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New Eastern Europe

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LOSING FOCUS?

Eastern Fatigue vs Reality

Andrew Wilson **Don't forget about Ukraine**
Hanna Hopko **We must rebuild Ukraine ourselves**

New Eastern Europe

NEW EASTERN EUROPE IS A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT BETWEEN THREE POLISH PARTNERS

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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.

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ECS european solidarity centre

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

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The Jan Nowak-Jeziorański College of Eastern Europe in Wrocław

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,

With open conflict taking place in different parts of the world today it is indeed difficult to stay focused on one issue when others, equally critical, appear so unexpectedly. Yet, we also all know that just because a new problem arises it does not mean that previous ones go away. Considering the costs that are at stake we highlight the message put forward by Andrew Wilson who writes that when it comes to Ukraine "now is not the time to lessen attention or lose faith". His words are reinforced by Ukrainian MP and reformer, Hanna Hopko, who poignantly states that: "The process of state-building is not particularly attractive to the media."

We agree with these calls for the West's attention to our region, convinced that countries like Ukraine and Moldova are at critical junctures in their European paths and at great risk of backsliding. A recent poll in Moldova found that 79 per cent of the population believes the country is heading in the wrong direction. While in Ukraine, as Balazs Jarabik notes, a majority of Ukrainians do not believe in the success of reforms.

Russia also remains a critical country that deserves greater attention, and one that is not solely limited to Vladimir Putin's rhetoric and military manoeuvres. With many voices in the West advocating for an end to the sanctions and stronger cooperation in international affairs, we have asked our authors to help us construct a broad picture as to the deeper issues facing Russia in a year that marks the 25th anniversary of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Thus, Russian political scientist Igor Gretskiy addresses the age-old question of Russia's European identity, while a report by a young journalist, Alexey Gorbachev, provides insight as to how the younger generation of Russians see themselves in the world today. Our reporter, Daniel Wańczyk, also takes you to Teriberka, above the Arctic Circle, to share his experiences of the journey and life in a place that was grimly presented in the award-wining film *Leviathan*.

Given the political, economic and security changes that are taking place worldwide, it would be naïve to expect that the oncoming months will only bring good news. The challenging times as they are today require an even greater responsibility of world leaders and the general public. For this reason, we encourage you to remain involved in our coverage of the affairs in Eastern Europe; be it online via our web site or social media sites (Facebook and Twitter). Let us all stay focused at this critical time!

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Has Europe forgotten about Ukraine?

ANDREW WILSON

Europe has become steadily more introspective since the financial crisis broke out in 2008. What is more, with the refugee crisis and the Paris attacks grabbing European and global media attention, and Russia suddenly becoming an ally in the fight against ISIS, it seems that Ukraine has become a topic of the past. But now is not the time for the West to lose faith and focus elsewhere. If that were to happen, Ukraine's chances of success will be very slim.

Europe was always going to forget about Ukraine. In recent times, western societies have developed a chronic case of Attention Deficit Disorder. Or perhaps that should be in "post-modern times". An over-supply of 24/7 conventional mass media, with declining journalistic standards and fact-checking abilities, works on a constant cycle of replacement, moving from one narrowly televisual event to the next. Social media works on an even quicker cycle of superficiality and specialist focus. There is no joined-up conversation anymore. Any given news cycle is lucky to last more than a few days. As a result, Ukraine is, inevitably, just so 2014.

Moreover, Europe has become steadily more introspective since the financial crisis broke out in 2008. The euro's travails are never-ending. Sovereign debt crises may have been isolated, but much of Europe is stuck in a deadening low-growth trap. Greece's third bailout in the summer of 2015 is unlikely to be the last time it hogs the front pages. The refugee crisis has grabbed attention, deepened internal divisions and radically transformed politics, even in seemingly stable heartland states like Germany. Even Angela Merkel now has to watch her own back.

Reality bites

The Paris atrocities in November 2015 created another set of diversions and temptations. Enter Russia, with its own brand of superficiality. The Russian intervention in Syria is many things, but it is first and foremost an attempt to shift the *dramaturgia* away from Ukraine. It only takes a few phone calls for this to happen on Russian TV, but Russia is clearly hoping the rest of the world will follow suit. However, to paraphrase *Wag the Dog*, Russia is seeking a "small, diversionary war", rather than a "small, victorious war". It is enjoying being back on the world stage, but that will not bring "victory", however it is defined. Russia will not get too involved on the ground. It can launch a few cruise missiles from the safe haven of the Caspian Sea and drop as many bombs as it likes, but it does not have the military capacity to destroy ISIS.

Plus, reality bites, and the Kremlin will not want too much reality ruining the TV shows at home. And despite the immediate blowback, probably including the loss of 224 lives on Flight 9268 in the Sinai desert and two aircraft over Syria and Turkey by the end of November 2015, terrorism against Russia has never really changed policy before. It is unlikely to make the Kremlin switch targets to a real revenge mission against ISIS. This will be the key litmus test for the rest of the world in the long term.

The Russian intervention in Syria is many things, but it is first and foremost an attempt to shift attention away from Ukraine.

Yet, you can see the temptation for France to make the shortest of short-term alliances with Russia. European politicians, especially weak ones like François Hollande, also need PR. To this end, Vladimir Putin is Yin (the shaded side) to Hollande's Yang. After the Paris attacks, Hollande talked of "war" but not of revenge. Putin has no such compunctions and there is nothing to stop him boasting that "We will search for them everywhere, no matter where they are hiding." Putin can provide the instant bombing that is slow to materialise in the West. France also flew some immediate sorties, but had to wait for other western allies to join in. The invocation of European Union, rather than NATO, collective defence articles was designed to make it easier for others like the United Kingdom to opt in to military action against ISIS, something which may well have happened by the time you read this, but was never going to happen overnight. Russia may be a useful instant ally, but it is an awful long-term one. Russia was barely targeting ISIS before the Paris atrocities. It still supports Bashar al-Assad. If the West really wants to destroy ISIS bases, it will have to do so by itself.

Is rapprochement with Russia likely?

Ukraine is right to feel neglected, or even like a potential pawn in this geopolitical chess match. There are few scenarios in which one can imagine a direct trade-off between Syria and Ukraine, but Russia is hoping the context, priorities and language of the main actors will all change after Paris, or have already changed, particularly because the Paris atrocities occurred when the chorus of voices calling for a "normalisation" of relations with Russia was already rising in volume. However, before the Paris attacks, those calling for some kind of rapprochement with Russia were largely the usual suspects, Trojan Horse states like Cyprus, southern European countries with recession and migration on their mind and Hungary. Yet if France were to be added to this list, the dynamic would obviously change, and Hollande would come under enormous pressure from both Le Pen and Sarkozy to begin the rapprochement.

Ukraine is right to feel neglected in this geopolitical chess match.

Russia is also banking on exploiting the rising tension between the eastern and western parts of the EU over the migration issue. Part of the reason for its Syrian intervention is surely to increase the flow of migrants towards Europe. However, it is still unlikely that the EU will fully lift its sanctions against Russia in January 2016 (and the original round of sanctions imposed after the annexation of Crimea remain a separate issue), by which time this piece will be out. The appraoch in Brussels, linking sanctions to the "full implementation" of the second Minsk Agreement, is not always helpful. The Minsk Agreement is full of holes. Yet that is precisely what makes it hard for both Ukraine and Russia, as well as Russia's proxies, to fulfil the agreement. Not enough boxes will have been ticked by January, assuming that Brussels does not forget its own mantra.

The broader trend is clearly towards a softer approach, or to find ways of talking to Russia in other fora and other contexts. The barrier for new sanctions, if there were to be a sharp uptick in fighting in eastern Ukraine, is ever more blurred. The Juncker letter to Putin in November 2015 expressed frustration at deteriorating relations, "which to my regret have not been able to develop over the past year", and largely blamed un-named EU member states for blocking rapprochement (which ironically advertised Juncker's impotence). However, the letter did endorse the idea of direct talks between the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union, a classic "alternative channel".

In Germany, there is a clear desire to invent some kind of successor dialogue to the Trilateral Process (the EU "reassuring" Russia over the DCFTA deal with Ukraine), which looks like it will end when the DCFTA comes into force in January

Photo: Wojciech Kożmic

Despite growing "Ukraine fatigue" in the West, now is not the time for Europe to lessen its attention or lose faith.

2016 (About time too. There could be no clearer case of hypocrisy concerning Russia's "national interests". The whole time that Germany has been reassuring Russia over mythical threats to trade, Russia has been busy destroying Russo-Ukrainian trade). Yet, the desire to talk remains fundamental. Berlin will find something.

Pragmatism is back

Where this leaves the Eastern Partnership is far from clear. The review announced in November 2015 had already shifted its emphasis towards the new buzzword of "stabilisation", rather than transformation. There are voices in southern Europe denouncing the Eastern Partnership as a failed project. This is premature. EU initiatives never formally die. However, the other rapprochement, between the EU and Turkey in November 2015, further complicates the issue. It puts pragmatism back in fashion. Three billion euros of annual funding and visa-free travel for Turks represents a massive gamble that Turkey will stop more migrants passing through its territory. It is also a massive gamble with conditionality, given the deteriorating quality of democracy in Turkey, to put it mildly, under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. What is the current price for the necessary reforms for visa-free travel in Kyiv? The deal with Turkey even risks sending a completely contradictory message to

Ukraine: the EU is equally likely to deal with you, regardless of whether you are a problem or an asset.

At the moment, Ukraine is at risk because it is not delivering at home. Reforms are proceeding painfully slowly, with every measure sweated through after pressure from civil society and abroad to counteract brinkmanship by the authorities. Ukraine has also shot itself in the foot by inventing the new phrase "de-oligarchisation", an unfortunate, as well as clumsy, neologism, because it draws attention to the fact that this is not what is happening on the ground. De-oligarchisation led by oligarchs was always a suspect process. This is so depressing. It took about one year for the Orange Revolution to reach the point where the system was able to regenerate itself, roughly around the time of the political crisis in September 2005. Yet this was because the Orange Revolution had advanced on a narrow front. The Orange protestors of 2004 put their faith in a group of leaders who proved to be quarrelsome, incompetent and corrupt. The 2013–14 EuroMaidan protest was a more profound challenge to the system. Despite this, we now seem to be reaching the point, predicted by Henry Hale in his excellent book *Patronal Politics: Eurasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective* (CUP, 2014), when the post-Soviet patronal system reconstitutes itself.

At least in political science terms, it is interesting to see these mechanisms at work. The Ukrainian terminology is also instructive. Too many vicious circles are eddying around Ukraine's brave minority of real reformers. Political success depends on the mass media, which is owned by oligarchs and depends on money. Politicians have to raise money in order to compete, but are then dependent on their sponsors. Politicians are also connected to money through a series of *smotriashchy* (literally "watchers"), *hroshovi mishky* ("wallets", or more precisely "money bags", allies placed in strategic state positions) and placemen in state-owned enterprises, all of whom then fund the politicians who appointed them. The point of politics then focuses on keeping the cycle going, so that debts are repaid. Politicians are not casually corrupt but become *korruptsionery* (corruptioneers), professionals preoccupied and dedicated to nothing but corruption.

Vicious circles

There are a few attempts to break these cycles, and one has to hope that they will succeed. Countervailing forces are much stronger than they were in 2005. Even if the *sistema* reconstitutes itself, it will be opposed. A new law on state financing for political parties will make a difference if it is properly funded and implemented. Non-systemic parties like the Democratic Alliance and the Force of

the People tried to campaign for the recent local elections, mainly on social media. Unfortunately, at the moment, the vicious circles seem to be wining; in Kyiv you can almost hear the low sucking sound of the *sistema* drawing everybody back in. The leaders of the "reform" coalition that took office in December 2014 are not just tolerating oligarchy, they are a part of it.

In Kyiv, you can almost hear the low sucking sound of the *sistema* drawing everybody back in.

Of course, all of this creates an opportunity for Russia to regain influence. Russia is banking on more than just the occupied areas of the Donbas to expand its channels of influence within Ukraine. The public mood is febrile, many politicians are hedging their bets and many oligarchs could easily be co-opted by Russia if the mood was to change.

This would only create another vicious circle, furthering the already growing "Ukraine fatigue" in the West. Despite that, now is not the time for Europe to lessen its attention or lose faith. It would help if Ukraine were making its own plea more robustly, both by doing more and advertising it better. In both cases, that would require more activity that goes against the grain. Otherwise, Ukraine risks only attracting global attention the next time it explodes.

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Reform and resistance: Ukraine's selective state

BALAZS JARABIK

Two years after the EuroMaidan Revolution, Ukraine's reform path is shaping up, but the political context remains eerily similar to the country we knew before. Viktor Yanukovych, who let his family and cronies challenge the oligarchs' wealth and the freedom of Ukrainians, is gone. The power of the Donbas lobby, which made the Donetsk rules possible, is fading away, though in a manner that may cost Ukraine more than the price of war.

The post-Maidan "winner takes it all" approach seems to be the key feature of Ukraine's current state of affairs: (s)elected oligarchs in power, selective justice to keep others at bay, selective reforms where state and individual interests match or when local and western pressure combined is strong, and selective de-oligarchisation. The threat from Russia remains the main reason why such a selective state should be tolerated at home and supported in the West.

Those who had high expectations are becoming disillusioned. Even without Crimea and Donbas, a post-Maidan Ukraine is framed by political impunity, competition of oligarchs' interests, a weak central authority and a disenchanted society.

Those with lower expectations could point to the fact that Ukraine as a state has survived, against all odds. Moreover, hundreds of reform steps are currently in progress and are, slowly but surely, pushing the state forward. While there are some reasons to be cautiously optimistic, a reform review, as Carnegie's Ukraine Reform Monitor aspires to, illustrates a mixed picture at best.

Rebound at risk

The most visible progress has been made in the stabilisation of Ukraine's finances. This includes the National Bank of Ukraine's institutional reforms, a new fiscal policy, a modest reduction in state expenditure, the ongoing stabilisation programme of the International Monetary Fund and the agreement Ukraine reached with private creditors. Rating agencies upgraded the country. Fitch improved Ukraine's grade to "CCC" first, while Moody's followed suit and upgraded the sovereign rating of the government from Ca to Caa3. Capital inflows to Ukraine increased by 34.1 per cent to 2.55 billion US dollars between January-September 2015, against a 40.7 per cent decrease in outflow in the previous annual period to $526 million ($888 million a year ago). There are promising signs of an eventual recovery. The third quarter GDP show a seven per cent year-on-year contraction, much improved from the 14.7 per cent slump in the second quarter. The National Bank forecasts 2.4 per cent growth for 2016.

However, Ukraine's rebound may already be at risk due to tax reform controversy and a disputed 2016 state budget. While macroeconomic results are viewed positively abroad, regular Ukrainians face a different reality. Real wages are down to a quarter of what they were in 2014, and the average monthly salary plummeted to $186. The UN estimates that 80 per cent of Ukrainians now live on less than five dollars a day. The winter months will call into question the sustainability of Ukrainians' political patience, although the growing shadow economy at around 58 per cent is enabling survival.

While macroeconomic results are viewed positively abroad, regular Ukrainians experience a different reality.

There is also some modest progress in the energy sector, with increased transparency, decreased gas consumption, Russia's reduced leverage and greater energy security as a result of reverse gas flow from the EU. However, there is still no independent regulatory body. The package of laws necessary to improve the energy sector further has also been called into question, while most energy assets are still controlled by the oligarchs. Pricing has been justified by demands from the IMF, but without explanation to citizens about what benefits modernising the sector would bring. Subsidies are not given directly to households but to the state company, Naftohaz. Neither transparent regulation nor market competition is present, while Ukrainians are paying up to 450 per cent more this year for their heating, adding to their grievances. Energy efficiency is not a priority, which is shocking considering that almost 20 per cent of Ukraine's GDP value consists of oil and gas consumption.

Half-hearted reforms

The Ukrainian army has become one of the largest military forces in Europe, increasing in size from 146,000 to 280,000 soldiers. Security expenditure has been maintained at five per cent of GDP in 2016, amounting to $4 billion. There is a new online procurement system, but levels of corruption in the army, even in the Donbas war zone, remains significantly high. Official statistics reveal that at least 30 per cent of losses are endured outside combat, pointing to mismanagement and poor leadership. Ukraine has lost a significant portion of its air (in the Donbas conflict) and sea capacity (with the annexation of Crimea) and the integrity of its armed forces (the army, National Guard, and volunteer battalions) remains an open question.

In Ukraine, local powers, administration and funding have all been strengthened. However, a more systemic approach to decentralisation remains unresolved.

Decentralisation reforms have advanced technically in the past year. Local government powers, administration and funding have all been strengthened. However, a more systemic approach, particularly in terms of the political dimension of decentralisation, remains unresolved and depends on the broader dynamics of the Donbas conflict. There is no consensual vision what kind of political system Ukraine would adopt and how to ensure the division of power to avoid state capture.

Political legitimacy has been restored via the presidential and parliamentary elections last year. Political pluralism and competition, which differentiates Ukraine from Russia, is still there. However, there are signs of intimidation and authoritarian abuse of administrative power. Judging by turnout, the recent local government elections proved that Ukrainians are increasingly fed up with the country's ruling classes. They feel that reforms are not tackling those fundamental aspects of the political and social framework that the EuroMaidan Revolution was about. The constitutional amendments on decentralisation or the proposed judicial reforms are examples of half-hearted measures aimed at preserving elements of the status quo's habits and values, under which the ruling elite and society at large continue to live.

An integral part of those habits is the elite's impunity. The high profile arrests of Yanukovych-era figures on corruption, such as Olena Lukash, the former justice minister, and the failure to proceed with an investigation of allegations of corruption against current political allies, show that holding the rule of law in contempt remains standard practice. Decisions on anti-corruption cases, as well as the management of law enforcement, judicial and security agencies, remain dominated by politics, although not by a single clan, as was the case under Yanukovych.

Major obstacles

Some similar, though not identical, urgent steps are being made in the fight against corruption, such as the outsourcing of drug solicitation to international agencies. The government is engaged mostly in a rhetorical exercise when it comes to corruption, and there is a lot of foot-dragging taking place regarding the establishment of special, independent institutions to fight it. As an OECD special monitor report suggests a new anti-corruption framework in Ukraine has significantly improved the legal framework. Nevertheless, the share of public contracts awarded via a non-competitive process is still too high and is on the rise. One example where Ukraine's law enforcement system failed to produce tangible results is its inability to recover assets allegedly stolen by the Yanukovych regime.

The government is engaged in a predominantly rhetorical exercise when it comes to corruption.

A recent survey by Pact, a US NGO based in Ukraine, shows a slow decline in the number of people experiencing corruption and a significant decline in voluntary bribes. The survey also highlighted an increased perception of the fact that corruption is connected to institutions that are high on the media agenda, such as the prosecutor's office and the courts. An improvement in people's awareness about corruption and an increased desire to act against it have not yet necessarily translated into action. Thus, although the old centralised corruption may be gone, rent seeking schemes remain and have instead become "decentralised".

Public opinion surveys show that a majority of Ukrainians do not believe in the success of reforms (only 30 per cent do) and citizens have named the government and oligarchs as major obstacles. The key reasons for the socio-economic crisis, according to respondents, are telling: 72 per cent of Ukrainians blamed corruption, 54 per cent pointed to an oligarch-controlled economy, 47 per cent named government incompetence and 35 per cent believed it was the result of an absence of economic strategy. However, only 30 per cent indicated that the war in Donbas was the key obstacle to reform.

Nevertheless, in the current social, economic and political framework, Ukrainians are more worried about their own economic and material survival than about reforming their country. Interestingly, neither the government nor civic groups are championing the biggest priority that citizens named in reform-related surveys: healthcare. According to the Democratic Initiatives Foundation, "every third Ukrainian can no longer tolerate a further decline in the standard of living due to material status" and "every fourth citizen does not believe in the success of reforms". These figures should act as a stark warning to the authorities.

The Carnegie's Ukraine Reform Monitor concludes that low-level reforms have undoubtedly created progress. As Russia reacted to the EuroMaidan Revolution with the drastic step of annexing Crimea and aiding the armed resistance in Donbas, Ukraine was stretched between reforms and war. Key political and judicial reforms were hijacked with the emergence of the Donbas war, which has become the unfortunate legacy of the protracted Maidan saga. Thus, the reforms have suffered from half-hearted measures and widespread perceptions of poor communication and co-ordination. Meanwhile, Ukrainian bureaucracy, which often operates under the influence of rent seeking interests, remains entrenched and opposed to reform.

The oligarchs' wealth has been reduced, but they are not out of the system and their informal impact remains strong. Almost all of them have encountered significant losses. Many of them are locked in protracted debt restructuring talks with creditors. However, there are virtually no signs that they will focus on the modernisation of the state, as opposed to fighting for their own interests. Especially as Petro Poroshenko, Ukraine's president, who did not make his fortune via "classic" rent seeking schemes, is expanding his business empire on the contrary to his election promises. According to a Ukrainian newspaper, he has been the only one to increase his fortune since the EuroMaidan Revolution.

No consensual and sustainable vision

There is no doubt that corruption remains the biggest threat to Ukraine's national security. The "rule by law" erodes state institutions and limits the government's ability to exercise authority and build trust of citizens. These reforms should not be treated by the West as Ukraine's "art of possible", but as an urgent necessity, no matter what real and/or exaggerated risks Russia presents.

Internal political risks remain extensive and civil society is turning increasingly towards "radical" reforms. Activists are growing impatient with the continuous dysfunctionality of politics, the remaining stubborn resilience of the old system and old societal habits. Civil disobedience (yet again) has been turning violent, as was the case with the Crimean Tatar blockade of the peninsula. In the eastern city of Kryvyi Rih, opponents of the disputed elected mayor, Yuriy Vilkul, are threatening the authorities with "people's power" after occupying city hall. Oligarchs are consolidating their power, fearful that they could lose even more power to Kyiv by supporting new faces, likely introducing even more political fragmentation.

In the meantime, Kyiv is barely able to catch up with these events. Poroshenko's policy of putting out fires offers no sustainable political vision, although it provides continued impunity in exchange for political loyalty. The EuroMaidan's political

legacy thus far has not been reforming the country but, following Russia's intervention, maintaining its divisions between the (majority) of winners and the (minority of) former rulers. Even though the new Ukraine is turned firmly towards the West, it remains as selective as its predecessor.

It is time for the West to adopt a selective strategy as well. The overall pace of reforms is slow because the reformers are in the minority. A minority strategy might help; a gradual step-by-step change regarding key priorities alongside the necessary communication and education efforts to re-engage with disillusioned Ukrainians. Instead of relying on individuals, it must focus on the gradual reform of state institutions. An integral part of this should be reform of the education system to cultivate a new, European, generation of Ukrainians. This may reduce resistance as (a large) part of society needs more time to absorb the change the government is (self) pressed to do.

The overall pace of reform is slow because the reformers are in the minority.

Ukraine's economic problems have been underestimated and misunderstood. What the West needs to realise is that the country is obviously lacking an economic trajectory which would trigger modernisation. Modernisation requires far more aid. Hitherto, more aid would require a more transparent, accountable and effective state and a much better business environment – aka reform. As there are neither such resources nor political will in the West and reform is slow in Ukraine, the country will likely be kept afloat.

The European Neighbourhood Policy review designated economic development and job creation as Ukraine's first priority. To its credit, the European Union has created institutions to assist with this, namely the Advisory Mission to Civilian Security Sector Reform (EUAM) and the Ukraine Support Group. However, they need to perform better. Unless domestic reforms deliver, the West will get what it pays for: a fragile and frustrated state on its border that has turned its back on Russia.

Balazs Jarabik is an associate fellow at the Central European Policy Institute and a nonresident scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

The role of a superpower in the post-Cold War world

NIKA SIKHARULIDZE

It is important to remember that to be a "superpower" is to carry the heavy obligation of acting as a guarantor of a fragile international order. If we do not care about the world, others will, since the metaphorical throne is never vacant.

The United States and its western allies have legitimate concerns as to why they should risk blood and treasure in support of Georgia, Moldova or Ukraine, especially if providing these distant countries with financial support, military assistance and political leverage in international affairs could lead to a confrontation with Russia. Meanwhile, the Russian bear remains unpredictable and aggressive. It is a "great power" that has historically been antagonistic towards the United States. US citizens in particular remember the Vietnam War which resulted in thousands of casualties and produced few, if any, benefits. The Americans have also experienced calamities in the western hemisphere, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis, which almost triggered a third world war. Nobody wants to risk repeating these, or any of the many other events that unfolded during the last century, today.

In 2008 America almost became entangled in the five day Russian-Georgian War. Its involvement could have led to serious consequences for the US. Indeed, the expanded global pursuit of American national interests has resulted in a world in which many populations now harbour ill will towards the United States. Even more pressingly, why should the United States commit to the enlargement of existing western economic and security pacts when the European Union, with its ideal of a continent that is whole, free and at peace, is already prepared to defend

itself and has a good partnership with the US? Those who argue against expansion point that there are many other problems in Southeast Asia, South America and the Middle East with which the US is substantially concerned. Wouldn't it be best to leave Russia and its developing neighbours alone and let the Europeans deal with them, allowing the United States to manage and prioritise its own affairs?

Values versus interests

The defence and sustainment of the contemporary international order, with its commitments to international law and its foundations in democratic peace theory, have been core foreign policy objectives for the United States since the end of the Second World War. These goals have their roots in an idealistic approach to international relations. However, this approach was also practical, as we will see by examining American foreign policy choices from medium- and long-term perspectives.

The defence of the contemporary international order, with its commitments to international law and its foundations in democratic peace theory, have been core foreign policy objectives for the United States.

A common counter-argument to my idea is the theory that nation-states often face a dilemma when choosing between values and interests. It is now widely accepted that only national interests are appropriate determinants for such decisions, a perspective which can be interpreted in many different ways and is perhaps best reflected in the words of Charles de Gaulle: "France has no friends, only interests." However, do we really want to forget the significant world events that led to our contemporary international order? Should we forget why Russia did not conquer Tbilisi, Georgia's capital, in 2008? Should we forget why China did not occupy Taiwan by force, why Kosovo became independent, why Slobodan Milošević was brought to trial at The Hague and why the policy of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is guaranteed by the great global powers? These and many more are examples of the superiority of a world order founded on common international law.

It is understandable why there are many concerns regarding the efficacy or malfunctioning of established international restraints. However, we must also understand that there is only one mechanism, the international order, which can prevent new global atrocities like those caused by the fascist aggressors of the 1930s and 1940s. We also have to understand that this international order is based not

just on realpolitik or the quantifiable interests of our individual nation-states, but also on the core values of democracy and liberalism, to which we remain deeply committed.

One of the main concerns within the ongoing dialogue addressing the split between the West and Russia centres on the redistribution of the post-Cold War world. Russia claims that there were commitments made by the West: namely, that NATO would never come close to the Russian border. Therefore, the three Baltic states, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, should have stayed in the Russian "sphere of

influence", or at least acted as a buffer zone between Russia and NATO. The United States played a key role in the integration of these three states into NATO and later the EU, thereby bringing NATO and the West to the Russian border. However, it is crucial not to forget the long struggle these three brave nations had against Soviet (and before that, tsarist) occupation in the first place. It is important to remember their freedom movements, the "Baltic Chain" and the trilingual song, "The Baltics Are Waking Up", which served as a liberation anthem for all the freedom fighters within the nations of the former Soviet Union at the end of the 1980's.

At the time, this decision was in the American strategic interest, because its support could expand its influence within Europe and thereby make the US a more important player on the continent. However, the US already had significant leverage in and over Europe. It had won the Cold War. Russia was beset by deep economic and political problems during the 1990s, including violent conflicts in Chechnya and its escapades in Transnistria, Abkhazia, so-called South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh, which involved the use of Russian forces and lethal military support. At that time, China was just emerging as a major power.

American Europe

By championing the inclusion of the Baltic states in western economic and security organisations, which involved the US operating in the post-Soviet space on behalf of former Soviet nations, America proved itself to be a champion of democracy, freedom and liberal values. There were few American interests at stake in that part of the world. Instead, the justification for American engagement in the post-Soviet space was its dedication to historical justice and universal values, the same justice and values for which our dissidents and cultural elite were detained and sent to the Siberian gulags, where most of them were executed by the Soviet regime.

After the Cold War, the justification for American engagement in the post-Soviet space was its dedication to historical justice and universal values.

By the middle of the 2000s, after the fifth wave of EU enlargement, some scholars began using the term, "American Europe" to describe the reality created by the newly accepted members of Central and Eastern Europe into the EU. Usage of such terms supports the claim that even if in some cases, foreign policy decisions were originally motivated by seemingly idealistic commitments, those same commitments later led to practical and productive rewards.

What about the situation today? Russian aggression in Ukraine has no justification. Moreover, the Russian-Ukrainian war has not just altered the European security architecture, but has also breached fundamental principles of international law, and thus totally reconfigured the post-Cold War international order. The takeover and later annexation of Crimea, as well as the aggressive military attacks on eastern Ukrainian territories by Russian forces, have created dangerous precedents. Revisionism, revanchism and a reinvigorated political appetite for subordinating other countries have all been inflamed by these actions. The West's failure to pay attention to the ongoing tension in Ukraine, alongside its failure to react to them, could lead to an extremely undesirable outcome: a reconsideration of the current post-Soviet international order, which could also mean a new war.

Should such a situation occur, and if the US was still the primary great power operating on the world stage at the time, we would need to consider a key question: should we accept the American claim that it is not in their interests to intervene in such a conflict and alternatively let the US pivot towards Asia, pursue a trade-off of influence in the Middle East, assert that it lacks the resources to engage with the matter, or simply demur out of a cautious preference not to irritate Russia?

Empires of evil

Taking into consideration democratic peace theory, American action in this hypothetical crisis is not just a matter of going to war and securing peace on behalf of democratic states. The sustainment of reliable economic markets, partners and ties is also at stake. It is obvious that when partners share the same values and a common understanding of order, there are far fewer challenges and threats to mutual co-operation. Conversely, business with international hooligans leaves one vulnerable, as seen in the following examples.

Until 2006 Georgia's main supplier of natural gas was Russia. That year, during an unusually cold winter, the gas pipeline exploded in the north Caucasus, leaving the Georgians without gas for almost one week. At that time, Russia was also Georgia's main trading partner. Informed by its foreign policy perspective, Russia placed an embargo on Georgian goods. With this same leverage over trade and utilities, Russia asserted itself over Moldova, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Poland, repeatedly banning Moldavian wines, Latvian and Estonian marine products, Polish and Lithuanian dairy products, etc. Regarding the crisis in Ukraine, the US and the EU have imposed sanctions on Russia. Despite this, Russia itself imposes sanctions on trade in food products from them. It is obvious that there are more risks involved in dealing with unaccountable, authoritarian regimes than there

are in managing relationships between democratic states. Nowadays, considering the importance of resource sustainability, states should be twice as cautious when establishing strategic economic ties.

In the contemporary world, there are some nations striving for freedom and democracy, who endeavour to affirm and secure these values through admission into international organisations dedicated to democratic values and liberalism. The processes that enabled the waves of democratisation seen in earlier decades were generated within respective nations and nurtured, in some cases, by outside factors. In some post-Soviet countries, significant progress towards democratisation is being made through similar processes. This is hard-earned progress, achieved with, and worthy of, international support. However, "Empires of Evil" exist that seek to hinder such progress in whatever way they can. The Russian bear has laid its paw on these would-be democracies, claiming that they exist within its sphere of influence and denying them self-determination. The West should not accept this kind of behaviour in the 21st century. Instead, it must do everything it can to facilitate the next wave of democratisation in ways that require Russia to recognise the rights of nation-states to decide their own future.

The West must do everything it can to facilitate the next wave of democratisation, forcing Russia to recognise the rights of nation-states to decide their own future.

It is important to remember that to be a "superpower" is to carry the heavy obligation of acting as a guarantor of a fragile international order. If we do not care about the world, others will, since the metaphorical throne is never vacant. Life under illiberal and undemocratic regimes is an unnecessary injustice. Of course, this does not mean that only the United States must act in defence of democracy and liberalism, as if it were a modern-day Athens or a martyr, sacrificing itself to save all the oppressed nations around the world. However, the United States should lead its fellow western democracies in arguing for and securing the superiority of an international order based on law, devoted to universal values, resistant to authoritarian and unaccountable displays of power and protective of its interests in providing the opportunity for democracy to flourish in willing states, particularly those who wish to become a part of the free world.

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I come from Belarus

STSIAPAN STUREIKA

The reality in Belarus is that two parallel worlds, that of the state and that which lies beyond it, have formed and now co-exist. Unfortunately, these two worlds never meet and Belarus remains divided. People have found a way to have a fulfilling life outside the state sector. Some settled in business, some went abroad. While others created an alternative, independent and European cultural scene in Belarus, almost from scratch.

I often travel abroad, mostly to Lithuania, less frequently to Poland and occasionally to other European countries. I participate in numerous conferences, am involved in debates and present my research to international panels of experts. In this regard, my experience is very similar to that of my peers from other European states. However, it is, remarkably different during the breaks, be they for coffee, lunch or evening cocktails, which are common socialising and networking opportunities. During conversations I hold with colleagues at these events, I often catch them looking at my identification badge, where it is written that I come from Belarus. I immediately feel that I am being pitied.

Compassion takes many forms. For example, a foreign researcher may ask me about the type of repressions I have recently experienced, or whether I have problems because of a foreign trip or a speech I have just delivered (unsurprisingly, my speeches are almost always critical in nature, although they focus on the restoration of monuments rather than political freedoms). If my conversation partner has already been to Belarus, s/he eagerly tells me about their poor experience with Belarusian officials, concierges in hotels or border guards that made them open up their bags, completely forgetting that the Polish or Lithuanian border guards

also probed their luggage. I am usually met with a surprised facial expression after I mention that I have a Facebook account, or that I am a long-time fan of the American television show *The Big Bang Theory* ("how is it possible that western culture managed to get there?!").

Better to be a Lithuanian

The inevitable "national" questions also come up: Do Belarusians understand Russian? Why don't they speak Belarusian? Does Alyaksandr Lukashenka prohibit people from speaking Belarusian? Is he even Belarusian? If Lukashenka does not prohibit people from speaking Belarusian and he is Belarusian (there are differing theories about that), then why are the speeches that he delivers in Belarusian considered "breaking news" by independent media? Lastly, people often ask me how Russia's occupation of my home country is going and how democratically spirited Belarusians intend to save themselves from an invasion from our eastern "comrades".

When I admit that I am an admirer of the fabulous exhibitions at the Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow or the masterpieces of the Soviet film industry of the 1960s, I can read their facial expressions with ease: "This guy admires the Soviet Union and will now start justifying Vladimir Putin, just as we expected!" As a side note, this is how my interactions often go with experts, researchers and intellectuals. It is scary to think how "ordinary" people would react in the same situations.

As you might have gathered from what I have written thus far, whenever I say I am from Belarus, I already know what we are going to talk about for the next three hours. Since I meet with my foreign peers quite often, you can imagine how tired I get of these types of questions and topics. I am also not alone in this resentment. One of my Belarusian colleagues came up with the idea to introduce himself as a Russian whenever he was asked "Where are you from?" Of course, after Russia's takeover of Crimea and the ongoing war in Donbas, he does not say this anymore. As a matter of fact, introducing yourself as a Russian or a Ukrainian is probably even worse than saying that you are from Belarus. These internationally recognised events make the level of compassion almost mind-blowing. As a result, another friend of mine pretended to be Lithuanian during his semester abroad in France. Since nobody could verify his command of Lithuanian, no one pitied him or asked him silly questions on the subject.

Whenever I say I am from Belarus, I know what we are going to talk about for the next three hours.

Photo: Marcin Rychły

People have found a way to have a fulfilling life outside the state. Some settled in business, some went abroad and others created an alternative, independent European scene inside Belarus.

Subject to control

Of course, I am not saying that everything is perfect in Belarus and that all speculation about the excesses of the authoritarian political system is mere stereotypes. Excesses do exist. For example, those who are overly critical in their statements are banned from their professions. This is a "soft" repressive tool to combat dissidence and disloyalty, which covers the entire country and is present not only in state bodies, institutions and state-owned enterprises but also in private institutions and firms. As confirmed by an independent research survey, ideologically disloyal people are gradually "purged" from the sectors that deal with knowledge, public conscience, ideas, etc. Primarily, this takes place in the media, education and science industries. Within these areas, the content of all professional activity, including the topics of research papers and the content of educational programmes, as well as articles and media broadcasts, is subject to special controls.

Clearly, there is always a chance that tomorrow, your favourite news portal could be blocked in Belarus, like the website of *Naviny.by* a leading news site

temporally blocked at the end of 2014, or the popular fashion magazine *kyky.org* blocked for about a week after criticising the false pathos of Victory Day celebrations. It is equally possible that the scheduled presentation of a fiction book could be disrupted by the militia for the most unusual reasons as was the case with the presentation of Viktor Martinovich's novel *Mova* in Hrodna, which was cancelled due to a violation of fire safety rules. It is true that a friendly procession could be declared an illegal public event, like a bike ride in Minsk in the summer of 2013 or a beach party near Homel in 2015, whose organisers had to pay hefty fines. Generally speaking, any meaningful cultural event is subject to control by the special ideological service.

The main threat from Belarus' authoritarianism is its attempts to forcefully marginalise you; to strip you of your institutional ties and funding and demonstrate that you are a nobody. As a result, officials have developed a strategy of responding to criticism. Instead of dealing with the arguments, the critic's credibility as a professional, or even as an individual, is revealed. Approximately 80 per cent of my friends have dealt with the State Security Committee on at least one occasion because of their public and social activities; sometimes, even because of their cultural activities. I have also had such experiences. You eventually begin to treat these horrors as a given or an objective inconvenience, like the local climate. What do you do if the weather gets worse? You dress warmer.

The downside of our authoritarian regime is that it cannot be fixed with clothing. However, thankfully, it can be avoided through non-involvement. This phenomenon can be partly interpreted by the term "internal emigration", a phrase first used by the dissenting intelligentsia in the Soviet Union. However, due to a relaxation of state controls and the emergence of modern communication technologies, this can also be sometimes open and even demonstrative.

Parallel worlds

The reality in Belarus is that two parallel worlds, that of the state and that which lies beyond it, have formed and now co-exist. Unfortunately, these two worlds never meet and Belarus remains divided. While I can say that around 90 per cent of my friends are European, I am fully aware that there are also a large number of people in Belarus who still think in terms of the Cold War. Our Nobel-prize winning writer, Svetlana Alexievich, in a recent interview, correctly stated that 20 years is not enough to change people's way of thinking.

There is an old Soviet joke which perfectly conveys the essence of this perplexity: "Upon studying the experience of western motor traffic, our ministry concluded

that the level of road accidents in countries with traffic that travels on the left is lower by three per cent. Hence, a decision was made to introduce left-sided traffic in the Soviet Union. However, the minister decided to start with an experiment, and introduced only two models of left-sided cars…"

In Belarus, such an experiment took the form of inoculation against freedom of speech, a national upsurge in the 1980s and 90s, the opening of borders and the beginning of western co-operation with Belarus. However, the Soviet counter-reaction did not come too late and the pendulum swung in the opposite direction. It now seems to have reached the opposite extreme. People who either could not work within this Soviet reaction for moral reasons, or tried to fit in but at some point were discarded, have found a way to have a fulfilling life outside the state. Some settled in business, some went abroad. Others still created an alternative, independent and European cultural scene in Belarus, almost from scratch.

A good example of this is universities. Today, there are state universities (as well as universities which have agreed to play by the state's rules) and there is the European Humanities University, which was shut down by the authorities but revived in Vilnius. It now continues to work exclusively with Belarusian students and teachers. There are also other noteworthy educational initiatives, such as the "Flying University" or the "European College of Liberal Arts". However, the research which is carried out in state and non-state institutions, as well as the academic staff, rarely overlaps.

The narratives presented in the state and non-state media are so different that there are moments where their consumers may get the impression that the two media are talking about different countries.

There is state-run television and there is also the independent *Belsat* channel, which operates abroad and cannot obtain permission to do so in Belarus. Despite this, it manages to deliver high quality information on a daily basis through its broadcasts from Poland. There is a state news agency and state-run media, but there are also non-state outlets such as *BelaPAN*, *Nasha Niva*, *Narodnaja Volya*, Euroradio and Radio Svoboda. There are outstanding local media outlets in many regions, like the Hrodna websites *Tvoj styl* and *S13*. Characteristically, the narratives presented in the state and non-state media are so different that there are moments where their consumers may get the impression that the two media are talking about different countries.

Parallel worlds also exist in the sphere of academic publishing. On the one hand, there are state-supported academic journals, featuring poor quality articles (at least with regards to the humanities) whilst on the other are influential publications such as *ARCHE*, *Palitychnaya sfera* (*Political sphere*), *Haradzenski sotsyum*

(*Hrodno Community*) and *Belaruski histarychny ahlyad* (*Belarusian Historical Review*). Academics employed by state universities hardly ever contribute to these publications, whereas independent researchers never get published in state journals. Similarly, academic conferences are held in state universities and the National Academy of Sciences, but there is also the non-state International Congress of Belarusian Studies, which annually attracts more than 400 researchers.

There is a pro-government Union of Writers, whose members receive state awards, and the independent Union of Writers of Belarus, whose members receive international awards. Good examples of this include Ihar Babkou, the philosopher who was short-listed for the prestigious Angelus Award in 2009, and the Nobel Prize winning Svetlana Alexievich.

More competitive

The main conclusion from these reflections is that Belarusians, even though they are forced to operate in difficult circumstances, still have some room to express their creative energy. This is clearly seen in non-governmental initiatives that have emerged and developed, evolving from the counter-cultural sphere and going full circle to become completely mainstream. Moreover, a growing number of cultural products coming out of Belarus demonstrate a truly world class standard.

Even though circumstances are difficult, Belarusians still have some room to express their creative energy.

We are now at a point where the standard achieved by actors in the non-state sector in Belarus is so high that it is time to start the discussion about the transition from quantity to quality. Therefore, operating in the non-state sector should no longer be seen as escapism or marginalisation (although going underground may still be necessary), but rather another dimension of productive existence. In my opinion, over time, the non-state sector will prevail simply because it is more competitive. Already, it is quite an influential actor in the Belarusian cultural sphere. One indirect sign is that private businesses are demonstrating an interest in independent cultural initiatives.

However, I fear being overly optimistic. We are still only at the starting point of the formation of a sustainable non-state sector. There are reasons to be wary of brutal influences by unfavourable external political forces. Thus, a lot depends on the maintenance of international contacts, participation in joint international projects, etc. In addition, promoting contacts and co-operation between the two halves of Belarusian society is an important step for cultural evolution.

Lastly, one thing that I would like to say to all of those who cannot help but ask the questions presented in the introductory part of this essay is this: Please stop pitying us and start treating us like mature, responsible partners. We have proven to be a society which is able to create high quality, intellectual products that can be of great interest to the world, especially as at least half of its members mentally belong to the European family. I think that both us and you have deserved this transition to the next level.

Translated by Olena Shynkarenko

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Russia's troubled European identity

IGOR GRETSKIY

Overall, Vladimir Putin's first two presidential terms were about pursuing rapprochement with the European Union. The Russian leadership emphasised that Russia shares European norms and values and that the policy of integration with Europe had been defined as one of Russia's foreign policy priorities. So, how could it happen that in Russia today, the voices of those who consider that country to be a separate civilisation are the ones that get the most support?

In recent years, Russian society has become increasingly engaged in a contentious debate as to whether Russia is a part of Europe. This discussion has focused on answering the question about how the country should develop and what type of identity Russia has, European or not. The vast majority of historians and anthropologists unequivocally believe that Russia is a part of European civilisation due to a variety of common cultural features.

Dispute arises mainly when Russia's European identity is considered in terms of philosophy and politics. Once the Soviet Union collapsed, it looked like the public controversy over Russia's identity had purportedly ended with the new Russian government's decision to conduct democratic reforms and pursue membership in major European and international organisations. Therefore, the question is why didn't this discourse subside under Yeltsin and Putin's rule? Why does Russian society return to it over and over again? Why has Russia changed its strategic priorities in the 2000s, displaying little interest in European integration and gradually sliding into a confrontation with the West? Finally, what outcomes can we expect from the public discussions about Russia's identity?

The Westerners and the Slavophiles

To answer these questions we need to address the onset of the 1830s intellectual debate between the Westerners and the Slavophiles. Curiously, up until that point, there had not been much public discussion regarding Russia's identity and civilisational alternatives. Most likely, it was triggered by two momentous events in which Russia played an important role, the Napoleonic Wars and the Crimean War. Regarding the former, it is important to remember that during the protracted military campaign against Napoleon's army, Russian soldiers and officers spent considerable time in other European countries, including Prussia, Saxony, the Duchy of Warsaw, Switzerland and France. The presence of Russian nobility in Europe in such numbers and for such a lengthy amount of time was unprecedented in Russian history.

As early as the beginning of the 17th century, the Russian government began to systematically send children from wealthy families to study in European capitals. However, this practice was limited in scale. Participation in the Napoleonic Wars enabled thousands of young people from the upper class to learn more about the culture and life of European cities and villages. Russia's economic and technological backwardness had always been a grim and obvious fact for Russian tsars and their inner circles, but not the broader Russian elite until the 1800s. Having returned back to their homeland, young noblemen established communities and clubs to discuss possible ways of carrying out economic and political reforms. Unfortunately, the liberal and reform-minded Alexander I was succeeded by Nicholas I, who opted for conservative and oppressive politics. Under the slogan of "Autocracy, Orthodoxy and Nationalism", Russia began to look for its own "special path" through the centralisation of power, by strengthening its repressive apparatus and through greater control of universities and gymnasia. This "special" policy was summed up by the Crimean War, which proved that the gap in economic development between Europe and Russia was much wider than what St Petersburg saw. Technologically inferior Russia had nothing to oppose Western rifled guns and steam engines.

Participation in the Napoleonic Wars enabled thousands of young people from the upper classes to learn more about the culture and life of European cities and villages.

Another attempt by the Russian Empire to find its "special path" occurred under Alexander III, who reverted back to the centralisation of power and conducted a series of anti-liberal counter-reforms, abolishing much of what had been done by his father, Alexander II. Local government, university freedoms, ethnic minority

rights and the transparency of the judicial system were the hardest hit. The rights of citizens and peasants were significantly reduced in favour of bureaucracy and large landowners. Slavophilism was actively supported by the authorities and it quickly became the ideological basis for domestic policy. Curiously, counter-reformist emperors such as Nicholas I and Alexander III had not been the eldest sons to their parents and were thus preparing for military service, not for ruling the country. Their elder brothers, who had not been able to inherit the throne for various reasons, were more educated and had the statesmanship qualities to continue their parent's economic reforms. However, regardless of what domestic policy was being implemented at the time, none of Russia's rulers denied its European identity and its affiliation with the big European family of states.

A new paradigm

A denial of European identity became the norm only when the Bolsheviks came to power in 1917. Their leaders positioned the Soviet Union as a completely new paradigm, which was the antithesis to the "retrogressive capitalist world", not just politically and economically, but also in socio-cultural terms. Ever since the mid-1900s, the Bolsheviks had begun to describe Europe as "moribund" and "decadent". According to Joseph Stalin, Europe's degradation should have been ended with the proletarian revolutions in the 1940s. Since 1919 this point was invariably coupled with Vladimir Lenin's conspiracy theory. The Bolshevik leaders believed that the West, recognising the inevitability of proletarian revolutions in Europe, would always incite regime change in Soviet Russia by military means. However, repudiating the western model of development, the Soviet leadership was not above acquiring European technologies, machinery and equipment for its new industrial projects in the 1920s and 1930s.

Victory in the Second World War allowed the Soviet Union to obtain the status of a superpower and to significantly expand its sphere of influence at the expense of the Eastern European countries. However, the degree of antagonism between it and the West had risen sharply. Traditionally, Soviet propaganda systematically incited hatred towards the United States and Europe, portraying them in extremely negative terms. Several generations of Soviet citizens had grown up behind the Iron Curtain believing that the West was the greatest enemy of "the world's first country of victorious socialism". The Soviet government's domestic policy was designed to totally eliminate Russia's European identity and its accompanying attributes by falsifying and rewriting history, intensifying propaganda, waging struggle against religious communities and exterminating intellectuals, clergy, scholars and artists.

The atheist five-year plans, the introduction of total censorship, the climate of fear, the mass repressions and the Great Purge, the witch-hunting, the subordination of science and education to ideological needs and the strict prohibitions and restrictions on travelling abroad were also designed to further this aim. These policies created a unique being, the *Homo Sovieticus*. Qualities such as entrepreneurship, critical reflection, self-reliance and responsibility were alien to this being's nature. Instead, apathy at work, a welfare mentality and a dependency culture filtered deep into Soviet society.

However, its 70-year attempt to break with Russia's European identity had very little effect. This was clearly evident when Mikhail Gorbachev announced his policy of *perestroika* and in 1988, admitted that "We are Europeans. The Ancient Rus' had been united with Europe by Christianity. The history of Russia is an organic part of the great European history." It is curious that democratic reforms were launched by the first General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union who from the moment of birth spent his entire life in the Soviet Union.

Russia's 70-year attempt under Soviet rule to break with its European identity has had very little effect.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the Russian government adopted a new political agenda that was aimed at full-fledged integration with Europe. Under Boris Yeltsin's rule, civil rights and freedoms received new impetus and Russians re-opened themselves to Europe, travelling much more than during the Soviet era. Despite this, decades of communism had taken a heavy toll on Russian society. Many Soviet-era stereotypes about ways of thinking became fundamentally rooted in people's minds. Inherited from the era of a planned economy, the structural imbalances the new government inherited were tremendous. Therefore, the authorities, lacking experience, knowledge and sometimes determination, proceeded with extremely unpopular but necessary reforms. By the end of Yeltsin's presidency, the idea of Russia's "special path" had regained substantial support amongst a disappointed and impoverished society.

Eurasianism

Under Yeltsin's successor, Vladimir Putin, Russia's strategic course remained initially unchanged. This was confirmed in the president's annual message to the Federal Assembly on April 25th 2005, where Putin said: "Russia was, is and will, of course, be a major European power. Achieved through much suffering by European culture, the ideals of freedom, human rights, justice and democracy have for many

centuries been our society's determining values. For three centuries, we, together with the other European nations, passed hand in hand through the reforms of the Enlightenment, the difficulties of emerging parliamentarianism, municipal and judiciary branches and the establishment of similar legal systems. Step by step, we moved together towards recognising and extending human rights, toward universal and equal suffrage, towards understanding the need to look after the weak and the impoverished, towards women's emancipation and other social gains."

Overall, Vladimir Putin's first two presidential terms were about pursuing rapprochement with the EU. The Russian leadership strongly emphasised that Russia shares European norms and values and the policy of integration with Europe has been defined as one of Russia's foreign policy priorities. So how could it happen that today in Russia, the voices of those who consider Russia to be a separate civilisation and favour the "Eurasian", not the European, path of development, are much louder? A survey conducted in April 2015 by the Levada Center shows that this vision is shared by 55 per cent of the Russian population.

Firstly, this is partly due to the "post-Soviet syndrome" in Russian society. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, many Russian citizens had not managed to find themselves in a new socio-economic system. They perceived a return to the Soviet way of living and its principles, nationalism and isolationism, to be a natural solution to their problems. Secondly, the concept of Eurasian integration is popular among the political elite as a means preserving an element of the Yalta-Potsdam system of international relations, in other words, "spheres of influence". It presumes an exclusive vision of international relations, as well as an instrumental approach to the interpretation of international law. For a long time, Eurasianism has been a marginalised ideological concept, and it only gained widespread support in political circles in the mid-2000s. In other words, Eurasianism became popular only after Russia made several unsuccessful attempts to retain the former Soviet republics in its sphere of influence through involvement in Moscow-led integration projects, which were even promoted as a possible alternative, not antithesis, to European integration. Thirdly, by searching for a "special path", the Russian government and society indirectly recognise their inability to implement modernisation reforms. A thesis on the exceptional destiny of Russia is used to justify failures to bring about transformation in a European manner.

Usually, as tensions with the West increase, such views become more and more popular. Indeed, until the mid-2000s, full-scale economic reforms with a strong orientation towards Europe were proclaimed to be a domestic and foreign policy priority. Unfortunately, most of these plans and goals remain to be achieved. Russia failed to create a competitive market economy, to double its GDP in ten years and to catch up with Portugal's GDP per capita, amongst other things. Speaking

in January 2015, at a meeting of the "Mercury Club", Yevgeny Primakov, Russia's former prime minister, claimed that during the last 25 years, nothing has been done to modernise the Russian economy and to get rid of its heavy reliance on oil and natural gas revenues. One cannot help but agree with his statement.

Colour revolutions and western soft power

As a result, today, the concept of Eurasianism as a special, non-European path of development is mostly comprised of ideological clichés from Russia's Soviet past. By applying it, modern Russia inherits patterns of development from the Bolshevik-Soviet model, not the tsarist one. After all, unlike the Soviet Union, the strategic vector of Russia's foreign policy under the Romanov dynasty was a comprehensive rapprochement with Europe. In addition, continuing the legacy of the Soviet Union, Russia has adopted prejudices and conspiracy theories about the West. The only difference now is that Russia's government warns of "colour revolutions" and western "soft power".

An ideology based on opposition to the West may serve as a justification for failures, but it cannot be a promising and attractive model for development.

Still, Eurasianism, or any other concept about a "special path" of development, does not have a long-term future in Russia. Under its veil, one can always find uncertainty, vacillation and an inability to guarantee an effective economy, open society and the rule of law. Ideology based on opposition to the West may serve as a justification for failures and errors, but it cannot be a promising and attractive model for development. Russian history is the history of a European country, which has striven to become an integrated part of the western community by overcoming the negative experiences of its past. The ideological legacy of the Soviet period will continue to be the most significant challenge to Russia's political and economic transformation and bidding farewell to its remnants will be painful and difficult. Yet despite the current crisis in relations with the West, Russia and Europe undoubtedly have a common future, as there is no real alternative to the European path of development. NEE

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How should the West respond to Russian repressions?

ALEXEY KOZLOV

Russia's level of state sponsored threats and repression has grown significantly over the last few years. This has led to a situation where activists and critics are forced to leave the country in order to continue their activities from abroad. Western countries need to find effective ways to help vulnerable sectors of Russian civil society which have become political refugees.

It is an open secret that the number of people leaving Russia for permanent residence abroad has rapidly increased. This process began in 2012 after Vladimir Putin was once again elected president. It gained further momentum due to politically motivated prosecutions, such as those brought against the Bolotnaya Square protestors and the introduction of numerous discriminatory and repressive laws. Many Russians felt compelled to leave their homeland because of the Ukrainian crisis and Russia's occupation of Crimea. By the end of 2015 the number of those who had left that year was about 300,000. This means Putin's third term, which is due to end in 2017, will likely result in more than one million Russians seeking permanent residence abroad. In 2015 almost 300,000 people expressed an interest in participating in the United States' "Green Card Lottery" programme, which allows a selected number of people to receive permanent residence in the US. This number is five times larger than the previous year's. Moreover, as far as the number of asylum seekers in the European Union is concerned, Russians are in the top five after Syrians, Afghans and Somalis. Currently, more than 60,000 Russian citizens have gone through the EU asylum procedure and around 5,000 are granted refugee status each year.

A significant number of these emigrants are people who cannot and do not want to continue their activities in Russia, primarily because they do not agree with the regime and are threatened by the extremely aggressive propaganda and growing levels of repression. Those who are passionate and creative want Russia to be a thriving country but do not support Putin. We cannot lose these people by forcing them to survive in a difficult environment. They may be the ones who emerge at the forefront of a free and democratic Russia, which will rise once the regime falls.

Growing repressions

It is possible to identify some of the most vulnerable groups already in need of assistance in Europe. Firstly, there are the leaders and activists of non-profit and non-governmental organisations, who recently have become the regime's virtually only public opposition. Throughout his entire term, Putin consistently eliminated and devastated the legal political space without providing the possibility of a real political challenge. This was achieved in three ways: by introducing laws to regulate political parties, through both direct and indirect rigging of elections and by repressing political opposition. As repressions have grown, political activists started to be viewed as a vulnerable group, particularly those in Russia's outlying regions, which are barely noticed and frequently overlooked.

Numerous repressive and defamatory laws have been adopted. They primarily target NGOs and social activists as is the case of the law on "foreign agents", anti-orphans law (the Dima Yakovlev Law) which contains a chapter discriminating the NGOs that have any kind of relations with the US or a law on undesirable organisations. As a result, many NGO leaders and activists have been subjected to administrative and, in some cases, criminal prosecutions, searches, interrogations and costly fines. The pro-government media pursue an active defamatory campaign that often utilises unscrupulous methods such as disclosing personal data, forging facts and blatantly falsifying documents. Human rights and environmental NGOs have become the primary targets of these new repressions. The majority of organisations listed as so-called "foreign agents" – over 100 at the time of writing – are national or regional human rights and environmental organisations.

The majority of organisations listed as "foreign agents" in Russia are human rights and environmental NGOs.

The situation of the LGBT community should be considered separately. After the homophobic and discriminatory so-called "LGBT propaganda" law was adopted

in 2013 homophobia turned into a politically mainstream topic in Russia. This has led to a rise in hate crimes, government harassment of LGBT organisations and an increase in aggressive actions. Hate crimes committed by homophobic political and religious groups, such as neo-Nazis, nationalists, Orthodox and Islamic fundamentalists, certain Cossack groups, etc., have gone unpunished.

It is not just activists who have been affected by these groups' actions. Ordinary innocent people who have had the courage to come out about their sexuality have also been targeted. A good example of homophobia and aggression levels in Russia is a legislative bill, proposed by the communist party, which proposes that those who come out publicly should receive a fine and be arrested. All these factors, along with the country's overall aggression levels, have caused a sharp increase of Russian LGBT refugees seeking refuge in EU states. Many of them are either LGBT activists or journalists who cover such topics.

No time to lose

Due to the disastrous distortions of Russia's socio-political space, independent journalists and bloggers (even those whose blogs have small audiences) have become often involuntarily political actors. This is particularly noticeable in outlying regions, where an active alternative socio-political arena is limited to a few dozen people. Therefore, journalists and bloggers have also become a vulnerable group. Although journalists have always felt threatened, the range of topics for which one can be killed or jailed has recently significantly increased. Laws re-criminalising defamation, against extremism, and a new anti-separatism law have all been actively used to limit free internet expression in order to curb the influence of independent bloggers. Another worrying trend is the persecution of those who repost and link to texts they have not written themselves.

The fourth and final group under increased pressure in Russia includes university lecturers, students and independent researchers. There are several new laws which have significantly impacted Russian education. These include a law on high treason actively used against academics in natural sciences and a law on "foreign agents" applied against independent sociologists and gender scholars. State policy actively focuses on "removing Russophobia" from the academic and publishing spheres. Unfavourable authors are banned from education and research programmes. The state also bans the "distortion of history", which means only one narrative is allowed. As a result, the Great Patriotic War's celebrated victory includes a positive assessment of Joseph Stalin as well as complete denial of the large-scale political repressions which took place in the Soviet Union.

In this context, academic teachers or researchers can be expelled from their universities for their political views or dismissed because of lectures critical of taboo subjects. These people are usually unable to teach or research elsewhere and become blacklisted. Coercion to participate in pro-governmental public events and forced membership in pro-governmental organisations and parties has long become a standard practice in most regional and metropolitan universities.

Platform for refugees

Thus, a key question arises: how can European civil society and European governments help discourage the situation, if not quite remedy it? It is worth noting that Russian civil society cannot wait until EU level decisions are made as, generally speaking, they are neither adopted nor implemented rapidly. Thus, the only hope lies with EU member states and their national governments.

One possible route is helping Russian civil society's vulnerable sectors which are being forced to leave (including the four groups listed above). This would primarily involve issuing visas and residence permits. Since the number of those leaving is steadily growing and situations requiring the need to flee increasing, this formality is becoming more important. Sweden, which grants five-year visas to human rights activists, is a positive role model in this respect. Another good example is the individual approach adopted by Poland and Lithuania assisting critics of Alyaksandr Lukashenka's regime in Belarus.

It is crucial that all these vulnerable groups have the opportunity to tell the truth about today's Russia. It is obvious that the chance to speak openly about human rights or environmental protection groups within Russia diminishes daily, while the number of repressive practices and incidents constantly increases. Therefore, gaining a new platform to present the truth is important also for those who have stayed in Russia. It is yet equally essential to support the establishment of groups and platforms within Europe which can promptly react to Russian developments, addressing the European media and decision-makers in a language they understand. The "translation" problem becomes increasingly noticeable in the Russian government's information war, waged not only against its own people but also against Europeans by exploiting the freedoms of speech and expression.

The opportunity to speak openly about Russia's situation diminishes every day, while the level of repression increases.

For Russian civil and political activists it is important to be able to continue their work. The majority of those who have left Russia due to threats or repression

continue to engage with various Russia-related issues. The main challenge that they are faced with is adapting to a new culture. To reduce it internships (from six to twelve months) in leading field-specific NGOs based in Europe could be offered to help political activists learn how to better operate in new cultures and how to continue their work in Russia. It is also important to support co-operation between organisations that deal with Russian matters, including the ones that have been operating in Europe for quite some time and new ones that are being created by Russian emigrants.

As said before LGBT community representatives are an important part of Russian civil society thus their activities also fall under the above mentioned proposals. However, there are some specific activities that could further help this repressed group. Firstly, western states could register and recognise same-sex unions and partnerships between Russian citizens. Secondly, and more importantly, over 80 per cent of LGBT Russian refugees face homophobia, including violence, in refugee camps and facilities. The Netherlands' example, where a special camp for LGBT refugees was created, should be adopted throughout the EU.

Journalists and bloggers also need a platform to exercise their right to freedom of speech and continue their work in the EU. A major solution which could address this situation is the development of Russian-language media in the EU. This can serve both emigrants as well as perform a secondary function helping to make their political and social voice heard. The goal should not be to create a counter-propaganda resource to confront RT (former Russia Today – editor's note) but rather to inform Russian-speaking EU citizens (whose number varies from three to five million) who often support Putin's regime simply because there are no alternatives to Russian-language export media. Poland's experience of supporting Belarus' independent media, in particular *Belsat* TV, would be useful in this regard. Special mention should also be made of de facto volunteer attempts to translate current social and political materials from Russian into German and English. The European public should be given a chance to understand what is happening in Russia and what people living there think. This information should come not only from experts and European journalists, but also from independent voices on the ground.

Time to act

Many lecturers and researchers deprived of the opportunity to teach and conduct research in Russia have found refuge in foreign universities through programmes providing support to academics in difficult political situations. They have proved to be successful schemes and should receive wider support. In regards to

students, there are currently almost no scholarship programmes which take into account political repressions and discrimination in Russia. Once again, Belarus' experience could be useful and a special scholarship programme should be developed to support undergraduate and graduate students who were dismissed from their universities on "political" grounds or forced to leave Russia for other reasons.

A special scholarship programme should be developed to support undergraduate and graduate students who were dismissed from their universities on "political" grounds.

The academic community, especially in Europe, has always been democratic and prone to demonstrating solidarity with colleagues in difficult situations. Many Russian scholars already work at European universities where they also help their newly arrived colleagues integrate, establish new research groups on Russian topics, and develop existing ones. This should be welcomed and further supported. This, however, does not solve a major problem that is emerging, namely: who will boost Russia's degraded education system when the regime falls and how will they achieve it? In my view it would be a good idea to set up a taskforce to establish an educational and research centre to gather the best Russian scholars and lecturers who see it as their responsibility to preserve and enhance the quality of Russian education. This can be done in different ways, either by establishing a single centre (which would require significant financial and human investment) or by forming relevant departments and offices at various European universities.

Unfortunately, although many of these proposals have been extensively discussed over the last two years, the situation continues to deteriorate. The year 2016 will be an election year for the Russia's State Duma and therefore likely a year full of politically motivated emigration. Repressions, discrimination and propaganda will undoubtedly intensify. Let us hope that Europe will at least be partially prepared for this situation and able to respond accordingly.

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Russian youth: In the middle of nowhere

ALEXEY GORBACHEV

Accustomed to all of the luxuries of western life which their parents never had growing up, young people in Russia are often confused by propaganda regarding the current state of affairs between Russia, Ukraine and the West. While state television channels urge everyone to stay calm, hate the United States and "be patriotic", the Russian youth is beginning to question the authorities.

"When will the rouble stop falling?" is a question one often hears among circles of young people who are usually not interested in politics. "Why didn't they ask me whether I needed Crimea before they started this whole mess?" my 24 year old apolitical friend, Sergey Ermikchin, asked me. He runs his own business and does not care about politics or Vladimir Putin, but his income shrinks when the dollar grows stronger.

If you ask school-aged children, you hear the opposite point of view. "We kicked the Americans' asses; Crimea is important for our navy; there are fascists in Ukraine who are against us", says Alexander Ckholodkov, an 18year old high school student. This is what he has seen on TV and learnt at school. Alexander is currently convinced this is the whole truth. Similar statements are commonly heard from teenagers across Russia.

This generation does not remember the times of Boris Yeltsin or Mikhail Gorbachev. It grew up watching American films, drinking Coca-Cola and eating at McDonalds. It has no idea how hard it was to live under the Soviet regime. The Soviet

Union for some Russian youth was not an "evil empire." In fact it was an entity they are proud of because they have been taught to be so with 15 years of propaganda.

Paradox of our time

This generation does not understand democracy's benefits when compared to authoritarian communism, but it also does not believe the West is an enemy. Travelling to Europe or the US is still perceived as a great opportunity by the majority of young people. Studying or working in the West provides more social capital. This is the paradox of our time: for older Russians who came of age in the Soviet Union, the West is something very distant and unfriendly, whereas young people are much more ingratiated into its culture. This paradox could be an answer to questions concerning future relations between Russia, the US and Europe.

According to the Levada Centre, Russia's largest social research organisation, most young Russians believe in the possibility of normalising relations with Europe and the US. After the Crimean conflict between Russia and Ukraine, more than half (51.6 per cent) of Russians aged 18 to 24 responded to a poll by saying relations between Russia and the West will soon be normalised. One third of young respondents predicted a new Cold War, whilst 12.9 per cent found the question difficult to answer.

Sociological research shows young people in Russia, despite official propaganda, generally perceive the West "as a partner and good neighbour," and not as an enemy. Simultaneously, the prevailing view is that Russia should continue its current foreign policy in Ukraine, despite the sanctions, according to 70.7 per cent of young Russians. Only 22.3 per cent believe Russia should follow a policy of compromise and concession.

Despite official propaganda, young people in Russia generally perceive the West "as a partner and good neighbour," and not as an enemy.

For the generation of young democrats, Russia's situation is very uncomfortable. Daria Garmonenko, a member of the "Solidarnost" (Solidarity) democratic movement says: "It is obvious to me that Russia today is moving towards the abyss. Moreover, this trend is not recent: it spans the 15 years since Vladimir Putin was first elected president. Since then, the Putin regime has controlled all the elections and the results of each are always predictable. The opposition is forbidden to appear on television and it is difficult to organise protests. The judicial system is actually under the control of the executive branch of power. Freedom of speech

on television does not exist and even though in some printed and internet media there is a bit of leeway, strict government control remains. Finally, there are dozens of political prisoners in the country and there have been many political assassinations. This has all occurred during the last 15 years, during which power in the country has belonged to intelligence and security services. The last murder, that of opposition leader Boris Nemtsov, shocked the whole world and the Russian opposition plunged into deep mourning. In my opinion, the only way out for Russia would be a democratic revolution, similar to that which occurred in 1991. Otherwise, Russia may be headed towards a totalitarian regime and the world may be on the verge of a Third World War."

Limited freedom

"From our government's point of view, we are heading in the right direction, but my personal opinion is that we have rolled democracy back and moved closer to a new stage for the Soviet Union," says Dmitry Artamonov, a 25 year old accountant. If you do not look at Putin's policies as a whole, there is some freedom in different spheres of life, but it is limited. "For example, it gives me some hope we are moving forward in the cultural sphere."

Alexey Anikin, 24, who has just finished his university studies and is starting a job in a government agency where he works with pro-Putin colleagues, is convinced Russia is now frozen. "It is primarily our foreign policy which has become the cause of European and US sanctions against our country," Anikin says. "Where Russia is moving towards now is unpredictable, since all state decisions are undertaken solely by President Putin. In my opinion, this is leading the country to self-isolation from the outside world."

Does the opinion of these young Russians represent a majority or a minority? It is difficult to say. Regardless, there is a pro-Putin point of view as well. "Ukraine, Donbas, Syria and now the strikes against ISIS; in short, Russia's current foreign policy, puts our country in a difficult situation. However, I cannot say this policy is wrong," says Dmitriy Salov, a youth activist for the pro-Putin ruling United Russia party. According to him, "you have to understand we have to react to all attacks by our so-called western partners systematically. We are protecting our interests abroad." Dmitiry understands the direction Russia is taking: "It is a difficult position, but this is the only correct way to defend Russia's national values and interests. Throughout its long history, Russia has never been an aggressor and has always been forced to respond to provocations by other states. The good news is we have always been the winners," Dmitry adds.

The question about which is the right or wrong path for Russia is quite subjective. Roman Doronin, a student at Moscow's Higher School of Economics also agrees, making this statement: "If you start from the viewpoint of a democratically-minded person, the answer is definitely 'no,'" Roman says. "We haven't built a free and transparent political system and the economy is unstable. A citizen with a paternalist point of view will point to Russia's international achievements in recent years and the 'stability' in the country, under which everyone now has some form of work, which they would argue is more important than elections."

Roman adds that in his personal opinion, "Putin was effective and even necessary for the country when he first came to power. I really think much of what he did brought about many benefits. However, 15 years have passed, the economy has gotten on its feet and the political situation has stabilised, but the methods of governance remain the same and are not working anymore. The main problem for the president is he cannot handle a situation when Russia needs to develop rather than be rescued. Now the country is like a big ship being carried by the waves without knowing where its final destination will be. Naturally, this is entirely the fault of its captain."

"Putin was effective and even necessary for the country when he first came to power. However, 15 years have passed, the economy has gotten on its feet and the political situation has stabilised, but governance methods are still the same," says Roman.

More rigid dictatorship

"It is strange to talk about Russia in the abstract when the country is in fact run by members of a few powerful families," admits Mikhail Dostovalov, a 26-year-old teacher. "Several people close to the Kremlin are just out to make money, a practice which has a costly impact on our country's citizens. Misaligned foreign and domestic policies affect the lives of ordinary people: they are losing their jobs and social services for the neediest are declining. This creates discontent and disagreements, not only within society, but specifically within families who are losing touch with relatives in neighbouring countries because they cannot afford to travel abroad. In addition, the fear of terrorism and refugees has taken hold. It is not clear what direction our country is headed in, but one thing is certain; we're not awaiting a positive future."

"Of course, Russia is moving in the wrong direction," says Nikolay Kavkazsky, a 27-year-old member of the Yabloko party (the oldest Russian democratic party). "The government reduced the social budget and adopted more and more repressive

laws against human rights and freedom. State propaganda is sowing hatred and chauvinism while the ruling nationalist regime establishes a more rigid dictatorship. If this trend continues, the future of Russia is heading towards a Neo-Stalinist or Fascist State."

It is difficult to say why our country is headed in this direction. Going abroad enables one to compare Russia with other countries and while we may not be the most prosperous, we are not a failing country either. Egor Lutsenko, a 21-year old student from Novosibirsk (Siberia), is not certain about a lot of things, such as "why, if Russia has such 'huge resources', do these only benefit a small minority and not the whole country? Prices are rising and now this crisis is being felt in Moscow and not just in Russia's outer regions."

The young man assured me that he is adamantly against any military action, whether in Syria or Ukraine. "In general, if you look at the experience of developed countries, Russia is not moving towards progress," Lutsenko continued. "If you look at poorer countries, you realise Russia is not that bad, but everyone always wants a better life." At the same time, from a consumerist point of view, things in Russia are generally good. Egor adds "There is no mass starvation and people feel calm and secure." In his opinion, Russia has been restored since the collapse of the Soviet Union, but is now on the cusp of a new decline. Perhaps the country needs to begin taking steps to prevent this from happening.

Change starts at home

Olesya Doligoida, a 25 year old manager from Moscow, agrees with this sentiment. "Russia is moving in the wrong direction," she says. "I want our country to become a more socially-conscious state. Now our pension system is unclear and it looks like when our generation retires, the retirement age will rise to 100, so everyone will die before they reach retirement. The money earned because of this will be used by our authorities to build a country house or second house somewhere abroad. I love Moscow and I love my country but I want it to begin to focus on the people who live in it."

Kate Novak, a public relations manager from Tver, established a club where young Russians can meet and interact with visitors from Europe and the US. She says the only way to change our country is to start with ourselves. "Me and myself, step by step, changing the space around me. I think it is the only way to make the world a better place. One day, I realised my city did not have enough places where people who speak different languages, practice different religions and have different traditions could communicate," Kate says. "That is why I established the 'Cock-

tail' project. Every time we meet, we look for what we have in common, be it art, theatre, poetry, music, etc. Our 'Cocktail' meetings have brought together a lot of guests. This indicates there is a need to expand and invite new people, to learn about their lives and cultures. By learning about others, we become the other and change ourselves. It becomes another way of understanding the world around us."

Lev Gudkov, director of the Levada Center, in a recent interview asserted that Russian youth in general is more apolitical and hopes for good relations with the West, even though, on the whole, a pro-Putin sentiment permeates the nation. "Of course, urban and rural youth are different in this way. However, in general, youth understands that academic, cultural and other achievements come mainly from the West."

The Russian youth in general is more apolitical and hopes for good relations with the West, even though a pro-Putin sentiment still permeates the nation.

Retirees may remain afraid of the West because of the once pervasive Soviet propaganda, but most young people do not feel this way. Some even have positive experiences and expectations from the West. "Unfortunately, this does not mean that after a certain number of years, the relationship with Europe and the US will automatically improve" Gudkov asserts. Before that, state institutions must change their behaviour and anti-western propaganda must end. "Even now, because youth are watching public TV less and using a wider range of information sources on the internet, we do see a greater diversity of opinion," he concluded. NEE

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In search of its place in the world

MACIEJ RAŚ

Since the 1990s, the "multi-polar world" doctrine that is implemented by the Kremlin has been reduced to attempts at halting the spread of the western powers. The dominance of the West has significantly limited Russia's influence in the world. As a result, the Kremlin has been increasingly showing signs that it wants to create its own model, which is a hybrid of the western one mixed with "traditional" Russian society.

Noticeably, the Russian Federation has been aspiring to change the international order that has emerged since the fall of the Soviet Union. In the words of Vladmir Putin, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the system of alliances it had built was "the greatest geopolitical failure of the 20th century". It resulted in Moscow's reduced international position and power. The state, governed by the Kremlin, ceased to play the role of a superpower, balancing out the influence of the United States. It stopped being a regional leader that could offer an alternative ideology to liberal democracy and capitalism. In addition, Russia's borders with Europe were moved to more or less what they used to be in the 17th century, the period when Russia first expanded onto the European continent. Equally important, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, not only was Moscow deprived of its hegemonic position in Central and Eastern Europe, it also lost its direct control over the former Soviet republics. As a result, Russians, whose homeland had disappeared, began to face a serious identity problem.

Russia needs to be a superpower

The international identity of the "new Russia" began taking shape based on different, often eclectic, historical references (usually Tsarist and Soviet), as well as often contradictory images about the place and role of the Russian state in the contemporary world. These issues were often the subject of political conflict, dividing the elite and the rest of society. However, gradually the rivalry was "won" by the conviction that "Russia needs to be a superpower". It needs to be a superpower which is independent from the influences of other powers and it needs to be self-sufficient, meaning that it is not doomed to making long-term alliances with other powers. In addition, it continues to have its own spheres of influence. Russia wants to be a superpower that is "respected" by the outside world. In other words, the Kremlin perceives a beneficial world order to be one that allows Russia to implement its national interests by participating in today's "concert of powers".

From the Kremlin's point of view, a beneficial world order is one that allows Russia to implement its national interests by means of participating in today's "concert of powers".

Thus, to become one of the politically and economically significant "centres of power" in a multipolar world, Russia has started to emphasise effective diplomacy, project its military strength, develop "soft power", modernise its state apparatus and mobilise, as well as consolidate, its society around the government. It has also initiated an integration process for the majority of the post-Soviet states; politically, via the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and economically (also politically) by means of the Eurasian Economic Union. Overall, Russia wants to be a state that has the right to have "equal" status in international relations at both the political and economic levels. It wants to prevent an undesired infiltration of its own sphere(s) of influence by third parties and is determined to incessantly implement this strategy, as well as in regards to counteracting competitors.

As a result of an increased sense of "disappointment" with the West, which has emerged within Russia in the last decade, the Kremlin has been increasingly showing signs that it wants to create a new, Russia-specific, civilisational model, one which is a hybrid of the western model fused with elements of a "traditional" society. This includes a paternalistic nation with state-induced capitalism and a strong, centralised apparatus of power. This model is viewed as competition to western projects, especially from the perspective of the post-Soviet republics and their political and business elites.

Of these ambitious goals, the only ones that have been successfully implemented are those that relate to the "superstructure" and, to a smaller degree, the "base". The attractiveness of the superpower was built with the help of "soft power", both internally (massive "patriotic" propaganda aimed at building Russian national pride) and externally (by artfully using the mass media to present Russia's point of view, create new communication channels abroad, further expand public diplomacy efforts, etc.). Yet, it also cannot be denied that Russia's military capacity, as seen in different areas of the post-Soviet space (South Caucasus, Ukraine) and even the Middle East (Syria) has also increased the state's credibility, both in the eyes of its allies and its rivals.

Anti-western assertiveness

The imperial economy and its development is still based on the export of energy resources, something that Russia has little influence over when it comes to international prices. Innovation is at a relatively low level. This pushes the Russian Federation into a secondary role in the international markets. The recent projects of "the world's fifth economic power" and its attempts at turning the rouble into a reserve currency have been brutally verified by the current economic crisis. Stagnation and recession, which the Russian economy has fallen into, as well as a decrease in the standard of living, has forced the Kremlin to undertake activities aimed at "consolidating society".

To this end, an "assertive" foreign policy has worked very well. The annexation of Crimea increased public support for the government and built a "post-Crimea majority", infatuated by Putin and with a negative attitude towards the Kremlin's enemies. This kind of success was reinforced by Russia's continued engagement in the Ukrainian crisis and its intervention in Syria. Putin and his political circle's position are built on anti-western assertiveness, as recently demonstrated by Russia's response towards Turkey over an international aviation incident. The sanctions imposed on Russia as a result of the Ukrainian crisis overshadowed the societal perception of the real causes of Russia's current economic problems.

Since the 1990s, the "multi-polar world" doctrine implemented by the Kremlin has been reduced to attempts at halting the spread of the western powers. The dominance of the West, led by the United States, in world politics, the global economy and military might, have significantly limited Russia's influence in the world. In the 1990s Moscow did not have the tools to implement its own ambitions in the international arena. The Russian state was described then as a "resource and nuclear power". The problem was that the price of petrol, whose export generates

Photo: European Commission

The Kremlin has clearly formulated its offer for the West: Russia has to join "the club" that decides on the fate of the world. It is also expected that the West will stop at today's eastern borders of the EU and NATO.

the largest amount of revenue in the state budget, was low and foreign policy with a nuclear arsenal was of limited use. Thus, paradoxically, the Kremlin's greatest argument in its dialogue with the West was its weakness, showing it to be a state that was encumbered by a serious socio-economic crisis and the political problems that accompanied that.

The Kremlin elite of that period specialised in scaring the West with the political instability of the "Russian bear". In this way, Russia was granted an extraordinary level of tolerance from its partners, especially as it was explaining all the faults of "new Russia" with the previous regime and the difficulties of its "transition period". As a result, the West did not threaten the Russian Federation with sanctions when military units faithful to President Boris Yeltsin were shooting from tanks at the parliament building. The same went for electoral manipulations and economic

abuse which involved politicians with pro-Kremlin ties. In Washington and Western European capitals, such activities were seen as an unavoidable price that had to be paid as part of Russia's westernisation, aimed at preventing it from a "return to the past". That is why the increasingly numerous anti-western references, made as part of the doctrine and statements issued by the Russian political elite, were seen as an element of an internal political game, rather than a genuine expression of the real views and aspirations of these politicians, strategists and experts.

Anaconda strategy

Ultimately, this policy of turning a blind eye did not help Boris Yeltsin's circle maintain power. At the same time, this was the moment when the foundations were created for a system which started to dominate Russian politics for the next decade. In other words, it was Russia's socio-political and economic situation in the 1990s, as well as the attitude of the West towards the Kremlin elite, which enabled the new regime to consolidate power. Today, Kremlin propaganda exploits the "relations" of the systemic transformation in the 1990s with the pauperisation of society and a rapid decrease in the importance of the state, building simple relations between "democracy" and "the free market" with poverty, the criminalisation of social life and the belittling of Russia in the international arena. Thus, the proponents of change, especially during the period of the late-Gorbachev and early-Yeltsin years, are seen as romantics who were naïve, or possibly even representatives of foreign interests.

The proponents of change in Russia are seen as romantics who were naïve, or possibly even representatives of foreign interests.

At the international level this means presenting the West in a negative light, especially when it comes to developments in the "new Russia". The West was seen as being consumed by its victory in the Cold War. It was portrayed as trying to achieve complete hegemony in international relations and trying to impose its development model on the rest of the world, leading to the expansion of its own sphere of influence to the East. Based on this way of thinking, it is also argued that the West assumed the marginalisation of Russia as a superpower. This was achieved through a "takeover" of Russia's sphere of influence in post-Soviet territory, which automatically became the most serious hot spot in relations between the parties. In this context, a term that became extremely popular in Russia was "Anaconda strategy". It describes the apparent western (especially American) doctrine towards Russia, which foresees a gradual, systematic

surrounding of the Russian state by a network of unfriendly nations, generating conflicts along its borders.

In Russia, the West is seen through the prism of "double standards", especially when it comes to areas such as human rights, democratic institutions and economic policy. Russian propaganda, which does not require much effort, makes references to the aforementioned policies of the West towards Russia, but also stresses the "friendship" between western states, the EU, NATO and non-democratic and non-capitalist regimes. First and foremost, emphasis is clearly placed on breaches of international law by the West, which are used by Russia to justify its own activities, as well as its mistakes, such as the ill-judged interventions in Iraq and Libya, or its engagement in Syria.

An opportunity and a threat

From the perspective of the Russian Federation, the West is not just a threat. It is, above all, an opportunity for multi-dimensional development. It remains the main trade partner of the Russian Federation, especially the EU. It is thereby the main source of Russia's budget revenue, but also the source of innovation for the Russian economy and society, as well as a creditor for Russian business. This can be explained by the fact that regardless of geopolitical views, Russians feel their civilisational and cultural connections are with Europe. The Kremlin has also learned to play with the economic needs of the western states (or rather their elite's desire for profits) in exchange for a friendly political atmosphere with favourable business connections.

The unpopular United States remains the main point of reference for Russia's foreign and security policy, as it is programmed in the Kremlin.

The West is also a desired partner in international relations. The unpopular United States remains, since Soviet times, the main point of reference for Russia's foreign and security policy. A similar role in the regional (but also partly global) context, is played by Western European powers, led by Germany and France. At the same time, Russia willingly favours the decomposition of the West, trying to counteract its unity. It will welcome, with much hope and relief, all tensions and disputes in transatlantic relations, as well as those between EU states.

The Kremlin has clearly formulated its offer for the West: Russia has to join "the club", with full rights, that decides on the fate of the world. It is also expected that the West will stop at today's eastern borders of the EU and NATO. "The Greater

Europe" should be shaped by two integration centres: a western (based on the EU and NATO) and an eastern one, in the Russia-dominated post-Soviet space. This relates to the call, formulated by the Russian Federation, that the EU and NATO should establish relations with their "Eurasian counterparts", namely the CSTO and the Eurasian Economic Union.

Internally, Moscow demands respect for sovereignty, or in other words, no intervention by the West in Russia's political system or that of other Russia-friendly states. Meeting these postulates would give the West a "responsible", "predictable" and "loyal" partner in international relations. From the West's perspective, it would mean a contradiction of at least some of its values and a resignation from its political and economic interests.

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

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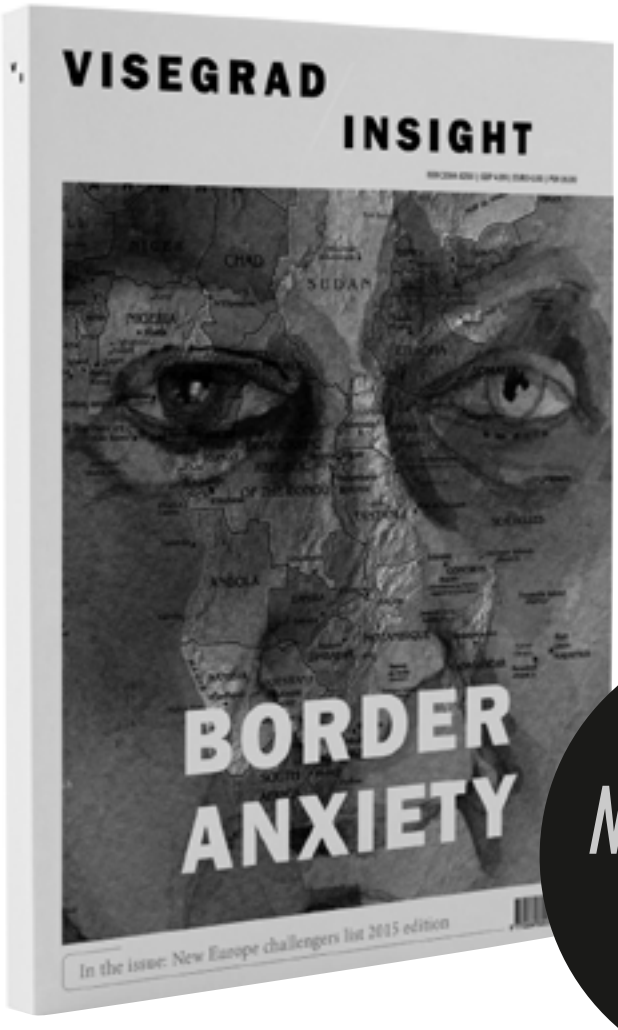
BORDER ANXIETY



On Schengen, TTIP, and euro

NEW EUROPE 100

CHALLENGERS 2015

The roots of Russia's neo-Eurasianism

MAKSYM BEZNOSIUK

Within the last several years, neo-Eurasianist ideas of Alexander Dugin and others have been incorporated into Russia's key strategic policies. As a result, a doctrine created by Vladimir Putin heavily based on neo-Eurasianism has provided justification for efforts to restore the unity of the "Russian nation". Therefore, any state unwilling to pursue this pro-Russian, neo-Eurasian agenda can be subjected to political and economic pressure, often with severe implications, as was Crimea's case.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has lacked an ideological concept that could redefine its geopolitical position in the post-Cold War world. At the end of the 1990s, the neo-Eurasianist ideological concept gained broad prominence among Russian intelligentsia and post-Soviet state officials, with its emphasis on the uniqueness of Russian civilisation and its drastic contrasts with the "hostile West." With the ascendancy of Vladimir Putin to the Russian presidency in 2000, an opportunity to implement these neo-Eurasianist ideas in practice arose. This subsequently led to work being undertaken to rebuild the Russian state within the boundaries of the former Soviet Union and to unify the Eurasian space in security as well as economic and political terms.

The Kremlin has employed political, legal and informational instruments to implement its neo-Eurasianist agenda to annex Crimea in March 2014. This an-

nexation has triggered an active debate within academic and policy-making circles concerning the impact of the concept of neo-Eurasianism on Russian foreign policy and the adverse implications it may have for the foundations of the international legal order and European security.

Isolationist approach

The 1789 French Revolution is one of the key historical events that led to the ideas behind the emergence of Eurasianism and subsequently neo-Eurasianism. It laid the path for an active debate regarding the relationship between Russia and Europe and subsequently led to the December 1825 uprising in Russia. The two parties involved in this debate were the conservative nationalists, who supported maintaining an enlightened despotism, and the constitutionalists or Decembrists, who promoted the introduction of European economic and political models in Russia. The Decembrists wanted to modify Russia's geopolitical strategy to bring it closer to Europe. However, they were defeated when their uprising failed in 1825. The Decembrists soon lost their influence on Russia's and Europe's relationship, a subject that became dominated by conservative and Russian romantic nationalists. These nationalists supported an isolationist approach and a Christian Orthodox moral superiority over Europe, standing in stark contrast to European civilisation and its western values.

This debate led to the evolution of Slavic ideology through different stages including pan-Slavism, Eurasianism and finally ending with neo-Eurasianism. It should be noted that the first intellectuals who emphasised the unique nature of Russia's national ethos, which was neither western nor European, formed a circle called the "Russian Tendency", which aimed to shift the focus from introducing western reforms to the unique role of Russia's spiritual and cultural roots. This approach was adopted by the Slavophiles, who argued for a special mission by the Russian state in its struggle against European civilisation. They also fiercely opposed the historical measures undertaken by Peter the Great to implement western economic and political reforms in Russia, as well as his idea to Europeanise Russia's image by dividing Russia into European and Asiatic regions.

Representatives of the pan-Slavic movement, headed by Konstantin Leontiev in the late 19th century, believed that Russia had a messianic mission to respond to the decaying and morally inferior European civilisation. According to Leontiev, Russia was obliged to either take over this inferior European civilisation by military means or to isolate itself completely from Europe. These traits in the Slav and pan-Slav movements were absorbed by the emerging Eurasianist concept that be-

came popular among many anti-Bolshevik Russians who fled the country after the 1917 October Revolution and subsequent civil war. Eurasianist ideologists emphasised the perception of Russia as a unique civilisation that combines Christian Orthodox traditions, Slavic culture and Turkish elements. They believed this unique Russian-Eurasian civilisation has always been threatened by the West, which aimed to undermine its geopolitical unity and subordinate it for exploitation purposes.

An ideological principle

Attempts to modernise the Russian economy and introduce democratic reforms in Russia at the beginning of 1990s were rejected by some Russian nationalist and patriotic sectors, who opposed de-Sovietisation and believed the collapse of the Soviet Union to be the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 21st century. Among such key leading nationalist patriotic intellectuals was Alexander Dugin. Dugin became the founder and key proponent of the neo-Eurasianist concept, which absorbed features of the aforementioned movements, adapting and modifying their overall conceptual approach.

According to Dugin, Russia-Eurasia is a unique geographical and civilisational space which represents the legacy of the former Russian imperial and Soviet statehood. However, he insists on perceiving Russia-Eurasia not only as a unified civilisational entity and geographical region but also as an ideological principle. The key role of this principle is to resist and fight the global unipolar dominance of the United States, which ensued after the end of the Cold War. Eurasianists believe Eurasianism should be a key platform in the struggle against the US-dominated West.

It is important to note that neo-Eurasianism as promoted by Dugin relies heavily on the works of various political and military experts such as Halford McKinder, Alfred Mahan, Nicholas Spykman and Karl Haushofer, all of whom contributed to the formation of the theory of geopolitics. In reference to their works, Dugin emphasised there is a constant geopolitical struggle between the continental state or empire (*tellurokratiya*) and the sea state or empire (*thalassokrati*). Neo-Eurasianists adhere to the position that Russia represents *tellurokratiya* in its struggle against the US, the *thalassokrati*, which tries to surround and pressure the most important geopolitical area called the Heartland, the geographical area of the modern Russian State.

Neo-Eurasianists also believe the post-Cold War period represents Russia's tactical and strategic retreat and that the struggle is now taking place along Russia's western borders and in its close neighbourhood. Therefore, neo-Eurasianists see it as a geopolitical imperative to counteract US-dominated actions aimed at

weakening and encompassing Russia along its western borders and to geopolitically liberate and expand what they call "Eurasian large spaces."

The 1825 triumph of conservatives over liberals and the end of the Cold War first created and then reinforced the neo-Eurasianist perspective. Since the 1990s this was followed by attempts to use the neo-Eurasianist ideological concept to redefine Russia's newly formed geopolitical position. At the heart of neo-Eurasianism is the belief that the West is trying to encompass and diminish Russia's role in the Soviet Union's former states by approaching its western borders.

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Russkiy Mir

In order to counteract these activities along Russia's western borders and regain its strategic significance in the region, the Kremlin has undertaken measures to integrate neo-Eurasianist ideas into Russia's legislation and official policies. Since the mid-1990s, neo-Eurasianists, headed by Alexander Dugin, have expanded their contacts and established good working relationships with the Russian political elite. During the 2000s, the neo-Eurasianist concept received public recognition among many Russian intellectuals, reaching the point where some key figures in the United Russia party openly acknowledged that their policy positions were mainly inspired by the neo-Eurasianist concept. Not surprisingly, the Kremlin worked on ways to integrate neo-Eurasianist aspirations, starting with the arrival of Vladimir Putin as President of the Russian Federation in 2000. Sergey Kagaranov, who served as Putin's advisor, introduced a doctrine (later named after him) that implied the right of Russia to defend ethnic Russian minority rights in the Soviet Union's former states. It also implied that Russia has a right to apply pressure and assert influence over states in which ethnic Russians could be subjected to perceived discrimination.

This foreign policy concept outlined in the Kagaranov Doctrine was further enshrined in Russian federal law, titled "On the State Policy of the Russian Federation in Relation to Compatriots Abroad", and was adopted in 1999. After that, the Kremlin went as far as to introduce the concept of the "Russian World" (*Russkiy Mir*), which has been promoted since 2006 and which has served as an integral component of the Kagaranov Doctrine. It implies the existence of a unique Russian civilisation with multi-cultural and multi-religious features in order to weaken the national identities of citizens from the former Soviet Union and promote the idea

Eurasianist ideologists emphasise the perception of Russia as a unique civilisation that combines Christian Orthodox traditions, Slavic culture and Turkish elements.

of Russia's exclusivity as the political and civilisational core of these states. One of the key purposes of this Kremlin approach was to "reintegrate the post-Soviet space under the leadership and domination of Russia."

Putin and his close circle are heavily influenced by neo-Eurasianist ideas, having actively pursued the formation of a Eurasian Union, which is being constructed on the basis provided by the cultural core of neo-Eurasianist Russia-Eurasia. This could be observed during the course of the 2012 presidential elections, when Putin began emphasising the formation of a Eurasian Union with Russia and other post-Soviet states. Prior to his third presidential term, he was calling for the formation of a Eurasian Union to shape the geopolitical configuration of Eurasia, which he argued could have a positive impact on a global scale. After his return to office in 2012, he reiterated this notion on several occasions.

Towards a new union

Within the last two years, neo-Eurasianist ideas regarding the Eurasian Economic Union and Russia's leading role in the Eurasian integration processes were further incorporated into Russia's key strategic documents. One of the most important

documents is the "Concept of Russian Foreign Policy" adopted in 2013. Item 44 of the text sets out the goal of forming a Eurasian Economic Union as a top priority. The aim is to serve as a complex integration model which would include all of the former Soviet Union's states. In this regard, the "Strategy on State National Policy of the Russian Federation to 2025" and the "Strategy of National Security of the Russian Federation to 2020", including the Presidential Order from May 7th 2012 "On Measures of Implementation of Foreign Policy of Russia" contain similar provisions on the urgent need to deepen Eurasian integration and expand Russian influence to counteract the US-dominated West, represented by NATO in the region.

"The Doctrine of Information Security of the Russian Federation" and "Foundations of the Russian State Policy in the Sphere of International Information Security 2020" further provide the basis for the implementation of the neo-Eurasianist concept by enhancing Russia's presence in the global informational space, protecting Russian informational space and promoting Russian cultural and spiritual values within Russia and in the post-Soviet space. At the same time, Kremlin programmes such as "On Building a Positive Image of the Russian Federation" and "Improving Russian Information Security" were subsequently launched to counteract "western propaganda" and promote a neo-Eurasianist agenda of Russia being at the centre of the neo-Eurasianist integration processes.

Recent events in the post-Soviet space, especially in Ukraine, have served as an example of the direct implementation of neo-Eurasianism in the region.

The practical realisation of these informational strategies aimed at promoting a Russian neo-Eurasianist agenda rests on a set of state-funded TV and radio channels and many online sources. The goal has been to mobilise information warfare technologies to unify the domestic public behind the strength of the new ambitious Russian foreign policy and to promote a neo-Eurasianist agenda with vocal concerns over the well-being of ethnic Russians abroad.

A new understanding of Russia

As a result, a Putin doctrine heavily based on neo-Eurasianist ideas has provided a "justification for efforts to restore the unity of the 'Russian nation'" via Eurasian integration or even through the creation of a single state spanning at least part of the post-Soviet area." Hence, any state unwilling to pursue the pro-Russian, neo-Eurasianist agenda could be subjected to political and economic pressure, often with, as in Crimea's case, severe implications.

It is clear that the ideological founders of Eurasianism adjusted key integrative components of other political trends mentioned above to reassess and construct a new understanding of Russia and its standing between Europe and Asia. The key emphasis rested on the uniqueness of Russian civilisation and its struggle against the hostile West, with its inferior and decaying morals. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the possibility emerged to introduce and implement neo-Eurasianist ideas in practice.

Neo-Eurasianist ideas have deliberately been integrated into policies and laws in Russia, with the aim to solidify the theoretical framework for the practical implementation of neo-Eurasianist ideas. Recent events in the post-Soviet space, especially in Ukraine, have served as an example of the direct implementation of neo-Eurasianism to intensify geopolitical pressure in the region and return former Soviet states back to Russia's sphere of influence. Such a course of action can also be seen in Russia's concern over the ephemeral threat the West presents when wishing to encircle and trigger a disintegration processes in Russia. This is combined with the practical implementation of the Kagaranov Doctrine on protecting ethnic Russians in nearby states and the strong desire to rebuild Russia's previous might and glory in security, economic and military terms. NEE

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Polish-Russian relations

Can they get any worse?

JUSTYNA PRUS

Polish-Russian relations are at their lowest point since 1989; both experts and all major political powers in Poland seem unanimous about this. Politicians from the new Law and Justice (PiS) government see the need to "amend foreign policy", yet any substantial change in bilateral relations with Russia seems very unlikely. There is no doubt that Moscow will do everything possible to weaken Poland's position in the West.

The current situation concerning Polish-Russian relations, or to be more precise its rapid worsening since 2013, is a direct result of Russia's aggressive policies – its reaction to the EuroMaidan Revolution in Kyiv, the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas. Poland has been consistent in opposing any occurrence of Russia operating outside international law and limiting Ukraine's sovereignty. Poland's position on upholding sanctions against Russia and the need to "hold Moscow back", as well as the assessment of danger the latter poses, could all potentially change only if the Kremlin abandons its aggressive policies. So far, apart from several rather symbolic gestures and keeping relative peace in Ukraine's south-eastern parts, Russia has not offered any substantial change to its current course of action. There is no indication that Russia or its proxies in Donbas are close to finalising the implementation of the February 2015 Minsk Agreements. Any improvements introduced so far on the side of Russia and the separatists it is backing can be easily reversed in a very short time.

One could say these simple observations are met with disagreement from Moscow which traditionally blames Poland for the current state of relations and claims that the latter bears responsibility. Leaving Russia's interpretations and its frequent references to "Polish Russophobia" aside, it is worth noting that for one and a half years now, as a consequence of the Kremlin's policy, there has been some objective worsening of relations between Russia and all European Union states, even the ones considered friendliest towards Moscow.

Between Civic Platform and Law and Justice

The new Polish government accuses its predecessors, from Civic Platform (PO), of erroneous policies towards Russia. The list of complaints include consecutive attempts of resetting relations with Moscow after 2008, which, according to PiS, did not serve Polish national interests and was a submission to the demands of stronger partners from the EU, particularly Germany. Another point that PiS makes is that its predecessors were too passive and negligent in investigating the cause of the Smolensk plane crash on April 10th 2010, in which the president and 95 other people including top government officials lost their lives. PiS blames PO for handing the case over to Russia. It is certain this key item is high on the new government's agenda, as it raises emotions on the Polish political scene, mobilising support for PiS. For over a year now, PiS has also consistently criticised the former government for being left out of talks concerning the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Witold Waszczykowski, the new minister of foreign affairs, has explained that Poland should not only be included in the Normandy format, which he once called pro-Russian, but has also called for the creation of a format that would include Warsaw with a broader representation of the EU and the United States. According to Waszczykowski, Poland has reduced its role to being a German vassal, rather than becoming a strong player in the EU.

The new Polish government accuses its predecessors of an erroneous policy towards Russia.

The two political parties' discrepancies, which became rather visible during the last election campaign in Poland, do not change the fact that there is a consensus of opinion as far as key issues concerning the assessment of Russia and the threats to Poland's security. What is certainly going to distinguish the new government from the previous is its style of politics and rhetoric. However, some of the changes to Poland's policy on the European forum can have a serious effect on Polish-Russian relations.

No new opening for Russia?

In previous comments, the new minister of foreign affairs has called for a more active Polish policy in the East, closer transatlantic relations, a greater presence of NATO in Poland and Eastern Europe and a stronger Polish position in the EU. Regarding Russia, he emphasised that it is Moscow that is responsible for deteriorating relations and consequently, when it comes to any possible improvement in this matter, the ball is in Russia's court. Above all, Russia would have to back down from its aggressive policy towards Ukraine and stop breaking international law. As long as that does not happen, Poland will insist on upholding sanctions against Russia.

Poland's new minister of foreign affairs has called for a more active policy in the East, closer transatlantic ties and a greater presence of NATO in Poland and the region.

For the new government, one of the key issues in bilateral relations remains the Smolensk plane crash. According to PiS, this issue has not yet been clarified; this includes the return of the government aircraft's wreckage back to Poland. Shortly after their electoral victory, the leader of PiS, Jarosław Kaczyński, whose twin brother Lech was president and a passenger that was killed when the plane crashed, stated there was no need to engage international bodies in a new investigation; "we have to arrive to the truth ourselves". It can be expected that this issue will most likely play out on a domestic forum rather than on the international stage.

For its part, the Kremlin greeted the Polish election results with its standard declaration of willingness to co-operate. It is possible that more meaningful gestures could follow, which could include an invitation for the new Polish leaders to visit Moscow. Russia desperately wants to return to "business as usual" in world politics, so it does not have much to lose by extending a hand to Poland. Even if it was met with rejection, such attempts can still be played to Russia's advantage by letting the world see how Poland has refused a gesture of goodwill. On the other hand, any actions on Poland's part, such as calling for the implementation of the Minsk Agreements in Ukraine, speaking out over well-founded fears of Russia's neo-imperialist policy and taking up concrete measures in security, like strengthening NATO's eastern flank, are still going to be presented by the Kremlin as attempts to provoke discord and exacerbate mutual relations.

It is in Moscow's best interest to suggest that such actions are unwarranted. By doing so, Russia will try to convince both its own nation and international public opinion that there is no cause-and-effect relationship between Russia's policy and Poland's critical attitude.

The diplomacy of words

The Civic Platform government's eastern policy might not have been a resounding success and there is no doubt we can come up with some concrete criticism, such as Poland hastily joining other EU states that opted for the normalisation of relations with Russia after the war with Georgia in 2008. Nonetheless, officially avoiding the rhetoric of emotion, Poland simultaneously pushed through some concrete projects on the European forum, such as the Eastern Partnership programme with Sweden in 2009. Poland introduced the small cross-border traffic law with the Kaliningrad Oblast (a similar agreement was prepared with Belarus, though it was detained by Minsk). Undoubtedly, among Polish diplomacy's achievements was the mediation, along with EU representatives from France and Germany, of Ukraine's political crisis in February 2014. Thanks to these efforts a possible scenario where Ukraine's president, Viktor Yanukovych, would use force against protesting citizens was stopped.

A strong conviction behind Polish policy towards Russia and post-Soviet states has been that it is not possible to act effectively in the East without support from key EU member states like Germany. Simultaneously, however, it meant the need for compromise. The new PiS government has declared not only a more active policy in the East, but also a more assertive policy towards Germany and the European Union. It is so far unclear how these goals are actually going to be achieved. Skilful diplomacy and a policy of compromise have been in growing demand due to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, and even more so in the context of the refugee crisis, the war in Syria and Iraq and the terrorist attacks in Paris. All of these processes have shown signs of facilitating the normalisation of relations between Russia and the West. Unyielding and assertive rhetoric in times of international crises might be attractive to the PiS electorate; objectively, however, it might be counterproductive. Even more so, some EU member states are ready to put a spoke in the wheel as soon as an opportunity arrives to oust Poland from participating in vital decision making circles.

PiS has declared its willingness to compromise in ways that do not harm Poland's best interests (which in fact does not differ from the predecessors' policy). So far, the position on the refugee crisis and the reaction of the vice foreign minister for the European Union, who just several hours after the Paris attacks declared that Poland sees no possibility to implement the decision to relocate refugees, are by no means examples of sophisticated diplomacy. Those comments did not have any meaning for actual policy but effectively attributed to the worsening of Poland's image in Europe. Hungarian diplomats are said to already be joking that they cannot wait until Poland joins them in the EU "penalty box".

Improving security, both by modernisation of the Polish army and by the enlargement of NATO infrastructure and a NATO presence in the East, is a top priority for the new Polish government.

Both the new president Andrzej Duda and the PiS government have heralded strengthening regional alliances, such as the Visegrad Group (V4) or the Baltic states. It is rather unlikely to counterbalance the main players in the EU, even if such regional alliances act unanimously. The truth is that the V4 members differ when it comes to European problems as well as on Russia and Ukraine. Indeed, V4 members managed to reach a consensus where most development assistance funds go to Ukraine. However, it is hard to imagine that the openly pro-Russian Viktor Orbán would act as an advocate and ally of Warsaw when it comes to upholding sanctions against Russia, especially if France and Germany take a different position. Tighter co-operation with the Baltic states, in turn, is hindered by complicated relations between Poland and Lithuania. It seems unlikely that these problems will be overcome in the near future. Increasing regional co-operation is a good idea, however it is crucial to understand that the potential leading role of Poland in such alliances – to which PiS aspires – is preconditioned by Poland's strong position in the EU.

Security above all

Improving Polish security, both by the continued modernisation of the Polish army and by the enlargement of NATO infrastructure and presence of NATO's army in the East, is a top priority for the new government. This is yet another element linking policy matters towards Russia with the ability to continue alliances within the West, which in this case rests upon implementing the decisions made at the NATO Summit in Newport, as well as those made at the next summit in Warsaw in July 2016. As for security, PiS considers Germany's rejection towards Poland's position of increasing the presence of Allied forces in the country as a confrontational gesture. The Polish side believes that new challenges facing security, above all Russia's growing militarisation and aggressive policy towards neighbouring Ukraine, call for such actions. Despite Russian claims, which Germany unfortunately speaks in unison with, those actions would not violate the 1997 Russia-NATO Founding Act. However, emphasising discrepancies between Warsaw and Berlin will fuel Russian propaganda that paints a false picture of NATO as "tightening the ring around Russia". A dispute like that can also give Russia a chance to divide allies by warning Germany, France and Italy against the consequences of "reckless" and supposedly Russophobic policy. While Poland's argument can be right, the form in which it is voiced is essential. While loud public criticism is something applauded by the domestic public, it does not necessarily lead to actual accomplishments.

Emphasising discrepancies between Warsaw and Berlin will fuel Russian propaganda that paints a false picture of NATO as "tightening the ring around Russia".

Some historical issues also remain a burden on Polish-Russian relations. The symbolic 1940 Katyń Massacre remains an unresolved issue. The problem, however, does not lie in establishing facts or accessing key documents on the murder of over 20,000 Poles on Joseph Stalin's orders. In fact, Moscow has made a number of political gestures recognising the Soviet Union's responsibility for the massacre. Yet, at the same time, it has failed to finalise the case in a legal sense, keeping the investigation secret and refusing legal rehabilitation to the victims' families. At the same time, within a broader public discourse, the Russian authorities have come up with new interpretations that challenge already established historical facts, such as blaming Nazi Germany for the Katyń Massacre.

The Katyń case, along with other "difficult matters" in Polish-Russian relations such as the annexation of Polish territory pursuant to the Molotov-Ribbentrop

Act, Soviet policy towards the Polish independent underground movement during the Second World War and the post-war Sovietisation of Poland have all become part of the broader theme of how the Kremlin conducts its historical policy. This policy aims at falsifying history and distorting facts to fit its current narrative, using it as a weapon in its information war and aggressive policies towards different countries, including Poland.

That famous Polish "Russophobia"

Moscow's best scenario would be for Poland to become isolated from the EU and left alone facing threats from the East. "A Poland that is both anti-Russian and anti-European is a dream come true for Kremlin strategists. The lack of unity between the EU and NATO, this time due to our own efforts, would create space for new configurations of world powers, including Russia. And preferably in the company of Germany and France" claims Robert Cheda, an analyst in Warsaw. For this reason, the Kremlin will go at great lengths to implement such a scenario, focusing on depicting politicians from Poland as people driven by anti-Russian phobias and prejudices.

An optimal scenario for Moscow would be for Poland to become isolated from the EU and left alone in facing threats from the East.

The picture depicted by Russian authorities as expressed by various diplomats, politicians and commentators differs considerably from opinions presented in Poland. According to the Russian narrative, Polish politicians act out of an irrational assessment of the situation. Warsaw is accused of implementing Washington's policy and of being blindly pro-Ukrainian. It seems the conflict in Ukraine, however, has helped other countries, even those traditionally not interested in Eastern Europe, to realise what the term Russophobia actually refers to: any action Moscow or Kremlin's ideologists do not approve of. It is worth keeping in mind that when many start pushing for the "normalisation" of relations between Russia and the West, the former once again will start labelling inconvenient countries as Russophobic.

Bilateral relations, seen in the broader perspective of relations between Russia and the EU, will be shaped by two serious security crises that Europe currently faces: the continuing conflict in Ukraine and the war in Syria connected with the refugee crisis and the threat of terrorism. Russia plays a major role in both crises. In the first one, it was and still acts as an aggressor, while in the second it presents itself as an indispensable ally to the West in the fight against radical Islamist ter-

rorism. Leaving the Kremlin's true intentions aside, the West seems to take this version at face value.

Contrary to what Polish foreign policy's new architects might wish, it is not possible to separate Polish policy within the EU, like the position on refugees or decisions concerning a climate package, from the efficacy of Poland's eastern policy, or to be more precise its policy towards Russia. In this situation, the new Polish government is facing a significant challenge since there is a risk that even proper diagnoses and ambitious plans might not bring about effective solutions or ways to implement them.

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EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CENTRE PERMANENT EXHIBITION | CATALOGUE

Edited by
Basil Kerski, Konrad Knoch, Jacek Kołtan, Paweł Golak
Gdańsk 2015 | 280 pages | ISBN 978-83-62853-54-0

The catalogue includes the description and pictures of the history that visitors will find during their journey through seven halls of the European Solidarity Centre's permanent exhibition–a modern, multimedia display devoted to Solidarity's revolution and the collapse of the Soviet bloc. It is one of Poland's biggest narrative exhibitions taking up the recent history of Poland and Europe. The display is approaching the phenomenon and originality of the Solidarity movement in an interesting way comprehensible to a variety of audiences: witnesses and participants of the depicted events, foreign guests, people from the younger generations, and even children. The basic narrative consists of historical storytelling which reconstructs the dynamic process in its numerous dimensions: political, social and cultural. This foundation allows us to convey the history of a universal idea that found a new expression in Solidarity. Visitors will learn how the revolution proceeded in Poland and Central and Eastern Europe.

EUROPEAN SOLIDARITY CENTRE PERMANENT EXHIBITION | 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 socio-political 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 Centre–sum up the scientific, publishing and archiving work carried out so far by that institution.

solidarity academy

VISEGRAD GROUP EDITION

Solidarity Academy 2015, photo: Dawid Linkowski/ECS Archives

Solidarity Academy 2013, photo: Grzegorz Mehring/ECS Archives

Solidarity Academy is an international project aimed at inspiring and supporting the development of the young intellectual elites across Europe. The project's title refers to the Polish social movement Solidarność (Solidarity) and the peaceful socio-political transformations that took place in Poland and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe. In such movements we can find inspiration for solving the problems of the modern world.

Solidarity Academy 2015, photo: Grzegorz Mehring/ECS Archives

Each edition of Solidarity Academy has a specific theme. In 2013 the theme was the EU's Eastern Partnership programme, in 2014–the Ukrainian crisis. Th 2015 edition was dedicated to Polish-Russian relations, with an additional focus on border traffic between Russia's Kaliningrad oblast and Poland's Pomeranian and Warminsko-Mazurskie Voivodeships. The 2016 edition will be dedicated to the Visegrad Group.

photo: Katarzyna Janota

"In the last year the impossible occurred to be possible: Visegrad Group found a common language. This language is xenophobia: the biggest demon of the 20th century. It's the time to press 'rewind' and think what happened to the Solidarity ideas which had united Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary 30 years ago. The 'Visegrad' edition of the Solidarity Academy is not only a great opportunity for it but also a big challenge for participants, trainers and tutors to ask themselves a question: how to talk and not get carried away by the emotions." Kaja Puto, journalist, editor, activist, vice-president of Korporacja Ha!art Foundation, graduate of the Solidarity Academy 2015, and a tutor for the Solidarity Academy 2016.

Solidarity Academy 2015, photo: Grzegorz Mehring/ECS Archives

solidarity academy

The working language of the Solidarity Academy is English

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The Suwałki Corridor

MARIUSZ MASZKIEWICZ

Russia continues to look for an advantageous transit solution that would connect the mainland with the Kaliningrad Oblast. One idea, repeatedly discussed since the fall of the Soviet Union, is the "Suwałki Corridor" – a 99-kilometre-long transport connection linking Hrodna to Kaliningrad through Poland.

The problem of a reliable connection between Russia's Kaliningrad Oblast (located on the Baltic Sea between Lithuania and Poland) and the Russian mainland first became discussed in Moscow at the beginning of the 1990s. For Lithuania, which re-gained its independence in 1991, the most important security issue at that time was the withdrawal of Soviet troops from its territory and the regulation of transit to and from Kaliningrad. Equally important was the issue of the three Baltic harbours (Klaipeda, Kaliningrad and Riga) and which of these would be the region's main trade terminal. For Moscow, transit of goods and military between its two territories was vital. Without a secure link between the enclave and the Russian mainland, its interests were threatened.

Radical proposals surfaced on many occasions. Vladimir Zhirinovsky, a Russian member of the Duma known for his confrontational populist rhetoric, proposed the Kremlin "dig a tunnel underneath Lithuania". Other politicians and experts also demanded that authorities negotiate simple conditions for border crossings (e.g. not subject to border controls) with the EU. Lithuania, however, refused to permit "sealed railway wagons" to pass through its borders without inspection. And in Brussels, voices suggesting the building extraterritorial corridors were considered absurd and senseless.

In search of a solution

One project, dubbed the "Suwałki Corridor", emerged as an alternative to Lithuania's strict transport arrangements. This idea advanced by Vadim Smirnov, a Russian analyst from Kaliningrad, originated from reports by the former chair of the Kaliningrad Oblast Council – Yuri Shemonov. In late 1990 Shemonov met with Mikhail Gorbachev and Soviet Prime Minister Nikolai Ryzhkov to propose a 99-kilometre-long transport corridor between Hrodna and Kaliningrad (through Poland). The proposal may have come from the analysis of the situation in Lithuania and a potential for military conflict. A transfer route through Poland thus seemed like a safer alternative. Shemonov's proposal called for the construction of a highway, railroad and network of connections. Interestingly, while Ryzhkov supported Shemonov's proposal, Gorbachev rejected it, recommending that both politicians "stop spreading panic".

The Suwałki Corridor initiative emerged as an alternative to strict Lithuanian transport arrangements between Kaliningrad and mainland Russia.

Between 1993 and 1996 the Russian side returned to Shemonov's idea, supporting the plan to build transit links from Hrodna to Gusev/Gołdap (Poland) and on to Kaliningrad. This issue was raised by experts at the Diplomatic Academy from the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These experts revealed that a transport corridor through Poland had already been considered in 1993. With the assistance of the authorities in Minsk, Russians began pursuing an agreement regarding this co-operation between the border regions of the Hrodna Oblast and Poland's Suwalskie Voivodship. These agreements were not warmly welcomed by Poland. The historical relations and level of mistrust between the two states obviously played a big role in Poland's response.

A transit route through Lithuania, especially for military and equipment (as Russia's simultaneously withdrew from East Germany) became a serious source of tension between Moscow and Vilnius starting in the early 1990s. Russians needed to find an alternative for transferring cargo between the Kaliningrad Oblast and the rest of the Russian Federation. Construction of ferries and other naval routes connecting Kaliningrad's harbours with other Russian Baltic ports was seriously considered. Yet, the cost of constructing a sea lane between Kaliningrad and St Petersburg, Russia's other Baltic warm water port, would be too expensive, especially considering the amount of transit cargo as well as the poor condition of the harbours' infrastructure.

In addition, Kaliningrad's harbour was not considered a major transport hub for shipping and trading goods. Only eliminating competition would turn the existing

Photo: Christopher Michael (CC) www.flickr.com

For Moscow, the transit of goods and military between Kaliningrad and mainland Russia is vital. Without a secure link, its interests are threatened.

situation to Russia's advantage. One estimate showed that the sum of the account balances in Soviet Baltic harbours was around 92.5 million tonnes in 1988. Of this quantity, 81 per cent was in the three Baltic republics: Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. The situation did not change with regaining of independence. In 1998 the Baltic states, which were no longer under Moscow's auspices, continued to have the largest regional trade balance with 79 per cent of trade and trans-shipment taking place in Klaipeda, Riga and Tallinn. Meanwhile, trade in Kaliningrad throughout the 1990s decreased further by several percentage points.

Seeking benefits

The Kaliningrad Oblast also suffered from the underdevelopment of its railway network and an obsolete road infrastructure. Hence, it was assumed that attracting foreign capital, or European funds, would help solve its severe problems. Russia began to become more engaged in trans-European multi-party projects. After two conferences, the first held in Prague in 1991 and the second in Cyprus in 1994, Moscow seemed pressing to develop a transport link from the South to the North and from the East to the West, while including Kaliningrad's interests in a benefi-

cial direction. Other platforms of dialogue with Western Europe included a series of initiatives within various EU frameworks such as TACIS (Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States), Poland and Hungary Assistance for Restructuring Economies (PHARE) and "Euroregions"; attracting capital and involvement in external financing for implementing road and transportation projects was important for Moscow. The so-called "Cyprus Transport Corridors" (especially the one connecting *Via Baltica* and *Via Hanzeatica* with a road system from Kyiv and Minsk to Kaunas, Klaipeda and west to Kaliningrad) would help solve some of Russia's problems. The 1997 Agreement with the EU signed in Helsinki by the Russian Federation asked for a significant investment of resources from the West. Kaliningrad looked like a potential to transit and logistics hub for Russia. Hence, it seemed logical to work out a deal to create an additional corridor through Poland and Belarus. The 1993 Suwałki Corridor initiative re-emerged once again.

Kaliningrad was seen as having the potential to become a transit and logistics hub for Russia. Hence, it seemed logical that a deal to create an additional corridor through Poland and Belarus should be introduced.

In purely economic terms, the Suwałki Corridor could be seen as Russia's idea to link Kaliningrad Oblast with the rest of Russia and secure its own interests. However, a serious decline in good and stable economic relations with Russia put such a transit link on the back burner – or unnecessary.

Small border traffic

After Lithuania regained its independence in 1991, the transit rules across its territory initially remained unchanged. Until 2003, any document issued in the Soviet Union, or a Russian passport that confirmed the citizenship of the Russian Federation and residence in the Kaliningrad Oblast, was considered adequate and was recognised in Lithuania, allowing transit without many complications. After 2003, however, as a result of Lithuania's accession to the EU, the rules changed based on an agreement that was made between the Russian Federation and the EU (signed in November 2002). Since the agreement, Lithuania issues documents permitting transport (by rail, free of charge and by road costing five euros). Since Poland and Lithuania's accession to the Schengen zone, visas issued to citizens of the Russian Federation have changed once again, from being free of charge to paid (35 euros for a one-entry visa). Warsaw, without consultations with Vilnius, in-

troduced small border traffic in 2010 between the Kaliningrad Oblast and Poland. Lithuania has withheld from such a move.

Kaliningrad officials complained that Lithuanians were increasing prices for the transfer of goods to and from Kaliningrad each year, while prices for transport to Klaipeda's harbour remained the same. From the Russian point of view, this created unfair competition, one to which the Russian government should not be indifferent. It may seem as if the "Suwałki Corridor" idea Russia was less interested in offending Poland than to beat Lithuania in – what it perceived – was its game. Nonetheless, they also demonstrated insensitivity and lack of foresight about Polish reactions to such project proposals.

Today Russia is still looking for an advantageous transit link that would connect its mainland to the Kaliningrad Oblast. Yet, key facts as well as the chronology of specific events should not be neglected. In 1994 when the project entitled "On the Reconstruction of a Road Section from Gusev-Gołdap-Hrodna" began, it was recognised that the solution proposed would require special international agreements with Poland, including an agreement of transit conditions. Since the Belarusian side would also play a key role in this project, Russia decided that signing the agreements would take place at the local levels.

Yuri Kashlev, the Russian ambassador in Warsaw at the time, while responding to questions in the monthly magazine *Mieżdunarodnaja Żizń*, said it would be very beneficial for Russia to build a Gusev-Gołdap-Suwałki-Hrodna corridor. The ambassador confirmed that his embassy received the task from the Kremlin to open a border crossing in Gołdap, Poland, based on bilateral agreements. The next step was to set up a transport corridor so that all goods would not be transferred across Lithuania. Kashalev's announcement was accompanied by numerous public expressions of support for the project by Polish local authorities. The Polish government appointed a proxy responsible for the coordination of activities between Poland and the Kaliningrad Oblast.

April fools

For the authorities of the Suwałki Voivodship, a new border crossing at Lipszczany would mean attracting more investment and trade as well as improvement in the labour market. However, the signing of the 1996 agreement between the governor (Voivode) of Suwałki and the governor of the Hrodna Oblast in Belarus spawned serious political aftershocks. The Polish press published articles claiming the "Suwałki Corridor has already been drawn". They cited Boris Yeltsin during his visit to Belarus when he agreed with the Belarusian president, Alyaksandr Lukashenka,

on the rules building connections through Poland to Kaliningrad. A Polish satirical leftist weekly *NIE* (Poland was at that time ruled by a post-communist government) published an article on April 1st 1996 in which the whole issue was framed as an April fools' joke. At the same time, it was speculated that the corridor was a "gift" from the Russian Prime Minister to the Polish president Aleksander Kwaśniewski for resisting Russian business. *NIE* journalist Piotr Gadzinowski created an ironic science fiction hypothesis that Poland and Belarus agreed on territorial exchange; Poland was to receive the left-bank of Hrodna and a piece of the Vistula spit. The joke was taken quite seriously by Hrodna residents. In a matter of days, the left side of the city's real estate prices skyrocketed.

It is worth adding that in 1995 Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin visited Warsaw. An agreement was then reached on building the Yamal gas pipeline. The contract's value was 2.5 billion US dollars. The agreement foresaw that one of the pipelines would connect to Kaliningrad. An agreement was also signed to annul mutual debt in both western and Russian currencies between Poland and the Russian Federation. Many politicians and businessmen in Warsaw anticipated making huge profits from these deals. In this atmosphere, the transit corridor to Hrodna seemed like an added benefit.

An analysis of available materials and information today allows us to draw a conclusion that the favourable climate for the transit corridor through Poland seemed to be bringing the implementation phase closer to reality. Road construction had already begun on the Russian side. In Gołdap, a new expensive beltway was set up as well as a modern border crossing. Similarly, the Belarussian side prepared for road construction in the Hrodna Oblast. As part of the Russian Federation's and Belarus's "division of labour", Minsk took the responsibility for pressuring Poland on the "Suwalki Corridor" issue.

Unknown Europe

In 2001 Deputy Prime Minister of Belarus, Leonid Kozik, confirmed the fear of an "impending threat" for the Kaliningrad Oblast; in other words, an "encirclement" of this Russian enclave by the EU, after Poland and Lithuania joined it. At that time Kozik wrote: "there is an increasing need to create one more alternative route through Poland. It is only 80 kilometres long. I am not saying that building a railway line branch, an energy line or a modern connection line will bring significant benefits to everybody: Russia, Poland and Belarus."

The issue in question was not only transport infrastructure, but also projects that would allow Poland to get consent to open a new border crossing. To avoid

political associations, the project's first steps were aimed at building "a tourist ring". It was meant to connect the regions of Druskininkai (Lithuania), Hrodna (Belarus) and Augustów (Poland). This project received a "European seal of approval" as part of Lithuania's infrastructure and Poland was being financed by EU structural funds. A project called "Unknown Europe" was meant to connect parts of the Augustowski Channel in three countries (around 100 km in total). The Belarusian side was particularly engaged in making this project come to pass. The Russian side supported rebuilding the tourist trail around the Augustowski Channel and helped finance some tourism projects and hotels in the Hrodna region.

To avoid political associations, the projects' first steps were aimed at creating "a tourist ring".

Another important step in reviving tourism included discrete attempts to set up a border crossing in the Augustów area. Belarusian authorities insisted the parties "create the right conditions", which meant investments aimed at developing transportation and tourist infrastructure on both sides of the border. To help service the modest level of tourism, Warsaw agreed to establish a Belarusian consulate in Augustów in 2008. The Belarusian consul's task was not only to issue visas, but also improve the active development of the Suwałki Corridor project under the guise of "the tourist ring." The Belarusian side stressed a wide range of historical and sentimental aspects of the project. One focus was the positive associations the region had, especially the "Polish nostalgia for the Borderlands". These activities referenced the historical Grand Duchy and the emotions of the older generation of Poles who remember kayaking along the Augustowski channel.

Despite the 2014 developments in Ukraine and the growing threat Russia plays in the region, the "Suwałki Corridor" still comes back in different forms and initiatives. We can only hope that behind current trans-border projects, tourism and small border trade, there are no serious geopolitical plans on the part of our great neighbour, something that could be a threat to peace and security in this part of Europe.

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

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Moldova's great disillusionment

MIHAI POPȘOI

Moldova is currently in a state of political and economic crisis. After a huge banking scandal which saw the disappearance of one billion dollars, thousands have organised to protest against the corrupt, pro-European elite. As Moldovans grow increasingly disillusioned, a real danger now exists that the country will slide into greater authoritarianism.

For years Moldova has been depicted as the poorest, most corrupt and least developed country in Europe. Moldovans have long come to terms with their country's negative image, rivalled only by its obscurity. However, the youth protests in April 2009, better known as the "Twitter Revolution", have put the country on the map. The communist regime's subsequent departure opened the way for progressive forces promoting truly inspirational messages, all under the banner of European integration. Moldovan citizens and European decision-makers were equally inspired. Moldova was subsequently quick to become the poster child for the European Union's Eastern Partnership Programme. With generous western assistance, Moldova has embarked on a path of economic transformation and political democratisation, or so everyone thought. However, signs of trouble emerged early on.

Projecting their hopes onto their new leadership, both local civil society and the country's development partners in the West have turned a blind eye to the snail-paced reforms in the justice sector, endemic corruption and a lack of transparency. As a result, seemingly emboldened by a feeling of self-righteousness bordering on impunity, the ruling pro-European coalition's leaders felt free to repeatedly accuse

each other of corruption, engage in hostile takeovers of private assets and take political control of nominally independent law enforcement agencies and state-owned enterprises. Above all, rivalry between the then-Liberal Democratic Party leader Vlad Filat and former second-in-command of the Democratic Party Vlad Plahotniuc has triggered one major political crisis after another.

War of roses

There is no exception when it comes to the latest of these brawls in Moldova, fittingly labelled the "War of Roses", because the Democrats have red roses as their party symbol whilst the Liberal Democrats are fond of white roses. Like in medieval times, aristocrats fight each other while the common people bear the consequences. In true political thriller fashion, Moldova witnessed a public political execution in October like it had never seen before. One of the ruling coalition parties' leaders and former Prime Minister Vlad Filat was stripped of his legislative immunity and arrested in the parliament chamber in connection with the infamous billion dollar bank scandal (a recent event where one billion US dollars disappeared from Moldova's three main banks – editor's note). As a result, Plahotniuc has emerged as the undisputed hegemon of the national political scene.

Inevitably, Moldova's democratic credentials have come into question. A concept, tailored by political scientist Lucan Way over a decade ago (addressing Moldova's unique condition immediately after independence), described the situation with surgical precision. According to Way, "Moldova is best understood not as a struggling or unconsolidated democracy but instead as a case of failed authoritarianism or 'pluralism by default.'" Weak state institutions, tenuous elite networks and polarised politics have ensured a feeble democracy. However, as institutions grew stronger but less accountable, elite networks became ossified and political pluralism waned.

Moldova is best understood not as a struggling or unconsolidated democracy but rather as a case of failed authoritarianism, or "pluralism by default".

Currently, Moldova faces a rather peculiar reality as a political party holding about 19 per cent of parliamentary seats is controlling the national political system whilst enjoying only six per cent popular support. The Democratic Party yields disproportionate power, thanks in part to its position at the political spectrum's centre. However, more important is the powerful, Berlusconi style media empire which Vlad Plahotniuc, the party's main benefactor, has been able to amass. Plahotniuc's much

debated influence over law enforcement and the justice sector is another factor contributing to the eroding democracy in Moldova.

Most importantly, people have started to lose faith in European integration, largely because the pro-EU establishment has given European integration a bad name. Today, the number of people supporting Moldova's integration with the EU has decreased to almost half of the initial 70 per cent that supported it when the communists left power in 2009. The once surreal notion of Moldova joining an integration project spearheaded by Russia is now a real possibility, though still unlikely because of the inherent political backlash associated with a radical change of political direction. Following Ukraine's EuroMaidan experience, pro-Russian politicians in Moldova would be ill-advised to even consider any such moves, but it certainly has not prevented them from mobilising their support with promises of "closer ties to Russia". Indeed, a wave of charismatic populism has swept the national political spectrum's left wing as the communists' demise has created a significant vacuum. However, the so called Russian threat, although real, is often exaggerated in order to be rapaciously exploited by the incumbent elite at the expense of democracy and good governance.

Dignity and truth

Ironically, Moldova's western partners have also fallen prey to this "anti-Russian hysteria" which allowed local politicians to manipulate Brussels by only playing lip service to reforms and blaming their failures on their country's geopolitical context. The Moldovan elite have learnt that by simply invoking the Russian threat, they can make the EU more lenient and less demanding. The tactic has worked even better on the national front. Liberals, Liberal Democrats and Democrats were able to win the 2014 parliamentary elections by a narrow margin only by engaging in large-scale fear mongering and by outright banning a pro-Russian party. Meanwhile, voters were kept in the dark about the banking sector's ongoing shenanigans.

The year 2015 will go down in Moldovan history as the year of four prime ministers.

When the billion dollar scandal erupted after the elections, many voters felt cheated. The lack of transparency associated with the nomination of Chiril Gaburici as prime minister in February 2015, followed by his resignation in June, created further instability. His successor, Valeriu Strelet, failed to provide stability, being censured by parliament on October 29th 2015. As Moldovans put that year behind them, it looks as though 2015 will certainly go down in Moldovan history as the year of four prime ministers.

Meanwhile, a group of civil society representatives joined forces in February 2015 to set up a civic platform called "Dignity and Truth". This civic movement is closely associated with a local TV channel called *JurnalTV*, owned by businessman Victor Topa. Topa has been living in exile in Germany to avoid a ten year prison sentence issued by a Moldovan court in 2011, allegedly upon Plahotniuc's orders. *Jurnal TV* and the civic platform have routinely been credited with supporting the Liberal Democratic Party, but the civic movement has quickly outgrown the party's base and has been able to mobilise tens of thousands of people to rally in the National Assembly Square in Chișinău and ultimately occupy it. However, Plahotniuc's own media arm has largely been successful in discrediting the protest movement which lacked strong leadership and a coherent strategy. Nevertheless, the civic platform remains a major outlet for public discontent. Having announced its intention to build a political party, the movement will now attempt to become an alternative force, hoping to oust the current elite.

The new "Dignity and Truth" movement has quickly been able to mobilise tens of thousands of people to rally in Chișinău.

Worsening economic conditions have bolstered anti-government sentiment. Despite this, the ruling parties have been instrumental in containing the protest by denying media access, defaming organisers and sabotaging public rallies. Furthermore, the government has benefited from a lack of unity among protesters, both within the civic platform and within the left wing pro-Russian opposition. Moreover, this disharmony has been most keenly felt between these two large groups. Protesters from both left and right wing camps are clearly undermining each other instead of working together to achieve common goals. Apart from ideology and geopolitical preferences, there may also be a rather mundane explanation for this. There have been numerous allegations in the media about pro-Russian forces being influenced, at least in part, by Plahotniuc. These two relatively new players on the national political scene appear to have an increasingly powerful grip on the vast left leaning pro-Russian electorate disillusioned with the communists' recent track record. The socialists, led by former communist Igor Dodon, and Our Party, led by controversial businessman Renato Usatii, have been propelled to nationwide notoriety after staging a protest of their own: a broken mirror reflection of the civic protest movement. Therefore, the protests have been increasingly viewed as a proxy war between political groups in power. The most disheartening fact is the vast majority of the people attending these rallies on both sides are genuinely frustrated with the status quo, but their sincere display of civic indignation appears to have been hijacked by the political establishment.

The situation is still in flux, but socioeconomic conditions are prone to deteriorate quickly, particularly if a new government is not appointed in due time or if the government fails to agree on a memorandum with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Financial support promised by Romania was put on hold pending a resolution to the political crisis in Chișinău. Therefore, it is clear a new government is unlikely to ensure a budgetary lifeline from elsewhere and will be forced to accept the IMF's demands, creating inflationary pressures and cornering the political establishment even further. Macroeconomic indicators are worrying while the recent spike in energy prices is likely to contribute to even greater popular dissatisfaction (which has the potential to trigger a mass revolt the government could not contain).

Dim future

At the same time, as Moldovans grow increasingly disillusioned with the last few years' so-called democratic transformation, there is a real danger of the country sliding into authoritarianism. Moldova has been fortunate enough to avoid this thus far, not by virtue of intention, but rather by circumstance. It is a well-known fact that populism thrives in times of economic and political turmoil. Therefore, it is highly unsurprising that Renato Usatii, the leader of the populist Our Party, is currently the most trusted politician in Moldova and could win a direct presidential election. It is still unclear if the next president will be elected within the parliament or whether the constitution will be amended to allow direct elections. Either way, Usatii will not be eligible until 2018, when he turns 40.

However, the second most trusted politician in the country, according to a recent poll commissioned by the International Republican Institute, is Harvard-educated World Bank economist, Maia Sandu. She unswervingly carried out painful yet necessary reforms during her three year tenure as education minister, which ended abruptly with the fall of the Gaburici government in June 2015. She is considering launching a political project and is currently weighing up her options. In light of the ongoing political crisis' uncertain outcome and lacking funds for party building, Sandu has been hesitant to fully take advantage of her political capital but remained outspoken. The former minister cannot hide her disappointment about the fact that, while high calibre professionals have made sacrifices to accept low paying jobs in the public sector, "the rest of the team is stealing a billion dollars." Needless to say, the dim hope of alleviating the human capital deficit in Moldova's public sector is now more distant than ever.

As a result, the immediate future of the country looks bleak. The political establishment has been running the country into the ground with an occasional helping hand from the opposition. None of the major political parties have a credible plan for turning the country around. Mounting social pressure will further push the country towards the brink. However, instead of assigning guilt, I would encourage politicians to look for possible remedies. As there is currently no short- nor medium-term local solution available, international partners need to step in. There is clearly no silver bullet. However, the idea of capacity building among the country's weakened and demoralised civil society never gets old. Although imperfect, it is the best hope for kick-starting a failing democratic process and re-energising a deeply disillusioned nation. Even so, the bigger question remains: how can Moldova build a sustainable culture of citizenship that nourishes critical thinking and learns to view the government as its agent and not its master? NEE

None of the major political parties have a credible plan for turning the country around.

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A playground between the East and West

Interview with Oazu Nantoi, Moldovan political commentator, analyst and politician. Interviewers: Tomasz Grzywaczewski and Tomasz Lachowski

TOMASZ GRZYWACZEWSKI & TOMASZ LACHOWSKI: Our conversation is taking place whilst there is an ongoing armed conflict occuring in eastern Ukraine. Moldova, after its recent internal turmoil, has also plunged into a political crisis. Would you agree with the notion that this looks like a perfect moment for Russia to provoke another conflict which could take place between Transnistria and Ukraine?

OAZU NANTOI: First of all, let us start this conversation with a clarification of the terms we will be using. Transnistria is not an independent state; it is a criminal regime. What we must also bear in mind is that in terms of international law, Transnistria remains an integral part of Moldova. Thus, from a legal standpoint, a war between Ukraine and Transnistria would mean a direct conflict between Kyiv and Chișinău (the Moldovan capital). However, politics is a different world and here the factors that need to be accounted for include Russia's military and political presence in Transnistria. Thus, if Vladimir Putin commands Russian forces to be deployed to Transnistria in order to for example attack Odesa such an order would be carried out. Tiraspol (the Transnistrian seat of power) does not have any real competence to decide to start a war with anyone. These decisions are made solely by the Kremlin.

To what extent does the Ukrainian crisis influence Russia's policy towards Transnistria?

Let me say this: Transnistria is a land of pensioners. The pace of depopulation there is horrifying. According to the last census conducted in the Soviet Union, there were 750,000 people living on the left bank of the Dniester River; in other words, Transnistria. Today, there are little more than 300,000, maybe 350,000 at most. Half of them are retired. It is clear that without Russia, Transnistria


Photos by Piotr Trybalski

cannot even secure its own pensions or the humble salaries of its working population. Even though the Kremlin has recently limited the stream of money sent to Tiraspol, they still receive free supplies of natural gas. The symbol of the fall of this regime is the situation of its currency, the Transnistrian rouble. The authorities have recently introduced plastic tokens which are to be considered legal tender equivalent to normal notes. They have done this because it is no longer profitable to print currency for the shrinking handful of pensioners living in Transnistria.

Yet as this state-like entity has been in existence for more than 25 years, its ideologues, such as historian Nikolai Babilunga, claim there is one coherent Transnistrian nation. It consists of three equal groups – Russian, Ukrainian and Moldovan…

Tiraspol's regime is just a puppet in the Kremlin's hands. Officially they say one thing, but in practice do another. I know a lot of people who work for these Transnistrian "illegal authorities". Many of them hold Romanian or Bulgarian passports. In other words, they are EU citizens. This is not surprising as some data indicate more than 65 per cent of Transnistrians hold Moldovan passports. Since the introduction of the visa-free regime in Moldova, the number of people applying for Moldovan passports has increased. So please do not perceive Transnistria as a coherent and solid society whose people are consolidated by national interests. Such a narrative is nothing more than a smokescreen prepared by the "ideologues" you have mentioned and it is designed to hide the real nature of that regime.

Has there been a new approach proposed by the Moldovan authorities that would help solve the "Transnistria issue"?

Please excuse me for what I am about to say, but I must make this statement: there is no government in Moldova. However, to answer your question, I would like to mention the first President of the Republic of Moldova, Mircea Snegur. He was a man who openly spoke about Russian aggression and the infringement of our territorial integrity as he refused to sign the first memorandum designed to normalise relations

between Chișinău and Tiraspol. The period which occurred right after the dissolution of the Soviet Union was a romantic age in Moldova. The following president, Petru Luchynski, signed the memorandum prepared by Yevgenyi Primakov, the Russian minister of foreign affairs. During his rule, it was proposed that Russia (and Ukraine) should be mediators in this conflict, not parties.

Of course, if you want my personal opinion, I think it was a big mistake. Following Luchynski, President Vladimir Voronin spontaneously signed a whole set of documents recognising, in practice, the lawfulness of Transnistria's existence. It was an extremely reckless move. It was Voronin who created the idea of an "asymmetric federation" and was ready to accept the Kozak Memorandum (the Russian proposal to end the conflict). It was only because of public pressure he did not do so. Since then, it has been difficult to talk about any coherent strategic proposal that would settle the "Transnistrian issue". I am strongly convinced the only way to finish this conflict is to build a Moldovan state which is attractive for the left bank's inhabitants.

Are you suggesting that none of the political parties in Moldova would like to bring the topic of Transnistria into the realm of public debate? There was a perfect moment for such a discussion during last year's parliamentary elections.

The issue of Transnistria is almost non-existent in Moldova's public debate. Looking at the latest opinion polls, you can see only five to eight per cent of Moldovans consider conflict settlement between Chișinău and Tiraspol to be a key issue regarding the internal and external security of our state. Unfortunately, only a tiny fraction of our society perceives the full reintegration of the Republic of Moldova to be a priority for our state's future development.

What then are the most important issues for Moldovan voters? Is it integration with the European Union?

The most important issues are poverty, corruption and unemployment. In other words everything we call socio-economic problems or bread and butter issues. On the other hand, support for EU integration is plummeting. If you asked me to make an assessment, I would say about 40 per cent of Moldovan society could be described as Euro-optimists. This low level of support towards the EU is also a direct reflection of people's reaction to the ruling political forces' pathologies, as well as the shocking fraud and enormous scale of corruption among the elite. Most recently, 1.5 billion US dollars were stolen from our banking system. This is 12 per cent of Moldova's GDP, so proportional to the size of its budget, it is more or less the same amount as what Ukraine lost because of the military campaign in Donbas. This does not help us keep a pro-European mentality. Even if we take into consideration the ratification of the EU Association Agreement during the summer of 2014, we saw only a moder-

ate wave of "Euro-enthusiasm". I must also stress that Russian influence is still very strong in Moldova. Consider this: some non-governmental organisations, such as the Russian Youth League, are financed directly by the Kremlin. The Orthodox Church, which is under the jurisdiction of the Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate), also holds a very strong place in society. All this demonstrates that Moldova remains a playground between the East and West, and currently I cannot say which side will be victorious.

Maybe we should rephrase the previous question: What does Moldova mean to Moldovans? Is it a place from which one would like to escape as swiftly as possible or is it an important component of people's national pride and identity?

Moldova is an artificial state, a result of Stalin's socio-national engineering. Such a concept is still familiar to many of our citizens. The language situation is a perfect example. Even today, a quarter of a century after we gained independence, our parliamentary debates are translated into Russian. This is because some of the deputies do not speak Moldovan! On a side note, this language was created artificially by the Stalinist regime in order to justify the foundation of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic. To be honest, I must confess the Moldovan language is in fact Romanian, enriched with some additional words. Some people even say it is Romanian from a scientific point of view and Moldovan from a political one. To make things even more complicated, note that while Article 13 of our constitution stipulates that the official language of Moldova is Moldovan written in the Latin alphabet, according to the 1991 Declaration of Independence, the official language is Romanian! All I can say is our political elite are suffering from schizophrenia. When the communists rule, we use Moldovan and when other political forces are in power, we speak Romanian. It sounds funny, but it is a consequence of the political prostitution carried out by Moldovan politicians. They exploit our history and tradition, but they are not able to build a strong, independent state.

Do you think the conflict in Ukraine is used as a tool to further the disintegration of an already divided Moldovan society? We all know very well how Kremlin propaganda works…

Once again, I would like to refer to the opinion polls which clearly illustrate that 74 per cent of ethnic Ukrainians living on the left bank of the Dniester River claim the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation was absolutely legitimate. We are living in the age of a permanent information war and sadly, Russian propaganda is very effective. Do our authorities have any countermeasures? Recently, a ban was imposed on the pro-Kremlin TV channel *Rossiya 24*. However, to tell you the truth, Moldova does not have any coherent policy designed to effectively compete with the information noise generated by Moscow.

The pro-Russian attitudes in Transnistria are well-documented. Brainwashing techniques have been used there for a very long time. Therefore, the thinking goes: Moldova is an aggressor while Russia is a friend and protector. With this kind of mentality, it is not difficult to create new anti-western clichés or spread arguments that Kyiv equals fascists and Banderites.

What about your political plans? Would you like to try to actively re-engage in politics?

If you want to make God laugh, tell him about your plans. I am no longer young. However, as you know, I became engaged in a civic movement called "Dignity and Truth". It was launched in the spring of 2015 as a mass protest movement and we are trying to scrutinise politicians and keep them under detailed surveillance. I am strongly convinced that the 100,000 people who protested in Chișinău against the current government perfectly illustrate that the people do not want to live in a country of chaos, deception and corruption. In Moldova, political parties' coffers are often filled with money from illicit sources. We do not have experience in establishing political organisations which are free from influence or oligarchs and, in a broader meaning of the word, the business elite.

However, I hope our platform will gain significant support during the next elections. This gives me hope that the issue of Transnistria will return to the political debate and that we will be able to prepare a roadmap for its reintegration with Moldova. It is not Transnistria that is strong, but Moldova that is really weak.

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Booming Romania in a hurdle race

PAWEŁ ŚLIWIŃSKI

Looking at Central and Eastern Europe, Romania is a particularly interesting example. It aspires to be an economic tiger, as one the fastest growing economies in the European Union. The country has great growth potential and is attractive for foreign investors. However, Romania also has one of the biggest informal economies in the EU, accounting for 28 per cent of that country's total economy in 2013.

The economic slowdown in China has led to a situation where investing in emerging markets is more risky. In most emerging economies, economic growth is not as high as it was between 2010 and 2013. However, analysts from Capital Economics, an economic research consultancy based in London, point out that GDP data from Central and Eastern Europe is not entirely pessimistic. Economic growth in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Romania has accelerated in 2014 and has remained above the global average since 2010. In general, economic forecasts for Central and Eastern Europe are very positive. As a result, international investment agencies, such as Nomura International, encourage entrepreneurs to invest in this part of Europe. PineBridge Investments went even further, calling Romania and the whole region in general a safe haven.

Looking at Central and Eastern Europe, Romania is a particularly interesting example. It aspires to become a new economic tiger as one the fastest growing economies in the European Union. This has been confirmed by data from the second quarter of 2015. For the past several quarters, Romania's economy has been growing at an average rate of above three per cent (percentage change on previous year). In the first quarter of 2015 it grew even more rapidly at 4.3 per cent, the fastest rate in the entire European Union.

Rising star?

These statistics should not surprise anyone. In early 2014 Romania was labelled in the ESCAPE index by experts from PricewaterhouseCoopers as a rising star of the global economy. The World Bank estimates that Romania's yearly economic growth in the coming years will be at least three per cent. After Poland, Romania is the second largest state in Central and Eastern Europe by territory, population and GDP based on purchasing power. Membership in the EU has also boosted its economic stability, since it is a major beneficiary of the EU development fund. The EU's budget for 2014–2020 has assigned nearly 43 billion euros for projects in Romania.

Romania is the second largest state in Central and Eastern Europe by territory, population and GDP based on purchasing power.

It is clear to see where the EU funds have been spent when you look at the development of Romania's infrastructure. According to the International Monetary Fund, in 2014, there were more than 500 infrastructure projects taking place throughout Romania, accounting for 31 per cent of the country's GDP. Sadly, the optimistic statistics are not entirely borne out in reality. A large number of these projects will take years to complete and European funds are often inefficiently utilised. A report by the National Bank of Poland emphasised that Romanian law regarding public auctions is not clear, projects are highly fragmented, the manner in which they are selected is often ineffective and they depend heavily on current political events.

There were serious difficulties with the absorption of the European funds during the implementation of the EU financial perspective from 2007–2013. The perspective allocated 19 billion euros to Romania within the structural and coherence funds framework. However, the European Commission estimated that the lowest level of funds absorption was in Romania, which was able to account for just 61.4 per cent of the funds it received. By contrast, Estonia, Lithuania and Poland were able to account for over 90 per cent of their funds. At present, the high absorption of EU funds is one of the most difficult challenges facing Romania.

EU funds are expected to boost both private and public investments. Economic growth in Romania is currently based more on consumption than on an increase in investment. Between 2008 and 2014 there was a 30 per cent decrease in foreign financing of the Romanian banking sector. As a result, foreign banks (foreign ownership of the banking sector remains at a high level of about 90%) in Romania were less willing to give loans. This led to a decrease in private investments. All the more, given the highest proportion of non-performing loans in Central and Eastern Eu-

rope and a large share of loans denominated in euro, banks adopted a very cautious policy in granting new loans. It is also important to note that Romanian enterprises do not have many alternatives for financing their activities. Similarly to other Central European states, Romania's financial system is dominated by banks. The banks' assets represent around 80 per cent of all the assets in the country's financial system.

Romanian banks contribute around 80 per cent of all the assets in the country's financial system. Therefore, another challenge for the state is to create a scheme of capital support for Romanian enterprises.

Therefore, another big challenge for Romania is to create a scheme of capital support for Romanian enterprises, especially small and medium-sized ones, so as to create an alternative to a scheme based on banks. In Romania, there is an ongoing reconstruction of the capital market taking place, (its regulations, strategies and development) which at present still does not contribute to the financing of the Romanian economy to any great extent. However, the capital market in Romania has a significant potential and that is why it is on many international investors' radar.

A promised land for investors?

In 2012 the British-based money management and research firm Bespoke Investment Group published a ranking in which Bucharest's stock market was evaluated as the fourth fastest-growing stock market in the world. In December 2013 the Bucharest Stock Exchange presented its vision of development: to turn itself into one of the most important stock exchanges in the region. Some of the ways in which it planned to achieve this were the launch of the AeRO market for small and medium-sized companies and an easing of bureaucratic barriers, which have been a real burden for foreign investors until now.

Currently, market capitalisation of the Bucharest Stock Exchange is around 32 billion euros (by comparison, market capitalisation of the Warsaw exchange is around 266 billion euros). Another challenge Romania faces is the incentivisation of Romanian investors to move people's savings into financial products which would boost the development of Romanian enterprises. This is an issue that has to be tackled primarily by the Romanian government. The last public offering of a state treasury enterprise took place in June 2014. However, Romanians could become interested in the stock exchange again when the government decides to capitalise big state-owned enterprises like CN Poșta Română SA (postal servic-

es), Bucharest Airports and Telekom Romania Communications, which is planned for 2016.

The Romanian authorities are also trying to consolidate their business-friendly legal changes. Since the second half of 2014 Romanian entrepreneurs are no longer obliged to pay taxes if the enterprise's revenues remain in the company and are dedicated to further investment. In January 2015 the rate of property tax on certain properties decreased and the dividend tax was reduced to five per cent. These decisions proved to be effective as early as the first quarter of 2015, when the investment rate grew significantly.

It is important to note that Romania has numerous opportunities and investment possibilities for foreign investors. Direct foreign investments are attracted by the large internal market, a cheap labour force (especially compared to Western Europe) and a flat 16 per cent personal and corporate income tax. In Romania, there is also a low nine per cent VAT on food and non-alcoholic beverages. Beginning in 2016 other commodities will be subject to VAT at the rate of 20 per cent.

It is also important to note the large numbers of fluent English speakers and well-educated high-tech staff. Romania has one of the highest densities of IT specialists in Europe, and together with Estonia the best internet when it comes to transmission of data. Romania also has bitcoin ATMS which can be used for payments in some restaurants and cafes in Bucharest and other cities. Also interestingly, among all Microsoft employees worldwide, Romanian is the most commonly used language after English.

Romania is an economically stable country. Its low inflation, interest rates and stable currency have created safe conditions for investors.

Romania is an economically stable country. Its low inflation, interest rates and stable currency have created safe conditions for investors. In the Bloomberg currency basket of emerging markets for the period since the beginning of the second half 2015 to September 16th 2015, when a majority of currencies of the Emerging Markets region when compared to the US dollar lowered their values, Eastern European values (and the Hong Kong dollar slightly) appreciated towards the dollar. The Romanian currency was a world leader as it increased its value by 2.7 per cent towards the dollar.

Opportunities and threats

There are many future opportunities for Romania to take advantage of, but the country also needs to counter possible threats. Tax reductions encourage entre-

preneurs to invest and citizens to consume more by stimulating economic growth, they could cause Romania's budget deficit to rise above the EU's ceiling of three per cent of GDP. If this were to happen, Romania, as an EU member state, would be obliged to undertake measures to address the situation. It is worth remembering that back in 2009, Romania's budget deficit was at nine per cent of GDP. Back then, Bucharest had to borrow $20 billion from the International Monetary Fund to deal with the problem. One aspect of the agreement made in 2009 by Romania, the IMF, the World Bank and the European Commission was that the target level at which to run a budget deficit would be 1.1 per cent of GDP. However, this has proved impossible to achieve under the current circumstances. In 2009 Romania was subject to excessive government deficit procedures, which it overcame in 2013, largely as a result of radical austerity measures.

Romania is also a leader in the EU in terms of informal economy, which accounted for 28 per cent of the country's total economy in 2013. The informal economy in Romania is the second largest in the EU, after Bulgaria. Massive bureaucracy and endemic corruption are still serious problems in Romania and both are key issues for foreign investors. However, the fight against corruption has been fast tracked, a fact that has been noticed and praised by the European Commission. Another negative trend in Romania's economy is the outflow of people who are leaving to work abroad. According to estimates by the Central and Eastern Europe Development Institute, there are approximately 2.4 million Romanian citizens currently working in Western Europe, compared to 1.8 million Polish migrants working in the so-called old EU states.

Nevertheless, Romania's transformation is heading in a positive direction, although the speed of development in some areas can be underwhelming. The country has the capacity to become an important economic player in Europe. It is a strategic location for both the EU and NATO, with the longest non-EU border in the Union. It would be a mistake to perceive Romania through the prism of stereotypes that make it seem backward. Unfortunately, this image still frequently appears in the international press. Romania should be perceived for what it is: an increasingly modern and wealthy state which has great development potential and numerous opportunities for foreign investors. NEE

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Imperfect literature

Interview with Radosława Janowska-Lascar, Polish translator of Romanian literature. Interviewer: Piotr Oleksy

PIOTR OLEKSY: A few years ago Romanian cinematography took over Europe. Do you think Romanian literature can do the same?

RADOSŁAWA JANOWSKA-LASCAR: Definitely. The only difference between these two mediums is that literature finds itself in a more difficult situation. Films are based not only on dialogue but also images which are much easier for audiences to process than books. This is particularly true today when images are a key component of pop culture. Foreign literature has to be translated and for that one needs a whole regiment of people who not only know the language but also understand its cultural and mental context. Only then can one translate a text into a foreign language well.

Is the Romanian state undertaking any activities to get European readers interested in its literature?

Yes. Such activities have been undertaken throughout the past 25 years, although the intensity with which they have been pursued has increased during the last 15. Romania has been promoting its literature since before 1989, of course. However, promotion was limited back then to only writers who had been approved by the communist authorities. Today, Romania presents its literature at key book fairs throughout Europe. Simultaneously, a European network of translators has slowly started to emerge with some good programmes for translators. I think the current young generation of artists and culture managers have come to understand that without investing in translation and promotion, Romanian literature will have no chance. It belongs to a group of so-called "smaller literatures" and does not have the same broad recognition English, French or Spanish do. This of course does not mean Romanian literature is of lesser quality, but rather that it needs to be continuously promoted by every means possible.

When you ask Europeans what they know about Romanian culture, they usually point to such names as Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, and Eugèn Ionesco. Has Romania tried to use this leverage in its promotion efforts?

Yes, of course, but there is a paradox here. An example is Ionesco, who for a long time was considered a French rather than a Romanian author. The same applies for Ciocran. Eliade also has global recognition but historically has not been fully associated with Romania. That country, however, has not forgotten about these masters and the latter will continue to exist within its cultural realm. Having said that, I would also like to point out there is now a noticeable tendency to question their heritage.

For example, I recently saw a fantastic play titled *The Last Cigarette of Benjamin Fundoian*. Fundoian was a Romanian interwar writer of Jewish origin who was murdered in Auschwitz. In a very interesting way, this play touches on the issue of Cioran's and Eliade's antisemitism and their support for the Iron Guard (a nationalist and pro-fascist Romanian organisation in the 1930s – editor's note). In the play, Fundoianu, who is the main protagonist, accuses Cioran regarding antisemitic statements he made on the radio and wrote in different magazines before he left for France.

So would you say the heritage of these artists is being questioned?

Yes. These artists have skeletons in the closet that can no longer be hidden and need to be talked about. Yet this questioning is a relatively new topic. It is something that has been taking place only during the last two or three years. If anybody talked about Eliade's or Cioran's relations with pro-fascist ideology before, they did so quietly, bashfully and unwillingly. Now, it seems this voice is getting louder. The point is not to condemn everything they have written, which would be suicidal. Instead, it would be better to distinguish universal values that can be found in their writings or philosophy from the values and attitudes they demonstrated in their personal lives. Only when such a division is made will it be possible to talk about them honestly and without emotion.

You translate Romanian books for the Polish publisher Amaltea. Most of these publications focus on the past and deal with a difficult topic regarding making peace with the past, be it during the period of the Second World War or the post-war dictatorship of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej. Is this issue that important in today's Romania?

The writers themselves say this topic is not yet well received in Romania. Even though it has been 25 years since the collapse of the communist dictatorship, these issues are still very painful and fresh and that is why not many authors decide to tackle them. In my view, Romanians still need time before they can really address these topics. This will probably happen when the generation who were neither victims nor beneficiaries of the system are able to speak up.

What are the main topics that have been tackled in Romanian literature in the last 25 years?

I could try to list them, but bear in mind such an attempt would be a huge

generalisation. What I can say is the first decade after the collapse of the communist dictatorship was characterised by an explosion of protests against what had occurred during the former years. In terms of literature, this meant genres such as non-fiction, diaries, memoires, letters, etc. became very popular. There was a great need to unveil the truth and literature's main role was to describe the past through the medium of personal experiences. Therefore, there was a plethora of memoires written by people who had experienced persecution or were prisoners of the regime.

At that time, some very controversial figures were also writing and being published. This was the period when the first pieces of literature about Ion Antonescu (the Romanian dictator in the years 1940–1944) or Corneliu Zelea Codreanu (founder of the Iron Guard), as well as other prominent communist figures, were published. Keep in mind Romanian readers at that time were by then tired of the literature they had been offered during the last decade of Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime, which, if you want to characterise it, was very metaphorical and offered an escape from reality. In the 1990s, people wanted to know the naked truth. Hence, these memoires and letters were quite popular. It was only by the end of the 1990s that fiction began to gain popularity on a wider scale. At that time, the past was still rejected and many topics banned earlier, like sexuality, were being explored. Similarly, writers began working with forms that had previously been forbidden, such as political parody or horror. The language also changed and became more brutal and vulgar, reflecting street language. No topic was taboo.

What can you say about readership in Romania?

When you talk to people in Romania, you see that even writers complain people read less and that it has become increasingly difficult to publish valuable literature. However, looking at it from the outside, I would say Romanians read a lot and have a good knowledge of literary life both inside and outside their country. There are many valuable translations of foreign literature and numerous literary events which attract large audiences. For example, I just returned from a three-day literary festival in Iași where meetings with authors were attended by hundreds of people.

Romania's language brings it closer to western culture, while its religion (Eastern Orthodoxy) pulls it more towards the East. In addition, the heritage of being a satellite state of the Soviet Union links Romania with Central European states. Geographically, the country is located at the nexus of Central Europe and the Balkans. If we asked Romanian authors which part of Europe their country belongs to, what would they say?

I think the answer would be as complex as the question. There is no one answer and that is a good thing. We love Romania for its ambiguity and its constant search for identity. This is a project which remains unfinished and

this country has very diverse orientations. Its value lies in the fact that such an answer can never be provided. As Romanian author Cristian Teodorescu once said: "Something which is perfect is almost dead." It has no ferment, no space to ask questions. And questions about identity are very exciting.

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

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Gazprom gambles on Germany

SIJBREN DE JONG

The combination of major energy deals, appearing to play nice over Ukraine and upping the ante in Syria begs the question of what Russia is trying to achieve on the international scene. It seems that Vladimir Putin is trying to throw up a smokescreen that will help cement Gazprom's position in Europe. To pull this off, the Russian President is hoping that the European Commission is asleep at the wheel. However, this may prove to be a naïve thought.

On June 18th 2015, the Russian state-owned gas giant Gazprom announced that it had agreed to build a new pipeline, which will run parallel to the existing Nord Stream natural gas pipeline that connects Russia and Germany. Conveniently dubbed Nord Stream 2, it has a planned capacity of 55 billion cubic metres (bcm) and would be 51 per cent owned by Gazprom. The other partners in the consortium are Germany's E.ON, OMV from Austria and Anglo-Dutch Shell. The announcement came merely a day after European Union members had agreed to extend sanctions against Russia due to its role in the Ukraine conflict for a further six months.

On September 4th, around three months later, Gazprom revived an asset swap with the German company BASF that had previously been shelved due to the conflict in Ukraine. Under the deal, Gazprom will take full control of a jointly operated

European gas trading and storage business, including the biggest underground storage facility in Western Europe. In addition, the Russian company will acquire a 50 per cent stake in BASF subsidiary Wintershall's North Sea operations, which is involved in hydrocarbon exploration and production off the coasts of Denmark, the UK and the Netherlands. Wintershall, for its part, will acquire stakes in two West Siberian gas fields.

Essential power broker

Around the same time, Gazprom announced that it would auction 3.24 bcm of natural gas to Northwest Europe for the 2015 winter period and another 6 bcm in 2016. Despite the fact that the auction failed to attract many buyers, the move was an attempt to signal to the European Commission that the Russian company is playing by Europe's rules. The company has since announced it is planning more gas auctions and indicated to the European Commission its willingness to settle the long running anti-trust case against the company over the alleged abuse of its dominant market position in Central and Eastern Europe.

The Kremlin appears to be positioning itself as an essential power broker to end the conflict in Syria and strike a deal over Ukraine that could bring an end to the western sanctions.

While this was happening, the fighting in east Ukraine had calmed down, leading to an agreement on rogue elections and the withdrawal of heavy weapons, brokered in Paris in early October. These positive signs notwithstanding, the Minsk 2 agreement remains far from fully implemented. Moreover, with Russia's military intervention in Syria, the Kremlin appears to be positioning itself as an essential power broker to end the conflict, secure its interests in the eastern Mediterranean and, as part of a grand bargain, strike a deal over Ukraine that could bring an end to the western sanctions. In fact, some senior European politicians have suggested as much. The Paris attacks on November 13th 2015 only serve to reinforce Russian efforts aimed at making sure that the West "joins forces" with Moscow in a grand coalition against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in exchange for looking the other way with respect to Crimea and eastern Ukraine. This would require that western countries ignore the fact that Russia's bombing campaign has hitherto struck just about every rebel group other than ISIS.

Despite these contradictions, it is likely that calls for joining forces with Moscow will increasingly find a receptive ear in the West. The combination of striking

major energy deals, appearing to play nice over Ukraine and upping the ante in Syria begs the question of what Russia is truly hoping to achieve. In effect, Putin is using Gazprom's energy deals and military actions in Syria to throw up a smokescreen that will make it seem that the only viable option available to EU leaders is to accept a strategic bargain on Ukraine in order to make peace in Syria, whilst at the same time cement Gazprom's position in Europe. To pull this off, the Russian President is hoping that the European Commission is asleep at the wheel. However, this may prove to be a naïve thought.

In May 2014, soon after the EU and the United States had made it clear that they would impose sanctions on Russia over its role in the Ukraine conflict, Putin announced the signing of a gas deal with China worth 400 billion US dollars. Under the agreement, Russia would provide China with 38 bcm of natural gas for a 30-year period from its gas fields in East Siberia. Soon after the agreement was signed, talks about a second pipeline to transfer gas from Russia's West Siberian fields to China's western border also began. After the demise of the South Stream pipeline in late 2014, the blame for which Russia was quick to place at the door of the inflexible EU, Putin announced the arrival of "Turkish Stream", a planned natu-

ral gas pipeline with a capacity of 63 bcm that will run from Russia, underneath the Black Sea to Turkey and onwards to a hub at the Turkish-Greek border from where interested EU countries can opt to buy Russian gas.

The failed pivot

However, two years after the Ukraine conflict began and almost a year after the cancellation of South Stream, much has changed. In August 2015 Bloomberg reported that Russian GDP had contracted by a staggering 4.6 per cent in the second quarter of that year. Rattled by a collapse in the price of oil of over 50 per cent since June 2014, a disaster that was amplified by Western sanctions, the International Monetary Fund predicted that the Russian economy would contract by an additional 0.6 per cent in 2016.

When a country is forced to make new friends from a position of economic weakness, rarely does it succeed in striking deals where it is not taken advantage of. Inevitably, so it went for Putin's much coveted pivot away from Europe towards China and Turkey. The Chinese have proven to be tough negotiating partners, securing not only an attractive price for future gas deliveries but also setting a high interest rate. In the eyes of Beijing, the collapse in the price of oil has rendered Russia less attractive as an investment prospect. Moreover, the economic slowdown currently hampering China effectively sealed the fate of Putin's Asian pivot, forcing Russia to turn back to Europe.

The economic slowdown currently hampering China effectively sealed the fate of Putin's Asian pivot, forcing Russia to turn back to Europe.

Gazprom's experience in Turkey has so far been somewhat similar. Aware of the fact that Gazprom needs Turkey more than the other way around, the Turks drove a hard bargain, demanding a substantial discount from the Russians. Gazprom went as far as to grant a discount worth 10.25 per cent. However for the Turkish state-owned oil and natural gas pipeline company, this was not enough and on October 27th 2015 it filed a case for international arbitration to seek a price discount for Russian gas deliveries. The decision to press legal charges comes at a time when Turkey and Russia are at loggerheads over Syria. Needless to say, the downing of a Russian jetfighter by a Turkish F16 on November 24th 2015 did little to improve the negotiating process. Vladimir Putin was quick to announce a sharp response and imposed a string of economic sanctions on Turkey. Although Turkish Stream was initially spared, the Russian

Energy Minister Novak announced it had suspended the project until further notice As a result it looks increasingly certain that is far from clear if the Turkish Stream will proceed at all.

The bottom line for Putin and Gazprom in all of this is that Russia continues to be reliant on Europe as a key-market for the foreseeable future. However, over the course of the last decade, the European market has become a steadfast headache for Gazprom owing to numerous pricing disputes with Ukraine. The original Nord Stream pipeline was built precisely with the aim of lessening the transit risk by circumventing Ukraine. However, the high incidence of cut-offs and pricing disputes since has done little to deter regulators in Brussels from advocating for a diversification of natural gas suppliers, away from Russia.

Enter Nord Stream 2

After Gazprom's announcement to build Nord Stream 2, the European Commissioner for the Energy Union, Maroš Šefčovič, was quick to issue a warning to the companies involved that the project raises a host of questions on how the pipeline fits with the EU's energy security and regulatory priorities. The European Commission is pushing to upgrade the existing infrastructure carrying Russian gas through Ukraine into Europe, rather than build large, new projects. Regulators in Brussels worry that Ukraine will be hit hard if it lost the crucial income that it receives for transiting gas to Europe if Russia were to shift its gas transit to other routes such as Nord Stream. The "State of the Energy Union", a report tracking the progress on the implementation of the Energy Union released by the European Commission on November 18th 2015, confirms this belief. The report states that "[t]he EU believes that it is in the interest of all parties that Ukraine remains an important transit country."

If Russia were to shift its gas transit to other routes such as Nord Stream, Ukraine will be hit hard.

The situation concerning the OPAL pipeline, which connects Nord Stream to the European gas network, is problematic for Gazprom. Since European law forbids energy companies from simultaneously owning production capacity and transmission networks, the capacity of the OPAL pipeline is currently capped at 50 per cent in the absence of other operators that use the Nord Stream network. Gazprom would like to make full use of the pipeline, but the European Commission, the German regulator and Gazprom are yet to reach a decision on the conditions that would allow for an exception to rules of the EU's Third Energy Package. On the occasion of the launch of "the

State of the Energy Union", Maroš Šefčovič was quick to state that the regulatory regime of the OPAL pipeline is still valid and remains in place. More stringently, the Commission's document reads "Nord Stream 3 and 4 would not give access to a new source of supply and would further increase transmission capacity from Russia to the EU. The EU will only support infrastructure projects that are in line with the core principles of the Energy Union."

Gazprom's recent gas auction and the company's stated willingness to settle the antitrust case against it are intended to act as the catalysts needed to reach a positive decision on OPAL's access regime. After all, if Gazprom is moving away from its traditional long term oil-linked contracts in favour of selling gas based on spot prices by means of open auctions, would that not mean that the company is playing by the rules? This observation could not be more wrong. Firstly, thanks to the assets it acquired in Germany under the deal with BASF, Gazprom will be able to continue its plan to replace gas transit through Ukraine with increasing supplies using the German network. The effect this would have on transit countries such as Ukraine, Poland, and Slovakia would be detrimental. Secondly, the auctions concern only small amounts of natural gas and will thus only have a limited effect on the tenacity of Gazprom's traditional pricing model. Lastly, the auctions could serve as a trick to use the companies that acquire the Russian gas to fill up the remainder of OPAL's capacity so that Gazprom can increase its transit through Germany, using both Nord Stream pipelines to full capacity.

I fought the law and the law won?

Crucially, if Gazprom's plan is allowed to succeed, it will mean that Europe risks losing access to the only supply line that is not in Gazprom's hands. Out of the three key supply lines feeding Europe, the Nord Stream pipeline, the Yamal-Europe pipeline through Belarus and the Ukrainian Gas Transportation System (GTS), only the GTS is not controlled by Gazprom. Moreover, all this is taking place against the backdrop of Russia's intervention in Syria, where the Kremlin is using every trick in the book to attract western leaders, whose Syrian strategy up to this point has been relatively unsuccessful, to sit down at the negotiating table and listen to what Putin has to offer. To allow this to happen would not only mean we turn our backs on our allies in Ukraine, but also that we roll out the red carpet for an enormous strategic vulnerability to take root and for Russia to consign EU energy diversification plans to the dustbin of history.

However, there is hope. From a regulatory point of view, the last word is yet to be said about Nord Stream 2. As Šefčovič correctly pointed out, the extension of

Nord Stream must comply with EU legislation. "We need solutions which would not negatively influence the gas balance for some European countries, but which should improve security for all," Šefčovič said. What Gazprom and its shareholders are attempting to do is the former. The extension of Nord Stream only adds to route diversification for Gazprom and not source diversification for Europe; an observation shared by the European Commission. By camouflaging the initiative with gas auctions and "Great Power" posturing over Syria, Putin is trying to score from an offside position, hoping that the referees in Brussels will have missed it. Luckily for Europe, Šefčovič appears to have good vision.

By camouflaging Nord Stream 2 with gas auctions and "Great Power" posturing over Syria, Putin is trying to score from an offside position, hoping that the referees in Brussels will have missed it.

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A Balkan game of poker

IDA ORZECHOWSKA

Without a doubt, Russia's involvement in the Western Balkans' energy sector is part of a wider strategy towards the region and is one of the easiest tools Moscow can use to maintain its presence in the region. However, the game is not only about energy, and is far more nuanced.

Texas Hold'em is a "game for thinking men", the saying goes. This expression applies to the Balkans as well, since many there love gambling. Betting shops are found on nearly every street corner in almost every city across the region. Spending time there is hazardous and emotional. The thrill of risking it all is guaranteed, much like politics. However, in gambling one can bet on two exclusive options and still win, while in politics only one party hits the jackpot. Everyone understands that winning is what it is all about. Thus, in the energy games currently being played in the Balkans between the East and the West some gamble and think strategically while others bet and hope for good luck. The stakes remain uncertain.

Unquestionably, the ultimate goal to be reached in the Balkans for the West is stability. For Russia, on the other hand, it is destabilisation. The Balkan states themselves, meanwhile, aim for maximum profits in political, economic and personal terms. Hence, both Brussels and Moscow attempt to offer some benefits. This, more than anything, is what makes the power games taking place so fascinating and simultaneously dangerous. Nowhere else can we see a situation where a win-win-win can turn into a lose-lose-lose.

Russia ups the ante

Russia's involvement is a sexy topic for western journalists, analysts and politicians. Though there is no current war in the Balkans to report, since the war in Ukraine erupted, any news about Moscow's activities immediately draws international attention. The gas supply traditionally represents a tangible example of Russia's dangerous meddling in local affairs, especially after the Ukrainian gas crisis of January 2009 which painfully affected the Balkan states, among others. However, Russia does not have fundamental economic interests in the region. Even energy policy in the Balkans, indeed controlled by Moscow, is seen rather as a result or even by-product of Russian energy policy rather than a unique interest in the Balkan market.The gasification of the region is very low and total consumption of gas averages around 12 per cent of the population. The fragmented Balkan market with roughly 22 million inhabitants is simply too small to be considered of vital interest to Moscow and the local economies' dependency on gas is too low to enable maintaining political dependence on Russia.

The popular belief that Russia uses energy policy to control the region may be overstated. Russia's offer in the gamble over the Balkan region does indeed include economic gains, but even more importantly it includes a certain sense of belonging, a brotherhood and symbolical empowerment. This is particularly relevant in Serbia's case, still the most powerful actor in the region. There is an extremely high perception among Serbs that there is an exceptional brotherhood of Serbian and Russian people and local political leaders are fully aware that this is a crucial card to be played in elections.

The popular belief that Russia uses energy policy to control the region may be overstated.

Hence, Russia's strategic interest behind maintaining a presence in the Balkans is about the power to divide and destabilise. This strategy proved to be successful in Ukraine. It may also be successful in Moldova. On a tactical level Russia is running three interrelated policies in the Balkans. Energy policy is the most obvious one, with the brightest examples being the South Stream Project, investments in Banatski Dvor (one of the largest underground gas storage facilities in south-eastern Europe) and privatisation of Serbian oil and gas company NIS (Petroleum Industry of Serbia). It comes as no surprise that all these transactions are being carried out in the aftermath of Russia's strong opposition to Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence from Serbia in February 2008.

The second key pillar to Moscow's presence is security policy. Serbia, while officially neutral, has an obviously sour relationship with NATO since the 1999

bombings of Yugoslavia. Hence, Belgrade is expanding its military cooperation with Russia including purchasing equipment, joint exercises and further development of the "Emergency Situations Centre" in Niš in southern Serbia. The third policy is related to identity policy, aimed primarily at the Orthodox communities in the region but represented also by support for the Eastern-style quasi-authoritarian leadership of Aleksandar Vučić, Serbia's prime minister, and Nikola Gruevski, the prime minister of Macedonia.

A glance at the large scale energy projects in the Balkans offered by Moscow – including the South Stream and Nabucco pipelines – supports the argument regarding the destabilisation potential. The fiasco of those initiatives, controversial from the very beginning, has resulted mainly in political disruption and growing intraregional divisions. Russia's troublesome energy policy is additionally supported by Turkish involvement. As far as Turkey remains rather loyal towards its western allies, Ankara is not constrained – at least until recently – from involvement in energy business with Russia, such as the South Stream offshore licensing. The termination of the Turkish Stream project, a project which was doubtful even before exacerbation of relations between Russia and Turkey, after the downing of the Russian Su-24 bomber aircraft in November 2015 paradoxically made Recep Tayyip Erdoğan support Moscow's tradition of making big energy plans with no effects.

Two offers on the table

Being the largest market in the region and having strong historical ties to Russia, Serbia represents the crucial battlefield in the Russia vs. the West struggle in the Balkans. The competition over Serbia is extremely difficult as it is being played out on two totally different levels. Brussels offers Serbs tangible material gains, but the question remains whether the offer is clear enough; whereas the offer from Moscow is more about a sense of belonging, of symbolic unity and power. There is no clear understanding in Serbian society that these two offers are mutually exclusive, even though Russia's tactical policies prove to be not always coherent.

The closest ties Vladimir Putin has in the region is with Republika Srpska, the Serbian entity of the federal state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Milorad Dodik, the president of the republic, maintains closer relations with Putin than he does with Vučić. And there is hardly any gas involved in this relationship. Dodik's statements about Russia being a traditionally important friend of the Serbian people, supporting Serbs through the course of history and sharing common values, makes the Bosnian Serbs feel part of a larger community. Moscow does not need to do much, not even invest in the energy sector; words are enough. And they guarantee

Photo: Allan Leonard (CC) www.flickr.com

Being the largest market in the region and having strong historical ties to Russia, Serbia represents the crucial battlefield in the "Russia vs. the West" struggle in the Balkans.

Putin can do a lot in terms of destabilising Bosnia should he decide to. No other external political power – neither Washington, Brussels nor Berlin – has this kind of power in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This power is limited, though, and can be further constricted by NATO's expansion in the region. The recent mass anti-regime protests in Montenegro organised by the Democratic Front with high support from the Serbian Orthodox Church and Metropolitan Bishop of Montenegro, Amfilohije Radović, are supported and probably also financed by Moscow. The simple logic that stands behind this support is that in case Milo Đukanović's current government fails to deal with the protests and calls for early elections, there will not be enough time for the Montenegrin parliament to process the constitutional procedure to vote on the country's NATO membership.

The EU raises the stakes

The European Union offers membership to Balkans nations somewhere, at the end of a long path. Yet this offer is unclear and extremely difficult to compete with

Russia. Ever since Tony Blair's (who is now an advisor to Serbia's government) offensive entry into the Balkans after the Saint-Malo Summit of 1998, which initiated the path towards a common European Security and Defence Policy, the EU has been trying to dominate all other external powers in the region. However, Brussels's political offer has been losing strength and the Berlin Process, which kicked off in the summer of 2014, seems to be insufficient to overcome the lack of an EU strategy towards the region. Washington's NATO offer is also losing its appeal, however it has not lost full steam since Montenegro has received an invitation to join the Alliance ahead of the Warsaw Summit in July 2016.

Balkan states constantly look for bargaining chips, and the balancing between Moscow and Brussels is one of the key ones.

Nevertheless, Brussels seems unable to see the lack of its clear offer as a problem and is not keen on offering much more. Therefore the Balkan states constantly look for bargaining chips, and the balancing between Moscow and Brussels is one of the key ones. The refugee crisis is becoming another important one. Serbia in particular, and Macedonia to a lesser degree, have been coping with the crisis fairly well, given their limited financial and logistical capacities. Belgrade and Skopje managed to organise registration procedures, shelter and transport. Even more importantly they have succeeded in sending a clear message to their societies that people coming from Syria and other countries are victims of war, just as they themselves were back in the 1990s, and they deserve respect and support.

Unlike some EU member states, the people of the Balkans do not oppose the influx, have not organised anti-Islam rallies or campaigned against Muslims in social media. Moreover, the Serbian government has been able to sell this success to the international public and present a new image of Serbia and Serbs. However, the government has begun to feel with time that their efforts have not been appreciated by Brussels. They have begun closing their borders to "economic immigrants" and threaten to close borders to refugees as well.

Significant EU involvement by increasing energy security accompanied by a positive message sent to the region's people could represent a strong card in the game. The Western Balkans are already part of the EU Energy Community aimed at harmonisation of the energy sector in third countries in order to extend the EU internal energy market to Southeast Europe, as well as Ukraine and Moldova. Participation in the Energy Community means that the Balkan countries can participate in a long-term process of sector liberalisation and is meant to help them address key challenges in the energy sector. The European Commission's newest energy project to form an Energy Union in order to coordinate European energy supplies creates a potential opportunity for the region to diversify and actually participate in

the Southern Gas Corridor project, mainly through the development of the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP). The proposal is ambitious, perhaps too ambitious, and aims to achieve short and medium-term results.

The weak players?

The Western Balkan countries are now trapped somewhere between the West and East, trying to exploit this entrapment as much as possible. The young and conflicted democracies are still dealing with state and peace-building processes. In this case, a long-term perspective towards the energy sector is not their priority. However, despite a lack of reliable data, it is certain there is a high energy savings potential in the region. Historically we are dealing with two independent systems – the Yugoslav one and the Albanian one, where the former was damaged during the war. The local energy sectors are highly dependent on solid fuels in electricity production which also bring catastrophic environmental effects. In Serbia and Bosnia dependency accounts for around 60–70 per cent, in Macedonia around 80 per cent, while Kosovo is 100 per cent dependent on electricity produced in one coal burning power station at Obilić.

A high dependence on gas and oil import, extremely low energy efficiency with losses of even 50 per cent in Kosovo, a lack of investments in renewables and a low level of regional integration and outdated technology are major challenges for the Balkans' energy sector. As long as the government manages to limit power cuts and secure a daily supply, energy does not represent a major issue for the common people. The lack of transparency, corruption, a complicated political system and political instability only make the situation worse.

These trends show that the Western Balkans will have to deal with increased energy use in all countries and sectors. Consumption is expected to increase by 70 per cent within the next 20 years and 100 per cent by 2050. These countries are expected to depend on solid fuels until at least 2050, mainly due to domestic lignite (brown coal) reserves in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. The level of dependency will vary due to renewable-related policies and carbon footprint prices. Given the fact the region has an extraordinary solar and hydro potential, as well as a relevant wind one, the trend could be easily shaped by foreign investors and external policy incentives. In Albania, for example, around 20 per cent of total energy consumption already comes from hydropower and almost 100 per cent of electricity comes from hydropower plants. According to the World Bank investments in the energy sector in the region by 2030 will amount to over 70 billion US dollars.

There are two key challenges that directly relate to the East-West gamble. First, the liberalisation of energy markets in the region – and hence an increase of energy tariffs – will inevitably hit Balkan societies' most vulnerable social groups and they are the ones most likely to radicalise, easily boosting anti-western attitudes. Second, the gasification of the region is likely to develop rapidly by 2020, which creates an opportunity for Eastern suppliers to increase their presence in the region and thus increase political dependency.

The gasification of the region is likely to develop rapidly by 2020, creating an opportunity for Eastern suppliers to increase their presence, and thus increase political dependency.

Without a doubt, the involvement of Russia in the Balkan energy sector is part of a wider strategy and is one of the easiest tools that Moscow can use to maintain its presence in the region. The game is not about energy though and is far more nuanced. Energy serves as a tactic to maintain relations with local policy-makers but can be easily replaced with other ties. It is one of the several tools Russia uses to enable introducing chaos to the region.

The Balkan region has traditionally been used by the West as a political laboratory for experimenting innovative solutions and testing the limits of power. As in policy-making, this tends to have disastrous results for the region. In the energy sector it can be explored in a positive way. Testing small-scale, decentralised projects such as windmill farms, waste-to-power technologies or the use of hydropower can improve the energy security of the region and the EU. More importantly it can give the Balkan states a certain sense of recognition, appreciation and empowerment.

For now, Russia is dealing out the cards in the Balkan game of poker. But the dealer is not necessarily the one who gets the strongest cards. Nevertheless, Moscow knows how to play the game, while the other players are confused about the rules and hope for luck. In the end, it seems that everyone is playing a different game and following completely different rules.

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Ukrainians in Poland: In pursuit of a better life?

JOANNA FOMINA

Ukrainians make up the largest group of migrants and foreign workers in Poland. However, because there is no effective labour market monitoring system, the real scale of irregular employment is unknown. Yet, what is known is that the majority of Ukrainian workers in Poland are undocumented and work in less than desirable conditions.

Vira, a 30-year-old graduate of customs and excise tax studies works twice a week, cleaning her friends' houses while living with her Polish husband and their seven-year-old son in one of Warsaw's suburbs. She has been registered with the unemployment office for the past five years and has never been offered a real job. The degree she obtained in 2009 is not valid in Poland without a painstaking and expensive recognition process. When she asked why there were no jobs for her, the unemployment officer acerbically explained: "We have enough Poles without jobs. They should be a priority". At least her medical insurance is being paid and she has also taken advantage of two English courses covered by the office.

She is happy to work any job just to allow herself some financial independence from her husband whom she met at a salon in Warsaw where she worked as a hair dresser. Prior to that, she ran a little shop in her hometown in Ukraine, selling clothes that were bought in Poland. Now she needs to ask her husband for every cent. While she actively seeks stable employment and has sent out many job applications, she has not received any valid offers except for one, which she turned down. The available position was that of a personal assistant, translator and in-

terpreter – but there was a catch: she was expected to accompany her potential employer on international trips, who told her of the nature of what their relationship would be while abroad.

Sleeping in a garage

Vira is from a large family in Volhynia, Ukraine. All of her nine siblings have worked abroad; her younger sister Marichka and brother Mykola are the most successful. Marichka, who recently mortgaged a flat, works for a big company as a personal assistant earning a rather handsome salary. Her knowledge of both Russian and Ukrainian is a great asset. Mykola moved to Prague where he has worked his way up from a rank and file worker to a manager at a company producing foil. Since the family lives so close to the Polish border, the siblings have all experienced working as "ants" trafficking cigarettes from Ukraine to Poland.

Two of her older brothers, Petro and Ivan, are now working in Poland picking apples for eight zlotys an hour (about 2 US dollars) without permission or a contract. They believe this is better, otherwise they likely would earn even smaller wages. Yet, there is no guarantee the employer will actually pay them the money earned. Their friends had been duped this way, with their employers refusing to pay half the promised money and threatening to report them to immigration services. If Vira's brothers are caught working without proper papers, they will face a fine of up to 5,000 zlotys as well as deportation and a ban on entry for up to three years. Despite these circumstances, they are willing to take a risk to earn a little more. They sleep in a garage on their employer's estate which has four beds, a sink and an electric stove. The toilet and a shower are in a separate shed. Petro used to earn 10 zlotys an hour working at a fruit and vegetable market repackaging goods to hide the produce's country of origin. Poles like their own plums over Turkish ones, for example. Hence, businessmen would pay for placing the fruit into the "appropriate boxes". Petro, an excellent carpenter, had worked five years for a Polish employer with a work contract, paid leave as well as accommodation and food provided by the employer. But when the employer's wife died, he closed his business.

Vira's remaining siblings work in their hometown in Ukraine, helping take care of Petro's and Ivan's children who were left behind with their unemployed mothers. Their salaries in Ukraine range between 100–200 US dollars a month, which is half that of the brothers in Poland. But at least they will receive their pensions upon reaching retirement age, unlike Petro, Ivan and most likely Vira.

People like Petro and Ivan are unaccounted for in labour migration statistics. In fact, most estimates of Poland's scale of foreign employment are unreliable. There

is no effective labour market monitoring system, and the real scale of irregular employment is unknown. Yet, statistics can still tell us a story.

How to work legally in Poland?

Labour migration policy has been somewhat liberalised recently, aiming to attract foreign employees, especially from neighbouring countries considered culturally and linguistically similar. One way of working legally in Poland is by getting a potential employer's declaration of intent to offer a job. The holder of such a declaration may work in Poland for six months without a permit. This option is only open to citizens of the six Eastern Partnership countries, plus Russia. The other option is to seek a work permit. A recent innovation was the introduction of single work and stay permits intended to streamline the process.

Ukrainians are by far the largest group of foreign workers in Poland, constituting at least 80 per cent of all registered employees from abroad. There is also steady growth in both the issuance of declarations of intent as well as work permits for Ukrainian citizens. In the first half of 2015 there were 20,092 permissions issued – twice as many as in the same period in 2012 and slightly more than during all 2012 (19,375). There is also a considerable increase in the number of declarations issued over the past several years. The number of declarations in the first half of 2015 (402,674) was slightly higher than that in all 2014 (372,946) and five times more than that number in 2013. The deepening economic crisis, devaluation of the hryvnia, military conflict and resulting army conscription have increased the supply of Ukrainian workers to Poland. The dominant group of Ukrainians employed in Poland are skilled and unskilled workers in such sectors as domestic care, agriculture, construction, transportation and food processing. Since agriculture is seasonal, the declaration of intent is the predominant form of legalisation. While the number of Ukrainian foreign workers has been increasing in Poland, so has the amount of Ukrainian professionals. In the first half of 2015, 1,000 residence and work permits were issued to Ukrainian employees in the professional, scientific and technical sectors such as architecture, public relations and accounting.

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It is pointless to indulge in elaborate calculations, since existing statistics are unreliable. First of all, the scale of unregistered workers is high, especially in the agricultural and domestic care sectors, making it difficult for state agencies to

monitor. But the number of declarations issued is also not indicative of the true scale of migration. Declarations are becoming an easy way to secure visas. Holders of visas obtained on a declaration basis may eventually travel to Poland (or another Schengen state) for a variety of purposes, including employment. Others prefer to have a visa "just in case" without ever using it. Statistics collected by the State Labour Inspection and Border Agency demonstrate only one-third of all declaration holders show up for the intended job. Another third cross the border and never reach the declared destination, while the other third never cross the border at all. This situation has arisen due to high demand and considerable difficulties in obtaining a visa via Polish consulates. Declarations can even be bought in the Ukrainian black market for the equivalent of 100 US dollars.

Moreover there are categories of documented employees who are not well reflected in the statistics available. Holders of the Pole's Card (*Karta Polaka*), a document confirming Polish ancestry, are allowed to work in Poland without any permits and may be granted long-term visas. Since 2008 about 150,000 Pole's Cards have been issued and about 90 per cent of them to Ukrainians and Belarusians. But there is no reliable information regarding what number of these cards' holders has entered the Polish labour market. Foreign language teachers and Polish university graduates do not need work permits either – they may or may not be reflected in official statistics depending on what type of residence permit they have.

Ukrainian students in Polish higher education institutions may also join the labour force. In the 2012–13 academic year 34 per cent of all foreign students were Ukrainian (9,400); this number is most likely much higher today. Student status also grants the right to work. There are no reliable statistics, but we can increasingly spot young people with "eastern accents" working in cafes and restaurants. Some of them may drop out of the university and continue with paid employment, while others will graduate and find jobs according to their qualifications in Poland or abroad.

In the 2012–13 academic year 34 per cent of all foreign students in Poland were Ukrainian; this number is most likely much higher today.

Finally, there is a group of permanent residence holders, such as Vira, who have the right to employment without limitations. In 2015 there were about 21,030 permanent residence holders with Ukrainian passports, but we do not know what percentage of them have paid employment. Vira and her husband also belong to a growing group of bi-national married couples. Every year, about 1,000 Polish men marry foreign-born women, of which 50 per cent are Ukrainian (according to the Central Statistical Office data). The number of Polish women with Ukrainian-born husbands is considerably smaller.

Employment relationships

As Vira's and her siblings' cases demonstrate, Ukrainian migrants work in a variety of labour market sectors and face a number of problems, regardless of their status. The issue of unregistered or undocumented employment is linked to a number of other problems. Investigations conducted by the State Labour Inspection Agency discovered malpractices in the cases of half the companies employing foreigners. In more than ten per cent of all investigated companies, employees worked without proper documents. The majority of them were Ukrainians.

Sectors with the highest rates of undocumented employees include building, construction, food processing and agriculture. Domestic care is not mentioned in the report, but it is expected that a considerable share of cleaners and caregivers do not have the appropriate documents required to work, even though the majority possess valid visas or residence permits. There are several reasons for this situation, including the employer's desire to earn higher profits and the number of complicated procedures – something smaller companies have been known to avoid. Sanctions to prevent illegal employment are not high enough and in some cases it might be cheaper to pay a fine as opposed to additional labour costs. At the same time, some Ukrainians prefer to work without a contract because it allows them to be more competitive if the potential employer avoids overhead costs and pays the employees a higher amount instead. They may also enjoy more flexibility by being able to change jobs if they are offered better conditions as well as hide additional sources of income from Ukrainian fiscal offices thanks to informal arrangements. Needless to say, the relationship between the employer and employee is unequal, and quite often Ukrainian employees are pressured into undocumented work by their Polish employers.

The popular assumption that Ukrainian migrants work for less is not entirely accurate. If they are employed on a regular work contract, they enjoy the same rights as their Polish counterparts, including the 1,750 zloty minimum salary. In terms of work agreements, there are so-called fee-for-task and task-specific contracts which are also given to Poles. Official statistics demonstrate a considerable difference in the types of contracts awarded: of those who received declarations in 2014, just less than 48,000 had regular work contracts, 130,000 had fee-for-task ones and more than 190,000 were given task-specific ones.

The popular assumption that Ukrainian migrants work for less is not entirely accurate.

The amount of available information regarding conditions of legal employment among employers and employees has considerably increased. There are many information sources available now, including free legal advice, Polish consulates,

The dominant group of Ukrainians employed in Poland are skilled and unskilled workers in such sectors as domestic care, agriculture, construction, transportation and food processing.

dedicated internet portals and designated public offices. On the other hand, it still remains a challenge for Ukrainian migrants without internet access to seek information, and word of mouth is not entirely reliable or accurate.

Abuse and mistreatment

In terms of relationships with employers, unregistered employees are the most vulnerable to different types of abuse and mistreatment. Since there are no contracts, it is impossible to execute any of the initially agreed conditions of employment, including the number of hours, living arrangements or salary. Quite often, employers do not pay a full salary to their undocumented workers and demand longer working hours than initially agreed upon or refrain from providing food and accommodation even if initially promised. Undocumented workers are also less likely to look for help for fear of penalties and/or deportation. Another problem is the lack of access to medical assistance. A highly publicised story of a Ukrainian undocumented worker who died of ovarian cancer because she lacked resources for proper treatment serves as a case in point. Moreover, even though migrants

need to have valid medical insurance covering emergency medical treatments in order to receive a visa, there are situations in which the employees themselves, as well as their employers, fear reporting injuries because of the possibility of sanctions for undocumented employment. In a situation where illegal employment is heavily penalised, mistreated employees are afraid to defend their rights.

Ukrainian women are vulnerable to sexual harassment and experience difficulty rejecting unwanted sexual advances from their employers. Popular stereotypes about "women from the East" being "easy" as well as a general dismissive attitude towards the problem of sexual violence in Poland do not help their cause and play into the possibility of sexual harassment. Vira's situation also demonstrates two other issues. The first is a lack of recognition of academic degrees and qualifications. In Ukraine's case, only degrees obtained before 2006 are directly recognised. Otherwise, a degree holder needs to go through a long and complicated recognition process. Hence, it is not surprising that only 1,000 work permits are issued per year to professionals and only several dozen to those in the education, health and social sectors.

Another problem faced by a relatively narrow group is the labour market's discrimination of permanently settled migrants. So-called "discrimination tests" conducted by the Institute of Public Affairs in Warsaw demonstrate that labour market conditions in Warsaw are much better than those of other cities. About five out of 100 foreigners have faced unequal treatment. In other Polish cities, this indicator can be four times greater. Private prejudice combined with a lack of knowledge of regulations may lead to unequal job competition between Polish and non-Polish permanent residents.

Loneliness and nostalgia

Problems related to separation of families in a migration context are universal, but are more acute in the case of the visa regime as Ukrainian migrants often find it difficult to secure visas for their family members. The phenomenon of "euro-orphans" present in Poland (children left alone by parents working in EU countries) is also known in the context of Ukrainian migration to Poland. A considerable share of women working in Poland already have grown-up children. Some try to bring their children to work or study. But in the minors' cases, there are additional challenges. The other parent needs to provide written consent, which is especially difficult when there are divorced or separated parents.

Broken families are not unusual, especially when a husband who left home has problems accepting a more empowered and independent wife and her new expecta-

tions towards family life and duty divisions. But there are also cases in which partners successfully trade gender roles, with husbands taking care of family and children, and wives earning their pensions abroad. Loneliness, nostalgia and psychological instability are also well-known and researched problems in a migration context. Women, who are more sociable, are more likely to rely on networks of friends or take advantage of classes and courses offered by various NGOs (e.g. Nash Vybir, Ukrainsky Dim, Perekhrestya-Zatoka Gdanska) than men.

Another recent development deserves some attention, namely the civic and political engagement of Ukrainian migrants. The EuroMaidan events have pushed out a number of migrants from Ukraine, as well as intensified the civic participation of migrants present in Poland. Marches, pickets, charity concerts and other fundraising initiatives aimed at supporting the EuroMaidan and later Ukrainian soldiers and their families as well as internally displaced people, have been organised by the Ukrainian diaspora and Ukrainian migrants, often in co-operation with Polish NGOs and individual citizens. This has contributed to the internal integration of Ukrainian migrants with the settled diaspora as well as wider society.

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The complicated story of Belarusian opposition

BARTOSZ RUTKOWSKI, MARCIN RYCHŁY AND MACIEJ ZANIEWICZ

The 2015 presidential election in Belarus once again demonstrated how weak the opposition is. Its poor results were caused not only by regular persecutions but also internal divisions. These divisions were so strong that the opposition could not manage to register one candidate to run for president or become a symbol of its unity.

Currently looking at the Belarusian opposition scene there are three outstanding groups: the movement "For Freedom", the "Tell the Truth!" campaign and a number of parties and organisations connected with Mikalai Statkevich. "For Freedom" is a non-governmental organisation founded by Alaksandr Milinkevich after the 2006 presidential elections. Back then, Milinkevich ran for president as a united opposition candidate. The main aims of Milinkevich's NGO are to defend Belarus's independence, adopt European standards in the economy and society, as well as become a future member of the European Union. Over the years "For Freedom's" members entered various alliances. In 2008 it joined the United Democratic Forces of Belarus, however co-operation lasted for just one year. "For Freedom" then allied with the newly established Belarusian Independence Bloc, but this did not last long either. Their partnership ended in 2010 when Milinkevich decided not to run for president.

"Tell the Truth!" is a social campaign launched in 2010 by Belarusian novelist and poet Uladzimir Nyaklyayew. It was meant to be a base for his presidential campaign which took place the same year. On election day, Nyaklyayew, just like the other opposition candidates, was detained by the Belarusian KGB and arrested.

"Tell the Truth!" focuses primarily on social issues such as electoral observation, the fight against unemployment and the commemoration of personalities important for Belarusian identity. Surprisingly, Nyaklyayew withdrew from the presidential race in 2015 under pressure from members of the movement he created. Soon after that, he left "Tell the Truth!" and began appearing next to Statkevich, one of the Belarusian opposition's most recognisable faces.

The search for the "one"

Apart from Nyaklyayew, another influential oppositionist active in Statkevich's circles is Anatoly Lebedko, head of the United Civil Party of Belarus (UCP). There are also two more organisations to be mentioned in that context: the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) and the civil movement "European Belarus". The Belarusian Popular Front was established in the last years of the Soviet Union. Zianon Pazniak and Ales Bialiatski are its most "popular" members. "European Belarus" appeared in 2008 and was created by Andrei Sannikov, a former deputy foreign minister of Belarus who left the regime in 1995. After the 2010 presidential election, Sannikov was also arrested and imprisoned until April 2012. Sannikov now supports Mikalai Statkevich.

Before the presidential election which took place on October 11th 2015, the Belarusian opposition again made attempts to delegate a single candidate to run for president. The opposition established "co-operation platforms" for that purpose. The so-called "Seventh" was the first of them. It gathered almost all the registered and illegal opposition organisations, from left to right, from communists to nationalists. Because of such vast ideological divisions, "Seventh" was not an effective way to discuss political issues. Another much more promising platform was the "People's Referendum" established in 2013. It consisted of key opposition groups like "Tell the Truth!", "For Freedom", BPF, the Belarusian Liberal Party of Freedom and Progress and the Belarusian Social Democratic Party "Hramada". The negotiations on who should be the next presidential candidate ended only in March 2015. Nyaklyayew and Milinkevich came out as the most probable candidates. But they were not the only ones, as other candidates were fielded as well, including Tatsiana Karatkevich, the candidate from the "Tell the Truth!" movement.

Before the presidential election on October 11th 2015 the Belarusian opposition made several attempts to delegate a single candidate to run for president.

Over time, greater tension within opposition groups emerged. Nyaklyayew, the most active and ambitious candidate was unacceptable for "For Freedom" and BPF. He was forced to cancel his campaign and gave the floor to Milinkevich who, unexpectedly, also resigned from the presidential run. Due to this situation, Nyaklyayew proposed that Mikalai Statkevich, who was still in prison, be the united opposition's candidate. Nyaklyayew's proposal was not only pragmatic but also convenient. If the opposition managed to collect 100,000 signatures supporting Statkevich as a presidential candidate, it would put Alyaksandr Lukashenka in a very uncomfortable position. The incumbent president would either have to let political prisoners free or run for president without an opposition rival. This would certainly leave a huge question mark over electoral procedures in Belarus.

Had Lukashenka decided not to release Statkevich, Nyaklyayew would have had a greater chance to become the new opposition leader. However, Nyaklyayew's offer was not accepted by all opposition parties. Milinkevich's "For Freedom", for instance, left the opposition coalition as a result. In the end, a thinner coalition decided to elect Karatkevich as the opposition candidate. She enjoyed the support of a relatively large part of the opposition until late July 2015 when Hramada's central committee refused to join Karatkevich's election campaign.

With no regard to the opposition's quarrels and negotiations, Anatoly Lebedko and Sergey Kalyakin, leader of Belarus's communists, decided to participate in the election but did not manage to collect the 100,000 required signatures. In the end, four candidates took part in the presidential election: President Lukashenka, Sergei Gaidukevich, Nikolai Ulakhovich (both Gaidukevich and Ulakhovich are commonly viewed as a " false opposition") and Karatkevich.

Turbulence in the opposition

Meanwhile, the Belarusian opposition was hit by another wave of turbulence. After leaving the "Tell the Truth!" movement, Nyaklyayew formed a new organisation whose mission was to free political prisoners. By doing so, he emptied a post in "Tell the Truth!" which in May 2015 was filled by Andrei Dmitriev. Dmitriev, a lesser known figure from the new generation, quickly appeared to be very effective, albeit controversial. In December 2010 Dmitriev was arrested by the Belarusian KGB like many other opposition activists. He was detained together with Statkevich, but Dmitriev was released in January 2011. Many suggested Dmitriev had co-operated with the Belarusian secret service. But the case did not bring much attention and was not a problem until August 2015 when "For Freedom" asked the Belarusian electoral commission to investigate whether Karatkevich really

Mikalai Statkevich

One of the opposition's most recognisable faces, Statkevich is the leader of the Belarusian Social Democratic Party. He ran for president in 2010. After that election he was arrested and imprisoned, remaining in jail until August 2015.

Uladzimir Nyaklyayew

A poet, novelist and founder of the public campaign "Tell the Truth!" In 2013 he received the "Jerzy Giedroyc Literary Award" for his novel *Soda Fountains With and Without Syrup*. In May 2015 he was replaced by Andrei Dmitriev as leader of "Tell the Truth!"

Aleksandar Milinkevich

A physician and founder of the movement "For Freedom", Milinkevich ran for president in 2006. In the same year he was awarded the Sakharov Prize by the European Parliament.

Tatsiana Karatkevich

A member of the "Tell the Truth!" campaign. In the 2015 presidential election Karatkevich came in second place, with 4.4 per cent of the vote.

Mikalai Statkevich, photo: User1963 (CC) commons.wikimedia.org; Uladzimir Nyaklyayew, photo: Katarzyna Pyrka;
Aleksandar Milinkevich, photo: Katarzyna Czerwińska (CC) Senat Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej; Tatsiana Karatkevich, photo: Marcin Rychły

managed to collect 100,000 signatures. Some opposition leaders claimed it was impossible. Their argument was based on their personal experience and problems with collecting signatures. According to them, the government may have helped Karatkevich collecting the necessary signatures.

Adding fuel to the fire was the release of political prisoners by Lukashenka in August 2015. A few days after his release, Statkevich began organising a political movement which could be seen as an alternative to the "People's referendum". It gathered all the parties that lost influence and significance between March and August 2015, including Nyaklyayew's and Lebedko's movements. On August 28th 2015, they presented their official position on the upcoming presidential elections and called supporters to boycott it. During a press event, Statkevich publicly asked why BPF did not join his new movement. The answer was "BPF is currently working for a candidate [Karatkevich – editor's note] who is backed by a traitor."

Soon after that, every major opposition leader not connected with the "Tell the Truth!" movement began to promote this narrative and Dmitriev was frequently accused of collusion with the KGB. This led to the marginalisation of Dmitriev and, of course, Tatsiana Karatkevich. BPF finally withdrew its support for Karatkevich

citing "differences in political programmes and views". This was the defining moment when the opposition's division crystallised into three groups.

The open remaining issue is whether "Tell the Truth!" worked with the KGB. According to Statkevich, Dmitriev signed KGB papers which allowed him to leave prison in January 2011. His task afterwards, as his rivals claim, was to create a mild party within the opposition which would take part in the elections and oppose a violent change in power. In exchange, he and his colleagues would be untouchable. For Lukashenka, the existence of such a party has two basic advantages. First, it would guarantee legitimacy of elections as nobody could blame the Belarusian president for making life harder for the opposition. Second, it would decrease the possibility of a "Belarusian Maidan".

Certain elements of this claim seem to be true. Karatkevich's main campaign slogan was "peaceful change". She stressed that she opposed any kind of revolution in Belarus. No doubt, her participation in the election was in Lukashenka's favour. Statements made by the head of the Central Election Commission of Belarus, Lidia Yermoshina, additionally suggest Karatkevich was on relatively good terms with the regime. When "For Freedom" asked the commission to look into Karatkevich's signature lists, the commission refused. Yermoshina even praised Karatkevich for "behaving like a civilised person". It is still unclear, however, what led to the division inside the opposition, whether Dmitriev's treason or his high political ambitions.

Divisions

The structure described above does not have the same impact on all opposition politicians. At a certain point in their political careers, all actions, ideas and interests combine and create nothing but chaos. Party leaders aside, the members of BPF, "For Freedom" or "Tell the Truth!" are idealists who want to change their country.

Young people dedicated to the idea of "rebellion" are their organisations' engines but are not so aware of these divisions. Many young activists work for several movements simultaneously. Rumours about new leaders, arrests and persecutions; this is what the Belarusian opposition's everyday life consists of. Rivalry between faction leaders and inter-party intrigues are also routine affairs. Activists at the grassroots level often do not know what is taking place at the top of their parties. It also occurs that

Rumours about new leaders, arrests, persecutions – this is what the everyday life of the opposition in Belarus is all about.

many grassroots initiatives are being conducted in co-operation between parties despite the fact their leaders may hate each other.

There is a new generation of leaders which is slowly emerging inside the Belarusian opposition. They cannot clearly identify, however, the goals they want to achieve. There are a variety of scenarios. So far, the younger generation is not in a position to take a real leadership position since people like Statkevich are still strong. Milinkevich, however, seems to be slowly leaving his place in public life and whoever will replace him will inherit a well organised movement. One possible replacement for Milinkevich is Alaksandr Lahvinets. Educated abroad, Lahvinets has gained unique experience, but lacks charisma which could be a challenge when trying to mobilise people to protest. Lahvinets is also very hostile towards another representative of the younger generation in the Belarusian opposition –Dmitriev.

It seems there is a brighter future ahead for Dmitriev than for other young Belarusian oppositionists. He is a skilful organiser and the divisions among the opposition and accusations against him paradoxically make him stronger. In our conversation with him, Dmitriev claimed two things which reflected his future plans. First, he said "Tatsiana Karatkevich is a means, not the end". Second, he stated that his "greatest fears are opposition demonstrations and repercussions from the state".

The financial aspect of the opposition's activities in Belarus is a topic that nobody likes to talk about. Yet everyone confirms that the main source of money comes from the West.

Recently, Dmitriev and Karatkevich both intensified their travels abroad. Just a few days after the election, they both had meetings in Brussels and Washington. Without a doubt, it increases the popularity of the "Tell the Truth!" movement and strengthens its position. Although Dmitriev is now head of the movement, without Karatkevich he would have no chance to get an invitation in the West.

The financial aspect of the opposition's activities in Belarus is a topic nobody likes to talk about. But everyone confirms the main source of money for opposition activities comes from the West in different forms. Western grants and subsidies are, simultaneously, the main reason the opposition is so divided. It is like a cake everyone wants a slice of, but the number of slices is limited. The problem is that none of the opposition groups try to bake another cake, but argue over who gets a larger slice of the existing cake.

Another reason for the divisions is power. Sometimes, opposition activists seem to forget their ultimate goals. Internal tensions within opposition groups result in the disappointment of many young people who would otherwise be willing to engage more in the movements. Today not many people in Belarus perceive the

opposition as a real alternative to Lukashenka's regime. Voting for the opposition in Belarus is regarded simply as a vote against Lukashenka, but not in favour of any new ideas or changes.

It is easy to get lost in the complicated world of the Belarusian opposition. It is difficult to understand complex relations between certain leaders who may accuse each other of collaboration with the regime one day and then meet and discuss it freely the next. This leads to the conclusion that Belarus's opposition is divided not because of different views and ideas but because of its particular leaders' ambitions. Perhaps this is why there is decreasing hope within Belarusian society, much of it concluding there is no real alternative to its modest but quiet life under the current regime.

Translated by Bartosz Marcinkowski

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We have to start from scratch

A conversation with Hanna Hopko, EuroMaidan activist and member of Ukrainian parliament. Interviewer: Adam Reichardt

ADAM REICHARDT: The new Ukrainian government has been in power now for over a year and some visible reforms have taken place. However, the economic situation in the country is dire, corruption still seems rampant, almost at the levels it was during Viktor Yanukovych's rule, and even some faces of the Yanukovych era are still highly visible. As someone who is very much on the inside of Ukrainian politics, how do you assess the situation? Do you believe your country is heading in the right direction?

HANNA HOPKO: Ukraine's transformation demands a systematic approach and above all patience. The changes we want to see cannot take place within one or two years. We have to remember that Ukraine was totally destroyed. The army, economy, education and health sector were all destroyed over the last 24 years. It was the kleptocratic governments with their post-Soviet mentality and oligarchs who monopolised politics and the media. The new generation has gained a small place in Ukrainian politics, but we still do not constitute a majority in government, the parliament or the presidential administration. This is a battle between two approaches: the old one, which is oriented towards money and the use of power to become richer, and the new one, whose aim is to build a new country.

However, in order to build a new Ukraine, we have to start from scratch. First, we have to clean out the system, which is infected with KGB agents, and prosecute corrupt officials. We have to build strong institutions, including an anti-corruption bureau, a new police force, an independent prosecutor's office, judges and courts. We have to get rid of the old mentality which used to be a part of the system and bring in a new one. We also have to teach the new

generation how to effectively govern the country.

I became a member of Ukraine's parliament for the first time at the age of 32. I still remember the Orange Revolution, when I was standing with posters that read "Yushchenko, Yes!". I was 22 years old at the time. I was under a lot of illusions and had a naïve understanding that after tomorrow, with the victory of the Orange Revolution and with Viktor Yushchenko as president and Yulia Tymoshenko as prime minister, my life and our country would change. Unfortunately, nothing really changed. So within ten years we got the Revolution of Dignity. This time, we realised that the transformation of the country relies on everyone taking personal responsibility for it. We cannot rely on only two people; we must rebuild the country by ourselves, alongside our international and domestic partners. This process of state-building is not particularly attractive to the media.

We also have to fight for transparency, especially in key state-owned companies like Naftohaz (the national oil and gas company – editor's note). This is the direction we need to keep heading towards, fighting corruption in all our state institutions. We started implementing this within one year. To change the country so dramatically in one or two years after the Revolution of Dignity has been incredibly challenging. Let's look at it this way: what we are doing right now is similar to building a house's foundation. I think our mission is to build this foundation and prevent the return of practices from Yanukovych's or Leonid Kuchma's regimes.

That is a very challenging mission…

Of course, we have a lot of challenges. Those who killed activists during the EuroMaidan demonstrations are not sitting in jail. A lot of corrupt people remain in power, even though the lustration law has passed. Despite this, it has helped us start cleaning up various government institutions.

Do you think that expectations are too high? More and more often, we hear voices, especially from the West, saying that reforms are not moving fast enough in Ukraine…

I can definitively say Ukrainian society's expectations are not too high. However, the speed of reform indeed may not be fast enough, especially when you take into account the system's resistance. We also need to remember that even those who are in power as a result of the Revolution, even if they put on a new mask, still come from the old system.

Yet there are some new faces, such as your own.

Yes, but we are a minority. I was never previously involved in politics, especially compared to our president, prime minister and other ministers. They know the old system well and know how to work with it. The key question is whether they are ready to fight against that system. We are trying to push them to speed up this process.

What motivated you to enter into Ukrainian politics?

The reality of our situation. During EuroMaidan, I was very active. At the end, when we realised Yanukovych was going to flee the country, we began discussing how to change the system. Not just the faces, but the whole system. We established a coalition of NGOs and think tanks and put together what we called the "Reanimation Package of Reforms"; in other words, how to bring the state back to life through anti-corruption, de-centralisation, judiciary reform, law enforcement reform, police and prosecutor reforms, economic revival, deregulation and tax reform measures. We united different NGOs and established this coalition, which still exists and functions today. I was one of the co-founders of this initiative. Within the previous parliament, after the Revolution but before the second most recent set of elections, we pushed them to accept this package. However, it was very slow because there were still communists in parliament and members of the Party of Regions. When Petro Poroshenko announced early parliamentary elections, I received proposals from almost all the democratic political parties to run. I was very hesitant; I understood that those were not real political parties with a genuine vision for the country's future. They did not have a real programme that had been developed and discussed with their members.

I have a lot of friends and colleagues abroad in the European Union who said to me: "You are obliged to run … to become an MP, you will do more good for your country this way than by being an activist." That is when I chose to run with the Samopomich party ("Self-Reliance", the political party established by Lviv mayor Andriy Sadovyi – editor's note). I was number one on their party list. My idea was to have a pure, reformist party, although we did invite representatives from the Donbas Battalion, which I was against. However, the founder of the party, Andriy Sadovyi, insisted that when the country is at war, there is a need to include battalion representatives on party lists. Nevertheless, I invited other people from our "Reanimation Package of Reforms" initiative to join, including Oksana Syroyid, who is now a vice speaker of parliament, and Yegor Sobolev, who is the head of the anti-corruption committee in parliament. I also invited Victoria Ptashnyk. She was expelled from the party, as I was recently as well…

Your expulsion was mainly due to your decision to vote for the constitutional amendment on decentralisation. Do you regret this decision? What convinced you it was the right choice at the time?

I would like to emphasise that I am not a politician. I still consider myself a civic activist. I have never been a member of any political party. Even in Samopomich, I was not a party member. Ukrainian law allows you to run on a party list without being in the party. In Ukraine, political parties are not well-respected.

People usually think an oligarch is behind a party and there is no real transparency regarding party financing. Now, following the introduction of a new law on political corruption, all parties will have to report their financing sources, how money is spent, etc. That is why I was not a member of the party. Unfortunately, after some time, Samopomich began playing political games…

In fact, you were quite critical after you left the party. You stated that Samopomich was sliding into populism and Bolshevik authoritarianism. What did you mean by that?

An example of the slide into populism would be when the party voted for a mortgage law that demanded the state to return money to a certain group of mortgage owners at the rate of eight hryvnia per US dollar (when the dollar was at 25 hryvnia). I was against this because although 40,000 people could perhaps be helped, the state budget would need to find one billion dollars to cover the price difference. Samopomich supporters, the "smart people", were against this populist policy. Nevertheless, there were some in the party who tried to package it as necessary politics, since other members of the coalition could try to use this against us.

In terms of the decentralisation law, it included elements of the Minsk obligations. Some representatives of the party said: "We do not recognise the Minsk Agreements. This is not our problem, but the president's." My response was that this was the whole country's problem. All political forces need to have a united front in the face of Russian aggression. As head of the parliament's foreign relations committee, I urged my colleagues to think about the country's interests first, even if I personally do not like the Minsk Agreement. I did not sign it, but when it was agreed upon, Ukraine was under attack from Russia and civilians were being killed. We had to adopt an approach grounded in reality.

I tried to convince colleagues from our faction that when we have a weak army and our economy depends upon international loans from the International Monetary Fund, we have to win time to become a stronger country. When this happens, we can then return to the discussion about our territory. Unfortunately, the party said I had to vote as they did and I refused. My professional understanding of the situation was apparently different to theirs. The party decided to expel me because of my decision. They even changed party rules because they did not initially garner enough votes to expel me. I am a supporter of interparty democracy and not dictatorship. I considered Samopomich to be a new party and a platform for those who are reform-oriented. That is why I did not join Bloc Petro Poroshonko or Yulia Tymoshenko, who was trying to convince me to join her party two hours after I was expelled from Samopomich.

So you are not interested in joining a different political party?

No. In fact, five MPs were expelled from Samopomich as a result of our votes and we are now all independent. We have no plans to join other parties, even though Samopomich is already trying to use our expulsion against us, saying we were bought off by either Poroshenko or others, which is not true.

We prefer to be independent because it means we can be effective and we are not obliged to pay back or provide favours. This is an important precedent in the Ukrainian parliament. We were given a choice as to what was more important; our country or the party? I chose our country.

The results of the local elections across Ukraine show there still is a visible split between the east and west of the country. How will this challenge the implementation of reforms and keep Ukraine on the path towards Europe?

Let us take a look at some examples such as Kryvyi Rih, a city near Dnipropetrovsk in eastern Ukraine. It is a city that was a stronghold for the old Party of Regions. Despite this, new political parties received several seats and won the city council elections. I participated in Hlukhiv, a city which is 15 kilometres from the Russian border. In Hlukhiv, the candidate for mayor, Michel Terestchenko, is originally from France. This year, Poroshenko granted him Ukrainian citizenship as his grandparents used to live in Hlukhiv and emigrated to France in the 20th century. He returned to Ukraine and decided to run for city mayor, which was under the grip of the oligarch Andrii Derkach, who is affiliated with the Party of Regions and the corrupt elite. We ensured the results were fair and Terestchenko won the election.

There was also a surprise in Mykolaiv. Everyone was certain the former city mayor, Ihor Diatlov, the Opposition Bloc's candidate, would win. He lost. Now, there is a new mayor from the Samopomich party. This shows there is a change taking place, even in the eastern parts of Ukraine. If local people see there is an alternative, they will support the alternative. It is a matter of time and I think all candidates, even the good ones who lost the recent campaign, have to continue, build their networks and find new people, including from the civil sector and local actors. They must invite them to take part in the future. This is a transitional period and taking this into consideration, I still think the local elections' results' are much better than what we could have expected.

Despite everything you have been through, you still seem quite optimistic about Ukraine and its future. What are the biggest challenges that still lie ahead and what can you do to convince your peers to be as optimistic as you are?

First of all, I dream the Ukrainian political elite will be united by their motivation to initiate change, not for personal benefit or popularity, but for the country. When you look at countries like Poland or Romania, when their political elite decided they wanted to be-


Photo: Bartosz Tesławski

come members of the European Union or NATO, it did not matter whether they were in power or opposition; they worked together. They did not criticise each other abroad when working towards these common goals. Of course, internally they competed and disagreed on policies, but in the international arena they spoke with one voice. The Ukrainian elite still needs to learn how to cooperate as one national team.

What makes me an optimist? Ukrainians have the survival gene. We need to understand that although Ukraine's independence is only 24 years old, as a country and a people we are much older and we have this gene that has enabled us to survive through it all. Look at the 20th century. Russia won the Second World War because of Ukraine's support. Ukraine protected Russia; it was a joint victory over fascism. In November, we commemorated the 82nd anniversary of the Holodomor famine. We survived as a people. Now, we are finally shedding our fear. This year, we finally passed a law on de-communisation. In Poland and Lithuania, when the Soviet Union collapsed, they demolished all Soviet monuments. Alongside their

economic transformation, they erased their Soviet heritage. We are finally doing the same. We are renaming streets that were named after KGB agents who killed Ukrainians during the Soviet period. We will now rename them after new heroes who protected Ukrainians in the east, fighting against Russian aggression.

The new generation, both my age and younger, do not have an attachment to the Soviet Union. It travels abroad and does not belong to any system of oligarchy. It does not focus on just becoming rich. They have a different philosophy and this is what makes me optimistic. Now is the time for a new generation; for change-makers and state builders.

Hanna Hopko is a member of the Ukrainian parliament and head of the parliament's committee on foreign affairs. She was also actively involved in the EuroMaidan Revolution.

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

Everything is normal, but at the same time, completely mad

A conversation with Peter Pomerantsev,
London-based journalist and TV producer.
Interviewer: Łukasz Wojtusik

ŁUKASZ WOJTUSIK: The title of your book is *Nothing is True and Everything is Possible*. However, when reading this book, I thought that the title could actually have been: *Everything you wanted to know about Russian Propaganda but were afraid to ask*. How do you think this reflects the story you tell in the book?

PETER POMERANSTEV: I was very lucky. If you go to an English bookshop, there are dozens of books on Russia. The only advantage I had was that I actually worked inside Russian television. It was truly a fluke. It all happened quite by accident. So, to be honest, I did not set out to write a book on propaganda. My aim was to describe Russia's new society. However, I do think that television is absolutely key to understanding this society. A Russian media professor once said that Joseph Stalin was 75 per cent violence and 25 per cent propaganda, while Vladimir Putin is 75 per cent propaganda and 25 per cent violence.

How would you describe the difference between Russian propaganda and media elsewhere in the world? For example, Russia Today (RT) seems very similar to other media brands like Fox News.

Defining the term propaganda is tricky. It is a bit like trying to define love. It means so many different things that it is almost too big to define. Propaganda can be defined as any form of mass persuasion. Getting people to wear condoms to stop AIDS is also propaganda. Hence, the idea that every state promotes propaganda is actually a real fact. There is nothing right or wrong about this. If we compare Fox News and RT, there are several similarities. They both use con-

Photo: Wojciech Kożmic

Peter Pomerantsev (left) in a discussion with Poland's former ambassador to Russia, Jerzy Bahr (right), during a meeting in Kraków in September 2015.

spiracy theories and both have a widely post-modern attitude to the idea of truth. RT basically says that there is no such thing as "objective truth"; therefore, we can lie. That is their basic logic.

However, unlike RT, Fox News is not a state broadcaster. It is not the voice of the American government, at home or abroad. It is not a foreign policy tool, whereas RT is. If the BBC were acting like RT, it would be troubling.

Do you believe Russia uses TV and the media as a weapon?

This is what Russian media is all about, the militarisation of information. The idea of an information war has nothing to do with debate, persuasion or journalism. It is about using information as part of a non-physical operation to distract, divide and conquer.

How do you reconcile your heritage, which is Russian, and your western life, as a permanent resident in the United Kingdom? Do you feel torn between the two? Like someone who went to Russia to rediscover their heritage?

To be honest, I am very western. When I was in Russia, I understood how western I truly am. When I first went to Russia, everyone assumed I was from the group of emigres who left in 1991. A lot of people left back then, so it was easy

to assume that I had a Russian childhood and then returned later. Nobody really asked. In fact, I left in 1978, when I was nine months old. I never lived in the Soviet Union.

It took me nine years to actually conceptualise what it meant to be Russian and how to operate in its social system. Most of the time that I spent in Russia was with open-minded Russians. Even so, I still could not understand what the hell was going on. Russians kept telling me "Peter, it is not like this here, don't you understand?" I had to learn that you do not follow the official system. There is a different way. Society follows these unwritten rules, whether it is about corruption or trying to do business. When I look now at other western journalists writing about Russia a little too literally, I say to myself "how come they don't get it? It doesn't work that way!" I guess it took me nine years of living there to figure that out. So in some sense, I am now more Russian.

Let's talk about some of the characters in your book. How should readers interpret them? Although they are based on real people, shouldn't we also see them as characters in an elaborate performance?

That is a very good question. A lot of the characters are (not all, but many) quite baroque and quite magical-realist; that was a conscious decision. I think the 2000's period has been like that. This is a Gogolian and Bulgakovian age in Russia. So I chose characters which highlighted that. I tried to choose characters who would show Russia's development from 2001 up to the war in Crimea.

I start with characters who had just emerged from the 1990s, like the gold digger and the gangster. However, they are already different from the 1990s, because the gold digger goes to an Academy for gold diggers whilst the gangster makes films about gangsters. So we are moving out of the 1990s, when Russia is already making sense of itself. A lot of the skill with shaping the characters for the book revolved around finding exactly where they fit. I had a lot of great stories which did not make it into the book.

When you are looking at Moscow's heroes, you present the story of Grigoriy, who is a millionaire but is also a man with no story, no history…

Grigoriy was an extreme example because I think he made this choice consciously. This is similar to how a lot of Russians are, for very practical reasons. It is interesting, when you go to a party in England, the classic question when meeting someone new is "So, what do you do?" You don't ask this question in Russia. You can't talk about peoples' pasts or what they do now, so you end up talking about abstract things like art or football. Partly because they probably did something illegal at some point, but also because they could have been quite poor. You don't talk about your past because you are afraid of what it says about you. This refers back to this element of performance, constantly trying out one thing and then another.

Is that why Moscow is the future of the world?

Well, that was a provocation in the book. I go to Moscow and I look at it as a historical freak. I come back to London and actually realise that what I have seen in Moscow is a very exaggerated and extreme version of what I see happening in the elite everywhere; from the denigration of the idea of truth to a lack of any kind of stable identities. It is a trend and you are quite right when you point to Fox News when talking about global trends. Russia takes them, as it always does, to the extreme. Moreover, it conjoins these trends with very traditional Russian values, such as a lack of human rights and imperialism.

That is why the Russian elite and super rich are very good at navigating this new world. When you go to London, you go to these parties and Russians seem at ease in this new world because it is chaos. If you go to America, you still have the sense of there being a stable system. But in London? Well, I think Russians are very much at ease here; in the same way as they are at ease in Dubai, within a sort of created reality. They are at ease in Singapore and in this kind of world which is, in a way, very pop-up. America is different. America is still old school. Americans still live in the 20th century and are very romantic. Nowadays, you do not go to New York for the future and London for the past; it is actually the other way around. You go to London for the future, with its plutocratic elite, and you go to New York for a romantic 20th century experience with a classic identity.

A Polish author named Barbara Włodarczyk wrote a book called *There is no one Russia*. She argues that there are many different meanings to Russia. Do you agree?

I completely agree. Even politically, we can ask the question, "Is it a country? A civilisation? An empire?" Russia has a very weird attitude towards its borders. Ukraine is a perfect example of this. So in that sense, even politically it is as if they cannot decide who they are. It is a reflection of the unofficial nature of the bonds inside Russian society and how deeply these bonds actually go; to the point that we cannot name them, which is what makes them so subtle.

The army is a perfect example. The military is a classic way of building a national identity. You have mandatory conscription in Russia, so everyone goes to the army and does their two years of service, like in Israel. After two years, you are meant to believe in the country and are ready to die for it. This is one of the time honoured ways of forming a clear national identity. Yet, even though there is military conscription in Russia, most people don't do it. They pay a bribe to get out of it. They pay a doctor who provides a letter that says the young man has a leg problem or an eye problem and can't go to the army. The mother goes to the head of the army, delivers the doctor's note and pays another bribe. So from the age of 18, you have

already learnt how to simulate and act. Everyone is connected by this web of corruption and simulation. This is, oddly enough, a deeper bond than just going to the army and marching for two years. This is what really binds Russian society together; this corruption and simulation. The Kremlin functions the same way, by simulating democracy and getting people to imitate that simulation through corruption, which is actually a form of glue. These things go very deep.

Life is just one big performance?

We improvise, and play along and that is what holds it all together. Ukraine's agony is also a part of this. It is trying to pull itself away, but these bonds go deep. So we will see if Ukraine can break away. It is a big question.

I still cannot imagine the tools required to live in this reality show. There are things like new speak and social realism, but these are tools of the old regime. What other kind of mechanisms are used in Russia?

I think it is more of a continuation. Some things are new, but others already existed in society. Obviously, TV plays a huge role. The economy plays a role as well. At the end of the day, despite these lovely TV and advertising companies, all of them are connected to the big state-owned energy companies. A friend of mine who runs a PR company has many employees who went out to protest against Putin. He told them "you can go and protest, but remember, we get our orders from Gazprom." The new Russian middle class, something like 80 per cent of them, actually get their money, either directly or indirectly, from state-owned energy companies.

Finally, what will your next book be about?

I have been considering contemporary war as my topic. War today is more about information and economics, and that is actually where my current book ends. It ends looking at the new kind of warfare, and I try to work out what this new kind of war means.

Peter Pomerantsev is a TV producer based in London. He is the author of the book *Nothing Is True and Everything Is Possible*.

Łukasz Wojtusik is a Polish journalist and radio reporter. He is the head of the Kraków office for the radio programme TOK FM.

With a view over the abyss

DANIEL WAŃCZYK

It is located 1,500 kilometres north of St Petersburg, 2,000 km north of Moscow and 450 km above the Arctic Circle. For 43 winter days there is no sunlight. For 62 summer days and nights the sun does not allow the tired senses a moment of rest. This is Teriberka – the edge of the world. It is located on the rocky shores of the Barents Sea and is a ghostly place, finding its balance on the edge between life and death, between being present and fading away.

Teriberka is a place where a harsh variant of nature deals cruelly with human weaknesses, whether they are psychological, economic or organisational. It is a graveyard for human civilisation. Corpses of its creation are made evident by the naked skeletons of boats. Enormous hulls of former fishing boats rest on its shores, resembling dead whales which have been washed ashore. The remnants of ports and a pier stick out of the water, the town is full of deserted houses and schools and hospitals are devoid of windows, doors, roofs, life or hope. This is the sight that greets those who arrive to this fishermen's village.

In this place, nature is triumphant. The tundra sloping down towards the sea is peppered with rocky hills. Scanning the area, one can see the bay, glacial lakes, the brownish, mysterious colour of the Barents Sea and dark, heavy clouds clearly outlined against the sky. The extreme temperature is another one of nature's triumphs here, falling to minus 30 degrees in the winter and accompanied by hurricane-force winds which not only pierce the layers of one's clothes but are also

deafening. These are the physical aspects of this wild and primitive beauty. Nevertheless, this beauty draws a person in and can sometimes even make them feel the need to stay. This is an intrinsic characteristic of Teriberka. I had no plans to live there, though I wanted to grasp its uniqueness. However, my willingness to go increased thanks to Andrey Zvyagintsev, who filmed most of his 2014 film *Leviathan* there. As a result, he awakened the town from the agony it had been experiencing for almost half a century, albeit temporarily.

The natural beauty of the Russian north draws a person in. This is an intrinsic characteristic of the place.

Fearing the worst

I wanted to go alone, by car and during the winter. This is because direct and intimate contact is possible only in one-on-one situations (the Russian north vs. me), with no witnesses. I wanted to go by car because being behind the wheel guarantees solitude and offers freedom on the road. I wanted to go during the winter because only then does the north reach its full potential and severity. In terms of the actual journey, I was dreading two factors: politics and nature. The former made me fearful because of the recent tense relations between Russia and the European Union (my journey took place between the end of February and beginning of March 2015). During this time, Russia had strengthened its military presence on its western border. Therefore, I expected a greater level of control and bureaucratic overzealousness while travelling. I was concerned about the impact nature might have on my journey because it is commonly known that sudden and unexpected snow blizzards above the Arctic Circle can make travel impossible. Snowstorms can come out of nowhere and trap a car for hours or even days. In my case, it was the very last section of my journey, between Murmansk and Teriberka, that was potentially the most troublesome as such situations are common there. Moreover, the probability of coming across another traveller was low.

In the end, none of these concerns came to pass. On the road from St Petersburg with my Polish registration and number plates, covering over 3,000 kilometres during the course of my four day round trip, I was not stopped once by traffic police. The high military presence was noticeable, but luckily none of them noticed me. The weather and road conditions were favourable. Both "Kola", the nickname for the M-18 road from St Petersburg to Murmansk, and the road to Severomorsk and then to Teriberka, were in fairly good conditions and well ploughed. Therefore, my worst fears never came true.

The very first mention of Teriberka occurred at the beginning of the 17th century when fishermen went there to fish for cod. At that time there were no permanent residents. People moved there from the White Sea only after the colonial policy of the 1870s. During the next 40 years, the town's significance gradually increased. It was here that the first weather station was built on the Murmansk coast along with a lighthouse, two Orthodox churches and a medical facility. There was also a telegraph station.

After the October Revolution, Teriberka's residents began to feel braver and more optimistic about the future. The new regime's vision of man conquering nature must have been very successful there. In 1930 the first *kolkhoz* (collective farm) was set up and named "The Red Army". It specialised in fishing for herring, cod and salmon. People had permanent jobs and felt a sense of purpose when they got up in the morning (even if the sun had not risen with them). With jobs came money, shortly followed by electricity. Soon afterwards, a cultural centre was built, then a cinema, hospital and school. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, the population exceeded 5,300. Additionally, the golden years were yet to come.

Home

After the war ended, another *kolkhoz* was built, alongside dairy and poultry facilities and an American mink breeding farm. Moreover, the local landscape was enriched by a herd of 2,000 locally-grown deer. Two fish processing facilities were opened, as well as numerous workshops dealing with repairs and maintenance for the local fishing fleet. New schools, medical facilities and a stadium were also built. The local newspaper *Teribersky Kolkhoznyk* began publishing and cargo ships would set out on trade missions down south to Africa's distant shores. This rich development lasted until the 1960s. For eight decades, the city was prosperous and the people felt alive.

For eight decades, Teriberka was a prosperous town where life flourished. The local population was on the rise and so were jobs and happiness.

Life flourished. The local population was on the rise and so were jobs and happiness, until it all suddenly ended. Svetlana, an employee at the workers' hotel where I stayed, told me about the past with a sense of tenderness. She talked about a time she still remembers and one which came alive in her imagination from the stories of her parents and grandparents.

Enormous hulls of former fishing boats rest on the shores of Teriberka, resembling dead whales which have been washed ashore.

Photo: Daniel Wańczyk

I travelled to Teriberka alone by car and in the winter. I wanted to go by car because being behind the wheel guarantees solitude and offers freedom on the road.

Photo: Daniel Wańczyk

Looking at the local graveyard in Teriberka, located slightly above the beach, one cannot help but reflect on the fact that the number of people in the graves is much larger than the number of people living in the village.

Photo: Omar Marques

"It is not easy to point to a specific reason for the downfall," she said. "No one knows exactly how it began. It was a mixture of many things." First, the administrative centre was relocated to Severomorsk. There was also a lot of competition coming from Murmansk, which was bigger and developing rapidly at that time. Then it was the construction of a hydroelectricity plant, which was blamed for destroying the salmon population. Soon, the *kolkhoz* began shutting down, swiftly followed by other farms, the fish processing facilities and repair shops. All of a sudden, there were no jobs. There was no life. The residents no longer had a reason to get up because they had nothing to live for, no happiness. People started leaving en masse.

Human degeneration above the Arctic Circle takes place swiftly. People get weaker much faster, both psychologically and physically. They get sick more quickly and die much younger. In 1970 the population of Teriberka fell to 3,150 inhabitants and by 1989 it was 2,300. Currently, it stands at just 850. This development could easily be written off, since after the fall of the Soviet Union, thousands of settlements were wiped off the Russian map. However, can statistics be any excuse here? Can they provide any reassurance?

As I mentioned earlier, I stayed at the workers' hotel. This is a newer building, erected when the fish processing plant was opened in 2005. It is the same plant where Lilya, the wife of Kola, *Leviathan*'s protagonist, worked. The plant is something of an exception to the general trend of local decline. It employs a few dozen people and is struggling to keep production going. It is not easy and during my visit, it was empty. Production has been put on hold and employees have been forced to take leave. However, Svetlana is optimistic and believes these are just temporary difficulties. She is a very sensible and down-to-earth middle-aged woman. She does not want to leave Teriberka because it is her home and she feels good here. Her choice to stay, she says, is a conscious one, not made out of necessity. She is well-travelled and has been to many places, but always returns home.

The most important thing for her, she tells me, is to be able to provide for herself and her family. She knows a few things about politics but does not focus on the international situation or Russian political priorities. She does not even ask me what I think about the war in Ukraine or the annexation of Crimea, which is currently a common topic for small talk in Russia, like the weather or one's health.

Back to the fifties

"I make an honest living", Svetlana says calmly and with a well-balanced tone of voice. "And this is the only thing I believe in. If I don't take good care of myself, no institutions will." She dreams of developing Teriberka's tourism industry, which

is not a completely unrealistic idea. Kitesurfing and its winter variant ski kiting have become very popular in the region. Even during my brief stay, several rooms were occupied by people from Moscow who are passionate about the sport. It is believed that local conditions for kitesurfing are the most favourable in Russia.

Apart from tourism, there is one other prospect which gleams on the Teriberkan horizon. Gazprom has announced plans to build a pipeline to deliver gas from the Stockman field on the Barents Sea to Teriberka, where a cargo handling port and gas compression facility will be built. From there it would then go onwards to mainland Russia and perhaps even farther afield. A road leading through the rocky hills was already being built and a building site prepared. *Polyarnaya zviezda*, a Murmansk daily newspaper, reported in August 2007 that "the whole social and cultural sphere [in Teriberka] will be rebuilt from scratch. There will be two pre-schools, three schools, thirty apartment buildings with 48 units each, a new cultural centre, an administrative complex and a sports centre. There will also be a large store, restaurants, a new heating facility and a hospital with 200 beds. What is more, over 1,000 people will be required to work in the new harbour and freight complex and 200 places will be guaranteed for the local inhabitants. Salaries will start at 20,000 roubles."

Moreover, specialist training, social security and stability will surely follow since this is not a virtual investor but Gazprom. Teriberka was meant to come full circle and return to its 1950s heyday. Its current inhabitants were supposed to experience the stories they once heard from their grandparents. What triggered their imagination and dreams was about to come true. Unfortunately, that dream did not last long. No one knows why, but the investment was suspended. Some say the geological research revealed difficulties while others note the investment was incorrectly estimated. There are also those who believe the problems are temporary and that work will soon restart. Paradise is not lost, just put on hold.

Today, the local unemployment rate in Teriberka is about 40 per cent and most jobs are related to village maintenance.

At the time of writing, the project remains half-finished, with a road leading to nowhere and a sandy beach occupying the space where the future gas terminal will be located. To commemorate these unfulfilled dreams, the beach was named "Gazprom-бич" (I have written this in Russian since it is a play on words: the Russian phonetic similarity between the English words *beach* and *bitch*).

Once again, I return to the harsh land, covered with a thick layer of snow and swept by hurricane-force winds. Today in Teriberka, there is a school, a small health centre, a library, a post office and a branch of Sbierbank. The local unemployment rate is about 40 per cent and the jobs that do exist are mostly related to village

maintenance. A bus to Murmansk runs four times per week. Speaking about the future is like reading tea leaves; it might get better or soon there might be nothing left. Almost everything in sight, all human activity, has its origins in the past. It is the past tense that dominates conversations in Teriberka. When one looks at the local graveyard, located slightly above the beach, one cannot help but have metaphysical reflections. One realises the number of people in the graveyard is much larger than the number living in the village. In any case, death and the feeling of nothingness and existential dread has already left the graveyard's grounds and spread throughout the village. Perhaps in the near future, Teriberka will exist only in our collective memory.

Translated by Justyna Chada

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Babyn Yar: A site of massacres, (dis)remembrance and instrumentalisation

YURI RADCHENKO

The name "Babyn Yar" has become a symbol of what has been called the "Holocaust by Bullets" during the last decade. In the absence of a clear, national commemoration policy this place remains the object of "competition" among different remembrances while at the same time an object of political instrumentalisation and speculation.

A century ago, Babyn Yar (also often referred to as "Babi Yar") was a vast ravine on the edge of the city of Kyiv. Today, this place is actually located in the centre of the Ukrainian capital and is now built up with roads, an underground, parks and apartment blocks. Initially the Babyn Yar hillslopes were rather steep and in some places its depth ranged from 10 to 50 metres. In the 19th and the first half of the 20th century there were several cemeteries here: Orthodox, Jewish, Karaim and Muslim. At that time, in a nearby settlement called Syrets, there were barracks with firing ranges which belonged to the Russian imperial army. After the Soviet regime came to power, a summer camp for the Red Army soldiers soon appeared.

Before the Second World War, Babyn Yar was not used as a burial site for the victims of the Holodomor famine or political repressions of the Soviet totalitar-

ian regime, as some people in Ukraine and the Ukrainian diaspora tend to think. Bodies of the victims of the Stalinist regime were buried in secret mass graves at nearby cemeteries.

Victims

Some of the Jews who lived in Kyiv before the outbreak of the Soviet-German war left the capital of Soviet Ukraine for the east. Those who remained were for the most part elderly, ill or had such relatives. On September 19th 1941 the Wehrmacht occupied Kyiv and the next day there was a large explosion at the armoury near the Kyiv Pechersk Lavra, a historic monastery. This explosion was used as a pretext for arresting the Jewish population of the city by the German military.

On September 24th, pursuant to the order of the occupation administration, the local population gathered at a building on the main street of Khreshchatyk, where the toy store used to be. The order was for the local population to turn in their hunting weapons, gas masks and radios. Suddenly around 2pm, there was an explosion. Mines, which were left behind by retreating engineers of the Red Army, began to explode, causing a huge fire in the centre of the city.

The occupants and collaborationists found a "scapegoat" in the Jews that remained in Kyiv. German SS units began making mass arrests in the city. Jews, communists, and Soviet NKVD agents were among those who were detained. Arrests were followed by executions. The slaughters were carried out in many places, possibly also near the ditches dug by the Soviet prisoners of war in Babyn Yar.

On Friday September 26th a landmark joint meeting of the military administration and the SS representatives was held where the decision was adopted that all Jews living in the city should be executed at Babyn Yar, instead of setting up a ghetto in Kyiv. This place was "convenient" as the SS-men had been using the place for mass killing of public officials for several days there. On September 28th the newly created Ukrainian Auxiliary Police circulated an announcement addressed to the Jews of the city Kyiv and its vicinity. According to the order the Jews had to assemble at a given intersection by 8am the next day, bringing along their "documents, money, valuables, warm clothing and linen". It could be understood from the text that it was not written by a Kyiv resident, as the indicated intersection of "Melnikov and Dokterivska Streets (near the cemetery)" did not exist. The street that was crossing with Melnikov Street was called Dehtiarivska. It was notified that the Jews who would not comply with the order would be shot.

The following day, on September 29th, a large group of Jews made up of men, women, children and the elderly, together with their non-Jewish spouses, headed

to the aforementioned intersection and then turned to the west, walking on Melnikov Street. There they all went through the gates to the Jewish cemetery which was being patrolled by the Ukrainian Auxiliary Police. According to the witnesses who managed to escape, the entrance to the cemetery was a "point of no return"; only truck drivers could exit from there. From the German side, *Sonderkommando 4a* and *Feldgendarmerie* soldiers were present at the site.

Executions

After walking through the gate, the massive group of people turned left and headed along Kahatna Street (today Sim'i Khokhlovykh Street). There, the Germans forced their victims to give up their documents, which were immediately burnt. The Jews then turned right, entering Laherna Street (today Dorohozhytska Street). The victims were forced to undress and leave their belongings. The men and women were then separated and marched to the ravine for execution.

Sometimes the SS-men beat the Jews before shooting them. In the evening after the execution, the Germans, together with their local assistants, scoured the area where the corpses lay and searched for any signs of life. The bodies were then covered with a thin layer of sand. The execution took place between the hours of 10am to 6pm. Those Jews who had not been killed during that time were herded in a local shed and had to wait until the next morning. The shootings then continued. According to a German report, 33,771 Jews were executed in two days – September 29–30th, 1941. Although there are no video records or photos of the execution, there are colour photos taken by a German officer at Babyn Yar several days after the shooting. These pictures show Germans going through the piles of clothing of the Nazi victims, while the Soviet prisoners of war were flattening out the graves of the murdered Jews.

One of the most interesting and most painful issues that remains in question is who performed killing of the Jews in Babyn Yar.

One of the most interesting and yet most painful issues that remain in question is who exactly performed the killing of the Jews at Babyn Yar. It is reliably known that the German *Sonderkommando* 4A, which was a subdivision of the Einsatzgruppe C, bears direct responsibility. It was assisted by the 45th Hamburg Reserve Battalion and the 303 Bremen Police Battalion as well as local interpreters and the Auxiliary Ukrainian Police. However, the issue of the Ukrainian military formations created by the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists headed by Colonel Andriy Melnyk (OUN-M) remains unclear to date.

According to Dutch researcher Karel Berkhoff, who relies on a broad evidentiary basis, at least two military formations created by the OUN-M were in Kyiv during the shooting of Jews at Babyn Yar. The first formation was the squad of Ukrainian policemen mainly from Galicia and Transcarpathia under the command of Ivan Kediulych, which arrived in the capital of Ukraine on September 24, 1941. The second one was the Bukovinian Kurin, the first group of which arrived in Kyiv "shortly after it was liberated from the Bolsheviks" according to the memories of the participants. It remains unclear whether these units were present at Babyn Yar during the shooting. And if they were there, the question of the functions they performed also remains open. It is known that Stepan Fedak, a member of the OUN-M, was one of the interpreters of the *Sondercommando* 4A. Fedak is known in history for shooting the car in which Poland's chief of state, Józef Piłsudski, and Lviv governor, Kazimierz Grabowski, were driving in Lviv on September 25th 1921. Grabowski was injured in the assassination attempt, but Piłsudski was not hurt. When Fedak joined the Einsatzgruppe C in the summer of 1941, his main duties included translating documents from Russian and Ukrainian into German and participating in arrests. According to testimonies made at post-war trials in West Germany, during the shooting at Babyn Yar, he was patrolling the road which led to the massacre site. Another point of view regarding participation of the Bukovinian Kurin in the killing of Jews at Babyn Yar is represented by Vitaliy Nakhmanovich, a historian and leading research fellow of the Museum of the History of Kyiv and executive secretary of the public committee for the commemoration of the victims of Babyn Yar. He also examined a large number of sources, mostly memories and diaries of the participants and reached the conclusion that the Bukovinian Kurin arrived in Kyiv in the first fortnight of November 1941, i.e. after the mass execution of Jews in Babyn Yar.

At the same time, there is no doubt that the auxiliary parts of the Ukrainian police were present, which was recruiting not only the OUN members, but also former Soviet prisoners of war and civilians. Members of the OUN-M, who sought to co-operate with the Germans for several months after shooting of Jews in Babyn Yar, published the newspaper *Ukrainske Slovo* (*Ukrainian Word*) in Kyiv. This newspaper contained many antisemitic articles, in which the Jews were equated with Bolshevism and accused of "oppression" of the Ukrainian people.

First monuments

There were further executions in Babyn Yar. It became the resting place for non-Jewish members of Jewish families, Soviet prisoners of war, Roma, and Red

On September 29th 1991, the 50th anniversary of the Babyn Yar executions, a monument to the Jews massacred by the Nazis was opened. The monument was Menorah-shaped and was titled respectively, indicating the Jewish ethnicity of the victims.

Army partisans. One theory is that the bodies of the OUN-M members, who came into conflict with the occupation authorities in late 1941/early 1942, and of head of Kyiv City Administration, Volodymyr Bahaziy was placed there after they were shot by the Germans. In 1943, when it was clear that the Wehrmacht would retreat from the occupied Eastern territories, the Third Reich initiated a new operation named "Sonderaktion 1005", which aimed to hide evidence of the mass murders. Those who were forced to perform this horrible task provided various numbers of the exhumed and burnt corpses, ranging from 45,000 to 120,000, most of which were Jews.

Even prior to Nazi Germany's surrender in March 1945 the Ukrainian Soviet government adopted a decree "On the construction of a memorial on the territory of Babyn Yar". However, as an antisemitic campaign was gaining momentum in the Soviet Union in the late 1940s under the motto of the "battle against cosmopolitanism", the construction never commenced. In 1950–1960s the Jewish, Karaim, Muslim and Orthodox cemeteries were destroyed at Babyn Yar. In March 1961 another tragedy occurred in this area, which took many lives and destroyed a large number of residential houses. Water and mud which had built up in the area as a result of hydraulic earthworks burst the protective embankment and flooded some blocks between Frunze and Novo-Konstantynivska Streets.

The first monument was opened only in 1976 in memory of the "Soviet citizens and prisoners of war and officers of the Soviet Army shot by the Nazis at Babyn Yar". As can be noted from its very title, the monument did not indicate the ethnicity of the majority of people massacred at that site. Later a park of culture and leisure for the Shevchenkivskyi district, covering 118 hectares, was built on the territory of Babyn Yar. In fact nothing "authentic" from Babyn Yar was left by the 1980s. During the period of Ukraine's independence, there were no largescale constructions on the territory of Babyn Yar. The only exception was the opening of Dorohozhychi metro station at the corner of Melnikov and Olena Teliha Streets in 2000.

In more than 20 years since Ukraine's independence, around 29 plaques, monuments and memorials were installed on the territory of Babyn Yar, mostly by private initiatives.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, several different monuments were erected on the territory of Babyn Yar. On the 50th anniversary of the execution, on September 29th 1991, a monument to the Jews massacred by the Nazis in Babyn Yar was opened on the site of the former Kyrylivske Orthodox cemetery, with the leaders of the young state attending the ceremony. The monument was Menorah-shaped and was titled respectively, which indicated the Jewish ethnicity of the victims. At the same time, a tablet in Russian and Yiddish was attached to the monument which was erected in 1976. Around the same time, wooden cross were installed in Babyn Yar in memory of the OUN members murdered by the Nazis in Kyiv during the war. According to the official statement of the OUN successors from Ukrainian diaspora and Ukraine, Germans killed 621 members. In more than 20 years since Ukraine's independence, around 29 plaques, monuments and memorial signs were installed on the territory of Babyn Yar, mostly by private initiatives.

History and memory

In April 2003, civic activists represented by the Ukrainian liberal intelligentsia of Ukrainian and Jewish origin consolidated to establish the Public Committee for the Commemoration the Victims of Babyn Yar (The "Babyn Yar" Committee). The co-chairs of the committee were: Semyon Gluzman, Ivan Dziuba, Myroslav Popovych, and Vitaliy Nakhmanovich as the executive secretary. The main objectives established by the "Babyn Yar" Committee included the "establishment of a state historical memorial sanctuary; a national memorial at Babyn Yar in memory

of the Holocaust victims of fascism and totalitarianism; and an opening of a state museum at Babyn Yar". As to the material effects of the committee's work, the first book of a five-volume collection of archival documents and research papers titled *Babyn Yar: Man, Authority, History* was published, dedicated to the historical topography of Babyn Yar and the overall chronology of events which took place during the Nazi occupation.

The committee also initiated a number of academic conferences. Between 2005and 2008 three nationwide conferences titled "Second World War and the Fate of the Peoples of Ukraine" took place. Funding was provided by the State Committee of Ukraine on Nationalities and Migration.

In November 2005 Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, commissioned by "Babyn Yar" Committee, conducted a nationwide survey to identify the level of awareness of the history of Babyn Yar among Ukrainian citizens. Further, a comprehensive programme for research of public opinion regarding the issue was developed which so far has not been implemented due to lack of funding. Nevertheless, on the 70th anniversary of the shooting at Babyn Yar, an international academic conference titled "Babyn Yar: history and memory of a massacre" was held in 2011.

Since 1991 Ukraine's government has not pursued a concrete or clear policy regarding the legal status of the territory of Babyn Yar.

Since 1991 Ukraine's government has not pursued a concrete or clear policy regarding the legal status of the territory of Babyn Yar. At the time of Leonid Kuchma's presidency, the cabinet of ministers of Ukraine adopted a decree in December 2001 which stated that "the complex of monuments at the site of the mass killing of civilians and prisoners of war at Babyn Yar during the Nazi occupation of 1976–2001" was to be placed on the state register of monuments of Ukraine. During Viktor Yushchenko's presidency, the territory of Babyn Yar, where the monuments had been installed, was granted the status of state historical memorial sanctuary. One of Yushchenko's last decrees issued in February 2010 was to grant national status to the sanctuary. However, all those actions were mere formalities.

Putting aside verbal rhetoric, however, little has changed even after the revolutionary events in Ukraine of the late 2013 and early 2014. Nakhmanovich noted in 2015 that only "a small portion of the territory which should be turned into the memorial complex has been transferred to the sanctuary … Site developing problems have not been resolved. The Jewish cemetery, which was actively developed already in post-war times, was not included in the sanctuary." Nakhmanovich also argues that Ukraine, unlike Poland for example in relation to the Auschwitz memorial, does not have the "state's position".

Global commemoration site

The Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance (UINR) was established during Yushchenko's presidential term. During this, the institute was primarily promoting the Holodomor events of 1932–1933 as genocide and glorifying the OUN and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). The institute hardly conducted any real research and was mostly engaged in propaganda activities. During that period there was not a single discussion held on the role of Ukrainians in the Holocaust, including participation (or non-participation) of the OUN-M members in the shooting of Jews at Babyn Yar. Under Viktor Yanukovych's presidency, the "neo-Soviet" vision of the Second World War was adopted which seemed to be inspired by the late Leonid Brezhnev. The management of the institute was replaced, and it no longer had any significance.

In 2015, Volodymyr Viatrovych, a Ukrainian social activist and historian known for his non-academic sympathies for the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (Stepan Bandera wing) was appointed as director of the UINR. Upon his appointment, the UINR began posting on its website that "along with Auschwitz, Babyn Yar in Kyiv is a global commemoration site and symbol of the Holocaust. For Ukraine, it is a site of the massacre not only of Jews and Roma, but also Soviet prisoners of war, Ukrainian nationalists, hostages and prisoners of the Syrets concentration camp, patients of the Pavlov psychiatric hospital suffering from mental disabilities and Dynamo Kyiv football players. In addition, it is also the site of the Kurenivka tragedy of 1961". In an interview Viatrovych compared the plans for the "Babyn Yar Museum" to the memorial complexes dedicated to the crimes of the Stalinist regime. "It is my belief that the institute should coordinate the work of the museums operating in the field of restoration of historical memory: the National Memorial to the Victims of Holodomor, the National Museum Prison at Lonckoho Street in Lviv, the Bykivnia Graves, Babyn Yar, the Dem'ianiv Laz historic memorials … These are the places that can tell us about the terrible crimes."

On June 26th 2015 the UINR held a consultation on the prospects of developing a Babyn Yar sanctuary. During the meeting it was decided to hold a public roundtable in September 2015. Yet, to the best of my knowledge, this roundtable never took place.

As may be noted from publications and statements made by the UINR, it is not planning to hold a painful debate on the participation of non-Jewish population of Ukraine in the Holocaust. It is difficult to say why it is so. One reason might be that the UINR is "mechanically" following the post-Soviet tradition of avoiding "difficult" problems, the study of which could allegedly "undermine" political "stability" in the country. Another reason might lie in the political views of the

director and some of the employees of the Institute. Viatrovych was known as a proponent of the OUN-B and belongs to the group that advocates for the so-called "nationalistic" model of remembrance of the Second World War. In their views, any such debate on participation in persecution and killing of the Jews by any Ukrainian political actors or military formations during the war could "undermine" the national identity and "harm" the statehood.

Most likely, it is not a political factor that matters, but bureaucratic and economic factors. Even if the management of the institute is willing to take an active part in arranging the sites of massacres, the UINR has rather limited resources and has no clear mechanisms to implement its declared solutions. At least formally, the UINR engages the following non-governmental research and educational institutions to resolve problems of commemoration sites in Babyn Yar.

"Last Witnesses"

Despite all of the above, the new Ukrainian government along with the UINR have taken part in the commemoration of the victims of Babyn Yar. On September 12th 2015 Petro Poroshenko, the president of Ukraine, issued a decree providing for a series of events dedicated to the anniversary of the tragedy. The decree states that the purpose of commemoration is "to honour the victims of the crimes committed by the Nazis during the occupation of Ukraine's capital – the civilians of all nationalities, prisoners of war, members of the Ukrainian liberation movement – and to join society's efforts to prevent a repetition of crimes against humanity in order to unite the people around the idea of creating a European state governed by the rule of law in Ukraine which is able to protect all its citizens and support Ukrainian and international civic initiatives."

Therefore the decree does not accentuate that Babyn Yar is, first and foremost, a place of a Jewish suffering. Interestingly, there is a "reference" on Babyn Yar on the UINR website which provides much information about the killing of Jews, however, it is silent about Ukrainian participation in the execution of Jews. According to the UINR, only Germans were the murderers: "During the German occupation of Kyiv in 1941–1943 Babyn Yar was the site of mass executions of Jews and Roma, Soviet prisoners of war, prisoners of the Syrets concentration camp, as well as members of the Soviet underground, [and] members of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists".

The history of Babyn Yar is also instrumentalised by pro-Russian propagandists. For example, in 2013 the Russian Historical Memory Foundation produced a documentary called "Babyn Yar. Last witnesses". This foundation is headed by

Alexander Dyukov under the guise of studying the Holocaust and other crimes committed by Nazism and different national movements in Central and Eastern Europe. Dyukov has been for many years engaged in assisting Vladimir Putin's regime in propaganda attacks against the Baltic region states and Ukraine. Dyukov and people like him do not treat the history of the Holocaust as a part of national (in this case – Russian) narrative, but only as an instrument to highlight "neo-Nazis" in these states. It is also illustrative that the documentary film was produced during the presidential term of Yanukovych when, as opposed to Yushchenko's term, the "nationalistic narrative" was suppressed and forced out from public discourse. The documentary is abundant with exaggerations, misrepresentations and open falsifications. It mentions relatively marginal publications of "revisionism" of Babyn Yar history which came out in several small newspapers in 1990s and one publication in the Internet.

The authors of the film hold the view that "everything was fine" with the commemoration of the Nazi victims during the Soviet period. Interestingly, they note that "Babyn Yar is covered with earth. There is a park there now", however they fail to mention that this was done not during Ukraine's independence, but during Soviet times. The film also mentions that, unlike in Germany, there is no punishment for the denial of the Holocaust in Ukraine. Interestingly, there is no such punishment in Russia, as well. Indeed, knowledge about the Holocaust is unfortunately low, sometimes way too low in Ukraine. There was no discussion in the country about participation of non-Jewish, non-German population in the Holocaust, unlike in Poland. Yet, were there any such discussions in Russia? Is that not the reason why Jürgen Graf, one of the "leading" Holocaust deniers, has moved from Switzerland to Moscow?

While watching the film, I personally had the impression that the authors selectively "edited" testimonies of the witnesses in order to create a negative image of "Western Ukraine" and oppose different Ukrainian regions with each other. The film suggests that only the members of the OUN from Galicia were in the police which killed the Jews. The authors of the film failed to mention that many Russians were willing to kill Jews for a piece of bread and immunity from beating and disease in the camps for the Soviet prisoners of war. The film also contains factual errors. For example, the police superintendent in Kyiv whose surname was Orlyk is represented as an active OUN member named Dmytro Myron (nicknamed "Maksym Orlyk").

Periodically various provocations take place on the territory of the massacre. For example, on the night of September 13th 2015 an unidentified person placed car tyres around the Menorah monument, poured petrol on them and set them ablaze. The fire was extinguished only due to the assistance of the guard of the

Orthodox Church which was not far from the monument. According to some records, this is already the sixth act of vandalism on the sanctuary's territory since the start of 2015. It is largely due to the fact that there is no security present at the memorial complex.

This attack was very similar to another desecration of the monument to the Holocaust victims in Kostiantynivka village of Melitopol Raion in Donetsk Oblast which occurred on the night of September 27th 2015. There, the monument was also vandalised with car tyres and fire. The similarities of such acts suggests that this was a deliberate action with the purpose to accuse the "people of the Maidan" for such acts, as car tyres were the symbol of resistance to the Yanukovych regime in the winter of 2013–2014.

Heritage

Certainly the history of commemoration of Babyn Yar from 1991 until today should not be described only as a relationship between the post-Soviet (Ukrainian) officials and the representatives of the Jewish and other communities, which put forward initiatives to install various monuments or even erect buildings. To that end, initiatives of the people who represented themselves as leaders of the Jewish communities in Ukraine are illustrative. After the collapse of the Soviet regime, dozens of organisations emerged in Ukraine declaring that they represented the Jewish population of the country. In 2002, Dr Amos Avgar, the Joint Distribution Committee country director for central, western and southern Ukraine came forward with an initiative to build the "Heritage" Jewish Community Centre on the territory of Babyn Yar. This initiative, put forward by Avgar who lacked knowledge of Russian or Ukrainian and did not know much about the situation in Ukraine at that time, was supported by many leaders of organisations naming themselves Jewish. For example, this project was endorsed by the Ukrainian businessman and president of the All-Ukrainian Jewish Congress Vadim Rabinovich, the president of the Jewish Council of Ukraine, Ilya Levitas, and the head of the Ukrainian Anti-Fascist Committee, Alexander Shlayen. This initiative was opposed by the general Ukrainian public which was represented by both Jews and Ukrainians. Particularly, the erection of "Heritage" at Babyn Yar was criticised by the head of the Association of Jewish organisations and communities (Vaad) of Ukraine, Josef Zissels, the head of the Ukrainian Centre for Holocaust Studies, Dr Anatoly Podolsky, Vitaliy Nakhmanovich and many others.

The main argument against construction was that the "Heritage" had to be erected on the territory where the Nazis had killed the Jews. This is contrary to the

laws of Judaism (the major argument against construction was that the "Heritage" was to be built on the site where the Nazis had been killing Jews, as in their view, this contravenes the laws of Judaism). Further, the suggested model of commemorating the deceased was designed to reflect only the Jewish martyrdom of Babyn Yar and, for example, did not include Gypsy or Ukrainian ones. This scandalous project gradually came to naught, however, from time to time there are appeals to construct various buildings "on the bones". In 2013 the president of the World Forum of Russian Speaking Jewry, Alexander Levin, proposed the then President Viktor Yanukovych with a project for construction of a "memorial and community centre" at Babyn Yar. It was planned that this "centre" would include an "interactive pavilion" with the scene of killing carried out in autumn of 1941 reconstructed with the help of "Hollywood special effects". In his interview, Levin stated that "The Complex, which shall include the Community centre, will be a flamboyant symbol of revival. At the very place where attempts had been made to wipe the Jews off the maps, children will learn Torah". As far as I am aware, implementation of this project was never commenced.

Translated by Olena Shynkarenko

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Turning away from the horrible past

KINGA ANNA GAJDA

Academics and research projects are still largely focused on negative places of memory, with the years 1939–1945 usually the main topic of discussion. Thus, there is still a void in regards to projects dealing with positive aspects of memory. It is slowly being filled with new voices that are pointing to the great value of promoting positive places of memory.

The UNESCO World Heritage List maintains a list of places protected around the world due to their universal, environmental and cultural value. Objects on the list are under special protection of UNESCO, which aims to prevent their destruction believing the loss of any item of cultural or natural heritage is a loss to all humanity. UNESCO tries to not only safeguard the survival of these places, but also protect knowledge regarding them and their memory. Thus, the organisation makes sure documents such as manuscripts, prints and audio-visual recordings are safeguarded and shared.

As part of the Memory of the World International Register, which has operated since 1992, a record of such documents is being kept. In 2003 UNESCO signed the Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Paris, recognising that cultural heritage is a source of cultural diversity and agreeing to ensure sustainable development and protect traditional culture and folklore. This agreement also stressed the far-reaching relationship between immaterial and material heritage.

Symbolic value

In 2007 another initiative was launched – the European Heritage Label, which is awarded to places located in the EU and recognised for their contribution to European history, including EU buildings. The first selection of places awarded with such a title was made in 2013. As assumed by the initiative's authors, this label is aimed at protecting selected places, emphasising their importance in the process of building the European community, but also recognising their European dimension. According to the European Parliament and Council of the European Union, the purpose of bestowing the label is to "stress the symbolic value of a place which played a significant role in European history and culture, or in building the Union and increasing its profile".

Overall, the European Heritage Label is awarded to cultural properties, monuments, natural and urban landscapes and other testimonies of European history. Polish academic Krzysztof Kowalski, while explaining the need for marking heritage significant to Europe, wrote that the collapse of the Eastern bloc and the gradual enlargement of the European Union brought about a stronger need for a new representation of the past. This representation should take into account the heterogeneous, multi-national and cosmopolitan heritage of Europe, while simultaneously attempting to capture its common and irreducible element.

This observation refers to the concept of *lieux de mémoire* (places of memory) coined by French historian, Pierre Nora, which describes places created to foster remembrance and create communities. While explaining his understanding of such places, Nora wrote that "memory is blind to everything except the group it unites." In this way, the historian stresses memory's social nature and identity-forming function. Thus, memorial sites are memory's first incarnation, manifesting and creating a sense of community. "They are born," Nora further explains, "with a sense that there is no spontaneous memory and that is why we must deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries and organise celebrations…"

Admittedly, collective remembrance creates collective identity. While explaining this phenomenon, another Polish researcher named Barbara Szacka wrote that "social memory includes ideas about the past, a particular group and various forms of physical commemorations". Every social group, be it micro or macro, has its own memory. Thus, in Nora's view, the purpose of *lieux de memoire* was to help a group remember and promote major events which build its sense of togetherness and collective identity. Maurice Halbwachs, a French sociologist and philosopher known for developing the concept of collective memory, also strongly stressed the social nature of memory. "It is in society," he wrote, "where a man normally acquires memories, identifies and locates them."

Photo: Grzegorz Mehring / European Solidarity Centre

The historic Gdańsk Shipyards in Poland have been recently bestowed with the new European Heritage Label.

Scholars thus argue that memory should be articulated, reproduced, duplicated and represented through language, narration, video or audio. Nora, for example, noted that places of memory can include public and private archives, banners, libraries, dictionaries, museums, diaries, celebrations and events, as well as a "purely functional space such as a school textbook, will or veteran convention".

Reminder of shared history

Such an understanding of memory sites has become an essential part of modern academic discourse. However, it is worth noting that both research projects and teaching on remembrance sites are still largely focused on negative places of memory and make the years of the Second World War the topic of their discussions. Meanwhile, there is still a large void regarding projects dealing with positive aspects of memory. It is slowly being filled with new voices pointing to the great value of promoting positive places of memory, such as those awarded with the European Heritage Label. They are presented as a reminder of Europe's shared

history, an element in the process of creating a federation aimed at ensuring peace or even highlighting a common heritage.

In 1946 at the University of Zurich, Winston Churchill gave his famous speech advocating the concept of a "United States of Europe". The statesman said that to achieve it we must all turn away from a horrible past. We must look to the future as cannot afford to drag forward the hatred and revenge created in the past. This new culture of memory, as articulated in Churchill's words, shows that remembrance is a cultural asset. Thus, the responsibility of remembering, which lies at the EU's foundations and was aimed at preventing further extermination, is undeniable. The most common memories today said to be competing with each other are those of the Holocaust, National Socialism and Stalinism. This view is shared by American historian Peter Novick, who called the Holocaust's memory one of the united Europe's founding stories. And indeed, when we analyse different activities relating to the EU's history we can notice this influence. This also explains why scholars such as Margaret Pakier and Bo Strath, in their self-edited book *A European Memory?*, claim elements of various European countries' historical events must be remembered as a warning. They include, apart from Holocaust and communism, European colonialism.

The Holocaust is recognised as the main event that led to the formation of the European Union.

The European Parliament recognises the Holocaust and socialism as the main events that led to the formation of the European federation. Their memory allows for the past to be cultivated and a common future to be built. It treats European values such as humanism, tolerance and democracy as important. It opens a wide discussion on mutual understanding and reconciliation. It also brings attention to the issue of the historical truth, one that is not afraid to commemorate European history's uncomfortable and unpleasant events. Importantly, it introduces the aspect of union building on historical facts and research.

European cultural memory

The concept of European memory has emerged relatively recently. It was in 1927 that Aby Warburg, a German art and cultural studies historian, pointed to the existence of a European cultural memory. In his review of Warburg's works, Austrian historian Ernst Gombrich claimed that Warburg's concept helped him find a panacea for the cultural amnesia that torments western civilisation. His assumption of the role of cultural symbols was close to Nora's theory.

European memory, which is an artificial creation and which *de facto* does not exist as such, is merely a synthesis of different national memories. Thus, what we like to call European remembrance appears rather as an implementation project aimed at constructing memory of the community. This community's identity should be based, as British sociologist Gerard Delanty argues, on common values. He writes: "European civilisation, the attachment to common values and principles, the increasing convergence of attitudes towards life, the awareness of having specific interests in common and the determination to take part in the construction of a united Europe all give European identity its originality and own dynamism".

Studies on positive memory should therefore be marked, to quote Robert Traba, by a "trans-local and transnational provenance". They should relate the history of European integration, aspirations for solidarity, tolerance and community spirit building. It is a memory which should be constructed. Its primary purpose is not only teaching a common history, but also building a future by promoting and celebrating Europe's values and achievements as well as preserving their memory. As pointed out by the aforementioned Halbwachs, preserving a group's identity requires having both a shared memory of the past and common thoughts about the future. Such a memory can be constructed through socialisation and education. A similar observation was made by German political scientist Gesine Schwan who stressed that memory "both for individuals and the community – [is] the basic material of what we call identity". Hence, there is an insistent need to create collective ideas about the past, stimulating knowledge and highlighting transnational historical canon.

Museum of Europe

It seems that such was the intention of the founders of the Museum of Europe. In 2004 Krzysztof Pomian stated in an interview for the Polish daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*: "It will be a museum dedicated to the history of European integration recognised as a centuries-long process. This is its peculiarity. There are museums of European history, like the German Historical Museum in Berlin which will soon open its new exhibition presenting German history within the framework of European history. In Marseilles, a museum was made regarding Mediterranean and European culture. However, there is no museum yet representing the history of European integration."

The museum's aim is to shape and disseminate information about European history and "show Europe's formation as a community in a historically and culturally *sui generis* manner". Its creators put forward some very important assump-

tions believing European history is not part of national history, but the history of a higher level of integration built on national integrations. It is the story, they argue, of the "emergence, maturation and degradation of certain levels of supranational integration, as well as interfaith, transnational, supranational and supra-ideological levels." Hence, they emphasise the process of creating unity.

A similar assumption accompanies the initiative of the European House of History. The former president of the European Parliament, Hans-Gert Pöttering, in a keynote speech delivered on February 13th 2007 said: "I would like to start developing a memorial and space devoted to a future in which the European idea will be able to continue to grow. I would like to propose the creation of the House of European History". While further elaborating on his vision, Pöttering said: "It cannot be a boring and uninteresting museum, but a place to cultivate our memory of European history and unification. It should also be open to the further development of the European identity by the European Union – from present to the future."

The aim of creating this place was to overcome nationalism, dictatorship and to further encourage the idea of living together in peace. The house is intended to mediate between the academic world and the public. The same objective was uttered during the 2011 opening of the European Parliament visitors' centre, the Parlamentarium, which presents the history of European integration as well as the functioning and role of the European Parliament and other EU institutions. A similar function was to serve the European handbook. Its creation was proposed in 2007 by German Minister of Education Annette Schavan. This idea was met with both criticism and support.

The aim of creating the House of European History was to overcome nationalism and dictatorship.

All these ideas and projects derive from the same belief in education's role to create a positive common European memory. As emphasised by the above mentioned Prutsch: "Education plays a fundamental role in gaining information about history and promoting historical consciousness, making it a key broker for any memory policy." It is therefore important to promote learning and an open-minded, conscious and critical reading of history in order to "increase awareness of Europe's diverse cultures, histories and memories, promote mutual respect, provide students with knowledge and skills necessary to assess their own local and national pasts unbiasedly in comparison and in relation to other European and global realities and thus encourage them to become active critical thinkers and participants of 'historical remembrance'".

For this purpose, Europe needs its *lieux de mémoire*, "not as mnemonic measures – says Pim de Boer – for building identity … but in order to promote under-

standing, remembrance and forgetting". Positive European memory, therefore, still appears as a vision. It has, however, already become an important and powerful tool in the pursuit of knowledge, understanding, and sense of community. *Lieux de mémoire* ceases to be a symbol of the past and becomes a social image of consciousness, a binder of community, and the image of the past in the present.

Positive European memory is still a vision.

The late Władysław Bartoszewski once wrote that "forms of remembrance should be adapted to the requirements of the 21st century, the community of the Union and the future path of the young and middle generations". A well-invested memory allows for stimulation of emotions and a "sense of relationship with those who lived here and used to walk on the same pavement, touched the same handles and doors, read the same author; with people long gone and about whom we no longer know anything. They allow the re-living of the past."

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A writer of the common people

ELŻBIETA ŻAK

Svetlana Alexievich, the winner of the 2015 Nobel Prize in Literature, addresses in her prose the sensitive issues of war and the complex relationship between the people and the state. She focuses on the tragic fate of an individual who is a victim of troubled history.

After the verdict of the Nobel Committee for Literature was announced in October 2015, stating that Belarusian writer Svetlana Alexievich was that year's award winner, many Polish commentators suggested that she was a follower of the late Ryszard Kapuściński, a Polish writer known for his prosaic reporting style. By making this reference, the commentators were stressing that Alexievich's writing style was more like narrative journalism. However, such an approach to writing prose, which is so highly valued in Poland, is not appreciated to the same extent in many other post-Soviet countries, although it should be stressed that, paradoxically, at the turn of the 21st century, there was a greater trend of non-fiction in Russia. One symbol of this was the naming of a prestigious book fair, which has been taking place in Moscow since 1999, as the "Non-fiction Book Fair". The term has since become associated with "intellectual" or "non-commercial" literature.

The fall of the Soviet censorship system, which had forbidden authors from presenting their own subjective points of view and a new desire for "the truth" which emerged in the 1990s, undoubtedly contributed the flourishing of such genres as documentary, autobiography, memoirs, journals, essays, literature portraits, notes and sketches. It also created a greater need to turn towards the readers with whom the writer has a sincere and intimate conversation, deprived of social

pathos or touching on private life. The rule was: "the readers look into themselves while reading me". Authors began to strive to be authentic, feeling they had a moral mission to do so.

Journalists don't understand writers

The role of non-fiction prose in post-Soviet countries is much more crucial than the factual message itself. It fills in gaps in one's knowledge. It can even be said that widely understood non-fiction literature exists in an ethical dimension, like the best Russian literature. It often helps to settle things, illustrate and discredit beliefs, and touch upon universal problems. Despite this non-fiction literature's sub-genre, the reportage, which in Poland has brilliant representatives and many admirers, has not become very popular. Neither has the sudden development of commercial media that took place in Russia after its systemic transformation started in 1991 increase the prestige of reporters and journalists. Instead, representatives of the media started to generate distrust and became accused of being representatives of certain interests, or economic servants who were financed by shady sources. In the post-Soviet world, which is deeply saturated with tabloid news, information that is generated by reporters has a very brief life span and is soon pushed out by another piece of news. It is also associated with the instrumental fight either in favour or against the authorities. As Alexievich says, "journalists do not understand writers".

Characteristically, Alexievich does not engage in journalism, simply stating that her genre is of the "epics". She stresses that what she has been doing for the last few decades is a documentary in the form of art, even though she finds it difficult to define what this documentary is. "It is only one person's story and one human being cannot be trusted," says Alexievich, who could be described as a collector of human stories. Hence, it is the hundreds of subjective versions of a story (which reflect human beliefs, prejudices, passions or even lies) that comprise a specific truth. Collecting them, Alexievich names her genre as a story, or an encyclopaedia of feelings, saying "My facts are feelings!"

Alexievich focuses on the tragic fate of an individual as a victim of a troubled history.

By utilising the form of documentary and reportage, Alexievich addresses the sensitive issues of war and the complex relationship between the people and the state. She focuses on the tragic fate of an individual who is a victim of a troubled history. She turns over official historic narratives, even though statements made by her protagonists lack an anti-systemic struggle. It is historical background that prevents this literature from being freed from politics. Therefore, the media that

point to the political nature of the Nobel Committee's decision to award this Belarusian writer with their prize present the mechanism of politicising both fiction and the writer herself. This also obliges her to comment on politics.

The impact of Alexievich's writing is much stronger when it is not pushed into the frames of an ideological struggle, even though literature, as the 20th century clearly revealed, can be very closely linked with politics and ideology. However, opposition to the authorities and the existing order without a doubt reinforces the social impact of the text. It delineates another role for literature, one that makes it focus on current affairs and functionality, to be useful in a given historic moment. Nevertheless, it also entails the risk of over-simplification and highlighting the banality of the message. Alexievich is aware of this and admits that documentaries are very unstable, which is why she wants to write about individuals, their souls and their tragic fates.

I let everyone scream out their truth

Being a writer for over 30 years, Alexievich has created her own writing style. She has spent many years with a cassette player and a notebook, talking to her interlocutors in such a way that they would open up and begin to trust her. In her reflections, entitled *A man is greater than the war*, inspired by the earlier book *The war does not have a woman's face*, Alexievich writes in a very illustrative way that she is slowly changing into one large ear, directed towards another human being. She is interested in the psychology of an individual, an insignificant witness and an invisible participant of history. As a result, her readers are left alone with the protagonists' words, without the author's commentary.

Alexievich is interested in the psychology of an individual, an insignificant witness and an invisible participant in the story.

Alexievich's books are not a set of reports; they are composed. What matters is the whole story that the author wishes to report on, and she presents it through a multi-voiced song of "the ancient choir". In her view, the biggest difficulty that comes with this kind of writing is breaking through the layer of banality. That is why all stories presenting the perspective of a small "ant" are carefully collected and filtered by the writer, (who is not merely a record archiver) and which are later transcribed onto paper.

Alexievich's writing method is part of the trend of oral history that developed rapidly in the West after the Second World War. However, in the post-Soviet world,

these books have taken on a novel role, which we can see in the composition of the cycle *Voices of utopia* and the sensitive topics it touches upon. They have become a unique literary and social phenomenon. As Alexievich writes, after the Soviet victory in the Second World War, everyone became quiet and too frightened to speak about their personal experiences. With the passage of time, they almost forgot how to talk about it completely. Then, a few decades later, a woman came along who took on the challenge of documenting the personal stories of masses of small participants in great historical narratives and gave them a voice and shared their experiences with the public. "I let everyone scream out their truth," says Alexievich.

The Polish writer and essayist Andrzej Stasiuk says that Alexievich's writing is characterised by her female sensitivity, which "at times makes reading indigestible". Another Polish writer and reporter known for her writing on the Holocaust, Hanna Krall, while discussing the issue of the reporter's work tackling challenging topics such as the Shoah or the war, said that the power of emotions should not exceed the ability of the recipient to absorb them. Thus, writers, Krall argues, should have mercy on their readers. This statement reminds us about the different traditions of non-fiction writing in the West, in Poland and in Russia. Moreover, it makes us realise that the differences lie not so much in the genre, but rather in the mentality of the people to whom the literature is addressed. When reading texts dealing with such difficult topics, we become overwhelmed by the intensity of the emotions contained within. As a result, we begin to wonder where the border between the literal meaning and the allusions is. We also question the ability of readers who do not necessarily have direct experience of such extreme scenarios to take on this burden. For people living in post-Soviet countries, who have been dealing with a brutal reality at various levels, it is like giving them a right to sincerely speak and transmit their emotions that were being held back for so long.

Unhappy is the country that is in need of heroes

In Alexievich's books, regardless of their sincerity and sharpness in presenting individual suffering, we notice an idealistic naivety, as well as a tendency to subject individual fate to the community and people's heroic service to the state. In her book *War does not have a woman's face*, the writer confesses that she observed a striking distrust felt by her interlocutors towards the things that are ordinary and human. In addition, her observations paint a picture that can be characterised by a person's willingness to change their lives into the ideal, "the ordinary warmth into the cold glow", or even turning their own truth into a distant illusion. In the preface to *Zinky boys*, Alexievich talks to the mothers of soldiers who were killed

Photo by Tomasz Wiech, courtesy of the Krakow Festival Office.

Svetlana Alexievich's writing method could be seen as part of the trend of oral history that developed in the West after the Second World War. However, in the post-Soviet world, these books have taken on a novel role, becoming a unique literary and social phenomenon.

in the Soviet war in Afghanistan. They protest against her book saying: "We don't need your truth; we've got our own", "I love the country for which my son died. I hate you with your truth!", "We deprive our youth of our heroic history". Alexievich shows the suffering of individuals who embrace this type of perspective.

Before the outbreak of the Second World War, in his play *The life of Galileo*, the German playwright Bertold Brecht stated that unhappy is the country that is in need of heroes. The prose of Alexievich reminds us of how irresistible this need is and how high the price is for those individuals that have to pay it. Thus, what is shocking is the combination of women's suffering which, as Alexievich presents it, is related to the loss of their children and the conviction (also visible in people's thinking) that this sacrifice was the right thing. As a result, we get a picture of realism and pain, which is contradicted by a heroic story. In the majority of the "common people's" stories that Alexievich presents in her books, we see great faith in the idea of a community, as well as in the virtues of sacrifice and the tragedy of

sacrificing human life for a greater cause. These human "ants" feel safe when they are in an anthill, where the routes and roles are clearly indicated. Alexievich does not assess those attitudes, which are so common in post-Soviet countries. She understands them. By presenting them, she tries to explain an individual's psychology: "We are a social people who experience everything in a group, both happiness and tears." That is why socialism fits with the Russian mentality. It is a society similar to a cramped dugout, one whose lack of comfort is not a topic worth discussing. The Nobel Prize winner notes "We were not simple slaves, but romantic slaves."

A great number of people's accounts presented in the book are an illustration of the author's belief that it was the affiliation and dedication to the state that turned Soviet society into a society of religion and war at the same time. The polyphonic description of the thinking of the "Soviet people", as it emerges from Alexievich's books, shows the great suffering and unhappiness of the members of society, which is so strongly attached to heroes and enemies. As the writer explains, her intention was not to frighten with awfulness but rather "collect the human spirit". Being human, she adds sadly, is very difficult. Indeed, in the Russian cultural tradition, it is suffering that speaks of human greatness and remains a constant part of the Russian mentality. However, should the measurement of this symbolic human soul be so extreme? Alexievich asks a different question: why doesn't suffering transform into freedom?

In the Russian cultural tradition, it is suffering that speaks of human greatness.

We had the past, we had the future

For readers who are deeply rooted in western civilisation, it is striking how in an awful world, people do not stand up to cruel and destructive circumstances. However, for the members of a post-Soviet society it is the description of filth, down to earth matters and the petty perspective of everyday hardships that are unacceptable, according to Alexievich's prose. In their view, these are not the right things to talk about when big ideas are being implemented. Therefore, the mixed reception to prose in post-Soviet countries, as well as the repeatedly articulated rebellion and objections towards Alexievich's books by her interlocutors, are the result of the writer's attempts to wrestle with a truth that exists "down there". Indeed, Alexievich publishes records of intimate conversations which are seen as more suitable for discussions around the dinner table. This generates protests against including them in the public debate. These reactions make us realise how big the disconnect between the private and public sphere is in post-Soviet societies.

Alexievich's books are like a cat set amongst the pigeons as they bring the topic of modern times (which to date have either been kept at bay or simply ignored) into the debate on a much wider scale. An interlocutor in *Second-hand time. The end of a red man* explains: "We had the past, we had the future, we had it all". In this reality, which for decades was mythologised and idealised, there was no place for an analysis of the "here and now", nor were there attempts to describe the processes taking place. Hence, Alexievich's portrait of Soviet civilisation is a resounding success. On the basis of hundreds of subjective records, she puts together a multi-level analysis of the people of this former empire. This polyphony creates a narrative of identity. Alexievich is undertaking the discussion on post-Soviet society at a time when there is a growing longing for the past. In the collective memory on the post-Soviet space, the common experience of the Soviet past is idealised.

The need to reflect on "ourselves" is confirmed by the fact that at the end of 2014, Russian speaking readers who took part in the prestigious "Great Book" (Большая книга) contest voted for Alexievich's *Second-hand time*, which closes a long chronicle of the *Voices of utopia*. The author skilfully deals with an issue which is very sensitive for the inhabitants of the former Soviet Union, namely the collapse of the Soviet world and the nature of the cultural change that followed. It is also not the first time that she has applied the writing method of "a collective choir", i.e. recalling the accounts of "speaking people". Once again, she takes the position of a "compassionate" individual, a member of society whom she knows well and feels close to. That is why she attempts to illustrate the way of thinking of "ordinary" people.

In the conversations presented in the book, there is a certain nostalgia for an idealised past. It is clear that many people cannot adjust to the new system of interdependencies, which generates aggression. Thus, emotional tales of past hardships prevail. These are stories of times when people experienced intense love and fear and believed in their ideals. In 1991, a turbulent transformation occurred, which brought about foreign trends, something a large number of Russians were not prepared for. It evoked a feeling of frustration and bitterness, especially towards the criminalisation of social life and the influx of a sudden wave of consumerism. Hence, Alexievich's protagonists repeatedly present a critical assessment of modern times, calling them "bloody capitalism". Objection towards this new reality goes hand-in-hand with the feeling of trauma after the collapse of the Soviet empire.

On the basis of a sharp contrast between the Soviet world, perceived as ascetic and socialist, and today's reality, characterised by rapid commercialisation and the quasi-free market, people's convictions about the greater sensitivity and warmth of others under the previous regime are reinforced. As a consequence, "humanity" is nostalgically attributed to the inhabitants of the Soviet Union. The last book

from Alexievich's *Voices of utopia* series presents different stages of the trauma experience that today's post-Soviet states are currently undergoing, as well as their difficult position. Alexievich calls for more careful judgements when it comes to people who "have an idealised consciousness", "don't understand the notion of freedom" and "are unable to make individual critical assessments". At the same time, numerous human "ants" are anxiously circling the messy anthill, searching for their beliefs and values in this new chaos.

It is to Svetlana Alexievich's credit that the totalitarian system is exposed (which has been done by numerous authors) but also that the mentality of the people shaped by the Soviet era is illustrated. Her readers are offered a wide range of arguments that help them better understand identity and problems that characterise the collective thinking of the inhabitants of the former Soviet empire.

Translated by Justyna Chada

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EASTERN CAFÉ

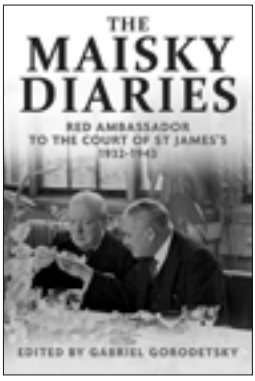
With this issue, we would like to introduce a new section which will be called "Eastern Café". It will replace the already known format of "Books & Reviews". Just as the previous section, the Eastern Café will also discuss books, films, exhibits and cultural events that are read, watched and debated across the region of Central and Eastern Europe. It will do so, however, in a slightly different manner. This debate will built around a wider discussion, like the ones in the widely admired Bohemian cafés, to relfect the ferment that is taking place within the societies and especially their elite.

Thus, our authors while writing about books, films and art will also talk about issues such as war and peace, democracy, authoritriatrism, freedom and oppression. Just like the old Vienna, Kraków or Lviv cafés, this section will give you a foretaste on what is on people's minds and what possible changes may come from disussions. Encouraging you to join this debate on the pages of *New Eastern Europe* we invite you to take these ideas to your own cafés and, by doing so, contribute to the wider discussions on issues that matter today.

On the mentality of Soviet diplomats: The case of Ivan Maisky

ŁUKASZ JASINA

The Maisky Diaries. Red Ambassador to the Court of St James. Edited by Gabriel Gorodetsky. Published by Yale University Press, New Haven-London, 2015.



Ivan Maisky is primarily well-known for one thing: the Polish-Soviet agreement concluded in the summer of 1941. It became known in history as the Sikorski-Maisky Agreement, named after the Soviet ambassador to the United Kingdom and Poland's prime minister in exile, Władysław Sikorski. Nevertheless, considering how history remembers Maisky thanks to the Poles, he would probably be quite surprised, if not a little upset. Even though Maisky had Polish-Jewish roots, which was quite common among many of the "old Bolsheviks", he was not particularly fond of Poland, as we learn in the pages of his recent memoirs, edited by the American professor, Gabriel Grodetsky.

Undoubtedly, Maisky's life should not be limited to just his signature on a well-known historical document, although his biography can certainly be used as an exit point in a debate regarding the mentality and lack of change in Soviet and Russian diplomacy. As a matter of fact, Maisky and his diplomatic activity in European capitals (especially in London), which was always carried out to the highest of standards, depicts the tradition of Russian diplomacy: cynical and professional. In other words, extremely effective.

From Liachowiecki to Maisky

Let us start with a few words about Maisky himself. Ivan Maisky was born as Jan Liachowiecki in 1884 in Kirillov, a city on the Novgorod Governorate and one of the most remote places in the Russian Empire. Even today, this town in Vologda Oblast is seen as a rather mediocre place. Maisky's father was a Polish Jew and Maisky himself would carefully hide or denounce this fact whenever it was brought up.

Maisky's father was a military physician and his relocation to this remote part of the Russian Empire was not the result of exile but, as was the case with many other Poles, a search for employment. In Kirillov, he became a part of the local intelligentsia and was well-respected. He had good relations with the local elite and tutored the children of wealthy families. At that time, the Russian province was filled with such people: doctors, teachers and social activists.

Being the son of a doctor, Maisky did not face many problems while enrolling in university in a state that had become more liberal under the last set of Romanov rulers. The young Liachowiecki started his studies at the University of St Petersburg, where he soon became involved in the Social-Democratic movement, which in turn led to his dismissal from the university. It did not take long before the Revolution of 1905 broke out. During the upheaval, Maisky, who had already started using this pseudonym, became a member of the Soviet council of deputies in the remote city of Saratov. He was already a member of the Mensheviks (a faction inside the party which gathered Lenin's opponents), a fact which was used against him in Soviet times and even levied as a threat during the Stalinist era. After the revolution, Maisky left Russia and emigrated to the West. Such a decision was not difficult at that time as anybody could leave Tsarist Russia, unlike the Soviet Union. After his departure, Maisky lived in Germany, France and the United Kingdom. In Munich he obtained a degree in economics. During his five-year stay in England he polished his English and became fascinated with the country. His return on this investment came when he joined the Soviet diplomatic corps.

After the February Revolution Maisky moved back to Russia, where surprisingly, he found a place for himself. He first worked for one of the ministries of the Provisional Government. However, after the Bolshevik takeover of power, he did not immediately join them. In the summer of 1918 he even became the minister of labour in the city of Samara, under one of the governments that had been created by the Bolsheviks' opponents. He was also nominally a member of the next government, led by Admiral Alexander Kolchak.

After that, Maisky disappeared. Official information claimed that Maisky had left for a scientific expedition to Mongolia. After a few years he returned

to Russia, this time as an employee of the new Soviet diplomatic corps.

Korney Chukovsky, a well-known writer who knew Maisky in the 1920s when the latter began his brilliant career in diplomacy, claimed that Maisky was a traitor to his former friends. During one of the show trials of former Socialist Revolutionaries, Chukovsky said that Maisky was not a "star of diplomacy" but a "former Menshevik, who, as all Mensheviks, tries to be more Bolshevik than the Bolsheviks themselves".

However, it was Stalin rather than Chukovsky who would decide Maisky's fate. As a result, he was sent to some strategically important diplomatic posts, including Japan. His most important mission would take place in 1932, when he moved to London. He stayed there for the following 11 years. His diary, written during that period, became the basis for Gorodetsky's recent publication.

Creative period

In London Maisky witnessed enormous geopolitical changes. They included, first and foremost, the "Great Purge", during which people like him, i.e. diplomats with a Bolshevik or Menshevik past, were killed off. He also witnessed the fall of his mentor, Maxim Litvinov, as well as the outbreak of the Second World War. In 1943, after the new diplomatic cadres had already been prepared, Maisky was recalled to the Soviet Union. He served for three years as Vyacheslav Molotov's deputy in the foreign ministry. However, after the post-war conferences stopped convening, his knowledge about England was no longer useful and Stalin ordered Maisky to retire, reimbursing him with a prestigious position at the Academy of Sciences. Even though Maisky was also a victim of the terror machine, it affected him to a much lesser degree than his peers. Arrested shortly before Stalin's death, he too was beaten and sentenced to a few years in prison (after admitting, under duress, that he had been conscripted to work for the British intelligence service by Winston Churchill himself), but was not executed. He left prison in 1955. Maisky spent the final 20 years of his life in peace, writing academic books and memoirs. His works on the history of Spain are an integral part of the canon of Russian historiography. Embittered by the end of his life, Maisky was eager to talk about his past. Moreover, he did so much more honestly than in the diaries edited by Gorodetsky.

Despite this, the memoires are not what one could call a classic example of the genre, written honestly and in secret. His writing from that period was an obligatory task that many Soviet diplomats were required to do. Thus, the text is full of Soviet new speech and repeated reas-

surances about the author's faith in socialism. Even in London, the ambassador was not a "lonely island"; his activities were systematically observed. The main advantage of this diary, as opposed to the memoires that Maisky wrote when he was reaching his 80s and which were published in the Soviet Union under heavy censorship, is that it was written on a daily basis.

The memoires show how Maisky forsake the ideals he proclaimed to believe in.

On the one hand, the 11 years that Maisky spent in London was an extremely creative period for him as a diplomat. In this role, he met the highest expectations of his bosses. He came to England as a representative of a state that had murdered a close cousin of the British monarch. He left it as a widely respected person who was liked by many. Maisky understood the role of ambassadorship very well and he made friends with many journalists and intellectuals, from both sides of the political spectrum. He loved British cuisine and the English lifestyle. Those who did not know the true Soviet reality underpinning his stay could even trust him. Among the victims of Maisky's psychological manipulations were people such as George Bernard Shaw and David Lloyd George; the ambassador's memoires provide clear evidence of this.

On the other hand, the memoires show how Maisky forsake the ideals he proclaimed to believe in. While visiting workers in Wales, or smiling during sessions of the League of Nations in Geneva, colleagues he had known from before were being executed back home. Cheating himself was something that Maisky mastered to perfection. He undoubtedly knew the fate of those diplomats who had been recalled to Moscow. Among the victims of the "Great Purges" were many of his closest friends. Was this double thinking? Or plain hypocrisy and determination to save his own career? Some light can be shed on this from the laconic description of Maisky's journey to Moscow in the spring of 1939. Officially, as the representative of the Soviet Union to Great Britain, he had been called for consultations with the government. However, when travelling to Moscow, he felt like a convict. His fear was not the fear of a revolutionary. It was the fear of a broken man.

A totalitarian diplomat

A few Soviet diplomats survived Stalin's purges. As well as Maisky, this number included Alexandra Kollontai and Jakov Suric. Kollontai was a symbol of

the more liberal face of Soviet reality. As a former feminist activist and party leader during the revolution, she did not have a greater chance of survival than Maisky. Maisky's diary includes an excerpt on how the Soviet diplomats (Litvinov, Maisky, Kollontai and Suric) were once sitting together in a meadow in Switzerland and talking about world peace. These former revolutionaries, who were involved in the fight for workers' rights, were seemingly behaving as they had done years before. Meanwhile, back in their homeland, the old revolutionaries were being murdered and millions of peoples' lives were being destroyed. Compared to this state, Tsarist Russia, the one that people like Kollontai had fought against, seemed quite liberal.

Maisky was a totalitarian diplomat. He was professional but loyal. When he was expected to support the League of Nations and an alliance with western states, he did so wholeheartedly. When the time came for an alliance with Germany, he approached it with equal professionalism. After June 1941, he became the best implementer of Soviet-British unity. Maisky was also a master lobbyist, someone who broke treaties that he himself had signed. He was a cosmopolitan, but also a man who betrayed himself. His revolutionary life started with his unwillingness to wear the uniform of a student at a tsarist university. When the Soviet Union started to resemble its predecessor, Maisky without hesitation put on his richly-decorated ministry of foreign affairs uniform, which bore a noticeable resemblance to the uniform of the most hated tsarist generals.

Betraying friends and a life spent in a state of permanent deception did not pay off for Maisky. In the end, he too was sent to prison.

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

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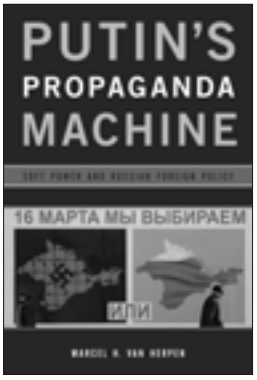
A perversion of soft power

ADAM REICHARDT

Putin's Propaganda Machine. Soft power and Russian foreign policy. By: Marcel Van Herpen. Publisher: Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, Maryland, USA, 2016.



In July 2009, a few months after the inauguration of US President Barack Obama, a letter was published to the new American president in the Polish daily *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Signed by current and former heads of states and leading intellectuals from Central and Eastern Europe, the letter was meant to be a warning to the new American administration. Despite the success of the region's rapprochement with the West, the authors felt there was still much work to be done. "20 years after the end of the Cold War," the authors wrote, "we see that Central and Eastern Europe … is a part of the world that Americans have largely stopped worrying about." They cautioned it was too premature to "assume that the region's transatlantic orientation, as well as its stability and prosperity, would last forever."

In a more ominous tone, the letter's authors added that "Russia is back as a revisionist power, pursuing a 19th-century agenda with 21st-century tactics and methods … it uses overt and covert means of economic warfare, ranging from energy blockades and politically motivated investments to bribery and media manipulation, in order to advance its interests and to challenge the transatlantic orientation of Central and Eastern Europe."

Back to business as usual?

Looking back over the past two years, it is clear that the authors were more right than they probably could have imagined in 2009. The Obama administration's Reset Policy was doomed to fail and completely dead in the water after the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014. The crisis in Ukraine, which included Russia's support (directly and indirectly) for separatists in the east of the country, was another final nail in the policy's coffin. Yet even as policymakers in the West have finally come to understand the perspective of Central and Eastern European leaders who wrote that original warning in 2009, we are already seeing signs in Western Europe that there is a desire to return to "business as usual". These include a letter from the president of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Junker, to Vladimir Putin in November 2015 outlining proposals for greater economic co-operation, as well as a proposal by Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the German foreign minister, to Cecilia Malmström, the EU's trade commissioner. In his proposal, Steinmeier asked that the EU find ways to seek energy concessions to Moscow and "respond to Russia's wishes and begin a closer exchange of views on energy and investment protection issues." The terrorist attacks in Paris and the threat of ISIS have led many Western European countries to be more lenient in their policies towards Russia, while Italy and others are already questioning arguments about sustaining EU sanctions against Russia.

There is no doubt some of the moves towards improving relations with Russia in the West are motivated by economic interests. However, some of the motivation is also ideological. In both cases the role of Russian propaganda and the information war being waged against the West are critical components. That is why Marcel H. Van Herpen's new book *Putin's Propaganda Machine: Soft power and Russian foreign policy* is a valuable resource when trying to understand the geopolitical developments between Russia and the West.

The Obama administration's reset policy was doomed to fail and became completely dead in the water after the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Van Herpen is currently the director of the Cicero Foundation, a Netherlands-based think tank which aims to discuss issues important to European integration. His latest book, published in 2016, can be viewed as a continuation of his previous ones, including *Putinism: The Slow Rise of a Radical Right Regime in*

Russia (2013) and *Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism* (2014). We should have no illusions regarding Van Herpen's views, so the reader is right to be a little sceptical when first picking up a copy of the book. However, after reading it, it is clear that Van Herpen's research puts together a convincing picture to help the reader understand the lengths to which Russia is willing to go with its propaganda abroad. Some of the cases presented in the book read like investigative reports, chillingly putting the pieces together to show how tangled some parts of the West are becoming with Kremlin interests.

Forced attraction

The real key to understanding Russia's weaponisation of information (or misinformation) is its approach to soft power. As originally conceptualised by Joseph Nye, soft power is related to the ability to attract through non-coercive means. This attractiveness emanates from a country's culture, art, music, values, ideals and policies. The characteristic of soft power, Van Herpen explains, is that there "exists no resistance needing to be overcome". What's more, soft power is not just about politics. It can be a Hollywood film, Coca-Cola, McDonalds or a German BMW. The Soviet Union also had a certain degree of soft power, as communist ideology was attractive to many in Western Europe and the developing world. However, since the fall of the Soviet Union and the "victory" of western liberal democracy over communism, this attraction had disappeared.

Putin's famous, almost clichéd, assertion that the fall of the Soviet Union was the worst geopolitical disaster of the 20th century was a subtle recognition of the strength of soft power. After the Rose Revolution in 2003 and Orange Revolution in 2004, Kremlin strategists began fearing that the attractiveness of the West, in other words its soft power, was penetrating its own backyard. Not only could Russia lose its traditional sphere of influence, which is currently happening, but western ideas could eventually make their way inside Russia and threaten the ruling regime's existence. This was when, as Van Herpen noted, the Kremlin realised that Russia itself was no longer attractive, and that if it wanted to survive it would need to find a way to use soft power to its own advantage.

However, the Kremlin's mindset is significantly different to that in the West. This may sound like an obvious statement, but to truly understand the Kremlin's approach to its relations with the world, we need to understand its perpetual belief that the world is a zero-sum game. Its approach to soft power in this case is no exception. For many in the Kremlin, the world is divisible; it is a

black-and-white reality. The West's soft power success was interpreted in Moscow as a direct result of policy aimed against Russia. Certain actors, such as NGOs, the media and spies, were considered to be agents, forcing western "values" on the region, and the only way to counteract was to respond in kind. Hence, Putin and the Kremlin, as Van Herpen argues, decided to undertake a soft-power offensive. This offensive was a "large-scale, centrally led and co-ordinated effort by the Russian state with the aim of creating the maximum possible impact". In other words, it was a perversion of soft power, as its approach actually consisted of hard power. It became a weapon in the war against the West.

Propaganda with a 21st century feel

This perversion was manifested in many ways. In the realm of media, the international news channel RT (formerly Russia Today) is probably the most visible. Its production mimics 24 hour television news channels in the West, such as CNN or the BBC. However, unlike those channels, RT does not adhere to journalistic standards and ethics. It is a classic approach to propaganda with a 21st century feel. Yet the perversion of soft power does not end there. The Kremlin employs "lobbyists" in order to promote its image and interests abroad. In some cases this is by directly hiring lobbying firms, such was the case with Henry Kissinger, or by using "useful idiots", who appear in the media to promote Kremlin arguments on a given situation or topic.

Van Herpen also notes the purchasing of foreign media, such as the case of *France Soir* by Alexander Pugachev, son of wealthy Russian oligarch Sergey Pugachev. Pugachev's primary aim was to create a paper promoting both the Kremlin and the far-right in France. Ultimately, the project failed in 2012. However, the Kremlin has since decided to take a more direct approach by providing financing for far-right parties, such as Front National in France or the Eurosceptic Alternative for Germany (AfD). These investments are paying dividends; Front National took first place in the first round of the regional elections in December 2015 (though losing in the second round).

Another tool in the Kremlin's soft power arsenal is the Orthodox church. Van Herpen points out that the Russian Orthodox Church is not independent and is closely linked to the Kremlin. The aim of church activities is to put a "spiritual" face on Russia's foreign policy. This is especially evident when looking at the church's activities in the United Nations Human Rights Council, where the Russian Orthodox Church repeatedly tries to link human rights with "traditional Orthodox" values and argues against the universality of human rights. In 2008, Moscow Patriarch Kirill out-

right criticised the behaviour of some countries (here we can read, "the West") "who consider their own system of human rights implementation to be universal … they seek to impose their own standards on other nations or become the only judge in the matter of human rights." The Russian Orthodox Church has also become an influential institution, especially in post-Soviet countries. The role the church played during the EuroMaidan Revolution in Ukraine illustrated its dependence on the Kremlin, pushing many Ukrainians away from it and towards the unrecognised Kyiv Patriarchate. The Russian Church also plays a significant role in Georgia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. These have significant impacts on people's attitudes towards Russia and promotes, even if only indirectly, sympathy towards Putin's neo-imperialistic ideology.

Power of ideas

The role "soft power" has played in the 21st century is no more diminished than it was during the Cold War. In fact, with the rise of social media and new technologies, soft power's role has actually increased in many ways. Information flow is instantaneous and works only when its power is spread organically. It is here where the Kremlin fails to see the true meaning behind soft power: it is a power of its own; it cannot be controlled or manipulated. It is not a weapon and it is not used in a zero-sum game. Despite all the manipulations, lies and propaganda, the power of ideas and attraction cannot be fully suppressed.

With the rise of social media the role of soft power has actually increased.

We can only hope that in the end, the Kremlin's perversion of soft power fails. As Van Herpen writes, Russia's efforts are "constrained by the reality on the ground … People may be duped by state-sponsored propaganda, but not indefinitely, no matter how cleverly packaged. Moscow's manipulation of 'soft power' cannot circumvent the fact that the essence of soft power is its power of attraction." If the Kremlin continues to act as an aggressive, revisionist power, bent on breaking international law and subjugating its neighbours, it may in the end have to learn the hard lesson of true soft power.

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

The inception of fanaticism

DOMINIK WILCZEWSKI

Une histoire de fou (*Don't tell me the boy was mad*).
A film directed by Robert Guédiguian. France, 2015.

Robert Guédiguian, a French film director, screenwriter and producer of Armenian descent, has been enjoying respect and recognition for his work both in France and internationally. As a politically engaged artist, he used to be a member of the French communist party. Today he still supports the left and it is clear Guédiguian does not restrain from political themes. He directed *The Last Mitterand* (*Le Promeneur du Champ de Mars*) dedicated to the final years of François Mitterrand, the French president between 1981 and 1995. The main hero of another film, *The Army of Crime* (*L'Armée du crime*), was Missak Manouchian, an Armenian Genocide survivor and communist who fought against the Nazis with the French Resistance.

In his most recent movie, *Don't tell me the boy was mad* (*Une histoire de fou*), Guédiguian returns to the issue of the Armenian Genocide, which took place one hundred years ago in the Ottoman Empire. Today, most countries, with the exception of Turkey, recognise these tragic events as genocide. Yet, the film is about something else. It shows the far-reaching consequences of denying such crimes as genocide, as well as how idealism can quickly turn into fanaticism. The key part of the plot takes place in the 1970s and 80s. Aram, the main character, is an Armenian-French boy living in Marseille growing up in a family of genocide survi-

vors. Aram, disappointed with the tame positions the Armenian diaspora has towards the genocide, rebels against his parents and joins the radical Armenian movement. Once involved, he takes part in an assassination attempt against the Turkish consul's life. As a result, a young Frenchman named Gilles becomes severely injured. Gilles cannot accept his disability and seeks to find the man who nearly killed him.

The film *Don't tell me the boy was mad*, was inspired by the true story of José Antonio Gurriarán, a Spanish journalist who was wounded in a bombing which in 1980 in Madrid.

The French director, while making *Don't tell me the boy was mad*, was inspired by the story of José Antonio Gurriarán, a Spanish journalist who was accidentally wounded in a bombing which took place in 1980 in Madrid. The responsibility for the attack was claimed by the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA), a Marxist militant organisation that operated between the 1970s and 90s. During that period ASALA targeted numerous Turkish diplomats in the West trying to raise attention about the Armenian Genocide and force the Turkish government to admit Turkey's guilt in the matter. ASALA's main base was located in Lebanon where it fought in that country's civil war (the US Department of State considered it a terrorist organisation). Gurriarán was so interested in ASALA's goals he managed to arrange a meeting with some of its members. The outcome of the meeting was described in his book *La Bomba*. Interestingly, *La Bomba* supported ASALA's key aims and the Spanish journalist himself became an important supporter of the Armenian cause.

Members of ASALA perceived themselves as inheritors of Armenian revolutionaries who, after the First World War, launched an operation called "Nemesis". This operation was a series of attacks against former high officials of the Ottoman Empire who were responsible for crimes against Armenians. The prologue to Guédiguian's film is a story about the most spectacular attack which occurred on March 15th 1921 in Berlin. That day in the German capital, Soghomon Tehlirian, a revolutionary Armenian, assassinated former Ottoman interior minister Talaat Pasha. Pasha was one of the triumvirate known as the "Three Pashas", together with Enver and Djemal. They were the de facto rulers of the Ottoman Empire during its final years.

Talaat Pasha was shot dead in broad daylight in the eyes of many witnesses. Tehlirian did not resist and voluntarily surrendered. In court he confirmed that he killed Pasha, but he did not consider himself guilty. For Tehlirian, it was a sim-

ple act of justice, as all his family died in the genocide. The trial was also a big event in the newly established Weimar Republic. In Berlin, post-war memories of its alliance with Turkey were still fresh in German thinking and the trial was symbolically also against a Germany that did nothing to prevent the genocide. In the end, a jury expressed sympathy for Tehlirian's motives and found him not guilty. For Armenians around the world, he became a national hero.

The attacks however did not change Turkey's position, even though they may have shocked public opinion. Neither did they influence relations between Turkey and other states. As a result, the Armenian diaspora abandoned terrorism and turned towards political activities. But these attempts failed as well since global superpowers did not want to harm their relations with Ankara. More than 50 years since the assassination of Talaat Pasha, some Armenians decided to return to the path of terror. The most radical Armenians were mostly children or grandchildren of the genocide's victims, as well as survivors. This is why, thanks in part to the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), ASALA was established in 1975 in Lebanon.

In *Don't tell me the boy was mad*, Aram's family represents the various attitudes of different generations of Armenians living abroad. Aram's grandmother, a genocide survivor, represents the generation of the last living witnesses to the tragic events. She keeps the memories of the genocide alive, as well as a deep hatred towards Turks. The younger generation, Aram's parents, were forced to struggle with daily life in a foreign country. For them, the memory of the genocide was more like an intimate ritual; they come back to it in their prayers in the Armenian church or at the graveyard. Aram's generation is uncompromising. Rebels and insurgents like Che Guevara, Yasser Arafat and also Soghomon Tehlirian have become their role models.

In the film, Guédiguian convincingly presents the inception of fanaticism and the very specific moment in Europe's history when the strength of terrorist groups like the PLO, ETA and IRA was at its peak. It was a time when young people wanted to change the world through whatever means. The memory of genocide, the silence of the world, a conclusion that politics is more important than morality and contempt for the Armenian diaspora's inaction; these are the factors

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which pushed Aram to join the violent organisation and fight. Although Aram takes an active part in combat and even travels to Lebanon, the scale of brutality and accidental casualties scare him. He subordinates to the commanders' orders but his doubts grow.

Internal arguments within ASALA (in fact, the director clearly refers to ASALA but this name is never mentioned in the movie) that were shown in Guédiguian's film using Aram's example were authentic. Not all of ASALA's members supported bloody attacks that killed Turkish diplomats and innocent random civilians. The Orly Airport attack in 1983, where eight people were killed and 55 wounded, was a spectacular attack, but it also led to the movement's disintegration. After Israeli military intervention in Lebanon, ASALA lost the PLO's support. By the end of the 1980s, ASALA's activities died; even if some like Monte Melkonian continued to fight (he died in Karabakh in 1993).

As far as the movie's main character is concerned, Aram embodies the young Armenian diaspora's attitudes. The wounded French Gilles, on the other hand, represents most European societies, unaware and indifferent to Armenian sorrows. Gilles, trying to figure out the causes behind what happened, repeats the steps made by the Spanish journalist. He visits Aram's family and goes to Lebanon to meet with his would-be assassin. Gilles simultaneously learns about Armenian history and becomes persuaded to the Armenian cause. Certainly, he would never have taken this path had it not been for the attack and his injuries. The question is: did the attackers get what they wanted? Was it a conclusion made by the director?

There are certain points in the movie that make it even more difficult to understand Guédiguian's intensions. The characters are too one-dimensional, and not all the actors perform this trait equally well. Some parts of the film seem unnecessary, like Aram's affair with his female "brother in arm". What is disappointing is Grégoire Leprince-Ringuet's portrayal as Gilles, and Syrus Shahidi as Aram. Their unnatural performances and lack of charisma is striking since their roles should be the movie's driving force.

Sadly, the main characters too often use slogans in their conversations. It is rather surprising, having the political engagement of Robert Guédiguian in mind. What is more, critics accused him of justifying terrorism, and it was not a groundless accusation. The director may not be openly supportive of terrorists, but has not condemned brutal actions and attacks. For him, radicals like Aram are somewhat lost young people who are pushed to brutal action by the "international public opinion's" hypocrisy. It is a controversial claim but relatively popular these days.

Using the example of Armenian terrorists, Guédiguian shows the dilemmas which are predominantly present in oppressed groups and societies. These groups often fight for their freedom or international recognition, but the same

problem always bounces back – does the end justify the means? What should prevail in politics: morality or effectiveness? What is the best way to fight for an idea: negotiations, political participation or combat?

Guédiguian had a chance to create an important and great film dealing with these big questions. Yet, the poverty of the screenplay, shallowness of the main characters and a poorly chosen cast all leads to the conclusion that this chance was somewhat wasted. Nevertheless, Guédiguian's movie is still an important voice in the discussion on the roots of hate, violence and fanaticism.

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