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The City of Gdańsk
www.gdansk.pl

A city with over a thousand years of history, Gdańsk has been a melting pot of cultures and ethnic groups. The air of tolerance and wealth built on trade has enabled culture, science, and the Arts to flourish in the city for centuries. Today, Gdańsk remains a key meeting place and major tourist attraction in Poland. While the city boasts historic sites of enchanting beauty, it also has a major historic and social importance. In addition to its 1000-year history, the city is the place where the Second World War broke out as well as the birthplace of Solidarność, the Solidarity movement, which led to the fall of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe.

The European Solidarity Centre
www.ecs.gda.pl

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

The Jan Nowak-Jeziorański College of Eastern Europe
www.kew.org.pl

The College of Eastern Europe is a non-profit, non-governmental foundation founded on February 9th 2001 by Jan Nowak-Jeziorański, a former head of the Polish section of Radio Free Europe and a democratic activist. The foundation deals with cooperation between the nations of Central and Eastern Europe. The aims if its charters are to carry out educational, cultural and publishing activities, and to develop programmes which enhance the transformation in the countries of Eastern Europe. The organisation has its headquarters in Wrocław, Poland, a city in western Poland, perfectly situated in the centre of Europe and with a deep understanding of both Western and Eastern Europe.
Dear Reader,

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Soviet Union, an event that Vladimir Putin has dubbed the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century. As a result of the Kremlin’s actions our region has witnessed in the 21st century a rearmed Russia, one that clearly challenges the post-Cold War liberal order. This new geopolitical situation has called into question previously held convictions, namely whether or not the NATO Alliance is truly ready and willing to defend its eastern flank and deter a hostile Russia. As NATO prepares to address this issue in Warsaw in July 2016, our authors have begun the debate on the pages of this magazine focusing on the current state of NATO’s eastern flank, goals planned for the summit and the role Russia plays in the region today.

The collapse of communism has also taught us that power is more than brute force. That is why in this issue we look into the state of civil society in Eastern Europe – a sector that continuously needs support from western partners. Our exclusive survey of civil society organisations based in Eastern Europe shows that the NGO sector is growing and independent, but lacks assistance to build capacity. A series of texts and interviews illustrates these challenges further by highlighting the specific situation in countries such as Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova and Azerbaijan. The conclusion of this section calls attention to the need of not only confronting revanchism with deterrence, but also focus on the social-economic aspect of state transformation, in other words winning the hearts and minds.

Lastly, we are pleased to announce that one of our co-publishers, the European Solidarity Centre in Gdańsk, has been awarded the prestigious Council of Europe Museum Prize for 2016. We invite you all to visit this unique cultural institution dedicated to promoting freedom and solidarity.

Speaking of solidarity, we would to thank you all for your continued support. As many of our readers know, we have been facing financial difficulties with a decrease in funding for our project. But thanks to the mobilisation of hundreds of our readers, we were able to successfully appeal the most recent funding decision. The support we will receive is still significantly lower than expected, but it is enough to maintain the magazine for 2016. In this place, we would also like to express special gratitude to the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life and Culture for its generous grant that our magazine received this year.

For those of you who are willing to further support our efforts, please consider a donation online at: www.neweasterneurope.eu/donate

The Editors
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Who will succeed Vladimir Putin?
Marcel H. Van Herpen

Is it too early to start speculating about the next Russian leader after Vladimir Putin? Or perhaps Putin himself is starting down this path. After nearly 16 years in power there have been some recent rumours which indicate that a search for Putin’s successor is currently taking place.

Is the West doomed to repeat its mistakes with Russia?
Wojciech Jakóbik

In search of fresh air
Paweł Pieniążek

Several hundred Russians have immigrated to Ukraine since the EuroMaidan Revolution in 2014. Many of them are political activists who do not want to live under the Putin regime. However, their status in Ukraine is also uncertain.

Wildest dreams in Croatia
Blythe McGarvie

Interviews

Putin is not a grand tactician, he is an opportunist
An interview with George Soroka

“Putin talks a great deal about a multipolar world. He certainly sees himself and Russia at the head of an emerging Eurasian community, a link between Europe, which he is increasingly disillusioned by, and an economically vibrant and dynamic Asia.”

Eastern Café

Ukraine’s ghosts
Bartosz Marcinkowski

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Marta Studenna-Skrukwa

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Dorota Sieroń-Galusek

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People, Ideas, Inspiration

The power of humbleness
Bartosz Marcinkowski
The West needs to stop pretending that it is strategically blind. There is no other option than to defend its vision of the world, or at least shape the post-western world according to the basic tenets of the liberal order. A good place to start is by putting Eastern Europe back on the Transatlantic agenda.

In 1939 French politician Marcel Déat wrote an article entitled “Mourir pour Dantzig?” (“Why Die for Danzig?”), in which he argued that France should avoid war with Germany if the latter seized Poland. This publication was not just an expression of Western European appeasement and deep reticence to enter another military conflict. It symbolised a readiness to forswear European values.

Today, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, as well as Russia’s belligerent foreign policy, leads us to ask similar questions. In fact, the political faith of Central and Eastern Europe will depend on how we respond to them. Is Europe ready to stand behind the international order which it designed, together with the United States, after the Second World War? Are Europeans able and willing to defend major diplomatic agreements such as the 1975 Helsinki Accords or the 1990 Paris Charter, which are the foundations of the European vision of the world? In short, is Europe ready to “mourir pour Helsinki?”

The 2016 liberal world order

After the Second World War, the US took the mantle of global leadership from Europe. Washington insisted on dismantling the European empires in the name
of self-determination embarked on programmatic efforts to spread democracy. Europe and the US designed, underwrote, maintained and enforced a globalised world order. It embraced liberal democracy, self-determination, industrial capitalism, secular nationalism, open trade, human rights and the rule of law. In order to defend those values, the US and Europe institutionalised a liberal, multilateral order. This is how NATO, the European Union, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the Council of Europe (CoE) and the Community of Democracies came to life and became pillars of the western vision of the world.

Over the last decade, the West envisioned a steady transformation of the liberal world order based on its greatest strengths: it established co-operative architecture and a highly developed capacity for dialogue across deep political divides. The US and Europe knew that western-dominated structures must adapt in order to remain relevant. The concept of modern partnership emerged, which was based on the assumption that the establishment of a “co-operative architecture” would lead to a multi-partner world (rather than a multi-polar world).

Today, many claim that the West’s material and ideological hegemony appears to be coming to an end. The international system seems to be moving toward an inflection point, where a possible clash between the West and “the Rising Rest” cannot be fully ruled out. However, the West’s diminishing ability to anchor a liberal international order is not just a product of the rise of emerging powers that are challenging prevailing norms. The West is also experiencing an economic downturn, political polarisation and dysfunction, coupled with the resurgence of a revisionist neighbour (and global power): Russia.

Russia has never been a part of the liberal world order and, in fact, has never genuinely wanted to be. Rather, it has shown that it prefers to follow the logic of power, which was best depicted by John Ikenberry, an international relations theorist, in his book *Liberal Leviathan: The origins, crisis, and transformation of the American world order*. In short, harmony within the liberal order is based on values and consent, and is organised around rules and multi-lateral institutions that allocate rights and limit the exercise of power. Harmony outside the liberal order is maintained through bilateral relationships, organised around shared interest and based on power. For Russia, only the latter matters.
Systemic challenge

In 2014 Russia once again decided to exploit a growing weakness in the West. Therefore, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is a systemic challenge. By using military force against Ukraine (as in 2008 against Georgia), Russia made a bold statement: smaller, weaker countries do not possess the right to determine their own future. This right only belongs to a group of powerful countries with a strong military, including those with nuclear weapons. This group is not bound by any rules and international law does not apply to it. The conduct of this handful of powerful countries may only be limited from within.

Over the last decade Russia has adapted the concept of “spheres of influences” and transformed it into “spheres of dominance”. For Russia, Ukraine is central to its vision of establishing an alternative international system, where integration signifies domination and rules serve as a smokescreen. By fully controlling Ukraine, including both its internal and foreign policies, Russia wants to become the true leader of a post-western international system.

Why has the West not succeeded, despite numerous attempts, to forge a true strategic partnership with Russia? The problem is that strategic partnerships based on limited shared interests and not supported by shared values are almost impossible to sustain, because all partnerships entail prior acceptance of different positions and are dependent on both sides having something to gain. Unless strategic partnerships are based on willingness to accept partners as equals and to play by rules that are acceptable to both sides, there is little to be gained from them. In fact, partnerships based on narrow shared interests rather than more widely shared values are vulnerable to setbacks caused by unexpected events. The illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia serves as a perfect example.

The West needs to stop pretending that it is strategically blind. There is no other option than to defend its vision of the world, or at least to shape the post-western world according to the basic tenets of the liberal order. The conduct of diplomacy requires a clear understanding of what is happening in the world and an ability to make an accurate assessment of it and draw honest and in-depth conclusions. In his speech at the UN General Assembly on September 30th 1982, George P. Shultz, a former US Secretary of State, outlined four basic principles of action for diplomacy, which could help to revitalise the West. First, start from realism. Second, act
from strength (military, political, economic and moral). Third, be ready to build agreements and negotiate on key issues. Fourth, progress is possible.

Realism is the key. By denying the facts on the ground, the West will be unable to return to a path of political growth. It must be crystal-clear for both Europe and the US that Russia has confirmed its status as a revisionist power. Its principal foreign policy goal is to maintain Eastern Europe in Russia’s sphere of dominance and to hamper the political aspirations of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine to strengthen their ties with the institutional pillars of the liberal world order (e.g. the EU and NATO). Its other goal is to influence and intimidate some EU and NATO members. To achieve these ends, Russia has reached for a centralised and co-ordinated use of hybrid techniques, which have evolved into hybrid warfare. Russia seeks to secure its military might and signals its readiness to use conventional forces just as easily as it does other, softer means. In the past decade, its military capabilities and defence budget have grown significantly.

**Military anchor**

The creeping militarisation of the High North, the Kaliningrad Oblast and Crimea, including the development of technologically advanced anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) systems, alongside Russia’s forward basing in Belarus and Syria, poses a major threat to the stability of the EU, NATO and their member states.
Furthermore, Russia has breached numerous international legal commitments (the 1975 Helsinki Accords, the 1987 Treaty on Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces [INF], the 1990 Paris Charter, the 1990 Conventional Armed Forces in Europe [CFE] Treaty, the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act and the 1999 Adapted CFE Treaty), severely undermining their assurance.

Strength still matters. NATO will remain the military anchor of the West. The upcoming NATO Summit in Warsaw (July 8–9th 2016) is an opportunity to adequately respond to the worsening of the security environment in the vicinity of the Alliance. The eastern flank is where it remains the most exposed, both militarily and politically. Russia commands an overwhelming 10:1 force ratio at its northeastern corner. Adding to this the possibility of a tactical nuclear strike, Russia is increasingly undermining NATO’s strategy of extended deterrence to protect its most exposed allies in the East. The Alliance cannot rely solely on extended deterrence and small mobile forces.

In Warsaw NATO must shift its strategy towards forward presence. The recently published report by the German Marshall Fund *NATO in a world of disorder: making the Alliance ready for Warsaw* accurately describes the nature of forward presence. It should be multinational in order to increase its political deterrence and defence value. The force must be combat-ready, properly trained and equipped to address the threats in the region. The force should be large enough to conduct autonomous defensive operations. Two brigades (one in Poland and one in the Baltic states) would be a good starting point. Finally, the force should include advanced military capabilities, such as air defence, intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and electronic warfare.

However, military capabilities alone will not be enough. They must be underpinned by an appropriate level of defence spending. Indeed, strength also means economic vitality. Reviving economic growth is critical to re-legitimating the EU in the eyes of Europeans, just as a robust recovery is essential to restoring the efficacy of democratic institutions in the US. Therefore, economic recovery will remain a crucial component of order-building in the 21st century and will help the West regain its position in the world.

**Litmus test**

The ability to solve international problems will make the West a safer place. Europe should begin with its immediate neighbourhood, where neither focusing
on security whilst omitting elements of sustainable development (North Africa before the Arab Spring), nor the promotion of democracy without paying proper attention to security (Eastern Europe), is the right approach. Without a doubt, finding a solution to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict will constitute a litmus test for Europe. However, there is a rising expectation in some European capitals that Ukraine will unilaterally speed up the full implementation of the political and social elements of the “Minsk agreements”, including the decentralisation process. This asymmetrical situation, where one party does more in practice and gets less in return, cannot even be mitigated by the sanctions imposed on Russia. In fact, the West should not forget that dialogue is only a tool that forms part of a broader policy. Dialogue itself is not a policy.

Nevertheless, progress is possible. The West can achieve it by putting Eastern Europe back on the Transatlantic agenda and by properly reinvigorating the Eastern Partnership. The fundamental question that has not been asked often enough is “partnership for what?” The answer should be clear. There is no reason (apart from psychological) why the Eastern Partnership countries should still be deprived of the possibility, however distant, of a European perspective. It would be naïve to assume that a policy based on the establishment of partnerships would be easy or would yield quick results.

Building up new relationships is time consuming. It should embrace agreed rules, embedded practices and eventually, trust. The ultimate goal of a new partnership with Eastern Europe (an Eastern Partnership 2.0) will be to resolve conflicts and disagreements through dialogue and negotiation, as well as to achieve a level of predictability through institutionalised patterns and rules-based behaviour that is clearly beneficial in a fast-moving and complex world.

Dominik P. Jankowski is a security policy expert, diplomat, think-tanker and regular contributor to New Eastern Europe.
What to expect in Warsaw

ERICH VAD

On July 8–9th 2016 Poland will host the next NATO Summit. What we expect to come out of it is a strong demonstration of unity, which sends a signal of credibility and resolve to all potential opponents. Nevertheless, it is clear that the upcoming summit will need to focus on preventing a potential split in the Alliance due to the different regional perceptions of threats coming from Europe’s eastern and southern flanks.

In the East, Russia undermines our European peace, as well as international laws and norms, through its blatantly aggressive annexation of Crimea and “soft” invasion of eastern Ukraine. The West has responded decisively to these actions as the European Union and the United States imposed sanctions against Russia and these sanctions bite. Germany will not recognise the annexation of Crimea by Moscow. Likewise, only through a thorough implementation of the Minsk Agreements can Moscow’s aggression in eastern Ukraine be stopped and peace restored. The Alliance stands firm on this.

Russia’s neo-imperial foreign policy in Eastern Europe has shown that the core function of NATO, the Article 5 commitment that an attack on one NATO member is an attack on all, is still valid and relevant. Therefore, a comprehensive package of measures and military reinforcements to strengthen NATO’s defence capabilities was agreed at the previous Wales Summit. However, NATO is split on the issue of how and where the Alliance’s abilities to defend itself have to be improved. Southern Alliance members, especially Italy and Turkey, are concerned
that the Atlantic Alliance might concentrate too much on Eastern Europe while the risks and challenges in the Middle East and along the Northern African coastline will be underestimated. While in Eastern Europe, “hybrid” warfare is the current “hype”, and this narrative is a tough sell in Southern Europe due to the more complex security situation there.

**North-South divide**

The threats coming out of the southern Mediterranean and the Middle East, including failing states, mass migration and extremism, have to be addressed beyond simple military solutions. An appropriate response demands a combination of humanitarian and socio-economic approaches, border police, in addition to military measures, and closer co-operation with the North African states in security matters, including the stabilisation of countries like Libya, where ISIS has recently begun operations.

Many NATO partners are also involved in Syria (US, France, the United Kingdom and Turkey). Germany also contributes there, supporting the coalition with Tornado reconnaissance aircraft. In Iraq, Germany supports the Kurdish Peshmerga with equipment and training. However, a formal NATO involvement is unnecessary and politically inopportune in many cases. What is important is that Turkey, who views the Russian intervention very critically, is supported. We need to refocus the situation so that a political process can lead to greater stability.

There is also a high probability that the European refugee crisis will have unforeseeable consequences for NATO debates. Some southern NATO members might wish for more solidarity regarding the ongoing refugee crisis and will point to the need for a NATO-supported EU border protection operation. It is possible that our southern partners will demand that the new Rapid Reaction Force be suitable for missions along the southern flanks of Europe.

As a result, Germany, France and the UK will need to consider positions which reduce the tensions between the “North” and “South”. The US will surely strive for unity in the Alliance. The Americans will push the Europeans again to show more leadership in security matters, as well as to increase their defence budget spending to the required two per cent threshold of their gross domestic product (GDP). Currently, only five states are able to meet this target, although six have increased their defence spending in 2015.

Due to its internal political situation, Germany will not be able to reach this target, which amounts to some 50 billion euros. There are also ongoing considerations to deviate from this static two per cent rule and to choose military effectiveness
as a measure of fair burden-sharing. However, such qualitative criteria are more difficult to measure and compare.

In search of a common response

Another issue that NATO countries will need to address at the summit is the new dimensions of a potential Article 5 situation. Specifically, countries will need to examine Article 5 in the context of “Smart Defence” or initiatives such as the “Framework Nation Concept”, in which NATO countries are grouped for certain military tasks. Russia has shown that it can mobilise and concentrate several thousand men in “Snap Exercises” within two to three days. The 5,000 person NATO Rapid Reaction Force cannot cope with these Russian capabilities in an emergency, since their reaction time is around five to seven days. NATO is also concerned about Russian plans to develop “area denial” measures designed to block parts of Eastern Europe in case of a conflict, essentially cutting NATO supply lines or cleaving the Alliance through nuclear threats. Here, corresponding counter-concepts are required. However, due to the different geographical interests within the Alliance, finding both a common and appropriate response to the Russian threat will be difficult to achieve.

In my view it makes little sense to continue the ongoing discussion as to whether NATO combat troops should be stationed on a permanent or rotational basis, as the decision by the US to send an armoured brigade to Eastern Europe effectively ended that debate. It is far more important that the stationed forces are in place in case of emergency, with the ability to be used both in and outside of Europe. The security situation in Europe is, quite frankly, very precarious. We need more flexibility in our response, not just to follow the antiquated measures of “Forward Defence” concepts for the old eastern Polish border that bear no relevance to today’s situation. With the advent of “hybrid warfare” we should really be looking for “hybrid solutions”.

The debate on retaining the NATO-Russia Founding Act, the 1997 agreement which established relations between Russia and NATO, is also superfluous. None of the NATO measures for improving the deterrence and defence capability of the Alliance is contrary to the Founding Act. Therefore, a formal termination of this document by NATO would only provide Kremlin propagandists with useful pretexts. Furthermore, termination would be contrary to the principle: *pacta sunt servanda*.
Particularly sensitive will be the question of the future role of nuclear weapons in NATO’s strategy. NATO’s “Deterrence and Defence Posture Review” (DDPR) is based on the principle that Russia is a partner of NATO and would not use its nuclear capabilities against the Alliance. Both conditions appear to be no longer valid. Russia under Vladimir Putin has defined itself as an anti-western power. In addition, Russian military exercises are simulating the use of nuclear weapons against Poland, which is also threatened by the further transfer of nuclear weapons to Kaliningrad (not to mention Russia’s frequent violation of Polish airspace with nuclear-capable fighter aircraft). Thus, there is a necessity to look for a new nuclear strategic consensus in the Alliance.

A credible nuclear deterrent is necessary, even though this is more complicated today than it was during the Cold War. Generally, it is more difficult to deter Russia in the role of a “declining power” than as a rising one. Despite its inferiority in absolute terms, we have to face the fact that Russia can concentrate combat troops much faster than NATO can react. So the different reaction times and the future role of nuclear weapons will form the basis of necessary and important discussions in Warsaw.

**Co-operative security**

From a German perspective, it is important to stress that Poland’s security is also our security. Bilateral co-operation with Poland has reached unprecedented levels. A German Infantry Battalion is subordinated to a Polish unit. There is a Polish Tank Battalion subordinated to a German brigade. Germany has also taken the leading role in the implementation of the new Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF). This NATO group is to be guided in the future by the Multinational Corps Northeast, based in Szczecin. The staff of the corps is 400 soldiers in total, a third of them originating from the German Bundeswehr. We also participate in air patrols over the Baltic states. Germany contributes significantly to the readiness of the AWACS unit (a third of the crew members are German soldiers). Overall, in 2015, more than 2,700 soldiers have participated in rotating NATO exercises in the Alliance’s eastern territory.

As important as deterrence is, a stable security-architecture in Europe also requires elements of co-operative security. Deterrence and détente are two sides
of the same coin. This has been proven since the publication of the 1967 Harmel Report on many occasions. We want to keep the channels of communication with Russia open. For this, we should use the NATO-Russia Council. Risk avoidance and conflict in Ukraine are meaningful topics. The security policy dialogue with Russia is necessary. Germany also sees its OSCE chairmanship as an opportunity in this regards. Ultimately, many major challenges, such as Syria or international terrorism, can only be tackled with Russian co-operation. A good example of progress is the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran. Here, it was possible to solve a decades-old conflict, despite the gloomy predictions about the futility of the attempt and the alleged naivety of the West.

Finally, the summit will also be an opportunity to address the continuation of the “Resolute Support” mission in Afghanistan. Germany will increase its contribution to 980 men and also plans further substantial financial and human assistance to stabilise its sector in Afghanistan. Overall, it is my view that although we are beset by many challenges, the 2016 Warsaw Summit will provide a much needed opportunity for the development of productive and innovative solutions.

Brigadier General (ret.) Erich E. Vad has served as a military adviser to German Chancellor Angela Merkel and as a senior consultant in the German parliament. He is now a lecturer at the chair for international relations at Geschwister-Scholl-Institute for Political Science in Munich.
Warsaw will be a consequential summit

Interview with Alexander Vershbow,
Deputy Secretary General of NATO. Interviewers:
Adam Reichardt and Bartosz Marcinkowski

ADAM REICHARDT & BARTOSZ MARCINKOWSKI: Let us start with the upcoming NATO Warsaw Summit in July 2016 and your expectations. Do you think there will be a substantial change in terms of providing security for the Alliance’s eastern flank?

ALEXANDER VERSHBOW: Without wishing to exaggerate, I think it is going to be one of the most important and consequential summits in a long time, even though some very important decisions were also made at the Wales Summit in 2014 and these are currently being implemented. I think there is now a greater appreciation within NATO that we face long-term challenges, both from the east and from the south.

Therefore, the Warsaw Summit is an opportunity for NATO to redefine its security strategy for the long term. The most important aspects of this, particularly from the point of view of Poland and Eastern Europe, include strengthening our defence and deterrence posture, dealing with an evolving Russian threat, hybrid warfare, anti-access/area denial and the ability to mobilise significant forces at very short notice. I think that we will see a very positive response to these challenges, especially based on the agreements that were made, in principle, by the NATO defence ministers in February 2016. Enhancing the Alliance’s forward presence, which was agreed, will be defined in more concrete terms, together with ensuring that we have a robust and rapid reinforcement capability. You need both if you want to have a strong deterrence.

We are also developing a hybrid strategy, which has been pretty much agreed upon within NATO, and we are trying to connect this with what the European Union is doing in that respect. The spectrum of hybrid threats, from political to economic, from cyber to disinformation, has created significant pressure and is a
source destabilisation. Some of the tools to address these threats belong more to the EU than NATO, and that is why it is important to co-ordinate our efforts.

In the south, there needs to be an equally effective strategy, recognising that we are dealing primarily with non-state actors, making deterrence a challenge. There is also the Russian factor in the Middle East, which combines the south and east together. On top of that, there is the problem of ISIS and other terrorist groups which promote destabilisation, state failure and all kinds of local conflicts. We have to think of ways of how to prevent things from getting worse and reverse some of the unravelling that has occurred following the failure of the Arab Spring. NATO has a lot of tools that were very helpful in Europe in the 1990s to reform the armed forces and build capacity. Moreover, they helped countries like Poland prepare for NATO membership.

We need to explore ways to use these same tools to help the weakened states in the Middle East and North Africa, so that they can withstand the forces of radicalisation and terrorism and find local solutions to local problems. Therefore, at the summit, we will be discussing both our eastern strategy and our southern strategy.

Speaking of deterring Russia and strengthening NATO’s eastern flank, there are some voices in this region that have declared the 1997 Founding Act on Mutual Relations Co-operation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation invalid. What is NATO’s position on that matter?

First and foremost, the allies are the ones who have chosen not to tear up this agreement. The document itself is very important because it establishes the principles for good relations between NATO and Russia. These principles are still valid. Even though Russia has violated many of them, our ultimate aim should be to bring Russia back into compliance with principles such as respect for territorial integrity, sovereignty, peaceful resolution of disputes etc. Notwithstanding Russian misbehaviour vis-à-vis the Founding Act, NATO is sticking to the diplomatic high ground.

At the same time, the Founding Act does include some commitments by NATO regarding nuclear and conventional forces on the territory of new members. In this case, the Alliance believes that everything we need to do to address the eastern flank can be done without breaking the commitments outlined in the NATO-Russia Founding Act. We can enhance our forward presence through a combination of rotational deployments, increased infrastructure, prepositioned equipment and more active exercises. We do not need to go back to a Cold War posture with large, fixed combat forces stationed along the eastern border.

In this case, rapid reinforcement is key, complemented by a forward presence to make sure the Russians are unable to achieve even a limited incursion or achieve success through hybrid attacks.
As NATO is considered by Russia to be its number one enemy, is there any room for co-operation between the Alliance and Russia?

At present, we have suspended co-operation because of Russia’s actions in Eastern Europe, specifically in Ukraine. Politically, we are not able to go back to co-operation until they prove to us that they are able to fully respect the principles of international law. I think in the mid-term, the allies see potential for dialogue and co-operation with Russia on a more limited basis, including managing the risks that arise from today’s dangerous security situation. With the Russians carrying out aggressive air patrols, sometimes without transponders, on the edge and maybe even across the line of NATO airspace, or flying very close to the Turkish border, there is an increased risk of an accidental incident that could quickly lead to a serious conflict.

Certainly, the allies would like to talk to the Russians mainly about transparency and risk reduction, recognising that more substantial co-operation is not possible while Ukraine is still the victim of Russian aggression.

Is there any willingness on the Russian side, especially when we are talking about avoiding accidental incidents that could lead to a broader conflict?

Attempts are being made to organise a meeting of the NATO-Russia Council and we are exploring with our Russian counterparts what the agenda for that meeting would look like. The NATO-Russia Council has not met for over a year and a half. It was never shut down or suspended, but just stopped meeting as a result of the security situation. We shall see if an agreement on an agenda is possible.

In terms of the long-term possibility of co-operation: it exists, but it may be narrower because of Russia’s choices. The Russians have chosen to treat NATO as an adversary and a potential threat. They clearly believe that European security should be based on spheres of influence, not on the sovereignty of states. They speak a lot about Russian sovereignty but they do not seem to care about the sovereignty of their neighbours. Hence, the scope for co-operation is currently much less than it was when we started the NATO-Russia relationship in the 1990s.

Switching to the so-called “southern threats”, do you believe that the migration crisis will be among top issues discussed during the Warsaw NATO Summit?

I am not sure if the refugee crisis as such will be a major topic. I think that the south and the challenges that stem from there will definitely be a point of focus. The more unstable the neighbours, the more insecure Europe will feel. Refugees are basically a symptom of that, not the central issue. Finding ways for NATO to be more effective and have a greater impact on stability along our periphery will be the key subject of the summit. Another subject that will also be discussed is the root causes of migration and refugees. How to address these
will also be debated, including measures such as building up local capacity, local armed forces, and helping countries with their ability to collect and interpret intelligence about the movement of terrorist groups, organised crime and any other destabilising factors. It is more about projecting stability, so we do not have to intervene like we did in Afghanistan.

Regarding the refugee crisis, our role is quite limited. NATO conducts maritime surveillance missions in the Aegean Sea, which are aimed at helping the local authorities in Turkey and Greece, as well as assisting border agencies like FRONTEX to crack down on illegal smuggling. Maybe there are other ways that NATO can contribute, but I do not think the Alliance is going to become a central actor when it comes to the refugee issue.

Will there be any discussions at the summit on the future growth of NATO membership? Montenegro received an invitation to join the Alliance. Does this mean that there could be future prospects for other Eastern European states like Georgia or even Ukraine?

There will definitely be discussions as to what the next steps will be regarding our “open door” policy, but I do not expect any big decisions on new candidates. Montenegro was issued an invitation in December 2015 and we hope that by the time of the summit they will have completed the legal processes of accession so they can at least attend the summit as observers. They will still need ratification by the 28 member states’ parliaments.

We will also want to show that we are continuing our support for Georgia’s
rapprochement with the Alliance and address the requirements for its future membership. We want to send encouraging signals to Bosnia and Herzegovina and to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, who are also candidates but are still struggling to make progress. We may even have some meetings involving these candidates at the summit, but this has not yet been decided.

We believe that the open door policy has been a success story, no matter what the Russians might say. It has been good for stability and has helped Central and Eastern European countries integrate more broadly into the Euro-Atlantic community. Furthermore, it has provided a belt of stable neighbours for Russia as well. In fact, one of the problems we face today is that Russia does not feel secure when its neighbours are stable; it seems to feel more secure when its neighbours are unstable. That is one of the biggest obstacles to overcome when it comes to building a more co-operative relationship with Russia. In the end, we need to stick to our principles and do what is best for Europe.

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Increasing Russia’s potential

ANNA MARIA DYNER

The changes that have been taking place in Russia’s armed forces over the last few years have been directed at rebuilding its military capabilities. However, there is no doubt that they have also been designed to increase Russia’s military potential, which undeniably makes the Federation one of the greatest security challenges currently facing NATO.

The illegal annexation of Crimea, the war in Donbas, as well as numerous incidents involving Russian military planes and the increased activity of the Russian army, have brought renewed attention to the changes that have been taking place in the Russian armed forces over the last two years. Beginning in 2009 and implemented to ensure the rebuilding of Russia’s military potential, these changes fit the paradigm shift affecting Russia’s foreign and domestic policy. Thus, by rebuilding its combat capabilities, Russia has become one of the greatest challenges currently facing NATO.

Today, it is still difficult to adequately assess the state of the Russian army. While there is no doubt that the Russian Federation has improved its combat capabilities, recent drills and exercises by the Russian military have uncovered several flaws, including its poor logistics capabilities and deficient equipment. The latter is also a challenge for the Russian arms industry, which continues to struggle with outdated technology and a shortage of highly-trained personnel. Nonetheless, it is evident that the armed forces have become the focal point of Kremlin attention and in the next few years, we will surely know what effect today’s investments and reforms have had on Russia’s offensive potential.
The 2008 conflict in Georgia confirmed many analysts’ fears regarding the difficult state of Russia’s armed forces, especially the numerous deficiencies in their armament, a remnant of the economically, politically and socially difficult period the country underwent at the turn of the century. Evidently, the conflict with Georgia showed that even a larger and better equipped Russian army faced serious problems when it came to conducting military operations. Its poor performance was a result of flaws in command systems, communications, intelligence gathering and logistics, as well as the inadequate combat training of soldiers (especially conscripts). In addition, it was clear that co-operation between different branches of the armed forces and the army was also problematic. As a result of these experiences, a wide ranging reform of the military was announced. It began in 2010 and became known as the Serdyukov reform, named after the then minister of defence.

The reform foresaw a change in the military command and organisational structure; replacing the six existing military districts with four: the eastern, western, central and southern.* Another important goal was to increase the level of combat readiness in various units and radically rearm the army. The armed forces structure was trimmed from five branches to three: ground forces, the navy and the air forces (in August 2015 the latter merged with the aerospace defence forces, becoming the aerospace forces). The strategic missile troops were “downgraded” from being armed forces to troops. Despite this, it was the strategic missile troops and the air forces that maintained direct subordination to Russia’s general command.

The reform also dissolved some units (which were actually military arsenals), with the majority of them being part of the ground forces. This was a departure from Soviet doctrine, which foresaw a complete development of combat units after mobilisation, as well as their participation in a global conflict. Another outcome of the reform was the separation of command functions between the ministry of defence, the general command and the leadership of the different branches and troops within the armed forces. At the same time, significant resources were allocated for the development of means of transportation, to enable rapid troop and

* Moreover, on December 1st 2014 the Arctic Joint Strategic Command was established, which was based on the Northern Fleet.
military equipment deployment, as well as for the creation of highly trained rapid reaction forces with adequate support systems.

The revision of Russia’s defence policy was accompanied by a change in its perception of what constitutes war. Thus, information space was added to the traditional areas of warfare (ground, naval, air and aerospace), leading some to label Russia’s current conflicts “sixth generation war”. In practice, Russia’s activities go beyond hacking attacks on the infrastructure of potential enemies to include information warfare and the application of military force as one of its elements. Russia’s presentation of its military capabilities, including strategic bombers’ long-range flights or the spreading of information about the placement of Russian weapons at NATO borders, was a demonstration of force for both Russian citizens and Alliance states. In regards to the latter, there have also been efforts to significantly increase the number of military exercises, which often involve tens of thousands of soldiers and a large amount of military equipment (the flagship example is the Vostok 2014 [East 2014] manoeuvres).

The reforms have not yet provided an answer as to what the Kremlin’s vision is regarding the army. Does the Russian government want to create capacity for full-scale mobilisation, which in a period of population decline and an increase in the modernisation of the military, could lead to a loss of significant combat capabilities? Or are they opting for a fully professional military force? Judging by the Kremlin’s decisions, it is safe to say that in Russia, there has been at least a partial departure from the concept of total war in its strategic thinking. This is evidenced by Russia’s purchase of specific types of military equipment and the revision of its main strategic doctrines.

**Rearming**

One of the most visible elements of the Russian reform of its military has been its rearmament plan. This plan responds to the needs of rotating out obsolete post-Soviet equipment, filling in certain capability gaps and upgrading its armament. Officially, the state rearming plan was accepted in 2010 as part of the army reform. At that time, its cost was estimated at 700 billion US dollars. Rearing is planned for all branches of the armed forces and is gradually being implemented. For example, the deputy defence minister, Yuriy Borisov, stated in 2015 that the ground forces received over 100,000 items of military equipment including: 300 rockets, 3,400 vehicles and two Iskander brigade systems, while the aerospace forces got over 230 airplanes, 158 helicopters and four squadrons of the S-400 system. The navy also received new equipment, including four combat vessels, four submarines.
and 52 support units. In addition, purchases were made for the airborne troops and the strategic missile troops; the latter received 21 strategic rockets.

In theory, the implementation of the 2015 plan is 97 per cent complete. In practice, the fleet has not seen an increase in equipment, mainly due to the expiration of other units. Also, some important orders remain unfulfilled. As many as 15 airplanes (including Tu-95MS and Tu-160 strategic bombers) and eight ships were not delivered in 2015. Therefore, the percentage of modern equipment possessed by all the branches of the armed forces equates to almost 35 per cent for the ground forces, 41 per cent for the airborne troops, 52 per cent for the aerospace forces, 57 per cent for the strategic missile troops and 39 per cent for the navy.

These data show that although the Russian army has been recently modernised, it is still far from being a modern military force. Moreover, considering factors such as the current economic situation in Russia and the effects of the sanctions imposed by the EU and the US (which affect dual-use technology), it is clear that Russia’s rearming programme is going to be delayed.

Clearly, rearming is a necessity which has emerged from the gradual degradation of the ground forces, the navy and Russia’s nuclear arsenal. An opportunity to improve the situation came in the form of an increase in the price of petrol and natural gas, the sales of which are the primary source of income for the Russian budget. Nevertheless, problems with the implementation of the current rearming plan and the need for further modernisation of the existing arsenal have pushed the government to work on a new programme, which is expected to be published in 2018.

**New doctrines**

The reform of Russia’s armed forces was accompanied by new strategic documents, including a new edition of Russian military doctrine, which was published in December 2014. It presents the most important security challenges (both internal and external) currently facing Russia, as well as possible reactions by both the military and state agencies. It also concentrates on threats such as terrorism and information war, both in Russia and abroad. In addition, significant importance has been placed on fighting and counteracting local conflicts. It notes that in relations with NATO and the European Union, Russia aims to establish a dialogue of equal partnership and not, as was the case until now, simply develop mutual relations.

The document also makes it clear that Moscow wants new mechanisms to be developed at the international level to bring and maintain peace. It has introduced a new concept of non-nuclear deterrence, an idea understood by Russia as keeping
conventional forces in a state of combat readiness in order to counteract possible aggression. This assumes that new, effective mobilisation systems, both within the armed forces and civilian agencies, will be developed. By so doing, the range of responsibility of state agencies increases and they now constitute a pillar of state defence, in addition to the armed forces.

On July 27th 2015 a new naval doctrine was announced. In many ways, this document corresponds with Russia’s new military doctrine. This is especially true for identified strategic areas, such as the Arctic and the so-called Atlantic direction, which includes the Black Sea basin. The doctrine also stresses the role of the fleet (both military and civilian), the shipbuilding industry, harbours and rigging infrastructure as priorities for the further development of Russia’s naval economy.

On January 1st 2016 a new doctrine on state security was subsequently adopted. The document identifies the domestic threats to Russia’s state sovereignty, society, information space, economy, transport and energy infrastructure, natural environment as well as foreign-born risks. These risks are presented in a wider context of hard security and terrorism, as well as some economic, political and social problems, including migration and information war. The activities undertaken by NATO, the US and their allies are portrayed as the greatest threat to state security. Both the US and the Alliance are accused of double standards and generating international conflicts in places such as Ukraine and the Middle East. To counteract these threats, Russia will strengthen and modernise its armed forces and other state agencies that are responsible for security, including special forces, ministries and the judiciary. It will also develop its industry (including the arms manufacturing industry), agriculture and transport networks. Moreover, Russia has further declared the need to strengthen the education system and the state’s energy security. The Russian Federation also announced the importance of maintaining its existing alliances, such as the Union State with Belarus, arrangements with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and co-operation agreements with other states.

All of the doctrines outlined above form a coherent whole. Together, they clearly determine the priorities of the state and its security policy. Their adoption is not only meant to show that the Russian state is ready to react quickly to changes in the international scene, but also that it would like to influence them.

**Increasing combat capabilities**

The reform of Russia’s military has brought, from the perspective of the Russian authorities, some positive results. The Russian army has significantly increased its combat capabilities, including its expedition skills into regions with a difficult cli-
The Russian army has significantly increased its combat capabilities, including its expedition skills into regions with difficult climates, such as deserts, the Arctic, etc. However, the testing of military operations, including the co-ordination of different branches of the armed forces, communication and command systems and new equipment, took the form of both military exercises (which were, at times, carried out on a very large scale) and real life combat operations, both in Ukraine (especially in Crimea) and Syria. Changes in the armed forces have been accompanied by an increased media campaign. One of its aims was to rebuild trust in the military, a trust that was especially abused in the 1990s, as well as to unite society against an "enemy" and thus turn people's attention away from the country's economic and political problems.

Admittedly, even though the scale of reform is impressive, Russia's military potential is still significantly less than that of NATO or the United States. Russia's recent intervention in Syria, where it used sea-launched missiles, air-launched precision-guided munitions and modern navigation systems, is no big deal considering that all of this technology was being used by the US 25 years ago during the first Iraq war. The ongoing reform and modernisation of the Russian military is being further impeded by factors such as an economic recession and the technological shortfalls that Russia's military industry continues to experience, an unfortunate legacy of the 1990s. Certain social trends should also not be ignored, including the demographic decline that is seriously affecting the number of conscripts and could have an impact on the overall effectiveness of the army, particularly as it is still not fully professional (unlike the armies of most NATO states).

Overall, the changes that have been taking place in the armed forces over the last few years have been directed more at rebuilding rather than strengthening Russia's military capabilities. However, there is no doubt that they have also been designed to increase Russia's military potential, which undeniably makes this state one of the greatest security challenges currently facing NATO.

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In the shadow of a neo-imperialist Russia

ADAM BALCER

Not since the Cold War has the security of Central and Eastern Europe been as under threat as it is now. Without question, the greatest challenge facing the region is the fact that Russia currently appears more willing to use force. The economic crisis in that country, combined with growing levels of nationalism among both the society and the elite, has the potential to form a dangerous combination. However, to successfully deter Russia, the American protective umbrella on its own will not be sufficient.

For years now, we have heard many European experts claim that a superpower’s position in the 21st century would be based on soft power and a modern, dynamic economy. Being a superpower was supposed to involve having a major impact on other countries by using subtle and sophisticated economic and political resources to pressure them, rather than using brute force as in the past. At the beginning of the 21st century, traditional imperialism based on military aggression seemed to be increasingly anachronistic. Military power was to gradually become an old-fashioned attribute, like a family sabre attached to superpower status.

However, the wars in the Middle East and in the Black Sea basin have painfully shown that, sadly, the contemporary world still resembles a jungle, much like the state of nature described by Thomas Hobbes: “war of everyone against everyone”. Hobbes’ perception of pre-civilisation stage definitely favours Russia, a country that can only really compete as a global power by using tanks and nuclear warheads. Its mentality is deeply rooted in the 19th century perception of a superpower (spheres of influence) and the Concert of Europe. The ultimate aim of Russia’s foreign policy
An extension of politics

Russia's neo-imperialist and militaristic attitude, which is here to stay, is going to be the largest security challenge to Central and Eastern Europe in the coming years. Apart from a significant permanent presence of the US in the region, the following actions are vital to successfully deter Russia: a substantial increase in defence spending by NATO member states on its eastern flank, a broadening of geopolitical horizons (creating a wider perception of Russia's threat) and closer co-operation between NATO members and countries in the region that are not members (Finland, Sweden and Ukraine).

Since Vladimir Putin's ascension to power, Russia has been increasingly rearming itself. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Russia's defence spending between 1999 and 2015 has more than quadrupled (at constant 2014 prices and exchange rates). According to the Kremlin, this is in response to the growing NATO threat. However, the US, Russia's perceived enemy number one, increased its defence expenditures by only two-thirds, while European member states have made substantial cuts to their defence budgets during the same time period. As a result of its defence modernisation scheme, militarily, Russia has become the strongest European country. In 2011, Russia's defence budget was equal to that of the United Kingdom (at constant 2014 prices and exchange rates). In 2015, the British defence budget was a mere 65 per cent of Russia's military expenditure. Despite its current economic problems, Russia has announced plans to further increase its defence spending while the UK and France, the most powerful NATO members in Europe, are slashing theirs.

Obviously, Russia has no chance of building a military that would be as powerful as that of the US. It is worth noting that in 2015, the American military budget was more than six and a half times that of Russia (at constant 2014 prices and exchange rates). However, Russia produces its military equipment almost exclusively on the domestic market. Therefore, its purchasing power parity (PPP) needs to be taken into account. With this in mind, it turns out that Russian military expenditure is only four times lower than that of the US. Yet the more serious problem is that Russia appears to be far more willing to use its might than western countries are. For several years now, Russian foreign policy has been increasingly based on military interventions (Georgia in 2008; Ukraine in 2014 and Syria in 2015). The Russian intervention in Syria is particularly symbolic, as it represents the first time since
the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 that Moscow has become involved in a conflict beyond what it considers to be its exclusive sphere of influence.

Moreover, Russia’s provocation of its neighbours has become commonplace. The clearest indications of this are the numerous incidents of airspace violations involving NATO member states, especially the Baltic states and Turkey between 2014 and 2015, as well as massive military exercises close to the Polish and Lithuanian borders (during which Russian forces simulated a nuclear attack on Warsaw). In November 2015 Turkey decided to react to yet another violation of its airspace and ended up shooting down a Russian bomber on a combat mission. The last time a NATO member shot down a Russian (Soviet) plane was 60 years ago. This incident led to a very severe crisis in bilateral relations.

Such incidents involving Russian planes are not just dangerous for civil aviation. They could also lead to an exchange of fire between Russian and NATO forces, leading to potentially unforeseeable consequences, especially since Russia has declared that should escalation of a local conflict occur, it reserves the right to use a tactical nuclear weapon. Unfortunately, because of Russia’s internal situation and the worldview of its society, as well as favourable external conditions, we can expect to see an escalation of Russia’s aggressive foreign policy in the upcoming years.
**Power hungry**

The Russian model of social and economic development has so far been based on an unwritten agreement between the authorities and society. Russians accept authoritarian rule in exchange for increasing prosperity. However, this model has failed due to the inherent structural weaknesses of the Russian economy in the form of very high levels of corruption, low levels of economic freedom and openness to the rest of the world and a marked deterioration in what was already a limited pool of innovation. In 2013 the sudden drop in oil prices, as well as western sanctions (to a lesser extent), caused the Russian economy to shrink.

In 2016 Russia is facing a recession. An optimistic estimation for 2017 assumes minimal growth. An economic meltdown cannot be ruled out, although it is more likely that a creeping crisis and economic stagnation will occur, as the authorities look for a red herring to blame. That is why the Kremlin needs an external enemy: so that the country’s aggressive posturing acts as a means to rally society around its leader. Since 2014 the Putin regime has unambiguously based its legitimacy on anti-western nationalism and neo-imperialism (Russia as a global superpower). However, this goes beyond the internal situation. The vision of Russia as an empire and the West as its greatest enemy is deeply rooted in the cultural and historical identity of the Russian society and its elite. Unfortunately, in today’s Russia, pro-western tendencies are mostly marginalised.

The geopolitical confrontation between Russia and the US takes place predominantly in the form of proxy conflicts. Russia is much more determined than western countries to use force to achieve its political objectives. Unfortunately, Russia’s primary opposition is the incumbent American president, who is known for marking out “impassable” red lines. Consequently, Russia needs no further encouragement to test American hard power. That is why Russia, as a fully-fledged superpower, is challenging the status quo of the US as the sole global superpower; not in the form of points but on the broader eastern flank of NATO, from the Arctic to Aleppo.

**Permanent deterrence**

Recently, Russia has taken on a new defence doctrine that for the first time clearly defines NATO as a fundamental threat for its security and names the US
as its main opponent on the international scene. Moscow’s goal is to weaken the Alliance as much as possible by exploiting its internal divisions. Its primary aim is to minimise America’s presence in Europe and prevent NATO’s further military involvement in Central European countries, which are treated by Moscow as a buffer zone. Russia claims “hibernation” of Central Europe in the grey security zone (no NATO bases) as the *sine qua non* condition for keeping Eastern Europe within the Russia sphere of influence. The countries on the eastern flank are threatened, either directly or indirectly, by states neighbouring Russia or Eastern Europe. For example, Poland has a sea and land border with Russia (Kaliningrad – the most militarised zone in Europe), a border with Belarus (which, to a great extent, is controlled by Russia, at least in terms of security) and with states that are either Russian targets (Ukraine) or potential targets (Lithuania). Turkey is “surrounded” by Russia from the south (Syria), east (Armenia, Abkhazia, South Ossetia) and north (Crimea, Donbas, Transnistria). NATO staff must be having nightmares about a local conflict in the Baltic states, triggered by Russia, where the Russian army decides to connect Kaliningrad with Belarus while cutting Poland off from Lithuania, taking over the so-called “Suwałki corridor”.

Russia’s neighbours are the most severely affected by its neo-imperialism and militarisation. The first line in Europe is Ukraine, already a victim of Russian aggression. Ukraine is followed by NATO states on the so-called eastern flank (from north to south: Norway, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Turkey). Due to numerous incidents provoked by Russian aircraft and the navy, there has been a significant threat increase in Sweden and Finland, who are not members of the Alliance but co-operate with it closely.

Setting up NATO permanent bases, especially US-led ones, in Central and Eastern Europe is key to successfully deterring Russia. However, it is not a catch-all solution. First of all, the establishment of the second Rammstein in Poland is highly unlikely because the US, Germany or France perceive this scenario as an unnecessary provocation towards Russia and as an alleged violation of the NATO-Russia agreement from 1997. In this context, the security potential of the eastern flank countries is becoming even more important. Currently, the picture remains unclear. Some countries like the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary have been downplaying the threat posed by Russia. Their defence expenditures have decreased from 1.8–2 per cent of GDP at the beginning of the 2000s to 0.8–1.1 per cent of GDP now. The attitude of Lithuania and Latvia is even more shocking. Before 2013 these countries had reduced their spending to an equally low level. Since regaining independence from the Soviet Union, Lithuania’s defence expenditure has never risen higher than 1.4 per cent of its GDP. An increase in defence spending started only after the Russian aggression in Ukraine.
When compared to Latvia and Lithuania, Estonia is the role model to follow. Unlike those countries, it has doubled its defence spending to two per cent of its GDP. It is not just about the money, but also a country’s ability to spend it wisely. For years now, Poland has been spending 1.8–1.9 per cent of its GDP on security. Moreover, the Russian aggression in Ukraine lead to a significant increase in Polish defence spending (2.2 percent in 2015). In 2015 rapid economic growth enabled Poland to increase its expenditure to 12.6 billion US dollars (fixed exchange rate in 2014). In other words, Poland pretty soon will have a defence budget similar to that of Spain. Nevertheless, at the same time, Poland's military potential, especially aviation, missile defence and the navy, remain on a significantly worse than those of Spain.

Size matters

Poland is the main advocate of co-operation along NATO’s eastern flank. It was Poland’s initiative to organise a mini-summit of NATO member states from the region in Bucharest in November 2015. Officials from the Baltic states, Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria all participated. However, size matters. In this instance, Poland has a problem, as its defence spending is higher than that of all those other states combined. From this group, the most important partner for Poland is Romania, which has the strongest military. The Romanian navy is even more powerful than the Polish one. In 2014 Romania began increasing its defence spending from 1.3 to 2 per cent of its GDP.

However, Poland also needs to co-operate with the NATO partners who are at least as strong, if not stronger. That is why, when looking at the North-South axis, Warsaw should also be considering close co-operation with Norway and Turkey. The former is a medium-sized NATO member state with vast military potential, especially in terms of its navy and aviation. At the same time, Norway’s defence expenditure is more than three times higher than that of the Czech Republic. Turkey is also a strong European NATO member state in terms of its military capacity, only preceded by the UK and France. In recent years, the Turkish defence budget stood at 2.1–2.3 per cent of its GDP. However, the budget for 2016 is expected to grow by a significant 20 per cent.

A more effective NATO eastern flank will also mean stronger co-operation between NATO members and their partners, located between the Arctic and Aleppo.
states and their partners located between the Arctic and Aleppo (i.e. Sweden, Finland and Ukraine). Closer military ties between the Nordic Defence Co-operation (Nordefco), which includes Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia, is a good thing, something that was reflected in a joint declaration adopted in Stockholm in November 2015. Closer co-operation in the security sector between NATO members on the North-South axis and Ukraine is equally important. Poland and Lithuania have established a joint brigade with Ukraine. At the same time, a new opening in Turkish and Ukrainian relations is even more important. In February 2016 Turkey and Ukraine agreed to set up working groups to develop weapons systems production and advanced technology co-operation. This will focus on turbojet aircraft engines, radar, military communication technologies and navigation systems. Both countries also announced their plans to organise joint military exercises.

It is worth noting that Ukraine is becoming an attractive partner in terms of military co-operation with NATO. The conflict with Russia has provided the Ukrainian army with significant combat experience, with Ukraine almost doubling its defence spending (to four per cent of GDP). Ukraine’s current defence budget is one and a half times as large as that of Romania. More importantly, Ukraine has significant potential to develop its defence industry. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, between 2011 and 2015, Ukraine was the tenth largest global exporter of arms. Its contribution to the global export market exceeded 2.5 per cent and was more or less on the same level as Italy. Ukraine’s case confirms once again that Poland, the closest ally of Kyiv in the Alliance, is predestined to play the key role of facilitating co-operation on the North-South axis, this time as a partner to Kyiv on NATO’s eastern flank.

The upcoming NATO Summit in Warsaw is a unique opportunity for strengthening co-operation along NATO’s eastern flank. However, Poland’s chances of facilitating this will be dependent on Warsaw’s relations with the key members of NATO (the US and Germany) and the Polish elite’s ability to perceive the eastern flank in broader terms, stretching from the Arctic to Aleppo.

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Towards a new confrontation in the Black Sea?

IULIAN FOTA

For Russia, the Black Sea has always been an important region. Russia’s status as a European power depends on the way it exerts control over it. The illegal annexation of Crimea brought multiple geopolitical advantages to Moscow, helping the Kremlin speed up its plans to expand the Black Sea Fleet and turning Crimea into a strategic outpost of Russia.

Following Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea and its aggression towards Ukraine, western administrations took great concern in evaluating, identifying and countering potential Russian threats against Poland and the Baltic states. The situation seemed perfectly reasonable, since the scenario that played out in Donbas could easily happen in Northern Europe, especially when you take into consideration the existence of Russian-speaking populations in the Baltic countries and the three states’ common border with Russia. On the other hand, focusing only on security issues in the North could be a strategic error. The Black Sea is arguably more important to Russia than the Baltic Sea since it geopolitically fills in the gaps on the Mediterranean-Caspian Sea axis, control of which is essential for Russia.

Russia’s position as a great power also depends on the way it is able to prove its military capability on the Caspian-Black-Mediterranean Seas axis. The centre of this axis is the Black Sea, a region from which NATO risks being excluded. According to Eurasian theorists, control over the Black Sea is one of the reasons why Russia is assuming its key role in the new global game of power, one of the gates
towards world domination. To regain its great power status, Russia must build up its capacity to strategically dominate the Black Sea area, by controlling its three key points: Crimea, the mouths of the Danube and the Bosphorus.

Rebuilding hegemony

For Moscow, the Black Sea has always been an important region and with its status of a European power depending on the way it exerts control over the area. Russia’s European ascent accelerated once it defeated the Ottoman Empire, thus gaining the right to sail on the Black Sea and weakening the Ottoman monopoly over the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles straits. Although primarily a land-based power, ever since the 19th century, Russia understood that it could not assert itself as a hegemon if it lacked access to one or several warm seas. Therefore, it did its best to assert control over the Black Sea region by controlling its three strategic points: Crimea, with its deep-water ports, the mouths of the Danube, one of Europe’s major naval waterways, and the Bosphorus and potentially the Dardanelles straits, which connect the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea. It is important to note that imperial Russia was quite close to accomplishing this in 1916 when, as a result of the Sykes-Picot agreement, it gained control over the straits, including their Turkish territory. Russia’s membership in the Danube Commission could also be questioned, seeing as it gave them a big say in how the river was managed and considering that it had been 25 years since Russia last had any territorial contact with that specific European region.

Since 2007, Russia has turned its attention to the Black Sea region as part of its strategy to reassert its hegemony. During the 2007 February Munich Security Conference, Russian President Vladimir Putin showed himself to be reluctant to further tolerate a string of NATO actions he deemed to be “unfriendly”. That was the beginning of what Sergey Karaganov called “a new epoch of confrontation”. A few months after the Munich conference, Russia decided to resume its long-range strategic bomber patrols, including over the Black Sea region. At that time, I was serving as the national security advisor to then-Romanian President Traian Basescu. When discussing these new developments during my talks with my NATO counterparts, I was told to relax and give up “my traditional Romanian Russophobia”. “Russia is too weak to represent a threat” was the typical answer I got from several NATO members.

Although Russia’s Black Sea Fleet played a marginal role in the war against Georgia in 2008, the Russians learnt their lesson from that conflict: that they lacked the necessary naval capabilities to control the Georgian coastline. They understood
that their new regional power status could not be preserved without a strong naval presence, with a plan to acquire Mistral ships forming part of that new vision. After the war, Russia’s naval chief, Admiral Vladimir Vysotsky, stated in *The Economist* that such ships would have allowed the Russian Navy to complete its missions in 40 minutes rather than 26 hours.

In autumn 2008 the Russian admiralty announced its ambitions to widen the Black Sea Fleet’s capabilities. Russian naval forces in the Black Sea had to be able to perform missions beyond their area of responsibility, including covering the Mediterranean Sea through a regular naval presence. Navy spokesman Captain Igor Dygalo defined the goal of the Russian naval presence as “flying the St. Andrew’s flag” in the eastern Mediterranean. Furthermore, plans to build Novorossiysk military port were approved, a significant development considering that Russia was at that time restricted to increasing the number of ships it had based at Sevastopol, under its agreement with Ukraine.

**Strategic outpost**

The illegal annexation of Crimea brought multiple geopolitical advantages to Russia, especially in terms of naval and air power. Once the territory was under full control, Moscow no longer had to observe the restrictions imposed on it by the Ukrainian government in its lease of the Sevastopol port. That freedom helped Russia speed up its plans to expand the Black Sea Fleet, turning Crimea into a strategic outpost facing the Balkan region, the Levant and the Mediterranean Sea. All the measures to streamline and expand Russia’s naval and air capabilities in Crimea were meant to enable that country to: dominate the region, thus guaranteeing freedom of movement for Russian ships as well as the security of Russian gas and oil transportation; develop new power projection capabilities; intimidate potential competitors, in particular Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey (NATO members) and develop tactics to restrict NATO forces access to the Black Sea region.

The plan to expand the Black Sea Fleet was approved by Putin in April 2014, together with measures to increase the presence of Russian military aviation and to monitor NATO’s naval and aerial military manoeuvres. Disturbed by the increasing number of NATO ships in the Black Sea and seeking to take advantage of its good relationship with Turkey, Moscow urged Ankara to ban access for military
ships which did not belong to countries on the Black Sea, under the Montreux Convention. Faithful to its commitments as a NATO member, Turkey commendably rejected Russia’s request.

In 2015 Russia’s defence minister, Sergey Shoygu, announced that the Russian Federation would spend 2.4 billion US dollars by 2020 to provide its Black Sea Fleet with state-of-the-art ships, submarines, air defence systems and naval infantry. Furthermore, a detachment of ships for the Mediterranean Sea and the Gulf region, the “Mediterranean Task Force”, was to be set up within the Black Sea Fleet. For the first time since the end of the Cold War, Russia decided to prepare ships and submarines to operate in the considerably warmer waters of the Mediterranean Sea, Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. That made it possible for a Rostov-on-Don submarine, which had set sail from Novorossiysk, to fire Kalibr missiles against ISIS targets in Syria from the Mediterranean Sea on December 8th 2015. After the use of ships in the Caspian Sea, Russia returned in full force to the eastern Mediterranean. The Russian Caspian-Black-Mediterranean Sea axis was operational, offering significant geopolitical benefits to Moscow.

**Significant striking force**

Russian official documents released to date indicate that 30 new ships are to be supplied to the Black Sea Fleet, including six new frigates, six new submarines and other smaller vessels for naval infantry landing. Although Russian plans were dealt a big blow when France refused to deliver the two Mistral ships, if current objectives are achieved, Russia will have full control over the Black Sea by 2020, enabling it to enforce its anti-access strategy (A2/AD) against NATO forces.

According to the Jamestown Foundation and the September 22nd 2014 issue of its main publication *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, in addition to the naval measures that Russia has undertaken, it also decided to bolster its air force capabilities in Crimea. Several SU-27SM and MIG-29 fighters, SU-25M ground attack aircraft, IL-38N maritime patrol and anti-submarine aircraft, KA-52K attack helicopters and KA-27 ASW helicopters were all deployed, with more on the way. A regiment of TU-22M3 strategic bombers, which can be used as platforms for different high-precision missiles, will be deployed at Gvardeyskoye airfield, 15 kilometres northwest of Simferopol. Together with the new naval infantry and Special Forces...
units, some of which have already been used as part of its hybrid war, Russia will own a significant strike force, which could help implement different military scenarios in the Black Sea and beyond.

Romanian representatives have consistently signalled the existence of this difficult situation in the eastern part of the Europe. In September 2005, Basescu warned in a speech delivered at Stanford University that the Black Sea risked turning into a “Russian lake”. Then, like now, Russia opposed the internationalisation of the region, rejecting the area’s co-operation with the international community, as it wanted to keep it isolated and under its own sphere of influence. The Romanian president also noted that western democracies should focus on the Black Sea region “before it is too late”. Ten years later, that statement became a prophecy. Unfortunately, western administrations had ignored these developments in the region and we are now paying the price.

Attitudes only began to change in 2014 after the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia and the attack in Donbas. The West was forced to admit the existence of a new strategic reality. In the wake of the Wales Summit, the final NATO statement acknowledged for the first time that the security turmoil in the Black Sea was sparked by Russia. In addition to other measures, NATO decided to boost its naval presence in the Black Sea and to send more air patrols over Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey, as well as to pay more attention to Russia’s military decisions about that area.

Several NATO member states pulled rank to develop national programmes focused on the Black Sea’s new security needs together. Within this context, US efforts are indicative of this. The US ambassador to Romania recently stated that “besides aggression over Ukraine and its consequences for our Baltic allies’ defence and security, we are also worried about its effects on the Black Sea region. That’s an issue that Romania has urged NATO to thoroughly examine”. Russian aggression in the Black Sea is finally being treated with the seriousness that it deserves. Paradoxically, that will have a positive influence on the overall situation regarding relations between Russia and the West, which always seem to be governed by the Latin saying *Si vis pacem para bellum* (if you want peace, prepare for war).

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In a matter of just two years, the devastated Ukrainian army has turned itself into one of the most efficient armies in Europe, mostly thanks to volunteers and private donations. However, reform of the defence system has lagged due to the rampant corruption and bureaucracy of the state, forcing many volunteers to give up.

One of the main reasons that Russia was able to swiftly annex Crimea and later occupy part of the Donbas territory was the Ukrainian army’s total lack of capability. From the moment Ukraine gained independence in 1991, its armed forces were systematically ignored and devastated. The only concern of the entire military hierarchy was to liquidate equipment inherited from the Soviet Union and to make a fortune from it. Lower ranking officers often treated soldiers as their own personal workforce, with low-level soldiers being used to aid the construction of personal vacation homes or being “rented out” to local businessmen for various favours. No one cared about the professional training of the troops and even less attention was paid to the army’s morale. In fact, only those who could not “dodge the draft” joined the army, while the prestige of military service sank to zero. The implementation of sophisticated technology, as well as the strategic and tactical training of personnel in accordance with NATO standards, was well out of reach.

Absolutely unprepared

The Ukrainian army was unofficially considered to be a useless relic inherited from the Soviet Union. Generally speaking, it was unclear who Ukraine would
have to fight: the NATO states were to the west, a non-aggressive Belarus to the north and “fraternal” Russia to the north-east. Until the spring of 2014 even Russia’s most dedicated adversaries were reluctant to admit that there was any possibility of open military aggression from that country.

As a result, Ukraine was completely unprepared for the invasion of Russian troops that occurred immediately after the success of the EuroMaidan. In February 2016 the transcript of a meeting of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine, which was held on February 28th 2014 (i.e. when events in Crimea were unfolding), was declassified. It provides a very clear insight into the status of the Ukrainian army at that time. According to the then minister of defence, Ihor Tenyukh, Ukraine could counter the Russian invaders with only 5,000 effective combat personnel. “Let’s be frank,” Tenyukh said during the meeting, “Today, we have no army. There are soldiers who have not fired a single shot in their lives.”

Ukraine only avoided occupation of its vast territory because Russia did not venture further inland in the spring of 2014. Instead, it relied on growing pro-Russian attitudes in the south-eastern regions. Prior to late summer, Russian actions were limited to infiltration and sabotage, supplying money, weapons, military equipment and ammunition to insurgents, and shelling Ukrainian bases from Russian territory. The real offensive, which included regular Russian army troops,
began in late August and turned into a heavy defeat for the Ukrainian armed forces near the city of Ilovaisk. Despite this, the Ukrainian army had grown slightly stronger by that time and was able to prevent further occupation of its territory. Now, two years after the outbreak of hostilities, the armed forces of Ukraine have firmly suppressed any attempts by Russian and insurgent troops to expand into their territory. Another large-scale offensive by the Russian army, should it take place, would likely end in failure, or at least result in disastrous losses for Russian side.

Ukrainian volunteers played a crucial role in enhancing Ukraine's defence capacity. Not only did they supply medication and equipment to the Anti-Terrorist Operation (ATO) Zone, but they also helped reform the entire military sector.

**From helmets to artillery**

At the beginning of the war, Ukrainian soldiers had almost no equipment, except for the light Soviet weapons that had been in storage for the past 20 years. Volunteers heading to the front had to supply themselves with everything, including uniforms, body armour, helmets, medication and even food supplies. Equipment provided to individuals by the state was usually outdated, both physically and morally, by around 20–30 years. At first, fighters in the numerous volunteer military units often looked the same as the separatist gangs. Most were dressed in an unsuitable manner, wearing jeans and t-shirts, and body armour and helmets that were bought from around the world. They were armed with different weapons, including seized ones (the state did not rush to share its weapons with patriotic combatants who had no official status). The regular troops also relied on volunteers for food, uniforms and footwear, first aid supplies and communications and surveillance equipment, since the ministry of defence could not provide anything of suitable quality in sufficient quantities.

In time, things began to change. A growing number of soldiers were receiving volunteer assistance, the state apparatus gradually began to move, ordnance factories started operating at full capacity and the soldiers in the ATO zone were receiving better supplies of equipment, munitions and medicine at the government's expense. The basic needs of the army were finally being met and the volunteers began looking more professional.
At the beginning of the war, volunteer activity was mostly chaotic. Those who were willing to support their country’s army would buy whatever they deemed necessary, contact friends fighting in the ATO zone or look up requests posted on social networks. The “gifts” were brought to the frontlines or passed through friends. Money and objects were collected among friends using Facebook and online crowdfunding mechanisms. It soon became clear that there was a demand for better co-ordination of volunteer activity, which soon led to the emergence of powerful volunteer associations.

Every Ukrainian taking at least some interest in their country’s life is familiar with organisations such as Wings of Phoenix, People’s Home Front, Return Alive or Army SOS. These volunteer funds have turnovers of tens of millions Ukrainian hryvnias, clear procedures, structure and transparent financial reporting. They handle far more ambitious tasks than simply buying food or medication and delivering it to the ATO zone. For example, the Peoples Project fund is engaged in the medical treatment of the ATO soldiers who suffered severe burns or limb injuries. With the application of modern biotechnologies, new tissues and bones are grown for the wounded and all the necessary operations are conducted thanks to this NGO. The fund also works on a project called “People’s Armour” to produce armour for armoured vehicles. A system devised by the fund’s engineers has already been attached to over 100 units of military equipment.

In addition, the Peoples Project has developed a complex system of army logistics. Each unit at the frontline can submit a request for equipment, communication means and any other items that they need and the volunteers will arrange the whole process, from fundraising to delivery of the requested aid to the frontline. Similarly, the Return Alive fund runs professional training courses for combat engineers, while Combat.ua funds, trains and fully equips sniper specialists according to the highest standards.

**Volunteer innovation**

The Ukrainian volunteers have achieved significant success in developing and supplying high-tech equipment to the Ukrainian army. First and foremost, this refers to unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), which have proven to be highly effective during the war in Donbas. Many volunteers are engaged in the construction
of the drones and even gears are assembled by Ukrainian schoolchildren in aero-
modelling hobby groups. However, in order to effectively resist Russian electronic
warfare systems, a more serious approach needs to be applied. For example, the
Peoples Project was granted a licence to buy components for drones from abroad
and began designing and constructing a Ukrainian model of a UAV. Army SOS
and People’s Home Front funds also provide surveillance drones to the army.

The volunteers are particularly proud of their innovative fire-control system, as
well as the combat battlefield management system. Software engineers from Peo-
bles Project have developed combat systems that can be used to adjust the course
of combat in real time, using tablets and GPS devices. The fund installed these
systems on the ambulances which it provided to the ATO zone and they greatly
facilitate the evacuation of wounded soldiers.

Army SOS has developed an assistance system for gunmen and provided
thousands of tablets with terrain maps and instruments to estimate the location
of enemy positions, thereby massively increasing their efficiency. Tablets are also
a component of the “Krapiva” (nettle) complex, which is used to create situational
awareness on the battlefield and coordinate the actions of multiple military units.
The “Arta” system, which was developed by the Return Alive fund, enables the co-
ordination of artillerymen within entire brigades, which is particularly important
as these soldiers play a key role in the fighting in eastern Ukraine. Overall, the
major volunteer organisations aim to tackle the problems which the state either
does not want to or does not have the time to handle. For example, this is the case
with thermal imagers and night vision devices, which the state does not provide
for its soldiers, unlike assault rifles, helmets and body armour.

After several months of active hostilities, the major volunteer organisations re-
alised that just supplying the necessary equipment to soldiers is not enough to turn
the Ukrainian army into a truly efficient force. One of the crucial tasks that needed
to be undertaken in order for this to happen was to reform the ministry of defence,
which had continued functioning in the old way i.e. maintaining tremendous levels
of bureaucracy and corruption despite Russian aggression. Therefore, a group of
volunteers aiming to change the system from within, the so-called “Volunteer As-
ault Force”, began working at the ministry of defence in late 2014. The main public
figures constituting this “assault force” were Yuri Biryukov, the head of the Wings
of Phoenix fund who took the office of adviser to President Petro Poroshenko and
David Arakhamia, the founder of the Peoples Project, who took over leadership
of the volunteer council under the ministry of defence.

The volunteers set out to accomplish several key tasks, including the imple-
mentation of a system of e-procurement, the provision of soldiers with adequate
accommodation, food and clothes and the introduction of a logistics system in ac-
cordance with NATO standards. At the same time, the volunteers had to handle other urgent problems. They oversaw the distribution of humanitarian aid and helped the ATO fighters receive veteran identification cards (this turned out to be a huge challenge due to the army’s massive bureaucracy), awards and compensation. Within a year of starting, the “Volunteer assault force” managed to achieve significant progress. They successfully introduced electronic accounting of the properties owned by the ministry of defence, launched a new experimental provision system for the soldiers and launched electronic identification cards which contained information about injuries and medical treatment. In the autumn of 2015 Arakhamia announced that project “Volunteer assault force” was being shut down and its functions transferred to the Office of Reforms under the ministry of defence, which embraced the reform initiatives commenced by the volunteers.

The activities of the volunteers at the ministry of defence were not all plain sailing. They were unreasonably accused of illegal activities including corruption, attempting to cash in on army supplies and exploiting their status in order to achieve career and political goals. Yuri Gusev, the deputy minister of defence who was overseeing the volunteers, was publicly fired and the general prosecutor’s office even initiated proceedings against Arakhamia on charges of inflicting losses to the state. After an outburst of social unrest, the criminal proceedings were halted. Nevertheless, this case demonstrates that the old corrupt system is not going to give in easily to the forces of reform.

The system does not surrender

“In a year and a half, the system has only learned not to bother volunteers and even to say ‘thank you’ sometimes. Indeed, this is better than nothing. At the same time, it is next to nothing,” the well-known volunteer Pavlo Kashchuk posted on his Facebook page in early 2016 following the announcement of his decision to cease volunteer activity. At around the same time, many other volunteers made similar statements. Some of them returned to their previous “pre-war” jobs, while others engaged in public activity, like joining commissions that were established to re-evaluate law enforcement officers. There are several reasons for this development.

Firstly, financial aid donated by the general population has shrunk significantly. As the economic situation worsens, very few people can continue handing over large sums of money from their own household budgets to aid the volunteers. Furthermore, the war is no longer a matter of paramount importance in the popular consciousness, particularly so after the relative truce that has been achieved on the frontlines (the last major fighting took place in early 2015 at Debaltseve). The war
has taken a back seat in the media as well, giving way to the current parliamentary and governmental crisis.

Secondly, many volunteers feel utterly discouraged when they see how soldiers treat them. Although it is not commonly discussed in Ukraine, many soldiers have started to openly abuse volunteer assistance. They often resell the expensive individual equipment which was purchased for them and persistently demand new supplies from the volunteers. Taking into account their current pay rate, soldiers could at least afford to buy food and clothing. In addition, excessive drinking in the military has reached epidemic proportions. In the absence of active hostilities, fighters feel discouraged, particularly taking into account that many casual, unmotivated and unpatriotic people were sent to the frontlines due to conscription. When a soldier who was wounded, not on the battlefield but in a drunken gunfight with his companions, was awarded a watch by the minister of defence, the absurdity reached its climax. So far, the army’s leadership has not come up with a clear plan on how to tackle alcoholism amongst the troops.

Thirdly, the state as well as the soldiers has maintained its consumer approach to the volunteers. While the troops find it easier to mooch aid from the volunteers than to approach their command with requests and thus potentially risk drawing down anger on themselves, the state apparatus sticks to a simple principle: since volunteers purchase thermal imagers and modern first aid kits, let them keep doing it. It simply means that the ministry of defence does not have to devote any of its own resources to that.

All the reforms that have been carried out are thanks to the persistency of the volunteers. The outcome of a recent tender to supply food to the soldiers was a real slap in the face for attempts to reform the defence procurement system. The firms that had earlier monopolised this market would receive around 70 million euros, even though their competitors were ready to provide food for the army for 50 million euros less.

Pavel Kashchuk gave an honest account of the progress that the volunteers had made in a year and a half: “We had to make every effort to hold out until the reforms were launched and proper procedures were in place, while the state learned to maintain the army using its own resources. We were so involved in these tasks that we did not notice that a year and a half had passed. Yet the system still does not work... Or to put it more accurately, it has not started to work the way it should.
This is partially the volunteers’ fault. Unfortunately, we eased the army, we eased
the government and we eased the state.”

The volunteers’ frustration is understandable. They see their Herculean efforts
yield disproportionately little result due to passivism and even resistance from the
bureaucratic system. Nevertheless, the situation is not as bleak as it might seem.
After all, the country’s defence system got rolling and partial reforms began tak-
ing place. The amount of modern weaponry and equipment at the frontline has
increased significantly over the last two years and the Ukrainian army has gained
badly needed experience and skills to become one of the most efficient armies in
Europe. Unfortunately, this all came at a cost: the thousands of Ukrainian soldiers
who lost their lives in the conflict.

Translated by Olena Shynkarenko

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JEWISH CULTURE FESTIVAL

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IWONA REICHARDT: Starting in 1990, Poland began to undergo the first stages of significant reform at the local government level. The communist national councils were replaced with democratically elected city councils. You were among the first elected deputies to the city council of Gdańsk. What are your memories of those early days?

PAWEŁ ADAMOWICZ: My work for local government formally began in May 1990, when I was elected for the first time in my life to the city council in Gdańsk. I was 25 years old at the time and my knowledge about local government was purely theoretical and academic. A lot of it had come from books that had been published in Poland before the Second World War, as well as some western publications. The truth is, outside of my theoretical knowledge, I had no practical experience of local government and neither did any of the other candidates for the council. Thus, I devoted my evenings to reading about local governance. Meanwhile, during the day, I taught it. My students were the other candidates for the city council. I also travelled throughout Poland and, as a recent law graduate, I became a coach. This was one of the most fascinating periods in my life; full of optimism and energy.

Professor Jerzy Regulski, who was one of the lead architects of local government reform in Poland, recently stated that its implementation on the scale that was undertaken in 1990 would be impossible today. He also noted what you just said: that at that time, nobody had any experience of democratic governance at the local level. Despite that, those reforms are regarded as some of the greatest Polish successes of the last 25 years. Why?

The assessment of Professor Regulski is a post-factum assessment. His words refer to the direction these changes have
led to, not to what was begun in 1990. He speaks about the whole process in which the local leaders and activists, such as myself, were learning their roles and responsibilities. New opportunities were created and thankfully, everything has progressed in a very positive direction. However, without the energy and enthusiasm that I mentioned earlier, the reforms would have been unsuccessful. Therefore, it was not just the reforms themselves that were a success, but the whole process of implementing them and learning from them.

What was this process of learning like?

Our first lesson was in 1990 with the local elections, or to be more specific, the preparations for them, which excited many people. Citizens’ committees were established in every district based on a bottom-up approach. People were abandoning their underground activities and beginning to operate legally. Their involvement in distributing anti-regime brochures morphed into interest in their local situation. I vividly remember the discussions at these committees, where we debated issues like the quality of drinking water and beautification. We were slowly becoming citizens responsible for our own localities.

Another important lesson we learnt was about the free market and entrepreneurship. Under communism everything was state-owned. In the early 1990s privatisation was introduced, which was also a spontaneous bottom-up process. It was supposed to be regulated by the local authorities, who did not really know how to handle it themselves. Local authorities took over a significant number of state-owned enterprises. For example, in Gdańsk, the local taxi company and brewery were among the first to be privatised. This was an accelerated lesson in local capitalism. At that time, there were discussions about whether this newly-born free market would be truly free or whether it would be subdued by – mind my words here! – the democratic government; whether we would have a communal economy or “communal socialism”, as it was called back then. In other words, there were serious debates about local governments having to quickly privatise state enterprises and whether they should own them and become shareholders in them. Different models were proposed. Gdańsk took a decisive path of privatisation, whereas Gdynia took a more communal one, introducing privatisation more gradually.

Another important challenge was decommunisation of the city government. A commission was set up to verify the workforce. It is important to acknowledge that even though this commission was composed of former oppositionists, who had often experienced harm and harassment from the communist authorities, in Gdańsk at least, (I don’t know what the situation was like in other cities) there was no atmosphere of revenge, no witch hunt. Intuitively, we understood that there was nobody who could immediately replace the incumbent communist personnel and that we
would have to do so in an evolutionary manner, step by step. The process of exchange was spread over ten years and did not take place right away. It was a very stormy period. It was also a time when the local political scene, as well as leaders and opinion formers, were taking shape. Journalists also had to learn what local governance was all about and how to cover it in media.

The success of the last 26 years is certainly impressive, but all roses have thorns… What were the failures and where is there still work to be done?

Where we did not succeed, and it is questionable as to whether we ever could, was the mass engagement of citizens. When we conduct public opinion polls here in Gdańsk we can see that since 1996, people have become more interested in local affairs, but this interest is still at a much lower level than that recorded in Western Europe. Voter turnout and other indicators of civil activism suggest that we are dealing with a civil society in status nascendi. Furthermore, although in 1989/1990 we were saying that it would take a few generations to leave communism behind, the truth is that we did not really believe in what we were saying. Lech Wałęsa has said that for Moses, it took one generation to bring his people to the Promised Land, adding jokingly that in Poland, we have neither a desert nor a Moses, and nor was our journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. Today, we may be one sociological generation away from communism, but *homo sovieticus* is still here and making its presence known.

How does it affect local governance?

Local government leaders, deputies and mayors should all be animators of local life. However, they rarely are because they are scared of creating an alternative to themselves i.e. opposition or possible successors. As a result, local governments stay focused on investment, rebuilding and the whole technocratic sphere. By doing so, they have drastically increased the standard of living for their residents, which is without a doubt an important success. Yet despite that, we still lack imagination, patience and perspectives on how to build a community of citizens. This is now our biggest challenge.
We know, both from literature and social practice, that civil society is not about enlightened absolutism imposed from the top. It takes place through the activism of different entrepreneurs and people of different professions and ideas, as well as through public disputes and conflicts. That is how civil society is created. In Poland we talk a lot about ways of enforcing this process. We have projects whose purpose is to achieve this, including a citizens’ budget, open data and social consultations. Of course, the internet and social media websites such as Twitter and Facebook have been instrumental in creating direct contact with citizens, despite their adverse aspects like online hate speech. Even so, I still believe that their net impact is positive rather than negative.

Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that the local authorities in Poland are closer to citizens now than ever before. Local government is more transparent and accessible. Whilst this does not apply to every single mayor, a great majority of them are. Nevertheless, there is a major debate in Poland that keeps coming around about how the central government should impose regulations on local authorities. Personally, I am against overregulation. I believe that there has to be a certain amount of room for freedom of local expression and flavour, and I fear state paternalism. In addition, I disagree with the belief that central government has the best understanding of local needs. However, this view is still prevalent and characteristic of all Polish political groups, regardless of their orientation.

Finally, it is important to note that the EU funds which are made available to local governments help create metropolitan areas and help the authorities co-operate and overcome local particularities. However, the truth is that in spite of the funding, co-operation between neighbouring communities is still pretty weak. This is probably because local leaders and their communities often have mental blocks about these sorts of things. They still do not see the value of local co-ordination, co-operation and compromise and how it can reduce costs and increase effectiveness, as well as attract investors and improve their overall quality of life. Luckily, we have been able to overcome this barrier in our local region and as a result, we now have the Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot metropolitan area.

This area is regarded as an important urban centre in both northern Poland and the southern part of the Baltic Sea region. Thanks to the Small Border Movement agreement, it is also a destination for many Russians, who come here not just to shop but also to share experiences and co-operate with Gdańsk-based organisations. This shows the potential for soft-power activities in the area. What is your experience of this?

My personal interactions with Kaliningrad and its authorities began in the 1990s. I remember the negotiations regarding the first agreement on co-operation. They were difficult but ground-breaking times. Today, representatives
from Kaliningrad’s authorities often come to Gdańsk. We train them and share our experience with them. The same can be said about partnerships with non-governmental organisations. However, their activities are unfortunately heavily dependent on financial resources and the political atmosphere in Russia. Nevertheless, when asked about the effectiveness of these visits, I would say that it is difficult to assess to what extent they have resulted in behavioural change, new administrative practices and an improved political culture. I have personally had several meetings with residents of Kaliningrad, with whom I have discussed our experiences.

Did these talks make you more optimistic or pessimistic?

Let me put it this way: when I said earlier that civil society in Gdańsk is in status nascendi, the same is even truer of civil society in Kaliningrad. Thousands of Russians come here and observe our media and civic activities, but the process of comprehension is very slow. In my view, it will be the residents who will make decisions in times to come. Let us see what comes from it.

Gdańsk is also partnered with cities in Ukraine, a country that is now undergoing system reforms which could be comparable to those that Poland experienced in the early 1990s. What would you advise your Ukrainian colleagues who want to make their country as strong and prosperous as Poland is today?

Before I answer your question, let me make one disclaimer: I am not a specialist on Ukraine and I do not know the local context very well. Nevertheless, I can share with you a few reflections regarding the overall situation that I am familiar with. In addition to the national changes that are being introduced in Ukraine, a few experiments should be encouraged as well. What I mean by this is that certain localities which the government deems to be “ready” should get more rights at an earlier stage than others. In Poland we had a series of “pilot projects” which were used in smaller areas before being introduced at the national level. It meant that we were able to gain experience in certain areas and subsequently adjust our ideas and policies for wider implementation. Certainly, the mode of introducing reforms is very important and requires determination and total commitment.

It is also very important to find time and money for the training and monitoring processes, utilising both internal and external sources if necessary. In the 1990s we travelled a lot to France, Denmark and Sweden for different forms of training. That is why, in my view, it is very important that Ukrainian oblasts have partners in European states and that these are genuine partnerships. For this reason, I often meet with Ukrainian journalists, representatives of Ukrainian NGOs and local authorities. Nevertheless, it is vital that these interactions are tactful and are not perceived to be a new form of colonisation.
You are a member of the European Union’s Committee of Regions. One of its strategic aims is political and economic co-operation with Eastern Partnership states. Yet the EU’s Eastern Partnership programme seems to be in crisis. Do you think local governments can break the current impasse?

A year ago I was in Yerevan in Armenia, listening to representatives from Armenian, Georgian and Ukrainian cities. It was from them that I learned how much those places need the Eastern Partnership. They argued that it should not cease to exist and that although the amount of resources the EU puts into this initiative is not large, especially when compared to other programmes, it is still significant. That is why if I were to advise the EU on how to advance co-operation with partners in the East, I would recommend getting more local actors and practitioners involved.

I remember in the 1990s when I was trained by the Germans, French, Danish and Dutch. Now, I see it as my duty to pass on this knowledge further East. The selection of people is key, as is avoiding routine and Potemkin villages. That is why it is important that trainers who go to the East are supported with financial assistance. We need to avoid situations where a trainer arrives, gives a speech, maybe even helps initiate a project but then leaves and nothing is continued. There needs to be constant interaction and support. I am convinced that the mayors of cities in the former Soviet bloc that are now EU members can be credible messengers of knowledge about local governance and the EU. Our partners in the East need to feel that they can count on us. There is nothing worse than a quick loss of interest.

Do you think that citizens in these Eastern European cities will develop a sense of responsibility for their locality, such as we see in the West?

Of course. In my numerous conversations with Georgians, Armenians and Ukrainians, I have noticed that these people have already discovered (or are on the path to discovering) the future of their cities. They are involved in the process of building their communities and creating civil roots for them. I see a lot of local leaders who are champions of change and we need to support them, but at the same time, not expect too much of them straight away. Change will often be two steps forward, one step back. That is why we need to be patient and persistent.

Looking towards the future, what are the main challenges facing us at the local level in our region?

In my view local leaders can do a lot to build a pro-EU atmosphere and encourage co-operation. Naturally, this requires character, courage and determination. The key issue in Europe today is refugees. In Gdańsk, we discuss this matter widely. There are many fears and residents are very concerned. I try to go against mainstream opinion and explain that should the Polish government decide to accept refugees, it is our moral
responsibility to host them in our city. Of course, this calls for the preparation of an integration policy and for this to be effective, we need to co-operate with local NGOs that work with immigrants.

It is also important to celebrate our membership in the EU and what it means for us at the local level, which frequently seems abstract to many people. I often argue that it was not the EU that funded something in our city, like a road or a bridge, but European tax payers like the Dutch, the Germans, the Swedes or the Brits. This is how we should be constructing language around the EU, by staying away from bureaucratic jargon and highlighting the human dimension.

Finally, in the face of what is going on in the world, particularly the conspicuous changes in Europe and the United States, it seems that local governments still represent something of a base. It is possible that in the next few years, although there could be major changes in the system of managing states and international organisations, local governments will continue to be the foundation of democracy.

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Iwona Reichardt is deputy editor in chief of New Eastern Europe.
The European Union and civil society are the two main driving forces pushing the Ukrainian government to implement reforms. Ukrainian activists support the army, help those displaced by the conflict and fight for change in cities, as well as monitor law-making and public finances. Yet the truth is that even more should be expected of them as they have the potential to be a real “game changer”.

The reform process in Ukraine has been moving at a snail’s pace. The politicians who are responsible for its implementation are facing an uphill battle. The economy is in ruins and the east of the country is being torn apart by a never-ending war. Although its intensity differs at times, it is certainly not a “frozen conflict”. As if all this was not enough, there has been a serious power struggle at the highest level of politics, where Arseniy Yatsenyuk’s government lost social support and the post-Maidan coalition in parliament collapsed, leading to a new government with Volodymyr Groysman as the new prime minister.

Moreover, Yatsenyuk and his people were viewed as the main impediment to change. The public is irritated, but not yet speaking with a united voice. Some people argue that while things could be better, given the circumstances, complaints should be restricted. Others are not hesitant about voicing their strong criticism, blaming the current government (the prime minister more than the president) for the lack of progress. Foreign partners, both from the EU and the United States, are not hiding their frustrations either.
Fifteen minutes

This is big politics. Nevertheless, in today’s Ukraine, there are also other actors playing an important role, especially when it comes to rebuilding the state. Their work may receive less media attention than the activities of the government, but it is priceless nonetheless. They are the non-governmental organisations, also known as civil society. Those who are part of it and still remember Ukraine after the Orange Revolution know that this time, they cannot allow the reform process to be managed solely by the politicians. They know that if this were to happen, the collective efforts of Ukrainian society, including the sacrifices made during the Revolution of Dignity, would have been in vain, digested by the fire of political turmoil, just like before.

There is no doubt that Ukrainian non-state actors are currently experiencing their fifteen minutes of fame. Their work is visible and appreciated by the Ukrainian society that not only values their social and political activities but also the sacrifice of the volunteer battalions fighting in Donbas, as well as the role currently played by the church and other religious organisations. Supporters of these non-state initiatives are also outside Ukraine, mainly in EU institutions and states. The EU has made it clear that it expects civil society to play an important role in rebuilding Ukraine, assuming that the authorities consult all relevant decisions with NGOs and truly listen to what the activists have to say.

Clearly, not all NGOs can play an equally important role in the reforms. Ukraine is not an isolated case and like anywhere else, there is a small number of organisations that are considered to be the leaders of change and whose voice is regarded as important in debates on different issues. Nonetheless, the whole third sector is now learning important lessons and gaining real experience. For example, it is said that the NGOs are successful only when they manage to somehow change the reality. Realising this many representatives of today’s Ukrainian NGOs are now quite aware that sole criticism will not allow them to achieve much. Knowing that politicians are usually strong personalities who do not like to be poorly graded, activists are now more and more cognisant that the key to being effective and respected is dialogue and a constructive attitude. This also includes a pro-active approach and offering the authorities solutions which later require lobbying efforts.

After the Revolution of Dignity, activists took advantage of the reinvigorated desire for change and new NGOs sprouted up everywhere. However, in terms of competence, many organisations are still quite weak and require assistance. Hence, another important lesson that the Ukrainian NGOs are learning is the need to share
their know-how with others. This is a prerequisite to the overall empowerment of the NGO sector – a development which is still very much desired.

The greatest disgrace that Ukrainian NGOs have experienced in recent times is being labelled “grant-eaters”. This name is meant to show that those who work in the third sector are focused on one thing: money. Thus, they are said to be operating from project to project, just to obtain funds. Despite this slander, it is becoming clear within the third sector community that a good NGO is one that is persistent in the implementation of its mission. Consequently, it seeks funding to further it, not the other way around i.e. adjusts its goals to match the expectations of its donors.

**First among equals?**

The leading organisation that supports the Ukrainian government in the process of rebuilding the country is the Reanimation Package of Reforms (RPR). It operates as a platform uniting different leading Ukrainian non-governmental organisations. The most important document produced by the RPR is a road map which presents, in a very detailed way, the priority areas which require reforms,
starting with the fight against corruption through administrative reform, tax reform, decentralisation, energy sector reform, reform of the army, election law reform, etc. The document has strong backing from the current parliament. Before the elections in the autumn of 2014, eight political forces, including those that are currently in Verkhovna Rada (Batkivshchyna, Petro Poroshenko’s Bloc, National Front, Samopomich and the Radical Party of Oleh Lyashko) signed a memorandum, expressing their willingness to implement the reforms included in the road map.

On the surface, everything looks perfect. There is a strong team in place, ready to work and support the government with concrete solutions. In practice, however, things are less rosy. By February 19th 2016, the parliament had passed 64 of the bills that had been proposed by RPR (an additional 17 had been passed during the previous term). This may sound like a lot, but in fact, it is only a fraction of what is being proposed by the NGO coalition. Their strategy includes 24 different areas of reform and each of them has a number of objectives to implement. For example, the fight against corruption includes 15 objectives, tax reform has nine, energy sector reform has 14, decentralisation has 15 while judicial and prosecutorial reform – 30. These numbers speak for themselves, illustrating that the current parliament is not rushing in its bid to implement change. Furthermore, passing a law is not the end of the process. The provisions of a legal act still need to be implemented effectively. This has proven to be a problem for Ukrainian officials. When analysing the speed of reforms, it is worth reflecting upon what the process of modernising the country would look like if there were no RPR engagement. In all likelihood, there would not be a well-planned strategy and any changes would be ad hoc in nature or remain purely theoretical.

The RPR has quickly become an institution operating at the national level and with a nuanced approach to the reform process. Yet it is important to acknowledge that there are also many other NGOs in Ukraine which, through their hard work, have slowly been changing the country for the better. These organisations operate regardless of whether the authorities want to co-operate with them or not. In fact, a lack of co-operation with the government does not mean that they cannot fulfil their mission. Instead, it serves as motivation to convince Ukrainian politicians that the activists’ work is valuable and that their opinions matter and should be taken into account, even if they are not in line with those of the government.

**Conflict zone and beyond**

Although Ukrainian NGOs are currently dealing with a wide spectrum of issues, they are also coming up with their own solutions to almost every one of them.
Consider the value and importance of the organisations that work in the regions, as it is these activists who know which changes are required and who are able to monitor the real influence that reforms have on people’s lives. Although it is beyond the scope of this text to show all the sectors in which Ukrainian NGOs are currently operating, there are two areas of their work that should be highlighted: the war (and its consequences) and changes on the local community level.

When discussing the Russian-Ukrainian war in Donbas, it is important to remember that without a strong volunteer movement and the support of the NGOs, the size of the territory currently under Ukrainian control would be much smaller. When the war in the east started, the Ukrainian army was in decay and it was volunteers who primarily fed it. It was also idealistic activists who collected funds for the army and provided soldiers with food, clothing and combat equipment. Finally, it was activists who took care (and still do) of the wounded and their families.

The consequences of the war, as well as the illegal annexation of Crimea, included a large wave of migration from these territories. It is estimated that in Ukraine the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is around 1.7 million. The largest concentrations of IDPs are unsurprisingly in the east of the country, especially in the non-occupied Donetsk and Luhans’k regions, as well as the Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhia and Dnipropetrovsk Oblasts. However, there are also many other places where the number of IDPs is equal to the population who inhabited that territory before the war.

To date, the state has handled the migration challenge rather poorly. Not only does it lack funding for material aid, but there is also no strategic vision for how to manage the overall situation. Again, NGOs have stepped in to help. The organisations providing aid include Crimea SOS, Donbas SOS and Vostok SOS, to name but a few. An analysis of their work shows that first aid reaches the victims already as they are leaving the conflict zone. Support includes assistance with finding accommodation, psychological help, administrative and legal aid, for example, with obtaining social benefits or enrolling children into a new school or university and, if possible, finding employment. By definition, the most important aspect of the activities carried out by these organisations is providing necessary humanitarian aid, which includes the provision of food, medicine and clothes for families who, as a result of the war, have lost all of their belongings.

In addition to these grassroots activities, which are intended to directly help victims, there is also work carried out at “the top level”, which includes activists’
fighting for the regulation of IDP status in accordance with UN standards. Consequently, in December 2015 Ukraine’s parliament passed a law to strengthen the guarantee of rights and liberties for IDPs, which was signed by the president in January 2016. The current legislation is meant to simplify the process of establishing residency in a new place and regulate IDPs’ employment status with new employers (in cases when an employment agreement was not terminated prior to displacement and is legally binding).

Non-governmental organisations, such as the Institute of Social and Economic Studies and the Committee of Ukraine’s Voters, are also fighting for changes in election law that would allow IDPs to fully participate in the democratic process. Currently, the law in effect prevents them from participating in local governmental elections (Ukrainian citizens can only vote where they have permanent residency, not where they temporarily reside). In August 2015 a new bill was introduced in parliament to change this. Third sector representatives had hoped that the law would be passed before the local elections in October; they even organised demonstrations in front of the parliament building. Unfortunately, the law has still not been passed at the time of writing.

**Transparency and openness**

In the regions where Ukrainian NGOs are actively monitoring the legislative process and the financial activities of the authorities, the most popular projects are those that focus on transparency. Over 20 cities have already been evaluated according to the “index of openness of local government”. The index is based on a methodology developed by the Lviv-based Civil Network “OPORA” and mastered with other NGOs. It assesses transparency at the local government level and evaluates the openness of communication with residents.

Projects aimed at monitoring local budgets are also currently very popular in Ukraine and have been proven to have a significant influence on the financial policies of local administrations. Experience in many countries shows that monitoring the city budget allows to detect and stop corruption in local government whilst simultaneously forcing budget policy reform to ensure that public money is spent effectively. Therefore, initiatives that focus on monitoring the budget are being introduced in increasing numbers of Ukrainian cities, not just the largest cities in the oblast. Popularly known as “open budgets”, these projects allow residents to visually understand how local officials spend public money.

Few actors have had as large an impact on the development of cities over the last two years as NGOs. In Ukraine, where the conviction that “public means nobody’s”
is still quite common in the mentality of the government and ordinary citizens, initiatives aimed at improving the quality of life have an even greater meaning. They are meant to convince residents that the streets, roads, public buildings and spaces are there to serve them and thus have to be taken care of.

One initiative, called the “warm city”, in Ivano-Frankivsk illustrates how civil society is changing the way urban residents live in Ukraine. “Warm city” is a platform that connects NGOs, citizens and businesses interested in modernising the city. Thanks to the co-operation of many groups, the city has seen new initiatives such as: city identity (in 2014 the city received a new logo, street navigation guideline and recommendations on the architectural concept of the streets), child-friendly public space (after the architectural competition modern and organic child-friendly public spots were created) or bike-friendly city. Similarly, in Vinnytsia, local NGOs led by a group called “Our Podillia” have started to reform the local transportation system. Cities in Ukraine are notorious for having no public transport timetables at stops and stations. In Vinnytsia, the initiative aims to change that. Activists have already covered 90 per cent of the city with up-to-date timetables, all without the help of the local authorities.

Without a doubt, civil society and the EU are currently the two main driving forces pushing the Ukrainian government to implement reforms. If there were no NGOs, the number of changes that have been implemented to date would be significantly reduced. Yet the truth of the matter is that expectations should be higher. There is potential for even greater co-operation, as well as for more activities to be introduced outside cities and in new regions, especially in the south and the east. A stronger national network would force the authorities to treat civil society even more seriously, while activists need to start looking for new methods of communicating with the authorities.

Regardless, there is still huge potential in the mechanisms of public participation in Ukraine. The development of a strong NGO sector is still in its infancy. However, considering the recent developments that have taken place under the current government and the reports of old corrupt practices returning, there is a risk that the sector could become disillusioned or lose its momentum. Therefore, now more than ever, there should be a renewed focus on giving more power to the NGO sector in Ukraine.

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

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Non-governmental organisations and civil society are an important element of Moldova’s modernisation process. In many parts of the country, hundreds of projects and initiatives are being implemented with the aim of improving living conditions and development at the local level. However, due to the fact that the majority of the largest NGOs are based in Chișinău and that they are dependent on foreign funding, the majority of Moldovans do not trust the representatives of civil society.

The birth of today’s civil society in Moldova can be traced to the late 1980s, the period of resistance towards the communist regime, as well as to the rise of freedom movements in the early 1990s. It was also a time when the first foreign donors arrived in Moldova, ready to support the country’s modernisation and development of its civil society. In 1997 the first Civil Society Forum was organised by the CONTACT Centre, one of the leading Moldovan NGOs. The initiative was supported by the Soros Foundation, Moldova and the World Bank. These meetings still take place today.

With time the Moldovan authorities started to view civil society as an important element of the country’s development. In the late 1990s the law on the freedom of association and the law on foundations were passed. They were subsequently followed by the law on access to information in 2000, the law on philanthropy and
sponsorship in 2002 and the law on transparency in decision-making in 2008. When in 2006 the law on regional development was passed, civil activity was already regarded as one the main drivers of Moldova’s development. In 2008 the first strategy of the development of civil society for 2009–2011 was accepted. Within its framework, the law on volunteering was prepared. In autumn 2012 the Moldovan parliament passed another strategy for the development of civil society in 2012–2015. It was accompanied by an action plan on how to implement the strategy.

**Three priorities**

The 2012 strategy identified three main priorities for the development of Moldovan civil society. They included: strengthening civil society’s framework of participation in developing and monitoring the implementation of public policies, promoting and strengthening the financial sustainability of the civil society sector and developing volunteering and an active civic spirit. The implementation of the strategy was overseen by the department of the state chancellery, which was specially assigned to the task, and non-profit organisations united in the state council of non-governmental organisations. The process was also observed by foreign donors. Experts calculated that by the end of 2015 around 30 per cent of the changes mentioned in the document had been implemented. A few additional laws were also passed, including the law on financing non-governmental organisations with personal income taxes, the so-called “two per cent law”. However, at present, there are no implementation or monitoring mechanisms to oversee these changes.

The 2012 strategy is an excellent illustration of the state of Moldovan civil society. In the official report prepared by the state chancellery, from the perspective of the authorities, non-governmental organisations did not take an active role in the implementation of the changes envisioned in the strategy and that is why they were not carried out according to plan. However, civil society accuses the government of not taking their opinions into account. The donors, in turn, point to a lack of government ownership and responsibility for both the implementation of the strategy and the development of civil society, stating that a great majority of the resources the NGOs received came from abroad and not the Moldovan state, which does not want to bear the burden of responsibility.

All this has created a patchwork system of support and co-operation with non-governmental organisations. To help it heal, western partners have been pressing the Moldovan government to actively assist the development of Moldovan civil society, admitting that they are ready to financially support projects that are implemented by the NGOs. The state, insofar as it is able, has been trying to meet
the donors’ expectations, just so long as they do not require any financial contributions. As a result the NGOs, which for years have been heavily dependent on donor support, are now becoming part of a political game, often taking over the role of state institutions. In this way, they have become partners to foreign donors, and by doing so, have freed the state from this.

Moldovan law stipulates that there must be development opportunities for civil society and provides it with basic rights such as the right to gather, formulate opinions and establish associations. However, due to the lack of implementation mechanisms and the weakness of the state or, to put it differently, its (partial) capturing, non-governmental organisations are unable to completely fulfil their roles, neither as institutions monitoring the activity of the state nor as being initiators of change and reform.

**Donor-driven**

Most of the discussions on civil society and the role of non-governmental organisations in Moldova end with similar conclusions. They point to their dependency on external funding (the so-called donor-driven civil society) and their heavy concentration in Chişinău. In addition, there is the problem of a lack of effective support mechanisms for local, grassroots initiatives, as well as a lack of financial and institutional stability in the third sector in general.

In February 2016 over 10,200 NGOs were registered in Moldova. In October 2014 there were 9,200. These numbers make it seem like there has been a dramatic improvement in the country’s third sector. However, practice shows that quite often, these organisations do not undertake any activities and only serve as money-making tools. Research data suggest that only a quarter of registered non-profits have implemented at least one project in the last three years. Almost all of these projects, 80 to 90 per cent, were financed by external funding, mainly from the EU or EU member states, the US, Canada and Switzerland. Only a few ministries (including the ministry of youth and sport, the ministry of culture and the ministry of environment) announce open calls for grant proposals. This practice is still unusual. That is why a lot is riding on the aforementioned “two per cent” law that was passed in late 2013. It allows tax payers to assign two per cent of their taxes to the non-profit organisation of their choice. The law is due to enter into force this year.

The EU and its member states remain the biggest donors to Moldovan civil society. Among the countries that assist Moldova in its development are: the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Finland, Sweden, Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Romania, Lithuania and Poland. The US is also an important actor that, together
with an American organisation called FHI360, is implementing large support projects for the development of the non-governmental sector. The activity of Sweden also deserves recognition as it tries to act as an informal co-ordinator of foreign donors’ activities regarding civil society.

The majority of active Moldovan NGOs are headquartered in the country’s capital, Chișinău. However, this has created a gap between the well-developed professional organisations and the large majority of the country’s population (60 per cent) that reside in rural areas. This raises legitimate concerns regarding what the real interaction between these organisations and the rest of society is, as well as what their understanding of Moldovan reality looks like.

At least a few dozen NGOs headquartered in Chișinău are prosperous and professional. Yet outside the capital, the majority of organisations are struggling with problems such as an inability to write grant proposals, getting funds and administering projects. Therefore, donors are faced with the problem of how to reach the grass-roots initiatives that are run in local communities and rural areas, as well as how to effectively support them. Unfortunately, support is quite often limited by the rules of the aid programmes within whose frameworks the initiatives operate.

The fact that the largest NGOs are concentrated in Chișinău and that they heavily depend on foreign funding explains why the majority of Moldovans do not trust civil society representatives. The common perception of the third sector is that it is detached from reality, operating somewhere between the government and foreign partners. Opinion poll research shows that just 26 per cent of Moldovans trust non-governmental organisations, while as many as 80 per cent trust the Orthodox Church. The main reason for this low level of trust in NGOs is a popular assumption that NGO activities are a source of profit. It is certainly true that salaries in the third sector are higher than those in public institutions. It is also quite often said that NGOs are implementing projects not because they want to initiate change but to make money – “not money for projects but projects for money”. That is why the credibility of the third sector, as well as the system of co-operation between it and foreign donors, is currently regarded as the greatest challenge facing the non-governmental sector in Moldova. Moreover, it is affecting those who support its development.
For the European Union the development of civil society is one of the key talking points in its dialogue with the Moldovan government. This is not surprising given that representatives of non-governmental organisations have become partners in talks with the governments of EU member states. This is because they are seen as a credible alternative to the discredited authorities in Chişinău. NGOs have taken up the role of change initiators and are seen as guarantors of Moldova’s modernisation and integration with the EU.

The majority of NGOs, especially in Chişinău, support Moldova’s EU integration. Conversely, a whopping 60 per cent of Moldovan society would prefer to see their country integrated with Russia and the Customs Union. This anti-EU sentiment is clearly a result of the discredited EU integration process, which in the last few years has been carried out by the coalition of so-called pro-European parties. Their work did not bring about many positive changes, despite their claims to the contrary.

Thus, EU-Moldova relations are now characterised by a feeling of disappointment. This has also translated into a negative opinion of those NGOs who are advocates of the integration process. Furthermore, foreign donors are finding it difficult to reach out to organisations that are currently focusing more on co-operation with Russia. The activities of this group, who should be viewed as separate to the organisations discussed in this article, are supported mainly by the business community.

The division of political language between pro-European, Romanian-speaking Moldovans and Russian-speaking Eurosceptics is also reflected in a division between NGOs. The Association Agreement between Moldova and the European Union includes many statements regarding civil society and its role in EU-Moldovan relations. They assume the following: (1) Non-governmental organisations should be strongly involved in EU-Moldova relations and in the implementation of the agreement, (2) Civil society will actively participate in public policy-decision making processes through a transparent and open dialogue between different stakeholders, (3) Civil society will support consolidation-building and (4) The enhancement of the dialogue processes between civil society and its social partners.

The Association Agreement places emphasis on the exchange of experiences and building partnerships between Moldovan and EU organisations. A special platform, called the EU-Moldova Civil Society Platform, has also been created for the purposes of co-operation and monitoring the association process. Its task is to provide opinions regarding the implementation of the agreement to the Association...
Council. Similarly, in the economic part (the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement), the establishment of opinion groups, created by representatives of the non-governmental sector representing the interests of entrepreneurs, was foreseen.

Transnistria

The non-governmental sector in Transnistria is a separate case. In practice, the situation on the right and left bank of the Dniester River is completely different. The authorities in Tiraspol, the capital of the self-declared republic, tolerate the activity of non-governmental organisations in areas such as environmental protection and social assistance, but their work is heavily monitored by the committee for humanitarian assistance, which is operated by the Transnistrian authorities. Relations between NGO’s and the authorities follow the Russian model. Thus, Transnistrian discourse regarding the third sector has started to include phrases such as “foreign agents” and GONGO’s (government organised non-governmental organisations). In April 2015 the security committee in Tiraspol decided that non-governmental organisations receiving support from abroad are a potential threat to the security of the separatist republic. In addition, access to the media and information space is being gradually limited by the authorities. There have been reports of incidents where NGOs’ websites are blocked.

Official data indicate that there are around 2,500 non-governmental organisations registered in Transnistria. They face many difficulties gaining access to information and external financing, all because registration on the territory of Transnistria is not recognised by Moldova’s foreign partners. An additional difficulty they face is receiving resources from outside of Transnistria, which is due to a lack of compatibility with Transnistria’s banking system. All of these things show that non-governmental organisations and the civil society sector in Transnistria require a special approach. Even though there are programmes for NGOs that finance projects on both banks of the Dniester River, Transnistrian organisations often feel that they are not equal partners when compared to their contemporaries on the right bank.

Need for change

Non-governmental organisations and civil society in Moldova are incredibly important parts of Moldova’s modernisation process. In many parts of the coun-
try, hundreds of projects and initiatives are being implemented with the aim of improving living conditions and development at the local level. The majority of these initiatives are implemented by enthusiasts who care about the development of their local community and want to initiate positive change. Reaching them, supporting them and encouraging them to stay where they are is a challenge faced by all the parties engaged in Moldova’s development. The problem is that the architecture of the support system does not always allow civil society activities to be effectively supported. The (partial) capture of the state, as is the case now, makes things even more difficult.

The involvement of foreign partners also calls for deeper reflection. Existing methods have not brought about the expected results. Clearly, even the best prepared development strategies, workshops, training, new laws and proper implementation tools do not always bring the desired changes. It is clear that in Moldova the existing model of co-operation is losing its potential. Although the country could continue on its current course, nothing would change. It would merely pay for continued relative stability, nothing more. In this context, maybe we could try to re-think the role of non-governmental organisations and civil society, as well as their foreign partners, and work on increasing trust in their credibility and the values that accompany change, both at the federal and local levels. Reflection on what has been done thus far requires time and work. The question remains whether Moldova’s foreign partners have the will to undertake it.

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

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Sooner or later, there will be changes in Belarus. It does not matter what will be the cause. Under new circumstances, social moods will regain influence over the situation in the country. However, if public opinion has not changed by then, Belarus could repeat, in a fully democratic and transparent way, the Crimean scenario without “little green men” on the ground.

Why support Belarusian civil society? In 22 years of Alyaksandr Lukashenka’s reign, I have heard different answers to that question in Poland: “because it is the right thing to do”, “it is necessary to stop the rebirth of the Soviet Union”, “by doing so, the ‘Solidarity’ movement repays its debt for the support it received from the West in the 1980s”, “security reasons”, etc. There is a strong belief that this investment would quickly pay off. The pro-European, democratic and independence-oriented opposition would be able to tear down the post-communist and pro-Russian regime introduced by the Belarusian president, a collective farmer with a strange haircut and a Soviet mentality, who seemed to be an easy target. His future collapse was perceived to be a consequence of a natural set of events. So, why not help Belarus and foster this process?

No alternative

Years have passed and Lukashenka remains in power. His political opponents are marginalised, plunged into quarrels and alienated in the Belarusian political
reality. A grey-haired, pudgy Lukashenka continuously repeats rhetoric from a previous epoch, all the while gripping Belarus in both hands. Lukashenka’s power seems to be stable and is not threatened by anything. The opposition has transformed from the West’s pupil into a whipping boy. It cannot even meet the expectations of its supporters, despite its best efforts, and it is blamed for all their defeats.

Therefore, it should come as no surprise that it is increasingly being said that there is no point to focus on Belarusian civil society and that instead, it would be better to normalise relations with Lukashenka. Those who promote such rapprochement believe that working with the Belarusian president would be an opportunity to tempt him with western support and that by cultural osmosis, some western ideas will disseminate in his milieu. This is meant to be a “new” approach to Belarus. The democratic activists and oppressed independent media and NGOs become irrelevant in such circumstances. They can easily be pushed into the background in the name of political realism and good relations with an omnipotent Lukashenka.

The current mood seems to be in favour of establishing official contacts with Minsk. This is likely related to Russia’s aggressive policy in Ukraine and a never-ending anti-western campaign echoed not just in Russia but throughout the whole post-Soviet area, including Belarus. The Lukashenka regime, trying to stay moderate, got stuck between an aggressive Russia and the West, which has been trying to calm it down. Within the last several months, the Belarusian regime has made certain friendly overtures towards the West. It released political prisoners in August last year. The presidential election campaign, even though it was not particularly different from preceding ones in terms of a lack of democratic standards, did not result in mass repressions against the regime’s opponents.

Among Belarusian political analysts and those who are professionally involved in Belarusian affairs it is frequently claimed that it was the annexation of Crimea that scared Lukashenka and forced him, in a way, to turn towards the West in order to balance against Russian interests. In this narrative, Lukashenka presents himself as a statesman who has been carefully leading his nation, balancing between the West and Russia. In the eyes of the West, he must be a very similar figure to Viktor Yanukovych, the former president of Ukraine, who in 2012–2013 was tempted by an EU Association Agreement and fruitful co-operation with the West. The West easily fell victim to Yanukovych’s signals, believing that he was acting inde-
pendently from Russia and that he had a pro-European position. We know today that this was not the case.

**On the winning side**

It is very unlikely that Lukashenka’s ultimate choice would be different, not necessarily because of any political and economic links between Belarus and Russia, but because of Lukashenka’s way of thinking. His reality sees Belarusians and Russians as one nation. He sometimes calls Belarusians “higher quality Russians” and openly declares Moscow to be “his capital”. In this situation, the part of the Belarusian opposition that does not share Lukashenka’s pro-Russian views, along with NGOs and independent media, remain the only elements of Belarusian society which are consistently pro-European. At the same time, the intensification of contacts between Belarus and the West has significantly reduced the scale of anti-western propaganda in the Belarusian state-owned media. Lukashenka himself tries to avoid such narratives. A politician who not so long ago called on Russia to join a mutual crusade against the morally bankrupted West has now become a dove and an apostle of peace.

“We have borders with the West and we do not want any conflict, neither political nor diplomatic. The West makes up half of our balance of trade. If it turns to us and wants to co-operate, we should agree. We will try to normalise our relations with the West,” said Lukashenka in December 2014.

To many, it seemed to be pretty clear that Belarusian society would blindly follow its leader. Yet that is not the case. Contrary to the signals sent by Lukashenka, societal trends are heading in a different direction. According to the independent research centre NISEPI, which conducts public opinion surveys in Belarus, pro-European attitudes are very low. In March 2011, 48.6 per cent of Belarusians declared support for European integration. In December 2015, this number had dropped to a mere 19.8 per cent, while 53.5 per cent of respondents declared a willingness to strengthen ties with Russia.

This is undoubtedly a reaction to the Kremlin’s aggressive policy in Ukraine and a result of Russian propaganda, which affects Belarusians somewhat accidentally, as the regime accepts Russian media dominance in the country. The average Belarusian, although perhaps less so than the average Russian, has a positive view of
Putin’s actions. Belarusians miss the Soviet times and many, including the youngest generation that does not even remember the Soviet Union, feel the need to be part of a great empire. In their eyes, the West is weak and dumb. Russia is strong and decisive. They prefer to be on the winning side.

Lukashenka, for whom anti-western and anti-liberal slogans of the “Russian world” are held dear, does not see why he should oppose these trends. If you were to compare Lukashenka’s slogans from his presidential campaign in 1994 with the message spread by Russian propaganda today, you would see a lot of similarities. By fighting against the “Russian world”, Lukashenka would in fact be fighting with himself and by doing so, would have to acknowledge the validity of his opponents’ arguments from the 1990s.

The conflict between Alyaksandr Lukashenka and Vladimir Putin, which has appeared over the last few years, has no ideological foundation. It is a conflict between two leaders who have a similar ideology. Views and little respect for western values such as tolerance or minority rights. They have more in common than one may think. An authoritarian post-Soviet counter-revolution, which Lukashenka was the first to lead, appeared to be very attractive to Putin. The long-lasting ideological
battle with western liberalism and democracy binds Minsk and Moscow together closely. This has all led to the impression that Lukashenka, as happened with Yanukovych, will have no doubt as to whom he can count on in moments of peril.

Towards the Russian world

Tolerance for Russian propaganda in Belarus and the sympathy towards Russia expressed by Belarusian officials (a quick look at their children’s social media profiles is a good illustration of this) make it extremely difficult to combat. The fight against Russian propaganda is on an extremely low level in Belarus and is carried out mostly by pro-western opposition and some independent media outlets. The fight is unequal and Russia is winning. This comes as no surprise given that the only alternative to Russian television is broadcast by satellite, such as BelsatTV, Radio Racja and Radio Svoboda. There are also a few online Belarusian portals fighting for survival. Unfortunately, they all have very limited access to their audience.

The media that is most dominant in Belarus is Russian television, followed by Russian radio stations and online troll factories which target Belarusian readers on the internet. Those who sacrifice their allies in the name of good relations with Lukashenka and who believe in his ability to convince the Belarusian public to be more pro-western are severely mistaken. Firstly, he does not have the ability to convince Belarusians to adopt a more open and welcoming attitude towards the West. Secondly, he will not even try to do so. Lukashenka’s Belarus, dominated by Russian language and culture, proves that the country is in fact deeply rooted in the “Russian world”.

Belarusian public opinion should not be neglected. Today, it is not a political subject. It is incapacitated. Lukashenka’s regime regularly falsifies elections, forces people to get used to repressions and convinces them of his strength. He strikes a balance between Russia and the West, exploiting both to his own advantage and provides no alternative to his rule.

Sooner or later, there will be change in Belarus. It does not matter what causes it: a “Belarusian Maidan”, a severe economic crisis, a coup d’état, the death Lukashenka, etc. Under new circumstances, the social mood will regain influence over the situation in the country. However, if public opinion has not changed by then, Belarus could easily repeat, in a fully democratic and transparent way, the Crimean scenario, without any “little green men” on the ground.
If the West wants to avoid this scenario, it should consider a long-term programme of support for the Belarusian civil society. This should not be just about supporting alternative, independent media and NGOs, but also about boosting Belarusian national identity, which is an assurance that an independent Belarus will prevail in the coming decades and not melt into the ocean of the “Russian world”. There is a need to support the process of building a pro-European and pro-democratic lobby which would be able to effectively influence Belarusian society.

Clearly, it is no easy task to work with civil society under conditions of mistrust and repression. What is more, such an investment would not bring about immediate effects. However, it is the only way to transform Belarus and enable this country to find a suitable path for change. This should be in the interest of the entire European Union.

Translated by Bartosz Marcinkowski

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A decisive moment for Azerbaijan

ANNA ZAMEJC

The year 2016 may be seen as a turning point for Azerbaijan, once a wealthy country on the Caspian Sea. Faced with a decline in oil prices on the international markets, the regime of Ilham Aliyev is being forced to make a difficult choice: reform or face social protests.

In early January 2016 local Azeri media circulated the shocking news of a man who attempted to burn himself alive as an act of protest against his worsening living conditions. 63-year-old Alik Novruzov, a maintenance employee from a local school in Neftçala, a small town 170 kilometres south of the country’s capital Baku, decided to commit suicide as he was unable to pay the growing interest rates on his loan. With heavy burns, he was taken to a nearby hospital where he was miraculously saved. Novruzov’s case is no exception. Journalists estimate that in the last year, in this oil-rich South Caucasian republic inhabited by approximately nine million people, seven had attempted self-immolation, often motivated by similar reasons.

Farwell to luxury

Until recently the economic crisis was something that an Azerbaijani knew about only from the news abroad. As an exporter of energy resources, Azerbaijan has been the beneficiary of the global petrol boom in the last decade. Income from petrol and natural gas constitutes a massive 75 per cent of the country’s state budget, which has allowed the Ilham Aliyev regime to not only bribe its political opponents but also, more importantly, institute a sense of relative stability in the country.
In 2006 Azerbaijan’s GDP grew by 35.4 per cent, while during 2001–2013 the rate of poverty fell by almost half. This streak was interrupted by the economic problems that Azerbaijan’s closest trading partners (Russia and Turkey) experienced, as well as a dive in the international resources market. By February 2015 a rapid decrease in oil prices (in the last 15 months, the price of oil fell by around 70 per cent, reaching 30 US dollars per barrel) had forced the Azeri government to attempt the first devaluation of its national currency, the manat.

Consequences of this abrupt depreciation have included a decline in the manat-to-dollar value by a third, anxiety on the consumer market, increased inflation and unemployment. What is more, as a result of falling oil prices and decreasing state revenue, attempts to artificially maintain the currency rate (which was still too high) turned out to be too costly for the state, whose reserves are shrinking day by day.

In December 2015 the Central Bank of Azerbaijan decided to make a second attempt at devaluation and introduced a floating exchange rate. The markets imploded and the manat lost another 30 per cent of its value, with inflation growing by 11 per cent and foreign currency disappearing from exchange offices. Terrified Azerbaijanis stormed the banks to withdraw their savings and buy goods in fear of a further dramatic increase in prices.

The price of imported goods grew at their fastest rate to date, but it was the increase in the price of bread, a key product in the Azerbaijani diet, that generated the biggest panic. The effects of the economic crisis were most keenly felt by borrowers who took out loans in foreign currencies and who, according to estimates by economists, constitute over half of all borrowers in the country. The monthly rates on their loans skyrocketed overnight.

The banks are also in trouble because their clients, terrified by the prospect of losing their savings, have been hastily withdrawing money in case their bank goes under. These fears are not groundless. Azeri economist Gubad Ibadoglu estimates that only half of the 30 banks that currently operate in Azerbaijan will be able to continue their operations for the foreseeable future.

**Bread and work**

The wealthy have not been immune to the recession either. A Baku-based economist who has asked to remain anonymous told me about new, unusual possessions being held by Baku banks. “After the devaluation, many clients who took loans out for luxurious cars in dollars could no longer make monthly payments. As a result, the garages of many banks are being filled with Porches and Land Rovers.
Nobody wants them though. Who would want to have such a high maintenance car in this time of crisis?"

Gulnur, a 25-year-old regular customer in shops with western clothes complains that the Azeri middle class, who are used to a relatively high standard of living, can no longer afford fashionable imported clothes. “Some foreign brands, such as Promod, closed their shops here. Others, such as Zara or Next, now have prices like Gucci or Versace had a few years ago.”

However, it is not the problems of the wealthy Baku elite that give the authorities sleepless nights. With decreasing salaries and increasing food prices, social unrest among the poorer parts of society seemed to be only a matter of time. It cannot even been halted by a restrictive regime which normally uses severe punishment against non-authorised demonstrations.

On January 12th 2016 the streets of Liman, Siyazan and Agdzabedi (all small towns) were flooded by people demanding “bread and work”. On the following day, protests took place in three other small towns: Agsu, Füzuli and Ujar. Even though it was clear that the demonstrations were spontaneous social acts motivated by the deteriorating economic situation, the official communiqué from the ministry of internal affairs issued on January 13th made it clear who the government believed to be behind the protests: political adversaries and religious radicals. A wave of showcase arrests and a hunt for offenders was launched. Among those arrested was the owner of a bakery, who was accused of jacking up prices to take advantage of the situation. Altogether, around a few dozen people were arrested, including religious leaders and many local opposition activists, despite the fact that on this occasion, these politicians had not had much to do with the protests.

Even so, the protests spread relatively quickly and were met with force from the authorities. In Quba and Shaki demonstrators were dispersed by troops who used water cannons and tear gas. In other regions, peaceful demonstrations were crushed by the police. However, the authorities soon became aware that force was not enough to calm the social unrest. Thus, the stick was soon enriched by the carrot.

The 18 per cent value added tax on food and grain products was removed, while pensions, social benefits and the salaries of state employees were increased by ten per cent. In the regions with the greatest level of unrest the local authorities, instructed by the capital, initiated administrative control over prices and set up their own bazaars where food was sold at lower prices. This concession worked, but only for a short period of time. The protests did not end, although they had calmed down by the end of January. The question is for how long?
Baku vs the regions

Emin Milli, an Azeri dissident and the founder and director of an independent Berlin-based TV station called “Meydan”, believes that the ten per cent salary and pension increases are like “putting fire out with petrol”. In his view, the authorities have not solved a single problem and that “in a few months, when people run out of food and realise that their standard of living has gotten rapidly worse, they will once again go to the streets.”

To Ibadoglu, the economist from Baku, the fact that these grassroots protests started in the regions, and not the capital, came as no surprise. Ibadoglu stresses that the small towns were the worst affected by high unemployment (even before the devaluation) and price increases. Baku may get affected later on.

“In the regions, the employment rate is estimated at around 25 per cent. In other words, around 70 per cent of working age people are unable to find paid work. This is regardless of the fact that in the last 12 years, the government has spent around 35 billion US dollars on developing the regions. Sadly, the majority of this money was wasted in the sea of corruption and incompetence,” Ibadoglu explains.

The situation deteriorated with the onset of the economic crisis in Russia, which forced some migrant workers (including Azerbaijanis) to return home. As a result, many families were cut off from a stable source of income. Finally, the construction sector which, after the energy sector, is the second most rapidly developing part of the economy in Azerbaijan has also taken a hit. This was especially true in Baku, where many workers from the regions were employed.

The central bank has been pushing for currency devaluation and flexible rates, while the ministry of finance is convinced that top-down regulation of prices is the priority. “This causes chaos and makes people feel like the government has no strategy for managing the crisis,” Ibadoglu says, adding that “what makes things even more complicated is that among the ruling elite there are no young specialists”. There are plenty of good reasons why the council of ministers is humorously called a “House of Elders”: the prime minister is over 80, while the majority of ministers are over 70. Thus, just like in Soviet times, when it comes to economic issues, the only thing they talk about is how the government could force the market to lower prices. Naturally, in this undemocratic regime, everything depends on the president, but he does not seem to be leaning towards any liberal solutions.

Ibadoglu is convinced that without liberalisation, Azerbaijan’s economy will not be able to survive the recession. In a system that is under oligarchic control, there is a need to break down the monopolies and support competition on the domestic market. Among the necessary key reforms, Ibadoglu mentions price liberalisation. He warns that continuing the artificial reduction of prices by means of
administrative methods can, in an extreme situation, lead to food shortages and famine.

A dialectic crisis

Beyond the economy, Azerbaijan is in urgent need of judicial reform, greater governmental transparency and liberalisation of the archaic political system, which would allow for the renewal of foreign investors’ interest in the Azerbaijani economy. Unfortunately, it will not be easy to find a miracle drug straight away. Wide-ranging reforms and privatisation can help in the long-term, but in an economy that is dominated by family monopolies and a thick network of corruption, many people may start feeling threatened, which could generate internal conflict and lead to a lack of political stability.

“The government is faced with a dialectic crisis. Whatever it decides to do now will backfire,” says the Baku-based economist.

Many people wonder whether the current economic crisis will lead to political change in a country where the Aliyev family has held power since 1994. Milli believes that even though the golden age of the Aliyevs is long gone, the time for a change in power is not yet upon us. In his view, different scenarios are possible. Looking at the example of Zimbabwe’s president, Aliyev could stay in power even if inflation reaches two-digit figures. Yet one thing is certain, Milli says: “the foundation of the regime’s power has already weakened.”

Economists think that the real effects of the economic crisis will become visible in about two years, when the $30 billion in reserves which the government uses to pacify social unrest will have run out. One of my sources, who prefers to remain unnamed, has said, “The authorities are now faced with a dilemma on how to keep society under control and make sure that the stream of money continues to flow into the pockets of the ruling elite and the oligarchs. These are the questions that the authorities are now asking their advisors.”

It may turn out that there are no answers to these questions and that something will have to give: either society or its rulers’ pockets. Ultimately, this choice belongs to Ilham Aliyev.

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

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Civil society in focus

In March 2016 *New Eastern Europe* conducted a survey of civil society organisations based in Eastern Partnership countries (Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia). We received 46 responses from a wide variety of non-governmental organisations operating in the region. Despite the variations, the responses on challenges and needs are quite similar. At the same time, the survey illustrates a greater need on behalf of the international community, and the European Union in particular, to continue to further support and help build the capacity of a stronger civil society in the region.
Civil society in focus

IMPACT

75% Agree or strongly agree that funding from the European Union has significantly helped their civil society organisation.

INDEPENDENCE

97% Of responding organisations stated that they operate independently from the state.

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES FACED BY NGOS IN EASTERN EUROPE?

- Lack of proper funding and financial dependence on donors
- Government repression towards civil society
- Unstable political situation
- Corruption
- Lack of ties with European Union civil society

HOW CAN THE EU HELP?

- Work more with local civil society actors directly and support more actors (long-term) than projects (short-term)
- Provide funds for NGO operations and development and support training in fundraising
- Help build local NGO capacity through partnerships, trainings, and workshops
LOW BUDGET

The majority of non-governmental organisations (65%) operate on a budget of 100,000 euros or less, with 25% of NGOs operating on a meagre annual budget of 10,000 euros or less.

SOURCES OF NGO FUNDING IN EASTERN EUROPE

A more detailed analysis will be available online at www.neweasterneurope.eu
AGNIESZKA LICHNEROWICZ: What would you say is particularly unique about urban movements in Eastern and Central Europe, as opposed to those in Western or Northern Europe?

KERSTIN JACOBSSON: Of course, there are many similarities. In Eastern Europe, urban movements are very much a reaction to the liberalisation of the city. Yet I feel that in this region, you have a really high level neo-liberal urbanisation. Moreover, in many countries in this region, urban governance has not been as inclusive as it is in the West. For example, citizens do not have much of a voice regarding urban governance issues in a country like Russia. So, certain problems are more pressing here, but the majority of issues are very much like urban activism in Western Europe.

What do you mean when you say neo-liberal urbanisation?

I use this phrase to refer to the mass privatisation of housing and public space, or in other words, the commodification of public space. This has also manifested itself as messy urban planning. In Western Europe, city development is much more controlled, both in terms of public planning and in the way that citizens have more of a say when it comes to governance matters. In this region, city development has been more chaotic and private developers have much more free reign.

In other words, urban movements are more necessary here than in the West?

Yes, but many things are the same. I see two types of urban movements. One is more reactionary, responding to pressing needs in the neighbourhood. An example of this could be defending a green area against construction or a site of historical interest against destruction. Here, the pressure can be quite intense. The second type is more proactive, something akin to an active local community. For example, community gardening aims to make the city a more hospitable place to live.
Do you see differences between Central and Eastern Europe?

Yes, there are many differences. Urban mobilisations are typically rather fragmented, as they are emergency reactions to different threats. But in Poland, there are some early signs of collaboration, like the Congress of Urban Movements. There are similar examples elsewhere in Central Europe in countries like Slovakia, but they are not on the same scale. In Poland, these movements are the strongest, most developed and the most political ones in the region. They are more politically-oriented because they address policy-makers explicitly and some members even join local councils. In other countries, many of the movements do not want to be labelled “political”. For example, in Serbia, biking activists make claims about their rights in the city and are critical of neo-liberalism, but they specifically refer to themselves as “non-political”.

I would add that in Poland, urban movements also have broader agendas, which include issues of social rights, not just direct urban issues. I find the alliances that are built across class divides very interesting. For example, tenants who belong to a socio-economically weaker group work closely with activists who come from a middle class background. In other parts of Eastern Europe, this type of collaboration is rarely seen.

So would you say that Polish movements more closely resemble their western counterparts?

Yes, definitely. However, you also have to understand that the political context is very different. For example, in Russia, these movements are very constrained, so they have to find other strategies.

Can they still be effective?

At the local level, absolutely. I can also see it in Lithuania. There, urban activism takes slightly different forms. People create formal community organisations in order to be eligible to receive funding. However, they also do so to gain leverage over policy-makers. They have umbrella structures at both the city and the national level. It has certainly empowered them. By contrast, in Romania, these tactics are less effective. We have studies that show that policy-makers are less responsive to these sorts of movements there.

In Russia, urban movements are very careful not to show any political ambitions. Do you think this has helped them be effective?

There are some examples where groups have been able to stop construction taking place in their neighbourhood. I call this “fire emergency”, since they mobilise in relation to a particular threat. They may have some success, but it is very difficult for them because as you said, they cannot formulate an agenda that would in any way threaten the authorities.

On the other hand, I am fascinated by these groups because they find very creative ways to carry out their work.
They cannot organise a public gathering so picketing is done alone, in shifts. The protest ends up being one person who takes turns, standing all day and night in order to stop construction. Groups cannot organise a meeting, but they can organise a small “market”, which they use as a chance to discuss activist issues. Nevertheless, it is of course very difficult to have a major impact.

It seems that in Russia, construction is often the main mobilising factor…

This is true, partly because there are no laws or public planning structures. Authorities give pretty much free reign to private companies who want to undertake certain projects. For example, there is no public information about plans to build a highway in someone’s backyard. Ordinary citizens have little chance to influence things like that. Often, such construction is illegal, hence you have these “fire emergencies”. Even so, it is true that you rarely see a long-term ideological agenda.

Are there many of these so-called fire emergency protests?

Everything is relative, although these types of mobilisations constantly take place in cities like Moscow or St Petersburg. In the latter, a lot of the protests are about the protection of cultural heritage and historical buildings while in Moscow, it is more about illegal construction. The media do not give much attention to these movements and little research...
is carried out on them as well. They are small-scale, local and not very spectacular, but they are happening.

Do you think these movements are slowly changing Russian society?

That is a very good question. Sociologist Carine Clément analyses the process by which ordinary Russians, who have no experience of activism, start getting involved in their neighbourhood in response to an immediate threat. This starts a process that Elżbieta Korolczuk calls “political becoming”, where people gradually become politically-minded and politically-engaged. They also regain a sense of agency, since in Russia, people tend to keep more to themselves. They do not mix in the public sphere because it is dangerous. You do not know whom you can trust. You stick to your own. Yet with this type of mobilisation, a network of neighbours is slowly built up. Little by little, you see that you can initiate change, you learn to speak for yourself and you learn to trust others, at least in your own neighbourhood. It starts a whole process.

In this region, there is typically a low level of trust in society. In order to build a strong civil society, you need to learn to trust people that you do not know. This type of activism, where you start interacting with other people, starts a process of relationship and trust building and it forms a path to a stronger society, when the political context becomes more open. However, it is a balancing act for them. They need to stay on the right side of acceptability while stretching its limit as much as they can.

So how would you assess the strength of these movements in this part of the world?

I think that researchers have not really systematically looked at this type activism yet. I think that civil society is not as weak here as it is perceived to be. What I have observed in the last 15 years is what I call a wave of urban activism in this region. There has also been a noticeable increase in the use of participatory budgeting in countries like Poland and Slovakia. So I think there has definitely been a shift in the last 15 years.

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MARCEL H. VAN HERPEN

Is it too early to start speculating about the next Russian leader after Vladimir Putin? Or perhaps Putin himself is starting down this path. After nearly 16 years in power there have been some recent rumours which indicate that a search for Putin’s successor is currently taking place.

Recently there was speculation in the press about a possible abdication by Russia’s strongman, Vladimir Putin. Having dominated Russian politics for more than 15 years, Putin is being confronted with a harsh reality. A recent Bloomberg survey polling economists indicates that Putin’s economic policy was scored an “F”, the lowest possible grade, by 27 per cent of respondents. Another 50 per cent awarded him the next two poorest grades. Bill Clinton’s famous dictum, “it’s the economy, stupid”, which he used to explain his victory over President George Bush the elder, could be equally valid for Putin.

However, this time, it is the other way around. At a time when Brent crude oil is trading at below 30 US dollars per barrel and the rouble has lost 50 per cent of its value since the annexation of Crimea, the Russian population is being confronted with increasing pauperisation, which is having a negative impact on both their material well-being and their health.
Three scenarios

Despite his high popularity ratings, one cannot exclude the possibility that popular discontent will mount in response to increasing poverty and rising prices. The mass demonstrations in Moscow after the rigged Duma elections in December 2011 were already a clear sign. The Kremlin’s reaction was a massive clampdown on the opposition. The question now is what will happen? Will an eventual expression of popular discontent lead to further oppression or will it have consequences for Putin’s position?

It is certainly likely that the Kremlin will opt for further repression, helped by the Russian people’s tendency to blame the tsar’s subordinates, as opposed to the tsar himself, for their problems. A recent bill, introduced to allow agents from the Federal Security Service (FSB) to open fire on crowds, indicates as much. One can also expect the Kremlin to seek new military adventures abroad in order to deflect attention away from the country’s economic woes, as well as stir up patriotic feelings.
However, tsars, including communist tsars such as Nikita Khrushchev, are sometimes toppled. The way in which Mikhail Gorbachev was removed from power by Boris Yeltsin was far from gentle. So why should Putin be immune to such a fate? In the biographical book *First Person*, published in 2000, Putin himself said about Helmut Kohl: “... After 16 years, all people, including the stable Germans, get tired of a leader, even a leader as strong as Kohl.” Putin’s “16 year limit” will be reached on December 31st 2016. In Putin’s own words, the Russian people have the right “to get tired” of him. However, Russia is not Germany. Therefore, the question is not so much what would happen if Putin were to lose the support of the Russian population, but rather what would happen if he were to lose the support of his inner circle? This is far from clear. Under the authoritarian Putinist system, there are no institutionalised procedures to organise a succession, apart from elections which, as a rule, are rigged and manipulated. In the United States, there is the function of vice president, whereas this function does not exist in Russia. In this sense, not much has changed since Winston Churchill’s famous dictum that the Kremlin’s power struggles resembled the spectacle of “bulldogs fighting under a carpet”; an outsider only hears the growling and has to wait to see which dog will emerge as the victor.

There are at least three scenarios for Putin’s succession. The first scenario would be the outcome of a popular revolt, eventually in the form of a colour revolution. The second scenario would be “leadership fatigue”; to be at the helm of a state for 16 years takes its toll, even for a leader in good health (which seems to be the case), and there may come a moment when he starts to think about organising his own succession. The third scenario would be an internal “soft coup” by Kremlin insiders.

The first scenario seems to be the most improbable. The “non-systemic” opposition is too feeble and too dispersed in Russia. Moreover, Putin, who has an iron grip on the military and paramilitary power structures, would not hesitate to use all available means to suppress such a revolt.

**In the authoritarian Putinist system, there are no institutionalised procedures to organise a succession, apart from elections which, as a rule, are rigged and manipulated.**

**Meteoric rise**

There have been some recent rumours which indicate that the second scenario is possible. To some, it looks like Putin is grooming Alexey Dyumin, his ex-bodyguard...
and the goalkeeper in his private ice hockey club, to become the future Russian president. Dyumin is Putin's confidante. In 2014, as commander of the Special Operations Force which played a major role in the occupation of Crimea, he exfiltrated former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych from Ukraine.

Dyumin’s career is nothing short of spectacular. From colonel in the presidential security service, he was promoted to major general and then to lieutenant general. On December 24th 2015 he was appointed deputy defence minister under Sergey Shoygu. Shortly after, on February 2nd 2016, he was appointed governor of Tula. Dyumin’s latest promotion was said to be “a bid to give him political experience of running a region ahead of another meteoric promotion.” Could this be an indication that Putin is “grooming” a successor, as some Russian sources suggest? Indeed, it could be a sign that Putin is preparing a candidate for his succession. Moreover, there is a historical parallel: the close relationship of Putin’s predecessor, Boris Yeltsin, with his bodyguard (and tennis partner), Alexander Korzhakov. Korzhakov also had powerful ambitions but, in the end, he was sidelined by Anatoly Chubais. Putin could use Dyumin as a form of “insurance” in case he has to step down for health reasons. In all likelihood, Dyumin’s fate will be similar to that of Korzhakov. In the Florentine environment of Russian politics, with its many warring factions and feuding clans, merely being mentioned as “Putin’s possible successor” is a kiss of death.

In the Florentine environment of Russian politics, with its many warring factions and feuding clans, merely being mentioned as a possible successor is a kiss of death.

Even if we cannot exclude the possibility that Putin could quit the presidency voluntarily and resort to the same procedure as Boris Yeltsin by appointing a trusted but unknown figure to the role of acting president, there are two reasons why this is unlikely. The first is that Putin is not currently displaying any signs of “leadership fatigue.” In fact, it is quite the opposite. Rated by Forbes as “the world’s most powerful person,” in both 2014 and 2015, he is not only conducting a hyperactive and aggressive foreign policy, but has made it clear from the start that he wants to remain in power for as long as possible. This is why Medvedev’s fake presidency was utilised in 2008, allowing Putin to return as president in 2012. In the meantime, the presidential term was extended from four to six years, enabling Putin to stay in power until 2024.

Excluding the scenario of Putin falling ill, one can assume that he will cling to power for as long as possible, not least because he considers his presidency to be a personal vocation. Vladislav Surkov, the former first deputy chief of the presidential administration, called him a “person who was sent to Russia by fate and by
God in the country’s darkest hour.” Putin, sent by providence to repair the “greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century” (the demise of the Soviet Union), is clearly not going to give up his self-imposed mission of restoring the empire.

**Politburo 2.0**

There is a second reason why the scenario of Putin appointing Dyumin as his successor is unlikely. It is because the Putinist system is much more collegial than western observers generally assume. In Soviet times, the collegial ruling body was the politburo. Although it led a shadow existence under Stalin, it exercised real power after his death. The members of this small committee chose the new general secretary (called “first secretary” between 1953 and 1966). Although a Politburo no longer exists in Putin’s Russia, there is a body which is a worthy successor to this Soviet-era institution: the Security Council of the Russian Federation. Unlike the politburo, which was at the apex of the power pyramid representing the Communist Party, this council is not related to the ruling United Russia party. It is a purely bureaucratic organ that is chaired by the President. Interestingly, the council has an inner circle of 13 permanent members and an outer circle of 17 members. As such, it mimics the structure of the former politburo, which also had an inner core of members and an outer circle of candidate members.

What is striking is the dominant position of the intelligence services in the inner circle. Seven of the 13 permanent members have a KGB background. Apart from Putin himself, these members are Nikolay Patrushev, the secretary of the council, Rashid Nurgaliyev, his deputy, Aleksandr Bortnikov, director of the FSB, Sergey Ivanov, head of the presidential administration, Mikhail Fradkov, director of the SVR (the foreign intelligence service) and Sergey Naryshkin (chairman of the Duma). Tellingly, the army is kept outside this central power structure. Valery Gerasimov, chief of the General Staff, is not a permanent member and the director of the GRU, the military intelligence service, is not even a member. The other regular members are mainly presidential envoys to the different districts who have no power base of their own.

Therefore, the composition of the Security Council offers a good indication of what can be expected should Putin decide to resign (or if he is removed): the intelligence services will do their utmost to maintain a dominant position in Russia’s power structure whilst keeping the armed forces at arm’s length. Hence, it is safe to predict that an eventual power struggle will ensue within the secret services. Taking into account the fact that Fradkov, born in Samara, and Nurgaliyev, a Volga Tatar, are relative outsiders, and that Naryshkin, apart from his friendship with
Putin, lacking his own power base, it is likely that the struggle for Putin’s succession will be fought between three contenders: Nikolay Patrushev, Aleksandr Bortnikov and Sergey Ivanov. Interestingly, Putin has already mentioned two of them, Patrushev and Ivanov, 16 years ago in his biography and described them as the people whom he trusted most.

**Patrushev: The new strongman?**

In recent interviews, Patrushev, who headed the FSB from 1999 to 2008, increasingly presents himself as a new strongman, possibly in reaction to Putin’s grooming of Dyumin. In an interview published in *Moskovskiy Komsomolets*, Patrushev declared that Russia and Ukraine are “one people, temporarily [sic] divided [by frontiers]” and that “the global community must be grateful to Russia for [taking] Crimea.” In another interview, a few days later, he said that “the strategic goal of the West is the destruction of Russia”, adding that in the case of an escalation of conflict with Turkey, “if the [NATO] Alliance supports Ankara, the most logical answer is to invade the Baltic states. All Baltic states are ours.”

Patrushev once famously called the members of the Russian secret services a “new nobility” who did not work for money but for the greater good of their country. Should Putin decide to resign before, or just after, the presidential elections of 2018, it is safe to assume that most of the “dogs under the carpet” will have a KGB/FSB ID chip in their ear.

The recent attacks on oligarchs, even those close to Putin, fit into this schedule. The secret services men despise the oligarchs, not just because they envy their wealth but also because they consider these nouveaux riches who live offshore, invest abroad and pay no taxes to be bad patriots. Putin has always maintained a certain balance between the siloviki and the oligarchs. He only attacked those oligarchs who tried to gain political influence, such as Vladimir Gusinsky and Mikhail Khodorkovsky. However, there has recently been a spate of attacks on Kremlin-friendly oligarchs. One of them is Vladimir Yakunin, who is a long-time friend of Putin: both were members of the “Ozero” co-operative in the 1990s. In August 2015 Yakunin resigned as president of the Russian Railways, allegedly because his son had applied for British citizenship, a move that was widely seen as an “act of betrayal” in the “war with the West.”

Another oligarch who fell out of favour was Sergey Pugachev, owner of the Mezhprombank and colloquially known as “Putin’s banker.” Pugachev came under investigation for embezzling government loans and had to flee from Britain to France (where he is safe because he has French citizenship). These are signs that
In the present climate of confrontation with the West, the “offshore” oligarchs are losing influence compared to the hardliners in the intelligence services. Therefore, an interesting question is how the “new nobility” reacts to publications in the West accusing Putin of having accumulated a personal wealth of 40 billion US dollars, which would make him not only the richest oligarch but also by far the richest man in Europe.

These accusations coincided with press stories stating that Putin’s son-in-law, Kirill Shamalov (married to his daughter Katerina), received a cheap state loan for his SIBUR company, the largest Russian processor of petrochemicals. The interest rate on this loan was only two per cent, instead of the usual seven. The whole debacle had a whiff of the cronyism and corruption reminiscent of the final years of Yeltsin’s rule, which were characterised by the enrichment of the Semya (i.e. the Yeltsin family). Therefore, Putin’s main concern when picking a successor could be the same: finding someone trustworthy enough to safeguard him from prosecution.

The rumour that he has started grooming Dyumin might be a sign that he is putting more trust in this unknown bodyguard than in his inner circle of intelligence services colleagues. However, the exact scenario of Putin’s succession remains completely open.

Is the West doomed to repeat its mistakes with Russia?

WOJCIECH JAKÓBIK

A decisive and ambitious sanctions policy may stop Vladimir Putin’s aggression. Yet, historical evidence shows that this strategy will not be easy to pursue mainly due to Western European fears of the unknown in the case of Russia’s potential disintegration.

Cheap oil will not make Russia change its behaviour. It could just push it to further tighten its belt. Russia under Vladimir Putin grabbed Crimea and Donbas and entered Syria (but decided to withdraw in March 2016, nominally at least). What the West fears is an unstable Russia with a huge nuclear arsenal and vast territory. This is why there are no real ongoing talks about support for democratic opposition in Russia. The opposition is not treated like a real power with the capacity to change the country. Simultaneously, Russia, unlike Iran, has not been subjected to strict sanctions which badly affected the arms industry, banking and energy sectors in the latter. However, key parts of the Russian economy like Gazprom and the international SWIFT banking system were excluded from sanctions (mostly because of Europe’s dependence on Russian gas).

For Russia, relative peace in Donbas is a pretext to discussing the suspension of sanctions, in spite of the fact that Crimea is still under Russian occupation. The focus of international public opinion is shifting towards the Middle East, where Russia accelerated the conflict. It resulted in a massive wave of migration which has had a destabilising impact on Europe and seriously undermined the politi-
The geopolitical position of Europe’s formerly most powerful leaders, such as Angela Merkel. Despite an official statement by Hans-Georg Maaßen, head of Germany’s internal intelligence agency, that “Russia is fuelling tension over migrants in Germany”, Berlin accepts Russia as a necessary partner in order to maintain global dialogue, despite all of its “disadvantages”.

**Facing history**

When the October Revolution of 1917 elevated Vladimir Lenin to power, the West broke off ties with Soviet Russia. There were attempts to overthrow the communist government by supporting the White Guard, the anti-communist forces that fought the Bolsheviks. However, the communists’ ambitions stretched beyond ruling Russia; they were working towards dominating all of Europe, starting with Germany. Their march westward was stopped by Poland during the Polish-Soviet War of 1919–1920. The expansion of communism stopped and the revolution seemingly ran out of fuel.

When the communist economic system turned out to be too radical and ineffective, it was corrected rather than replaced. In 1921 the Bolsheviks implemented the New Economic Policy, which combined elements of both capitalism and a centrally-planned economy in order to prevent the whole system from collapsing. Lenin invited western companies to invest in Russia and import their know-how and technology in exchange for lucrative contracts. Over the years, the Kremlin would redeploy similar tactics in times of economic strife.

The transformation of Soviet Russia into the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin’s leadership was accompanied by the Great Purge. Anyone that Stalin considered a threat or disloyal was exiled and sometimes executed. Generals, commanders and specialists were executed while the Soviet Union prepared another attack against Europe. A temporary alliance with Nazi Germany helped remove the obstacle that had thwarted the Soviets’ previous attempt to carry out this plan: Poland. Stalin planned to join Hitler’s war against the Allies and bring the fires of the revolution as far into the West as he could.

However, the purges of the late 1930s negatively affected the Kremlin’s ability to think strategically. The German attack on the Soviet Union in May 1941 came as a surprise to the Kremlin. It temporarily paralysed the Union and, according to some historians, even created the risk of a coup d’état to overthrow Stalin. In addition
to defending itself against Nazi Germany by joining the Allies, which included the Lend-Lease programme (in which the United States provided weapons and other materials to the Soviet Union), Stalin managed to stay in power.

Struggling with crisis

In March 2016 the Russian government adopted an anti-crisis plan in response to the economic slowdown that Russia is experiencing. The documents contain several suggestions on how to support certain branches of the economy and regional budgets by providing its regions with loans, boosting the auto industry, introducing social benefits for local residents and other activities aimed at assisting the development of small and medium-sized enterprises. As Maria Domańska, an analyst with the Warsaw-based Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW), points out: “Despite these actions, which may to some extent soften the painful consequences of the economic crisis, the Russian authorities have not yet come up with a coherent strategy on how to fight its structural causes. Ongoing discussions about the plan in Russia show that the government is uncertain about the real perspectives of the plan’s implementation at a time of recession and deepening budget problems.”

The Russian economic recession (with a GDP drop of 3.5 per cent in 2015) is the result of both structural problems which have not been addressed for years and a drastic decrease in oil prices, from 115 US dollars per barrel in mid-2014 to around $30 per barrel at the beginning of 2016. The question of whether the Russian federal budget is realistic regarding this situation remains open, as it is based on oil prices from 2015, around $50 per barrel.

Russia remains confident that oil prices will soon rise. According to Viktor Zubkov, chairman of Gazprom’s Board of Directors, a price of between $50 and $60 per barrel is the best price that they can realistically hope for in 2016. Russia has already invested some effort into bringing this about. On February 16th 2016 at a meeting between Russian, Saudi, Qatari and Venezuelan representatives in Doha, the parties agreed to freeze the extraction of oil at the January 2016 level. The United States and Iran do not intend to join this deal. In fact, to freeze the extraction of oil at this level could require the signatories to actually increase their overall level of extraction in 2016. In spite of this, even negotiations on freezing can affect oil prices.

As history has taught us, when Russia was at its lowest points, the West was there to provide a helping hand. Yet despite this, the West’s generosity is rarely repaid with equal gestures of goodwill. After the Second World War, the Allies were faced with the Iron Curtain, which isolated half of Europe from the outside world, even
though it was actually them who agreed to that arrangement in Yalta and Potsdam in 1945. The consequence of this was the Cold War, which lasted nearly 50 years.

When Francis Fukuyama declared the end of history to be 1991, the West was fooled again, this time by Boris Yeltsin’s “correction of Russian politics”. Nobody seemed overly interested in making Russia adopt democracy at a time of weakness. Co-operation with Yeltsin the “reformer” paved the way for Vladimir Putin, who was named Russia’s next ruler by Yeltsin. Putin fits into the long tradition of autocratic Russian rulers, as evidenced by his invasion of Georgia in 2008, his annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the hybrid warfare he is waging against the West. The West was again caught by surprise, while Russia has begun to weaken once more.

**Oil price blues**

Most economists agree that Russia can no longer build its budget solely on the stability of high oil prices. In the long-term, Russians are aware that petroleum revenues will shrink. Russia’s extraction of oil is expected to decrease 50 per cent by 2035 and the Russian ministry of energy has already adopted a general plan of development for the oil industry for the next two decades. This plan is set to replace the current one, which was adopted five years ago and will be valid until 2020. The assumed price of oil in the latter plan was $80 in 2020 and $97.50 in 2030. The ministry also concluded that the exploration of fields that are already in use can only meet half of the necessary demand. To meet it fully, Russia will need to exploit new oil fields, which will require further development of exploration projects.

In terms of utilising undeveloped oil fields, the new plan has several main scenarios. One is moderately profitable and based on a price that would secure the minimum cost-effectiveness of research and assumes the suspension of western sanctions no later than the end of 2016. Another scenario is based on forecasts of low oil prices and assumes that sanctions have not been lifted. The plan suggests that Russia should maintain its current level of extraction through 2022. However, this is a controversial claim, since companies like Rosneft and Gazprom Neft have frozen their exploration programmes due to the sanctions and the serious limitation of access to technologies. Thus far, Rosneft has failed to find a business partner who would join with them to carry out their new extraction activities, such as the exploitation of the Vankor field in eastern Siberia. Meanwhile, Gazprom
Neft has developed ambitious extraction plans in the Arctic region, but its future is uncertain as well.

According to analysts at the Warsaw-based think tank OSW, Russian authorities have been aware of long-term oil price decreases and the persistence of Russia’s stagnation, but they do not have a well-thought-out strategy to strengthen the country’s development potential. This analysis argues that Russia requires a fundamental reconstruction of the current political and economic system. The Kremlin is certainly not interested in any deep, internal changes at the moment, although it may implement some temporary, remedial measures.

If oil prices remain low for more than two years and Russia is kept in international isolation, it could result in the collapse of the Putin regime. If not, Putin may yet emerge from the mire as a victor. Whatever happens, Russia cannot depend purely on oil. Therefore, its activity in Western Europe’s gas sector should be seen in these circumstances as a way to try and escape the crisis. Support that western companies give to initiatives like Nord Stream 2 is throwing a lifeline to Putin. If successful, Nord Stream 2 could eliminate Russia’s need for real reforms, which are necessary to modernise the country’s economy.

Gazprom’s income constitutes around one-fifth of the entire Russian state budget. Sberbank CIB predicts that gas prices in Europe will decrease in 2016 by 35 per cent. If this turns out to be true, Russia’s revenues from gas sales will shrink by an equal amount. In the first half of February 2016, Gazprom exported around 45 million cubic metres of gas per day to Germany via the Nord Stream pipeline. This amounts to about half of what was being exported to Germany during the same period in 2015.

Test for the future

The West might repeat the same mistakes it has made in the past and help a weak authoritarian regime recover. A pretext for this could be another virtual “correction” of Russian politics, purely for the consumption of western audiences. Evidence of first attempts at this can already be seen. There is widespread speculation about Putin’s successor, as well as about candidates for the post of finance minister, each of them increasingly liberal. Simultaneously, some western politicians have already begun changing their tune by arguing that Russia is an indispensable partner in international affairs. This narrative is slowly replacing any discussion
on the role that Russia plays in creating problems (as opposed to solving them). At a time when Russia is weak, the West could be more demanding towards it. Instead of flooding Twitter with #FreeSavchenko tweets, it could undertake real, concrete efforts to free Ukrainian pilot Nadiya Savchenko and support change in Russia. Nord Stream 2 could be a test regarding which way the internally divided West will choose to deal with Russia in the future.

The current US and EU sanctions against Russia are more about banking, oil and the arms sectors. A hermetic isolation followed by the extension of sanctions would force Russia to adopt structural changes in its economy. The ultimate step would be to exclude Russia from the international SWIFT banking system. It is true that the worsening of relations with Russia risks further tensions with the West, but energy interdependence is not a way to lessen this risk.

Perhaps there is no way back from the current poor relations that exist with Russia. To bow to Russia’s demands in this situation would make little sense. So far, Europe has not decided to go beyond the current set of limited sanctions that should still be regarded as a relative success. Yet the West should look at its own history of relations with Russia to draw conclusions on how to deal with this big, eastern neighbour when it is struggling with a severe crisis. 😊

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In search of fresh air

PAWEŁ PIENIĄŻEK

Several hundred Russians have immigrated to Ukraine since the EuroMaidan Revolution in 2014. Many of them are political activists who do not want to live under the Putin regime. However, their status in Ukraine is also uncertain.

Yulia Arkhipova is 23 years old. She came to Kyiv from Moscow, where she was engaged in human rights and anti-corruption activities. The well-known pro-Kremlin media personality Vladislav Solovyov said during a radio programme that he had uncovered a Ukrainian nationalist conspiracy in Russia. “It was me,” says Arkhipova. “He blamed me for supporting Maidan and publicly read out my phone number live on air.” Her phone began ringing constantly. Surprisingly, many calls and texts were to offer support and solidarity. However, others were not so friendly and some were even threatening. “They said that I would not live to see tomorrow,” Arkhipova recalls.

After this experience, she began accepting the fact that “maybe one day, I have to leave Russia”. The most logical choice for her was Ukraine, which she had visited regularly over the last few years. “As a tourist, I really enjoyed it. The Dnipro river, Ukrainian dumplings, everything is cool here. Moreover, I have friends in Ukraine,” she says. Ukraine is attractive to Russians because of the popularity of the Russian language and the cultural context linked to its previous co-existence as part of the Soviet Union.

From Manezhnaya to Maidan

Arkhipova is one of a few hundred Russian citizens who decided to flee their country following the start of the EuroMaidan Revolution in Ukraine. Many are activists, journalists or people who are critical of the Putin regime and understand
that their space to live and work is narrowing. As a result of the protests in Kyiv’s Maidan Square, the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Donbas, the atmosphere has shifted in Russia. More liberal minded Russians grew concerned that in their home country, it was getting harder to breathe. Some of them even decided to fight on the Ukrainian side to stop Russian aggression. Since 2014 more than 200 Russians have requested refugee status in Ukraine, though only a few have been granted it. Others have illegally overstayed their visas, seeking a way to legalise their residence in Ukraine. Despite their obvious plight, the local authorities seem very hesitant to help these escapees.

On July 22nd 2014 in Manezhnaya Square in Moscow, 24-year-old Anastasiya Fazulina protested in the front of Kremlin. Holding a poster which read “enough blood” with a painted caricature of Putin’s face, Fazulina felt she had no choice but to express her views. This was a few days after the downing of flight MH17, the Malaysian airliner that was brought down in Donbas by an anti-aircraft Buk missile, killing all 298 people on-board. The MH17 catastrophe was one of the most shocking events that took place during the conflict in Donbas. Independent investigators and media have pointed to Russian troops as the perpetrators. For Fazulina, it was obvious: “I was waiting for a reaction from the opposition, from activists, anybody,” she said. “For me, it was clear that I must do something.” Going to Manezhnaya Square was her symbol of resistance. After that, she decided to leave Russia.

Fazulina has been engaged in opposition movements in Russia for years. She began working with the liberal politician Ilya Yashin when she was fifteen. Yashin is one of the leaders of the People’s Freedom Party (PARNAS) and a close friend of the late Boris Nemtsov, who was assassinated on February 27th 2015. Most people are under no illusions that Nemtsov’s assassination is directly related to his report about Russia’s engagement in Donbas. The report, titled “Putin. War”, was finally completed in May 2015 by Nemtsov’s colleagues. Fazulina helped organise a presentation of the report in Ukraine.

Before leaving Russia, Fazulina spent a month and a half in Kyiv. At the time, she was working for the election team of Lesya Orobets, who was a candidate for mayor of Kyiv in the May 2014 elections. “I met so many brilliant people here,” she says, “and after seeing what is happening in my country, living in Russia became impossible.”

When she finally moved permanently from St Petersburg to Kyiv in August 2014, Fazulina again became involved in activism and politics. She is currently working
Kiril Mikhaylov left Russia in April 2014. He was 25 at the time. Mikhaylov lived in Ufa, a city of approximately one million inhabitants located in southwestern Russia, around 500 kilometres from the border with Kazakhstan. What happened when he left Russia? “Crimea happened,” he answers. “In Russia, I was thinking about how to get away from this machine of hate. Maybe in Moscow the feeling there is not so strong, where you can find thousands of people who think like you. However, in Ufa, I was alone.” He had been to Moscow and St Petersburg several times, livestreaming protests.

“I once believed the same things that the victims of propaganda now believe, but before it was ‘cool,’” he says jokingly. “In 2004 I was the only guy in my class with Arkhipova and other activists in establishing an organisation to assist like-minded Russians who have moved to Ukraine. “We want to help people with the legal process, as well as socialising and networking,” she says.
who supported Stalin. I found that reading and studying is the best cure for that, since it resulted in critical thinking. I began to understand that many of the things that we learnt in school are false.”

According to Mikhaylov, there are only a dozen liberal minded people in Ufa and they are not organised in any sort of community. “The opposition is constantly watched and under pressure. People are jailed, assaulted or even killed. So I decided not to wait,” he says. Mikhaylov bought a plane ticket directly to Kyiv (at that time, it was still possible). “The similarities between Ukraine and Russia are skin deep. I need more time to understand the differences.”

In May 2015 he joined a newly founded open-source investigation group called the Conflict Intelligence Team. They co-operate with the well-known Bellingcat investigative journalistic group, whose work on the MH17 catastrophe was crucial. The Conflict Intelligence Team uses the same methodologies as Bellingcat: open sources. They analyse photos and videos from social media and seek answers to tough questions, such as the presence of Russian soldiers in Ukraine. In 2015 their first investigation focused on three Russian special forces soldiers who were killed in Ukrainian Luhansk, a territory controlled by the rebels.

“We found three graves and geo-located one of the soldiers who was buried there. We got confirmation from his mother that he was serving in the Russian army. The ministry of defence did not want to tell us anything because it is a ‘state secret’. Putin signed off a law that all losses during operations abroad are considered state secrets,” Mikhaylov argues.

The Conflict Intelligence Team are continuing their investigations about Ukraine and in the last few months, have begun investigating Syria, where Russian troops are also operating.

**Atmosphere of hate**

“You just could not breathe in that atmosphere. If I had stayed in Russia, I do not know how I would have ended up,” Mykhaylov admits. He refers to the story of an 18-year-old Russian boy who overdosed on drugs. In the media, his tale was often presented as an example of the atmosphere of hate in Russia.

The drama of Vladislav Kolesnikov, hailing from a suburb of Moscow, began when he decided to support Ukraine and oppose the war being fuelled by Russia. The story was covered, among others, by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, who had a journalist get in touch with Kolesnikov. One day, the teenager went to school in a t-shirt with a yellow and blue Ukrainian flag on it and the words “Return Crimea”. As a result, he was beaten by his classmates. When he went to the military
conscription office, he played the Ukrainian national anthem. He was eventually suspended from school and his grandfather kicked him out of the flat where he lived. Kolesnikov was sent to live with his father in Zhigulyovsk, in the Samara region.

“Vlad was not Ukrainian. He was not a human rights defender or a political activist. He was simply a young Russian who disapproved of his country’s actions in Ukraine. Unlike many others, he was not afraid to say it out loud,” wrote Radio Free Europe journalist Claire Bigg just after his death. “How my friend, Vlad Kolesnikov, was driven to his death in Putin’s Russia” was the title of her story. For Ukrainian and western media, Kolesnikov became a symbol; for Russia, he was a traitor. The Russian tabloid *Komsomolskaya Pravda* interviewed his grandfather, who called Kolesnikov fat, a member of a sect and a hooligan.

In Zhigulyovsk, his nightmare did not end. The situation only got worse. Rumours began to spread that he was a homosexual, which in Russia, is considered to be even worse than supporting Ukraine. Kolesnikov was beaten and assaulted multiple times. “I can’t even remember how many times I’ve been beaten up,” he wrote to Bigg. The police began “visiting” him more often.

The last time Kolesnikov wrote to Bigg was on December 25th 2015. He sent three short messages: “If I don’t get in touch in the next two to six days, you can write [about me]. It means I am dead.” “I took a lethal dose” and “Sorry.”

### Senseless ritual

Asami Kadh is 50 and lived in Nizhny Novgorod, a city that is larger than Ufa and is located in the middle of the western part of Russia. Moreover, unlike Ufa, Nizhny Novgorod has had an active protest movement. The first wave of protests, which were related to the falsified Duma elections, took place in 2011–2012. Anti-war demonstrations, which were not as large as those that took place two years previously, broke out in several Russian cities, prompting a reaction from the Kremlin. Kadh took part in the demonstrations in his hometown. Repression targeted against activists had already begun in 2012. Many activists were detained. “The security services do not forget you,” Kadh says. In his opinion, all members of the protest movement were being carefully monitored.

A popular photo of Kadh shows three policemen holding his hands and legs while carrying him away from a protest. The right hand shows the symbol of victory and in the left, he is holding a cigarette. “It was November 2012,” he recalls. “Putin came to visit the city but he was quite scared. There were 1,800 police officers against 150 protesters. The ratio was more than ten to one.” Kadh eventually left
Nizhny Novgorod and lived in St Petersburg for a short time. He came to Ukraine through Belarus, fleeing Russia with his wife and two grandchildren.

“Why did we decide to leave? We understood that the opposition in Russia is losing. The state has successfully suppressed it. Many people began treating protests as a ritual without any sense,” Kadh confesses. In his opinion, the conflict in Ukraine is “the stupidest thing that the Kremlin has ever done.”

Fazulina, Kadh and Mikhaylov all declare that they will return to Russia only after there has been a regime change. “I am a citizen of Russia and I like my country. I would like to go back when the situation gets better,” Mikhaylov says.

However, if Ukraine does not change its policy towards asylum seekers from Russia, these activists could face problems. The Kadh family came to Ukraine in February 2015. The state migration service has still not made any decisions about their status as refugees.

“Common people in Ukraine are pleasant. Many have helped us. They are good people, but I cannot say the same thing about the Ukrainian state. We have no support. Without legalising our stay, we cannot work within the confines of the law,” Kadh complains. The state migration service has told him that “Russia is a democratic country.” “If anyone should know that Russia is not a democracy, it is the Ukrainians,” Kadh exclaims.

Uncertain future

According to Arkhipova, this is a common problem and refugee status in Ukraine is usually granted only to well-known cases, and even then only after the intervention of politicians. This has an impact on the decision of people who are looking for a place to hide from Russia. Some of them have decided to move further on, to other countries where they can try and seek refugee status. However, Ukraine is still one of the most popular destinations and more Russians have sought asylum there in 2015 than ever before. Arkhipova was able to legalise her stay in Ukraine because she has Ukrainian roots. However, many others are not so lucky and stay illegally in Ukraine, risking deportation at any moment.

Arkhipova recalls Ukrainian politicians promising that they would accept all Russians supporting Ukraine against Russian aggression. There was even a first reading of a bill which would create a simplified procedure...
for them, but this has since stalled in parliament. “People thought that it would easily pass and positively impact our decision to come here,” Arkhipova recalls.

In many cases, Russian fighters who joined Ukrainian volunteer battalions had no papers and cannot prove that they were really fighting. “These people made a choice. They cannot go back to Russia anymore. They will be sentenced because they were defending Ukraine against their own country,” notes Akhrhipova.

Sergei Petrovichev is one such example. Nicknamed “Ruby”, Petrovichev fought in several volunteer battalions like Shakhtarsk and the Ukrainian Nationalists Organisation. In September 2015 he stepped on a mine and lost part of his left leg. He is currently staying at the hospital in Dnipropetrovsk. He cannot move anywhere and cannot be transferred to a different hospital in another country because he is an illegal in Ukraine. According to a decision by the state migration service, he should have left the country in August 2015. It is still unclear what will happen with Petrovichev. What is clear is that in Russia, he has no future. “These Russians risk their lives for Ukraine and Ukraine seems to have no need for them,” says Kadh, clearly frustrated. He still has not idea if he and his family will be granted refugee status.

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When one thinks of Croatia today, one is reminded of the refugee crisis, the relatively recent war with Serbia and generations of people living under communist dictatorship. However, the western perspective often misses out on the reality on the ground. Today, business in Croatia is thriving despite some real problems, such as Byzantine bureaucracy, innate caution and a seeming tolerance of corruption.

After having spent some time in Croatia and researching the economic situation there, I believe that business (non-retail) investments have a good chance of succeeding like those of other Central European countries, due to healthy competition and a sense of belonging. What’s more, Croats have illustrated a determination to overcome and eventually limit the cultural impediments to business growth that have persisted to this day.

For generations, Central Europeans were denied the opportunity to think or act independently, at least in public, without government approval. The bureaucracies that persist in Croatia as a result of the previous system reflect the attention to meaningless detail that derives from the long-term saturation of government involvement in public life. These bureaucracies, like elsewhere in Central Europe, have become bothersome annoyances rather than real impediments to personal and business pursuits. Just like under the communist system, personal anecdotes illustrate the ability of individuals to persevere and overcome administrative hurdles.
Problem with bureaucracy

For instance, in order to stay in the country for longer than three months, Americans must apply for a year-long visa within ninety days of arrival. The US Embassy staff warned that this process can take a significant period of time, encouraging us to start the process during our first month. The process appeared straightforward: fill out forms, find an authorised notary to translate one’s marriage certificate, bind it in a special way with red and blue twisted string, buy a special 20 Kuna stamp (equivalent to 2.50 US dollars) from the local tobacco store, obtain a letter of employment from one’s employer, have the lease on one’s flat notarised (in both languages) and at the last minute, add a notarised lease annex from the lessor to indicate how many people are living in the apartment. The time it took to fulfil these requirements detracts from productivity and allows for plenty of hours to reflect on an observation Franz Kafka made: “It is only because of stupidity that they are able to be so sure of themselves.”

Once one has completed the file, one must go to the central office, take a number and wait until the bureaucrat calls one to her glassed-in counter. The first time I went to apply, the woman would touch a couple of keys on her keyboard and then pull back both hands as though the keyboard was spitting flames. She quickly dismissed my file, telling me I needed an annex to the lease, yet she had no examples of the correct wording required. After our files were individually completed and accepted, we had to wait for the police to visit our flat at some future date, along with a few other steps, before finally receiving our resident cards.

The moody bureaucrat at the computer was an exception to the hard-working people I have found in Croatia. One of my new Croatian friends is a 40-year-old taxi driver who quotes Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and was a teacher for 10 years until the students turned his hair partially grey. He has worked for the same employer for six years without an increase in his salary. He used to work five days a week, but his boss insists he work seven and produce a minimum amount of fares, even though the driver receives a flat monthly salary of 650 euros. So, my friend has purchased his own vehicle, passed the tests required to qualify for an independent business, completed and filed the necessary forms and now waits on one thing: the government to issue additional taxi medallions, something which it has not done in six years, despite the pent-up demand for more taxis in Zagreb. The lottery process does not guarantee that my friend will receive a taxi medallion, but his hopes and determination to better the
life of his family, consisting of two small children and a working wife, are palpable. This will happen.

Caution with a sense of belonging

Many Croatians invest their cash savings to chase the dream of running their own business and having control over their hours. In fact, many Croatians change jobs and accommodation with caution, ignoring a long history that teaches them that the penalty for losing is greater than any potential reward. Even in the 1990s, when Croatia separated from Yugoslavia and abolished laws and treaties created under the communist regime, business life in the country remained uncertain. However, Croatia’s 1991–1995 war of independence changed many people’s attitudes. The Croatian people came to the aid of their neighbours in a way that was reminiscent of the post-September 11th reaction of New Yorkers. In an odd way,
the war with people who had recently shared their history created a Croatia of compassion and sense of belonging to one another.

People demonstrate real pride in buying Croatian products and revel in local markets. Numerous neighbourhood festivals, markets in the Main Square and events in the large central parks provide “outlets” for the many demands for goods and services. Concerts, beer, wine stands and socialising enhance these events’ business potential. The seven-day a week Dolac market enables people from the city and beyond to sell some of the best food and craft products available, rain or shine. Every year, the season of Advent in Zagreb embraces small businesses selling from specially-constructed wooden Noel markets. Friends share mulled wine and food, and residents enjoy the temporary ice-skating rink, which brings neighbours together in the parks, despite the cold.

Both large and small businesses profit from an educated and dedicated workforce that produces high quality products. A US representative discovered a successful glass bottle maker supplying Coca-Cola Enterprises, among other companies. He visited the plant and discovered that the products were perfect for expanded export opportunities. We have discovered businesses owned by women selling specialty teas and spices, operating beauty salons and opening clothing stores. Klara Cadieux designs, manufactures and markets a complete line of dresses, coats, skirts and blouses. An Australian moved to Zagreb a couple of years ago to transform the first and oldest wine cellar in Croatia, called Bornstein, into a wine bar and shop, featuring wines while hosting special events for the young and old alike. It is typical of many shops in that it is beautifully constructed and decorated, has high-end goods and depends on dedicated family members and employees to succeed.

These businesses also share a commitment to aggressive marketing. The Cadieux shop came to our attention because of its support for a charity selected by the International Women’s Club Zagreb, an organisation similar to the Junior League in the US, which raises money for care-dogs. The Bornstein Vinoteka frequently sets up stands at neighbourhood festivals. Croatians are anxious for good products and respond to well-marketed items. There are many examples of actual and potential investment returns.

**Corruption**

Although the spirit of camaraderie exists throughout the year as people of all ages linger over a coffee at one of the many outdoor cafés, some people, with government complicity, grabbed power early during the formation of the country. Locals point to the owner of Konzum, the most famous food retailer in Croatia,
who owns outlets per capita as numerous as Starbucks in the US. They highlight Konzum as the most blatant example of this distortion of free enterprise. On-line records indicate that during the war in 1993, Ivica Todorić obtained a loan from the country’s major bank under privileged and vague terms. It provided no deadline for payment of the premium and had interest rates three times lower than the usual rates at the time. Todorić acquired the retailing and wholesale chain and ice cream and frozen goods company Ledo, which he used to create his monopolies, now named Agrokor. In addition, according to written reports, he used a pension fund to commandeer, as his private home, the famous restored Kulmer historical palace in the Sestine area overlooking Zagreb, claiming it is a hotel in spite of the fact he never offers any rooms for rent. Local manufacturers agree that Konzum will sell their product in its stores, but only if they agree to terms stipulating that the company will provide payment for the goods after one year of retail sales.

Few small businesses can survive without cash flow from the largest retailer. I told an influential business man that if I were the president of the country, I would go to Konzum’s owner and tell him that he has made his millions; now it is time to use his wealth in more responsible ways to encourage, not frustrate, free enterprise (his wealth, as estimated by Forbes in June 2014, is 735 million euros). I would use the laws to address the misuse of funds and power. Instead, employees report that he threatens to fire some of his 42,000 strong workforce if the rules are changed to limit his business. The new recently elected Croatian government does not come from either of the two traditional parties and could use its consensus power to make positive changes in the country. Many people are hopeful that new opportunities will arise as a result of this election.

Prior to the autumn 2015 election, a group called Agency for Investments and Competitiveness developed working groups to understand the Doing Business methodology of the World Bank and attempted to improve Croatia’s stature. These groups succeeded beyond their wildest dreams; they achieved remarkable progress in clarifying tax and business laws so that companies had some certainty and clarity regarding what to expect when investing. Croatia has jumped over the last two years from 89th to 40th out of 189 countries. The most significant progress was made in the Cross Border Trade area, where Croatia ranked number 1. The country also improved its standing with regards to dealing with construction permits, the settlement of commercial disputes, strength of minority investors’ protection and

The new, recently elected Croatian government does not come from either of the two traditional parties and could use its consensus power to make positive changes in the country.
registering property. Focusing on measurements and improving business conditions, the working group worked on a total of 181 business enhancement reforms, 90 of which have already been implemented since September 2014. As a result, the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Croatia rose to 2.89 billion euros in 2014, more than four times the 2013 level. It even surpasses pre-recession levels.

Supporting the FDI increase, the Agency for Investments and Competitiveness recorded over 300 investment projects and actively monitored 120 of them in various stages of implementation. By the end of the process, over 17,500 new jobs will have been created. The agency is responsible for providing active support to large enterprises investing in manufacturing, research and development, technology centres, high class tourism and other services with high added value. Data shows that the total number of all realised investment projects in Croatia is significantly higher than what the agency tracks, encourages and measures.

**Drive to compete**

Business families have succeeded for generations in this country, despite communism and war. Croatians take great pride in their family success and business continuity. In fact, you will see stores and companies with the name Purger posted on their signs. Purger is a sign of recognition that a store owner is third generation or older. It carries tremendous value for locals. I can only imagine the paperwork needed to verify such a claim, but knowing the completeness and competence of the bureaucracy, I trust a Purger sign. One such business sells custom-made top quality men’s shoes for less than 300 US dollars and exports them to the United States. Another firm sells silk blouses, ties and stunning clothes that would make some French fashion designers envious. One does not need to be from the elite to succeed in business. I recently purchased a custom-made gown from a woman who started her business two years ago; without government support, she has succeeded beyond her wildest dreams, employing many people in her factory, as well as other famous designers.

According to a 2015 book entitled *Nations and citizens in Yugoslavia and post-Yugoslav state: One hundred years of citizenship* by Igor Štiks, since the 1950s, “the process had started and it required constant changes and reforms that would in the decades to come, become increasingly market-oriented. It would also empower local actors, factory managers closely related to the republican elite and the republics themselves. Little wonder that Yugoslavia soon faced economic competition between the republics, as well as sharp inequalities in economic performance and standards of living between more developed republics and provinces such as
Slovenia, Croatia and Vojvodina and less developed ones such as Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia.” This early practice of continual improvement and adaptation has served today’s private enterprise well, albeit with a few distortions along the way.

When in France, I remember reading with dismay how year after year, the majority of college graduates in that country preferred to find a job in the public sector because of the higher security and salary in government. While the government is still the largest employer in Croatia, young people here are more interested in private enterprises. In fact, one can see many successful, as well as some failed, businesses, as people compete in both world-class sport and business. Competition pervades the Croatian mentality.

No government is perfect. According to one economist and professor, Ivo Družić, who has studied Croatia’s GDP and privatisation, growth has been flat for the last thirty years. Capital markets in Croatia need restructuring. Interest rates are about eight per cent and large Croatian companies can borrow at a rate of about 4.5 per cent. This is extremely high compared to the borrowing rates for global companies. He believes opportunity lies in connecting the dots. For example, railway construction would cost about $2–3 million per kilometre and highways cost $6–8 million per kilometre to build. The desire to connect the north to the south through improved transportation would stimulate more FDI and lead to growth in GDP. Croatia already enjoys deep ports and harbours and could represent the shortest route to other Central and Eastern European countries, which would help stabilise the region. When I challenged him about the high level of the government’s percentage of GDP and ownership, he said that past attempts at privatisation were viewed as plunder by entrepreneurs. To privatise utilities and other businesses run by the government is probably socially unacceptable and economically inefficient. However, much of this privatisation occurred during war-time and could be handled differently in the future.

Investors will discover the local stories and shared traditions keeping this society bound together. 97 per cent of the country is Catholic and connected to their parents through inherited real estate or second homes built during the booming 1980s. From the very beginning of grammar school, the state requires students to learn a second language. Rough estimates indicate students choose to study English 75 per cent of the time and German 10 per cent of the time. It seems that most people under 50 speak at least two languages. Tourism makes up over 15 per cent of the economy and keeps language skills quite sharp.
In the 17th century, investors from Great Britain arriving in a new land of 13 colonies in America were called adventurers. Today, investors in Croatian business must have a sense of adventure and a sense of humour, but much can be accomplished. Persistence pays off when one discovers the creativity and competence of the people who live and work here.

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Already in its fifth edition, the award “AMBASSADOR of the NEW EUROPE” is bestowed annually by the European Solidarity Centre and the Jan Nowak-Jeziorański College of Eastern Europe in Wroclaw. The author of the best publication receives: a medal, cash prize (worth 5,000 PLN) and the privilege to use the title “Ambassador of the New Europe”.

This year the jury had to choose from 75 applications which met the formal requirements. After several meetings, discussions and votes, a short-list of the final five books was announced:
From these five nominees

**Peter Krištúfek**
The House of the Deaf

**Jarosław Mikołajewski**
the Big Surge

**Serhii Plokhy**
The Last Empire.
History of the Soviet Union Fall

**Małgorzata Szejnert**
Making mountains. Stories from Polesie

**Varujan Vosganian**
The Book of Whispers

the jury will select a winner who will receive the title of AMBASSADOR OF THE NEW EUROPE 2016. The final award gala will take place at the International European Reflection Forum EUROPE WITH A VIEW TO THE FUTURE – 19-21 May, 2016 at the European Solidarity Centre in Gdansk.
You are cordially invited to this year’s fourth annual European Reflection Forum **EUROPE WITH A VIEW TO THE FUTURE**. This project aims to bring together experts, journalists, academics and politicians dealing with issues relating to European integration. The concept of the Forum therefore contributes to the need for European reflection in a wider circle of experts. It is not without significance that the Forum is held in Gdansk.

The **EUROPE WITH A VIEW TO THE FUTURE** forum is an international socio-political project where participants discuss the contemporary condition of Europe and Europeans. This is a meeting of the heroes and creators of change, representing different generations, disciplines and perspectives. All of them share a common concern about the future of the European Union and the ambition to act effectively in the areas bordering with the community.
MAIN TOPICS OF THE FORUM:

- Europe and the culture of hospitality. Migration as a test of the credibility of European values
- Twenty-five years in Central and Eastern Europe after the breakup of the Soviet Union. The after-effect of the democratization project?
- NATO in the 21st century. How safe are European democracies?
- How the dynamic of the EU Neighbourhood Policy changed due to the wars on East and South?
- Poland-Germany - a partnership for Europe. 25 years of Polish-German treaty on good neighborhood and friendly cooperation

AMONG THE SPEAKERS ARE:

Li Bennich-Björkman – political scientist, expert on Eastern Partnership, Uppsala
Irina Borogan – Russian investigative journalist, co-author of the portal Agentura.ru, Moscow
Pierre Buhler – ambassador of the French Republic to Poland, Paris, Warsaw
Marek Cichocki – program director of the European Center Natolin, Warsaw
Krzysztof Czyżewski – co-founder of the Borderland of Arts, Cultures, Nations Centre, Krasnogróda
Slawomir Debski – director of the Polish Institute of Foreign Affairs, Warsaw
Asli Erdogan – Turkish writer, activist for human rights, Istanbul, Krakow
Marzenna Guz-Vetter – Director of the Representation of the European Commission Representation in Poland, Warsaw
Paul W. Jones – ambassador of the United States to Poland, Washington, Warsaw
Iris Kempe – senior advisor for culture and education, the Council of Baltic Sea States, Stockholm
David Kipp – expert on migration, the Foundation for Science and Politics, Berlin
Pawel Kowal – historian, politician, columnist, former Secretary of State in Polish MFA, Rzeszow, Warsaw
Markus Meckel – former minister of foreign affairs of the GDR, a member of the Foundation for Polish-German, Berlin
Rolf Nikel – Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to Poland, Berlin, Warsaw
Serhii Plokhii – Ukrainian historian, Harvard University, Kyiv, Harvard
Patrycja Sasnal – expert on the Middle East, the Polish Institute of International Affairs, Warsaw
Rita Süssmuth – German politician, former president of the Bundestag, Berlin
Donald Tusk – President of the European Council, Brussels, Gdańsk
Putin is not a grand tactician, he is an opportunist

An interview with George Soroka, lecturer at Harvard University. Interviewer: Tomasz Stępniewski

TOMASZ STĘPNIEWSKI: The EuroMaidan Revolution in Ukraine and the subsequent crisis came as something of a surprise for many scholars. Was the Euromaidan a surprise for you as well? Had you anticipated the fact that events resembling the Orange Revolution of 2004 would sooner or later resurface in Ukraine?

GEORGE SOROKA: The timing of the EuroMaidan came as a bit of a surprise. I had not expected that Viktor Yanukovych, whom I regarded as corrupt but pragmatic, would change course so abruptly on the Association Agreement with Europe. Nevertheless, it was clear that something like this would eventually happen and probably sooner rather than later. Anyone who has spent time in Ukraine knows how pervasive the official corruption is and how sick of it normal, decent people are. Make no mistake, the Association Agreement was seen by many Ukrainians as a way to battle back against institutionalised corruption at home, not just as a means through which Ukraine could forge closer ties with the EU for the sake of becoming more “European” (whatever that means) or to enter the West’s economic and strategic orbit, although the latter was certainly a major consideration as well.

While living in Kyiv in 2009, during the final year of Viktor Yushchenko’s presidency, I talked with activists who had participated in the Orange Revolution and I understood how disappointed they were with the political outcome, or rather lack of one. The same was true of non-activists, the regular people just trying to live their lives. Many were fundamentally disillusioned with the system, from young people trying to make careers for themselves to old people trying to survive on meagre pensions. Then, Yanukovych was elected and things went from bad to worse in many respects. Hence, a new revolution seemed to be only a matter of time.

Let me add that part of the reason for the EuroMaidan protests occurring was
that the Ukrainian state has also become more self-conscious about its sovereignty since the early 2000s. Ukraine is a fascinating country with much more complex cultural, ethno-linguistic and ideological divisions than the hackneyed East/West, pro-Russia, pro-West divide would indicate. But as to what constituted a Ukrainian state or what this state stood for? That was less clear in the 1990s, and this in many respects suited the purposes of leaders like Leonid Kravchuk and Leonid Kuchma, who did not want to have a difficult conversation about Ukraine’s recent history and the divisions it created and reinforced among the Ukrainian people. They simply did not want to address the palpable divides in Ukrainian society at the state level (Kuchma eventually started to do so, but relatively late in the game and in reaction to mounting political pressure). Despite this, beginning in the early 2000s, it became harder to avoid confronting these divides and grappling with them politically.

By the time of the Orange Revolution, it was impossible. So although Yushchenko was mostly unsuccessful in his attempts to reconcile different Ukrainian identities and their associated historical memories under a common patriotic banner, he did succeed in focusing the institutions of the state on this conversation. Concomitantly, society as a whole was also becoming more attuned to the idea of Ukraine as a political entity, even though people were not yet ready to agree on what it meant in ideological or practical terms. This, combined with Vladimir Putin’s increasingly assertive foreign policy and Yanukovych’s generally more pro-Moscow stance, made the question of which direction the country would tilt more urgent. As a result, the EuroMaidan was a very dramatic manifestation of ideational tensions that had been simmering in Ukraine for years.

In your opinion, what was the main driver sparking the EuroMaidan? Was Russia the driver? Or maybe the EuroMaidan was only a cover for plans that Russia had made earlier?

The main driver behind the EuroMaidan was the large segment of Ukrainian society fed up with endemic corruption, which hoped that the Association Agreement would set the country on a new path, helping it develop politically and economically. Instead, they had this prospect yanked out from underneath them at the last moment. Yanukovych did not help matters with his tone-deaf and heavy-handed response to the early protests, which only made it more likely that large-scale violence would eventually break out.

As for Russia, I do not believe that the Kremlin had any sort of plan in mind with respect to annexing Crimea or fomenting a crisis in Donbas beforehand. Putin is not a grand tactician. He is an opportunist. The Kremlin was “flying by the seat of its pants” and simply saw a chance it could exploit and seized it. However, it bit off more than it could comfortably chew and the Russians did not expect that the annexation of Crimea would provoke such a strong response.
from Ukraine’s neighbours and the West in general.

However, I will say that what happened plays well with the narrative of Russkiy mir (Russian world) that Putin has been promoting in recent years. In this sense, the pump was primed at home for Moscow to take advantage of the situation in Ukraine when it presented itself, by claiming to be protecting Russian speakers from the “fascist” forces operating in Kyiv. Yet at the same time, it would be wrong to dismiss, as many in the West have implicitly done, those Ukrainian citizens (ethnic Ukrainians, not just Russians living in Ukraine) that strongly identify with Russia and believe in a common civilisational bond. They exist, their concerns and fears are real and they need to be listened to and have their points of view respected.

To address the last part of your question, Russia obviously also has real strategic and economic interests in Ukraine and many Russians genuinely felt these were being threatened by the political instability brought about by the Euro-Maidan. The degree to which the Kremlin actually believed this or simply utilised it as an excuse for getting involved is debatable, but in either case, Russia’s response was predictable.

What do you think were the real reasons behind Russia’s annexation of Crimea?

It has become a trite observation to note that many in Russia, Putin chief among them, rue the loss of global prestige that the dissolution of the Soviet Union brought to their country. Yet it is trite only in the sense that it is so obviously true; Russians today persist in treating Ukraine like a phantom limb, one they feel must surely still be attached, regardless of all evidence to the contrary. So the first point is that Russia’s involvement in the Ukrainian crisis is primarily about how the optics of this situation play out domestically. On this level, the annexation demonstrates that Russia is still a power to be reckoned with that does not need to ask permission before it acts. Crimea is also strongly connected to a normative argument about righting a perceived “historical wrong”, the idea being that Russia simply reclaimed what rightfully belonged to it. However, the events in Crimea can also be understood in terms of a more strategic cost-benefit analysis. From an economic standpoint, Russia is promising to pour a great deal of money into Crimea. The funds are supposedly designated for raising pensions and salaries of state-sector employees, as well as for modernising and developing the region’s infrastructure, a primary goal being to disconnect the peninsula from Ukraine for its energy needs.

Russian officials claim that the potentially massive hydrocarbon reserves off the Crimean coast did not figure in their calculations regarding the peninsula, but it is very hard to believe this. Russia now stands to save billions of dollars annually, no longer having to subsidise the price of Ukraine’s gas imports in exchange for maintaining its naval base in...
Sevastopol. Moreover, Crimea also has land-based natural resources and is a major tourist destination.

Having said all this, the second point I want to emphasise, and this is one that many in the West wilfully ignore, is that the situation with Crimea is historically complicated. What happened in March 2014 was not just the “annexation of Crimea by Russia”, a formulation which suggests no local agency was present. The reality of the matter is that many residents of Crimea wanted to go with Russia, if only to avoid the eventual fate of Donbas. The Crimean peninsula has been an ethnic Russian enclave for decades, so even if the referendum to secede had been perfectly transparent and legitimate, the majority of residents would still likely have voted to leave Ukraine.

So with regards to how Russia seized the territory, this was inexcusable under international law. Yet from the perspective of which country the majority of residents choose to identify with, I am less certain this was a tragedy for either Crimea or Ukraine in the long term. However, it remains to be seen what the final status of minority populations in Crimea will be under Russian rule. The Crimean Tatars, in particular, are not overly enamoured with Moscow, with

Soroka: “The main driver behind the EuroMaidan was the large segment of Ukrainian society fed up with endemic corruption, which hoped that the Association Agreement would set the country on a new path, helping it develop politically and economically.”
the memory of Stalin’s forced deportations still not having faded.

Is there any chance of solving the Crimea issue?

It depends on what you mean by “solving”. If you mean the West normalising relations with Russia, I think this is possible within the next few years, though it will be a hard road to travel. Reconciliation may be aided if both sides find common ground for co-operation on other issues, such as defeating ISIS in Syria and Iraq. This might permit them to save face and facilitate better relations. However, in terms of Crimea returning to Ukraine I would say that it is lost for the foreseeable future. Putin cannot backtrack on the decision to annex Crimea without appearing weak at home and he cannot afford such a reversal. Moreover, he does not strike me as the type of man whose psychological make-up would permit such an action, even if he could get away with it. As for Petro Poroshenko, he has no cards to play. Kyiv cannot make a credible military threat against Russian forces in Crimea and the West is not foolish enough to wade into this matter any further than it already has.

Russia frequently reminds the world about its “humiliation syndrome”, referring to the case of Germany after the First World War and the consequences of such humiliation. Can “Weimar syndrome” explain Russia’s current policies, such as the Russia-Ukraine war, the annexation of Crimea and keeping the West at bay?

Well, it certainly provides a convenient excuse. However, I do not want to be so cynical as to suggest that there is nothing to this idea beyond its instrumental uses. Yes, I think Russia was humiliated after the fall of the Soviet Union and Putin feels this acutely. Over the years, he has repeatedly used the image of Russia being forced “on her knees” by the West. I am fairly sure that he actually believes this enervation of the Russian economy and military was deliberate. To some degree, it probably was; the old Cold War hawks in the United States and Western Europe were surely not sad about this outcome.

However, I also believe that it is naïve to explain all of Russia’s actions through the lens of national humiliation, just as I think that it is equally naïve to refuse to acknowledge that humiliation plays any role in how Putin sees Russia’s place in the world today. He has made the regaining of international prestige, as measured by military and diplomatic clout, a cornerstone of his political vision. He wants Russia to be regarded as a country to be reckoned with, a real power capable of playing by rules that are more flexible than those imposed on less important states. At the end of the day though, I think economic realities trump hypothetical ones.

Russia’s decision-makers, headed by Putin, frequently state that the world order needs to be transformed in a way that grants Russia a more worthy role in it, possibly even the leading role. Do you think
that such plans can materialise and that the West would yield to Russia?

Putin talks a great deal about a multi-polar world. He certainly sees himself and Russia at the head of an emerging Eurasian community, a link between Europe, which he is increasingly disillusioned by, and an economically vibrant and dynamic Asia. Incidentally, China also shares this vision and it is probably appealing to leaders in Iran and India as well, two countries to which Russia has lately been making economic and military overtures. Regardless, I do not think that there is any chance the West, or more specifically the United States, will voluntarily yield to Russia on this matter, even though maintaining a unipolar world has cost the US a great deal of both lives and resources. For all that we can point to Kremlin power brokers with a KGB or Cold War mentality, a version of that mentality is also present in Washington and in Western and Central European capitals. In some quarters, there exists what I can only characterise as an almost pathological loathing and distrust of Russia.

Of course, eventually the US may not have a choice. All empires, whether material or ideological, eventually come to the end of their period of influence. What is clear is that a hegemonic world order, with the United States acting as the globe’s police force, supported to various degrees and in various capacities by often reluctant European allies, is not a sustainable model and nor is it a normatively good model. However, providing the world into spheres of realist influence where material interests prevail above all else, which is essentially what Putin proposes to do with his idea of multi-polarity, is not necessarily any better. The reason he can make common cause with a leader like Xi Jinping is that they both believe in the concept of hard sovereignty, meaning non-interference in a state’s internal affairs regardless of its policies on issues such as human rights, and a pragmatic foreign policy.

Ukraine is now dealing with a war on two-fronts. The first consists of the conflict in Donbas. The second is concerned with the necessity of introducing fundamental political and economic reforms. Do you think that Ukraine can manage these reforms without overcoming the system of oligarchy?

The oligarchs, or to put it more broadly and accurately, entrenched big-business interests and the personal networks of patronage and graft organised around them, are the biggest threat to Ukraine going forward, even more so than the war in Donbas. Moreover, if this present attempt at reform fails, I am not sure there will be a third anytime soon. However, I do believe that the oligarchs can be induced to stay more on the political side-lines than they have been in recent years in exchange for being incorporated into the new system in such a way that they feel their economic interests are not fundamentally threatened. Indeed, participating in rebuilding the Ukrainian state, provided of course they
recognise the government in Kyiv and are not predisposed to work against it, can potentially provide them a way in which to re-write their legacies and obtain a modicum of societal legitimacy. There is a long history of similar situations. For example, it happened in the United States with the Robber Barons of the 19th century. At the time, they were reviled. Today, their names grace buildings and charitable institutions. Their descendants sit on the boards of major foundations.

Despite this, it is going to be difficult to stamp out the deeply rooted day-to-day corruption that exists in Ukraine, both in the state bureaucracy and in business circles. I do not know if Poroshenko is the right man for the job; frankly, I have my doubts, given his background. However, it is a hopeful sign that Ukraine’s neighbours are proving so willing to help Kyiv in its reform efforts.

Let me conclude by observing that the question of political and economic reform in Ukraine cannot be fully addressed without thinking about what will happen in eastern Ukraine. I have no idea how or when the fighting will eventually end for good. Yet as for Russian designs on the region, I do not believe that Russia will try to grab any more Ukrainian territory unless something radically changes in either Moscow or Kyiv. Sure, Russia would not refuse a land corridor to Crimea if it could obtain one at a minimal political cost, but this would be impossible. Putin seemed surprised at the West’s reaction over Crimea and I do not think, at least in the present geopolitical climate, that he would be eager for any more such adventures.

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The power of humbleness

BARTOSZ MARCINKOWSKI

Romek Marber is a **Polish-born graphic designer of Jewish heritage** who has worked for renowned magazines and companies like the *Economist*, Penguin publishing and Columbia Pictures. So how is it that this “Polish artist” is completely unknown in Poland and does not even have a note in the Polish Wikipedia?

The answer to this question lies somewhere in history. The history of Romek Marber is as complex and tragic as the history of Poland and the Jews in the 20th century. Marber left Poland after the Second World War in 1946 and emigrated to the United Kingdom. Although he spent the first 21 years of his life in Poland, he returned for the first time only in 2015 at the age of 90. His traumatic memories of growing up in Poland during the war made it previously impossible for him to visit.

Romek Marber is a very warm and modest person, which is probably yet another reason why he has not become a well-known artist in Poland. When he speaks about his works, he often smiles and jokes. Yet when asked about the reason for leaving Poland his face suddenly changes and his voice starts to tremble. It is clear he does not want to talk about it and his experiences of war are more than just memories – he relives them, time and again. Although it is always interesting for people from a younger generation to speak with witnesses about the horrors of the Second World War, I restrained myself from asking Romek Marber such things, seeing how painful it was for him to even talk about it 70 years later.

**More Polish than British**

Marber was born in the small town of Turek, Poland in 1925 to an assimilated Jewish family. “I was raised as a Pole. My childhood in Poland was truly wonderful,”
Marber says. “But later I went through a period of my life which wasn’t so wonderful”, he adds trying to avoid the details. Two months after Germany attacked Poland in September 1939, Marber and his family were expelled to Bochnia, a town outside Kraków, and then to the Bochnia Ghetto which was established in 1941. There, he began to work for Gerhard Kurzbach, a Wehrmacht soldier who was granted recognition as one of the Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem. Kurzbach saved Marber’s life when he ordered all his workers to stay at work during the deportation from the ghetto to the concentration camp in Belzec. Later that evening, on August 23rd 1942, Marber’s mother, sister and grandparents were taken to Belzec as well. Marber himself was eventually taken to a concentration camp too, but he managed to survive the Holocaust.

In 1946 Marber reunited with his brother and father and emigrated to the United Kingdom where he made a successful career as a graphic designer. “I always thought a lot about Poland and even my colleagues told me sometimes that I spoke too much about it. I have been perceived as a Pole in the UK; I have been more Polish than British my whole life. If you are a foreigner, you can see more, you are a better observer in the country where you live,” Marber says. Perhaps this is what allowed him to capture certain motifs in his graphics that would have never been captured by a British born-and-raised artist.

But before Marber became a graphic designer, he performed numerous low-profile jobs including working in a clothing factory, for example. In the end it turned out that work at this factory was a life-changing experience. One of women who worked there as a dress designer encouraged Marber to attend evening classes in drawing and painting at St Martin’s School of Art in London. Struggling with poverty, Marber applied for a scholarship from the committee for the education of Poles in Britain and received it. He registered for a course in commercial art. It was a lucky choice for him: “I was happy as a graphic designer that many of my works were published as magazine covers. I did not expect so many years ago that I would make so many covers for the Economist. In this job, most of your works usually land in trash. It was different in my case.”

The Marber grid

In 1960, Romek Marber made his first cover for the Economist, a British weekly magazine founded in 1843. Romek Marber recalls his work with the Economist with a smile on his face: “I used to come to the Economist’s office around 11am where I would sometimes sit and wait; or to ‘The French’, a pub in Soho with my colleagues, waiting for hours for the theme of the week, a headline that would make it to the
cover. After the decision was made, I would make a quick sketch in the office. If approved, I would head home to work on the cover. It needed to be done by 9am the following day. There was no time to change or correct anything. There was no time to think about it too much.”

But it is not the Economist that Marber is most famous for. Of course, working for such a well-established and renowned magazine with a wide national and international distribution was a breakthrough moment in his career and he was noticed thanks to that. One day, he received a phone call from Germano Facetti, an art director at Penguin Books. “Somebody with a strong foreign accent called you, but his accent was not as bad as yours,” said Anna, the secretary at the art
department at the *Economist* to Marber. The two men finally got in touch and this is how it started.

Marber was asked to illustrate a series of crime fiction novels. A set of typical, green covers with a conservative symbolic design and characteristic division has become one of Penguin’s signs of recognition. Marber’s design on how he divided the covers was later called “the Marber grid”, a design studied by graphic artists even today. As Marber explained in *Penguin by Illustrators*, a book edited by Steve Hare and published by the Penguin Collectors’ Society: “I came to the conclusion that the cover design must unite the titles in the Penguin crime series. This would be achieved by a visual uniformity of all or some of the components that make up a cover. The grid divides the cover into areas of white and green, determines the typography, the placing of type and picture and is particularly important when artwork is commissioned from diverse illustrators/designers whose styles differ.” For Marber, designing covers for Penguin was a much more pleasant experience, not only because he did not need to work under the high pressure of a weekly magazine, but also because he simply liked crime novels. During the 1960s and 70s he made more than 70 covers for popular crime novels in Britain.

“Graphic design is like language. It takes time before you learn how to express yourself,” Marber says. Looking at his covers, one may immediately notice the specific language of Marber, a unique style in his work. “Romek Marber’s graphic designs throughout the 1960s and 70s have made a significant contribution to Britain’s enviable place at the heart of the global design community,” says Bruce Brown, a professor of design at the University of Brighton and a long-time friend of Marber. Marber’s graphic heritage is still an inspiration for younger generations of graphic designers: “Contemporary designers continue to admire and emulate Marber’s design, applying it to a range of mediums and twisting it to fit with modern day practices, a trend I personally hope continues for a good while yet,” says Paul Murray, a Manchester-based graphic designer on his blog thebookdesignblog.com.

**A Polish designer**

Although Marber spent almost all his adult life in the UK and visited Poland in 2015 for the first time since 1946, he is still being described in Britain as a “Polish designer”. This is yet another demonstration of the tragic history of the 20th century manifested in his life. Marber is a man with no real homeland. Is it the Poland where many people did not perceive him as a Pole because he is a Jew? Is it the UK, where Marber is known as a Polish designer who opened a new chapter in the history of book covers? There is no simple answer to that. One may ask: does it
really matter in the era of globalisation? To some it probably does not. But to Marber, the question is relevant, especially for someone who speaks of the country of his childhood and adolescence in an extremely emotional way.

“Marber’s extraordinary life has seen him through times of unprecedented change that, on the one hand, conspired to radically alter the face of Europe and, on the other, saw iPads replace sketchbooks. ... It is remarkable that after such experiences Marber has sustained a continuing wonder at the beauty inherent in modern industrial life,” writes Brown in a foreword to a catalogue titled Romek Marber: Graphics published by the Faculty of Arts of the University of Brighton.

Marber’s life was extraordinary indeed, but Marber himself is an extraordinary person as well. The power of his humbleness and his humorous approach to life, despite what he went through, creates a paradoxical combination that make meeting him an unforgettable experience. The story of Marber’s life is somehow universal and contains a powerful message especially now, when hundreds of thousands of people are fleeing conflict zones in the Middle East and seeking safe haven in Europe. Marber was a refugee himself, but thanks to his hard work and dedication, he managed to become a very successful person in his host country as well as globally, leaving his mark on the graphic design world for good.

Bartosz Marcinkowski is an editor with New Eastern Europe.
Several kilometres from the front in Donbas, normal life goes on. A few dozen kilometres down the road, there are virtually no signs of military operations. People live their lives and the roar of cannons does not reach them. The war is all but forgotten. Yet the conflict in eastern Ukraine is nowhere near its end.

Several months ago I was sitting with some Ukrainian marines in a house in the small town of Shyrokin near Mariupol. It was dark and there was an eerie silence. We were focused on the New Year’s show on a small television screen. For want of a better activity, the Ukrainian marines were watching the artists’ smiley faces. Nearby lay their abandoned guns, ready to be put to use at any time. New Year’s was just a couple of hours away, yet everyone was anticipating the possible “celebration” by the separatists. Due to the date, the enemy shelling might have been particularly powerful. Many believe that the first day of the New Year will set the tone for the rest of it.

The night was fairly quiet, but not entirely deprived of the gunshots that both sides would fire at each other. The next day also proved that peace and quiet was not to be expected any time soon. Mortars crashed down. Their explosions would make the pitch black night glow. At the Sea of Azov, a tourist destination in days gone by, no one was considering relaxing the way they used to. Civilians had fled the area and tourists were clearly not to be relied upon. Meanwhile, the soldiers’ minds had drifted far away from that place.
The grey zone

Several dozen kilometres to the north is Pavlopol. Local residents had stayed there because the town had been located in the so-called grey zone. Although neither side’s armed forces had entered the town, the residents were forced to survive while being surrounded by military positions on both sides. At least there was no permanent fighting taking place in the town itself. That is why it remained undamaged, unlike other places that were affected by direct clashes. According to one female resident, it was a black, not grey, zone. It had become a melting pot of the worst possible types of people. Thus, the use of a half-measure or a bland colour was inappropriate to describe this place. Grey may be suitable for indicating things on maps, but it hardly befits the stories of human survival. The inhabitants of Pavlopol are visibly worn out and fear for their future. They have no other choice but to put their faith in the idea that the time of absolute uncertainty will one day end.

For many, the moment the Ukrainian army marched into their town represented liberation and the chance of a better future. However, for a large group the time of uncertainty did not end. Opening a grocery store hardly makes any difference if you’d rather have Russian or Donetsk People’s Republic flags waving in the village. Similar views prevail in most cities and towns of Donbas. Some support Ukraine. Others definitely prefer Russia, while the majority are simply indifferent.

In eastern Ukraine, some support the government in Kyiv. Others definitely prefer Russia, while the majority are simply indifferent.

One such place is Marinka, a town near Donetsk. Civilians still live there, despite the fact that the town is the front line of the Ukrainian troops’ positions. Normal life is maintained. People buying and selling goods occupy the central square and single shops are open. Marshrutkas and taxis are running and it is business as usual until the afternoon. However, the onset of dusk puts an end to peaceful life here.

The ruined police station building somehow reminds one more of the war at night than during the day, when there are passers-by everywhere. Houses with blown-out windows, destroyed by grads, seem even more frightening. There are fewer and fewer people on the streets and the only movement is that of stray cats and dogs. A few hundred metres from here are separatist positions. Some bunkers can even be seen with the naked eye. They can wave at each other and try not to think about the constant threat that surrounds both the soldiers and civilians, day by day.

Perhaps someone on the other side will look through their binoculars and think about the enemy, standing barely a few hundred meters away, in a more humane
way. Yet if one does not look closely at one’s foe, they pull the trigger. Once, twice, three times; every night, should the need arise. No one knows exactly.

### Tragedies

Sometimes, the shelling takes place without any plausible explanation. There are gunshots, grenades and mortars. Some of the weaponry used is even banned under the Minsk Agreement (the agreement which outlined a ceasefire deal in February 2015 – editor’s note). No one seems to be bothered too much by political agreements that politicians entered into far away from the battlefield. Regardless, the wounded and the dead still fall; civilians and soldiers alike. The former do so because they get so weary of the war that they no longer want to wander around searching for a safe life. They would rather live at home and put their lives in jeopardy than look for refuge elsewhere. The soldiers fight and die since it is their duty. They assure us of their high spirits and remind us of their obligation to keep Ukraine safe. Yet, somewhere deep down, we get the feeling that they are forced to do so. They fight, but volunteers wishing to join the troops do not enlist as enthusiastically as they used to. Nowadays, the numbers are made up by either compulsory enlistment or by young men tempted by good wages promised under a military enlistment contract.

Throughout Ukraine, cemeteries are peppered with tombs enshrining victims of the conflict. New announcements regarding those who have been wounded or killed are made virtually every day. It is not only those killed in the fighting or during shelling; the news also includes victims of unexploded bombs or mines. Another matter is the suicide rate among the soldiers. All these tragedies occur because of the war, but they do not fit the narrative told during bedtime stories of heroic actions or sacrifice for the homeland. The war makes the whole zone near the front lines tainted, and for this reason the area has become a place that is just as treacherous as the front line.

The soldiers’ graves in towns and villages far away from Donbas are sometimes the only reminder of the ongoing war and the fact that Ukraine is going through the first military conflict on its territory since gaining independence. Although wooden crosses and the soldiers’ photos are heart-breaking, they fail to show the fear of the future that is predominant in Donbas. The conflict seems to have been simplified. Someone dies, so we buy flowers and sing the national anthem. Yet

The war makes the whole zone near the front lines tainted, and for this reason it has become a place that is just as treacherous as the front line.
the war is going on in some remote place, far away. All we want is to live peaceful and comfortable lives, at any cost. It has been this way for two years.

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At the end of February 2014, when the then-President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovych fled the country to seek refuge in Russia, Kyiv let out a sigh of relief. A massive social rebellion, also described as the Revolution of Dignity, was turning the Ukrainian political scene upside down and was creating hope that Ukraine would finally undergo the reforms that were necessary to heal the country. However, several days passed and news arrived of the so-called “little green men”, who had appeared in Crimea. Ukraine did not stand up to this aggressor and as a result of the controversial referendum, whose outcome was only accepted by Russia, it de facto lost control of the peninsula. Scarcely had the commentary on the events in Sevastopol or Simferopol faded away that everyone’s attention had turned to eastern Ukraine. In Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk and many other smaller towns, anti-Ukrainian and pro-Russian speeches were heard. Soon, fighting broke out, followed by the division of Donbas into two parts. The economic situation in Ukraine worsened and people repeatedly asked themselves what was going to happen next.

Initial, when traveling through Ukrainian villages, towns and further off the beaten track in Donbas, I got the feeling that there was a groundswell of belief in the ultimate success of the operations taking place, both in society at large and in the army that was being rebuilt almost from scratch. Volunteers had stepped forward to join the army and voluntary activities were popping up everywhere in order to support the military forces. If we assume that the EuroMaidan played a role in helping form the new Ukrainian nation, then the preliminary military phase in Donbas was its natural follow-up. Even though it was understood from the very beginning that the war was being waged against a far more powerful opponent (i.e. Russia), there was an immense belief that the country would succeed regardless.

There was also a belief then that all of Ukraine’s shortcomings were surmountable. God knows, there were plenty of them, namely inadequate military supplies, no budget, total reorganisation of the civil service structure and, last but not least, the possible further collapse of the state. Moreover, there was some kind of faith that the military operations would change the mentality of people from eastern Ukraine, as there is nothing that impacts one’s mindset more than a war on the doorstep and death affecting their loved ones. Some might have thought that revolutionary changes would also transform this part of society, which has always had a soft spot for Russia. It was believed that they would put Ukraine first due to its
pro-western orientation regarding economic and military integration. The famous “Russian Spring” was such a failure that the only remaining chance was to change their perception and support Ukraine, or at least get them not to interfere with the reforms taking place in the country.

In the summer of 2014 the zone of military operations in Donbas was growing rapidly. Ukrainian tanks were pressing on and recapturing cities one by one until August 2014. Then, the famous battle of Ilovaisk took place and the pressing of the Ukrainian army was put on hold while the separatist and Russian armed forces took over. Since that moment, Ukraine has been unable to recapture large parts of its territory, whilst also losing both Debaltseve and the Donetsk airport. The frontline was formed and so was the thinking regarding the shape of the eastern regions. It became clear that the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts were now divided, not only in terms of territory but also into good and evil, depending on one’s perception.

Even though the frontline has not significantly changed during that time, fighting is still taking place. However, after two years spent in the trenches, I cannot say that the feelings I had at the very beginning of the conflict still hold. My jour-
Society is now divided into those engaged in the conflict and those who are simply bystanders to it. The latter might sometimes spare a thought for what is going on to the east, but such thoughts are no longer predominant. The war has ceased to be front-page news. The single activation of military operations no longer draws much attention. While the defence of Donetsk airport drew a lot of domestic and international coverage, the on-going fighting in the Avdiivka region, which the Ukrainian soldiers compare to the defence of the airport is seen as just another insignificant incident in a broader conflict.

_Slowly forgotten_

Close observation of life in Donbas is subject to the brutal confrontation of a study of life at the rear of the front, as well as more remote places. Somewhere in between, there is a gap. For some, it is the border between the world of peace and war. For others, it is a line behind which exists the life that they long for. The soldiers’ problems have become the problems of the army, families and dedicated NGOs. Hardly anyone is interested in the struggles of the anonymous villager in Donbas. People are forgotten and, as they often say themselves, no one needs them. They might naively imagine that the state will take care of them. Crucially, they need to be taken care of, since they are used to the state, even one that is severely weakened, solving their problems.

Unfortunately, the Ukrainian state finds itself in a complex situation and it is difficult to imagine that it might engage more resources in order to provide constant help to its citizens. Other parts of Ukraine have enough problems and are not particularly interested in taking on the problems of those regions that, in their mind, are not worthy of support. A growing number of people in Ukraine doubt the possibility of reorienting the mentality of the inhabitants of Donbas. They have come to terms with the fact that those people have always been in favour of and will continue to favour autonomy or Russia; they simply do not support the authorities in Kyiv.

Donbas is being pushed deeper and deeper into the background. Ukrainians are used to the war but as long as it does not affect them directly, there is no need to discuss and analyse it on a daily basis. The enthusiasm I saw during the EuroMaidan
has all but vanished. The “Revolution of Dignity” has thus far not delivered improvements and, what is more, the state is now entrenched in conflict with Russia. The majority might view them as an obvious enemy but, at the same time, they need to be thinking about their own futures, getting and keeping a job and their families. There is no visible strength left in society. There is no hope of rapid improvements.

The war in eastern Ukraine is slowly being forgotten. Thousands of casualties and months of fighting have left Ukrainian society mentally exhausted. Their reaction is only natural. Yet at the same time, a question arises as to whether it is not too early. In Donbas the cannons are still heard and in the graveyards, new tombs keep appearing. While everyone longs for an end to this nightmare, no one can specify when it may happen and what shape it would actually take.

Translated by Justyna Chada

Wojciech Koźmic is a Polish civil society activist and New Eastern Europe’s photo-reporter. His photographs from the EuroMadian, Crimea (just before annexation) and Ukraine’s east have been published in previous issues of this magazine. He blogs at: www.wojciechkozmic.pl.
Latgale’s outlandish, Slavic qualities can be explained to a large degree by its highly distinct history. Unlike Riga, which was part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth for a mere 40 years, Latgale was ruled by Poland for over 200 years, right up to the partition of that country in 1772. This was long enough to leave imprints that are still detectable today.

Daugavpils is a city of a little under 100,000 people and is the largest urban centre in Latgale, the easternmost and most idiosyncratic of Latvia’s four provinces. The city straddles the Daugava River (the name Daugavpils translates literally as “Daugava Castle”), the country’s longest river and the closest to its heart, often evoked in songs and poetry as a watery stand-in for Latvia itself. The Daugava passes diagonally through Latvia, slicing it neatly in half, before emerging as a much broader body of water and flowing into the Gulf of Riga. Even 200 kilometres downstream from the capital, at Daugavpils, the river is so wide that the bridge takes a good two or three minutes to walk across. From the middle of the bridge, I turn and look at both sides; the city’s unassuming post-war rectangles sit on one side, while the sturdy but knocked-about wooden houses of Daugavpils’ riverside suburb of Grīva sit on the other.

Latgale as a whole is finely balanced between ethnic Russians and Latvians (most of whom are Latgalian speakers), but Daugavpils is de facto a Russian-speaking city, with less than one in five inhabitants identifying as Latvian. Perhaps for this reason, it is relatively rare for it to feature in the Latvian news and, until recently, the rest of the world was largely unaware of its existence. Russia’s aggression against Ukraine
changed all that, with the international media placing a giant question mark over
the demographically complex region of Latgale, and especially over Daugavpils. A misleading article in *The Telegraph* at the outbreak of the crisis in Ukraine described Latgale as “Latvia’s Crimea” and earlier this year, a high-profile BBC faux-documentary called *Inside the War Room*, speculated about a confrontation with Vladimir Putin as a result of pro-Russian riots and separatist activity in Daugavpils.

**Polish traces**

If we were to go back 95 years to the Daugavpils of the first independent Republic of Latvia, which existed between the two world wars, we would find comparable levels of Latvian fear and suspicion about revanchism and the manipulation of national minorities. The only difference is that then the suspicion in Daugavpils and its surrounding towns would have been not of Russia, but of Poland.

This may sound strange to Latvians now. For obvious reasons, Poland no longer plays much of a role in Latvia’s internal politics. Since the Second World War, Poland has retreated to the south and east and the Polish border is over 300 kilometres from Daugavpils. Nevertheless, Polish cultural and political influence, in Latgale at least, has historically been similar to that in Lithuania, although Poland’s connection with Latvia’s southern neighbour is much better known. Indeed, if just a few events had turned out differently, the stretch of the Daugava that I walked over could have become the border between Poland and Latvia, making Daugavpils a frontier town, looking across the water at the Polish Grzywa (the Polish name for Grīva).

In 2013 an enormously popular play called *Latgola.lv* opened at the Latvian National Theatre in Riga. It is a comedy that plays on the mostly affectionate stereotype of Latgaliens as emotionally unpredictable, close-knit and extraordinarily fond of drinking and dancing. They are indisputably Latvian and yet clearly different; as one non-Latgalian Latvian put it to me, “they speak funny, they spend their time making pottery and they have wedding celebrations that go on for days”. In a reserved, restrained country like Latvia, this is remarkable.

Latgale’s outlandish, Slavic qualities can be explained to a large degree by its highly distinct history. Unlike Riga and Vidzeme (northern Latvia), which were part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth for a mere 40 years in the late 16th century before being taken by Sweden, Latgale (then known as Inflanty) was ruled by Poland for over 200 years, right up to the partition of Poland in 1772. After that, it became part of the Russian Empire. Nevertheless, this was still long enough to leave imprints that are detectable even today. Latvia is traditionally a Lutheran country, but Latgaliens are overwhelmingly Catholic. The variant of Latvian spo-
ken in Latgale also bears strong traces of Polish influence and is often mutually unintelligible with Latvian, due to differing spelling and frequent vowel shifts that twist and clip the long, round vowel sounds of standard Latvian. Wealthy landowners in Latgale were Polish rather than German, as in the rest of Latvia. Many common people in the region also spoke Polish, though whether they were mostly ethnic Poles or Latgalians who had Polonised themselves for reasons of self-advancement remains contested.

However, in the chaotic years after the Russian Revolution and the country’s withdrawal following the First World War, Latvia and Poland became natural allies against both Russia and Germany. Polish troops fought and died alongside Latvians in Latgale during the bafflingly complicated struggle for Latvian independence. Poland seemed to be staking no claim to the vast majority of former Inflanty territory. Yet, just a couple of weeks after united Polish-Latvian forces took Daugavpils in January 1920, effectively defeating the Bolsheviks in Latgale, Latvian border guards crossing the Daugava River on their way to Grīva were stopped by their allies, who informed them that the town now belonged to Poland. In view of the large number of ethnic Poles in the area, the Polish government subsequently declared that it viewed Grīva, the nearby town of Ilūkste and six other neighbouring parishes as Polish territory. For the next six months, an odd, non-violent stand-off unfolded. Latvian officials periodically tried to establish border posts and enforce their authority over the region but were rebuffed by Polish troops.

**Well-organised and united**

The impasse was resolved in an unexpected way, when the Soviet Union launched an invasion of Poland in the summer of 1920. Polish troops were pulled to defend Warsaw and in response, the Latvians crossed the river and took back Grīva and Ilūkste (after a brief, non-fatal scuffle with the Lithuanian army, who also made a half-hearted claim for the disputed area). After defeating the Soviets, the Polish forces returned. The Polish government protested Latvia’s actions but took no concrete action. During the previous year, Poland had fought not only Germany and the Soviet Union, but also Ukrainian, Czechoslovak and Lithuanian armies. It clearly had no appetite for another military confrontation over such a small area of land. Polish representatives brought up the Ilūkste issue at a number of international conferences in the early 1920s, but received little outside interest or sympathy. A border treaty was finally signed in 1929 and it took another seven years to build a border fence. This made the Latvian-Polish border prone to smuggling and illegal incursions.
The Poles who found themselves living in Latvia became the new country’s fourth-largest minority, representing three per cent of the total population, behind Russians, Germans and Jews. Despite the relatively small size of the population, the Poles were unusually well-organised, united and thus able to take full advantage of Latvia’s fairly liberal laws on national minorities, which guaranteed cultural autonomy. State-funded Polish schools were opened, more than 60 by the start of the Soviets’ occupation, and the political party the Polish-Catholic Latvian Union of Poles was formed to defend the interests of Latvian Poles, winning two seats in the 100-member Saeima (Latvian Parliament) in 1925 and 1928.

Uniquely among Latvia’s minorities, the proportion of Polish representatives and of Polish schools teaching in their native language corresponded almost exactly to their share of the population. The Poles’ situation did deteriorate somewhat after Latvian nationalist Kārlis Ulmanis was brought to power in a coup and suspended democracy. Some Polish-language newspapers were closed, including the widely-read *Dzwon*, and the number of Polish schools began to decline.

**Key role in Latvia’s fight for freedom**

The National Library of Latvia recently hosted a donation ceremony to mark a new section of books dedicated to Poland with the participation of the Polish ambassador and Polish community leaders in Riga. Some predominantly younger participants spoke in Latvian, while others did so in Polish, although most seemed at least conversant in both. The strained accents of some of the Latvian speakers were clear when they switched to Polish; one woman I spoke to, who runs a Polish organisation in the capital, admitted she did not grow up speaking the language. All those I spoke to are firmly pro-Latvian and consider themselves patriots of both countries. When I asked one Pole whether Poles in Riga feel more of an affinity with Polish than with local Russians, even though Latvian is not a Slavic language or culture, I was answered with a slightly offended “of course”.

The loss of the ability to speak Polish among many, as well as close identification with Latvia amongst the intelligentsia, stems largely from the Polish community’s traumatic experience of Soviet occupation (1940–1941, 1944–1990). Although there was a clear programme of Russification involving massive immi-
migration from other Soviet republics and linguistic policies that placed greater importance on learning Russian than Latvian, the native tongue remained the republic’s official language and schooling in Latvian (with compulsory Russian lessons) was available throughout the country, as was the media. This was not the case for Poles in Latvia. No Polish schools, organisations or publications were permitted to exist in Soviet Latvia.

Although no concrete figures are available for the period, it seems that most Poles in Latvia, unlike the generally pro-Soviet Lithuanian Poles, were supportive of the restoration of Latvia’s independence. In fact, Polish Latvians played a key role in the struggle for that country’s freedom. Riga-born Pole Ita Kozakeviča (Ita Kozakiewicz in Polish) was one of the most passionate advocates for an independent Latvia and became the Latvian People’s Front (the most prominent pro-independence movement) representative for human rights. The Polish-speaking Jānis Jurkāns, who once said in an interview “I often wonder if I’m a Latvian of Polish origin or a well-integrated Pole”, served as the restored Latvian state’s first foreign minister.

After achieving independence from the Soviet Union, a Polish-language school opened in Riga and the Union of Polish Latvians restarted its activities (although now primarily as a cultural rather than political organisation). Poles were also for the most part spared from the more traumatic aspects of the transition to independence – as most Poles could trace their roots back to the pre-war republic, they received Latvian citizenship automatically without having to pass a language test, unlike the vast majority of resident Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians. However, the years of occupation during which, as one interviewee put it to me, “the Polish language was alive only in the family and in the church”, had dispersed and diminished the community. Although the proportion of Poles in the overall population had remained remarkably stable over the last 80 years, never rising above three per cent or dipping below two per cent, the destruction of the community’s infrastructure and intense Russification meant that many had become Poles for purely statistical purposes. The long-standing propensity of Poles in Latvia to marry outside of their ethnic group further sped up the process of assimilation. In 1939, 52 per cent of married Poles had a spouse from another ethnic group, while over the 1990–2007 period, it was 89 per cent.

### Poles of Latgale

Nadine is a 24-year-old Latvian of Polish descent. However, she does not speak Polish and admits that she has little interest in Poland. Both her maternal grandparents were Poles from what is now Belarus and were forcibly moved to
Latvia by German forces during the Second World War. After the war, Nadine’s grandparents settled in Jelgava, a city in southern Latvia without a significant Polish minority and brought up their children to speak Latvian, the language of their friends and neighbours. Yet, because of the way Latvia gathers statistics about its ethnic minorities, Nadine’s mother is considered a Pole (albeit one with Latvian citizenship), despite not being able to speak Polish and not having a particular interest or attachment to Poland.

Although statistics clearly contain many examples like Nadine’s, there are also many who do identify strongly as Poles, especially in Daugavpils where officially, 14 per cent of the population are of Polish ethnicity. Moreover, the proportion rises to over one-third in some nearby villages. I met Kristine Kunicka in Poļu Nams (the Polish House) in Daugavpils, an elegant magenta building first purchased by the Polish community in 1930, nationalised during the Soviet period and then restored as a Polish cultural centre in 1997. Kunicka is an exemplar of multi-cultural Daugavpils: married to a Russian and the daughter of a Latvian father and Polish mother, she is active in the region’s Polish community, studied in Bydgoszcz and sees Polish culture as attractive. Kunicka agrees that the Soviet period had a terrible effect on the Polish minority in Latvia and feels that the community was seen as a potential threat by Soviet authorities. While they were not forced to stop speaking their language, “teachers and headmasters came to them and said ‘please do not speak Polish to your children at home because it is very dangerous and does not help them to learn’”. Kunicka observes, though, that almost all Latvian Poles still pray in Polish; “it is the language of religion – like Latin”.

The Poles of Latgale speak a language that diverges considerably from modern standard Polish. In some rural areas, the language that “Poles” speak may actually be closer to Belarusian. In Latgale, long cut off from Polish culture and media, anachronistic pronunciations have been preserved. Here, the Polish letter “ł”, roughly equivalent to the English “w” sound in modern standard Polish, is pronounced “l”. This region’s Polish is also differentiated by a large number of words borrowed from Russian and the occasional Latvian influence on syntax. These days, the insular, even secretive, language from the Soviet period is increasingly being challenged by standard Polish, via the four Polish-language schools that have opened since the restoration of Latvian independence (one in Riga and three in Latgale), which teach Polish as it is spoken in Poland. Kunicka, who has written her PhD on this academically neglected dialect, observes that a “new peripheral Polish” is developing, spoken mostly by young people whose first language is Russian or Latvian. Its foundation is modern Polish but it is augmented with dialect words learnt from grandparents or other older community members. It is likely to lack fluency and depth and is heavier on academic concepts than slang. Kunicka gives the exam-
ple of a student who may be able to talk about EU policy in Polish, but might not know the word for spoon.

**Warm relations**

Before leaving Daugavpils, I visited the city’s Polish school, opened in 1991 and named after Józef Piłsudski, Poland’s inter-war leader. Head teacher Halina Smulko explained that the school receives funding from both the Latvian and Polish governments, but as students grow older, an increasing number of subjects are taught in Latvian rather than Polish. She said that some students do not speak Polish when they start school. Regardless of what language they learn at school, most young Polish speakers in Daugavpils effectively have to be trilingual. Apart from Polish, they must master Latvian for academia and to communicate with state institutions and Russian to speak with the majority of their neighbours. Indeed, the wall displays I saw as I walked through the school were in both Polish and Latvian, while the students I passed in the corridors were speaking Russian.

The fact that a school in Latvia can be named after Piłsudski, regarded by some as an autocrat who dreamed of restoring Poland to its pre-partition borders, would seem to be the ultimate proof that Poland no longer scares anyone in this country. This would not be true of Lithuania, where relations with the much larger and overwhelmingly Polish-speaking minority are complicated by disputes over which language to use on street signs and passports, as well as bitter memories of Vilnius as a Polish city. Comparing Lithuania’s situation to that in Daugavpils, Smulko told me: “the government in Lithuania is much tougher with Poles. If our government sees that we are working, they help us. Or at least they do nothing to hinder us.”

This seems to be the case. However, it is not clear whether tolerance and support alone will be enough to undo the damage done by over 50 years of Soviet occupation. Will it be enough to stop Latvia’s Poles from becoming simply Latvians or Russians with an unusual heritage? 😊

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In this section of Eastern Café we present to you reviews of four selected books authored by four highly respected authors: Ola Hnatiuk, Hioraki Kuromiya, Tim Judah and Georges Mink. We hope that their reading will give you not only a hint of the recent publications in (or about) our region but also good insight into some aspects of the struggles and identity of today’s Ukraine (Hnatiuk, Kuromiya, Judah) as well as an understating the changes that are now taking place in Poland and the region more broadly (Mink).

As different as all of the reviewed works are, they can be combined into in one category of identity-searching literature. This literature naturally derives much from history, yet also one that is free from prejudice and does not fit into what one of our reviewers describes as nationality-based discourse. Thus, all four books offer an unforgettable journey through the region, place and time.

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There are better known European states and there are lesser known ones. For example, the United Kingdom, France and Germany need no introduction. Yet the further east in Europe you travel, the more you begin to question and the stranger the names seem to sound. Before the Euro-Maidan Revolution and the outbreak of the conflict with Russia, Ukraine was definitely one of these lesser known European states, at least for those who were not paying much attention. Ukraine and Ukrainians were commonly perceived through a “post-Soviet” lens rather than being viewed as a distinct nation with its own history and heritage.

Yet even now, after all that has happened since 2014, interest in Ukrainian affairs is still often limited to war-related news and can be rather shallow. Tim Judah’s latest book *In wartime: Stories from Ukraine* is a rare contribution as it provides the western reader with a chance to scratch the surface of today’s Ukraine and get a better perspective about the deeper issues that the country is facing.

**Three worlds**

Tim Judah is a British reporter and Balkan correspondent with *The Economist*. He has a long record of bringing “Eastern Europe” closer to a western audience. Before his latest work which is his first book entirely dedicated to Ukraine, Judah published several books on Serbia and Kosovo. Yet unlike his previous
book, *Kosovo: What everyone needs to know*, which is a comprehensive look at the young Balkan state, *In wartime* is more of a reportage.

Make no mistake, *In wartime* is not just a book about the recent Russian-Ukrainian conflict. It is more about Ukraine as a country and its complicated history. The book is divided into six sections, three of which deal with the geographic regions of Lviv and western Ukraine, Ukrainian Bessarabia and Donbas respectively. Paging through these stories is akin to travelling between three totally different worlds. The author first takes us to western Ukraine, a region with a unique combination of Jewish, Polish and Ukrainian traditions and heritage. Judah dedicates a large part of this section to the Second World War: a time of pogroms, rising hatred between nations and emerging Ukrainian nationalism in its ugliest form. This section is also an important case study for those interested in the study of memory, leading us to ask questions such as “How is it that Poles, Jews and Ukrainians lived side by side in Lviv for centuries, but have such different memories of the city?”

Leaving western Ukraine, Judah next takes us to Bessarabia, a lesser known region and arguably one with a greater sense of mystery. One of the chapters in this section is called “The Bessarabian ticket”: in order to travel to Bessarabia, a region sandwiched between Moldova and Romania, you need to buy a special ticket. The reader travels with Judah and learns that the ticket indeed takes one to a different world. Bessarabia has little in common with Lviv and is far more similar to the Balkans. Jews and Poles are replaced by Albanians and Bulgarians, who settled this region centuries earlier. Judah visits small towns not far from the Romanian border and talks with local residents, testing for any signs of potential separatism.

However, what is most striking is how Ukrainian Bessarabia seems to be Europe’s forgotten land, omitted by tourists and still awaiting explorers. Judah's conversations with the locals parallel stories from Robert Kaplan’s *Balkan Ghosts*. What the authors have in common is that they dig deeper, go places where people from the outside usually do not venture to and dust off Europe’s forgotten history.

**Symbol of degradation**

Finally, Judah travels to Donbas, a turbulent part of Ukraine located at its eastern end. Here, the reader has a chance to explore yet another of Ukraine’s worlds, one that is entirely different from the previous two. Donbas has industrial roots. It is a land of coal, mining and oligarchs. Unlike Lviv or Bessarabia, Donbas is not a region that boasts a multi-national or multi-cultural past. However, it is the
The region that is most closely tied to Russia and is the home of former president Viktor Yanukovych, as well as many of those associated with his regime. In 2012 the region received a major boost during the European Football Championship, giving people here some hope for the future. However, this was lost after the war began and the region’s future is now uncertain. Once a place where people from all across the Russian Empire came to seek opportunities for work in the coal mining industry, Donbas has now been degraded into an unfriendly place. To those who have never visited the region, Judah’s book provides some insight into the life of Ukraine’s east.

While reading *In wartime*, I recalled *Workingman’s death*, a documentary film by Michael Glawogger that dealt with extreme working conditions in several countries around the world, including Ukraine. In *Workingman’s death*, Donbas served as a symbol of degradation, a place where people work themselves to the bone in exchange for very little. Judah sees the region in a similar way and provides an explanation for this state of affairs in one of Europe’s least stable areas: “The end of the Soviet Union stripped them [the miners] of status and in many cases jobs. Therefore, their comparative standards of living, including in the provision of healthcare, declined. At the same time, individuals such as Akhmetov [Rinat Akhmetov, a Ukrainian oligarch – editor’s note] came into possession of the most profitable assets in the region, while local politicians such as Yanukovych could boost local pride and help the employment situations of those close to his party.”

Of course, there is also much more to Judah’s book including an examination of Crimea, a deeper look at the war in Donbas, etc. However, these issues are relatively well covered by the international media and are still high on the agenda of western politicians and international organisations. The value added of Judah’s book is its in-depth look at the differences between the regions, as examined through the stories of common citizens and intellectuals alike.

**Balkan traits**

Valerii Pekar, a teacher at the Kyiv-Mohyla Business School and a member of the National Reform Council, recently wrote for *New Eastern Europe* that “Ukraine is very inconsistent.” It is one of the largest states in Europe and consists of very different regions and mindsets. Judah understands this idiosyncrasy and writes about Ukraine with sympathy. His Balkan background has been very useful in this regard. Although Ukraine is frequently compared to Poland, the Ukraine presented in Judah’s book appears to have more in common with the Balkans. Certainly, the author seeks to find some Balkan traits...
What is a bit misleading is the title. *In wartime: Stories from Ukraine* suggests that stories will be war-related, which they are not. In a way, they are all affected by the fact that Ukraine is at war, but this is not their defining characteristic, which is actually quite refreshing. Judah proves that there is room for stories like those from Lviv or a small town in Donbas. What is more, his stories inspire further exploration, encouraging readers to discover these lands for themselves.

Another major positive about Judah’s book is that it simply reads well, and for that reason alone should be recommended to anyone who wants to get a better understanding of the bigger picture regarding the processes taking place in Ukraine at present. Unlike the other countless books published in the wake of the so-called “Ukraine crisis”, Judah’s *In wartime* goes far beyond current political developments and gives us a deeper insight with stories about history, identity, belongingness, Ukrainianness, etc.

The stories in Judah’s book inspire further exploration of Ukraine, encouraging readers to discover these lands for themselves.

That being said, it might not be the best book for exactly the same reasons that make it great. Interest in Ukraine has dropped recently and focus has shifted to other parts of the world such as the Middle East. Hopefully, this book will not be overlooked, as it is not only a great opportunity to understand the Ukrainian reality better, but also an absolute pleasure to read.

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How to understand Donbas?

MARTA STUDENNA-SKRUKWA

*Understanding Donbas (Зрозуміти Донбас)*
by Hioraki Kuromiya. Publisher: Dukh i Litera, Kyiv, 2015.

The Russian-Ukrainian war that has been taking place in eastern Ukraine since 2014 has generated an unprecedented amount of interest in Donbas, a region that prior to 2014 was not covered much by either the Ukrainian or international media. Nor was this region analysed to any great extent in academic discourse. Moreover, Donbas was not on the minds of most Ukrainians, since many of them regarded it as a very enigmatic territory. It was seemingly only after Kyiv’s loss of control over this territory and the suffering of several million people that questions on the regional specifics of Donbas and the issue of its cultural adaptation to the rest of Ukraine became a part of the wider discussion. Clearly, the difficulties associated with providing a deep and satisfactory explanation of the aforementioned phenomena have illustrated that there is a certain hunger for more knowledge about this eastern region, a hunger that Ukraine has been slowly but persistently trying to satisfy.

With that in mind, the recent publication of the book *Understanding Donbas* by the renowned American historian Hiroaki Kuromiya, published at the end of 2015 by the Kyiv-based publishing house Dukh i Litera, should be a welcome addition to the debate. The book includes reprints of three historical essays and an interview that Kuromiya gave to the Ukrainian daily *День* (День), as well as an essay on the current situation in Donbas. It is completed by a wonderful afterthought, written by Alexei Panich.
Overall, the essays presented in the book are an important source of information for anyone wanting to gain a better understanding of Donbas’s history. Not only do they offer a historical explanation of the region’s specifics but also, and equally importantly, they inspire further reading and learning. One example of this is the essay on Joseph Stalin’s policies in the 1930s. In this piece, titled “Donbas as a borderland: ‘a free steppe’ in a captive country”, Kuromiya shows that long before the introduction of Soviet rule, Donbas was a region that attracted fugitives of all kinds: peasants, the religiously persecuted and common vagabonds. They all wanted to start a new life in a territory where the nominal power of the Russian Empire did not translate into real control.

The economic significance of Donbas as a coal and steel centre, which always lacked significant manpower, allowed it to maintain an atmosphere of being relatively free, especially when compared to other areas of the Soviet Union. The Donbas mines provided a real opportunity to hide one’s identity, which, in turn, made them attractive places for the “enemies of the people’s government”. Therefore, for Kuromiya, it was no accident that the Great Terror started with a trial of 53 engineers and mining technicians who were arrested in 1928 in Shakhty, a city on the southeastern spur of the Donetsk Mountains. Accused of sabotage and conspiring with the former owners of the mines (predominantly French), they were sentenced to death and long-term imprisonment. The showcase nature of this court case, known as the Shakhty Trial, is evidenced by the fact that it took place in Moscow. It also marked the beginning of a series of similar accusations against other “bourgeois specialists”.

In essence, the trials were meant to offer propaganda explanations for the causes of the slow speed of state industrialisation. Kuromiya also provides numerous examples to prove that Donbas experienced a disproportionately high concentration of the knock on effects of the Great Terror policies. It was a result of the party leadership’s deeply held belief that terror was the sole effective method of subordinating the disobedient region. Through Kuromiya’s essay, one gets a better understanding of the historical context of the myth that

Not only does Kuromiya offer a historical explanation of Donbas’s specifics but also, and equally importantly, he inspires further reading and learning.
Donbas was the most lawless region in Ukraine.

A subsequent essay, titled “Donbas between Ukraine and Russia: non-national identities”, includes one of the most important theses put forward by Kuromiya. In it, he argues that throughout ages, Donbas’ identity was shaped by an attachment to the region, not by Ukrainian or Russian national movements. Furthermore, it illustrates that the region’s inhabitants were immune to the rhetoric of class warfare, even though a large majority of them were blue collar workers employed in heavy industry.

**Space of freedom**

Trying to explain these phenomena, Kuromiya is prone to state that Donbas’s cultural identity has been formed within a certain “space of freedom”. The region has indeed united all kinds of migrants who have come to it in pursuit of freedom, including a freedom not to choose one permanent identity. Offering this type of liberty became one of the region’s defining characteristics. It was possible because no central agency had full control over Donbas. In light of this assumption, the Russian language, which is commonly spoken in Donbas, has become an instrument of communication between numerous peoples who live there and not a tool of Russification.

In another essay, titled “The last borderland of Europe”, which was first published in 2007, Kuromyia approaches different aspects of how Donbas functions within the independent state of Ukraine. Among other things, the author tackles issues such as the region’s image today and its economic development. His observations lead to the conclusion that the entrepreneurs from Donbas, who were free from the burden of nationalist ideology, had a better chance of finding one day “the path to the capitalist and democratic Europe” than western Ukraine did. Nonetheless, the Revolution of Dignity showed that the Ukrainian reality under the Viktor Yanukovych’s rule, a Donbas native, was much more complicated than might have been assumed. Kuromiya admits his mistake in the foreword to the book and in so doing, demonstrates the highest level of academic culture. Lastly, the interview, titled “I don’t think that the residents of Donbas wanted Moscow’s rule” and the text “Donbas nightmare”, are not only interesting mini-lectures on the region’s history or a search for the causes of today’s war, but also beautiful gestures of solidarity with the victims of Russian aggression in Ukraine.

Undoubtedly, Kuromiya’s *Understanding Donbas* is a very important read. Written in a clear style, it familiarises readers with the history of a region that has been so badly underrepresented in Ukrainian discourse. By so doing,
it encourages a critical reflection on the current status of this conflict-torn territory, whilst at the same time propagating the idea of Donbas as being a part of Ukraine. Readers are led to the conclusion that understanding Donbas is much simpler than it may first appear. It requires nothing less, and nothing more, than a tactful uncovering of its history.

Translated by Iwona Reichardt

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Lviv – A city and its people

DOROTA SIEROŃ-GALUSEK


Nowhere else are civilisation and culture as faithfully reflected as in the histories of cities. Urban areas are so fascinating that they have earned their own literary genre: biographies of cities. Among Polish cities, biographies have been written about Wrocław (Microcosm by Norman Davies and Roger Moorhouse), Gdańsk (Gdańsk. Biografia miasta by Peter Oliver Loew) and Kraków (Kraków w Europie Śródka by Jacek Purchła). The recent book Odwaga i starch (courage and fear) by Ola Hnatiuk is the latest addition to this collection of city biographies, exploring interwar and war-time Lviv. The biography of Lviv during this time period is an exceptional and beautifully written story, one that is available in both Ukrainian and Polish. Hnatiuk presents the story free from academic jargon and does not overbear with the amount of material. A simple description has never been enough for Lviv, the topic of so many academic and non-academic works. Yet Hnatiuk, master of words that she is, rooted in both Ukrainian and Polish culture, has succeeded in presenting it as completely as possible.

Kaleidoscopic picture

All cities are made up of people, their individual stories and attitudes as well as the different groups, institutions and networks that they create. Thus, while
writing about those who lived in Lviv, Hnatiuk describes the city that lived in them. This, more than anything, is what makes the book a unique city biography, one that cannot fit into any kind of scheme. Just like people, cities do not fit into schemes. This truth, which Hnatiuk knows very well, is illustrated by a meeting that took place at the Polish-Romanian border on September 18th 1939 between Frida Lille and Marian Hemar. Two people, one moment, two completely different decisions; Marian is leaving Lviv to go abroad and Frida is abandoning Paris, rushing to Lviv where her relatives are. In difficult moments, there is no one right way of doing things.

The book can also be read as a story of the Lviv intelligentsia. In her depictions, Hnatiuk takes individual national pieces (Polish, Ukrainian, Jewish) and glues them all together into one kaleidoscopic picture. Thus, in her portraits, we can see the founders of the Lviv school of philosophy and mathematics, academics gathered around professor Franciszek Groër, as well as some artistic groups, including Tea-Jazz and the literary group that held its meetings at the Café de la Paix, in addition to the painters of the ANUM association, whose members established the Lviv Union of Artists and Designers in 1932. Finally, she also writes about the Society of Soviet Writers.

For Poles, the history of the Jan Kazi- mierz University in Lviv concluded with the end of “Polish Lviv”. Hnatiuk shows how the university lost its autonomy in 1939, resulting in its name being changed to the Ivan Franko National University of Lviv. Since then, the academic staff have been obliged to lecture in Ukrainian. While analysing the university’s first non-Polish rector, Mykhailo Marchenko, Hnatiuk uncovers some factual discrepancies that can be seen in three national narratives (Polish, Ukrainian and Russian). By doing so, she attempts to abandon nationality-based discourse and describe a city of borderlands. That is why she also analyses the collapse of social ties in Eastern Galicia and is not afraid to state that the animosities that existed between people there were a result of national prejudices. In Hnatiuk’s view, it was the lack of trust between representatives of the ethnically diverse elite that explains the undoing of Lviv’s community. Having said that, she also highlights some gestures of solidarity that crossed ethnic divides when people helped each other in the face danger.

Humanistic approach

In addition to the ethnic tensions, Hnatiuk analyses conflict from various viewpoints, including between generations. An example that she investigates is the story of the Marchenko family. Mykhailo Marachenko, the first rector of Lviv University, spent three years in exile in western Siberia. He was released
in 1944 and returned to Kyiv where he got a job, first with the pedagogical institute and later Kyiv University. He died in 1983 after being beaten by unknown assailants. His grandson Valeriy passed away a year later from an illness he developed in the Gulag, where he had been sent for dissident activities and for his involvement in the Ukrainian Helsinki Foundation, with which he was fighting for human rights and civil liberties in the Soviet Union. Even though there was a strong emotional tie between grandson and grandfather, Valeriy felt embarrassed and guilty that his grandfather did not oppose evil and that he participated in the building of a repressive regime. He shared these feelings with the public in an open letter.

Hnatiuk’s portrayal of the complexities of human fate reflects her deeply humanistic approach to history. The title of the book _Odwaga i strach_ (Courage and fear) showcases the role that she assigns to emotions and attitudes. Today, historians are increasingly frequently prioritising experiences over facts. This approach was adopted by Marcin Zaremba, a Polish researcher who in his book _Wielka trwoga. Polska 1944–1947_ (A Great Anxiety. Poland 1944–1947), examines post-war Poland from a very emotional perspective. Through an analysis of different memoires and diaries, Zaremba notes that alongside the great enthusiasm and joy that people experienced in the aftermath of the Second World War came fear and anxiety. While reconstructing these sentiments, Zaremba states: “It was very important for me to recognise and describe these emotions and not solely focus on the events or activities which had generated them. In other words, I am more interested in people who are witnesses of a public execution than in the execution itself.”

Therefore, the focus has consciously been moved away from history, which is based on events and institutions, to the sphere of emotions articulated in individual narrations. For Zaremba, as he freely admits, it was important to show the source of fear and then reconstruct the attitudes that emerged from it. This approach helps readers understand the motifs of brutality and the acts of cruelty committed by people after the war. To achieve this, Zaremba departed from event-based history and reached out to the social sciences in search of a broader humanistic perspective.

Similarly, Hnatiuk does not see facts as the most important element in a narrative. However, this does not mean that she ignores them. Since she chooses to focus on people and their life experiences, her source material is primarily personal documents: memoires, diaries, letters
and recorded testimonies. Using these sources, she constructs a history that is a web of experiences, one in which fear and courage co-exist. Thus, Hnatiuk does not judge her protagonists; she merely tries to understand their behaviour and motivations. She makes no summaries and creates no models.

Instead of judging, Hnatiuk poses questions that help shed light on certain facts. A good example is the staging of *Hamlet* in Ukrainian in German-occupied Lviv which, even more controversially, was translated by a Jewish author. Clearly, the staging of the play took place at a time when Polish cultural life had moved underground and when all forms of legal activities were subject to ostracism. Nevertheless, Hnatiuk does not regard the staging as an act of collaboration. Instead, it was the occupier’s conscious policy aimed at antagonising people and instigating hatred.

Hnatiuk writes about the lack of respect for Ukrainian culture that characterised parts of the city’s elite, deepened situation that was made worse by the war. “On the other hand, interest in Polish culture,” she writes, “was treated as something very natural, so obvious that it was not worth paying attention to. Polish culture was treated as a focal point, nothing else was worthy of attention.” In the chapters titled “The Academic Kaleidoscope” and “Barbarian in the Garden” she illustrates the mechanisms of ethnic tension in academia, while in the chapter titled “The Ukrainian Hamlet”, she shows the mutual aversion and antagonisms that existed among the artists there.

Despite all that, Hnatiuk makes it clear that the world of the Lviv intelligentsia was not dominated solely by animosities. “Even the most fragmented testimonies that I was able to find,” Hnatiuk writes in the last pages of the book, “show me that it was the ties of friendship that enabled at least some artists to survive the war, even though the solidarity and assistance that they were showing each other in these most difficult moments did not save them all. It was also impossible to save the majority of their works. The remains that have stayed generate a sense of sadness: the world of multi-cultural Lviv has disappeared. Yet something has stayed behind. Something that deserves deep respect. It was the faithfulness of friendship that helped them survive through the fear.”

*Translated by Iwona Reichardt*

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A few months ago, Poland began making headlines for all the wrong reasons. While it was to be expected that the new conservative PiS government (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, Law and Justice) which came to power in November 2015, would change the course of Polish politics, few expected such an immediate attempt at dismantling the institutions of Polish liberal democracy, which have become the pride of the past 25 years of post-communist transition. For those outside Poland, a question emerged: How should we understand Polish politics, never mind its recent illiberal and populist turn? Certainly, our understanding cannot be dissociated from the broader illiberal trend in Central and Eastern Europe. Moreover, the populist underpinnings of politics seen in this region are no stranger to Western European polities either. Nevertheless, these broader tendencies and structural explanations in isolation cannot fully explain the situation in Poland. It cannot be disconnected from a more specific, historically grounded explanation.
Questions of memory and history

This is where the strength of Georges Mink’s La Pologne au cœur de l’Europe: de 1914 à nos jours (Poland in the heart of Europe: from 1914 to the present day) lies. By focusing on the rebirth of the modern Polish state following its long period of partition (1795–1918) and its political history to the present day, the book offers a full set of references to understand the current Polish political culture, state of affairs and the mechanisms that contributed to their creation. Mink’s analysis, as already hinted at in the book’s subtitle “histoire politique et conflits de mémoire” (political history and memory conflicts) focuses on the interlinkages between the questions of memory and history in Poland and their impact on the broader political field. Although the use of such methods is widespread in French political science, demonstrating its interdisciplinary potential and strong sociological and historical underpinnings, it is less common in Anglo-Saxon approaches. Nevertheless, with regards to Poland, this approach provides the reader with an interesting interpretation of the evolution of the country’s polity.

For a better understanding of this theoretical paradigm, readers should start by looking at the conceptual note included as the first annex in the book. It explains a number of general theoretical concepts that are used in the analysis of collective memory and it also introduces Mink’s contribution to the specific field of sociology of memory. Mink has developed a number of concepts that have proven to be extremely useful in understanding the different ways that memory is used in politics. Mémoire réactive (reactive memory) or gisements mémorials (memory deposits) are two examples of concepts that offer an active perspective on the “memory games” that happen in politics. The idea of memory deposits, in contrast to Pierre Nora’s lieux de mémoire (memory places), shows the interaction of places and events, as well as the mechanisms through which historical events or narratives can be invoked by different actors (politicians, historians, civil society groups, etc.) at a politically opportune moment to help them achieve their aims. At other times, these narratives might be left “sleeping”, or activation strategies might fail.

The idea of using specific historicising strategies lies at heart of the concept of reactive memory as well. This concept captures the idea that some specific, often emotive events or narratives
are re-activated to achieve specific political gains. It pays particular attention to the whole process of re-activation of some parts of collective memory, enriching the studies of memory and the understanding of processes of historical and collective memory formation and evolution.

Battles over interpretation

Mink’s book is accessible for both scholars of Polish history and the general public alike, as it combines a pleasant and easy to read narrative. It is enriched by a number of boxed text elements which highlight, among other things, a number of important public figures related to the period under discussion. Anyone willing to learn more about Poland could make the most of the book’s 18 chapters, organised in chronological order, which discuss the most important dates in recent Polish history. The chapters are divided into sections, which are headed by short, titles that offer a good idea of what lies ahead.

Although Mink focuses on the political history of Poland through the past 100 years, social-historical elements are introduced within the boxes, where appropriate. At relevant moments, global context and international relations are also invoked, notably in the overview of Poland’s relations with its neighbouring countries: Germany, Russia and Ukraine.

Probably one of the most thought-provoking and extraordinary elements of the book is how it analyses the usage of memories of notable events; the aforementioned memory games. Mink demonstrates that battles over the interpretation and significance of certain events can occur at any given moment, notably:

- Shortly after their occurrence: the quarrel about the instigation of Polish independence in 1918.
- During the event’s commemorations – at a number of subsequent commemorations of the events of 1956.
- In today’s politics – attempts at resurrecting memories of the Wielkopolska Uprising of 1918 and the Katyń massacre.

Interestingly, in Poland, a number of events linked to the Second World War were recently reactivated in the conservative-instigated “politics of history” (polityka historyczna), such as the Warsaw Uprising, General Sikorski’s death, the story of the “cursed soldiers” (Żołnierze wyklęci) of the Polish underground army, post-war partisans, etc. The way in which these memories are used is a perfect illustration of reactive memory and memory deposits, as Mink skilfully explains who uses these references, when, why and what happens as a result.
Missed rendezvous

Mink’s approach is instrumental in illustrating that history is not just a linear sequence of events, but also features an inherent circular aspect, linked with the (re)interpretation of the past that occurs in the present. This understanding is crucial to understanding the aforementioned success of PiS and its policies. It can be more easily comprehended in the context of Mink’s analysis of the politics of the party’s leader Jarosław Kaczyński during the previous PiS government of 2005–2007. Even so, the current brand of politics is not solely linked to its previous period of governance. Its other touchstones include more far-reaching historical references, such as Romanticism and the fight between the inter-war ideas of Roman Dmowski and Józef Piłsudski. Needless to say, all these elements are duly explained in the book.

The book’s conclusion succinctly summarises the narrative referring to the theory of missed rendezvous (*rendez-vous manqués*), an idea that had been previously popularised by the author. This theory refers to the missed opportunities for co-operation between different social classes during periods of social upheaval against the communist regime in 1956, 1968 and 1970, and how they influenced the subsequent co-operation between the workers and the intelligentsia after the events of 1976 and particularly throughout the whole of the 1980s, strengthening the *Solidarność* movement. The story of the deconstruction of this co-operation and social movement, after the initial success of the Round Table talks and of the first partially-free elections in 1989, is also discussed by the author, together with insights about the problems and inefficiencies of Polish transitional justice which give rise to the ever-growing social and political divisions in Poland. This is also why quarrels over lustration, the role and mission of the Institute of National Memory (*Instytut Pamięci Narodowej*) and the decommunisation of the public and political spheres remain unfinished and are brought up cyclically in Polish public debates. At least these events and discussions will no longer be misunderstood, thanks to the rich explanatory material contained in this book.

Finally, the choice of an excerpt of Jacek Malczewski’s painting *Melancholia* is perfect for the cover, as in its allegory to different Polish topoi, it serves as a perfect illustration of the book’s focus on the uneasy links between memory and history.
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