serbia, as well as fences along the borders with Romania and Croatia, drew harsh criticism. However, it did not change the policies of the Hungarian government. The project was considered so important that Csaba Hende, the minister of defence, resigned because part of the fence's construction was not delivered on time.

Hungary cannot wait

The arguments in favour of Orbán's government remain unchanged. They have been repeated like a mantra — a country has a right to defend its (as well as EU) borders, its religion, its values and its lifestyle. In Hungary, the EU's hypocrisy regarding criticising the border fence while simultaneously introducing border controls within the Schengen zone is also frequently mentioned. A further argument states that the refugee quota plan is not a good solution as it does not touch upon the roots of the problem.

Orbán has compared the migration crisis to a burst pipe in a flat, with water gushing out. It is not enough to repair the pipe, Orbán said. The coherence of the government's communications has worked well thus far. Currently, it is developing a new poster campaign – "People decided – time to defend the country" – as well as paid adverts in Arabic and English, to be published in Middle Eastern press outlets to discourage illegal immigrants from coming to Hungary.

All these events, coupled with a lack of coherent EU policy on the migration issue, have resulted in Hungary having to lead on the matter. The migration crisis in Hungary can be seen through two lenses: humane and legal. To date, the country's recent immigration policy has failed to address the humane aspect of the migration crisis. However, it has dealt with the legal side of the matter more successfully. It is important to remember that the issue is very complex and it is extremely difficult to meaningfully address both dimensions. At the beginning of September 2015, Hungary did not allow unregistered immigrants to leave Budapest, as outlined in the Dublin Regulation, which clearly outlines the rules of travelling around the Schengen zone. Hundreds of immigrants became stuck in the Hungarian capital, so they decided to walk to the Austrian border.

Viktor Orbán is now an emerging leader of Europe whether we accept his migration policy or not. In the meantime, Austria and Germany declared their readiness to accept the immigrants and appealed to the Hungarian government to adopt a more flexible interpretation of the Dublin rules. Unfortunately, in spite of these appeals, neither Vienna nor Berlin expressed any real will to help Hungary tackle the crisis on its own soil. In the end, it forced the Hungarian government to send immigrants, via hundreds of buses,

to Hegyeshalom, close to the Austrian border. János Lázár, the head of the prime minister's office, subsequently announced that "Hungary cannot wait for Europe anymore." It was this moment that forced German Chancellor Angela Merkel, as well as Austrian Chancellor Werner Faymann, to acknowledge the desperation of the situation and take immigrants from Hungary.

Viktor Orbán is an emerging European leader, whether we accept his migration policy or not. As a result of his actions, Hungary was given a chance to lead, at least for a moment. Hungary had a plan and implemented it. It is clear that Orbán is not going to make any concessions. For him, the migration crisis is a defining "to be or not to be" moment on the domestic and European political scene. Hungary has a greatness complex. It is a small country with large ambitions.

As of now there is no clear resolution to the crisis and this impasse has left Hungary isolated. This is yet another message to Europe that Hungary needs to be taken seriously. The problem is that it is a message that is not yet widely understood.

Translated by Bartosz Marcinkowski

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There is no Other Way

NATALIA ŻABA

Around 6,000 people travel daily along Macedonia, Serbia and Croatia to illegally cross the Schengen border in hopes of reaching their final destination: Germany. The ongoing migration waves however, have opened old wounds in the countries of the former Yugoslavia and literally have no end in sight.

The refugees are coming. They are coming through Greece, Macedonia and Turkey. Previously, they only used to come at dawn. Now, they come at all hours, both day and night. Around 6,000 people arrive in Preševo, Serbia every day. It is the half-way point between Syria and Germany. They come here along sandy footpaths in the wilderness. There is nothing but dust and scrub around here. The landscape is desert-like, atypical for the Balkans. The first place in Serbia where the refugees arrive is Miratovac, a small village near the Macedonian border. Not far from there is a refugee camp, established by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), containing some tents, and barracks for medical staff and three police patrols. However, there are no toilets or showers, inside the tents, just bare ground, rubbish and a stench as they are not considered necessary since this is just a temporary stop. Nobody wants to stay here.

When inside the camp, some people visit the doctors while others take a break, sit on the ground and wait. The UNHCR starts counting newcomers. They gather people in one group. Despite translator's efforts, suddenly, a general panic breaks out but no one can understand what is really happening. Some start to scream and there is fear and uncertainty in the air. The crowd gets nervous and everyone wants to keep moving. The UNHCR continues to count the migrants, but mistakes are made — a mother may be let go but without her children or a pregnant woman might go without being asked about her partner.



On to Belgrade

a stench. This is just a temporary stop. Nobody wants to stay here.

Miratovac is a hamlet distanced two kilometre walk from the camp. Once the refugees reach it, they line up by the wall in front of the mosque. They wait for buses provided by the UNHCR to take them to Preševo, a town located in southeast Serbia, which is mostly inhabited by Albanians. Taxi drivers try to attract those who have money. Nobody asks any questions – the more money you have, the sooner you get to your point of destination.

In Preševo the police presence is constant. They often work 12 or more hours without a break. Those working night shifts or overtime receive extra pay for the extra hours, but there is no end in sight. The situation has been like this for months.

"What can I do?" Mustafa, an ethnic Albanian in a Serbian police uniform, asks me in fluent Serbian. One hundred metres away from the place where we are talking, taxi drivers have just made a deal with some refugees – 50 euros per person, eight people in two cabs.

Those who have no money, or who want to save it for what lies ahead, wait in line to enter the refugee centre. Backpacks, packages and bags lie next to each

other along the curb to mark their owners' place in the queue. The line is at least 400 metres long. Every single attempt to cheat is immediately called out on the spot. However, the police do not do much to intervene, as the refugees deal with these issues on their own.

In the first tent, a policeman checks if anyone has a weapon or any other prohibited item. If not, they are free to proceed to see a doctor or go to the Red Cross tent, where food boxes are distributed. The daily food ration in the camp is quite limited: canned fish, poultry pâté, water and some bread. Inside the camp, clerks register the refugees and give them temporary residence permits, allowing them to stay in Serbia for the next 72 hours. This allows the refugees to travel by bus, train or public transport and even be eligible for free medical care. Once through the camp, many move on and attempt to hitch a ride to Belgrade, which is 385 kilometres north (and around 1,000 kilometres from Berlin). According to official data provided by the office dealing with refugees, there are 50 buses (60 seats each) that leave Preševo for Belgrade every single day.

Once in Belgrade, the refugees usually head to a nearby park, which has become a sort of informal camp. Only after four months of constant crisis have the local authorities finally decided to place eight portable toilets, two military tents and a tank-truck filled with water in the park. Between May and September, there was no help. Local volunteers were taking care of the refugees, bringing them food, clothes and other basic necessities.

For the refugees, Belgrade is just a temporary stop. The road to Western Europe continues through Subotica, Horgoš and then Hungary. It is also possible to get there by bus. Between 3am and 8pm, there are more

For the refugees, Belgrade is just a temporary stop.

than 20 buses heading in that direction. All of them are completely full. We arrive at the main station in Subotica at 11pm. There are no police, just taxi drivers and buses taking refugees to the border with Hungary. Although Hungary closed its border with Serbia and erected a fence, it has begun organising transport directly to the Austrian border for those who somehow manage to get through.

The prison

However, since Hungary erected the border fence, many migrants have changed their route to Western Europe to pass through Croatia. An increasing number of refugees have been travelling in recent months to Šid, a Serbian town which is located two kilometres from the Croatian border. In Šid, like anywhere else, taxi drivers await the refugees, hoping to make some money by taking them to a "better

world. One driver, Ivan, shows me the place where the refugees are being taken for 500 Serbian dinars, the equivalent of four euros. He even offers to take me there for free, but only if I find him a wife with a "European" passport.

In the place Ivan showed me, the road branches in two directions. At the intersection is a Red Cross tent. One road leads to the official border crossing at Tovarnik. Nobody goes in that direction. The other road looks very much like those in Miratovac, sandy and dusty. The refugees walk this way and continue onwards for seven kilometres through cornfields.

In the Croatian town of Tovarnik, there are no taxi drivers waiting for the refugees. When they arrive, the police, who are present throughout this tiny village of 3,000 people, direct them to the train station. In the first days of the intense migration, there were no public toilets in Tovarnik. People were sleeping on the ground and along the concrete road that leads to the train station. A train with 11 carriages leaves the city in the direction of the West twice a day, but this is not enough to take all the refugees. Some of them had to spend up to four days sleeping under the open sky before they could finally catch a train.

Tovarnik, according to the refugees is like a prison. It is a senseless, forced stay on their way to a better future. They do not understand why they are stuck there for several days after such a long and complicated journey. In the end, the refugees want the same thing as the Croats, Serbs, Hungarians, Greeks and Macedonians – for them to move further west. When a train finally arrives, the refugees stand up, hoping to catch a lift. However, this is not their train; it is just a freight train which does not stop at Tovarnik. The people are beginning to get frustrated and angry. They have no idea how much more time they will have to spend here. For some, it is their sixth day without a shower.

After two hours the right train finally arrives. It has 11 cars and all of them are quickly packed with men, women and children. They sit in the corridors and the toilets. Getting onto the train is a nightmare, but nobody cares. The refugees trying to board the train gather in groups. They are then surrounded by the police. Once the train is full, the police do not allow others to board. The tension and anxiety amongst the refugees begin to rise. A translator shouts through a megaphone, appealing for calm. He tells everyone that they will eventually leave. Nevertheless, the people are anxious; they do not know when the next train will come.

"Down, down, sit down," police officers are shouting to the crowd. The translator continues his appeal for calm in Arabic. Suddenly, the whole crowd becomes a "family". People shout: "He is my family member!" or "She is my family member!" They do not want to stay in Tovarnik, they want to get on the train with the others.

"They need help and we understand this. Especially the women and children. However, I cannot understand the men," says Ivan Horvat, a member of the Croa-

tian special police. Horvat, like his peers, thinks that the men from Syria should have stayed there and fought against Bashar al-Assad, ISIS or whoever else. This is how things are in the Balkans. This is how men should act, Horvat says.

The vast majority of those crossing the Croatian border are men between 17 and 65 years old. Within this group, most are between 20 and 40. "Look", Horvat says, "Men make up the largest group here. These men are of military age. They

are all healthy." Horvat does not believe in conspiracy theories and he avoids politics. He is serving here because it is his job, to take care of public safety and enforce the law. Order needs to be maintained with empathy – those are the instructions from the top – and Horvat and his colleagues are going to stick to them rigidly.

A vast majority of those crossing the Croatian border are men, aged between 17 and 65 years old.

"The problem is they come here in such large numbers. Nobody can control such a crowd," Horvat says. The crowd is self-regulated and has its own internal rules, which seem to be a chaotic democracy dazzled by unfulfilled desires and dreams. "Most of these people need help, even those coming from Africa or Iraq, not necessarily from Syria. But I am convinced there are also Islamic extremists among them. Yet, there is no way we can identify them in such a crowd," Horvat concludes.

Human misery

However, the Croatian government has decided that there must be a way to identify extremists and would-be terrorists. People are taken from Tovarnik and moved to Opatovac, where a refugee camp has been organised. Around 150 military tents are set up there. They also have toilets and showers. The camp was set up not because the Croatian government wants the refugees to stay in Croatia, but in order to have better control over who is on their territory. During the most intense period, in September 2015, within just ten days, around 66,500 people crossed into the country.

Similarly to their colleagues in Preševo Serbia, Croatian police officers work around 15 hours per day. They say it is easier to catch criminals than to look at this human misery. They cannot wait to go home.

The Croatian government soon became tired of the situation as well. It closed six out of seven border crossings with Serbia, while the Croatian prime minister, Zoran Milanović, bluntly stated: "Either Serbia stops sending refugees to Croatia or all the border crossings will be closed."

It did not take long for Aleksandar Vučić, the Serbian prime minister, to respond. He said that Croatia cannot deal with the migration crisis while Serbia has been successfully doing so for months. Milanović then accused Vučić of a plot against Croatia, prepared in co-operation with Viktor Orbán, the Hungarian prime minister. Serbia denied these claims. As a result, Croatia closed all its border crossings and Serbia imposed a ban on the import of all Croatian products. For six days,

For the refugees, none of the bigger political machinations really matter. Turks, Macedonians and Bulgarians were all waiting in a 20-kilometre-long traffic jam that stretched from the border.

In the meantime, Hungary put up more fencing on some parts of its border with Croatia, while taking in the refugees who were still managing to cross. Similarly to Horgoš, Hungarian buses took the refugees

straight to the border with Austria. In the sixth day of the blockade at the Croatian-Serbian border, the EU Commissioner for European neighbourhood policy and enlargement, Johannes Hahn, visited Serbia, where he met with Vučić and urged Croatia to lift the border restrictions. After Hahn's visit, Croatia finally re-opened its border crossings. Serbia treated this like a victory while Croatia considered it a diplomatic triumph.

However, for the refugees, none of the bigger political machinations really matter. They continue to come, like they have been doing for months. There is literally no end in sight.

Translated by Bartosz Marcinkowski

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A Great Migration

MILAN LELICH

As a result of the occupation of Crimea and the war in Donbas, one of the greatest internal relocations in contemporary European history is taking place on the territory of Ukraine. Yet the European Union, preoccupied with its internal problems and the influx of migrants from the Middle East, has so far ignored this fact.

Her name is Daria. She is 18 and comes from the town of Lutuhyne in the Luhansk oblast, which is currently occupied by the Russian-supported separatist forces. Daria is a volunteer. She fights in one of the reconnaissance battalions of the armed forces of Ukraine. Prior to turning 18, she helped military volunteers in the "anti-terrorist" operation zone. Dressed as a civilian, she uncovered accomplices of the "terrorists" near the frontlines. She has not yet been directly involved in the fighting, but really wants to be. She also wants to return to her hometown.

"I want to go back to Lutuhyne with my husband, to my family and friends; but only if Lutuhyne is a Ukrainian town — and it will be, I know that," she says to me. Daria communicates with her mother, who remained in the occupied town, only by phone and even then with caution. Her mother regularly changes SIM cards as she is afraid that the separatist authorities could tap the conversations with her daughter.

Daria is one of the millions of people who were forced to leave their homes after Russia launched its aggression against Ukraine by occupying Crimea and starting a war in Donbas. These people are very different, as in any society. Some are trying to liberate their homeland with guns, some cut off all ties with it and started a business in Lviv, while others passively wait for assistance from the state, which

they blame for their situation. There are also certain people who enjoy their lives in the Kyiv night clubs, damning the EuroMaidan and the "junta" while praising *Novorossiya*. The post-Maidan state has yet another challenge to face – the great migration of the Ukrainian people.

Snowball effect

In Ukraine, the term "refugee", or rather "internally displaced person" (IDP), came into general use shortly after the "little green men" began occupying Crimea. EuroMaidan activists, community leaders, businessmen, journalists and other "forward-thinking" people began leaving the peninsula, fleeing persecution from the local "Cossack self-defence", Russian nationalist movements and other pro-Russian formations. The Crimean Tatars also began leaving as they could not accept that their motherland was being occupied by the Russian Federation, the authorities of which, to a large extent, are spiritual adherers of Joseph Stalin, who deported the Crimean Tatars in the 1940s. They fled from persecution based on nationality and as subsequent events have demonstrated, not without reason.

Yet, the number of displaced persons have increased like a snowball effect after the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) was declared in Donbas and clashes between government forces and Russian-supported separatists escalated. Over a year and a half since the conflict began, with the fighting hardly suspended and any ceasefire respected only partially, a growing number of people continue to flee the east of the country. For this reason, the term "internally displaced person" is more commonly used in the public discourse and refers to the migrants from Donbas instead of Crimea. Unfortunately, during the war, the Crimean issue has fallen to the way-side in public speeches by Ukrainian politicians and in international negotiations aimed at settling the conflict. In order to bring attention back to Crimea, Crimeans, including the Crimean Tatars, are forced to employ radical measures such as organising a blockade of food deliveries to the occupied peninsula.

Overall, according to the ministry of social policy in Ukraine, the number of IDPs has reached one and a half million people as of October 2015. According to data from the United Nations Refugee Agency, more than a million Ukrainians have fled from the conflict-affected areas to neighbouring states. Most of them have settled in Russia and others in EU countries. For instance, 68,000 have fled to Poland, 6,000 to Hungary and around 2,000 to Romania. But it is very difficult to get a precise number that reflects the reality. According to human rights activists and volunteers that provide assistance to the IDPs, many of them do not want to register on the territories controlled by Ukraine. Young men fear conscription and

families do not want to deal with the bureaucracy in order to receive meagre aid from the state. On the other hand, many pensioners have registered, but remain in the occupied territories because registration alone guarantees a Ukrainian pension.

No money and no accommodation

It is even more difficult to estimate the number of those who have fled the country. Most people left through the uncontrolled parts of the border between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, so the credibility of figures lies with the Russian authorities (which have been caught lying on issues relating to Ukraine multiple times throughout the last two years). According to some estimates made by volunteer initiatives, there may be up to three million Ukrainians who have fled from the war.

Official data indicates that the majority have decided to stay close to home. More than half a million internally displaced persons moved to the liberated territories of the Donetsk oblast and more than 200,000 people to the liberated territories of the Luhansk oblast. Fewer people have moved and registered in the

western regions of the country – around 3,000 in each region. Migrants from Donbas most likely do not want to make the long journey. Perhaps some people are deluded by the myths of "blood-thirsty nationalists" residing in western Ukraine, but many more people reasonably believe that it would be much easier for them to find jobs in the industrially developed regions such as Dnipropetrovsk or Kharkiv, rather than in the Chernihiv or Ternopil oblasts.

The internally displaced persons have to deal with two major and interrelated problems: work and accommodation. Neither of these has been resolved According to some estimates made by volunteer initiatives there could be up to three million Ukrainians who have fled from the war-torn areas.

thus far. It is difficult to find a normal job without shelter and it is impossible to pay rent for an apartment without a job. Having no money nor accommodation, migrants cannot find their new place in the world nor protect their statutory rights as citizens of Ukraine.

In spite of the cheerful reports prepared by the Ukrainian authorities, the actual situation is far from perfect. Similarly to how Ukrainians support their military, ordinary proactive citizens take on the huge burden of problems themselves. "We usually say that the state does five per cent of the work, while volunteers do the remaining 95," says Oleksandra Dvoretska, a coordinator of the human rights ini-

tiative Vostok-SOS. "Neither the support programmes declared by the state nor the laws adopted to aid the internally displaced persons function properly. I once called around 400 places which were suggested as temporary accommodations for the displaced. It turned out that only one option was viable."

This is why many internal migrants still live in completely inadequate conditions such as student housing, sanatoriums and rest houses, where they are often treated as unwanted. There is another difficulty related to the job search: there is next to no demand for the many professions that are popular in Donbas, especially those related to the coal mining industry and not every miner can retrain as a computer programmer or car mechanic. Neither is it easy for someone who has worked as an employee for his or her whole life to start a business, which can be very risky.

Tradition of mutual aid

In addition to financial problems, the internally displaced persons must deal with social and psychological issues. Many of them survived shelling and were forced to hide in basements for weeks while many others have lost their loved ones due to the war. Hundreds of thousands of people in their 30s, 40s, and 50s are

Ukrainian officials speak a lot about the aid programmes they have initiated for the internally displaced persons, but the real work falls on the shoulders of volunteers.

forced to start anew. Again, the officials speak a lot about psychological aid programmes they have initiated, but the real work falls on the shoulders of the volunteers. The tradition of mutual aid, which strengthened during the EuroMaidan Revolution, helps the survival of Ukraine. Volunteers provide support to the IDPs by searching for free, or at least cheap accommodations, in the organising of free professional retraining and Ukrainian language courses. Other methods of assistance include collecting food, clothes and toys as well as taking those injured during the war for rehabilitation abroad and raising funds for them on social networks through donations from ordinary

Ukrainians, special funds and Ukrainian diaspora. To list all of the formal and non-formal initiatives, funds, organisations, both countrywide and local, that assist these forced migrants would take up several pages.

However, it should be noted that the Ukrainian society is not so unanimous in its noble desire to help their fellow troubled citizens. "You can feel exhaustion even among those who were willing to help. When the occupation of Crimea was beginning, there were more offers for free accommodation than needed. The situ-

ation has now changed. Not every family is ready to house strangers for years," Dvoretska explains.

Moreover, not all of the IDPs are hardworking patriots of Ukraine who are in trouble by a twist of fate. Indeed, there were people with pro-Ukrainian views in the first wave of migration from Crimea. However, after the full-scale war broke out in Donbas, everyone was escaping — Ukrainian patriots, politically indifferent people, Russophiles, proactive citizens and those who got used to living off social welfare. Now the forced migrants represent the whole society, its virtues and shortcomings. This is one of the causes of conflict between the "newcomers" and the "locals".

No particular discussion on how to accommodate the displaced persons can be observed at the level of political establishment. Hardly any self-respecting Ukrainian politician would risk calling for "sending the migrants back to Donbas" or deny them assistance. However, there is no such demonstrative unity amongst the masses either. This can be easily observed at the main forum for all social and political discussions in Ukraine, i.e. the social networks – first and foremost: Facebook.

Stereotypes and misconceptions

The root of the conflict is that Ukrainians, both in the west and the east of the country, are not overly tolerant. The events of the last two years have made them ever more judgmental and radical, while myths about both sides of Ukraine still flourish. They have been supported for years by political engineers as well as Russian and Ukrainian propagandists.

Ordinary citizens from "the big Ukraine" (this notion is sometimes used in relation to the territory of the country controlled by the Ukrainian authorities) often think (and write on social networks): "Why have you come here? If you no longer wish to live 'under Russia', take up arms and fight for your dear Donbas back! Why do people from western Ukraine have to sit in the trenches near Donetsk while you have fun here in our Lviv (Lutsk, Kirovohrad...)?!" Another forceful opinion can be seen: "All of you in Donbas are separatists, you wanted Putin, so go and live under his rule. No one wants you here in Chernihiv (Ternopil, Vinnytsia...)!"

On the other hand, many internally displaced persons that settle in "the big Ukraine" bring along with them numerous stereotypes and misconceptions which have evolved over decades and were fiercely fuelled by Russian television during the last two years. This applies to the myths of the "Maidaners, Banderovites and neo-Nazis" as well as the misunderstanding of the nature and causes of the war in the east: a denial of the Russian aggression, shifting the blame for the deaths

and devastation on Ukrainian nationalists and so forth. Some of them maintain a pro-Russian opinion even after moving to Kyiv or Lviv but rarely express these opinions in public. However, all these misconceptions preclude them from finding a common language with other Ukrainians.

As a result, stories that stir up an even stronger negative attitude towards the newcomers from Donbas often circulate online, like the migrant who hung a Novorossiya flag in his dorm room; or the bar fight where one migrant was calling to shoot all the "Banderovites". Although many such stories turn out to be fake, they still fuel the mutual distrust between the two groups. There are also real stories about eminent sponsors and supporters of separatists from the Donetsk and Luhansk "elite", including their families who with the acquiescence of the authorities, enjoy their lives in Kyiv, visit night clubs, expensive restaurants and sports facilities.

No future

Nevertheless, the country is gradually, but not without complication, shaking free from the propaganda. As a result of the large-scale migration, Ukrainians from the west are learning to live together with Ukrainians from the east, realising that

As a result of the large-scale migration, Ukrainians from the west are learning to live together with Ukrainians from the east, realising that there are not so many differences between them.

there are not many differences between them. However, in the absence of a clear state policy, this process may take a while and even reverse course under unfavourable conditions.

"The state has not developed a unified strategy towards displaced persons yet: whether to focus on their full-scale and complete integration or to take only temporary measures, expecting that the war would end and these people would be able to return to their homes," Dvoretska says.

The lack of a clear strategy towards the migrants is common for both the Ukrainian and the European authorities. Additionally, European leaders have not decided whether the particular interests of their states

or the universal principles of humanity are at the top of their priorities. So far, they try to apply partial solutions, like attempts to introduce quotas for distributing refugees throughout the EU.

It would not make sense to introduce quotas in Ukraine since those who have been forced to leave their homes are similar to the rest of the population. It has become clear that the war will not end soon and nobody knows when Donbas will be Ukrainian again. It is also questionable whether the displaced persons may ever want to return.

Twenty-three-year-old Yulia comes from Donetsk, which is currently occupied by the pro-Russian separatist forces. She was an activist at the EuroMaidan and in pro-Ukrainian events in her hometown. She moved to Lviv in early autumn 2014 after she and her family had been directly threatened. Yulia remembers her last rally in Donetsk in March 2014. The local separatists attacked the event and killed the 22-year old EuroMaidan activist Dmytro Cherniavsky – the first victim of the war in Donbas. She also recalls that two months later, people were cheerfully walking in the streets of the city holding carnations after the so-called "independence referendum".

"They celebrate that their grandchildren will have no future," Yulia said to her mother. When I ask her if she would like to go back to Donetsk, she responds: "I found a small chest in my grandmother's barn, wrapped a Ukrainian flag in a plastic bag and put it in there with a note: I want to return to our Ukrainian Donetsk, I want to return home. The answer is 'Yes, I do want to return, but I do not know how to live with those who betrayed us or how long I will manage.' Many people are ready to abandon their homes because they believe there will be no victory, and this alone is scary. A person who has lost faith only vegetates."

Translated by Olena Shynkarenko

Milan Lelich is a Ukrainian journalist and political analyst with the weekly magazine Φ o κ yc (Focus).

The Search for a Free Russia

ANASTASIA SERGEEVA

Russia is experiencing a new wave of emigration, where activists and others are leaving behind a hopeless situation for a new life abroad. However, unlike previous waves, this one has little to do with nostalgia and melancholy. In their new homes, new Russian immigrants have found their place, feel independent and reveal a cosmopolitan approach. They do not consider themselves refugees.

"Russian emigration" is a fixed expression that will soon celebrate its centenary. Beginning in 1917, those who could not fit into the current political system left Russia. There is tragedy, nostalgia and anguish associated with the term "Russian emigration" which is understood as an escape by intellectuals from the harsh reality of life or the search for truth outside the country. In the early 20th century, terms such as "thaw" and "stagnation" were marked with a second wave of emigration when the anti-Soviet intelligentsia was forced to leave the country voluntarily, without the right to return. Only after the Iron Curtain fell throughout Eastern Europe did emigration gradually transform from "political" to "economic". From then on Russians were often leaving their country to work abroad on temporary contracts to later return home or were living in two countries simultaneously.

Then there was 2011. Many participants in the political demonstrations that took place at that time in major Russian cities said that they woke up and saw the depth of their country's problems. These people were often scarcely involved in politics and had nothing to with the opposition. However, upon on their personal confrontations with injustice, they gradually came round to the views of the opposition. They decided to take part in the country's decision-making process, motivated by a desire to have a personal say. For the first time, these people participated in

elections as observers not because of money but because of ideas. However, they soon learned that in today's Russia there was not much room for such beliefs. As a result, once again, a new wave of emigration has emerged over the course of the next two years.

You do not exist

Some of the first people from my social circle who expressed their plans to leave Russia were a family of activists from St Petersburg, Elena and Alexey Ivanov. Parents to four sons, they were the engine of the campaign for military reform in 2005, participants of the "Solidarity" movement and activists fighting for the historic preservation of St Petersburg. Elena even ran in elections as a candidate of the "Yabloko" party for the Legislative Assembly of St Petersburg in 2007. At that time, "Yabloko" was illegally prevented from registering itself and her campaign quickly came to an end. In 2013 Elena and Alexey left for Montenegro.

"The first time we thought about leaving Russia was in 2008. I remember that I said: 'Well, there is nothing left here.' It was after the attack on Georgia that I realised I have to go. Before that, I did not want to leave," Alexey says, recalling their decision.

"My reasoning had to do with the awareness that I cannot change anything and an intuitive expectation that something ugly and disgusting was on the horizon. This was before Crimea, but I felt that something was going to happen. Something in which I did not want any part," Elena adds. "Before that, we were participating in demonstrations and marches and there was this feeling that you can have an influence. And then we felt that it was no longer the case. It was not a reflection of the frustration of the opposition, it was just a new feeling that there is no longer anything we can do about it. We knew that these guys dug trenches and were well prepared for our actions and were immovable. In such a situation you realise that your opinion has no meaning, in fact it does not even exist. You are a zero and you also do not exist. Departure in this sense was a way to save ourselves."

The story of another friend of mine, Grigoriy Frolov, a human rights activist who has worked on many public and civil projects in Voronezh and Moscow, played out similarly when he left to pursue education in the United States in 2014. "I decided to study a year and a

Elena: "Departure in this sense was a way to save ourselves."

half before the Crimean events. At that time, the situation in Russia was bad, but in the sense that it was typical, it was always bad. For those who work in civil society, life seemed to be sweet only during a short period of time: one month in late 2011 between the demonstrations at Sakharov Square and the march on Yakimanka Street. My idea to leave was about taking a break for myself. I did not think that I would be separated from Russia for good. However, between that moment and the time when I already had my plane tickets in hand, the occupation of Crimea took place and Donbas had begun to burn. Crimea was the final nail in the coffin for me, and I wished for a final and irrevocable escape."

"Nevertheless," Grigoriy continues, "it seems to me that for people who leave a country driven by values and not economic reasons, it is much harder to recognise themselves as part of another model and harder to imagine how their lives are going to be built outside Russia. My friends, not political activists but young experts, had been leaving much earlier than the rest of us. They have existed in another universe. The protest waves in 2011–2012 did not occur for them, it was just the economy without any promise of growth. Now, I see that this wave has reached us."

No hope for change

Aside from value-based or economic reasons, activists who have fled the country also point to some pragmatic factors that pushed them to leave Russia. Another friend of mine, Anna, for example said that her family was uncomfortable with the system of education in Russia and this was the most important reason for them leaving. The onslaught of propaganda and the totalitarian political system were cited as secondary reasons.

Additionally, among some other key factors that forced Anna to migrate were: "The limitation of creative thinking and the withdrawal of good books from the bookstores under the pretext that they are 'non-Russian," as she explains. Anna also mentions a conversation she had with school officials about a proposal to start Montessori classes. The school director's reply was straightforward and simple. There is no need for such things as the country needs workers, not a cadre of highly educated people. "Of course, we could have changed schools," Anna says, "but it is the same everywhere. It is about system."

The elections in 2012 were the final straw for her. "At our polling station, there was no fraud. I am sure about its fairness," says Anna, who was an election observer in her local polling station in 2012. "Sixty per cent supported Putin. It reflects the genuine level of his support in a typical district in Moscow. I was very upset, I wanted to help people in my area. They recognised and greeted me, smiled, and I wanted to protect their votes. Instead, they voted for the status quo."

For Ksenia Norall, this is her second experience of emigration. The first time she left was during the Soviet era. She returned to Moscow in 2000 for business

purposes and became involved in the movement *Rus Sidyashaya* ("Russia behind bars"), which helped those who were unjustly prosecuted and condemned in Russia. What was the result of her work? "Departure," says Ksenia. "It was a combination of many factors. My safety, but also psychological and physical reasons. I started to have this feeling like I could not breathe. The feeling of physical insecurity; that anything could happen to me and my family at any time. That was too much. In Russia, a person crossing the street on a green light could be hit by a drunk cop and a family member who tries to fight for justice would go to jail. So perhaps, my feeling to leave came from my connection with *Rus Sidyashaya* — we were constantly studying such cases."

Similarly to Anna, Ksenia also cites practical reasons. "I wanted to live a normal life and was ready to contribute to the improvement of my country. However, there is no hope for change, and there was no possibility of influencing anything. My

final decision came following the annexation of Crimea and the hopelessness I felt after the murder of Boris Nemtsov."

For many activists and leaders, physical security was the primary reason for leaving. In recent years, civil and political activists have been persecuted by the police and the FSB (Russia's security agency). Recently, even local "hooligans" who participate in aggressive,

Ksenia: "There is no hope for change, and there was no possibility of influencing anything."

radical movements such as "Occupy-pedifilyay" (Оккупай-педифиляй) or the National Liberation Movement (NLM) ("HOД" – Национальное Освободительное Движение) have joined in the persecution of activists. The security services seem to have turned a blind eye to many of these radical movements, allowing them to carry out (if not direct, then at least indirectly condoned) attacks, physical or otherwise, on leaders and activists in the regions, where they have less protection from the local independent media and civil society.

Vasily Melnichenko, a cultural expert, artist and performer from Omsk, left Russia when the persecutions began. However, as with many others his reasons for leaving were a combination of many factors. "At first, I thought that I could change the situation," Vasily says. "I put a lot of effort into making positive changes as a journalist, an artist and a teacher. Then, I gradually became excluded and banned in certain outlets. Art, which I produce, cannot be classified as a commercial business. Yet just like the bans on my professional activities, I witnessed a betrayal from people in the art industry. I came to the understanding that they were protecting themselves. They could not associate with me because this would damage their own position. It was ridiculous and disgusting." Soon afterwards, Vasily experienced what he calls "open persecution" by the police and the FSB, along with a

significant discrediting campaign in the media. This is when he decided to leave for Germany. Vasily was certain that if he had stayed, he would have risked physical harm to him and his family.

Hybrid emigration

My other interlocutor, Konstantin Rubakhin, was forced to flee Moscow with just a few days' notice due to his struggle to save a national park along the Khopyor River. His work resulted in a criminal investigation and an arrest warrant for him. Konstantin and his colleagues were campaigning against a nickel mine that

"My departure was connected with the fact that any moment could have been my last," says Konstantin who was forced to flee Moscow due to his struggle to save a national park along the Khopyor River.

was being expanded by the Ural Mining and Metallurgical Company. Konstantin's work included an independent environmental impact assessment and brought environmental leaders and experts to speak out against the nickel mine in various media. There was also a large protest held by local residents. Unfortunately, the company's management worked with security services to create false criminal charges against the leaders of the environmental movement.

"My departure was connected with the fact that any moment could have been my last. I could have been arrested. I was harassed. There was even an attempt to stage a bribe offer so they could accuse me of extortion and arrest me. At the same time, my apartment

was watched by the police and the next day, it was searched. Wherever I went, there were police. It was so severe that I could not even use the phone. In order to speak with anyone in confidence, I would take a taxi and switch on my phone only when the car drove at full speed, so it was impossible to track my signal. I could not check my e-mail without the risk of being monitored or even arrested. I was in an environment where it was impossible to continue my campaign and I realised that there was no chance of fairness."

While asking my interlocutors about their dreams, I had secretly hoped to hear that Russia would be a part of them. In many ways, I was disappointed. Unlike previous waves of emigration, this one has little to do with nostalgia and melancholy. In their new homes, these emigrants have found their place, feel independent and have a cosmopolitan approach. They do not consider themselves refugees.

"It is like a hybrid emigration," say Elena and Alexey. "There is a feeling that we have gone for a while but we do not think that we will stay here until the end of our



"For those who work in civil society [in Russia], life seemed to be sweet only during a short period of time: one month in late 2011 between the demonstrations at Sakharov Square and the march on Yakimanka Street."

lives. Moreover, it gives us a sense of freedom as we can live wherever we want. You can get used to the local culture and it is interesting to learn and understand how other people live. However, there is no feeling of emigration in the usual sense. We live in a different place, but have not lost touch with friends. Nothing is irreversible and there is no isolation. On the other hand, here we are living under a totally different set of conditions: people are not aggressive on the streets, they even smile at us. It is somehow more humane here. Relations with both the government and the public are a lot less confrontational."

Kseniya has a similar feeling. "There is such a difference when you look at facial expressions. People in Europe think about everyday life and enjoy it. On the other hand, people in Russia are not concerned with current affairs, but with hopelessness and hate. Moscow has become an incredibly difficult city in recent years. It is impossible to live there. Everyone is irritated and this creates conflict. In the 1990s, people were different, less brutalised. I remember the economic crisis in 1998, but there was never so much hatred as there is now."

Anna talks about her dreams: "We want to be mobile, and easily travel from country to country, from culture to culture. We want our children to experience as little stress as possible and for them to be able to adapt quickly to different situations. We want them to speak several languages and be tolerant of people from all nationalities. Our children need to learn the modern principles of teamwork and understand the importance of having a network that knows no boundaries. I think that these people contribute to the creation of a society without war."

"Now I want only one thing," says Vasily, "which is to have my family integrated into German life. I want us to help others and have a life that is good to us. I want to complete my doctoral dissertation. I want my children to speak German. I do not cherish reverence for Russian culture and I am not familiar with such a thing as nostalgia. I feel at home in Germany. My experience in Russia was traumatic and I want to forget it."

Only two of my interviewees said that they want to achieve things in Russia. "For me, the departure was an opportunity to see what is going on in Russia from the outside," says Grigoriy. "I think it is especially important to develop and come up with a plan to have the power and ability to change something in Russia later. We need to develop the Russian communities and institutions abroad. This process has already begun in the United States. With our colleagues, we have created the Free Russia Foundation and there are a number of similar organisations in Europe, France, Germany and Poland." Grigoriy believes his experience abroad will help him understand how to bring new ideas to Russia one day. "After a year in the United States, I see more answers and parallels with Russia in terms of the Civil Rights Movement and in the struggle against apartheid."

Waiting for disaster

Konstantin Rubakhin is simply continuing his campaign from abroad. "I became aware that my goal, both personal and professional, is to prevent the completion of the mining project. It is an inappropriate and extremely harmful project in many ways, including its economic, environmental, social and cultural impacts." Being outside Russia, Konstantin has actively engaged in revealing the illegal dealings of his opponents. "The root of the problem is the mafia style of management in Russia. However, in Europe, they also have components, including financial schemes, companies and money. Sadly, European partners contribute to this mafia and are involved in the destruction of Russia, taking part in money laundering and the legalisation of criminals. I fight against this here."

All my interlocutors, to a greater or lesser extent, are waiting for disaster in Russia. They are convinced that the current situation is so hopeless that it cannot last forever. Russians cannot live without a future and exist in a permanent state of hate. However, all of them doubt that the country will move towards democratisation once Vladimir Putin leaves, or as a result of mass protests.

"We need to change the scheme of power with increased citizen participation in governance. That is all," says Konstanin. "There are three basic ways to change power: A military coup, which is the worst option. The second option is a soft power

revolution. Some groups would be displaced, but others would remain and undergo major institutional change. We are all hoping and waiting for this to happen. The third way, which is unlikely, is through 'external influence', when the necessary changes begin because of external pressure from other countries."

"We should not be engaged in political mobilisation right now," says Gregoriy. "We have to deal with political maturity. All the forces, political and civil, within the country should be focused on two things: the preservation of the country and social issues. I think there is a new generation of leaders, those who work locally and in spite of everything, deal with social issues. It is necessary to help this new political group. For those of us who have left, we need to use our experience and potential to create a normative platform for the future of Russia. In particular, we need to separate the identities of Russia and Putin: we are satellites of common sense here and only we can remove such stereotypes, which are distorted by both activists in Russia and many foreign experts."

All my interlocutors agreed that they may return if the introduction of major changes in Russia is successful. That would mean free elections, a fair justice system and the eradication of censorship and propaganda. "It is difficult to give a definition of life, but it is very easy to distinguish the living from the dead," says Alexey. "I think I would be able to differentiate between the two as soon as there are free elections and the judiciary and media are revived."

"We will come back only when we know that it is possible to change something," says Gregoriy. "It is not enough to have the levers to provide real change if no-one emerges who would do something to instigate this change. We have already had Dmitry Medvedev and his 'restart'. Intelligent people trusted him, but you can see the results for yourself."

Despite everything, I believe in my country. I believe in the Russian people: those who leave and those who find the strength to stay. I know that they both want to see Russia return to being an open and law-abiding state, where citizens live in prosperity and dignity and respect other countries and nations. I know that this cannot occur by itself, and will only happen as a result of the joint efforts of Russians around the world, along with their friends and partners in the international community. Like all those who have left, it is this belief that helps drive me to continue to fight for a free Russia.

Translated by Lisa Yasko

Anastasia Sergeeva is a board member of the association "For A Free Russia". She emigrated from Russia after 2012 due to the political situation. She previously worked as a political consultant and an activist of the Republican Party of Russia.

Forced Migration

ALENA YAKZHYK

Human trafficking is a significant problem in Belarus.

Despite some progress, the country has recently been downgraded in a US State Department report. Until adequate measures are taken, this negative trend is likely to continue.

In the 2015 *Trafficking in Persons* (TIP) Report compiled by the US Department of State, Belarus was downgraded to Tier three, the lowest level, from its 2014 Tier two ranking. Despite Minsk officially promising to combat trafficking on the international level, the government has not made enough effort to protect the victims of such crimes. Many reports state that Belarus is a country of origin, transit and destination for men, women and children subjected to sex trafficking and forced labour.

According to the US State Department, in every year since 2011, there have been greater numbers of Belarusian victims being exploited domestically than abroad. Regarding Belarusians exploited abroad, the victims were primarily trafficked through Germany, Poland, Russia and Turkey. All the while, the prevention of trafficking remains a concern that has not been adequately addressed by the authorities, despite the work of domestic law enforcement or by a number of NGOs operating in Belarus.

Forced labour

According to data provided by the ministry of internal affairs in Belarus, during the first eight months of 2015, 640 crimes in the field of human trafficking were reported (146 were identified as serious or particularly serious), which was 40 per cent higher compared to indicators from previous years. In 2015 law enforcement agencies claimed to have eliminated 11 channels of export of "human live prod-

ucts" to four countries: Russia -7 (18 victims), Turkey -2 (6 victims), Cyprus -1 (2 victims) and the UAE -1 (2 victims).

In total, over the last ten years, 2,300 traffickers were convicted in Belarus. Moreover, 22 criminal organisations and 85 organised criminal groups were eliminated. More than 5,100 human trafficking victims were identified. NGO specialists claim that the number of victims being identified is constantly increasing, indicating the increasing effectiveness of the organisations carrying out this work.

However, there has been a sharp rise in the number of males falling victim to human trafficking. This is primarily due to an increase in cases of forced labour.

Experts state that although a few years ago the prevailing trend was human trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, the situation has now levelled off. Forced labour now comprises 50 per cent of all human trafficking cases in Belarus.

In 2006 La Strada Belarus was recognised by many European NGOs as the most successful Belarusian project attempting to counter the activities of human Belarus has seen a sharp rise in the number of males falling victim to human trafficking.

traffickers in Europe. The head of La Strada, Elena Nesteruk, also claims that there has been a decrease in the quantity of human trafficking for sexual exploitation.

"During the last ten years in Belarus, there has been a lot said on the issues of security in this particular field, a lot of preventive measures have been undertaken," Elena says. "It is impossible to say that sexual exploitation has totally disappeared, but at the same time, the main trend is now about the rise in the number of cases of forced labour." Russia remains the primary destination of Belarusian trafficking victims. This is largely due to the fact that Belarusian slaves are easier and simpler for Russian employers to handle and communicate with because for most Belarusians, Russian is their native language.

Women who are sexually exploited in Russia are usually forced to live in Moscow apartments without any possibility of leaving. According to specialists, sexual exploitation has not changed much in recent years. However, 10–15 years ago, recruiters rarely informed their potential victims that they would be working in the sex-trade, now, such work is offered to Belarusian girls looking to go to Moscow. It is marketed as an attractive proposition (with the possibility of choosing clients, gaining independence and safely pursuing one's work). In reality, the exact opposite happens.

As for labour exploitation, this often involves work in the construction industry, where men are often trapped without the help of a mediator. They come to the Russian Federation to find a job in the construction business or a small factory. Once they find such a job, they fall prey to the same conditions as victims of sexual

Pretty woman, ugly life



She is between 18 and 25 years old, a resident of the capital or a regional town but not from the rural area. She has completed secondary education (11 years of school) or secondary special/technical (vocational school). She is usually single without children. She could graduate from high school, but she is either not satisfied with her salary in the city or cannot find a job. In general, the economic situation forces her to start looking for ways to make money outside of the country. She does not consider working as a prostitute at all.

exploitation. For example, men are only allowed to leave their residences for work. They cannot go outside without permission and face the threat of physical harm.

On the rise

According to the director of La Strada Belarus, a common scenario includes the migrant finding a legitimate job at first, but then meeting a "recruiter" or a contact, usually at a Moscow bar for a drink. The drink is drugged and the worker is moved to an unknown location where he wakes up, disoriented and under the control of his new "employers". The person is monitored constantly, with no opportunity to break free from their captors. They are constantly threatened with physical harm and have additional threats made against their families.

According to statistics from the Bela-

rusian ministry of internal affairs, the involvement of children under the age of 18 in the production of pornography is also a significant driver of human trafficking in that country. According to experts, such crimes are now on the rise. "In this case, unfortunately, global trends have not passed over Belarus. As the internet has developed, the involvement of children in sexual exploitation and the distribution of images or videos of such exploitation has increased," says Nesteryuk. She explains that in recent years, numerous workshops have been held for specialists in law enforcement to help them identify such cases. Foreign specialists were involved, including some from the United Kingdom.

"What we are now observing is a growth in the number of crimes connected to child pornography. It means that law enforcement has started to deal with this in a more professional manner," Elena says.

Russia is still the country with the greatest levels of human trafficking. This is recognised in both official ministry statistics and that of NGOs. Experts at La Strada Belarus say that Russia is the top destination country of those being trafficked out of Belarus. The places below Russia are more difficult to allocate, depending on

where routes have been blocked, but typically include Turkey, China, Poland and the United Arab Emirates. The positions of these countries may vary but Russia always comes out on top, according to Nesteruk.

Not just a Belarusian problem

According to experts from NGOs, there is a lot being done to counteract human trafficking in Belarus, especially recently. In 2015 Belarus signed the Council of Europe Convention on combating human trafficking and since the beginning of the year, a significant process has gotten underway. New laws have been passed and in June, new regulations on the identification of trafficking victims were approved.

"One programme for those most likely

to be victims was established," say experts from La Strada. In addition, a request has been made for social support and other services for such people in different institutions. However, the most important measure that was approved is a 30-day period wherein a person who has not yet been identified as a victim, can receive support, including from the state.

Human trafficking is a transnational problem and does not recognise any borders. According to statistics from the United Nations, there are 137 countries which are involved in human trafficking, either as countries of origin, transit or destination. Clearly, although the situation in Belarus is difficult, it is not for them to face alone.

Translated by Lisa Yasko

All work, no pay



He is between 27 and 45 years old. He is married and has children. Usually he is from a small town and not from the capital. He finished lower secondary (9 years of school) or secondary school. He represents an active part of the population that cannot find a job in their home town. He considers going abroad to look for employment opportunities in construction. He does not look for a job for himself but, first and foremost, to support his family and its financial stability.

Russia Returns to the Middle East

ŁIIKAS7 FYDEREK

Supporting the Assad regime has turned out to be a Russian investment which has paid off in terms of its international position. Its actions are aimed at promoting the image of Russia as a renewed superpower and allow that country to retain its key influence over both the regime in Damascus and its military installations on the Syrian coast. Whether its support of Assad will be enough to be successful remains an open question.

Bashar al-Assad and Vladimir Putin both came to power in the year 2000. Their first telephone conversation took place in the shadow of death — in June 2000, Putin, who had already been Russian president for a month, extended his condolences to Assad, following the death of his father, Hafez the long-time president of Syria. A month later, Bashar took the oath of office as Syrian president. At that time, no one would have thought that fifteen years later, the Assad regime's struggle to survive would contribute to the revival of Russia's involvement in the Middle East.

Russian policy towards the Middle East has been shaped by a contradiction between great ambitions and limited resources. Despite the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian elite tended to perceive the Middle East as a "zone of special interest" and a "soft underbelly". These ideas, rooted in the geo-political concepts of the Romanov dynasty of Tsarist Russia, also prevailed during the era of the Soviet Union and shaped the way the elite of the Russian Federation perceived the region. Limited resources made it impossible for Russia to retain its influence from the Soviet era. This influence was developed with three main tools: the sale

of weapons on favourable credit terms, diplomatic support in the United Nations Security Council and developmental assistance.

Axis of resistance

The spectacular defeat of the Iraqi army, equipped by the Soviet Union, in its battles with US-led coalition forces during the First Gulf War in 1991, not only deprived Russia of its major client in the Middle East but also showed regional players the powerlessness of the Russian Federation in its support of previously Soviet-friendly governments. Over the next two decades, Russia aimed to preserve its market for weapons in countries whose regimes had once followed the "socialist path of development." Out of this group, which had diminished since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia only managed to sign major arms deals with Al-

geria, Libya and Syria. From Moscow's perspective, these countries were divided into those which paid for their arms and those which found it difficult to settle their debts. The latter group included Syria, a country with no significant reserves of oil or natural gas.

The static political landscape of the Middle East between 1991 and 2011 was dominated by monarchical regimes, whose foreign policy was generally oriented towards the United States, and the "presidential monarchies", whose leaders leaders after the Cold War also recognised the US as a strategic guarantor of their interests. According to Syrian propaganda, only Iran and Syria, by forming an "axis of resistance", managed to escape from the influence of the superpower. The two countries maintained good relations with Russia, even though political co-operation before 2011 was

The static political landscape in the Middle East between 1991 and 2011 was dominated by regimes whose foreign policy was generally oriented towards the United States as a strategic guarantor of their interests.

rather limited. Iran wanted to purchase Russian weapons, but Moscow had some misgivings as Iran had adopted an independent policy, epitomised by its domestic nuclear programme.

In the post-Cold War setting, Syria's list of priorities included economic development and attracting foreign investments. In this regard, Russia did not have much to offer. On the contrary, Russian partners regularly reminded Syria of its unpaid debt dating back to Soviet times. Diplomatic relations between the two countries took place alongside negotiations on debt relief. In 1992 Russia wrote off a two billion US dollar debt and in 2005, during Bashar al-Assad's first visit to

Moscow, another \$13.4 billion was cancelled. Russia committed itself to investing most of the remaining \$3.5 billion in the Syrian economy. Another topic that was discussed was security, an issue that both nations felt required greater co-operation. Damascus was ready to invest in Russian weapons only on the condition that they would be the newest types of offensive weapons which could balance, or at least reduce, the advantage of the Israeli army – the main enemy for Syrian military planners prior to the civil war.

Moscow considered supplying such weapons unacceptable especially since Russia aimed at avoiding serious complications in its relations with Israel. These conditions meant that by the turn of the century, Syria had carried out its strategic weapons plans concerning ballistic missiles in collaboration with partners other than Russia, namely Iran and North Korea. Hence, the two decades of relations between Syria and Russia before 2011 were characterised mainly by keeping up appearances of maintaining close ties, according to the patron-client pattern formed during the Cold War. Russia invested in this relationship more in terms of money, receiving, in return, a confirmation of its influence in the Middle East. The most tangible symbol of Russia's status was the material supply point for its fleet, also referred to as a supply naval base, located at the Syrian port of Tartus.

Both Russia and Syria gained from these relations by presenting an image of strong mutual co-operation. For Moscow, its involvement in Syria meant that it retained a voice on issues relating to the Middle East and, consequently, the status of a superpower. The Russians paid a considerable economic price for maintaining their status in Syria, but kept some distance from Syrian expectations concerning the question of advanced weaponry. Co-operation with Russia allowed Damascus to maintain an army that was 90 per cent equipped with post-Soviet equipment. It also reduced the risk of diplomatic isolation in exchange for the reasonable price of maintaining a small and virtually unused Russian naval base.

Superpower ambitions

In 2011 the Middle East changed and a new chapter in Russian-Syrian relations was opened. The collapse of authoritarian regimes in Tunisia and Egypt was an unpleasant surprise for the Russian elite. However, it was mainly the intervention of NATO countries in Libya that fundamentally changed the way Russia perceived the Middle East after the Arab Spring. Russia's conditional clearance to establish a no-fly zone over Libya was meant to be a means to prevent the massacre of civilians by the Muammar Qaddafi's troops. The broad interpretation of the mandate of the UN Security Council, presented by the United Kingdom and France, has led

to the defeat of government troops and the collapse of the regime. This took Moscow by surprise, which claimed the operation was contrary to Russian interests.

Russian analysts did not expect that the Qaddafi regime would be so weak and that the opposition forces, supported by the West, could win. The case of Libya became the main argument used by Russia in opposing the condemnation of the Assad regime and the legitimisation of intervention in Syria by the UN Security Council. Russia's assertive stance was connected to Putin's electoral victory in 2012 (when he returned to the presidency) and a renewal of his superpower ambitions for Russia. One of Putin's slogans during the 2012 election was "Together towards a great Russia!" The Middle East, which was undergoing a significant transformation, could become a place where Russia would demonstrate its renewed strength and opposition to the "unipolar model of the world". The image of Russia as a su-

perpower became important, not just because of the ambitions of its political elite, but also because of the need to legitimise the system of governance built around Putin.

The diplomatic support the Syrian regime received from Russia was a key factor that enabled Assad to survive the first phase of the civil war between 2011 and 2013. In addition, Russia supported the Syrian regime financially. Syrian currency banknotes were printed in Moscow and in 2012, Syria received a loan of \$3 billion, which enabled the government to finance salaries and social spending and to keep up the appearances of a country which, in spite of the war, was functioning effectively. Finally, the third area of aid provided by

The Middle East came to be seen by the Russian elite as a place where Russia could demonstrate its renewed status as a superpower, as well as its opposition to the unipolar view of the world.

Russia was military support in terms of advisers and equipment, spare parts and ammunition. These resources were instrumental in sustaining the government forces during the four long years of war. At the same time, this was still not enough to allow Assad's troops to maintain control over the whole country.

Silent rivalry

Supporting the Assad regime was a Russian investment which paid off in terms of its international affairs. After the first vetoed resolutions in the UN Security Council, it became clear that without the participation of Moscow, it would be impossible to reach any agreement between the warring parties. During key moments, Russia's influence over its partners in Damascus was considerable, as was



the case with the chemical disarmament of the Syrian regime. When the threat of a US aerial attack seemed imminent in September 2013, Walid al-Mouallim, the Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, agreed to disarm only after talks with his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov. The problem of chemical weapons enabled Russia to present itself as a responsible partner, capable of solving international crises constructively. However, Russian's influence over the regime was not always as considerable as the architects of Russian foreign policy wanted, as illustrated by unsuccessful attempts to initiate a dialogue between the regime and the moderate opposition.

Russian bombers since the Russian military began operations in Syria.

In the case of the first Russian initiatives in 2012 and 2013 the opposition parties were unwilling to engage in dialogue. By January 2015 the Russians had not managed to persuade the Syrian government to adopt a more flexible attitude towards its moderate opposition. Assad's regime was able to resist Moscow's demands by balancing the influence of its two foreign patrons: Russia and Iran. However, the government in Tehran was not interested in supporting Russian attempts to mitigate the conflict.

The silent rivalry between the two Syrian patrons became a permanent element of Syrian policy in the early days of the civil war. Nevertheless, both countries agreed that the primary objective was to keep Assad's regime in power. Yet despite considerable diplomatic, economic and military support from both Russia and Iran, Assad's grip on power continued to weaken.

In the summer of 2015 the regime found itself in a dire military situation. This was indirectly acknowledged by Assad himself when he said that there was a shortage of soldiers in the Syrian armed forces. The Russians were aware of the severity of the situation. Russian officers had been serving as military advisors to Syria. Hence, in the summer of 2015, Putin faced a dilemma: should he accept the collapse of the Syrian regime and come to terms with the loss of influence in Syria or support it militarily? The latter option would require a considerable commitment and vast resources, although the loss of Syria would tarnish both the international image of Russia and Putin's domestic legitimacy. Putin and his circle were also aware that in the foreseeable future, no other Middle Eastern country would agree to station Russian troops on its soil. These considerations outweighed the voices warning against the risk of armed intervention against Sunni jihadis and highlighting the parallels with the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan.

Two scenarios

As a result of Russia's military involvement in Syria, two scenarios are likely to emerge. In the optimistic scenario, the military situation will stabilise thanks to a ground offensive by Assad's troops and Shiite militants led by the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and supported by the Russian air force and possibly Special Forces. Regaining control over the entire country will be impossible. However, it may be plausible to restore control over the strategic axis between Damascus and Aleppo, as well as to retake the Idlib Governorate. Paradoxically, these areas are occupied by a coalition of groups called The Army of Conquest (Jaish al-Fatah), not by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), which is said to be the main target of Russia's military operations. If the offensive was successful, the regime, controlling the centre of the country, could join peace talks under the auspices of the UN from a position of power. Russia would play a leading role in any peace process and retain its key influence over both the regime in Damascus and its military installations on the Syrian coast. It should be added that while upholding the Alawite regime of Assad's Baath Party is crucial, it does not necessarily mean, from Moscow's perspective, keeping Bashar al-Assad in power. In the scenario outlined here, even if the peace process were a failure, Russia would benefit enormously from freezing

the Syrian conflict. A permanent and significant Russian military presence in the region would enable Russia to exert pressure on Turkey, the oil producing countries of the Persian Gulf and southern Europe.

In the second, pessimistic scenario, the Iranian and Russian offensive is unsuccessful and only provokes a union of opposition forces, with help from Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey. The military defeat of a pro-Assad coalition would result in the ultimate collapse of the government and the loss of Damascus. The ruling elite and the remnants of the regime's army would only be able to take refuge on the coast, in an area separated from the mainland by a mountain range and inhabited mostly by Alawites. Russia would be burdened with maintaining this "Alawite stronghold" and would have to deploy increased military forces to defend their bases in Latakia and Tartus against the offensive of the united opposition forces. In this case, maintaining a political and military presence in the region would turn out to be far more expensive for Russia.

The presence of Russia in the region should be seen as a new and permanent element in Middle Eastern politics.

Regardless of how things turn out, Russia's presence in the region should be seen as a new and permanent element in Middle Eastern politics. The withdrawal of the US as the dominant superpower in the region and the grassroots processes of the Arab Spring created the conditions for the struggle over a strategic rearrangement of the region. Until now, most analysts thought that this clash will involve only regional powers: Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey. Russia, which had just one

weak bargaining chip before 2011, namely its unique relationship with the Syrian regime, was not an obvious candidate to play an important role in this game.

However, Putin's desire to rebuild Russia's global significance led to the decision to join the contest to shape the future of the Middle East. Russia made this decision in haste, fearing it would lose the only base it had in the region. What consequences this decision will have for the Middle East and Russia itself will be largely determined not by Russia's actions but by the regional players and the unfolding developments of the next several months.

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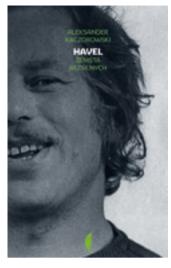
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Gdańsk 2015 280 pages ISBN 978-83-62853-54-0

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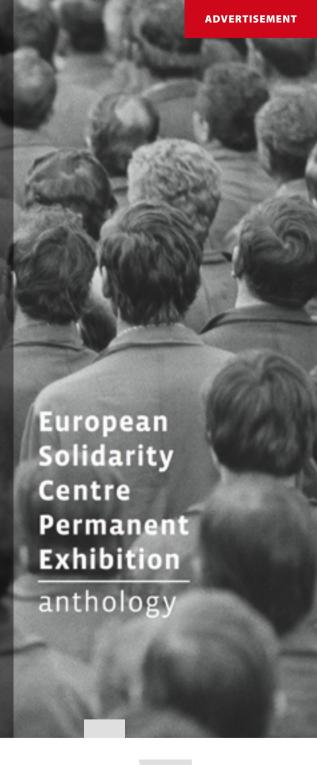
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ANTHOLOGY

Edited by Jacek Kołtan, Ewa Konarowska

Gdańsk 2015 380 pages ISBN 978-83-62853-55-7

The comprehensive publication presents a selection of texts and images closely related to the permanent exhibition. The Solidarity story in this anthology is built of the accounts of those directly involved in the events. juxtaposed with an iconography portraying the great metamorphosis which has occurred since-one in which politics has become a natural element of daily life. Accompanying the accounts are classic articles dedicated to the history and culture of the opposition. as well as lesser-known essays, articles and historical documents: the main thread running through these being the sociopolitical changes of the 1970s and 1980s. not only in Poland but in Central and Eastern Europe as a whole. The materials collected here-mainly brought together and previously published by the European Solidarity Centresum up the scientific, publishing and archiving work carried out so far by that institution.





solidarity academy

The **SOLIDARITY ACADEMY** is an international educational project for young journalists aimed at maintaining and developing the tradition of the Solidarity Move-

European relations-participants came from Poland, Russia, Ukraine, France, Portugal and Great Britain. This year they had the chance to have two debates, one in Gdansk and one in Kaliningrad, regarding the local border traffic between the North-East part of Poland and Kaliningrad Oblast.



Next year's **SOLIDARITY ACAD-EMY** is to be held in February 2016 and will be dedicated to the Visegrád Group (V4), inviting participants from Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia. The

ment. Workshops focus on history, politics, journalism and new media, concentrating explicitly on aspects of multiculturalism and solidarity with nations fighting for freedom.





main aim is to raise awareness about these countries, to further their cooperation with one another and to discuss current trends and challenges in European and world politics.

This year's topic of **SOLIDARI- TY ACADEMY** (6–13 September 2015) were the Polish, Russian and

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Drowning in a Sea of Propaganda and Paranoia

OLGA IRISOVA

In the last 15 years, Vladimir Putin and his team have succeeded in creating a well-oiled propaganda machine which targets those with "anti-Putin" views and sympathy towards the West. The negative rhetoric of the Kremlin's mouthpieces has a significant effect on the public's mental health, forcing the main victims of Russian propaganda, Russian citizens themselves, to live in a distorted and hostile reality.

Today, the perception of Vladimir Putin in Europe is both overblown and distorted. His most zealous opponents and sympathisers across the various ideological planes perceive him not according to his actual character, but rather through the myth of him as a strong leader who fights terrorism and has brought economic success to Russia, especially during his first two terms in office (although from 1998 to 2010 the real income of the population increased only twofold, when oil price grew almost ten fold). To many in Europe, Putin is perceived as a leader with unconditional support from his population, who defeated injustice through his victory over the oligarchs.

This image of "Putin the hero" in Europe is promoted not just by Russian media outlets with a focus on foreign audiences, but also with the help of local media that is either "bewitched by him" or sponsored directly by the Kremlin. According to civic activist Juraj Smatana, there are more than 40 websites that propagate pro-Russian sentiments in Slovakia. Such a large number may suggest that they are being funded from outside the country. The scale of the Kremlin's campaign to promote its vision of the world is reflected in the list of participants in the so-called "World

Congress of Russian Press", most recently held in Moscow in June 2015. More than 500 Russian-language media outlets from 63 countries attended this event, making it nearly impossible to grasp the scale of penetration of Kremlin propaganda.

Media as a threat

The main "consumers" and victims of Russian propaganda are Russian citizens themselves, forced to live in a distorted and hostile reality. It is important to be aware that in the future, Putin will leave office, but the environment he has created will remain and the quality of Russian relations with the rest of the world will be defined by the state of the society he has left behind. This is why it is important to not only fight Kremlin propaganda in Europe, but also attempt to start examining and healing Russian society to ensure peaceful co-existence in the future.

In order to understand the devastating nature of Kremlin propaganda, we need to go to its source and look at the visible effects it has already had on Russian society. The process of tightening the screws in Russia is connected to the creation and development of all the preconditions needed to legitimise and institutionalise propaganda. Although censorship in the mass media is prohibited under Article 3 of the Russian Federation's Law on Mass Media, asserting that it does not exist today is pointless. The conversion of Russian media into the Kremlin's mouthpiece is reflected in the restrictions on press freedom and the country's poor international rankings in this regard. Reporters Without Borders ranked Russia 152 out of 180 countries in its 2015 World Press Freedom Index, dropping four places in just one year. Even Turkish and Venezuelan media outlets fare better.

The authors of the report note that the current restrictive climate in Russia can be directly attributed to Putin's presidential return in May 2012. As a direct response to civil society activity in Russia, the government introduced a number of harsh measures, including the adoption of a series of draconian laws that significantly restrict freedom of information. Right at the beginning of his first term, Putin issued a decree on the "Concept of Information Security", which divided the media into "good" and "bad". Even then, it was already understood that any criticism of the authorities in the media would fall under the "bad" category. Within this decree, a separate clause was dedicated to what the Kremlin deems to be one of the most dangerous internal threats to Russia's information security in relation to its foreign policy – the "information propaganda activity of political forces, NGOs, the media and individuals who misrepresent the country's foreign policy strategy and tactics". If the media or public figures interpret the Kremlin's foreign policy differently to Moscow, they are considered a threat to Russia's national interests.

The process of stifling independent television journalism in Russia began on the night of April 13th 2001, when the state took over and nationalised the previ-

ously-independent NTV. Putin clearly understood the power of television in Russia. Nearly 90 per cent of Russians form their opinion of the world solely based on what they see on TV. By removing "unnecessary" facts from television programmes, the Kremlin has also distorted reality for millions of TV viewers. Large TV networks have been subject to the dictates of the Kremlin for years, whereas print and internet media enjoyed a longer period of relative freedom, having posed far less of a danger to the "Lord of the Kremlin".

By removing "unnecessary" facts from television programmes, the Kremlin has distorted reality for millions of TV viewers.

Red line

In Russia there is one available alternative to Kremlin-controlled television — the independently-owned *Dozhd*, or TV Rain. However, this channel, which is not widely available, targets a very narrow audience — primarily those who already share a certain point of view and are willing to pay for content. Most Russians would never consider purchasing a subscription and paying to watch alternative channels when they can watch state-run ones for free.

With their ability to capture the attention of the wider public, regional television stations, unaffiliated with the government, have greater potential to challenge the existing status quo. In contrast to *Dozhd's* narrow audience base, a quality regional channel is able to attract people of completely different political orientations and until recently, focus on coverage of local events and criticise local authorities and companies, as well as corrupt officials. However, the existence of such bastions of free regional TV journalism is tolerated by the Kremlin as long as their work does not directly contradict the key tenets of state policy.

A "demonstrative flogging" was recently held to show that there is a red line which, if crossed, can lead to serious consequences. The victim in this case was the local channel Tomsk TV-2, which aired a story about Russia sending (volunteer) fighters to Ukraine's Donbas region. Without adequate explanation, the Federal Service for Supervision in the Sphere of Telecom, Information Technologies and Mass Communications (Roskomnadzor) withdrew the channel's license, which had originally been issued until 2025. The Russian Television and Radio Broadcasting Network (RTRS) later refused to renew the channel's broadcasting contract. With the same bureaucratic red tape used by Roskomnadzor, the Kremlin then closed

down the Crimean Tatar channel ATR. Knowing that Roskomnadzor has already established a system to disable disobedient media outlets, many outlets practice the art of self-censorship. Though no formal regulation or law exists, the set of ideas developed by the Kremlin's gang of political technologists is well known and extremely dangerous to challenge.

The turning point in the state's control over the media came in November 2012, when amendments to the law on the protection of children were adopted. This amendment prohibited information deemed "harmful to the health and development" of children and resulted in the creation of a single registry of websites blocked for containing "prohibited information", which became known as the "blacklist of sites". Roskomnadzor was behind the creation of this registry. Furthermore, on February 1st 2014, the Lugovoi Law, named after the Duma member who sponsored it, entered into force and authorised the prosecutor general's office to block online sources within 24 hours without any court approval.

According to official data, Roskomnadzor has blocked 52,000 websites since 2012 at the request of the prosecutor's office, but data from an independent organisation called Roskomsvoboda estimates that over 260,000 domains have been unjustly blocked.

Shrinking space

In the last 15 years Putin and his team have succeeded in creating a well-oiled control mechanism over the media that specifically targets those identified as hav-

The Russian censors of the 21st century shelter themselves behind lofty slogans while obediently carrying out the Kremlin's orders.

ing "anti-Putin" views and sympathy towards the West. This is set to continue. The Russian censors of the 21st century shelter themselves behind lofty slogans, while obediently carrying out orders from the Kremlin. The shrinking space for freedom of expression on the internet was set to be constricted even further on August 1st 2014, when the "blogger law", which imposes restrictions on users of social media, came into effect. This set of regulations requires any person whose online presence draws more than 3,000 daily readers to register, disclose personal information and comply with the same regulations as mass media.

In the spring of 2015 hackers posted a mobile text conversation allegedly belonging to Timur Prokopenko, deputy head of domestic policy within the presidential administration, which provides an excellent insight into Roskomnadzor's true role.

In the message, Prokopenko states that Roskomnadzor has repeatedly "provoked" the liberal, independent media, while ignoring illegal nationalist attacks made by media loyal to the Kremlin.

Moreover NGOs monitoring the status of media in the country have been placed on a list of "foreign agents" and a new law restricting the shares of foreign ownership in Russian media companies by 20 per cent will come into effect in 2016.

Though the current information blockade does not yet have a single legislative authority, this will soon change. It is no coincidence that during Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a new information security approach was developed. This policy ad-

dresses such "dangers" as other countries using information technology "in order to gain intelligence and achieve political and military objectives", influencing the development of the Russian Internet and addressing the lack of co-ordination regarding authorities' activities on security issues at different levels. Once again, the focus is on identifying external threats, not on protecting freedom of expression and the media. The oppressive climate for those who question the Kremlin narrative continues to grow, with dissent either brought under control or erased from existence.

The oppressive climate for those who question the Kremlin narrative continues to grow, with dissent either brought under control or erased from existence.

The negative rhetoric of the Kremlin's mouthpieces does not go by without having an effect on the public's mental health. Phobias such as homophobia, liberalophobia and Americanophobia, which are supported and stimulated by the media, lead to an increase of intolerance and aggression in society. Back in 2013 experts from the Institute of Psychology of the Russian Academy of Sciences published the results of their study on the changes in the typical psychological profile of a Russian citizen from 1981 to 2011. It turned out that Russians became three times more aggressive and rude over the course of 20 years and it was also noted that the influence of media was one of the key factors behind this.

However, a lot has changed since 2011, including the manner in which information is presented. During the era of the Soviet Union, trained presenters read the news in orator-style voices, using official and sometimes stilted language. Today's style, forged by the aggressive pro-Putin TV personality Dmitry Kiselyov, is at the peak of its popularity and features typical jibes, threats and over-the-top theatricality. Even though Kiselyov himself was once seen as an exceptional phenomenon, the majority of TV personalities and journalists have now copied his aggressive trademark style. The media (especially since the days of the EuroMaidan in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea) have greatly accelerated their fermenting of the aggressive mood in Russia at present.



Traitors everywhere

An increase in aggressiveness inevitably leads to an increase in the crime rate, which is confirmed by official statistics from the Russian Ministry of the Interior. In the period between January and September 2015 more than 1.5 million crimes were recorded in Russia, almost a seven per cent increase from the year before. Since the active development and promotion of "the fifth Jewish column" myth in Russian media, there has been an upsurge in anti-Semitism, whilst citizens dissenting against the Putin regime are quickly labelled as "agents of the US Department of State". On the one hand, this leads to the perpetuation of the myth of sponsored oppositionists hiding in society and the need to fight them. On the other hand, Russians who are critical of the authorities but do not engage in political or media activity, refrain from voicing their views for fear of stigma or being labelled a "traitor of the motherland".

Another novelty introduced by the masterminds of Russian propaganda are the trolls flooding both Russian and foreign websites. One of their headquarters is located in the St Petersburg district of Olgino. Their activities aim to misinform and more generally negatively impact the psyche of those who are used to getting their information from the internet. Firstly, the vocabulary and tone adopted by paid-for commentators is far more aggressive, often making direct calls for extremism. Secondly, swarm attacks by trolls result in the majority of liberal, or simply

moderate, web editions opting to disable their comments sections altogether, thus depriving the online community of the opportunity to exchange genuine unfiltered views. On websites where comments remain open, one anti-Putin statement is counteracted by a flurry of offerings in the spirit of Kiselyov's "militant pseudopatriotism", leading to a feeling of isolation for those who fully or partially disagree with policies pursued by Putin. It is obvious that the trolls have not been created to prove something, but to create the illusion of the existence of an active majority which supports the regime. When a Russian is critical of the Kremlin or a particular policy, s/he is practically told: either you grin and bear and tacitly support it, or leave the country and take your views with you. A different message is sent to those who passively support the authorities. It is not enough to be pro- one should also be openly and aggressively against those who are not supportive of the Kremlin.

It is important to emphasise that the current situation is not static and with time the atmosphere of intolerance created by propaganda will continue to grow. The economic crisis and its consequences are only now beginning to be felt, which will inevitably result in an increased level of dissatisfaction and depression amongst society. These moods, mixed with aggressive attitudes towards the West and the opposition, while stoked by the media, have the potential to turn into a wave of violence and social unrest. Ironically, it is the regime itself which may in the end become a victim of its own aggressive social meddling.

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The author will be a speaker at the session of the Warsaw Security Forum 2015 – http://warsawsecurityforum.org/. This article is based on previous publications within the Intersection Project, an online analytical platform on Russia, established by the the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding, which is a partner of the Warsaw Security Forum 2015.

Democracy on the Defensive

SYLVANA HABDANK-KOŁACZKOWSKA

The war in Ukraine makes it clear that democratisation in the countries of the former Soviet bloc is not simply slow or stalled. It is actively opposed by forces that are determined to see it fail.

The findings of the 2015 edition of *Nations in Transit* (NIT), Freedom House's annual study of democratic governance in 29 countries from Central Europe to Central Asia, underscore the growing audacity of democracy's foes in Eurasia, where four out of five people live under authoritarian rule. When the first edition of NIT was published 20 years ago, only three countries – Belarus, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – were labelled "consolidated authoritarian regimes." Since 2000, the number of such regimes has more than doubled, and Eurasia's average democracy score has fallen from 5.4 to 6.03 on a 7-point scale. In fact, over the last ten years, authoritarian leaders who once paid lip service to democratic reform have systematised their repressive tactics and largely abandoned any pretence of inclusive politics.

In 2014 Russia earned its largest ratings decline in a decade, reflecting the fact that the country's aggression abroad is closely tied to Vladimir Putin regime's domestic struggle for survival. As it sought to destabilise the new democratic government in Ukraine, the Kremlin stepped up its suppression of dissent at home, targeting online media, opposition figures and civil society groups with legal bans on "extremism," trumped-up criminal charges and other restrictions.

In Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev's regime brought a new intensity to its multi-year crackdown on activists and journalists who threatened to expose official corruption and other abuses. Many were jailed on fabricated charges like hooliganism

or possession of weapons and drugs. Even as it shut down media and democracy organisations funded by the United States, Azerbaijan chaired the executive body of the Council of Europe from May to November 2014 and hosted the 2015 European Games.

Disdain for democracy

Democracy's most brazen opponents are far less powerful in Central and South-eastern Europe, with one major exception: Hungary. There, media freedom, national democratic governance and the fairness of the electoral process have declined rapidly over the five years that Viktor Orbán and his right-leaning Fidesz party have been in power. Only Russia's judicial independence rating has seen as much deterioration as Hungary's over the last five years. Unfortunately, while Orbán stands out for the virtual political monopoly he has achieved, he is not alone in his disdain for democratic standards. The European Union and its aspiring member

states have no shortage of individuals and groups that, through the exercise of political and economic pressure or by exploiting public anxieties and prejudices, contrive to keep or obtain power at the expense of democratic values and institutions in their countries.

Most alarmingly, these anti-democratic trends in Eurasia and Europe seem to be related. Menaced by Russian military activity and aggressive propaganda aimed at Russian-speaking minorities, countries on the EU's eastern fringes risk overreacting in ways that threaten free speech and civil liberties. At the same time Russian money and inspiration emboldens xenophobic and illiberal political movements across Europe, threatening European unity on critical human rights and foreign policy matters. More broadly, wealthy Eurasian autocracies – through their energy

The EU and aspiring member states have no shortage of individuals and groups that contrive to keep or obtain power at the expense of democratic values and institutions in their countries.

firms, lobbyists, investments and offshore accounts – have a corrupting influence on European politicians and businessmen, who help dampen criticism of such regimes' abuses, forestall any punitive action and weaken institutional safeguards in their own countries.

Throughout 2014 a wave of propaganda, masquerading as news and disseminated through Russia's state-controlled media, worked to simultaneously obscure and legitimise the Kremlin's aggression abroad. Nearby countries that felt threatened

by this offensive, particularly those with sizeable Russian-speaking minorities, reacted in a variety of ways, including censorship. The new authorities in Ukraine, facing both a military invasion in the country's east and a deluge of misinformation coming from Moscow, suspended retransmission of at least 15 Russian television channels in 2014. Moldova, whose breakaway territory of Transnistria is supported by Moscow, also imposed suspensions and fines on some stations for carrying Russian propaganda.

Even countries such as Latvia and Lithuania found it difficult to appropriately respond to the influx of Russian propaganda. Latvia banned the rebroadcasting of Rossiya RTR for biased reporting and incitement to hatred, emphasising the danger of programming that "splits society" over the situation in Ukraine and on "issues concerning Latvia's foreign and domestic policy situation".

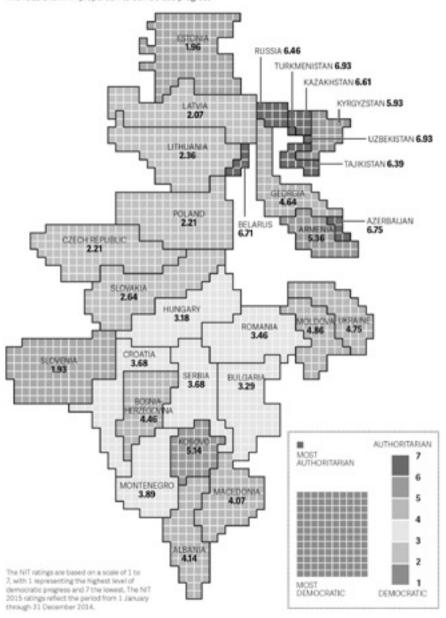
In the same vein, Lithuania's media watchdog suspended rebroadcasts of Russia's Channel One and the Gazprom-owned NTV Mir for three months each, after they aired a Kremlin-friendly cinematic interpretation of the Soviet army's failed attempt to remove Lithuania's pro-independence government in 1991. Lithuania also temporarily blocked broadcasts by the Russian channels RTR Planeta and REN TV Baltic for inciting hatred over and against Ukraine. In December 2014 the country's president, Dalia Grybauskaitė, proposed legislation that would increase fines on broadcasters that spread war propaganda and allow the radio and television commission to refuse licenses to broadcasters that have committed "crimes against Lithuania or have links with certain organisations that may threaten national security." Estonia was more circumspect in its reaction, advancing plans for its own Russian-language television station with programming governed by journalistic principles of accuracy and objectivity.

Ukraine: In transit

The events in Ukraine starting in early 2014 – with the collapse of Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovych's authoritarian government paving the way for fair and competitive elections – led to an unprecedented turnover in the political class. The EuroMaidan movement also generated a surge in civil society activism that continued well after the change in government, with citizen groups collaborating in drafting reforms and providing aid to those affected by the conflict in the east. Yet in spite of all of these breakthroughs, the stability and security of Ukraine's new government and institutions remain fragile. Many crucial reforms have yet to be enacted and Kyiv's control over its territory was battered by Russia's occupation of Crimea and its infusions of military personnel and equipment into the Donbas

PROPORTIONAL MAP OF NIT 2015 DEMOCRACY SCORES

With size shown in proportion to democratic progress



region. The Russian-instigated separatist conflict in Donbas has devastated the area, cost thousands of lives, and hampered Ukraine's efforts to revive its already weakened economy.

The EuroMaidan protests posed a serious challenge to the Kremlin, which has been working to crush internal dissent since Putin's return to the presidency in 2012. However, the regime's efforts to sabotage the new Ukrainian government created new domestic problems, as international sanctions weakened the Russian economy and activists raised objections to the unacknowledged Russian military presence in Donbas. Throughout 2014 the Russian government used new and existing laws to harass civil society, branding human rights activists and other critics as "foreign agents" and "extremists." With flagrant propaganda dominating state-controlled television, authorities also put legal and regulatory pressure on the country's few independent news outlets, like Dozhd (TV Rain) and Vedomosti, as well as on numerous online media platforms. Regional elections in September 2014 were carefully managed from above. Any genuine opposition was eliminated, while the LGBT community continued to be scapegoated as moral degenerates who would run amok if the West had its way. In a year of such disturbing developments Russia earned its largest single-year score decline in a decade. It now has a worse NIT democracy score than Tajikistan.

Despite Russian threats and attempts to derail the EU integration process in Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries, both Moldova and Georgia joined Ukraine in signing Association Agreements and related free-trade pacts with the EU. None-theless, Moldova's progress towards EU standards has been dispiritingly slow. The November 2014 parliamentary elections, though genuinely competitive and generally well-administered, were marred by some significant deficiencies, including the abrupt disqualification of the pro-Russian Patria party just days before the voting.

Apart from Ukraine, Georgia is the only country in Eurasia to have earned a recent improvement in the electoral process rating. Free and more competitive elections in 2012 and 2013 led to increased pluralism at the national level, and in 2014 Georgian cities held direct mayoral elections for the first time, with five major parties actively campaigning for seats. Nevertheless, the ruling Georgian Dream bloc won every directly elected mayoral seat and majority control over every legislature.

Armenia, on the other hand, was offered an EU Association Agreement in 2013, but decided to join the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union instead. Among post-Soviet states, Armenia is arguably one of the most dependent on Russia due to its closed border with Turkey, the military threat from Azerbaijan and Russian ownership of key energy and electricity infrastructure. Notwithstanding its rapid growth in internet penetration, the prosecution of some officials on corruption charges and signs of improvement in the administration of elections, Armenia's

overall democracy score has not changed in three years and is still somewhat worse than it was ten years ago.

In addition to their territorial issues, Moldova, Georgia, and Armenia continue to suffer from weak, politicised judicial systems that often fail to maintain the rule of law or hold political and business elites accountable for abuse. In such settings, even when ostensibly reformist and pro-European politicians win elections, the credibility of their platforms (and of the democratic model in general) is damaged by unchecked graft and opacity.

From bad to worse

The Aliyev regime's intensified crackdown on dissent in 2014 pushed Azerbaijan's democracy score to 6.75, near the bottom of the 7-point scale and even

lower than that of Belarus, once described as "Europe's last dictatorship." Both countries released a number of political prisoners late in 2014, but in neither case were these actions accompanied by any shift in policy or greater tolerance for independent political activity. At year's end, it was estimated that Azerbaijan still held at least 90 political prisoners.

As with Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan's wealth and strategic co-operation have discouraged many European and other democracies from demanding accountability for its poor human rights record. In 2014 the authorities shut down protests and arrested demonstrators, closed

Azerbaijan's democracy score in the *Nations in Transit* study was even lower than that of Belarus, once described as "Europe's last dictatorship."

independent media outlets and fined or jailed religious leaders. New criminal and administrative codes created further restrictions on the use of social media and freedom of assembly.

Democracy indicators for Tajikistan declined for the fourth consecutive year in 2014 as the government continued its sustained offensive against perceived threats, from opposition activists and their lawyers to academic researchers. The use of a pliant judiciary to mete out such harassment has reached critical levels, as have harsh conditions in Tajikistan's prisons. At year's end, the parliament was considering a version of the Russian law requiring certain non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to register as "foreign agents," carbon copies of which have sprung up across the region since Moscow adopted it in 2012.

Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan continued to earn the report's worst possible rating of seven on nearly every indicator. New legislation adopted in Uzbekistan

in 2014 formalised the already widespread practice of persecuting those with prior convictions through a variety of "preventative" restrictions, enforced by police and the country's ubiquitous neighbourhood committees. Kyrgyzstan is still the best-performing country in Central Asia, and unlike its neighbours it is not currently classified as a consolidated authoritarian regime. However, it lost ground on the civil society indicator in 2014, as the government increased restrictions on freedom of assembly and NGOs that had pushed back against illiberal legislative proposals the previous year.

Fighting to win

Russia's military aggression in Ukraine should dispel any lingering illusions that Putin's regime is a strategic partner of the EU and shares, even if it does not always pursue, broadly democratic goals and a commitment to the stability and security

The Putin regime is not an eccentric ally; it is an enemy of peace and an evangelist for a system of government that degrades and disregards fundamental human rights.

of the region. This regime is not an eccentric or demanding ally; it is an enemy of peace and human dignity and an evangelist for a system of government that degrades and disregards fundamental human rights, even when not at war.

Many of Russia's authoritarian neighbours are equally hostile to democracy and human rights, but as they grow wary of Moscow's unpredictable and even imperialistic behaviour, there may be opportunities to extract concessions that put them on a path to reform. When governments in Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan or Belarus look to Europe or the United

States as a source of balance in this new geopolitical reality, Brussels and Washington should not miss the chance to set conditions such as the release of political prisoners and the easing of restrictions on opposition parties and the media.

Above all, it is imperative that the EU and its allies provide as much support as possible to the development of a strong democracy in Ukraine. Eurasia's entrenched authoritarian regimes tirelessly warn their people that political change on the scale of the EuroMaidan movement can only end in chaos, violence and poverty. A Ukraine that is able to prosper economically while developing institutions and practices based on transparency and accountability would do more to shape attitudes in the region than any doomsday scenario presented on Russian television.

Given the nature of the external threat, Brussels and each EU member state will also need to do a better job of upholding democratic standards inside Europe.

The EU has recently shown some determination on issues like energy policy and Ukraine-related sanctions. But to maintain its strength and unity, the bloc must insist on transparency in business and politics, ensure free and fair elections and vigorously defend media freedom within its borders. This means creating mechanisms for monitoring, support, and enforcement through penalties, if necessary.

The past year and indeed the past ten years have shown that democratisation is often an adversarial process, and its proponents – whether dissidents, journalists, diplomats, or political leaders – cannot win if they are unwilling to fight.

For five years, Sylvana Habdank-Kolaczkowska was the editor of *Nations in Transit*,

Freedom House's annual survey of democratic governance from Central Europe
to Central Asia. She is now a Central Europe analyst for Freedom House and
a PhD candidate in Political Science at the University of California, Davis.

Crossing the Red Line

Interview with Asli Erdoğan, a renowned Turkish writer and human rights activist. Interviewers:

Iwona Reichardt and Bartosz Marcinkowski

MARCINKOWSKI: We are meeting here in Kraków, where you are staying as a resident writer of the International Cities of Refugees Network (ICORN). Today in Poland and, more broadly, in Europe, we are witnessing an ongoing debate on how to resolve the so-called migration crisis. Unfortunately, this debate is limited to statistics and phobias and much less about who these new migrants are or how the issue of migration really is not new to the European continent.

IWONA REICHARDT & BARTOSZ

ASLI ERDOĞAN: A month or two ago, I took part in a panel discussion here in Poland. I was quite surprised that there is so much talk about this "refugee problem" in Central Europe as, in fact, there are not that many refugees in these countries. In Turkey, where we have more than two million refugees from Syria, I have not heard anything like what I hear in Central Europe. I was

What is your take on this debate?

appalled that Poland is only going to take several thousand refugees and even that number is considered too high.

I also think that the migration problem has been built up in the minds of Europeans. If you keep repeating a phrase like "refugee problem" and keep thinking about it in those sorts of rhetorical terms, then it becomes a problem. Just like it was in the 1930s. Today, we know that the Jews were neither a problem, nor a question. However, if you start calling a certain group of people "a problem", then sooner or later, they become a problem. Maybe this is how we should change the debate. Abandon formulations like "refugee problem", "refugee crisis" or the "refugee question" and instead start talking about the influx of people who may enrich our culture.

The same is happening in Turkey with the Kurds. We also use the term "the Kurdish problem". What this rhetoric indicates is that a Kurd is no longer the subject of the discourse; he is always put together with the word "problem". I would rather say that there is a Turkish problem with the Kurds or a European problem with refugees.

What does the public debate on refugees look like in Turkey?

The debate in Turkey now focuses on hiding the fact that the country was totally unprepared for the refugees. They were left alone. As a matter of fact, there was no debate on this subject for several years. The discussion began only a few months ago and the media are now talking more about it, but only because the situation got out of hand, as demonstrated by the pogroms that took place when the tensions between the local population and the refugees became too high.

Does the Turkish debate focus on the dynamic situation in Europe or is it more inwardly oriented?

Turkey is now in a state of chaos. It is the worst I have seen since the 1990s. The state is busy fighting against the Kurds. All the newspapers report on it. It is nationalism and chauvinism at their peak. Mainstream magazines, mostly those supported by the government, concentrate on Turkish losses, never touching upon the issue of civilian casualties among the Kurds. The truth is that it is a form of preparation for the November 2015 elections. The message "the country is in chaos" is used to convince people

that they need a strong dictator to put things back in order.

The "refugee crisis" - to use your terminology for the moment – is a secondary issue. It is strange because Turkey's coastal line is a major route for the refugees trying to get to the European Union. Let me tell you about a more important issue that is not discussed in Europe. When Greek border police patrol boats catch a raft full of immigrants, the Greek policemen usually let the air out of the raft and let it go. The refugees still have four or five hours of air, which is usually enough to get them back to the Turkish coast. Greece has been doing this for a long time. I know people who tried to escape this way and they said that one of the most dangerous things is to be caught by the Greek coast guard. When Turkish papers reported these practices, they were accused of spreading anti-Greek propaganda.

Newspapers report dozens of deaths, but this gets little attention. Somehow, the picture of Aylan, the Syrian boy who drowned in the sea off the Turkish coast, made it on the front pages in Turkey, but it was not as widely discussed as in Europe. We have been seeing refugees for years now and we have gotten used to their misery, even in Istanbul. There, the streets are full of poor Syrian immigrants and children walking around barefoot.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been ruling Turkey with a strong hand but, as opinion polls indicate, he does not enjoy overwhelming support. At the same time, support for Kurdish parties is reported to be growing. What would you say are the current political attitudes in Turkey and what do they mean for the EU?

Turkey is currently going through an identity crisis. If you compare Turkish society today with how it was ten years ago, you see much greater divisions. For example, if you look at a map of Turkey, you can clearly see the political parties' zones of influence. The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) dominates in the middle of the country and on the Black Sea coast. The Mediterranean and Asian coasts, up to Istanbul, which is divided fifty-fifty, "belong" to the socialdemocrats (the Kemalists). The southeast is mostly Kurdish. It has been like this for the last four or five elections. In the past, people would be more hesitant in their political choices but today they are sharply divided, like enemies.

Would you agree with the opinion that Turkey has hit a dead end that is very difficult to overcome? And if so, what are the roots of this situation?

The roots of what is going on in Turkey right now are most likely found in the political system itself. When Mustafa Kemal Atatürk established the Turkish Republic in 1923, he set very strict rules (six arrows of light): republicanism, populism, nationalism, secularism, statism and reformism.

Since that time, Turkey has always looked to the West and secularism was implemented from the top. Traditional Muslims suffered under this regime.

However, they also exaggerated their victimbood. The truth is that it was the left and the communists that suffered the most, especially under the rule of the military regimes. Of course, the Kurds suffered a lot as well. Keep in mind though that the history of the left in Turkey is different than that in Eastern Europe, where socialism meant establishment. In Turkey, it meant being in opposition to the system. After 1990, the socialist movement was crushed. Labour unions and other left-wing organisations were harshly suppressed. The vacuum that appeared in their place was quickly filled by religious groups. The success of AKP can be also explained insofar as when it was formed, there were no other channels for opposition. Socialism in Turkey was supressed and it was also globally compromised after the fall of the communist bloc, so the youth turned to Islam.

How would you describe the political system in today's Turkey? Can we say that it is still a democracy?

Democracy in Turkey is a tale of the past. The only remaining democratic elements are elections. Nevertheless, it is clearly not enough for a real democracy to function. In the 1980s, Turkey was a military regime and it did not even try to pretend it was a democracy. The 1990s was a time of opening and partial liberation. Today's system is being compared more and more to the 1980s, when western Turkey was safe and peaceful but the regime was committing atroci-



ties in the south-east. Many people ask themselves today whether we are back in the 1980s.

I have recently been to eastern Turkey and I can say with certainty that the 1980s are indeed back. The power in my country has never been so monopolised. Erdoğan is omnipotent. He is second only after God. The press is silent and the judicial system has collapsed, hence everything is in the hands of the president. Even when he is caught stealing millions of dollars from the state budget, nothing happens. All the judges who investigate his case are simply replaced.

Erdoğan is not stupid, though. He pursues his agenda in a very intelligent way. For example, he passed a law which states that no academic paper can be published if it hinders the security of the state. Nobody noticed this new regulation as, at the same time, dozens of other laws (some of them actually beneficial) were passed. Another good illustration of Erdoğan's rule is abortion. Theoretically, in Turkey it is legal for a woman to have an abortion up to eight weeks of pregnancy. However, a piece of investigative journalism revealed that in Istanbul, out of 34 state hospitals, only

four were performing abortions. What makes things even more difficult is the fact that a woman who wants to have her pregnancy terminated needs to get permission from her husband.

Would you say that this restriction is also a reflection of Erdoğan's religious stance? Many argue that he has been bringing Turkey back onto the path of Islamisation and abandoning secularism...

Turkey has been perhaps the most successful Muslim-majority state in implementing secularism. In my view, religion is beautiful if you do not experience its oppressive side. I am an atheist but I study religion. To me, the Bible is beautiful. To you, as you live far away from the Islamic world, perhaps the Koran is beautiful. In Turkey, the majority of people who live on the west coast are very secular. They are the so-called "white Turks" and are very much against the AKP. They are also very much against female headscarves but my question is how secular they really are if they fast during Ramadan?

On the subject of secularism, ten years ago, Istanbul was a city with a buzzing nightlife. However, after the introduction of some new laws like the smoking ban in bars (the majority of Turks are smokers) or the prohibition of selling alcohol after 10pm, the nightlife became gradually supressed. Religion is also becoming more and more visible in schools. Religious secondary schools have become very popular under the AKP regime. Around one-third of all second-

ary school students attend a religious school. There are now four to six hours of religious classes per week in non-religious secondary schools. In my day, such a thing would be totally unthinkable. Now you have to study religion if you want to continue your education.

How would you characterise the situation with the Turkish media? How independent is the press?

There are around 20 newspapers in Turkey and 15 of them are state-controlled. During my last stay in Turkey, in September 2015, three magazines – Zaman, Hürriyet and one Kemalist magazine – were attacked. The Fethullah Gülen's sect was publishing Zaman. In the US, it is a very powerful organisation which was once in alliance with the AKP. However, after a power struggle between the publisher and the government, Zaman, which has a circulation of 800,000, fell under really strong pressure from the state.

A columnist for *Hürriyet* was physically beaten by a state-controlled crowd. It is a mainstream magazine and one of the biggest on the Turkish press market. *Hürriyet* has its own ideology; for example, it accused all human rights movements of being terrorists. It also launched a campaign against me in 2003. As a result, since 2012, there have been no articles written about any of my books by its journalists. I am on their blacklist. *Hürriyet*'s motto is "Turkey belongs to the Turks". Now though, even this paper is in trouble. It is the only remaining impor-

tant "opposition" paper. Another outlet, a social-democratic, kemalist paper, was busted last summer because it published evidence that Turkey is supporting ISIS, which is something everybody knows. I have even seen it with my own eyes. Its editor in chief was sentenced. The prosecutors asked for two life sentences plus 40 years for him.

In the West, we hear speculation about Turkey's supports for ISIS, but what do you mean when you say that you have seen evidence of such collaboration with your own eyes?

I once made a call to Turkish and Kurdish writers to go to the Mursitpinar border crossing between Turkey and Syria. It is very close to Kobane. All we wanted to do was hold a peace chain. There were 12 writers from Istanbul and around 40-50 Kurdish ones. The army did not want to let us go there, so we sneaked in thanks to some friends living in the area. Next to the mine field, we found a spot where people from Kobane could see us. In the end, we created a 500-person-long chain. At the same moment, the American bombardment against ISIS began. The photos taken there now look so beautiful because the bomb explosions made the scene look like a sunset. It was just one kilometre from where we were. There, I realised that the border with Syria in that place was closed. Kobane was surrounded by ISIS. One of our slogans was to open the corridor to Kobane. We were not saying "open the borders entirely", that would

be unrealistic. We just wanted to make a human corridor in order to help the suffering people.

However, Turkey was not even letting in the wounded. Twenty of them died because the border was deliberately closed. For the people who live there, the border is completely artificial. These are Kurdish towns and many families are divided on both sides. However, the border with the ISIS-controlled areas remains open. Anyone who wants to join ISIS can pass without any problem. Weapons deliveries are uninterrupted.

How would you describe the current state of relations between the Turks and the Kurds?

When I arrived here in Kraków, the war between the Turks and the Kurds had just started. It happened because Erdoğan could not secure enough votes to gain complete power. Peace negotiations with the Kurds have been taking place for two years and suddenly, after a poor election result, he simply knocked over the negotiation table and everything was finished

Ankara accuses the Kurds of a bombing in Suruç on July 20th 2015, where 33 young socialists, some of whom I knew personally, were killed. However, there is no way that the Kurds could actually have done this as the socialists supported Kobane. It is clear that only ISIS or the Turkish government could be behind this attack.

When I was in Turkey recently, I saw the hysterical mood. One Kurdish man

showed me a picture of a wounded female guerrilla caught by the Turks. She was tortured for four days and nights and then her naked body was dropped in the middle of a town called Garto. When I was repeating this story to my friends and used the word "guerrilla", one of them said: "Do not call her guerrilla. She was a terrorist."

Once, I was invited to take part in a discussion in Şanlıurfa, the oldest city in Turkey and the birthplace of Abraham. It was organised by the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), a Kurdish party. In the evening, I saw that Şanlıurfa was totally empty because the local people are afraid of ISIS, who are very strong in that region. There are ISIS strongholds on Turkish territory as well. In September, I went to Diyarbakır. I knew there were some cities under police siege. The situation in Cizre was the worst. Yet the press in western Turkey presented it in the following manner: "The Turkish army is fighting against the PKK." It is nothing like that in reality. These are little, civilian towns. The police were continuously shooting at anybody who would appear in public. The people in Cizre quickly ran out of food and water. One woman literally begged a Turkish police officer to take her baby to the hospital. Of course, this did not happen and the baby died. Overall, 21 civilians were killed in the siege. The oldest victim was 80 years old. Are they all PKK terrorists?

Would you say that there is now a regular war occuring in eastern Turkey?

When I arrived in Diyarbakır in September this year, shelling was taking place all night long. What is more, there were also jets and helicopters flying over the area. Forget about sleep! My friend, a Kurdish lawyer who was imprisoned for five years – apparently being a Kurdish lawyer is enough to be imprisoned in Turkey these days – decided to take me to the Silvan district. This area was barricaded by the police but they were opening up when I was there. First, we went to Silvan, a small town of around 90,000 inhabitants in eastern Turkey. I walked around the city and it looked totally empty. Houses were completely devastated by the shelling, all types and sizes of ammunition. In the hospital's courtyard, all the ambulances were burned out. You could also see bullets up to the third floor of the hospital building. When one of the doctors looked through the window with a white flag during the shelling, he was shot at as well.

The evening of September 9th 2015 was probably the worst in Turkey's history since the Istanbul pogrom in 1955. After more than 30 soldiers died in the fighting, many Turkish people went out on the streets in various cities, calling for a massacre of the Kurds. The main HDP headquarters were attacked in Ankara. Silvan went under siege again. Buses to Diyarbakır stopped. All the Kurdish shops were destroyed. It was literally like a crystal night (*Kristallnacht*). Many social groups took part in the pogrom, including the white Turks and Kemalists. Erdoğan simply set them against Kurds

because it was easy to play the hate card. One week later, Erdoğan made a smart move; he gave a speech under a huge national flag, which had always been a symbol of the Kemalists, who waved it at anti-Erdoğan demonstrations. He stole their symbol when he said: "We are all brothers, we are just against the terrorists".

Is there any hope for a bright future in Turkey?

No. If things like the pogrom are taking place, it means that the country has crossed the red line. There is no return from that. Totalitarian regimes do not just appear overnight. The formation of these systems is a process. You wake up one day and it is too late. Of course, you could say about Turkey, "It is not Iran" or "it is not Syria" but you can always find a worse example. This does not mean, that things are not very bad there.

Aslı Erdoğan is a prize-winning Turkish writer, human rights activist and former columnist for the newspaper *Radikal*.

Iwona Reichardt is deputy editor-in-chief of *New Eastern Europe*. She holds a PhD in political science.

Bartosz Marcinkowski is an assistant editor with New Eastern Europe.

European Ambassadors

A conversation with Maria Kret (Lviv, Ukraine), Stsiapan Stureika (Hrodno, Belarus) and Oksana Tsybulko (Donetsk, Ukraine), recipients of the 2015 *Thesaurus Poloniae* scholarship Interviewer: Iwona Reichardt

IWONA REICHARDT: You have all been awarded the prestigious *Thesaurus Poloniae* scholarship by the International Cultural Centre in Kraków to do research in Poland. I would like to talk to you about this experience as well as your impression of today's Poland and your own countries and their people. Let us start with a simple question: Is this your first scholarship in Poland?

STSIAPAN STUREIKA: This is my first scholarship of this type. However, Poland is no strange country for me. First of all, I am from Hrodno in Belarus, where Polish culture is affectionately perceived. Secondly, for the last eight years I have been visiting Poland quite regularly, watching Polish news and communicating with Poles. Probably less than I would like to, but nonetheless...

OKSANA TSYBULKO: I have also been to Poland before. I was a beneficiary of a 2012–2013 scholarship programme which was offered by the Polish government to young academics. I was in Warsaw and Poznań where I

took courses at the Adam Mickiewicz University and I wrote my dissertation on contemporary art.

MARIA KRET: This is also not my first stay in Poland. In 2009–2010 I was also a beneficiary of the same scholarship as Oksana. I must say it was a very interesting experience.

How would you say those in your home country view Poland today?

MK: Poland is a country that inspires us. I know many Ukrainians who came here in the 1990s and they told me that Poland then was like Ukraine is today. This means we still have so much work ahead of us. Twenty-five years since communism ended in Poland I can see that Poland is really a European country. People here have opportunities. I do not know if they always take advantage of them, but they have perspectives. Unfortunately, this is something that we still lack in Ukraine. Even when you go to college and get a degree you still may

not be able to find a job. Corruption is omnipresent, even since the EuroMaidan, we are still fighting with corruption.

OT: For me Poland is a free and open country. It is simply my second home.

SS: As a cultural anthropologist, I can say that Poland has long become an element of the day-to-day livelihood strategies applied by the Belarusian people. My colleagues who are historians often visit Poland. They participate in conferences and co-operate with their Polish colleagues. The same applies to artists and writers. Many people from western Belarus also visit Poland for business and commercial reasons, including shopping. In fact, Belarus became the world leader in the number of Schengen visas granted per capita in 2014. Even in absolute numbers there are only three countries that are ahead of us: China, Ukraine and Russia. The substantial number of those visas is obviously issued by Poland. On our websites you find discount tickets for flights from Warsaw's airport, along with those from Minsk or Vilnius. A very large number of Belarusians start their foreign trips from Warsaw.

It is also important to mention the support Poland offers Belarus in terms of grants for cultural, social and political projects. And Poland provides asylum to the victims of political oppression in Belarus, including expelled students. Thus, in the eyes of a Belarusian, Poland is a reliable friend that almost never fails.

How would you characterise your countries today? Let us start with Ukraine,



which has indeed undergone a significant change...

OT: The question about today's Ukraine is a difficult question to answer. On the one hand, Ukraine has changed in a way that you cannot recognise it. After the Revolution of Dignity, Ukraine has focused a lot on achieving a higher standard of living for Ukrainians. It wants to become a real European country and it very much deserves to be. On the other hand, it is still a country that is foreign and cold to even some of its own citizens.

MK: I would say that today's Ukraine is a "post-Maidan Ukraine". However, it has been over a year since the Kyiv revolution and the country is still in deep chaos. There is an ongoing war in the east which makes it even more difficult to answer the question as to what Ukraine is today. I would also add that the country is about expectations. These expectations are not only directed at the



Ukrainian government but also at the European Union. However, in recent months people have become more disappointed that their expectations are not being met. Of course there are people who want to change things and are trying to do so.

And Belarus?

SS: Belarus is also very difficult to describe in one sentence or two. Belarus is very diverse. There are several parallel worlds which unfortunately never meet. I can say that 90 per cent of my friends are completely European. They are intellectuals and very open-minded. Yet, there are also a large number of people in Belarus who still live mentally in the Soviet Union. I have recently read a good interview with Svetlana Alexievich (our Noble prize winner in literature this year) where she said that 20 years is not enough time to change the public consciousness which has been cultivated

for decades. We exist within the framework of a post-Soviet and post-socialist development, of course not without our own peculiarities.

Faced with immense Russian propaganda we are reminded of the popular term "soft power". This term, coined by American political scientist Joseph Nye, is used to describe a wide range of activities undertaken by a state and non-state actors that are aimed at attracting outsiders to their value system. Scholarships and exchange programmes fit this definition very well too. Since you are all beneficiaries of such a scholarship programme, would you agree that these visits have indeed changed the way you think to the point that once you return home you become a sort of "ambassador" of this country or its value system?

SS: Generally, yes. However, I would add to this that life in Poland, or any other European state, does not fundamentally change anyone but rather helps them better understand the social and cultural situation of their own countries. In my view, what people get the most from such programmes is experience and skills like inter-cultural communication. I know very few people that have dramatically changed after such a scholarship. Yet many of these people also admit that their stay abroad gave them more evidence that changes are necessary and provided a broader perspective of Belarus.

OT: I agree 100 per cent that such programmes change people for the better. They not only expand their horizons

but also encourage them to share their experiences with others and show them a different value system.

MK: I agree with Oksana. One example that comes to my mind is a wellknown historian named Yaroslav Hrytsak. I read an interview with him where he said that he had a scholarship in Poland in the late 1980s. Now in Ukraine, it is people like him who have become the engines of change, even if it is only at the university level. When you return from such a stay you really want to change your country. You get more frustrated with the red tape because you know that things can be better. That is why I think that everyone from academia should participate in such a programme, even for a short time.

As we all know, the EuroMaidan Revolution in Ukraine has pushed the country beyond the point of no return when it comes to its pro-European orientation. What does Europe mean for Ukrainians today?

OT: For Ukrainians, Europe is a dream. This means it is something that is not fully known yet. But also, unfortunately, for some Ukrainians Europe is still a place "where we are not present". It is, for sure, a place that is better than where we are now.

And for Belarusians?

David Lowenthal wrote an excellent and well-known book titled *The Past is a Foreign Country*. One of the themes analysed in this book is a tendency to romanticise the past without under-

standing that the way we imagine this foreign country is just our self-projection. which has little in common with historical truth. In my opinion, this is exactly the way Belarusians see Europe. Belarusians want to live as those in Europe, but not actually in Europe. Few people truly understand what Europe is (and by the way, how many EU citizens understand this?). This idealisation of Europe can be seen in everyday life in Belarus where an expensive renovation of an apartment is called "Euro-renovation", the most popular store chain is called "Evroopt". They like to use the prefix "Euro" to name companies like "Evropejski" grocery store in Minsk or "Evrodveri" ("Euro-doors") and even "Evrokrepezh" ("Euro-screws") also in Minsk. A Belarusian would label any manifestation of good taste as "European". Even if, frankly speaking, it is horrible. But if a Belarusian likes it than it is "Europe". This is a common feature for townsfolks as well as country inhabitants.

There are large complexes, too. For example, when Gérard Depardieu was visiting our country in July of this year he said that "Belarus reminds him of a little Switzerland". But he is wrong, at least because Belarus is five times larger than Switzerland.

What do your societies need the most today?

SS: I would agree with Siarhiej Dubaviec, a Belarusian intellectual, that what we need most of all is freedom. Just give us real freedom of speech, freedom of



political opinions, freedom of art, and maybe a little more economic freedom (although I am not an expert here), and in two years you would not recognise this country.

OT: The tragic events and the tense political and social situation in Ukraine in recent months are a consequence not only of some hidden factors, like external political influence, but also some internal factors, especially the low level of awareness about the problems faced by Eastern Europe as a whole. An incomplete or misshaped identity of Ukrainians as representatives of an Eastern European country leads to catastrophic mistakes not only in the sphere of politics but also in the mental transformation of our society. In my view, insufficient knowledge of our own history and culture can be very dangerous. I am convinced that today's Ukraine needs therapy. It needs to rethink its own history in the context of the Soviet Union and

other similar countries of the former Soviet bloc, for example Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania or the Baltic states, which are today examples of a productive and positive transformation from the Soviet experience.

MK: In my opinion, Ukraine needs to be able to decide about its own future. Personally, I do not like the division between the two Ukraines. I think it is a very outdated way of thinking. There is one Ukraine today and we need to find one united vision of our future.

How would you describe the situation of academics in your own countries, especially now that you have spent some time conducting research in Poland?

SS: I can only speak about humanities, particularly Belarusian history and ethnology. Everything is complicated. Although Belarusian scholars often take scholarships to Poland and elsewhere, we are still short of academic contacts and isolated from the European intellectual sphere. This is reflected in the areas of research as well as their quality. We can look at books published by Belarusian universities and academic state publishers - in the best case, they are good empirical studies. But more often these are compilations of ideological notions and attempts at self-praise. A lack of critical reflection is a weak point of the Belarusian liberal arts and humanities. It can get more interesting when it comes to non-state publishers and non-state researchers. They sometimes demonstrate a truly European level. But again, these

two realities rarely meet. I think that over time the non-state sector will prevail simply because it is more competitive. However, a lot depends on maintaining international contacts and participation in joint projects. We still need support and partnership.

MK: In Ukraine the life of researchers and academics is difficult. On the one hand, we are under pressure to enter the international academic stage. And rightly so, Ukrainian academia cannot develop in isolation. But, on the other hand, we do not have the resources like our peers in the West. Thus, a researcher is often very alone. The truth is that our academics do not even ask for high salaries. All they want is to be able to do their work. And here again, we can return to the

benefits of foreign scholarship. In my case, I not only have a stipend, but my cost of living is also covered. This allows me to deeply focus on my research and prepare publications, which in turn gets me closer to European academia. In Ukraine attempts have been made at increasing the universities' autonomy, but this process has just started and will take years. The grant system is still very small but Ukrainians are now entitled to apply for some funding from the EU, like the EU Horizon 2020 programme. Here again differences are visible between the older generation that is not used to such a system and those who have earlier been to other countries and are thus more accustomed with European programmes. 💖

Translated by Olena Shynkarenko

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Parallel Donbas

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Walking through Donbas's forests and meadows, even though they are right next to the frontline, you cannot feel the evils of war. In fact, here it is possible to forget about them. In a time of peace, it would be a perfect place to rest and escape from the noise of big cities. Today, just a few metres away there is no man's land, a strip of territory between the Ukrainian-controlled and separatist-controlled areas. The enemy can shoot anytime and everything is very simple.

The traffic at Kyiv's main railway station is very intense, even early in the morning. Trains from all over Ukraine arrive in the capital as others depart. One of the departing trains is heading to Konstantinovka in Donbas. The passengers inside are a mix of civilians and soldiers going to join their units on the frontline.

At their final destination, they are greeted by police patrols and servicemen from battalions of the Ukrainian ministry of internal affairs. The people who depart the train are carefully observed. If the police spot someone who looks suspicious, they begin to question them: "Why did you come here?"; "Who are you?" Even though the last shots here were heard more than a year ago, the combat zone is not that far away.

Many residents of Ukraine-controlled Donbas would not like to see a repeat of these events. Some time ago, it was an area where regular military operations were conducted. Today, it is very difficult to find traces of the war in Kramatorsk. If not for the Ukrainian soldiers hanging around, this would look like just another calm day in this average Donbas town. Shops open as normal, public transportation operates without interruption and travel agencies conduct business as usual. Heavy industry has not stopped its work either. Here, the war seems to be taking place in a far off land. It is an alien concept to these calm inhabitants.

Reports

Leninopad

Like many other towns throughout Ukraine, the city of Kramatorsk is painted yellow and blue, the colours of the Ukrainian flag. These days, many Ukrainians feel the need to emphasise their patriotism in a very visual way. However, this also creates the false impression that all Ukrainians support the state or that they all are patriots.

One of the local businessmen says: "We are tired of this war." His expression clearly shows that he does not care about the military conflict anymore. He does not care who is to blame. Some other people around us, who are in the same restaurant, look at him for a moment as if to agree, then go back to their meals. It seems as though my interlocutor is not the only person here who holds such an opinion. Locals are now more interested in peace and survival. A world free of shelling and bullets is their greatest desire. The city can be painted whatever way, but that will not replace the need for stability and a freedom from fear.

Kramatorsk's gigantic main square is overwhelming. A few months ago, in the heart of the square stood a pompous monument of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, more commonly known as Lenin. His days here are over. The leader of the revolution was overthrown and replaced by a large Ukrainian flag, which is a telling sign of change in this post-Soviet country.

Just like anything else in today's Ukraine, the war is a complex issue. That is why, to understand it, it is not

Locals are now more interested in peace and survival. A life free of shelling and bullets is their biggest desire.

enough to listen to the sound of explosions and count casualties. To understand its nature it is important to realise that this war is deeply present in the sphere of symbols and ideology. Combat is just a result of this silent front. Looking at the empty square and the remains of Lenin's statue, it is difficult not to start thinking about the changes currently taking place in Ukraine, especially the process of de-communisation. A clear, pro-Ukrainian message has become the dominant narrative in the media and there is less room for Ukraine's Soviet history. Since the war in Ukraine broke out, Soviet memories have been perceived much more negatively. What was part of Ukrainian history for many years has now started to become erased. What was once good, became evil.

The country was shaken by a wave of the so-called Leninopad (Lenin-toppling). Statues of Lenin were destroyed in many cities. Parliament passed a bill which banned the usage of Soviet-related names to streets and squares. However, these winds of change only really affected symbols and were not widely accepted by society. De-communisation was imposed from the top and not everyone understood the

point of it. Whilst it is true that the number of people opposed to Soviet symbols in public spaces is growing, large numbers of Ukrainians still do not share such a straightforward aversion to them. The reasons behind this are very simple: habit, opportunism and a lack of desire to reshape the outside world.

As time goes on, it is becoming clearer that Leninopad is only a symptom of de-communisation that happens to attract the most media attention. It is easy to rebuild the image of Ukraine around a soldier who is sacrificing himself for his new homeland. It is easy to tear down a Lenin statute in front of the cameras. Nevertheless, cameras do not change mentalities. Not far from Kramatorsk's main railway station, there is a park named after Lenin. People go there and rest. The name does not seem to be a problem.

In Sloviansk, a soldier told me: "We are working with the locals so that they will one day destroy Lenin's statue and not us. You know, it will look much better this way." Of course it will look better. This way, the army can avoid the accusations frequently spread by Russian propaganda that they are dismantling old, heroic symbols and replacing them with new, fascist ones. In the end, the Lenin statue in Sloviansk fell as well, but only with noticeable help from the soldiers.

It all started here

Slightly over a year ago, nobody outside Ukraine had ever heard of Sloviansk. As the war in Donbas continued, numerous international correspondents arrived in the city. When Igor Strielkov, also known as Igor Girkin, one of the Donbas separatist leaders during the first months of the conflict, took control over the city, it became one of the separatist strongholds. Although this takeover did not last long, it left considerable scars on the city.

In the museum of local history, I met a local pro-Ukrainian activist. I had first spoken with her when tensions had been running much higher. I see now that her energy and optimism have disappeared. Her sentences are more like a series of complaints about everything. "Not much has really changed, the former rulers are still in power. Separatists were not checked by the state authorities so now they are in power at the local level as well," she says. Despite what she says, the girl is not very emotional. She is angry at citizens who are content with the minimum and cannot see the real problem. To most of them, the war was not a warning that something should be changed, but just another tragic stage in their lives. The exhibition dedicated to the events which took place here over a year ago is visited by school children. It creates hope for the future. Maybe it will enable a shift in mentality. Nonetheless, for the time being, the future remains remote and uncertain.









Heading to the front

A Ukrainian soldier stands on top of a small hill and plays the national anthem. The traffic on a pontoon bridge nearby has stopped. Some drivers get out of their cars. Next to the old bridge, destroyed during the siege of Sloviansk, a Ukrainian flag is being hoisted. The ceremony does not last long and soon everyone goes back to their daily routine. The traffic starts flowing again and most cars head westwards. I am heading in the opposite direction – towards the frontline.

I leave Sloviansk and Kramatorsk behind. These cities continue their everyday lives for now, facing routine problems. I am heading to Artemivsk, around 90 kilometres north from Donetsk. It is now one of the furthest places in the east where the institutions of the Ukrainian state still operate. The closer to front I get, the less civilian cars I see. At the same time, security checkpoints become more numerous. There are trenches, fortified barriers and bunkers prepared for battle. The landscape changes, as does the attitude of the people who live close to the front-lines. In military circles, there is less belief that peace and success from diplomatic talks will come true one day. The soldiers feel a real threat to their lives. They also trust more in their weapons and skills than negotiations with the enemy. Things are even more complicated because Ukrainian soldiers do not respect their enemy. The Russian-backed separatists are, in their view, a miscellany of random individuals, often alcoholics, who are not ready for battle. To the Ukrainian soldiers,

the Russians are invaders, so there is no point in talking with them. The only thing to be done is to fight and push them back to Russia. Patriotism among the Ukrainian soldiers is different to the "civilian patriotism" displayed elsewhere. Something pushes them to believe that, in the end, Ukraine will prevail.

The most easterly Ukrainian army positions seem normal at first glance. There are broad fields with trees dotting the horizon. To the untrained eye, it seems that there is nothing suspicious here. However, soldiers point out the places where the enemy units could be hidden. They say they are now in a strong position from where they have good observation points. It will be difficult

Ukrainian soldiers do not respect their enemy. Russianbacked separatists are, in their view, a miscellany of random individuals, often alcoholics, who are not battle ready.

for the separatists to take control of this territory. This is where a dilemma arises: should the Ukrainian army just defend itself and its positions or should it try to regain territory from the separatists and launch an attack?

The dirt roads are not the best routes for travel but there is no other way. We head to a small town called Krymskoye, which is on the frontline. It is one of the

hearts of the conflict in Ukraine's east. The military vehicle has no major problems with the potholes along the road but the journey is still far from smooth. Soldiers who are travelling with me hold their weapons tight. We could be attacked at any moment, even in Ukrainian-controlled territory. At the same time, driving through the forests and meadows, you cannot feel the evils of war. Here, it is possible to forget about them. In a time of peace, it would be a perfect place to rest and escape from the noise of the big cities.

No man's land

My thoughts are interrupted by our arrival in the small, half-abandoned village. The local library is damaged, as is the kindergarten. Only a few shops still operate. Most residents have left because they feared for their lives. They were replaced by soldiers from one of the Ukrainian brigades fighting along this part of the front. We decide to move further until we reach no man's land. At this point, if you look through binoculars, you can even see the separatists' positions. The jokes are over. There is no room for insubordination. The only way to move around this area is in

We try to move fast and do not stay in one place for long. There is no point in provoking the enemy and putting people's lives at risk.

a group, with guards, strictly following all the security protocols. Not every place is available for a visit. It is safer to move around the area in the morning as shelling often starts in the evening. Still, we try to move fast and do not stay in one place for long. There is no point in provoking the enemy and putting the soldiers, and others, lives at risk.

We go into one of the huts where the soldiers are based. They are watching the news on the television. It is a way of staving off boredom and learning something new about what is going on in the world. The problem is that here, only Russian channels are availa-

ble, but the Ukrainian soldiers watch them anyway. They bite the bullet and watch even though they are fully resistant to the Russian propaganda and lies coming out of the television. War is not just about fighting, there is free time too and it needs to be used.

Outside, at the soldiers' firing post, there are pictures of women cut out from men's magazines and hung on ammo cans. Perhaps it is a part of normal life that they once had and that was suddenly taken away. Although it looks a bit childish, it should be placed in context. Their relatives are far away and pictures of them would almost certainly look even worse on these dirty ammo cans.

A few metres away from us is the no man's land that divides the Ukrainian-controlled territory from the separatist-controlled areas. The enemy can shoot at any time. Everything is very simple. We observe the separatists' positions and we are curious what they look like. Maybe someone in the enemy ranks is doing the same thing. Maybe they are curious as well. Or perhaps someone is aiming at us with a sniper rifle. But we do not know for sure, and that is probably for the better.

A few hours after our visit there, fighting flared up again and drones appeared in the sky. I found out later that there were no casualties on the Ukrainian side. This time, a chaotic shooting sometimes called a "discotheque", did not cause any tragedy.

One warm morning I had to say goodbye to the battalion's commander, with whom I stayed. I left but the others stayed. It could not be any other way. I returned back to a world without war. Those who stayed in the trenches of Donbas would like to do the same, but it is not their time yet.

Translated by Bartosz Marcinkowski

Wojciech Koźmic is a Polish civil society activist and *New Eastern Europe*'s photo-reporter. His photographs from the EuroMaidan, Crimea (just before annexation) and Ukraine's east have been published in previous issues of this magazine. Material for this report was obtained during his stay in Donbas in August 2015. He also blogs at: www.wojciechkozmic.pl.

Estonia's Export Commodity: Animation films

MAGDALENA LINK-LENCZOWSKA

Priit Pärn's piercing irony, black humour and razor-sharp comments on reality have turned Estonian animation films into a shining star in the once gloomy cinema landscape of Eastern Europe. Pärn is also an artist who, in the 1990s, was not afraid to engage in an affair with the world of advertising. As a matter of fact, by doing so, he encouraged and paved the way for many young Estonians today, who are now able to acquire funding and engage in international co-productions.

It would be difficult to find a more suspicious freak of nature than a film animator. Animation — a phenomenon with which we should all be well familiar — is, after all, as old as cinema itself. There are even experts who try to trace its origins back to the paintings found at the Lascaux cave, the first human attempt to capture movement in art. Such a thesis might be somewhat arrogant as just about any art history textbook will try to argue that the cave represents the mythical birthplace of the fine arts, not animation.

However, a quick look at the biographies of some animation artists should be enough to suggest some truth in the "cave theory". Where else, if not in isolated studios or basements, do animation artists usually work? Some, like Piotr Dumała,

are even hermits. This Polish director, who carves his interpretations of Dostoyevsky's prose onto plaster sheets, has worked in solitude for ten years at a time, meticulously carving out a single short story. Others could easily be suspected of practising magic, or at least alchemy. The American twins Timothy and Stephen Quay are a prime example of this. Their work indefatigably transforms the panopticon of the vivid Eastern European imagination.

A little big nation of animation

Animators, just like their profession, fall somewhere on the spectrum between the visual arts and film-making; between reality and fantasy or movement and stillness. They escape simple descriptive definitions as though they were functioning in some kind of space beyond, one that is available only to those who are like them.

Animation can be intimidating, both to the spectators and critics alike. The latter prefer to keep away from this fascinating, yet difficult, art. Consequently, animation films remain one of the most poorly defined and niche areas in the film industry, with animation-dedicated festivals being the only possibility of staying in touch with this art form.

It is then not possible for this field of art to become an export commodity. However, the career path of Estonian director Priit Pärn disproves this theory. It is mostly thanks to his efforts across a 40 year career, as well as the work of his colleagues and students, that the phrase a "little big nation of animation" keeps reoccurring in various descriptions of Estonia. This year's "Dragon of Dragons Award" that Pärn received for his lifetime achievement during the prestigious Kraków Film Festival was just the icing on the cake.

Estonia's success in animation may seem quite surprising, especially when you think that the country's population is a mere 1.3 million people. But one should also take into account the reality of the post-war Soviet period, which clearly did not generate an environment favourable to individualism. The broader context of Eastern European cinema in the second half of the 20th century was not much brighter. Bearing all this in mind, one cannot help but ask: what was it that made Estonia stand out and become recognisable on a global scale?

First and foremost, the language of animation is a powerful tool for creating metaphors or metamorphoses. Neither physical limitations nor physical laws apply when it comes to creating new animated worlds – the artist's imagination is the only limit. This explains why the western pioneers in the field – with Walt Disney leading the way – chose animation as a tool to tell their stories of doe-eyed princesses and cute little animals, feeding them to mass audiences and their starved

imaginations, traumatised as they were by their experiences of the First World War and the Great Depression.

In the murkiest corners of Europe

In the post-war period, the politically battered Eastern European states, if not literally devoured by the Soviet monster then certainly under its heavy influence, found the new reality of constant communist censorship inspiring in the sense that it led to the creation of laboratories for animation. In this way, new and so far unexploited possibilities were discovered. In addition to the introduction of some

In the post-war period, the politically battered Eastern European states found the new realities inspiring in the sense that they led to the creation of laboratories for animation.

new techniques, the change in storytelling that took place at this time can be best defined as a shift from metamorphoses (plastic, slapstick-like deformations of the subject matter) to metaphors.

Naturally, in Soviet times, metaphors were usually political in nature. The potential of abstraction was used to smuggle what the political system was trying to eradicate. The search for the political ambiguity of meaning – even when none had been intended – dominated the interpretation of art in general, often marginalising other aspects of it.

What also gave animation a clear advantage over feature films was its specific poeticism, the possibility to construct metaphors which served as a fabric for

weaving an innocent fable-like costume to disguise relevant and topical narrations. These metaphors were used as a weapon to effectively mislead censors. Thus, it was politics that created the impetus for animation to mature; evolving from a child's playful medium into artistically complex liberation manifestoes, resulting in the great success of the national schools of animation in Eastern Europe in the 1960s and 1970s. However, as a result of the systemic changes taking place in the region, the general interest in animation films being made behind the Iron Curtain began to gradually fade. Instead, systemic transformation in the 1990s brought about new challenges that some of the filmmakers were unable to meet.

Priit Pärn is a self-taught director. He often emphasises that it was his degree in biology which saved him from the temptation to copy other artists. Admittedly, he also owes his independence and unique style to the system of censorship that allowed him to remain blissfully ignorant of what was going on in the West, as well as the fact that he did not have much opportunity to soak up the artistic traditions

that are taught in art school. Deprivation may at times mean liberation, as indeed the future director learned accurate proportions and attention to detail while working in Tallinn's botanical gardens. He also made observations of the world around him by walking every day to the editorial office where he worked as a cartoonist.

Pärn's rough, caricature drawings and accurate observations, combined with his ironic sense of humour, are the most recognisable features of his style. In fact, it was his satirical drawings that convinced another Estonian director, Rein Raamat, who at the time was forming his team at the newly opened department of animated cartoons at the Joonifilm state film studios, to ask Pärn to start working with him. The openness to young, non-conformist personalities, as well as the appreciation for professionals from other fields demonstrated by Raamat and his peers, is what made the Estonian film industry stand out. It showed a unique quality of Estonian directors who were willing to take a risk. After all, young people's lack of experience requires a lot of time and patience on the part of their experienced teachers to remedy. In the 1970s, when the financing of film studios was entirely dependent on the whims of oversensitive Soviet bureaucrats, employing unknown nonconformist artists was like playing with fire.

Contaminating young socialist minds

Pärn was never a good diplomat. That is why his 1977 debut film *Is The Earth Round* got him in trouble at the first time of asking. Animation, pigeon-holed as a product for children, was supposed to be easily digestible for the audience. It was meant to entertain and teach – ideally, through simple moral tales. Pärn's innocent tale of a boy who decided to set off on a trip around the world to verify the theory that the earth is round stands in complete opposition to the education system at the time. Thus, all the wonderful adventures the main character experiences in the wider world – to return to the place where he started his journey as an old man – provided fuel to contaminate young socialist minds bred to be obedient and not ask questions. What made things even worse was Pärn's drawing-style – ostentatiously wobbly and primitive, it could not, by any means, be seen as pleasant. As a consequence, the Soviet State Committee for Cinematography (Goskino) issued a negative review of the film, which prohibited its distribution outside Estonia and caused some financial problems for the studio. The director nearly became a dissident.

Pärn never wanted to become an outlaw. Even though most of his films had a political message, he completely opposed being perceived as someone acting against the system. As a result of making films on his own terms and rejecting any form

of ideological compromise, Pärn became known for his defiance. Despite this, he managed to outsmart the system and quickly became a national export commodity, something which was no mean feat in a socialist Soviet republic.

During Soviet times, filmmakers were rarely sent to international film festivals. Highlighting this fact, Pärn noted that isolation provides the perfect conditions for artists to develop their own style. However, he might have been somewhat coy when he said that as he indeed used every opportunity to travel and clearly found inspiration in the works of Jan Švankmajer, a prince among Central European surrealists. The latter's sense of humour found an outlet in Pärn's second film ... and Plays Tricks. The main character of this 1978 ten-minute production, a little clown bear which plays tricks on other woodland inhabitants, is in fact quite a serious representation of an artist who, by the power of his imagination, can shake society out of its everyday reality. From that moment on the motif of the artist's role and that of the liberating, unrestrained absurd kept reappearing in Pärn's works.

This changed in 1995 with Pärn's daring production of *1895*, released to celebrate 100 years of world cinema. In this production, one of the funniest animations in the history of cinema, Pärn tells the falsified story of August Lumière, who wanders throughout Europe and its historical epochs. Even though the main purpose of Lumière's quest is to find his own identity, he seems to be more successful at coming across other legendary cultural figures of the 19th and 20th centuries, who are trying to come up with totally absurd inventions to change the course of human civilisation. In the end, he finds out what his name means and comes to the conclusion that the only thing that has not yet been invented is the cinematograph. This 30-minute film is a ceaseless race through countless gags, intertextual jokes and national stereotypes, coated in a thick veneer of sarcastic criticism regarding psychoanalysis. The perverse *1895* shows that cinema is a mere whim born out of existential boredom. At the same time, it becomes clear that nothing other than cinema leaves space for unrestrained creation and, in doing so, moves the world forward.

This has also been the case with Estonian cinematography associated with Pärn's name. His piercing irony, black humour and razor-sharp comments on reality made this small Baltic state into a shining star on the extremely gloomy cinema firmament of Eastern Europe. These very same characteristics prevented this star from waning when Eastern European countries started gaining independence, which also brought about a crisis in animation. Freedom meant privatisation of the film industry, even before Moscow cut off its central funding. Markets and borders were thrown wide open, yet the artists had to learn how to seek funds on their own. Their productions lost one of their vital functions, namely, being a window through which the curious West could peek behind the Iron Curtain.

In these turbulent times, the non-conformist Estonian director once again became an exception to the rule. It was thanks to his works that Estonian animation – the only variety of this craft in the region – made it smoothly through this transformative period.

Universalism

Pärn always emphasises that to him, animation is a way of telling a story. At times, as in *The Triangle* (1982), Pärn employs the simple convention of a folk fairy tale to engage in social criticism. The film presents the story of a married couple engrossed in performing their daily routines, infidelity included. The film, focusing on mundane Estonian reality, raises some

Thanks to Pärn's work, Estonian animation made it smoothly through the period of transformation, unlike so many others in the region.

universal questions, such as people being stuck in their stereotypically traditional gender roles. It is arguable that such "problems" might have not been the most pressing for citizens of the Eastern bloc who were busy with their daily struggle for a decent life. Yet their inclusion in the film shows the director's ability to take a much broader worldview.

This ability contributed to Pärn's first great international success, his 1987 production *Breakfast on the Grass*, a film that would have never been released had it not been for the political thaw in Eastern Europe. In fact, the film is recognised as one of the greatest achievements of world animation, which enabled Joonisfilm studios to be saved from bankruptcy. *Breakfast on the* Grass is a story of four artists coping with their lonely struggle with the trivial reality of constant deprivation and the monolith of the political system. It is not another *homo Sovieticus* tale though, but a very universal treatise on artistic freedom understood as the right to humanistic subjectivity. In the punchline series of scenes, the main characters having already collected all the necessary prompts and the key to a well-guarded park, meet up to reconstruct the scene depicted in the famous painting by Édouard Manet ("Luncheon on the Grass"). However, after a while, they get up and once again become a part of the grey mass.

Pärn's affinity for making references to great pieces of world culture is clear in the most important of his works, which premiered a year after Estonia gained independence. *Hotel E* (1992) was filmed at a time when the political transformation rocking the Soviet bloc was still in progress and the countries of Eastern Europe dreamt their frantic dream of becoming part of the West. In *Hotel E*, Pärn presents two parallel narratives. Both stories happen in separate worlds, on two sides of a

wall, unaware of each other's existence. On one side, we see a community squeezed into a claustrophobic, monochromatic greyish space. These scared people subjugate their lives to the jerky mechanics of a hopeless, rhythmical response to subordination. On the other side of the wall is a vast salon. It is decorated with pop-art design and is a paean to prosperity in which the characters – drawn with a soft line and in flat pastel tones – dwell. Moving sheepishly, they abandon themselves to the trance of mechanically repeated rituals, with subtle music in the background. Their behaviour, marked by boredom and aimless consumerism, is even more

Hotel E tells a story of the indifferent West, the inability to communicate and find a place in this new reality.

empty and predictable than the ones on the other side of the wall. A refugee from the parallel reality who manages to get to the other side has a chance to experience it for himself.

Hotel *E* tells the story of the indifferent West and the inability to find a place in this new reality. The film also questions the myth of American freedom by comparing the inertia of democratic prosperity with the trained passivity of the *homo Sovieticus*. The director

does not moralise, he merely reveals the glass wall which has replaced the bricks, but which divides just as effectively and perhaps even more painfully.

Free market challenge

The price that Estonia paid for political independence was an economic recession that presented the country's film industry with one of the greatest challenges in its history. Estonian artists call this period the "time of depression". Thus, the title *The Death of Dark Animation in Europe*, a performance prepared by Pärn and his colleagues for a festival in Stuttgart, was quite telling. It was a sort of obituary, marking the end of "the golden era" in Eastern Europe. However, it was also a time when this non-commercial, yet very costly, art form had to operate under free market rules as well as face the fact that the enemy, which had long been a source of inspiration, was now gone, bringing about paralysis in the industry.

What saved Estonia was a specific mixture of quick reflexes, a readiness to take up a challenge and its openness to commercialism. Privatisation weakened national filmmaking, yet it did not stop Pärn who, in his march towards further prestigious awards, became a sort of driving force for the whole industry. First working solo and then with his wife Olga, he kept making provocative films. At times, they were poetic, iconoclastic, saturated with irony, surrealism and sex. Just like before, they told colourful stories of a grey reality but also, using black humour, they talked

about new issues such as the increasingly globalised world, the dictates of technology and the rule of pop culture over people's hearts. In the age of the internet, this combination of somewhat distanced sophistication with Eastern European barbarism won Pärn hordes of fans and emulators.

Today, the director is busy sharing his knowledge with others. As he recently stated, it is teaching that keeps him young. For the past eight years, he has been the head of the animation department at the Estonian Academy of Arts, where he has managed to establish a strong group of artists who are well recognised and rewarded for their work. The fact that the influence of Pärn's drawing-style can be seen in the works of young authors around the world proves his lasting impact.

In the 1990s Pärn was not afraid to engage in an affair with the world of advertising. By doing so, he encouraged and paved the way for many young Estonian artists, who now make television commercials for clients all over the world. The 21st century brought about financial opportunities for animation, which can be seen everywhere: computer games, Hollywood productions and various mobile applications.

Baltic animators, well-accustomed to modern technology, are able to capitalise on their reputation, get funding for their projects and are increasingly engaged in international co-productions. The best example of this is a recent project which included co-operation with the National Film Board of Canada, the world's most renowned producer of artistic animation. Representatives of the board stressed that opening doors to the Baltic region can bring great benefit to the world of animation.

Translated by Agnieszka Rubka

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The Battle for a New Awareness



Батальонъ (Battalion). A film directed by Dmitriy Meshiev. Russia, 2015.

War and patriotic films have always been a Russian specialty and often generate

controversy among viewers and critics alike. On the one hand, they are accused of being propaganda, inducing indoctrination and manipulating facts. On the other, the artistic quality of these directors is, in the majority of cases, extremely high. The only thing that is certain is that Russian war films, which often use historical facts quite loosely (it is important to stress that the topic in question is not documentary films but artistic cinema) have always been heavily focused on generating or reinforcing myths. As a result, they have greatly shaped national awareness of Russian society, its sense of identity and its worldviews. Examining Russian cinema from this perspective makes it a very interesting phenomenon in a broader, socio-political context, a point that has been especially visible this year, both on screen and in real life.

Since the beginning of 2015 several very important (and highly costly) war films have been produced in Russia. Among the largest productions we find: *Battalion*, directed by Dmitriy Meshiev, *Battle for Sevastopol* by Sergey Morkitsky, Sergey Popov's *The Road to Berlin* and *The Dawns Here are Quiet* by Renat Davletyarov. Meshiev's *Battalion* stands out from this group because it depicts the reality of the First World War, whilst the remaining films are about the Second World War, prob-

ably the most exploited topic in Russian cinematography.

Battalion stands out not just because of the theme of its plot but also because of its incredibly high budget (ten million US dollars). The film's viewing audience has also been extraordinarily high (it has already reached two million viewers). Anyone who was in one of Russia's large urban centres in February and March 2015 could not help but notice the posters showing a bald woman with a shaven head walking in uniform through a red poppy field. Considering that the opening night took place on February 20th, shortly before the two most popular lay holidays in Russia – the Defender of the Fatherland Day, celebrated on February 23rd, and International Women's Day, celebrated on March 8th - the posters were ideally matched with the seasonal holiday decorations, whilst tickets for the film seemed an ideal gift for both men and women.

Unsurprisingly, the film is saturated with educational and patriotic content. Its producers, known for such mega-productions as *Brest Fortress* or *Stalingrad*, used every possible motifs and scheme known to male war cinematography, changing only the gender of the main protagonists. Indeed, *Battalion* is a film about female soldiers fighting in the First World War. More precisely, the film is a story about the female death battalion that was established in the spring of 1917, upon the order of the transitional government. Maria Bochkareva, who is played in the film by Maria Aronova, was in charge of the unit.

The purpose of the decision to establish an all-female battalion was clear. It was meant to raise morale and motivate other divisions that had been on the frontlines. Morale was decreasing as a result of autocratic rule. Soldiers were falling victim to alcoholism and refused to perform their duties. By August 1917 a few female battalions were created. However, later on, women were no longer allowed to take part in combat. The truth is that a final assessment of their involvement is far from simple since, despite some success stories, it is difficult to consider the sacrifice that they made as justified and reasonable. Therefore, the establishment of these battalions was a desperate decision meant to foster any hope that remained, at least for a certain period, before the final defeat.

Returning to the film, what comes as a surprise is the approach that the director took towards the war as such. In the film, women are shown to react positively towards any information about being drafted in, registering en masse as volunteers willing to head to the front. One could get the impression that women in Russia dream about sacrificing their lives for their homeland. However, something that is not discussed is the motivation behind such decisions. There is no mention of issues faced in everyday life, such as work, home, family or even pregnancy. These issues are portrayed as having no influence on the final decision of the women to join the army.

Dialogue between the recruits also implies that many women have been almost born to fight with a machine gun in their hand and that Russian family traditions, such as hunting expeditions, are in fact preparatory exercises for potential wars. Nobody knows when one may break out and who will be drafted in, so everyone should be prepared. This indicates that to Russians, war is a common occurrence. Everyone, regardless of whether they are aristocrats, farmers, blue collar workers, repre-

sentatives of the intelligentsia, men or women, is able to adapt to the muddy conditions of the trenches and learn to kill the enemy. If somebody has a problem with that (as shown in the example of an aristocratic recruit) they too can quickly learn the necessary skills and even come to enjoy them.

Thus, the female battalion are shown out on the frontlines, courageously reigniting the soldiers' morale in their fight against the Germans. The women are equally courageous when it comes to fighting the occupying forces and repelling enemy advances. In this sense, women have become a model of moral principle and patriotism (in contrast with the rebellious Russian male soldiers, who are unwilling to fight). They are also used as a symbol of courage and sacrifice, particularly in the scenes where they are contrasted with German cowards. Paradoxically, the final moment of this battle, which is eventually lost, is not shown in the film because it does not have a happy ending and contradicts the preceeding narrative.

From an objective point of view, the film is very well made. It is well directed and quite concise. However, the myths that it reinforces are smuggled into a general discourse, tempting and infatuating the public. This should raise some genuine concern and criticism from the audience. The question that most readily comes to mind here is whether patriotism should be always defined as a readiness or even willingness to sacrifice one's life for their homeland; to sink in muddy trenches and be part of military combat against the enemy. Seemingly for some, the answer to this question is still unclear.

Daniel Wańczyk Translated by Iwona Reichardt

Warsaw Bloody Warsaw



Portrait of a Soldier. A film by Marianna Bukowski. Distributed by Journeyman Pictures, Surrey, United Kingdom, 2015.

First, a brief history. The Warsaw Uprising, one of the most tragic events in the modern history of Poland, started on August 1st 1944 at 5pm sharp, in Nazi-occupied Warsaw. It was an operation organised by the Polish resistance Home Army, aimed at liberating Warsaw after five years of German rule. Unfortunately, it did not succeed. It lasted 63 days and ended with the systematic mass killings of civilians and the near total destruction of the city by the Germans. Timothy Snyder summed it up with the following sentence in his book, Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin: "No other European capital suffered such a fate: destroyed physically, and bereft of about half of its population."

Thanks to initiatives such as the Warsaw Uprising Museum, it has become one of the most important historical experiences shaping Poland's national identity today. Regardless of whether you praise the uprising or believe it was a colossal mistake, it is a highly controversial issue and discussions on its legitimacy have a very important place in Polish public discourse. Therefore, annual anniversaries of the uprising are one of those rare days when Poles gather together in the centre of many cities to sing patriotic songs and consider the lessons of the past and how they can be useful for the country's present and future.

Although widely discussed in Poland, the Warsaw Uprising is still a relatively unknown event outside of it. Portrait of a Soldier by Marianna Bukowski, a Warsaw-born, London-based director and producer, will hopefully help fill that knowledge gap, especially among a western audience. The film is a one-hour interview with Wanda Traczyk-Stawska, who joined a Home Army combat unit and fought during the uprising. Divided into several parts, which cover daily life during the uprising and provide a limited explanation of its geopolitical background, Portrait of a Soldier provides a complex and coherent look at what was happening in Warsaw between August and October 1944. It is a simple story about a very difficult time.

Traczyk-Stawska's story is told against a rich backdrop of original uprising video materials and pictures. This, combined with the sober narration of the film's subject, creates an extremely powerful effect. It literally sucks the viewer into the battlefield, like travelling back in time. Traczyk-Stawska takes us straight from our comfortable chairs to the dusty streets of Warsaw, where we desperately try to keep ourselves out of the line of fire, together with other young Polish soldiers. When she speaks about love and laughter under siege (yes, it existed) the audience feels something akin to a psychological connection with members of the resistance.

"One death is a tragedy; one million is a statistic" is a famous saying attributed to Joseph Stalin and it can sometimes seem like this is true. Portrait of a Soldier reminds us that the death of hundreds of thousands is also a tragedy and that Stalin's line, though memorable, is an inhuman observation. Bukowski's documentary adds a human element to the

statistics and history books, which makes us better understand the horrors of the Second World War because it really helps us imagine it.

Traczyk-Stawska's wisdom is striking. While speaking about the Warsaw Uprising, she shares her reflections on fundamental issues that are applicable to every human being - freedom, love and dignity. Her story also explains why the uprising is such an ambiguous issue in Poland. Reflecting on the end of the uprising, Wanda Traczyk-Stawska says that "there is nothing worse for a soldier than capitulation. ... The realisation that it was all senseless". It is easy with hindsight to look at the losses and conclude that the decision to carry out the uprising was disastrous. On the other hand, Traczyk-Stawska recalls the Polish flags waving from the buildings in Warsaw, just as they did before 1939, and states that two months of struggle were beautiful, despite all the horrific moments. After four years of life under the brutal German occupation, people wanted a taste of freedom, even if only for a brief moment. Freedom was very important to many young Polish soldiers taking part in the uprising, as well as for many citizens of Warsaw suffering from the Nazi regime's occupation of Poland.

Bukowski's film will unquestionably have the most powerful impact on Poles and people with an attachment to Polish history. More fragile audience members may burst into tears watching it. But *Portrait of a Soldier* is no tearjerker. It is a real story, the unique historical testimony of a witness, participant and soldier which also has a universal message which is that under even the most daunting conditions, it is not only possible but crucial to stick to certain principles and do the right thing.

It is difficult to write objectively about films like this if you are Pole. History has great importance for Poles as it is a strong policy-shaping factor. Every time someone in the West or elsewhere speaks of "Polish death camps" or suggests that Poland was somehow involved in "the Final Solution", Polish diplomatic service protests and a great feeling of injustice is felt throughout Polish society. Such expressions are not always a sign of ill will and are more often the result of a lack of knowledge about Polish history around the world. That is another reason why Bukowski's documentary is important. However, its biggest strength lies in the fact that it is an amazing and unforgettable story.

Bartosz Marcinkowski

A Tale of Cautious Optimism



Russia-China Relations in the Post-Crisis International Order. By: Marcin Kaczmarski. Publisher: Routledge, London-New York, 2015.

Marcin Kaczmarski's Russia-China Relations in the Post-Crisis International Order is the result of more than ten years of research conducted at the Institute of International Relations at the University of Warsaw as well as his rich experience travelling across Russia, Central Asia and China. In writing this book, Kaczmarski faced a difficult task. Many had doubts that not much else could be said about Russo-Chinese relations after Bobo Lo's excellent Axis of Convenience. Would it be enough to follow

Lo and illustrate how the "axis", while increasingly convenient for Beijing, has become less and less profitable for the Kremlin?

Instead, Kaczmarski set himself a more ambitious goal. He questions Lo's assumptions with a great deal of tact. Kaczmarski conducts analyses of the issues between the lines. However, in order to recognise this, one must read the book carefully. Kaczmarski delicately confronts the two narratives on Russian-Chinese relations: the official-optimistic one of a "strategic partnership" and the academic-pessimistic narrative of Lo's "axis of convenience". Although it is difficult to say whether Kaczmarski's approach is a better way to understand Russo-Chinese relations, it is undoubtedly a good sign that a new voice has appeared in the debate.

According to the author, the change in the balance of power between Russia and China has been pursued peacefully thus far and it should stay this way in the future. The economic crisis has not weakened the mutual ties between the two states, but has in fact made them stronger. Kaczmarski points out that "Russia has been gradually accommodating to the change in the balance of power while China has remained cautious." What is more, Moscow – after a deep analysis of China's policies – concluded that the rise of China is an opportunity rather than a threat to the Kremlin. These arguments are particularly important as it shows the rationality of the Kremlin's political calculations. In other words, Russo-Chinese relations can be sustainable because these two countries have finally found a common language, even in spite of the changing "weight" of both players.

The perception of Russo-Chinese relations presented in the book can be described as

"careful optimism". This is far from the "official optimism" declared by Moscow or Beijing, but it is also significantly different from the many pessimistic (or alarmist) western narratives. Kaczmarski argues that maintaining friendly relations between Russia and China is profitable for both states and has nothing to do with their values or geopolitical calculations. Instead, it is common sense that is the driving force behind the majority of these relations.

Although there are not many of them, the book does have its weaknesses. A comparison between the change in the balance of power between Russia and China and the United States and the United Kingdom is not convincing. In addition, while writing about China, the author makes some minor mistakes. For example, Kaczmarski writes that "the new Chinese Qing dynasty seeking to expand its influence in Asia, crossed the Great Wall and united China with Manchuria." In fact, Qing was the Manchu dynasty that conquered China. These moments are either mistakes or linguistic inadequacies but either way, they are still misleading for the reader. Unfortunately, conversations with Chinese analysts and citations from western experts on China cannot replace in-depth knowledge of that country. In the book, there is little room for Chinese political or strategic thought. Nor it seems is there much space for China's internal political discourse, which is only presented in a superficial way.

Despite this, the author has still provided adequate detail and analysis and has done so very skilfully. He has avoided blunders and has included everything that could be observed from a distance. Taking into account Kaczmarski's excellent analytical skills, this book could

be the first step in helping him to become not just a leading Polish expert on Russia but on China as well. Nevertheless, *Russia-China Relations in the Post-Crisis International Order* is a solid piece of work and a new and important voice in the international discourse on Russo-Chinese relations.

Michał Lubina Translated by Bartosz Marcinkowski

The Hidden War



Гібридна війна. Вижити i перемогти (Hybrid War. Surviving and winning). By: Yevhen Magda. Publisher: Vivat, Kharkiv Ukraine, 2015.

The term "hybrid war", despite its recent popularity, is a new phenomenon in international relations and so far. there has been little research conducted on this issue. This has led to a lack of in-depth understanding around hybrid war, since it exceeds the frames of our traditional understanding of war. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine is often classified as a "hybrid war", as it combines different types of warfare: traditional military, political and informational. Another feature of hybrid war, which can be observed in Ukraine to some extent, is its hidden character. Although Ukraine claims that there are Russian troops on its territory, Moscow has repeatedly denied these accusations.

Yevhen Magda's new book, published in Russian and called *Hybrid War. Surviving and winning*, is an attempt to explain this phenomenon. However, this is not an easy task for the author. On the one hand, hybrid warfare has been widely discussed and is considered controversial while, on the other, it is relatively a new term which needs solid, empirical research.

In the introduction of the book Magda outlines his understanding of hybrid war as "a desire of one state to impose its political will on another state by complex political, economic and informational activities without [officially] declaring war against that state." Naturally, Magda analyses the concept of hybrid war in the context of the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine. However, the book is not limited to giving an exhaustive description of what a hybrid war is; Magda also provides the reader with a set of tips as to how he believes one could go about winning a hybrid war.

The economy has always been one of Russia's strongest forms of leverage over Ukraine and its domestic and foreign policies. Thanks to its vast natural resources, Russia is in a position where it can dictate certain conditions to Ukraine. Before 2014 Russia had created numerous obstacles for Ukraine to halt any pro-European foreign policy developments. Paradoxically, the thing that Russia tried to prevent most – Ukraine's rapprochement with the EU by economic means – became the primary cause of another revolution and shift in power in 2014.

Earlier attempts by the Kremlin to influence Ukraine's policy included the gas crises of 2006 and 2009. During these events, Gazprom had aimed to take control over Ukraine's gas transit system. While the crises were a test of Ukraine's independence, both events were concluded not by a legal settlement between Gazprom and Naftohaz, but by intergovernmental agree-

ments which, in the end, resulted in Kremlin victories. Similarly, in 2013 Ukraine faced the dilemma of whether to sign an Association Agreement with the European Union or to join the Customs Union with Russia. Put together, these events, which took place in 2006, 2009 and 2013, were meant to present Ukraine as an unstable country that was unprepared for integration with the EU.

In this context, Magda illustrates certain mechanisms which can significantly limit the possibility of Russia using energy as a political tool against Ukraine. In order to achieve this it is necessary to: 1) strengthen Euro-Atlantic energy security structures; 2) create an information exchange system similar to the one that is currently used by the military and 3) make information about the flow of energy resources public, which would result in export-transit-import transactions becoming more transparent.

The historical aspect of the hybrid war between Russia and Ukraine is based on a popular notion that Ukraine is a part of the Russkiy mir ("Russian world"). Russia argues that its actions in Crimea and Ukraine's east are in defence of the Russian-speaking population. The perception of Ukraine as a part of the Russian empire, or a "brotherly nation" which is historically rooted in Russia, "forced" the Kremlin to pursue a policy of interference in the internal affairs of Ukraine. The political situation following the autumn of 2013 changed this perception and led to a new negative narrative towards Ukrainians in Russia. Magda suggests that Russia treats the history of its imperial past as a justification for the existence of a weakened, semi-dependent Ukrainian state. According to the author, Russia's actions have forced Ukraine to abandon attempts to find a common vision of Russian-Ukrainian history and set up its own priorities and trends in shaping its historical remembrance.

The political aspect of hybrid war has its roots in both history and the economy. While analysing Russian-Ukrainian relations, Magda divides them into four phases: 1991–1997, the period between Ukraine's independence and the signature of the treaty on friendship and co-operation; 1997-2003, the search for direction in Ukraine's foreign policy and the lost chance for a pro-European choice; 2003-2006, the period of worsening relations (the gas crisis, dispute over Tuzla Island) and the final one, 2006–2014, which is marked by Russia's attempts to re-establish control over Ukraine. The author makes a convincing case that the implementation of Russian interests in Ukraine was greatly helped by the presidency of Viktor Yanukovych. He was the most pro-Russian president since 1991, one who was unable to differentiate Russian pressure on Ukraine's domestic and foreign policies. In effect, his subordination to the Kremlin made the current hybrid war possible.

Another strength of the book is that Magda does not neglect the social and psychological aspects of hybrid war, taking into account the views and emotions of civil society. This is most closely connected to the informational dimension of the conflict and the role of the mass media. However, as Magda points out, it is extremely difficult to win this dimension of hybrid war as there is no clear battlefield and the phenomenon has no borders.

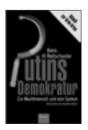
In conclusion, the author stresses that victory in a hybrid war is not based on military or media activities. According to him, in the case of Ukraine, it is crucial to convince civil society that the actions of their state are justified,

to maintain unity among the people and secure internal stability. In order to achieve these goals, Ukrainians will have to work intensively to overcome the divisions between the country's eastern and western regions. It will also require significant work to debunk the image of Ukrainians as "banderites" or extreme nationalists, an image created by an effective propaganda campaign whose aim is to discredit Ukraine in the eyes of the West and Russia. Other measures that need to be enforced in order to maintain the existence of the Ukrainian state include a continued fight against corruption, the creation of a middle class and the consolidation of national values.

Magda's book is undoubtedly a successful attempt to analyse the phenomenon of a hybrid war. One of its strongest assets is that it includes a wide range of empirical examples taken from the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, alongside theoretical analysis. Interestingly, Magda's book was published in both Ukrainian and Russian, though an English edition is not yet available.

Maryana Prokop Translated by Bartosz Marcinkowski

Russia's Club Law



Putin's Democratorship: A man of power and his system. By: Boris Reitschuster. German edition published by Ullstein Buchverlage, Berlin 2014. Russian

edition published by Vivat, Kharkiv, 2015.

The Russian translation of Boris Reitschuster's Putin's Democratorship: A man of power and his system (originally published in German as Putins Demokratur. Ein Machtmensch und sein System) appeared at quite a unique time. Due to the annexation of Crimea and the war in the Donbas region, relations between the West and Russia have severely deteriorated. What is so special about this book is that it already has two editions in Germany and was acknowledged as book of the year in Ukraine. Putin's Demacratorship is a compilation of essays, written by Reitschuster, a German journalist, during his ten-year stay in Moscow as a correspondent for the German magazine Focus. In 2011 the author began receiving threats, which were followed by accusations of Russophobia by several Russian newspapers. In the end, he felt forced to leave the country. Based on his experiences in Russia, his essays have become a compilation that reflects the current state of affairs in that country, one that in spite of its democratic facade, is a classic example of authoritarianism, based on enslavement, lies and manipulation – hence the title Democratorship (a portmanteau of democracy and dictatorship).

The European Union condemned the annexation of Crimea and Russia's military aggression in eastern Ukraine. However, among the societies of the European states, the situation was not so clear cut. For example, nearly 80 per cent of Germans opposed sanctions against Russia. This is quite a paradox since Germany, a country that experienced two totalitarianism regimes, Nazism and communism, should be particularly sensitive to any signs of nationalism, hatred or aggression. Does this attitude reflect a German society only interested in economic

profits, co-operation in the field of energy and German investments on the Russian market? Perhaps the problem is more complex and has its roots in Europeans' decreasing attachment to values like freedom, the rule of law and democracy.

Reitschuster sees the origins of Vladimir Putin's system of power in the traditions of the Soviet Union. However, he also believes that Putin's style of rule is modern and perhaps even ahead of its time. The author concludes that post-modern nihilism has eroded western European morality. Relativism successfully found its place in the sphere of culture, but has not yet infiltrated politics as it is too strongly linked with the economy. Irrational thinking would be extremely dangerous in this case. Putin broke this taboo, Reitschuster argues, as he managed to impose a Manichean view of the world on Russian society as part of his domestic policy. The outcome is that the majority of Russians are not interested in searching for alternative sources of information because they trust what is presented to them on the television. This is despite the fact that staterun television deforms reality and presents such problems as unemployment or crime as a norm of life in the EU. In this context the abuses of the Russian state – bureaucracy and corruption – do not seem so blatant anymore. However, as the author notes, such negative phenomena are not Europe's daily bread and butter, but exceptions.

The author notes that there are several paradoxes in relations between the West and Russia, something which has become even more visible over the course of the last few years. For example, by purchasing energy from Russia, European consumers finance pro-Kremlin parties

in their own countries, which aim to destroy the system of western values and change the EU's foreign policy. This is perfectly illustrated by the case of Gerhard Schröder who, as German chancellor, made Kremlin-friendly decisions and was later rewarded with a position on the board of Nord Stream AG.

Expansion is a key feature of the Putin regime. After taking control over Russia's political scene and instituting repressive policies within the country, Putin began to quell prowestern and pro-democratic tendencies in its neighbourhood – Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Russia's president is now preparing the ground for further expansion into Europe. Putin's Democratorship illustrates the various stages of expansion of "Putinocracy" which, at first, targeted individuals, opposition members and the businessmen who supported them. "Putinocracy" now focuses on the destruction of social groups, nations and states.

An important part of Reitschuster's book is dedicated to Vladimir Putin, a man who grew up in the proletarian district of Leningrad (St Petersburg), where the only known law was club law. The brutal suburbs of Leningrad taught Putin that the strongest is always right. The author argues that one event that greatly affected the future president of Russia was the fall of the Berlin Wall and the storming of the KGB outpost in Dresden by angry demonstrators. Back then, Putin experienced moments of defeat and humiliation which made him detest democracy. As soon as Putin became Russia's prime minister in 1999, the process of KGBisation of Russia began. Secret service officers and servicemen occupied most positions in the state administration. Reitschuster tries to understand the mentality of the people who were raised in the Soviet Union but comes to the conclusion that they simply have no political views. The driving force behind their actions is the old *Bolshevik* rule that the ultimate goal is to attain power and keep it at all costs.

In Reitschuster's book there is also a description of Russia's bureaucratic machine, fuelled by omnipresent corruption. In this vicious cycle of bribery, a citizen not only hands out bribes, but also eventually attempts to gain them himself. In the end, the average consumer falls victim to this pathological system. This explains why prices in Russian shops are so high. For a foreign investor it is necessary to find a Russian partner who has good relations with state officials. This is the only way to achieve a safe position in the market and avoid state security services' interference. The book provides many examples of cheated and ruined western businessmen trying to survive in this game with no rules.

A key condition of preserving such a system is to eliminate its critics. Reitschuster recalls the trial of Mikhail Khodorkovsky in detail and claims that this case was a definitive blow to the might of Russian business. Threats, intimidation, electoral fraud, the stories of Garry Kasparov and Mikhail Kasyanov or the assassinations of Anna Politkovskaya and Alexander Litvinenko are generally well-known facts, but when gathered together in one book, they create a depressing impression. In one of his essays, Reitschuster analyses Putin's own shady business links from his time spent in the St Petersburg's mayoral office. After reading Reithschuster's book, there seems to be no room for optimism regarding Russia's future.

In another essay, the author presents the first phase of the formation of Putin's neo-im-

perial doctrine. Reitschuster notices that the system recruits its supporters mostly among young people. Members of organisations such as "Nashi" or "Young Russia" are the ones who should quell any potential "threats" or any sort of social revolution in Russia. This ideology has also other consequences. The German journalist describes cases of attacks on Asians, black men, Jews and homosexuals that occurred between 2005 and 2006.

In the mind of a KGB operative, despite the existence of an internal enemy, the image of an external threat is also very important. Just like any other dictatorship, Putinism can function only in a state of being permanently at war with everyone. This is why the conflicts between Russia and other former Soviet republics that occurred after 1991 seem to be an appalling consequence of this doctrine. In the book we also find stories about trade wars that the Kremlin waged against Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine, as well as a report on Russian intervention in Georgia in 2008. Interestingly, the author concludes that the winds of change that could overturn Putin's regime would come from Ukraine. Knowing that Reithschuster is so astute in his analysis and understanding of Russia, perhaps this prediction of the future may actually come true.

> Eugene Sobol Translated by Bartosz Marcinkowski

Reading Leads to Dialogue



To proste (It's Simple).
By: Jerzy Pomianowski.
Publisher: Austeria
Publishing House,
Kraków/Budapest, 2015.

To proste (It's Simple) is a

book you just want to talk about. The cover of the book features the well-known Polish intellectual, writer, translator and expert on Eastern Europe Jerzy Pomianowski. The photo shows Pomianowski in the middle of a conversation. sitting at his desk and facing the camera as if he were speaking directly to us. The book is a collection of interviews with Pomianowski that were conducted by Joanna Szwedowska (a journalist with Polish Radio) over a period of twenty years (1991–2011). However, the book is far from what you would call a typical interview. While speaking with her interlocutor, Szwedowska allows him to go on at length to tell his tale and it is only towards the end of the book, in a conversation that took place in Rome in 2011, that we finally see the journalist interfere Szwedowska's decision to remain inconspicuous throughout the book allows us to believe that it is us, the readers, who have initiated the conversation.

"Reading leads to dialogue" – that was the credo that Pomianowski held dear throughout his whole life. This belief allowed him to make many friends including the Polish painter and writer Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz (Witkacy). It was also because of his almost obsessive passion for books that Pomianowski, as a pupil at a secondary school in Łódź, joined the philosophical association *Societas Spinozi*-

ana Polonica. Using the society's letterhead, he wrote a letter to Witkacy. When he received it, the artist was convinced that the correspondence had been sent by an adult. Consequently, he invited the letter's author for a short conversation. However, being in the sixth grade, Pomianowski could not possibly accept the invitation. The long-postponed meeting finally took place after Pomianowski finished secondary school. It was during his final summer holidays before the war that he spent in Zakopane, where he stayed in villa "Zofia". There, he had an opportunity to finally meet and engage in conversations with Witkacy and his friends.

In my view, Pomianowski's stories make for enlightening reading. The author shares with us his life experiences, introduces us to his closest circle of friends and discusses some must-reads. He reminisces about his friendships with some well-known people like Russians Anna Akhmatova and Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Germans Bertolt Brecht and Erich Kätner and Italians Nicola Chiaromonte, Ignazio Silone and Elena Croce. It was thanks to these people and their books that Pomianowski experienced such kindness, which prevented him from feeling hate and kept him away from "the burden of nationalist over-sensitivity that manifests itself mainly in the dislike of foreigners".

It's Simple is not only a story about the books that Pomianowski once read but also those that were his gift to Polish readers. Pomianowski was a prolific translator who translated into Polish such authors as Isaak Babel, Anton Chekhov, Mikhail Bulgakov and Osip Mandelshtam.

While reading the book we are transported to some of the places that Pomianowski lived in

throughout his life. Starting in Łódź, where he spent his childhood, we relocate to the Soviet Union where, for two years, he worked in the Krasnopole mine in Donbas (today's Ukraine) and then spent some time in Tajikistan, attending medical school. Afterwards, he moved to Moscow, where he continued his studies after the war. Pomianowski returned to Poland in 1946 but had to leave the country in February 1969, again after having lost his job in the wake of the 1968 anti-Semitic campaign. Recalling all the tribulations that he had experienced, Pomianowski nonetheless makes no accusations. There is not a trace of resentment or bitterness in his storytelling.

These painful events are discussed by a mature man who is at an advanced age and who has long resigned himself to his fate. He knows that what once may have seemed like a problem or even a complete disaster, years later, may be considered an important turning point that has enabled positive change. Thus, while discussing his first meeting with Brecht in Berlin, Pomianowski playfully and discreetly weaves the details of the negative effects that the March 1968 events had on him. After his article on Brecht was published by the weekly magazine New Culture, Pomianowski's texts were banned from Poland. He found refuge teaching at a university, where he worked as "an adopted professor", as he liked to call himself, for four years. Among his disciples were many future intellectuals, including the poet and songwriter Agnieszka Osiecka, journalist and writer Hanna Krall, poet and playwright Andrzej Jarecki and composer and writer Jarosław Abramow, amongst many others. Pomianowski found this professional experience very useful later in life, when he immigrated to Italy and

worked at the Theatrical Academy in Rome, as well as universities in Bari, Florence and Pisa.

In 1994 Pomianowski returned to Poland. However, he decided not to live in Warsaw. Enchanted with Kraków, "the most beautiful Italian city outside Italy", he settled there. Clearly, Pomianowski's memory is impeccable. As he himself admits, it was Solzhenitsyn who taught him how to remember things, as the Russian literary master used to make up rhymes with his recollections, so as not to forget what he had seen and heard in the Gulag.

Poetry has been always an integral part of Pomianowski's life, starting with the poetry sessions organised by his secondary school teacher and poet, Mieczysław Jastrun, to the poetry recitals that Pomianowski would engage in with his wife while entertaining guests during social gatherings. Thus, his contacts with poets turned out to be guite significant. For instance, Julian Tuwim, another famous Polish poet, became a generous donor who supported Pomianowski financially during his medical studies in Moscow. It was also with Tuwim's help that Pomianowski joined the editorial committee of the anthology of Polish poetry which, after the war, was supposed to be published in Russian. However, the publication was never completed because Pomianowski did not agree to exclude émigré authors such as Kazimierz Wierzyński, Jan Lechoń, or Antoni Słonimski from it. With this gesture, Pomianowski proved that defending utopian ideals was his right as well as the right of every poet.

In the book Pomianowski also talks about such Polish literary greats as Władysław Broniewski, Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński, Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz, or Maria Kuncewiczowa. By mentioning their names and discussing their works, he shows the courage to speak directly about what he sees as important and does justice to the writers who were sentenced to "purgatory" or silenced due to their wrongdoings, their submissiveness to the authorities or their political orientation, be it left or right wing. Thus, for Pomianowski, it is not enough to simply portray Iwaszkiewicz as a man who was prone to compromise*. He goes further and analyses how the writer's self-sacrifice possibly benefited Polish culture. He states: "Perhaps, it was thanks to [lwaszkiewicz's] strong backing that people such as Andrzej Kijowski, author of some great and incredibly insightful articles, or Anna Kamieńska, whom I consider to be one of the greatest female poets on earth, were able to keep their jobs at the literary magazine *Twórczość*; and along with them a whole galaxy of other excellent writers and poets who otherwise would have been banned from print."

Pomianowski's own definition of an intellectual is that of an avid book reader. He himself is one of those people who believes that had it not been for certain books that were read in childhood or early adulthood, people would be completely different today. The book that marked the beginning of true independence for him was a biographical novel on Beethoven written by Witold Hulewicz. There were also works by Joseph Conrad and Edgar Allan Poe. The latter Pomianowski would steal from his father's bookcase to read under the blanket when already in bed and hiding from his par-

ents. In time he was able to read books in other languages as well. He mentions that in order to learn Russian, he adopted the best method of studying foreign languages: he learned it in bed. His instruction came first from a beautiful woman, then from books.

Pomianowski belongs to that pantheon of versatile personalities that escape one-word definitions. A physician by training, he specialised in psychiatry but was also a translator, a literary director at the National Theatre in Warsaw, a lecturer at the Institute of Slavonic Studies, where he taught classes in the history of literature and Polish culture. He also wrote and is especially known for being the author of a novel called *The Hour of Hope*, which was adapted for the big screen.

This is what Pomianowski has to say about himself: "a specialist in Russian studies with no permanent position, author of a text about [Tadeusz] Kantor and the play 'Sodom and Odessa' that was staged in Germany". In addition, he is the founder of Novaya Polsha, a magazine that was created as one of the wishes listed in the will of Jerzy Giedroyc. Indeed, meeting Giedroyc, who was the editor-in-chief of Kultura, a Polish-language émigré magazine, was one of the most important events in Pomianowski's life. With equal admiration, Pomianowski talks about the role of Giedroyc's magazine and the importance of Radio Free Europe. Unsurprisingly, as a maxim to his book, he put forward the following sentence: "I attended Giedroyc's funeral at Maisons-Laffitte (in France), but I would not like to attend the funeral of his ideas"

> Dorota Sieroń-Galusek Translated by Agnieszka Rubka

^{*} Jerzy Iwaszkiewicz was a Polish writer and poet who was accused of being opportunistic during the communist regime.

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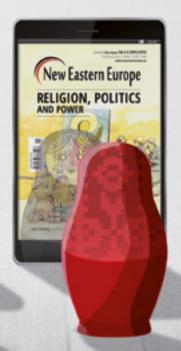






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