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Nikola Hendrickx



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Josep Borrell

THE UBIQUITOUS EUROPEAN

The very public life and views of Josep Borrell

However history may record him, there is no doubt about Josep Borrell's European credentials. As a member of the European Parliament, elected in 2004, he was immediately chosen to be its President, something that had not happened before and wouldn't again. From 2018 to 2019, as Spain's Minister of Foreign Affairs, he was a member of the European Union's Council of Ministers, the body made up of ministers from all the member states. Now, he is High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, therefore head of the European External Action Service, as well as being Vice-President of the European Commission. That means he has served in a senior rôle in all of the European Union's policy-making institutions. "I have devoted a significant part of my life, my work and my political activities to European issues," he told Members of the European Parliament, when questioned ahead of his appointment being confirmed by members of the Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs.

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Spanish Secretary of State, Josep Borrell in 1985



Spanish Minister of Public Works and Transport, Josep Borrell in 1991

You can say that again. I suppose that, as MEPs, they were hardly likely to say 'no' to a man who had been elected straight to the President's chair as soon as he was elected to the Parliament itself. Even so, his curriculum vitae reads as if it should be printed on a blue sheet with a circle of gold stars surrounding it. I have heard him nicknamed 'Mr. Europe' by journalists; he's not the only man to have been labelled that way but in his case the title seems oddly appropriate.



Josep Borrell holding an EU flag during a mass rally defending the unity of Spain held in Barcelona on 8 October 2017

"During my 40 years of public service," he told MEPs, "I have been involved in EU politics as Member of the European Parliament and of the Council of Ministers. As a Secretary of State for the Treasury, I participated in the negotiations surrounding Spain's accession to the European Communities. I represented my country for ten years (1986-1996) in three configurations of the Council of the European Union (Economic and Financial Affairs, Environment and Transport and Telecommunications." Amazingly, that's not all. It is said of England's Queen Mary I, in whose reign the city and port of Calais was lost to France after 200 years as an English possession, that she said:

"When I am dead and opened, you shall find 'Calais' lying in my heart". In Borrell's case, I'd expect a European flag, next to a Spanish one, of course.

He has been deeply involved in most of the issues concerning EU citizens in these strange present times. The SARS-CoV-2 virus may be officially the concern of the health Commissioner, Stella Kyriakides, but Borrell has been to the forefront in condemning the way in which some countries and non-state players have been attempting to make things worse by disseminating lies. Speaking in June, he said: "Disinformation knows no borders. Democracies and the West as such have been the target of disinformation, which underlines the importance of international cooperation. Let me turn first to the external dimension. The 'infodemic' has clearly been exploited by foreign state and non-state actors.

Disinformation from Russian actors have spread conspiracy theories and orchestrated disinformation campaigns, targeting the European Union, its Member States and neighbours by alleging lack of solidarity and internal crisis within the European Union and sowing confusion. China has also participated in that. Russian sources are old news, but China has been much more active. China sources have been promoting its image, presenting their [system] as the better system, the best equipped to tackle the pandemic and blaming democracies for their handling of the virus."



Josep Borrell and Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi

To be honest, that is probably more as a provocation to US President Donald Trump who, in his electioneering and his campaign for another presidential

term, repeatedly (and erroneously) refers to the SARS-CoV-2 virus as "the Chinese virus". In a way, it flags up the enormous gap between Borrell and Trump. Trump is an arch-nationalist, Borrell is a true internationalist. But he has very strong feeling about countries and non-state actors who try to make the pandemic worse by spreading lies as if they're a weapon of war. "We have witnessed a wave of false and misleading information, hoaxes and conspiracy theories, as well as targeted influence operations by foreign actors." It's hard to believe that, at a time of global ill health, any country could set about trying to make it worse, trying to ensure it kills a few more people. What do they gain from such things? You'd have to ask them, especially since no European country is currently engaged in a declared war. Address your letters to Moscow and Beijing, however.

Borrell's qualifications display his internationalist attitude: a Master's Degree in Applied Mathematics (Operations Research) from Stanford University in California; a Master's Degree in Oil Industry Economics and Technology from the French Institute of Petroleum in Paris; a Bachelor's Degree and a Doctorate in Economic Science from Complutense University in Madrid; and a Bachelor's Degree in Aeronautical Engineering from the Polytechnic University of Madrid.



Complutense University in Madrid, Spain

Still in the world of academia, he then became a Professor of Mathematics at the High Technical School of Aeronautical Engineering and Complutense University of Madrid. No-one can call him under-qualified. It's his belief in a unified Europe that has made him some enemies among nationalists generally and on the right. He even went to Barcelona to give an impassioned speech against Catalan separatism, which takes courage. The desire for independence by some Catalan campaigners runs very deep.



© Lamorecia

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, Josep Borrell, upon his arrival at the first meeting of the Council of Ministers and Ministers, chaired by Pedro Sánchez in La Moncloa in 2018

He was also on slightly controversial ground when he spoke out in June this year at an event to mark International Day in Support of the Victims of Torture. His remarks would find little support from, for instance, Aleksandr Lukashenko, as he desperately tries to cling to his almost certainly dishonestly-won election victory. Many protestors say they have been tortured in Belarus. "The eradication of torture is a global challenge," Borrell said, "it should be a global ambition. It is not impossible to achieve but can only be done if we act together. Joint efforts with international partners, in particular the United Nations, the Council of Europe and the International Criminal Court, regional organisations, national partners and civil society can make a real difference. The Global Alliance for Torture-Free Trade is a good example of how we can work together, and we call on all States to join it." By supporting the move towards a total ban on torture (or what the CIA euphemistically refers to as "enhanced interrogation techniques") Borrell is carrying on the work

started by Cecilia Malmström, former European Union Commissioner for Trade. She served in that capacity from 2014 to 2019 and was instrumental in launching the Global Alliance for Torture-Free Trade in September 2017, under the leadership of Argentina, the European Union and Mongolia.

HERE, THERE AND

© ctvby
Belarus President Aleksandr Lukashenko

EVERYWHERE

Borrell has also spoken in support of retaining the nuclear deal with Iran that the United States has repudiated and attempted (so far without success) to destroy. He, like the other partners to the JCPoA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action), wants to continue it, despite some questions over its effectiveness. Just to explain, this is how the Arms Control Association defines the JCPoA on its website: "The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPoA) is a detailed, 159-page agreement with five annexes reached by Iran and the P5+1 (China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) on July 14, 2015. The nuclear deal was endorsed by UN Security Council Resolution 2231, adopted on July 20, 2015." Under it, Iran is restricted for ten years to having no more than 5,060 centrifuges of a specified type, uranium enrichment capped at no more than 300 kilos with no more than a 3.67% uranium-235 content, and for the work only to be carried out at Natanz. There are several other provisions, too, and Iran's compliance is monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). In return, the US and the EU would lift their sanctions against Iran, although the US has now reimposed its own and wants everyone else to do the same.

© European Parliament
Josep Borrell

They're refusing. Borrell is a believer in the deal, and in a softly-softly approach to keeping it going. "As I have said previously, the Dispute Resolution Mechanism requires intensive efforts in good faith by all," he said in July. "As Coordinator of the Joint Commission, I expect all JCPoA participants to approach this process in this spirit within the framework of the JCPoA. The Joint Commission, which is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the agreement under the terms of the JCPoA has met since 2016 to discuss the implementation of the JCPoA and address pertinent issues brought to the attention of the Coordinator by any participant. As we approach the fifth anniversary of the JCPoA, I should like to take this opportunity to recall the importance of the agreement. The JCPoA is an historic achievement for global nuclear non-proliferation contributing to regional and global security. I remain determined to continue working with the participants of the JCPoA and the international community to preserve it." The Tehran Times quoted an article Borrell had written about the agreement for Project Syndicate, a website. "The JCPoA is enshrined in international law through UNSC Resolution 2231 (which needs to be fully implemented). It stands as a prime example of what European diplomacy and effective multilateralism can achieve within the rules-based international order. But the process leading up to it was lengthy and difficult, all but ruling out another chance at a deal. Second, JCPoA is not merely a symbolic success. It delivered on its promises and proved effective."



Fayeze al-Sarraj, head of the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord



Lybian General Khalifa Haftar

Iran is just one of the countries posing problems for those seeking peaceful co-existence. Libya remains divided between the UN-recognised government in Tripoli (and fiercely supported by Turkey) and a rebel government led by Khalifa Haftar that is recognised by Russia, France, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates. The EU (except for France) sides with Tripoli, and Borrell, still engaged in trying to find peaceful solutions to problems, has been to see the speaker of Libya's House of Representatives, Aguila Saleh in Al-Qubag, reporting back on what he clearly sees as a successful meeting. "We discussed how to peacefully resolve conflict and resume political dialogue within Berlin process," he Tweeted. "I welcome Speaker's commitment to implement ceasefire understanding & end oil blockade." His visit, on 1 September, was supposedly aimed at getting the parties at least to talk to each other. Borrell also met with Fayeze al-Sarraj, head of the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord, whose administration recently declared a truce with the forces of General Haftar after months of fighting. "Libya remains top priority for EU," he Tweeted afterwards. "We welcome recent

ceasefire understanding and continue to support dialogue and Libyan-led political resolution to conflict."

It's not surprising that Borrell takes a diplomatic approach; he is, after all, Europe's most senior diplomat and head of the European External Action Service, making him effectively the EU's Foreign Minister as well. Libya and Iran may be in Europe's back yard, so to speak, but Borrell sees the EU as a global player and speaks out on all the issues that affect it. He is keen, for instance, to normalise relations with China, which he described in articles he wrote for Spanish and French publications as "a new empire", on a par with Russia. He urged EU member states to "correct" economic imbalances with China "before it's too late." His comments were made as the Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, began his European tour in France. Two weeks later, China's President, Xi Jinping, was due to meet EU leaders at a summit hosted by the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel.

Following two visits by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, Borrell was keen to point out faults where he saw them, including in China. "Russia, China and Turkey share

three common characteristics; they are sovereignists on the outside and authoritarian on the inside," he wrote in an article for the newspaper *Le Journal de Dimanche* and quoted in the South China Morning Post.



Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo with High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of EU Commission Josep Borrell in Berlin, Germany, on January 19, 2020

"After 30 years where the European vision seemed to gain ground, the sovereignist vision has regained the upper hand with these new empires." Describing China as 'assertive', 'expansionist', and 'authoritarian', he also criticised the country for not treating Europe fairly as a trading partner, despite claims to the contrary by Beijing. "Our relationship is excessively asymmetric for the current level of Chinese development," he said, "And that must be corrected. If we don't do it now, in a few years it will be too late. Chinese products will continue to move up the value chain and our economic and technological dependence will increase." Of course, that may be exactly what President Xi wants.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Assertive nationalism seems to be all the rage. China, Borrell said, had drifted far from the sort of future Deng Xiaoping proposed in his speech to the United Nations in 1974, in which Deng said that China was not nor ever would be a superpower. Hmm... He accused China of "undermining international norms, including in the South China Sea", by promoting Chinese ideals as a "community of shared destiny" and by holding high positions in the UN system. He also drew attention to Chinese military development, a topic that is not discussed often in



Josep Borrell (second from the left) with Angela Merkel, and Antonio Guterres at the Libya Summit in Berlin



© European Union

French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and High Representative of the EU Josep Borrell

the EU, which is not much concerned with defence issues, as a rule. “The arms sales embargo decreed against China since the Tiananmen events in 1989 is still in force, but China no longer depends on imports of military equipment,” he said. “It has developed an arms industry, especially naval and ballistics, of the first order and every year it increases its exports.”

Meanwhile, Borrell continues his work with the Eastern Partnership countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, trying to ensure a close relationship with the EU. He was present at a summit of the leaders in June 2020, and afterwards told journalists: “This is one of the most important aspects of external relations of the European Union, and it was an important meeting. Just imagine that thirty-three foreign ministers had the opportunity to demonstrate our unity and our commitment to the European Union we have with our eastern neighbours and also to push for the future of this partnership in 2020.” Borrell believes that as Europeans we are better, stronger and likely to be more successful if we collaborate and work together in friendship, while some countries - including two member states - seem to believe in ploughing a lonely furrow. I recall a difficult conversation I once had with a barber who was cutting my hair and who was an ardent Brexit supporter. Although young (and clearly not well versed in history) she said that everyone would be better off if we just had separate countries that were not

in any sort of alliance and existed, as it were, in a sort of separatist bubble. What I should have pointed out is that such a situation existed, more or less, in central Europe in the 1930s, and it worked very happily apart from a few little problems like the Anschluss, the German seizure of the Sudetenland, the invasion of Poland, Auschwitz, Buchenwald and so on. Oh, and World War II, of course. Being partners with people, as Borrell clearly believes, is far safer and ensures our futures more clearly.

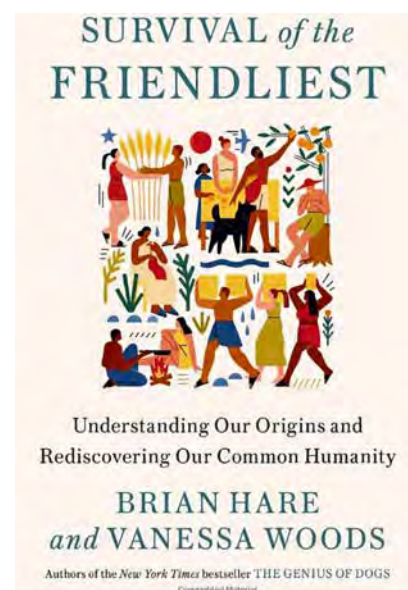


Brian Hare, Professor of evolutionary anthropology, psychology and neuroscience at Duke University



Vanessa Woods Australian science writer, author and journalist

In an article in Scientific American, Brian Hare, Professor of evolutionary anthropology, psychology and neuroscience at Duke University, and Vanessa Woods, a research scientist and co-author with Hare of a new book, ‘Survival of the Friendliest’, published this July, argue that the reason homo sapiens out-survived and out-performed our hominid rivals at a time when four separate species co-existed is because we were better at forming friendships and alliances with each other.



Neanderthals, they point out, were as clever as us, stronger and had been around for longer, while there were also other humans, such as the mysterious Denisovans, too. So, if we were not the strongest, nor the cleverest, nor even the best able to cope with extreme conditions (don't forget: Earth was going through an Ice Age back then), how come we survived and thrived while our rivals disappeared? How was it that less than 60,000 or 70,000 years after our ancestors headed north and east out of Africa, none of our rivals still exists? Hare and Woods don't subscribe to the idea that our ancestors went out and killed them all. They suggest we simply worked together better than they did. “Compared with other human species,” they write in the article, “it turns out we were the friendliest. What allowed us to thrive was a kind of cognitive superpower: a particular type of affability called cooperative communication.” In a

sense, they seem to be saying that it was a Borrell-like belief (they do not mention him, of course) in working together that did the trick. “We are experts at working together with other people, even strangers. We can communicate with someone we’ve never met about a shared goal and work together to accomplish it.” That, more or less, is the sort of policy in which Josep Borrell believes.

GETTING ON TOGETHER

It’s also, strangely, the main thrust of the mission letter he received from Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, which also listed some of the challenges ahead.



From left to right: Mr Josep BORRELL FONTELLES, High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy; Ms Ursula VON DER LEYEN, President of the European Commission during the Ceremony for the COVID-19 victims (16/07/20, Madrid)

“Changes in climate, digital technologies and geopolitics are already having a profound effect on the lives of Europeans,” she wrote. “We are witnessing major shifts all the way from global power structures to local politics. While these transformations may be different in nature, we must show the same ambition and determination in our response. What we do now will determine what kind of world our children live in and will define Europe’s place in the world.” Certainly, Borrell has always been committed to furthering the European project and one gets the feeling that he finds it hard to understand those who favour nativism and division. “The first times I ever crossed my country’s border - something that was not as easy back then as it is now - was for my student summer jobs,” he told MEPs, “working on a farm in Denmark, in the construction sector in Germany, in the hospitality business in London, or harvesting grapes in France. I can



Josep Borrell, high representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (left) and Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu

still remember the emotions I felt as a young Spaniard upon discovering Europe, a continent which for my generation was an existential reference that we wanted to be part of.”

Not only a part of, either; he wanted - and increasingly so as his European experience grew - to see a Europe that was not only united, but which could carry some weight in the wider world. “When assuming myself the concrete rôle as High Representative/Vice President, I truly would like to contribute to making the EU a stronger foreign actor. We all know that in virtually all policy areas, we have to act jointly as Europeans in order to make a difference on the world stage - across institutions and member states. This will not be an easy task, but I commit myself to do my utmost to achieve EU unity in external relations.”

How can Europe project its soft power in these days of aggressive national and non-state players? Commission President von der Leyen promised that hers would be a “geopolitical commission”. What does that even mean? Borrell thinks he knows. “Today’s geopolitical conflicts,” he said, “do not take place mostly in trenches in the battlefield, but mainly in the cyberspace and other fields, ranging from trade, economic and monetary policy to access for raw materials. The weapons used are no longer bayonets but rather cyber and hybrid attacks, sanctions, commercial tariffs, currency devaluations and forced technology transfers.”

Even so, back in May, Borrell was accused of caving in under political pressure from Beijing. An article in the New York Times claimed that the EU had wanted to place two



Josep Borrell and his wife Cristina Narbona

quite innocent-seeming articles in two leading Chinese newspapers, the China Daily and the People’s Daily, which together have a potential readership of more than one billion. The articles, written by Nicolas Chapuis, the EU’s ambassador to China, along with the ambassadors of the twenty-seven EU member states, were intended to mark the 45th anniversary of EU-China diplomatic relations by issuing what’s called an “op-ed”, that is an article designed to be published in a newspaper on the opposite page to its editorial column, hence “op-ed” - opposite the editorial. The article contained a sentence that regretted “the newly-arisen obstacles” to what it called the “deepening EU-China cooperation”, which was fine. However, the next sentence ran: “But the outbreak of the corona virus in China, and its subsequent spread to the rest of the world over the past three months, has meant that our pre-existing plans have been temporarily side-tracked as both the EU and China are fully mobilised to tackle what has now become a challenge of truly global proportions.” In that way, the reference to the virus briefly mentioned China as its place of origin at a time when Beijing was alleging it had been “weaponised” in the United

States or developed elsewhere. China objected at the highest level.

The incident came just two weeks after another scandal, also first revealed in the New York Times, which alleged that a detailed report on cyberattacks and disinformation had been watered down at Beijing's request. In an article on 24 April, journalist Matt Apuzzo claimed that EU officials first delayed and then softened and diluted a report on the spread of deliberate disinformation, even though, as he wrote, "The initial European Union report...was not particularly strident: a routine roundup of publicly available information and news reports." The New York Times alleged then that the dilution was Borrell's work. The European Parliament's Foreign Affairs committee held a virtual meeting which Borrell attended via video link. He faced some difficult questions, despite denying that the report on disinformation had been softened in any way.



German Christian Democrat MEP David McAllister

The Committee chair, German Christian Democrat MEP David McAllister, reminded members of a motion passed only two weeks earlier, condemning disinformation with regard to Covid-19 (something against which Borrell himself has spoken out on numerous occasions). "The EU must become more resilient against crises in general," he said, "to stay free of undue political and economic influence, such as from China and Russia, and that we must be ready to strategically communicate, to fight external disinformation, fake news and cyberattacks and to adapt continuously to the changing geopolitical landscape without ever



Josep Borrell with Egyptian President Al Sisi

compromising our core values." Bold words and clearly deeply felt, but some attending the meeting felt Borrell had let the side down.

He denied the report had been weakened, and that he had been in any way involved. "I was not even aware of what was happening," he assured MEPs, rather nervously, it seemed to me, "I remember very well because the 24th was the day of my anniversary (birthday) and I was supposed to have a free afternoon, and on the afternoon of the 24th, one of my friends from Spain told me 'have you heard the news that there is a problem or something with the publication of a survey of some external action communication related with disinformation? This was the first time I knew about it. Then I asked for information from my services and I was informed that in this time they were publishing the article and later, for sure, later that evening I had to be completely aware of what was happening.'" Borrell sounded unsure at that point and his usually near-perfect English faltered. He was clearly shaken by the allegations and, I felt, rather uncomfortable. He concluded by saying, however, that "I can assure you that I was not taking any pressure in order to create a publication that was biased due to any pressure from anyone." I have never heard the urbane and assured Borrell sound so flustered and somewhat unsure of himself. Borrell firmly denied that the EEAS had caved in, although I got the feeling that not all the MEPs believed him. However, just as he had said in his demand for greater equality between Europe and China, Beijing plays it tough, and diplomats have to be aware of possible ramifications if they upset a major trading partner. With China you don't just get someone getting into a huff and not speaking to you; as Borrell had hinted before, China has a thriving arms industry with ships and

ballistics. When Beijing wants to blow an idea out of the water it may not be talking figuratively.

Borrell is more at home in diplomatic circles than in political rows and disagreements. He's better at smoothing ruffled feathers than at deliberately ruffling them.

In September he made a trip to Egypt - long planned but delayed by the pandemic - to meet Abdel Fattah Al-Sissi, the President of Egypt, as well as Aboul Gheit, Secretary General League of Arab States, before holding a joint press conference with Sameh Shoukry, Egypt's Minister for Foreign Affairs of Egypt. "Here we are, trying to enhance our partnership," Borrell told the journalists assembled in Cairo. "This is a good opportunity to bolster this partnership, because we want to strong (strengthen) our relationship, and we want to do so because we share many interests. We want to consult with you on many pressing regional issues in the areas of energy, the environment, migration, trade and security."

Diplomacy to Borrell is all important. As Hare and Woods wrote in the Scientific American article, "Making contact between people of different ideology, culture or race is a universally effective reminder that we all belong to a single group called *H. sapiens*." It would be a shame if many of our leaders, in various parts of the world, forget that, in the generally mistaken belief that a show of aggression will get them their own way, just as a playground bully might have done. Or, perhaps, as a Neanderthal or Denisovan may have done. But they are extinct. Perhaps Borrell's approach - gentle persuasion - is the best way forward after all.

Jim Gibbons



© Edm

Lenin's Mausoleum, situated in the Red Square in the centre of Moscow, is a tomb that currently serves as the resting place of Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin

TOXIC LEGACIES

The USSR and Russia : A timeline of political poisonings

Eliminating political adversaries by using poison has been a favoured method since ancient times. In fact, some historians are still debating whether Alexander the Great, Cleopatra, Napoleon and even Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin were assassinated using this method.

However, in the course of the past century, although poisoning of political rivals and critics has been used by a number of intelligence agencies around the world, from around 1921 onwards, it definitely became a Soviet and later, a Russian state-sponsored speciality.

Russian activist and Putin critic, Alexei Navalny is merely the latest in a long list of victims.

The weapons of choice : toxins and nerve agents hidden in food or drink.

In 1921, Vladimir Lenin ordered the setting up of a secret research and development laboratory in the

outskirts of Moscow known as the "Kamera", which means "the cell" in Russian. It was run by the secret police agency, known as Cheka, with the purpose of dealing efficiently and mercilessly with critics and opponents of the young Soviet regime.

The speciality of this facility was to combine known poisons into original and untraceable forms.

According to Pavel Sudoplatov, a high ranking general in Stalin's intelligence services who was also involved in the assassination of Leon Trotsky in 1940 as well as Soviet attempts to obtain information about the atomic

bomb from the Manhattan Project, the NKVD and its successor, the KGB had long come to the conclusion that poison was the most effective method of getting rid of troublesome critics and opponents.

The Cold War period, from 1947 to 1990 witnessed a large number of assassinations of adversaries through the use of various poisons by the KGB throughout Europe.

It seems that the KGB's successor, the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (FSB) under Vladimir Putin fully shares this view.

ISAIAH OGGINS, 1947

© Courtesy Robin Oggins

Isaiah Oggins as a prisoner in a Soviet Gulag, shortly before he was executed in 1947 by injection

In 1947, a US-born communist and Soviet spy, Isaiah Oggins was accused of treason and arrested. After serving eight years in a Gulag, he was taken to the “Kamera” laboratory where he was injected with curare. He died fifteen minutes later.

Stalin feared that Oggins might reveal Soviet secrets if he was allowed to return to the United States.

BISHOP THEODORE ROMZHA, 1947

© Wikipedia

Theodore George Romzha

There was another Soviet state-sponsored assassination that same year. Theodore Romzha was a bishop in the Ukrainian Eastern Catholic Church who had organised a religious celebration, to the great discontent of Communist officials. It was decided he had to be eliminated.

And so, in October 1947 while on his way home, his carriage was rammed by a Soviet military truck. He and his

companions were then beaten up by soldiers dressed as civilians.

He was taken to a hospital where the nuns nursing him were dismissed and replaced by a nurse who was a Ministry for State Security (MGB) agent. She poisoned him with an injection of curare, again provided by the NKVD laboratory, “Kamera”.

According to Russian investigative journalist Yevgenia Albats who is also the editor-in-chief of the respected New Times Magazine, the order for the bishop’s elimination came from Nikita Khrushchev in person.

NIKOLAI KHOLKHOV, 1957

© Wikipedia

Nikolai Evgenievich Khokhlov

Nikolai Kholkhov was an NKVD and then a KGB agent who, during World War II was assigned various sabotage operations behind enemy lines, disguised as a Nazi officer.

In 1954, the KGB ordered him to supervise the assassination of Georgiy Okolovich who was the chairman of the National Alliance of Russian Socialists.

However, Kholkhov decided not to follow the orders and went to Frankfurt to warn Okolovich of the assassination plan.

In an act of retaliation, the KGB arrested his wife and sentenced her to five years of forced settlement in a remote region of the Soviet Union.

Kholkhov decided to defect to the United States and to testify about the activities of the KGB.

In 1957, while passing through Frankfurt, he drank a cup of coffee

that had been laced with poison. In what proved to be the first radiological attack by the KGB, doctors at the hospital found traces of radioactive polonium in the former agent’s body.

Nikolai Kholkhov survived the assassination attempt and went on to obtain a PhD in psychology at Duke University in the United States.

He was pardoned in 1992 by Boris Yeltsin and returned to visit family and friends in Moscow the same year.

STEPAN BANDERA, 1959

Stepan Bandera

In 1959 another Ukrainian national was targeted by the KGB. Stepan Bandera was the leader and ideologue of the far right Ukrainian Ultrnationalists and strategist for the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN).

These were fiercely anti-communist and collaborationist parties during Word War II.

In 1941, when the Wehrmacht reached Ukraine, Bandera and the OUN declared independence in the hope that Nazi Germany would officially recognise a fascist Ukraine after the war. However, things did not go quite as expected and in September of that year, Bandera and other leading members of the OUN were arrested by the Gestapo.

But in 1944, Bandera was contacted by SS officials to discuss plans for sabotage and disruption against the Red army.

In October 1959, Bandera was walking in a street in Munich when he suddenly collapsed and died a short time later. German medical examiners

established the cause of death as poison by cyanide gas.

Two years later, German judicial authorities announced that Bandera had been assassinated by a KGB defector who had acted under the orders of the then head of the KGB, Alexander Shelepin and Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev.

ALEXANDER SOLZHENITSYN, 1971



Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

In 1971, the celebrated Russian dissident and Nobel Prize laureate for literature, Alexander Solzhenitsyn suffered extensive burns, followed by a mysterious illness that lasted three months. He survived what was most probably a KGB assassination attempt.

His novel "The Gulag Archipelago" among others was considered a head-on challenge to the Soviet state and had severely angered the authorities when it was published abroad and sold millions of copies.

According to Russian journalist Dmitri Likhanov, who writes for the *Sovershenno Sekretno* (Top Secret) newspaper, he has read eyewitness accounts of the assassination attempt in the memoirs of Lt. Col. Boris Ivanov, a retired KGB operative.

The memoirs reportedly describe how Ivanov and two other agents were sent to Rostov-on-the-Don in August 1971, on a mission to eliminate Solzhenitsyn. The writer entered a department store, followed by the three agents. At the candy counter, Solzhenitsyn was approached by two of the agents and separated from the other shoppers.

According to Ivanov, one of the agents

took out an object from his pocket and began manipulating it before suddenly leaving the scene and heading for the exit.

It is still not clear how Solzhenitsyn might have been poisoned but an analysis by the Russian poison control centre concluded that the symptoms were due to ricin, a poison extracted from seeds that causes red blood corpuscles to stick together.

In 1974, Solzhenitsyn was stripped of his Soviet citizenship and went into exile in the US before being allowed to return to Russia in 1994.

GEORGI MARKOV, 1978



Georgi Markov

The next high-profile case was the assassination of Bulgarian dissident writer and broadcaster, Georgi Markov in 1978.

Due to government censorship of his works, Markov left Bulgaria and settled in London in 1971. He began working as a broadcaster in the Bulgarian section of the BBC World Service, as well as with Deutsche Welle and Radio Free Europe.

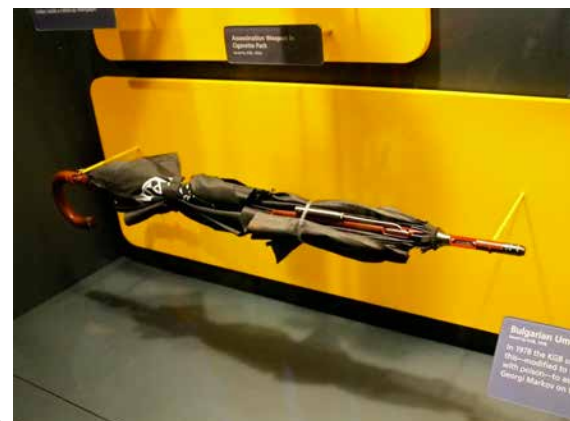
He launched a campaign of sharp and sarcastic criticism against the Bulgarian communist regime headed by staunch Stalinist leader, Todor Zhivkov.

In September 1978, Markov had been waiting to board a bus on London's Waterloo Bridge to go to the BBC when he suddenly felt a sharp sting in his right thigh. When he turned round, he saw a man pick up an umbrella from the pavement and hurriedly step into a cab.

That night, Markov developed a fever and was hospitalised. But he died four days later.

Police forensic pathologists found a pea-sized, hollow pellet in his thigh with traces of ricin. The wax-coated pellet had been injected into Markov's thigh when the assassin jabbed him with the tip of his umbrella.

The clues were there but the proof was missing.



KGB's umbrella gun displayed at International Spy Museum, Washington D.C. USA

Investigations by British police showed that the Bulgarian secret service had received the help of the KGB to plan and execute the hit. This was later corroborated by Oleg Kalugin, a defector and former general in the KGB who confirmed that the Bulgarian assassin had been supplied with the required equipment.

After 42 years and despite many investigations, the perpetrators have not as yet been brought to justice.

HAFIZULLAH AMIN, 1979



Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko (l) and then Deputy Prime Minister Hafizullah Amin (r) in 1978

In December 1979, there occurred two poisoning attempts that didn't quite go according to plan. It was that of the second President of Afghanistan, Hafizullah Amin in Kabul.

Amin's predecessor Nur Mohammad Taraki had set up Afghanistan's first communist government in 1978 with the help of the Soviet Union. After much intrigue and suspect dealings and wheelings with friend and foe alike, Amin managed to come to power by deposing Taraki and later ordering his execution in October 1979.

He then tried to win the support of those who had opposed Taraki's communist regime but without success. There followed a massive wave of executions and harsh measures that greatly displeased the Soviet Union.

Moscow decided it didn't need Amin any longer. The KGB even alleged that he was an agent of the CIA ; there was no need for him to stay alive.

Amin was invited to a dinner at the Soviet embassy in Kabul. Instructions were given for his food to be poisoned. But for some unexplained reason, Amin suspected that something was afoot and decided to switch his food and drink with his nephew who became severely ill and ironically, was promptly flown to a hospital in Moscow !

Before resorting to brute force, the Soviets gave it another try. Department 8 of the KGB managed to infiltrate one of their agents, a certain Mikhail Talibov (codenamed Sabir) as a chef into the presidential palace.

On 27 December, Amin organised a lunch for party members for discussions and to show them around the former Afghan royal palace that he had moved into. During the meal, Amin and a number of his guests became seriously ill and even lost consciousness ; the poison had apparently worked. But luckily for Amin and very unfortunately for Moscow, he somehow survived. Apparently, the carbonation of the Coca Cola he was drinking had somehow diluted and weakened the toxic agent.

Sometime later, Soviet forces stormed the Tajbeg Palace and shot Hafizullah Amin.



KGB head and subsequently Soviet General Secretary Yuri Andropov, who approved the invasion of Afghanistan in 1979

This time, Moscow installed its own trusted man, Babrak Karmal as the new president while the Soviet army began its ten year intervention in Afghanistan.

There was a lull in these types of exotic murders in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s. Boris Yeltsin had come to power and this was a time of cooperation between the west and Russia.

But no sooner did Vladimir Putin become president in 2000, than political assassinations in the form of poisonings gradually resumed.

It was even speculated that the poisons laboratory known as "Kamera" which had become a gloomy-looking building in the outskirts of Moscow was up and running again.

ANATOLY SOBCHAK, 2000



Vladimir Putin and Anatoly Sobchak

In 2000, one of the most creative Russian political poisonings involved a lethal lamp.

Anatoly Sobchak, the first democratically elected mayor of Saint Petersburg had been highly critical of Vladimir Putin during his campaign for president that same year.

After meeting each other in February 2000, Putin urged Sobchak to travel to Kaliningrad to support his election campaign. Sobchak duly arrived in the town of Svetlogorsk, accompanied by two assistants who were also his bodyguards.

But that night, Sobchak died in his hotel room of what was believed to be a heart attack.

What seemed very strange was that his young and physically fit bodyguards also had heart attacks, albeit mild ones, at the same time.

They survived however and were later treated for symptoms of poisoning.

Russian forensics experts believed that the reading lamp next to Sobchak's bed had been sprayed with a poisonous substance. The heat from the lamp would have vaporised the poison, spreading it into the air and killing its intended victim who was sitting right next to it. The bodyguards suffered minor heart attacks because they probably only came briefly into Sobchak's room before retreating to their own quarters. The vapour would have completely dissipated over time, leaving no trace.

A criminal investigation into this death as a possible premeditated murder was opened two months later, only to be closed after three months, without a finding.

However, the fact that all three men had heart attacks simultaneously indicated a probable contract killing by poisoning.

SAMIR ABDULLAH A.K.A KHATTAB, 2002



Samir Abdullah

In 2002, another poisoning incident took place on foreign soil.

Saudi Arabian-born jihadist fighter Samir Abdullah, more commonly known as Khattab first came to Chechnya posing as a television reporter in 1995. He began producing videos of Chechen rebels in combat operations in order to raise money and to boost international recruitment efforts. He became famous in 1996 when he filmed an ambush which he personally led against a Russian armoured column. He actively fought throughout the Chechen wars.

The 1999 apartment bombings in Russia proved a turning point in the career of Khattab. An FSB investigation named him as the main instigator and organiser of the bombings. A number of western journalists and political analysts claimed that the bombings were carried out by the Russian themselves in order to justify the resumption of heavy military operations in Chechnya.

Whatever the case, it was decided that Khattab had to be eliminated. In 2002, a Dagestani double agent by the name of Ibrahim Alauri was recruited by the FSB to act as messenger and to deliver a letter to Khattab, whose wife was also Dagestani.

The letter was from Khattab's mother in Saudi Arabia and had been intercepted by Alauri and handed over to the FSB.

Khattab died of poisoning when he opened the letter ; it contained a lethal dose of a potent nerve agent, possibly sarin or a derivative. Shortly after the poisoning, Moscow announced that Khattab had been killed in a "special operation."

VIKTOR YUSHCHENKO, 2004



Viktor Yushchenko and Vladimir Putin

The year 2004 proved a particularly difficult and sometimes a tragic one for politicians and other prominent figures who publicly and defiantly voiced their opposition to the seat of power in the Kremlin.

In the heat of the 2004 presidential election in Ukraine, Viktor Yushchenko who was running against Russian-backed candidate Viktor Yanukovich fell ill and disappeared from the campaign trail. He was rushed to an Austrian hospital where doctors found he had ingested a massive dose of dioxin that had been put into a soup he had eaten. Yushchenko survived the assassination attempt but when he reappeared, he was badly disfigured. His face was left bloated and pockmarked as a result of the near-fatal dose of dioxin, in the form of TCDD, an ingredient of 'agent orange'.

The pro-Western and pro-NATO Yushchenko eventually won the presidency after large scale street protests dubbed the Orange Revolution forced the authorities to organise a re-run of the election. But he had to undergo regular treatment in Switzerland to flush the toxin from his body.

There was no definitive proof but it is more than likely that the dioxin had come from a Russian laboratory.

ROMAN TSEPOV, 2004



Roman Tsepov

In the 1990s, Vladimir Putin held a high ranking post of Vice Mayor at the Saint Petersburg City Administration. Roman Tsepov was a wealthy businessman and a confidant of Putin during this period who had founded a security firm providing protection

to high ranking officials including the mayor Anatoly Sobchak as well as Putin himself. He had also established close ties with the Saint Petersburg branches of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs and the FSB.

However, Tsepov was arrested in 1994 on charges of illegally storing drugs and weapons. But it is thought that the real reason for his arrest was his obtaining protection money and securing gambling licences for various individuals by using Putin's position and influence in the city administration.

Tsepov had clearly become a liability for Vladimir Putin.

In September 2004, Tsepov went to the FSB office to see some of his colleagues who offered him a cup of tea. Later that day, he felt unwell and gradually began developing symptoms such as diarrhoea and vomiting. He was admitted to Hospital 31 in Saint Petersburg where doctors noticed a massive drop of white blood cells. Tsepov died a few days later.

A postmortem examination revealed massive poisoning by an unspecified radioactive substance. It was later rumoured that the substance was an isotope of polonium.

ANNA POLITKOVSKAYA, 2004



Anna Politkovskaya

The investigative journalist Anna Politkovskaya was another victim of an attempted poisoning in 2004.

She was not only a very vocal critic of Vladimir Putin but had also won a great many enemies within the Russian

political establishment for her coverage of the Russian invasion of Chechnya for the Novaya Gazeta newspaper. Despite many acts of intimidation and other threats, she continued her reports on the war in Chechnya and the abuse of human rights on the part of Russian troops stationed there. She was even arrested by military authorities there and subjected to a mock execution.

In 2004, she boarded an Aeroflot flight to North Osetia to help negotiate the release of children who had been held hostage during a school siege in Beslan. During the flight, she asked for a cup of tea and after drinking it, fell ill and began losing consciousness.

She was taken to hospital where it was found that her tea had been laced with an unspecified poison. It later emerged that the results of some preliminary tests performed by airport medical personnel had been destroyed or had gone missing.

That same year, Politkovskaya published a book entitled 'Putin's Russia', written especially with a Western readership in mind and which quickly became a best seller.

This may have been Anna Politkovskaya's one step too many. This time, her adversaries didn't take any chances and hired a professional hitman. On 7 October 2006, she was shot in the head at point blank range in the elevator of her apartment building in Moscow. It was ironic that this assassination happened exactly on Vladimir Putin's birthday. It attracted widespread international attention and although in 2014 five men were sentenced to prison terms, it is still unclear who ordered the contract killing.

ALEXANDER LITVINENKO, 2006



Alexander Litvinenko at University College Hospital, London

Possibly the most notorious poisoning ever took place in London in November 2006. Alexander Litvinenko was an FSB secret service officer who had defected to London with his family in 2000 after he had accused his superiors of ordering the assassination of Russian oligarch Boris Berezovsky. He was granted asylum and began working as a consultant for the British MI5 and MI6. He also published two books in which he accused the FSB of terrorist actions and false-flag attacks and accused, among others, Vladimir Putin for ordering the assassination of Anna Politkovskaya.

From that moment on, his days were counted. On November 1 2006, Litvinenko met with two former FSB colleagues, Dmitry Kovtun and Andrei Lugovoi at the Millenium Hotel in London. They had tea and discussed various business matters. Shortly after this meeting, Litvinenko fell ill and was admitted to a London hospital two days later. Doctors attributed his illness to poisoning with radioactive polonium-210. He was moved to an intensive care unit where doctors tried every treatment they thought might reverse the effects of the radiation poisoning.

But on 22 November he suffered what his doctors called a 'major setback' due to an overnight heart attack. Litvinenko died the following day. British experts said he probably was the first person ever to die of the acute radiation effects of polonium-210.

A criminal inquiry in 2016 concluded there was "strong circumstantial evidence of Russian state responsibility" and that Russian President Vladimir Putin and FSB chief at the time, Nikolai Patrushev, "probably approved" Litvinenko's poisoning.

British judge, Sir Robert Owen, also concluded that the two former FSB agents, Andrei Lugovoi and Dmitry Kovtun carried out the assassination by placing polonium-210 in the teapot that was served to Litvinenko at the London hotel.

British scientists managed to trace the source of the polonium to a Russian nuclear plant and in May 2007, the British government submitted a formal request for the extradition of Andrey Lugovoy to face criminal charges

relating to Litvinenko's murder.

But as expected, Russia declined on the grounds that extradition of Russian citizens is not allowed under the Constitution and moreover, that British authorities had not handed over any evidence against Lugovoy.

ALEKSANDR PEREPILICHNY, 2012



Aleksandr Perepilichny

We are in 2009 and back in England.

Russian oligarch, Kremlin critic and whistleblower Aleksandr Perepilichny had been granted political asylum in Britain.

He then went on to provide Swiss judicial authorities with incriminating documents detailing the involvement of high-ranking Russian officials in a money-laundering scheme and the fraud of \$230 million from the Russian Treasury through Hermitage Capital Management, an investment fund and asset management company founded by British-American financier Bill Browden and Lebanese-Brazilian banker Edmond Safra.

This case had attracted world media coverage following the death of anti-corruption lawyer and tax advisor Sergei Magnitsky in a Moscow prison following his arrest. Perepilichny had also provided evidence against Russian officials linked to the lawyer's suspicious death.

In November 2012, Perepilichny went out for a jogging session near his home in Surrey. He was found dead on the road by a neighbour. Two autopsies and toxicology tests failed to find any conclusive evidence.

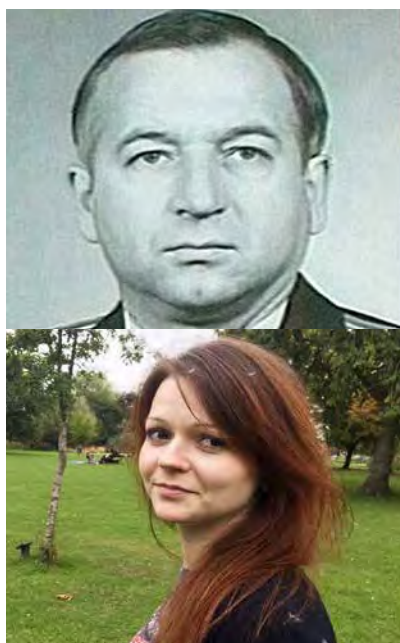
However, two years later Perepilichny's life insurance company ordered advanced tests that this time detected a toxin in his stomach. The poison came from the highly toxic flowering plant, *Gelsemium elegans*. The leaves of this plant which is colloquially known as 'heartbreak grass' and only grows in south Asia trigger rapid cardiac arrest when ingested.

It is a long known method of assassination by Russian and Chinese contract hitmen.

In 2017, there were unconfirmed reports that the CIA had communicated information to the British MI6 indicating that Perepilichny was probably "assassinated on direct orders from Putin or people close to him."

A U.S. intelligence report to Congress also stated with high confidence that Perepilichny "was assassinated on the orders of Russian officials".

SERGEI SKRIPAL, 2018



Sergei Skripal and his daughter and fellow victim Yulia

Sergei Skripal is a former military officer of the Main Intelligence Directorate or GRU. This organisation is the foreign military intelligence agency of the General Staff of Russian armed forces.

However, throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, Skripal acted as a double agent for British intelligence services.

In December 2004, Skripal had just

returned from Britain when he was arrested outside his house in Moscow.

After a trial conducted behind closed doors, he was stripped of his military rank and convicted of high treason in 2006. He was sentenced to 13 years in a high security detention centre.

In 2010, there was a spy swap between Russia and the United States as part of the Illegals Programme. This was the name given to a network of Russian sleeper agents under non-official cover in the US. The FBI arrested ten such Russian agents and proposed a prisoner exchange with Moscow.

And here, Skripal had an incredible stroke of luck ; Britain insisted that Skripal be included in the swap.

He promptly moved to Britain and bought a house in the town of Salisbury in Wiltshire. Skripal reportedly continued to cooperate with British and other Western intelligence agencies and travelled to meet officials in Colombia, Estonia and the Czech Republic among other countries to discuss Russian spying techniques.

For Vladimir Putin who himself had been a KGB officer and spy, Skripal's behaviour must have seemed intolerable ; Moscow was becoming increasingly irritated.

In March 2018, Skripal and his daughter Yulia who had come visiting were found unconscious on a park bench by a doctor and a nurse who happened to be passing by. They were immediately taken to hospital where doctors discovered traces of the lethal nerve agent Novichok. This highly toxic poison causes respiratory and cardiac arrest.

The toxic substance had been smeared by Russian operatives on the door handles of Skripal's house.

In September 2018, British counter terrorism police identified two Russians using the names Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Boshirov, as suspects of the Skripals' poisoning.

However, it turned out that Ruslan Boshirov was in fact Anatoly Chepiga, a GRU colonel and as for Alexander Petrov, his real name was Alexander Mishkin, also a GRU operative.

Later, a third agent who was also

present at the time of the poisonings was identified as Denis Sergeyev, a high-ranking officer of the GRU who, according to investigators, liaised with superior officers in Moscow.

Skripal and his daughter Yulia finally recovered after a lengthy hospitalisation and constant treatment. They lived in a safe house somewhere in Britain for over one year after their release from hospital, but their lives would never be the same. British intelligence arranged for them to settle in New Zealand and will probably have to give Skripal a new identity.

He may also have to undergo plastic surgery in order to minimise the risk of being recognised by his former, probably vengeful employers.

ALEXEI NAVALNY, 2020



Alexei Navalny splashed with green antiseptic solution in 2017

The poisoning and assassination attempt on Russia's best known opposition figure is the latest in a long list of Kremlin opponents. Considering past events, it may, very regrettably, not be the last.

It's reasonable to say that Alexi Navalny is the most prominent critic of President Putin. He is certainly not shy ; he has called Putin and his party "*crooks and thieves who are sucking the blood out of Russia*". He has also vowed to destroy what he calls "a feudal state being built". He has been jailed over ten times for organising anti-government protests.

And to be clear, he has enemies among opposition groups too. For example, he was criticised in 2014 after what he said about Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea during a radio

interview : *"Despite Crimea being seized, the reality is that it's now part of Russia...Crimea is ours"*. Navalny was criticised for saying so.

But he has also led high profile campaigns against corruption in Russia's biggest state companies. So, there are a number of people who may not be well inclined towards him.

As is now only too well known, Navalny drank some tea at the cafeteria of Tomsk airport before boarding a flight to Moscow. He fell ill and the pain he suffered was so severe that the plane had to make an emergency landing in Omsk, so that he could be taken to hospital.

A spokeswoman said that Navalny was in a coma and on a ventilator. She added that since the tea he drank in Tomsk was the only thing he had had that day, it was suspected that something had been put in the tea.

The head physician at Omsk hospital said that poisoning was *"one scenario among many"* being considered.

Meanwhile, the Kremlin's official spokesman Dmitry Peskov delivered this message to the press : *"We are reading this information...We know that he is in serious condition...As with any citizen of the Russian Federation, we wish him a speedy recovery"*.

Two days later, Navalny's supporters in Germany arranged for an air ambulance to evacuate him from Russia and fly him back for specialist treatment at Berlin's Charité Hospital.



The Charité hospital – Universitätsmedizin Berlin

On August 24, German physicians in Berlin announced that Navalny had been poisoned with some sort of cholinesterase inhibitor. This substance acts by blocking the breakdown of a key chemical in the body, acetylcholine, that transmits signals to the muscles.

Further tests revealed the exact nature of the poison. On 2 September 2020, the German government announced that samples taken from Navalny's blood contained traces of Novichok nerve agent, from the same family of nerve agents that was used to poison Sergei Skripal and his daughter.

Novichok is a military grade, highly toxic nerve agent that was developed in the former Soviet Union, in a secret laboratory in Uzbekistan in the 1970s and 1980s. Subsequently, the nerve agent was refined by Russia to be used as an assassination weapon, especially by the GRU.

We know the effect it can have from what happened in Salisbury in 2018. Pretty much the entire city had to be decontaminated by specialists in hazmat suits.

Even though this event took place on Russian soil, it has touched a raw nerve with Western governments. There have been reactions from Washington, Paris, London, Berlin and there will certainly be others.

If the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) backs up the claims from these governments, it is really going to put the pressure on Russia to explain this.

In the end, there are really only two possible explanations : either the Russian state was behind this or they've got a leak, and this very dangerous chemical has found its way into rogue hands. They will have to decide which of these two is the explanation.

However, according to Colonel Hamish de Bretton-Gordon, a highly-respected British chemical weapons expert, the second possibility is very unlikely : *"This is a really important Russian weapon. They designed it to overmatch NATO's capabilities to defend against it, and they have one up on NATO as it were. So, it would be very strange if they gave it to other people or allowed it to fall into the*

hands of criminals. Without another explanation, one cannot see how this is not a state-sponsored event".



Colonel Hamish de Bretton-Gordon

Given the wide range of chemicals and methods that can be used with great effect to eliminate or at least silence troublesome critics and opponents of the government, the use of a Novichok nerve agent so soon after the uproar that followed the attempted assassination of Sergei Skripal is somewhat baffling.

It is almost as though the Russians wanted the world to know that they are responsible for this latest event.

Be that as it may, this time Navalny narrowly escaped death, but like all poisonings, it sent a potent message of terror to all opponents of the regime. It seems as if the bullet is out of fashion ; apparently, the state assassin doesn't consider a bullet makes a big enough impression on the citizens any more.

This is the 21st century. Poison is a medieval weapon and it's not meant to happen any longer. But it's undeniable ; poison is out there, being used for assassination and terror.

In the present day, in Moscow, in Kiev and in London, people are being poisoned.

We probably don't know even half of it and what we see in newspapers, magazines and on television is only the tip of the iceberg.

So, next time you read of some mysterious illness or the sudden death of a Russian politician or billionaire, don't blame the vodka and the shellfish...blame poison !

Hossein Sadre



© coe.int

Paphos Castle, Cyprus

TREASURE ISLAND

How Cyprus has become a haven for a crooked elite

“**I**ll fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,

Where wealth accumulates, and men decay.”

So wrote the Irish author and playwright Oliver Goldsmith in the 18th century. Goldsmith is most famous for his novel, ‘The Vicar of Wakefield’, and for the play, ‘She Stoops to Conquer’, which is also about wealth and inequality, although he wrote many other things, too. In the play, the leading female character, Kate, learns that the man her parents want her to marry (and whom she quite fancies herself) is shy in the presence of posh ladies like her and is therefore more inclined to seduce (or attempt to seduce) ‘lower-class’ girls. She therefore pretends to be a barmaid to win his affection. It all gets very muddled with pranks galore but really centres on the snobbery of wealth and the dishonesty of those possessing it and determined to hang onto it at all costs. It remains a very funny play,

even today; I saw it once, appropriately, at England’s oldest theatre, the lovely 18th century Theatre Royal in Margate. Clearly, Goldsmith wasn’t thinking of Cyprus back then, but he might as well have been.

Cyprus grants citizenship in return for investment and, of course, many of those seeking the privilege of citizenship gained the money they choose to invest from somewhat doubtful activities. Thus, Cyprus is gaining quite a few new citizens that most people wouldn’t really want as neighbours if they knew what they’d done. On Cyprus, for some, it seems wealth is what matters most, something that became clear in the so-called “Cyprus Papers”. As the non-profit Transparency International noted in August, “Dozens of convicted criminals, fugitives and public officials have apparently bought European Union (EU) passports from Cyprus in recent years.” It’s not a cheering thought, unless, of course, you’re a dishonest public figure or a mobster

looking for somewhere to stash your ill-gotten loot. Indeed, citizenship of the European Union is seen by crooks as just another luxury good that can be easily purchased with dirty money. Transparency International says there is no shortage of buyers, which is “why investment migration is a growing, multi-billion-euro industry.” Some governments, it seems, can’t tell wealth from worth. They are most certainly not the same thing, as Oliver Goldsmith was only too well aware some 250 years ago.

The extent of the corruption was largely exposed by Al Jazeera in the ‘Cyprus Papers’, and it has put pressure on the European Commission to take action. Unfortunately, the Commission also displays a disturbing history of being swayed by wealth and of being slow to act, although not in itself corrupt (or not institutionally so). The Commission did a lot of spring cleaning during the scandals over certain members of Jacques Santer’s commission in the late 1990s. Santer

got a raw deal, in my view; he was a trusting man and believed his team was made up of honest and truthful commissioners, when one or two of them were slightly suspicious. It's true that his taste for the good life led to him being known as 'Champagne Jacques', but enjoying a glass of bubbly hardly sets him apart. I still like the man and we always stop for a chat when we chance to meet. The current Commission's problem is that it's just a bit too wary of upsetting rich people. Cyprus has certainly done well from its sales of passports; its unregulated 'golden passports' scheme is said to have earned the country billions since 2013. According to the Turkish journal, the Daily Sabah, the scheme brings in some €914-million annually. In some cases, this involves money laundering. Transparency International says that the Commission must do more to prevent the thefts of public funds, either from Europe or from far-flung countries, and to stop kleptocrats from seeing the EU as their private piggy-bank. The 'piggy' part is appropriate: many of the passport purchasers are people who've had their snouts firmly in the trough.



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Nguyen Bac Son, Vietnam's former Minister of Information



© Sputniknew

Former AVG President Pham Nhat Vu

Take the case of Pham Nhat Vu, who gave evidence in the trial of Nguyen Bac Son, Vietnam's former Minister of Information and also the self-confessed source of a \$3-million (€2.52-million) bribe involving the state-owned mobile phone and pay TV conglomerate, Audio Visual Global JSC (AVG). Son only escaped the death penalty because his family somehow managed to pay back the sum, but even so he received a life term in prison. Vu, however, was said to have cooperated with the authorities and confirmed that he had provided the massive bung (one wonders from where?). It's said that he looked unimpressive in court, but he has a lot of wealth behind him: his brother Pham Nhat Vuong, for instance, is Vietnam's richest man. What would Hồ Chí Minh have had to say about that? There were also appeals for clemency by the Buddhist Sangha of Vietnam (does that mean Vu's karma is squeaky-clean?), the Vietnamese Red Cross and the Russian ambassador.



© Wikipedia

Dmitry Rybolovlev

An odd assortment of backers but effective; he got away with a 3-year jail term. Vu came to the attention of Al Jazeera's investigative journalists, though, not because of the trial or his odd array of supporters but because he had been granted a passport by the Republic of Cyprus just before the trial. He is not alone. Thousands of people with dodgy sums of money tucked away that they gained through heaven-knows-what sorts of activities have taken part in what's called the 'Cyprus Investment Programme', earning (if

that's the right word) the island around \$8-billion (€6.72-billion). It's a major source of revenue for Cyprus.

A HISTORY OF DODGY DEPOSITS

In the aftermath of the 2007-8 financial crisis, those in the know could see a crisis looming for Cyprus. Despite its small size and modest population, it had been operating a massive offshore banking industry. The banks had amassed some €22-billion of Greek private-sector debt, despite the island's GDP being just €19.5-billion. It's a significant discrepancy, although the renowned economist Joseph Stiglitz argues that GDP is a poor way to measure the wealth of a country, and he's right. The banks held deposits of around \$120-billion (€100.47-billion), including \$60-billion (€50.23-billion) from Russian corporations. One Russian oligarch, Dmitry Rybolovlev even owned a 10% holding in the Bank of Cyprus.

The EU and other global players didn't exactly rush to help and some of the ideas put forward (and put in place) shocked EU-watchers, although not as much as they shocked Cypriot citizens whose personal savings they believed to be safe in a local bank. When the Dutch politician and economist Jeroen Dijsselbloem, then president of the EU's Eurogroup - the informal group of finance ministers from countries using the euro - announced plans to basically syphon off a proportion of the deposits held there, it caused outrage. I was one of the journalists covering the meeting of the European Parliament's Economic and Monetary Affairs committee at which Dijsselbloem announced the plan to cover the crisis by pinching people's savings.



© Lex Drijler

Jeroen René Victor Anton Dijsselbloem

There was outrage. What about all the deposit guarantee scheme? I asked Dijsselbloem but he seemed not to realise that his plan went against everything the EU was supposed to stand for. Either that or he simply couldn't see an alternative. It was the "like it or lump it" option, and many of us there wished Jean-Claude Juncker had still been head of the Eurogroup, instead of Dijsselbloem.

Under much media criticism, the EU eventually opted to stick to its promised Deposit Guarantee Scheme, under which deposits of up to €100,000 were protected, even if a bank went bust. Of course, some of the deposits in Cyprus banks were of more than that sum, and they suffered a haircut. In the 2013 bailout, funded by the European Commission, the European Central Bank (ECB), the rest of the Eurogroup and even the International Monetary Fund, Cyprus agreed to the closure of its second biggest bank, the Laiki Bank, and imposed a levy on investments not covered by the guarantee, as well as some 48% of uninsured deposits in excess of €100,000 in the island's largest bank, the Bank of Cyprus.



Laiki Bank in Agia Napa, Cyprus

A lot of the depositors came from Russia, who liked the relatively high interest rates, low corporate taxes and ease of access to banks in other parts of the EU. The whole, slightly-mishandled affair showed Cyprus to have been a tax haven, often for dirty money. Nothing much seems to have changed.

The Al Jazeera investigation researched some 2,500 people named in the Cyprus Papers, who appear in more than 1,400 applications for citizenship. The country from which the largest

number come is Russia, with around 1,000, followed by China with 500, just over 100 from Ukraine and a further 350 from the Middle East. All were, of course, extremely rich and much of their wealth seems to have been gained by questionable means. "Don't look too closely", seems to have been the guiding principle. Most would not be eligible if they applied today: Cyprus introduced new rules for citizenship in 2019, tightening up the criteria listed under the Cyprus Investment Programme (CIP).



Indeed, some previously-granted passports were revoked, although various justice NGOs are still highly suspicious of what's been going on. Transparency International, for instance, has called upon the European Commission to take decisive action against countries operating what are called 'golden visa' schemes, which are seen as being vulnerable to corruption and money laundering.

Since then, Commissioner for Justice Didier Reynders has told journalists that he is considering legal action

against Cyprus. Needless to say, we're talking here about the officially recognised democracy in the south of the island. North Cyprus may be many things but it's probably not the sort of place foreign crooks would want to declare as their official place of residence and citizenship. However, the European Commission has admitted that schemes that sell citizenship and residency rights to the super rich "threaten the EU's collective security and integrity." In a report, the Commission has pointed out that such citizenship schemes are "deliberately marketed and often explicitly advertised as a means of acquiring EU citizenship" with Bulgaria, Cyprus and Malta disregarding Union Law by selling passports without requiring applicants to live in their country."

We're looking at Cyprus today, but it would be unfair to leave out Bulgaria and Malta. It was in Malta, after all, that an investigative journalist looking into corruption was killed by a car bomb.

Daphne Caruana Galizia was very unpopular with rich and influential people for exposing their perfidy and lies; she was being sued when she died and the people she had exposed tried to pass the debts on to her relatives and dependents until the Council of Europe's Human Rights Commissioner told them to stop. When the murder was raised at a session of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly, Maltese delegates tried to get the subject dropped on the grounds that the death had not been proven to be murder. The rapporteur, Dutch MP Pieter Omtzigt successfully pointed out that there is no other way to classify killing somebody with car bomb.



Didier Reynders (r), European Commissioner for Justice



Journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia



Pieter Omtzigt

It can hardly be classed as an ‘act of god’, ‘accidental death’ or ‘attack by armadillo’. Somebody - probably quite a large number of people - wanted her silenced for good. The trial of her suspected killers, meanwhile, continues to make slow progress through the courts and one self-confessed member of the gang responsible, Melvin Theuma, successfully appealed for a pardon on the grounds that he was giving evidence for the prosecution. He has since suffered severe knife wounds to his right side and neck which the police say were “probably self-inflicted”. Hmm... Meanwhile, a senior member of staff in the prosecutor’s office quit the job one day and turned up as defence lawyer for one of the accused the next. It’s almost as if some people among the Maltese authorities are determined to prove to the rest of Europe just how corrupt they are. In her last blog before she was murdered, Galizia wrote “There are crooks everywhere you look now. The situation is desperate.” How true. The authorities were clearly surprised and distressed by the outpourings of public anger; they seemed to have thought nobody would care. Back in the 1920s, my mother lived in Malta

while her father, a British Royal Navy officer, was serving there. She was in her early teens and the only words of Maltese she learned were “Mur linfern”, which means “go to hell”. I’ve always wondered why. But clearly Cyprus isn’t alone in seemingly embracing corruption.

Bulgaria also offers ‘golden visas’ and slightly more cheaply. According to the New Balkans Law Office, “Bulgaria is one of several EU member states which offers a citizenship by investment (CBI) and a residence by investment (RBI) programmes. To qualify for citizenship on the Fast Track, you need to: Invest approximately €1,000,000 (approximately €500,000 on the Standard Track); Invest in bonds issued in euros or one of another three investment classes; Travel to Bulgaria up to three times over the (up to) 2-year application period.” Bulgaria may not have the Mediterranean appeal of Cyprus, but as the lawyers point out: “You do not need to: Make Bulgaria your residence (though you could); Learn to speak the national language; Meet other requirements which may apply in other EU CBI/RBI countries.” Furthermore, the website says, “Once a Bulgarian and therefore an EU citizen, you benefit from: Visa-free travel to an estimated 169 countries; Freedom of movement rights within the EU and its 28 members, the EEA, and Switzerland; A range of economic and social rights.” It would seem fair to ponder why a person resident in and running a business far from Europe should want or need an EU passport, don’t you agree?

GETTING IN IS EASY - IF YOU HAVE THE CASH

The CIP, introduced by Cyprus in 2016, officially lowered the threshold for the investment required to earn a passport by more than €1-million (from €2.5-million). It also required applicants to have unblemished criminal records, without explaining exactly what that meant. It apparently didn’t include those under investigation for alleged criminal activities or who were facing imminent conviction.

Under the CIP, the Cypriot government was supposed to make background checks of applicants, using the data bases of Europol and Interpol, but by and large they didn’t bother, relying on

applicants to tell the truth. If that was a reliable way of ensuring honesty, there would be no need for law courts; the simple question “how do you plead?” would result in crooks invariably saying “guilty” (if they were). But, of course, they don’t. As a result, only 2% of applicants for a Golden Visa in Cyprus were rejected between 2013 and 2018. One man was accepted despite a 16-year-old conviction for extortion. He is now a high-flyer in Russia, although whether that is the reason for his acceptance or a belief that after 16 years it no longer mattered is unclear. He’s not the only one.

How does one go about acquiring residency rights or, indeed citizenship? According to the website of a Hamburg-based firm of German attorneys, Jaber Law, it’s quite easy (if not cheap). Cyprus offers two ‘golden visa’ programmes based on investment in real estate, one for permanent residency and one for citizenship. “The two Cypriot immigration investment schemes are fast and efficient at granting a residency permit and second passport. Cyprus is a full member of the European Union and English is widely spoken on the island,” says the website, presumably aimed not at German citizens but at those who are not EU citizens. “Applicants can secure permanent residency in Cyprus through investment in real estate. The programme is one of the fastest and simplest investor visa programmes in Europe. It requires investment of just €300,000 into property to gain the Cyprus residency permit.” Within two months, the residency visa is granted, covering the entire family. “It includes parents of both the main applicant and spouse plus dependent children up to the age of 25,” the site assures prospective clients. What’s more, it’s valid for life and can be passed down to dependents and spouse. Once someone has bought permanent residency rights, they can travel freely throughout the EU and it’s only necessary for the whole family to visit Cyprus once every two years. The required investment sum can be split between two properties, but both must be brand new. What’s more, the purchaser must have a fixed deposit in a Cyprus bank account showing a €30,000 minimum deposit in the applicant’s name, which will

be locked for a period of 3 years. In addition, the applicant must prove he or she has a minimum annual income of €30,000 and an additional €5,000 per dependent, plus €8,000 per dependent parent or parent-in-law. After seven years of uninterrupted living on the island, the applicant gets citizenship. It's considered a very good deal, especially by lawyers who make money out of it, but it's probably worth remembering that Cyprus is not in the Schengen free movement area.

According to Transparency International, Al Jazeera's Investigative reporters obtained a huge volume of documents that appear to show how "an investment of over €2 million in Cyprus secured EU citizenship for 1,400 wealthy individuals and their 1,100 family members from 2017 to 2019. Reportedly among the primary applicants were at least 30 individuals with pending criminal charges or convictions, as well as 40 politically exposed persons." No wonder the EU is getting jittery; the union is quite capable of producing a lot of vicious, greedy criminals of its own without importing more and offering inducements to others. Transparency International cites an example of how the precautionary principle failed. "Some on the list appear to have bought their passports after the government introduced more stringent eligibility criteria in May 2019," it points out. "For example, former Gazprom official Nikolay Gornovskiy was on Russia's wanted list for corruption when he reportedly bought EU citizenship in 2019." In our highly connected world, warnings can be flashed from place to place and from law enforcement agency to law enforcement agency, but it somehow seems to fail to prevent known criminals from escaping justice. The really wealthy have always believed that they're above the law and, however criminal they may be, it seems that they're right. A little largesse to grease the wheels is all it takes.

It would seem that laws are applied differently for those who are really, seriously crooked as well as seriously rich. It's a fact of life that has helped to swell the coffers of Cyprus. Take the case of Ali Beglov, nick-named Alik Tartarin when he was a member of the St. Petersburg underworld, who served a 2-year jail term for extortion

in 1990-1992. He spent \$500,000 (€419,000) on a birthday party for his 9-year-old son which was attended by TV stars and senior local politicians in the old Tsarist capital, St. Petersburg. Despite his criminal record, he was able to obtain a Cyprus passport whilst also climbing the social ladder in Russia. From 1999 to 2016, he was general director of a subsidiary of Lukoil, which generates profits of \$13.2-million (€11.05-million) every year. Months before the party, reports Al Jazeera, a new dairy company was set up by Beglov's eldest son inside the regional headquarters of Lukoil in St. Petersburg. You may recall that the city is also where Tolstoy's tragic heroine, Anna Karenina, committed suicide at the city's rather splendid railway station. Across the road from it, when I was last there, there is an administrative building that still has on its roof (in Cyrillic, of course) Leningrad, the name it held before a post-Communist referendum changed it to its tsarist nomenclature, St. Petersburg. Leningrad is still the name of the oblast - the administrative region - surrounding it because the people in the wider region voted to keep it. A year after setting up in business, Beglov junior's new company was supplying dairy products to Russia's Constitutional Court, the State Duma (parliament), the FSB (federal security service) and the Federation Council (the upper house of the federal assembly).

This is by no means an isolated case, nor are Russians the only people to take advantage of taking another nationality: several senior members of the ousted Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich's government obtained passports in Cyprus.



Mykola Zlochevsky

One of them, Mykola Zlochevsky, had already registered his energy company, Burisma Holdings, in Cyprus, despite it being based in Kyiv. Joe Biden's son, Hunter, has served on the board of the company. It's reported that Zlochevsky now lives in Monaco, but retains his Cypriot passport. Another successful applicant was Low Taek Jho, the alleged mastermind behind a \$700-million (€586-million) fraud in Malaysia, while Oleg Deripaska, a billionaire businessman and close friend of Vladimir Putin, also holds a Cyprus passport.

I don't know what Cypriot vodka is like, but my personal favourite comes from Ukraine, just as one of my favourite red wines comes from Moldova. Eastern Europe still has a lot to offer other than corruption and dirty money.



Ukrainian prosecutors show a \$6 million bribe to close a case against ex-official Mykola Zlochevsky into Mykola Zlochevsky and Burisma



Oleg Deripaska

One of the changes Cyprus made in its golden visa regime concerns people classed as “politically exposed persons” or PEPs. Under it, anyone who had held a high-profile position in a government or state-owned enterprise would not qualify for residency or a visa until at least five years after leaving office. Apparently, investigators see PEPs as “more likely” to be involved in illicit activities, which says a lot about officials and politicians. Some of those associated with the VTB bank, a Russian institution, were hit, therefore, when the EU and the United States imposed sanctions following Russia’s seizure of Crimea and continuing involvement in separatist conflicts in East Ukraine.



Vladimir Putin with President of the Republic of Cyprus Nicos Anastasiades



© Parliament of Cyprus

Cyprus Interior Minister Nicos Nouris

The VTB had been used by Moscow to further its overseas activities and became known as the “Kremlin’s bank”. Three of its top executives, Al Jazeera reports, promptly invested in properties near Paphos in Cyprus. The NGO Global Witness has said that Cyprus became the preferred destination for outward foreign investment (it calls it ‘capital flight’) to the tune of \$130-million (€109-million). Although there’s nothing to suggest the money is being used for criminal purposes, the website says there’s growing evidence that Cyprus has become a favoured place for Russians wanting to launder the proceeds of fraud, extortion and other crimes.

GETTING BETTER?

There are claims, however, that things are getting better. The Cyprus daily, The National Herald, believes that the government has got a grip on it. “Cyprus’ tainted Golden Visa program that sold residency permits and European Union passports to rich foreigners who weren’t always vetted for money laundering or criminal activity has been reformed, Interior Minister Nicos Nouris said,” according to its leading article. “Cyprus, along with Malta and Bulgaria, had been singled out by the European Union for lax controls that increased the changes (sic) for corruption and misuse of the program that also saw even those with Cypriot heritage having to wait for residency or dual citizenship if not rich.

Nouris said the security of the scheme that Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades defended until a Reuters report pointed out loopholes that led to the government revoking visas for 26 people, has been enhanced, SchengenVisaInfo.com reported.” The Cyprus Papers and the investigation by Al Jazeera also clearly played a big part in the change of heart: another persuasive factor may have arisen just four days earlier, when European Justice Commissioner Didier Reynders told Al Jazeera he is looking into the possibility of legal action against Cyprus over the country’s

citizenship-through-investment scheme. Reynders said he was also calling for changes throughout Europe to such schemes which he would like to see phased out completely. Nouris, however, is not conceding gracefully. He has dismissed Al Jazeera’s allegations as “propaganda, not journalism” and accused the journalists of “falsifying the documents”, although without offering any proof that this was the case. He said investigations were continuing into the source of the documents, presumably with a view to prosecuting the whistle-blowers, which is clearly not what Reynders wants. Transparency International is urging the Commission to take action quickly.

Now the issue has been taken up by another member of the European Commission, Vice-President Vera Jourova, who is responsible for ‘Values and Transparency’. She says that “Europe’s security is being put at risk by so-called ‘golden passport’ schemes that have allowed states to sell citizenship or residency to potentially “dangerous” individuals.” She described the schemes as “problematic” and “unfair”, which is pretty much what Europe’s intelligence agencies have said. Malta and Cyprus have been named on a blacklist of 21 nations operating passport schemes that are deemed to pose “a high risk of tax evasion.” The list was published on Tuesday by the Paris-based OECD (Organization

for Economic Cooperation and Development), which wants tighter controls. Jourova accused the countries operating 'golden visa' schemes of "putting money before security", just because they help the economy. "But this is unfair," she said, "for the people who cannot afford to buy citizenship. And citizenship is something so, so big and so valuable that citizenship for sale seems for me rather problematic." Furthermore, according to Al Jazeera, not to mention various NGOs and opposition politicians, the expensive properties in Larnaca and Paphos have been bought with money stolen from the ordinary and less-well-off citizens of Russia, Ukraine and China.

The ex-EU United Kingdom doesn't escape criticism, either, and it's likely to get worse as it treads its new and virtually friendless path. Despite the passports by Cypriot, many of the anonymously registered companies are in London, while the Isle of Man has become a major centre for private jets, with over a thousand registered there. Did the UK quit the EU to become a pariah state, flouting international laws? Only time will tell, but certainly it has no shortage of venal people seeking ways to maximise and flout their wealth at the expense of others.

The motto of William of Wykeham (1320-1404), a one-time Bishop of



Vera Jourova, European Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality

Winchester and a top administrator under England's King Edward III was 'Manners makyth man'. Not, you will note, wealth or a willingness to acquire other people's money by dishonest means. I'm sure William wasn't poor by the standards of his day, but it seems he didn't judge people by how much they'd got tucked away. The same sentiment comes into Shakespeare's King Lear. In the play, Lear realises too late, and only when he's out in the storm with his Fool and a supposed mad man (who isn't really mad), what wretched lives are lived by the very poor. "Oh, I have ta'en too little care of this!" he says. "Take physic, pomp, expose

thyself to feel what wretches feel, that thou mayst shake the superflux to them and show the heavens more just." Justice has very little to do with it, I'm afraid; certainly no more than in Shakespeare's time, or even the supposed time of King Lear, or Leir, which was around the 8th century BCE, according to the 12th century pseudo-historian, Geoffrey of Monmouth. As the 1921 song "Ain't we got fun" goes, (slightly misquoting the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley) "there's nothing surer, the rich get rich and the poor get poorer." In another poem, 'Song to the men of England', Shelley puts it more plainly:

"The seed ye sow, another reaps;

The wealth ye find, another keeps;

The robes ye weave, another wears;

The arms ye forge, another bears."

In other words, nothing really changes: the poor do the hard work and the rich gain the rewards for it, and it's up to those of us who can to expose the kleptocrats and thieves, although they're still laughing all the way to the (probably overseas) bank. The world may never be as fair and equitable as all but the rich would like, but it can be quite a bit better than it is. Ending golden visa schemes would help to bring that about.

T. Kingsley Brooks



Larnaca

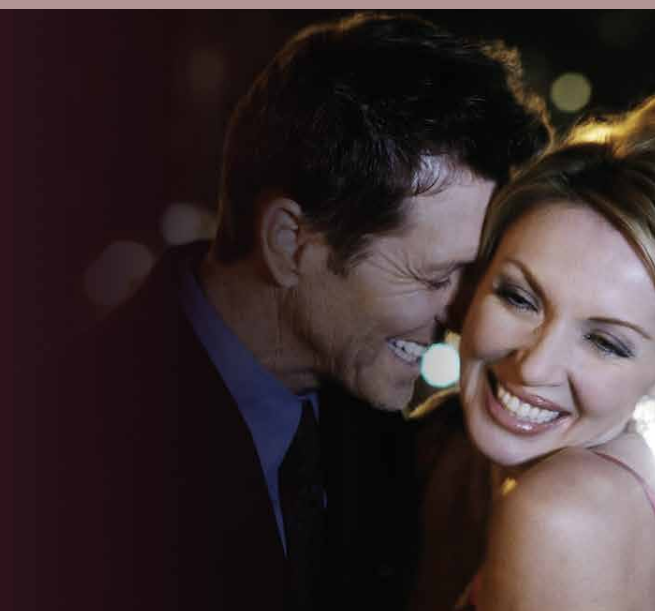


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Lansana Bea Diallo



© Wikipedia

Guinean President Alpha Condé

A BELGIAN-GUINEAN POLITICIAN'S AMBITION:

Taking over the Guinean presidency in 2020

For more than a year, Guinea has once again been plunged into political uncertainty. On September 22, 2019, during an informal meeting in New York on the sidelines of a UN summit, President Alpha Condé made it clear to his supporters that they had to stand ready to support him in his race to a third term. However, according to the Guinean constitution of 2010 the president was limited to two five-year terms. Elected for the first time 10 years ago, Alpha Condé, 82, should therefore have completed his presidency in December 2020. But to be able to stand legally before the Guineans for a third term, Alpha Condé then decided to vote for a new one. constitution by referendum. This popular vote to take place at the same time as the renewal of the Guinean parliament.

For its part, the opposition had anticipated the plans of President Condé given the postponement, on several occasions, of

the legislative elections. Many opponents of the Alpha Condé regime were also arrested as early as April and May 2019. This led to protests and clashes in the capital, Conakry.

Faced with what the opposition calls a constitutional coup d'état, the FNDC (National Front for the Defense of the Constitution) began to demonstrate in early October in Conakry and in the main cities of the country. It is a movement bringing together part of the political opposition and members of civil society. Government repression has resulted in the deaths of dozens of people since October 2019. According to several human rights groups, at least 80 people have lost their lives during the protests.

In January 2020, the European chancelleries began to be moved by the repression of the power of Alpha Condé against the demonstrators and strongly criticized the maneuvers of the president

at the end of the fiscal year. The French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jean-Yves Le Drian, did not hide his annoyance at Alpha Condé's new constitution project. "We are now particularly concerned about the situation in Guinea and we call for appeasement," the boss of Quai D'Orsay told the French national assembly. A message that he reiterated last July by emphasizing the fragile nature of Guinean democracy.

Last February, this time it was Jospe Borrell, the European High Representative for External Affairs and Security, who expressed concerns about the situation in Guinea. "The European Union's concerns have been confirmed by the recent statements made by the International Organization of La Fran-cophonie in its communiqué of 24 February on the state of the Guinean electoral register and by the African Union's decision, announced on Friday 28 February 2020, to recall the mission sent to observe the legislative

elections of 1 March. At present, the lack of inclusiveness and transparency casts doubt on the credibility of future elections. This situation is fueling the risk of divisions and tension within the national community. It is the responsibility of all political actors, and in particular of President Condé, as head of state, to resume dialogue and restore a climate of trust conducive to social peace and the holding of credible elections as scheduled for 2020. The European Union calls for re-strait and condemns the use of violence on any side. It supports any initiative from the region to find a peaceful solution to this crisis and calls on Guinean stakeholders to cooperate", declared the head of European diplomacy in a statement.



© Edm
Bea Diallo visiting the Conakry market

CONTESTED REFERENDUM

The main FNDC leaders like Cellou Dalein Diallo, ex-Prime Minister under the dictatorship of Lansana Conté, or Abdourahamane Sanoh, FNDC coordinator as well as the president of the Pades Ousmane Kaba, all called for a boycott of the legislative elections and the constitutional referendum. of March 22. In the midst of the Covid-19 health crisis, the ballot was still held with an unsurprising result of 85% of the votes in favor of the new constitution.

Following the contested victory of Camp Condé in this double ballot, the European Union once again expressed the highest concerns about the repression of the Alpha Condé regime.

"The non-inclusive and non-consensual nature of these ballots and the electoral roll undermines the credibility of these elections. The lack of recognized regional and international observation also calls into question the validity of the process. Inter-community divisions are growing dangerously. The European Union renews its support for the initiatives of the

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union and the International Organization of La Francophonie (OIF) likely to rehabilitate the electoral process, to defuse tensions and to renew a dialogue between all parties, "the EU's external affairs spokesperson said in a statement on 26 March. Same story on the side of the United States which via their embassy, expressed their "deep concerns" and condemned "all the abuses". Washington said "share" the international concerns on the organization of the poll, the regularity of the electoral lists retained and the absence of dialogue between the power and the opposition, absence to which the government did not remedy, notes the diplomacy American.

Unfortunately due to the Covid-19 crisis, all scheduled ECOWAS meetings regarding Guinea. The Alpha Condé regime is therefore taking political advantage of the health crisis by rejecting all attempts at international mediation. Faced with the impasse, the Belgian-Guinean world boxing champion Bea Diallo challenged the Guinean president and his opponents in mid-July by offering them national mediation under the aegis of ECOWAS. Bea Diallo's proposal to negotiate an end to the crisis and peacefully challenge Alpha Condé at the polls is gaining ground. And in the weeks that followed more and more Guinean political figures followed suit.

At the beginning of August, President Alpha Condé was appointed by his party the RPG arc-en-ciel to be his presidential candidate on October 18. He then indicates to take note of this request of his majority but does not yet declare himself a candidate for his own succession. The strongman of Conakry indeed has every interest in buying time to let his adversaries unveil the plans. Candidates wishing to run in the presidential election must make themselves known no later than 30 days before the election.



© Nat
Protesters arrests in Guinea

HISTORY OF MODERN GUINEA

1958: independence from France and start of Seikou Touré dictatorship

1984: death of Seikou Touré and start of Lansana Conté dictatorship

2008: death of Lansana Conté and start of dictatorship of Dadis Camara

2009: Dadis Camara is wounded by one of his guard, flee the country and start of the democratic transition

2010: Election of Alpha Condé

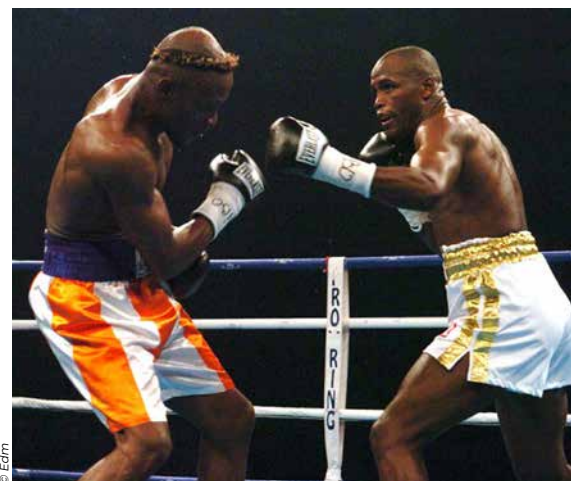
2015: Reelection of Alpha Condé

2019: Alpha Condé reveals his plan to do a third term as president

2020: New constitution is voted and mass protests follow

BEA DIALLO ON THE POLITICAL RING

Lansana Bea Diallo is a Belgian-Guinean politician born in Monrovia (Liberia) in 1971. He first rose to prominence as an international business leader and professional boxer. He holds a degree from the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB) in economics with a specialization in marketing. He is a member of the Belgian Socialist Party. He is an honorary member of the Brussels parliament where he sat for 15 years from 2004 to 2019. He currently holds the position of 1st alderman in Ixelles but he joined the Ixelles executive in 2006. Today, he is notably in charge of Finances, Human Resources, Pensions, Prevention, Youth, Employment, Social Integration, Twinning, International Cooperation and Sport.



© Edm
Lansana Bea Diallo boxing (right)

He began his boxing career in 1990 with a title of Belgian amateur champion before turning professional, two years later. Between 1998 and 2004, he won the title of intercontinental IBF (International Boxing Federation) middleweight champion seven times. In 2003 and 2005, he lost to Raymond Joval for the IBO middleweight title and ended his career with a WBF super middleweight title in 2007 on a record of 25 wins, 18 losses and 4. draws.

From the start of his political career, Bea Diallo established himself as a defender of the anti-racist struggle. In his municipality of Ixelles, he has also carried out numerous social integration initiatives involving young people from Brussels. One of its flagship projects was the creation of the non-profit organization "Emergence XL" which helps disadvantaged young people find their socio-professional path through sport and especially boxing. The support structure includes, among other things, a ring, a dojo and a weight room as well as a space for job coaching. In 10 years, several hundred young people in Brussels have been able to be helped in this way.

DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION

The world boxing champion has also been very active in Guinea. Politically, he notably participated in the way out of the crisis during the transition period in 2010 following the murderous interlude of Dadis Camara. Through his association RMGN (New Guinea Global Network), Bea Diallo was able, among other things, to implement a community health center in Tombolia or a sanitation plan to make Conakry cleaner. During the Ebola epidemic in Guinea in 2014, the world boxing champion raised some 35,000 euros to help victims of the disease.

In early 2020, he returned to the ring on behalf of his Fight For Africa foundation against his eternal rival Raymond Joval in a gala fight. Finally, since mid-July when the political situation is inextricable in Guinea, Bea Diallo has offered his services to relaunch mediation between all the leaders in order to start negotiations to get out of the crisis. Its goal? Lead to free and transparent elections in Guinea.

FIGHT FOR AFRICA

Fight for Africa is a social integration project led in Guinea by Bea Diallo. He intends to promote professional training

there. In early 2020, the world champion returned to the ring against his eternal rival Raymond Joval for Fight for Africa. The profits collected during this gala fight were entirely devoted to the creation of vocational training centers in Africa.

"BEA DIALLO" EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

Your country of origin, Guinea has been plunged into a political crisis since President Alpha Condé announced his wish to change the constitution and possibly run for a third term. What is your perception of the situation?

When I see young Guineans dying, I am grieved and I feel deep anger. It is obviously not the opposition politicians who are on the front line in the face of the regime's repression. Guinean youth are not cannon fodder. This is why I call on all Guinean leaders to be morally responsible to the people. Special interests cannot continue to take precedence over the lives of our fellow citizens. Everyone must come to their senses and come to the table to resolve this conflict peacefully. I therefore call on all parties of good will and who want the good of Guineans to put an end to the violence and to prepare for free and transparent presidential elections.



Diallo in Belgium

Are you at the origin of a mediation proposal in Guinea? Do you have positive feedback?

As I have already said, Guinean politicians must sit around the table to find a compromise. And I hear more and more people in Guinea talking about dialogue, but I expect concrete advances both from the power in place and from the opposition. In mid-August, the United States reiterated the importance of a return to calm. This proves that the international community

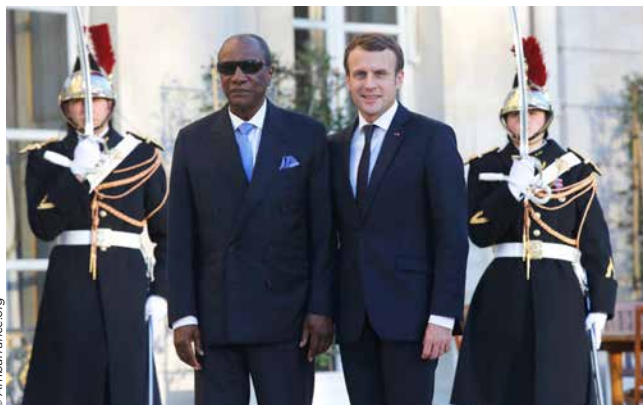
is also paying particular attention to the situation in Guinea and that my approach is unofficially approved. With the support of the international community, I believe that a real negotiation process can begin. This was already the case during the transition period in 2010. At the time, I had modestly contributed my stone to the building of peace in Guinea. But I do not want to be a brake on possible negotiations between the power of Alpha Condé and the opposition. This is why I support the ECOWAS mediation. Unfortunately with the Covid-19 health crisis, all discussions have stalled. To try to relaunch this process, I sent a letter to all the Guinean party presidents, to the representatives of the four natural regions of Guinea as well as a president Alpha Condé. I hope that Guinea will take an important step towards reconciliation in the coming weeks. What is certain is that only dialogue and free and transparent elections will be able to get Guinea out of partisan quarrels.

What do you propose in your mediation plan?

I propose a national mediation under the aegis of ECOWAS with the participation of the heads of 4 natural regions of Guinea as well as under the high patronage of the religious eminences of the country. This group of Sages made up of Guinean dignitaries will provide high-level moral support to this mediation which obviously intends to include all the democratic tendencies of the country. I believe that we need to establish a credible electoral calendar which should lead to free and transparent elections. All the parties can, I think, agree on the revision of the electoral roll under international supervision. I also want the presence of international observers to assess the electoral process. I am therefore asking the international community to monitor the election with modern means such as GPS beacons on the ballot boxes or other procedures. The newly elected president will also have to commit to forming a government of National Union to peacefully get the country out of the crisis. Finally, there will be a need for a national reconciliation plan that will have to recognize and compensate the victims of repression after an independent investigation.

How do you judge the presidency of Alpha Condé?

President Alpha Condé is an important man in the history of Guinea, but it is time for him to pass the baton. He sacrificed several years of his life for democracy in our



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Guinea President Alpha Condé and French President Emmanuel Macron



© Wikimedia

Vladimir Putin and Alpha Condé

country. And the Guineans are grateful to him. He fought the dictatorship of Lansana Conté and even went to prison for it. Alpha Condé has succeeded in redressing Guinea's economic indicators, which is a good thing. But the economic spinoffs benefit the Guinean people too little. Corruption and nepotism are still too often rife. The gray areas on the attribution of certain mining and port concessions must be removed.

Today, the fact that Alpha Condé seems to cling to power undermines his democratic struggle. He who has proclaimed himself the Guinean Mandela is more likely to end up as Robert Mugabe. Many voices around the world are also speaking out against repression. In early August, Amnesty International again denounced in a column published by Le Monde the repression of the regime. Some 200 victims are to be deplored since his accession to power and I fear the worst if he is re-elected for a third term next October. I am convinced that the best way to beat Alpha Condé is at the polls. Having said that, my preference is obviously to withdraw his candidacy. It could thus avoid many unnecessary victims and inscribe its democratic heritage in a lasting way in the history of Guinea.

What role do you want to play in Guinea? And are you a candidate for the presidential election?

I have said this before, I want the best for my home country and I am committed in all possible ways to help it. My person does not matter. If the Guineans want me to run then I will. On the other hand, I don't want to be a barrier to reconciliation and for now I want to focus mainly on the mediation that I have proposed.

Can you explain your political background in Belgium?

I was elected to the Brussels parliament

from my first election in 2004. I stayed there for 15 years as a regional deputy but I also sat in the parliament of the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, where I chaired the Commission des Relations internationales and European issues.

I have also worked in the Committee on Youth and Youth Aid as well as the Advisory Committee for Equal Opportunities between Men and Women. Finally, I was president of the Health Commission of the French-speaking Brussels Parliament. This shows my attachment to international and European matters but also to everything relating to equality and unfortunately in the area of health there is still work to be done to reduce inequalities.

In 2006, I ran for municipal elections in Ixelles, and at the same time as my Brussels deputy, I became alderman in my municipality. I like being close to people, which is also why in 2018 I focused on my local political career.

And do you plan to stop your political career in Belgium if you had to take on responsibilities in Guinea?

I want to continue my political action in Brussels as long as possible. For the moment, nothing obliges me to leave my functions as alderman in Ixelles. I want to help my country of origin to emerge from the crisis, to conduct this mediation I take my free time and it does not impact my work in the municipality of Ixelles. That said, if one day I have to take political responsibilities in Guinea, of course, I will take political leave for my current activities.

What role should Europe play in resolving the conflict in Guinea?

As a first step, I would like the Guineans to take their destiny in hand and manage to emerge from the crisis on their own. In



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Bea Diallo with religious leaders in Conakry

this case, the European Union must be able to help Guineans on the road to elections by sending observers during the ballot. On the other hand, if the elections are decided in advance then I hope that the European Union will be firm towards the outgoing president.

Finally, the EU also has an interest in helping projects like Fight For Africa to stem the exodus of young Africans.

We see young Africans leaving the continent by the thousands. What do you think is the real cause of this fact?

All over the world it is said that Africa is the future. The paradox is that not all young people on the continent have a future. This situation pushes young people to take enormous risks crossing the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe which is considered Eldorado.

I also believe that a link can be established between the real cause of this youth migration and local economic development. It is important to put in place training tools, as we are doing with our Fight for Africa Foundation, which will allow young people to access the economic development strategy.

David Baudoux / Sergio Bianchini

NEWS IN BRIEF

IMPLEMENTING ECHR JUDGMENTS: COUNCIL OF EUROPE URGES TURKEY TO RELEASE OSMAN KAVALA

The Committee of Ministers has urged Turkey to ensure the immediate release of jailed businessman and human rights defender Mehmet Osman Kavala pending the Turkish Constitutional Court's forthcoming decision on his case. The decision was taken during the Committee's latest regular meeting to examine the implementation of judgments from the European Court of Human Rights.

Mr Kavala was arrested in Istanbul on 18 October 2017 on suspicion of attempting to overthrow the Government and the constitutional order in Turkey through force and violence. In December 2019, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) ruled that his detention took place in the absence of sufficient evidence that he had committed an offence, in violation of his right to liberty and security under the European Convention on Human Rights.



Mehmet Osman Kavala

The ECHR also found that Mr Kavala's arrest and pre-trial detention pursued an ulterior purpose, namely to silence him and dissuade other human rights defenders. In addition, the length of time taken by Turkey's Constitutional Court to review Mr Kavala's complaint was insufficiently "speedy". The European court concluded that the government was to take every measure to put an end to the applicant's detention and to secure his immediate release.

On 18 February 2020, the Istanbul 30th Assize Court acquitted Mr Kavala and ordered his release. On the same day he was taken into custody on the basis of separate charges, concerning which the domestic court ordered his release on 20 March. Mr Kavala was placed in pre-trial detention on the basis of a third set of charges on 9 March.

The applicant lodged an application with Turkey's Constitutional Court on 4 May 2020 complaining that there is insufficient evidence to justify his continuing detention and that the authorities have failed to implement the ECHR's judgment of December 2019. The ECHR judgment became final on 11 May 2020 when the European court rejected a request from

the Turkish authorities for the case to be referred to its Grand Chamber. This week's decision from the Committee of Ministers follows submissions to the committee from Mr Kavala and his legal representatives, the Turkish authorities, several non-governmental organisations and the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights.

Given the urgency of the situation, the Committee of Ministers will resume its examination of this case at its next regular meeting to supervise the implementation of ECHR judgments from 29 September to 1 October 2020. Furthermore, in accordance with the committee's working methods, the Turkish authorities have until 11 November 2020 to submit an action plan setting out the general measures to be taken to prevent similar violations of the human rights convention occurring in the future.

Source : coe.int

EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS:

Disciplining teacher for remarks incompatible with his duty of discretion, in particular concerning the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris, was not disproportionate.



The European Court of Human Rights

Principal facts

The applicant, Yacob Mahi, is a Belgian national who was born in 1965 and lives in Brussels. He has taught Islamic religion since 1987 in schools run by the French-speaking Community of Belgium. On 4 February 2015 Mr Mahi sent an open letter to the press commenting on reports in certain sections of the media about his alleged role in disturbances occurring at the school in which he was teaching in Brussels. The disturbances had taken place in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of January 2015 in Paris targeting the newspaper Charlie Hebdo in particular. They had taken the form of attacks by pupils on another teacher in the same school who had defended Charlie Hebdo, and violence against a pupil who had refused to sign a petition against that teacher. In his open letter Mr Mahi commented on the Charlie Hebdo attacks. He also expressed views on homosexuality, the media, political leaders and the judiciary, and mentioned an author who had been convicted in France of Holocaust denial, describing him as his "mentor". In an opinion published on

13 March 2015, the Federal Centre for Equal Opportunities and Action against Racism and Discrimination found that Mr Mahi's remarks did not contravene anti-discrimination legislation as such, but voiced concern that such remarks had been made by a teacher. On 31 October 2017 the Government of the French-speaking Community, finding that Mr Mahi's remarks had been in breach of his duty of discretion, ordered his transfer to a school in La Louvière as a disciplinary measure. In a judgment of 16 May 2019 the Conseil d'État dismissed an application by Mr Mahi to have that order set aside.

Complaints, procedure and composition of the Court

The application was lodged with the European Court of Human Rights on 29 October 2019.

Relying on Article 8 (right to respect for private and family life) and Article 10 (freedom of expression), Mr Mahi complained about the disciplinary sanction imposed on him for the remarks made in his open letter. The Court decided to examine his complaint under Article 10 only.

The decision was given by a Chamber of seven judges, composed as follows:

Georgios A. Serghides (Cyprus), President, Paul Lemmens (Belgium), Helen Keller (Switzerland), Dmitry Dedov (Russia), María Elósegui (Spain), Gilberto Felici (San Marino), Erik Wennerström (Sweden), and also Olga Chernishova, Deputy Section Registrar.

Decision of the Court Article 10 (freedom of expression)

The Court noted that the disciplinary sanction imposed on Mr Mahi had constituted an interference with his right to freedom of expression. That interference was provided for in Articles 5 and 7 of the Royal Decree of 22 March 1969 imposing a duty of discretion on teachers. The interference had, furthermore, pursued a legitimate aim, that of preventing disorder in the school in question and protecting the reputation and rights of others (the school itself, and more broadly the whole French-speaking Community of Belgium). As regards the necessity of the interference in a democratic society, the Court pointed out that whenever the right to freedom of expression of public servants was at issue, the "duties and responsibilities" referred to in Article 10 § 2 assumed a special significance, which justified leaving to the respondent State a certain margin of appreciation in determining whether the impugned interference was proportionate to the aim as stated. With more specific regard to teachers, who symbolised authority for their students in the educational field, their special duties and responsibilities also applied, to some extent, to their out-of-school activities. In the present case the Conseil d'État, having noted that the statements made by Mr Mahi in his letter could not be considered as unconnected with his position as a teacher, had deemed them incompatible with the "duties and responsibilities" incumbent on him as a teacher, and ruled that he had breached his duty of discretion. The Court accepted that the opinion issued by the Centre for Equal Opportunities had shown that Mr Mahi's comments should not necessarily have been considered punishable under criminal law, in the absence of incitement to hatred, xenophobia or discrimination. It was nonetheless true that, as the Conseil d'État had ruled, those

remarks could legitimately be regarded as incompatible with his duty of discretion, particularly in view of the tense atmosphere prevailing in his school in the wake of the January 2015 attacks in Paris. The Court took note of Mr Mahi's plea that he had felt the need to react to certain accusations levelled against him. It nevertheless held that that consideration alone was insufficient to override his duty of discretion and the requirement that he show moderation in exercising his freedom of expression, given the specific context in which his remarks had been made. That was particularly true as the comments and statements had not been a spontaneous reaction during an oral exchange but had taken the form of written assertions which had been widely publicised and had therefore been accessible to his students, which could have aggravated the tensions in the school in question.

Consequently, the Court considered that in view of the potential impact of Mr Mahi's remarks on his students, his disciplinary transfer to another school located approximately 50 kilometres from the other school, where he had a full teaching timetable, was not disproportionate. The competent authorities had therefore given relevant and sufficient reasons in support of the interference, which had not been disproportionate. The application was therefore manifestly ill-founded.

ONE OF THE BIGGEST ONLINE PIRACY GROUPS IN THE WORLD TAKEN DOWN

On 25 August, an alleged criminal network of copyright infringing hackers, mainly responsible for pirating movies and hosting illegal digital content worldwide was dismantled in a coordinated action between US authorities and their counterparts in 18 countries around the world, with Europol and Eurojust support. Sixty servers were taken down in North America, Europe and Asia and several of the main suspects were arrested.



Streamed prior to release

The Sparks Group obtained DVDs and Blu-ray discs of unreleased content and compromised the copyright protections on the discs to reproduce and upload the content publicly to online servers. It is believed that the piracy group, under investigation since September 2016, had successfully reproduced and disseminated hundreds of movies and TV programmes prior to their retail release date, including nearly every movie released by major production studios in the US. The Sparks

Group has caused tens of millions of US dollars in losses to film production studios, mainly to the US movie, television, and supporting industries, from the copyright infringement.

False claims for free films

To get ahead, members of the Sparks Group made several material misrepresentations and omissions to wholesale distributors. On many occasions, they claimed to be DVD and Blu-ray discs retailers and promised not to sell the content prior to the retail release date. Once they received the products, the members of the group used special software to crack the copyright protections to then reproduce and encode the content in high-definition. The content was then disseminated and reproduced on streaming platforms, peer-to-peer and torrent networks from their platforms.

The servers were located around the world in Canada, Czechia, Denmark, France, Germany, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. These were taken down in yesterday's action and in the days preceding it, with the help of national authorities from these countries. Other measures were also taken in Italy, Romania and Canada. One of the members of the alleged criminal network was arrested over the weekend in Cyprus and another suspect was arrested yesterday in the US.

International cooperation

This successful operation was possible thanks to the extensive international cooperation facilitated by Europol and Eurojust between law enforcement and judicial authorities from the countries involved. Europol enhanced the exchange of information through the participating countries and coordinated the action day with Eurojust which hosted yesterday's a coordination centre, ensuring real-time coordination in the joint action of the national authorities in all the countries. An operational meeting at Europol and a coordination meeting at Eurojust were organised prior to the joint action day, facilitating the exchange of information between law enforcement and judicial authorities and setting a joint strategy between all the parties involved. Europol provided analytical support during the investigation and supported the information exchange between the involved police authorities via the SIENA secure communication system.

NATO EXPERTS BUILD PROTOTYPE TO DETECT, IDENTIFY AND LOCALIZE SMALL DRONES

Experts at the NATO Communications and Information (NCI) Agency have built an experimental prototype system to detect, identify and localize small Unmanned Aircraft Systems (sUASs) using low-cost commercial devices and machine learning.

The ARTEMIS system (Advanced Recognition Tool using Electromagnetic (EM) waves for Identifying unmanned aerial Systems) uses advanced techniques to detect and classify Radio Frequency (RF) signals. The system can classify what type of signal it is by processing only 40 milliseconds of data, with a probability of correct classification above 90 percent.

The system continuously monitors the bandwidth where drones normally operate and automatically detects any RF emissions.



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Once detected, a process entirely based on machine learning and pattern recognition will allow us to classify and identify the emission," said Franco Fois, Senior Scientist and ARTEMIS Lead Engineer. "And this emission could be an emission from Wi-Fi or Bluetooth, because they are entitled to work in the same band, but it could also be a drone emission."

If the signal is found to be from a drone, the system will also try to calculate the direction of arrival of the signal to localize the drone. The system can also localize the person who is controlling the drone from the ground.

The identification of the type of drone was a key driver of this work, since that information determines the threat response. Very high percentages of correct classification were achieved in experiments using up to 10 different drones.

"ARTEMIS serves to prove that it is possible, with low-cost equipment, to counter the threat posed by commercial drones," said Edison Cristofani, Radar and Signal Processing Engineer at the Agency.

In particular, the system uses software-defined radios and virtual instrumentation, which Cristofani said is "a game changer."

"These tools made possible fast prototyping – implementing changes or updates in a matter of hours," Cristofani said. "They provided us with a great degree of flexibility."

ARTEMIS was sponsored by the NATO HQ C3 Board Navigation and Identification Programme of Work. It belongs to a wider family of sensors designed and built by NCI Agency in the past decade.

The global community's use of sUASs, or drones, is rapidly growing.

Present-day efforts to counter insurgent drone capabilities are now a global issue of increasing concern for all military, governmental, and security force personnel and infrastructure.

"The use of drones is expanding. So are the threats and vulnerabilities caused by malicious users of these systems, hence the importance of capabilities such as ARTEMIS," said Jean-Philippe Saulay, Staff Officer in NATO's Defence Investment Division. "The fact that ARTEMIS is based on

the rapid and flexible reengineering of existing tools and applications is an additional bonus."

Terrorist groups have recently demonstrated abilities to remotely carry and employ payloads ranging from live-feed cameras to Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) via drones.

Due to easy access, low cost and lack of regulations regarding ownership and employment, protection against drones has become an imperative.

"The really cool thing of this work is that it's all done in-house inside the Agency," said Principal Scientist René van der Heiden, Project Manager of the work. "And I say 'in-house' but much of it was done in attics and gardens during the recent COVID-19 lockdown."

The Agency developed the prototype in-house to help the Agency continue to remain a 'smart buyer'.

"We did this so we can better understand the 'state of the art' in drone detection/identification/localisation," Van der Heiden said. "Once we start buying equipment from industry we know what is technically possible, we know what is available and we are able to separate the scientific truth from fiction."

When this work is done by NATO, another added benefit is that it then becomes available to all of the Nations.

"All of the Nations practically can have access to this information and that can help their own research establishments or their own industries to develop suitable systems," Van der Heiden said.

Work on this project will continue.

"This system will give us very good opportunities also to cooperate with other Nations," Fois said.

Other agencies and Nations have prototype systems that are likely complementary to this one.

"The work of NATO on countering the threat posed by small drones is benefitting from these developments. As the threat is rapidly evolving, so the countermeasures shall be innovative and merge different domains: from classical radio frequency and signal processing techniques, to sensor fusion and machine learning. This prototype opens new avenues for research, development and finally deployment," said Dr Claudio Palestini, Officer in NATO's Emerging Security Challenges Division.

UNIVERSITY OF ANTWERP AND NIST INITIATE COLLABORATION ON TOOLS FOR AUTOMATED DRIVING SYSTEMS

The University of Antwerp will collaborate with NIST to develop tools for use by industries producing partially or fully automated systems. These tools will be based on NIST advances in the area of cyber-physical systems or IoT, including its Cyber-Physical Systems Framework and emerging concepts like an Operating Envelope Specification for automated driving system safety measurement. The partners will collaborate to implement prototype tools using NIST's co-simulation tool, the "Universal CPS Environment for Federation," or UCEF.



Hans Vangheluwe

Ensuring the safety of automated systems is a clear industry challenge. Previous testing strategies focused on systems where human operators were involved. However, automation reduces, and may even eliminate, human involvement, demanding new approaches to testing and, ultimately, safety assurance.

Prof. Hans Vangheluwe of the Modeling, Simulation and Design Lab at the University of Antwerp, has agreed to collaborate with NIST cyber-physical systems researchers to install and use NIST's UCEF co-simulation infrastructure and NIST's Cyber-Physical Systems Framework to develop tools for CPS/IoT design, test, and assurance. This approach has the potential to assist in identifying the range of engineering concerns related to safety. By identifying critical concerns and their interdependencies, developers can more holistically determine and address the full spectrum of engineering requirements.

UCEF's co-simulation infrastructure will further aid automated driving system (ADS) testing and design exploration. UCEF makes possible the evaluation of components and the overall cyber-physical system, or systems-of-systems. UCEF integrates existing, best-in-class simulators, and allows them to interact. In the case of ADS safety, UCEF co-simulations will be structured to assess safety concerns by providing data that help developers and testers address intended system behaviors and identify unintended system behaviors with safety implications.





POSEIDON'S TRIDENT

Turkey and Greece rattle sabres over undersea gas

Τρίαινα του Ποσειδώνα

Helen was said to be the most beautiful woman of her age, even though she hatched from an egg laid by Leda, the beautiful daughter of King Thespius, after her unexpected liaison with randy old Zeus while he was disguised as a swan. Exactly how they achieved a mating is a matter of conjecture. And Zeus was bit more than disguised, really; 'metamorphosed' is the word used in my much-thumbed 1828 edition of Lemprière's Classical Dictionary. Mind you, the same dictionary, a product of the Age of Reason, argues that no eggs were actually involved; it was just that in those days women inhabited small upper apartments in their husbands' or fathers' houses that at time were known by a word that only differed from the word for 'egg' by the placing of a single accent. So in reality, Lemprière reckons, Leda, who was married to Tyndarus, the King of Sparta, had her affair with Zeus in an

upstairs room, incidentally while she was already pregnant (and he didn't look like an aquatic bird). The ancient story says she subsequently laid two eggs, one fathered by Tyndarus (quite an achievement for a human) and the other by Zeus, and that each egg hatched out two babies: Helen and Pollux from one (with Zeus as father, although that is disputed), Castor and Clytemnestra from the other. Quite a productive affair, then, and quite difficult for Leda to explain, I should imagine. Just saying you rather like swans doesn't really cut it, does it?

Helen, of course, like her mother, was not renowned for her great virtue and faithfulness. Pursued by a great many princes, she married Menelaus, King of Sparta, but while he was away in Crete to bury his uncle, Crateus, she fell for the handsome Trojan Prince, Paris, who was paying Sparta a fleeting visit, and sailed off with him, thus

causing the first recorded war between the Greeks and the people of what is now Turkey. The mighty walls of Troy, incidentally, were, according to legend, built by Poseidon, the god of the sea, a job for which he was never paid, which is why he sided with the Greeks in the ten-year war. Many a



Leda and the Swan, 16th-century copy after the lost painting by Michelangelo



Kastellorizo Island

jobbing builder would sympathise. He had an interesting talent, too: when he shook his trident it caused earthquakes or storms. Helen's face seems to have launched not only a thousand ships but also a seemingly endless succession of conflicts and the deaths of millions, spread over a great many years. Not bad going for a girl who hatched from an egg and whose dad was a long-necked bird of the genus *cygnus*, at least part of the time. Those ancient Greeks really knew how to have fun, didn't they?

Now it's all kicking off again around the Eastern Mediterranean, but not over a pretty face this time. It's about gas, at least in theory, and the discovery of vast undersea reserves around Cyprus and near to the tiny island of Kastellorizo. Other factors are involved as well, though, not least national pride and the balance of powers around the Mediterranean. The fact is that the price of gas has gone down by almost 50% over the last decade and some big energy companies are putting off further drilling, reluctant to invest in an industry whose prospects for making a profit have dwindled, at least for now, but that hasn't much impeded the dash for energy. Writing in the on-line news service 'The Conversation', Clemens Hoffmann, Lecturer in International Politics at the University of Stirling in Scotland, expresses his mild surprise at the tensions: "It may seem a strange time to be fighting over gas when prices remain in a slump due to weak demand and investors withdrawing."

The existence of COVID-19 is making things worse, too. However, there is no doubt that the demand for gas will eventually recover, despite the

European Union's much-vaunted 'Green Deal' with its investment in renewables. And it's been estimated that the gas reserves so far discovered in the Eastern Mediterranean are worth trillions of dollars, even at today's fallen prices. Europe needs gas and is understandably uneasy about relying on Russia as its main supplier. Now, as in ancient times, Greece and Turkey disagree wildly about who owns what in that troubled bit of sea. The problem is that they are extremely close to one another, with nominally Greek islands very close to the Turkish shoreline and Greece believes they're all entitled to their own continental shelf and the concomitant drilling rights. Kastellorizo is part of the Dodecanese group and is only two kilometres from Kaş in southwest Turkey, although it's 570 kilometres from Athens. Kaş used to be regarded as being within the Greek sphere of influence once upon a time, being built on the site of Antiphellos and boasting a number of ancient ruins, including Lycian tombs and a theatre.

Greece believes all of its islands - including Kastellorizo (population: under 500) - should have the right to their own Exclusive Economic Zones - territorial waters, in fact - but in the case of Kastellorizo, those territorial waters would theoretically stretch right up the beach of Kaş, a Turkish holiday destination in its own right, to take in several hotels and a number of gift shops, which would clearly be impractical. Who wants to have to produce a passport just to buy a postcard or a bucket and spade for the kids? In fact, the proposed boundary is within easy pedalo-boat distance from the north-eastern beach of Kastellorizo, but an EEZ of

its own, which Athens would like and which Washington supports, if not very firmly, would put a large hole in Turkey's own continental shelf and sphere of maritime influence.



President of Turkey and Turkish Armed Forces Commander-in-chief Mareşal Mustafa Kemal Atatürk with the Medal of Independence, Ankara, 1925

Turkey claims that the waters around Cyprus are within its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), although both Greece and the EU disagree.

Turkey's current President, its twelfth, is the bullish Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, a man of ambition who seems set on turning his country from the secular path mapped out by Mustafa Kamâl Atatürk and back towards its more aggressive, warlike past in the heady days of the Ottoman Empire. Atatürk was an astute man who wanted Turkey to be seen as a modern country and who was wary of those who saw themselves as 'men of destiny'.

Years ago, while filming in Ankara, I visited Atatürk's tomb and the adjacent museum, which contains mementos and pictures of the great man with various leaders of the time, together with his thoughts about them. After meeting Adolf Hitler, he predicted that Germany's new Chancellor would lead the world into war, and he urged caution in dealing with him, which means he saw more clearly than many of his contemporaries.



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Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in military uniform

But Erdoğan seems prepared to cajole and threaten his allies to get his own way, knowing that as far as the EU is concerned, he has a winning hand: Turkey could close its vast refugee camps and help thousands of refugees get to Europe, much to the disquiet of many European citizens and the probable fall of a few governments. The plain fact is that there are some vast gas reserves under the Eastern Mediterranean, while Turkey and Greece lay claim to territorial waters that overlap; a recipe for disaster. No wonder Poseidon seems to be shaking his trident.

UNLIKELY ALLIANCES

The Turkish drilling ship *Oruç Reis*, currently exploring the waters near Cyprus, has a Turkish naval escort and Erdoğan has warned that anyone seeking to interfere with its work will pay "a heavy price". This follows a collision between a Turkish Frigate, the *Kemal Reis*, and an elderly Greek warship, the *Limnos*. France has sent two Rafale fighter jets to Crete to support Greece, as well as two warships of its own, on what President Macron called a "temporary basis" and as a warning to Erdoğan, while Chancellor Merkel of Germany (currently holding



© Wikimedia Commons

Russian S-400 Triumf air defence missile

the Presidency of the EU's rotating European Council) has been trying to get the parties around a negotiating table. The maritime collision infuriated Erdoğan, who said that Turkey will retaliate if there are further incidents. Two people who must surely be laughing at all this brewhaha are Vladimir Putin, and Xi Jinping.

After all, all the countries involved in the fracas are members of NATO and when allied opponents fall out and bicker, the main beneficiaries must be Russia and China, along with a few anti-Western groups and nations. Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab, among others, must be splitting their sides. But it's not funny. Not in the least. It could disrupt the balance of global powers in and around the Mediterranean and lead to a conflict in which people will die.

It's not just Turkey and Greece, either. Cyprus and Egypt are also involved. Cyprus, to continue the classical theme, was supposedly the birthplace of Venus and is alleged to have given its name to the metal copper, which was mined there from ancient times. But it was the invasion in 1974 as Turkey sought to forestall an attempted coup d'état by Greek Cypriots wanting their island to become part of Greece that still rankles. The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is only recognised as an independent state by Turkey but is symbolic of the tensions between the two countries. It's hard to see how the issue could be resolved. Egypt comes into the story of the Trojan War, too, as the place where Paris and Helen were shipwrecked on their way home to Troy. Some versions argue that they saw out the war there, making it very difficult for King Priam to

return Helen to the angry Greeks (or Achaeans, to be more precise) since she was in another country and being held against her will. These days, Egypt has two large plants capable of turning natural gas straight from the undersea reserves into liquified natural gas (LNG) that can then be shipped to whichever country wants to buy it. But unlike previous squabbles (historical or possibly just literary) there's no sign of romance in the current troubles, no gods doing horrible things to ordinary mortals, nor handsome warriors skulking off with beautiful young women or building large wooden horses.

There is enough drama here, though, to keep a latter day Homer busy for months or years. The row over the exploitation of gas supplies has moved on from being an extension to the permanent disagreement over Northern Cyprus, because Turkey's drilling vessels have moved on from the Northern Cyprus coast to other parts of the sea. Turkey claims exploitation rights on the grounds that it sees the entire area as being its continental shelf and therefore part of its EEZ. As mentioned earlier, Greece sees all of its islands as also having their own EEZs, a claim strongly disputed by Ankara. If Greece's claims were to hold sway, Turkey's rights to exploit undersea resources would be restricted to a very small area centred on the Gulf of Antalya, which would clearly be unjust. In 2019, Turkey signed an EEZ agreement with the Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA) which, if implemented, would mean that the Greek island of Crete has no continental shelf of its own and therefore no territorial waters. I can recall paddling with my

wife in what's called the Libyan Sea, off Crete's southern coast, and I would have been miffed if a Turkish drilling ship had shown up to exploit resources there at that moment. Greece's claim to the seas around its many islands is based on the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, but Turkey is not a signatory. Turkey has agreed an EEZ with Greece, though, as well as one with Egypt. It's not an issue that's going away, either, as the Washington Post reports: "Moscow is eyeing a possible military base along the oil-rich shores of Libya. China is seeking investment deals across the region. Turkey is clashing with NATO partner Greece over drilling rights and militarized islands. Newly discovered offshore natural gas deposits have nations scrambling to stake their claims. Even the Trump administration on Wednesday partially lifted an arms embargo with Cyprus in what was widely interpreted as a shot across Turkey's bow."



Turkish Navy

The whole issue has become a big mess and a very dangerous one. After all, Turkish forces are also active in Iraq, where they are conducting large-scale military operations against the Kurdish Separatist group, the PKK. And as if that was not enough, Libya is involved, too, as is Syria. But Libya is, perhaps, the main reason (or one of the main reasons, anyway) for growing tensions. Libya is split into two opposing camps. In the west, the country is ruled from Tripoli by a government that has UN recognition. Turkey supports it, but France, Russia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, (UAE), - yet another player in this deadly game of musical chairs - support the group holding the

east of the country and ruled by Khalifa Haftar. France sees Haftar as a possible bulwark against Islamic extremists and its biggest oil company, Total, is a major investor in oilfields situated in areas he controls. Haftar almost took Tripoli in 2019 but was held back by the arrival of weapons, troops and Syrian mercenaries sent by Turkey to support the official government.

NOW READ ON...

The whole affair is such a mess that it really needs explanation, rather like in those "the story so far" sections that often precede an episode of an especially convoluted television soap opera. First of all, let's just set aside previous conflicts between Greece and Turkey, except for the issue of Cyprus, which is key to many of the subsequent difficulties. Back in 1974, the then Greek government, specifically the far-right 'Colonels' who had seized control in Greece, backed an attempted coup d'état in Cyprus, aimed as bringing it wholly within the control of Athens. This move, called enosis, was favoured by most Greek Cypriots after years of rule by Britain; they also voted to reject a peace plan put forward in 2004 by the then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, although Turkish Cypriots voted in favour. At the time of the coup, and fearing that Turkish citizens on Cyprus would get the same raw deal they had received on other predominantly Greek islands, Turkey launched an invasion and created a de facto independent state, albeit one only recognised by Turkey. There are citizens in both parts still smarting over properties lost in the other part. It is, of course, possible to cross that strictly controlled UN buffer zone (I've done that, with a German television team) but by and large, North Cyprus (approximately a third of the island) is noticeably less wealthy than the south. Both are friendly, however, despite the vast Turkish flag on a hillside overlooking the neighbours to the south. One thing I noticed there was that old Orthodox churches are still standing in Northern Cyprus, despite being out of use, while many of the mosques in the south have been demolished. Just as the internationally recognised government of Cyprus is not recognised by Turkey or North Cyprus, the government there - only recognised by Turkey - does not

acknowledge the government of the South. Meanwhile, much of the world seems to have forgotten just how awful Greece's 'colonels' were, running a military dictatorship in the home of what was and is the world's oldest democracy.

We move forward to a decade or so ago, when large reserves of oil and gas were discovered under the Eastern Mediterranean. Great news for many situated in the region (especially energy-starved Israel) but inevitably the touch-paper for an explosion, too.



Turkish research vessel Oruç Reis

It was not surprising, therefore, that Turkey's decision to send an exploration vessel into waters claimed by both countries (or all three, if you count Cyprus) would cause a tiff. In fact, it's being reported that the two NATO allies are closer to outright war now than at any time since the Cyprus invasion in 1974. Erdoğan's aggressive assertiveness is certainly not helping to keep the peace. He is to peace-keeping what a flame-thrower is to an ice cream sundae. Into this explosive mix add the agreement signed by Israel, Greece and Cyprus to create an East Mediterranean pipeline to exploit the gas and sell it to the EU, very deliberately excluding Turkey and Northern Cyprus. But drilling for gas or oil, especially under the sea, requires massive up-front investment, not to mention risk. Remember Deepwater Horizon? Or Piper Alpha in the North Sea? Or how about the Seacrest Drillship, in the South China Sea, off Thailand? Expensive in terms of human life and for the oil and gas companies and investors, just massively expensive.



Vladimir Putin and Recep Erdogan at the ceremony to launch TurkStream gas pipeline. The ceremony was also attended by President of Serbia Aleksandar Vucic and Prime Minister of Bulgaria Boyko Borissov

And in fact, Israel seems to be putting its faith in solar energy, of which it has a potentially huge supply. Furthermore, the 1,900 kilometre undersea pipeline required to transport the gas - all 10-billion cubic metres (BCM) of it would need to go at depths of up to three kilometres through an area famed for earthquakes. According to *The Economist*, most analysts reckon that the estimated cost of \$6-\$7-billion (€5-€6-billion) is optimistic. But Turkey needs foreign exchange to bulk out its falling currency, the Turkish lira, so it sees its activities as 'defensive', not aggressive.



Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu and German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas

But it is certainly expansionist, even introducing its currency into the parts of northern Syria under its control, despite the lira losing some 19% of its value since the start of this year. On the day of writing, it fell to 7.418 to the US dollar on morning trading in Istanbul, recovering slightly later. To cheer up the Turks, JPMorgan have started recommending that investors should use their greenbacks to buy

the lira, arguing that the pressure to sell may be coming to an end. The credit ratings agency Moody's, though, has said in a report that Ankara may need to revise its economic policies. "The policy mix that has fed the current economic situation," says the report, "credit-driven growth, monetary policy accommodation despite high inflation rates, and support to the domestic currency will likely be difficult to sustain for long if the external demand environment remains challenging." Another credit ratings agency, Fitch, lowered its outlook on Turkish sovereign debt from 'stable' to 'negative' in the light of the central bank's depleted foreign currency reserves and low interest rates, rating Turkey's debt at BB-, which means junk

Turkey's benchmark interest rate stands at 8.25%, while annual consumer inflation is 11.8%, resulting in real rates being in negative territory, like the central bank's foreign currency reserves.

Clemens Hoffmann, Lecturer in International Politics at the University of Stirling in Scotland, writing in 'The Conversation', reckons this whole business of sabre-rattling at sea is simply about getting a seat at the negotiating table for Erdoğan, although it seems possible his ambitions stretch further than that.

And as the Greek and Turkish navies conduct rival exercises in the disputed area, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu told journalists that Turkey was ready to "do whatever is necessary, without hesitation." Çavuşoğlu was speaking at a news conference with German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas,

who was visiting the two capitals in a bid to ease the standoff over territory and oil and gas exploration rights. Maas warned both sides to avoid any military confrontation, but neither seems to be paying much attention.

Aggression has already paid off for Turkey. Erdoğan persuaded General Haftar to halt his western advance in return for the UN-recognised Libyan government agreeing to Turkey's claims to establish EEZs in the Mediterranean, which, incidentally, ignore the existence of Crete and Rhodes and cutting across the proposed route for that pipeline.

UNLIKELY ALLIES

Turkey's unbridled aggression has had the strange side-effect of creating an unlikely alliance of countries wary of its ambitions. In Europe, France, Greece and Cyprus have been building friendships with Egypt, the UAE and Israel, which was once an ally of Turkey. Turkey has lost other friends, too.



Recep Erdogan and Vladimir Putin

Because it chose to buy Russia's S-400 air defence system, despite objections from NATO, Washington removed Turkey from its programme to buy the Lockheed Martin F-35 multi-rôle combat aircraft, which it is selling to the UAE, much to Israel's annoyance and concern. Mind you, Donald Trump has never shown much understanding of the complicated territorial issues in the Mediterranean. With a presidential election looming, his interest in the region is likely to dwindle further, despite Exxon-Mobile's interest in the waters off Cyprus. That serves to worsen the situation on the ground and increase the risk of adventurism by the parties involved. Meanwhile,

French President Emmanuel Macron was quick to visit Beirut following the ammonium nitrate explosion and to promise - together with the UAE - to co-fund repairs, beating Turkey to it. France now has military agreements with the UAE, Greece, Cyprus and Egypt, all keen to rein in Erdoğan. Germany, as usual, is playing peace-maker, trying to prevent the disagreements over rights and zones of influence from flaring up into something worse.



The Greek Minister of National Defence Nikolaos Panagiotopoulos at the launching ceremony of Guided Missile Fast Patrol Vessel no. "7"

Meanwhile, Greek naval vessels and aircraft have been conducting live fire exercises close to where Turkey's Oruç Reis is prospecting for hydrocarbons, to the south-east of Crete. But the Hellenic Armed Forces (HAF) are fairly small and are outgunned by Turkey. Writing in *Global Security Review*, Jack Dulgarian points out that the HAF are outmatched in terms of size, capabilities and technology. "I posit a scenario," he writes, "wherein Turkey decides to act on its territorial claims on the Greek islands of the Mediterranean Sea. In such a scenario, Ankara displays both the willingness and capability to carry out (through) a thorough examination of some of HAF's operational shortcomings, finally, what Athens can do to close the widening security gap with its hostile neighbors." Not much, it seems.

This brings us back to the tiny island of Kastellorizo, granted (along with the even tinier Strogelli and Ro) to Greece under the 1947 Treaty of Paris, having formerly been controlled by Mussolini's Italy. Greece wants an EEZ that is four times the area of the island itself, which Turkey opposes, saying that islands cannot impose EEZs. The



Eastern Mediterranean (EastMed) is a 1,900 kilometers long natural gas pipeline project to connect the gas reserves of the eastern Mediterranean to Greece

Turkish Foreign Ministry said: "The islands cannot influence the coastal projection of Turkey, the country with the longest coastline in the Eastern Mediterranean and that the islands on the opposite side of the middle line between two mainland areas cannot create maritime jurisdiction beyond their territorial waters."

That ignores the fact that Turkey signed a deal with the UN-recognised Libyan government in Tripoli to create an EEZ from Turkey's south coast to the north-east coast of Libya. It totally ignores the existence of Crete, a Greek island, bang in the middle. Greece called it "absurd", Egypt called it "illegal", but licences have been granted to Turkish Petroleum to drill in the Eastern Mediterranean, including just off the coasts of Crete and Rhodes. Turkey claims to be acting within the UN's Law of the Sea, even though it's one of the countries that has not signed the convention. At a press conference, Erdoğan promised that international efforts would not stop Turkey from conducting energy research in the disputed areas. "We will not back down in the face of sanctions and threats," he said. "We will never bow to banditry on our continental shelf." Not much room for compromise there. Both Greece and the EU have said the drilling is illegal, but Turkey isn't listening.

According to German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, however, there is a ray of hope. He has been trying through negotiation to improve relations and move towards talks. Maas has shuttled between Athens and Ankara in a bid to get the sides to cool the rhetoric

and re-enter direct talks. Afterwards, Maas conceded that the dispute had entered a "very critical" phase, but he added that "no one wants to solve this issue in a militaristic way, and there is a willingness for dialogue on both sides." That, I'm afraid, looks like wishful thinking. There's no obvious sign of a willingness for dialogue or compromise.

Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis has announced plans to extend his country's territorial waters almost twenty kilometres into the Ionian Sea, despite the appeals of Maas and others to calm the situation. Speaking to journalists, Erdoğan gave a forceful response. "Turkey will take what rightfully belongs to it in the Black Sea, the Aegean and the Mediterranean Sea," he said. "Just as we don't set our sights on anyone else's land, we won't make any concessions regarding what belongs to us. That's why we are determined to do whatever it takes, economically, politically and militarily."



Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis



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TAF Commander Yaşar Güler



WHAT THE PAPERS SAY

A leading Turkish newspaper, *Hürriyet Daily News*, has argued for a moratorium to give room for discussion, although that seems unlikely to happen, despite the best efforts of Germany. A German paper, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, says it's too late for appeals. "There is no sign of anyone who could de-escalate the tensions between the Turks and the Greeks," it wrote. "In recent decades this role has fallen to the Americans, but US President Trump is no mediator. So Europe is on its own. However, so far Turkey seems unimpressed by the military presence of the French and the diplomatic efforts of the Germans."

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas was forced to conclude in Athens and Ankara that appeals alone will not defuse this conflict. The EU must no longer shy away from the debate about sanctions against Ankara." Austria's *Die Presse* sees the biggest problem as Erdoğan himself. "The open provocations and sabre-rattling against Greece by means of Erdoğan's so-called research vessel," it writes, "show that neither Trump, nor China, nor Putin's Russia are currently the greatest threat to Europe. It is Erdoğan's Turkey that is blatantly challenging Europe in the Aegean, Syria and Libya. His message: you depend on us because of the refugees and you may soon also be militarily inferior to us. We are the new hegemonic superpower in the Mediterranean."

It's a somewhat bleak conclusion. Turkey's T24 news site, which has also claimed that Turkey is no longer a democracy, is not hopeful but sees other motives at work, beyond the issue of undersea energy reserves. "Between Turkey and Greece it is difficult, not to say impossible, to apply the concept of the continental shelf as it is defined in international law," writes the controversial and often-jailed playwright Aydin Engin. "What's more, the expression 'exclusive economic zone', which appears frequently in the recent agreement between Libya and Turkey, is a term from international maritime law that is difficult to implement in the Aegean and Eastern Mediterranean. All of these issues are creating uncertainty and causing difficult diplomatic discussions, unilateral action, tensions and empty threats between Greece and Turkey. And they act like fertiliser for nationalism in both countries. And both countries are using these debates to cover up internal problems and distract the people."

It remains a huge problem for the EU, as if it didn't already have enough of those. What with the United Kingdom quitting the bloc without a trade deal in sight, other groups pressing for Italy to leave as well, together with the continuing COVID-19 pandemic, the constant breaching of EU rules by Poland and Hungary and an aggressive Russia and China, it's hard to see what options are open to EU leaders in pouring oil on the troubled waters

of the Eastern Mediterranean and Aegean Sea. It may change after the US elections, especially if Joe Biden becomes president. He has shown a greater interest in and understanding of global affairs than the current incumbent. It's been suggested that Turkey's aggression is partly fuelled by the knowledge that Washington is unlikely to intervene with Trump at the helm. Poseidon seems to be not only shaking his trident but also laughing his socks off. According to Homer he and his brother Zeus were on opposing sides. Zeus wanted the Trojans to win while Poseidon favoured the Greeks, but one of the reasons the principal gods favoured a war at all was to rid the world of the demigods, who were a threat to them. There's always an underlying reason, if you look. Today, of course, it's not Trojans and Lycians against Achaeans and Cretans, it's Turks versus Greeks, and Erdoğan seems to be adhering to the advice in the *Iliad* (translation by Robert Fagles) that the Trojan Hector gave to Polydamas, who was concerned with bad omens: "Fight for your country - that is the best, the only omen!" But of course, the Trojans lost, if only through the trickery of the wooden horse. As Virgil wrote in his version of the Trojan War story, the *Aeneid*: "Do not trust the horse, Trojans. Whatever it is, I fear the Greeks, even when they bring gifts."

Anthony James



© Council of Europe

A wide view of the Security Council meeting to consider implementation of its resolution 2231 (2015) on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) regarding Iran's nuclear programme in 2017

HAWKS AND HANDSAWS

Mike Pompeo says Europe is “siding with the ayatollahs”

“I am but mad north-north-west: when the wind is southerly, I know a hawk from a handsaw”, says Hamlet in Shakespeare's eponymous play. He says it to his newly-arrived school friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to explain his supposed madness. The two have been summoned by his mother and his uncle, the king, in an attempt to ‘cure him’, but he knows they're only doing it for the money. He is really hinting that he sees the king as a hawk and his two deceitful friends as mere ‘handsaws’. The word ‘handsaw’ is supposedly an English dialect corruption of ‘heronshaw’ or ‘hernshaw’, derived from the Old French ‘heronçeau’. It means heron, an aquatic bird of the family ardeidae, and, although carnivorous, it restricts itself to fish, small reptiles, amphibians, insects and shellfish. It is nothing like a hawk, while Mike Pompeo, the US Secretary of State, is clearly a hawk through and through, predatory and red in tooth and claw. No-one could mistake him for a heron. Now he's got his talons out for European leaders, to rend them with his sharp beak, figuratively speaking. So far, no-one is really listening.



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Mike Pompeo, United States Secretary of State

Pompeo has accused Europe's leaders of “siding with the ayatollahs” because they have refused to back attempts by the United States to reimpose sanctions on Iran over its supposed nuclear ambitions. But the Europeans, together with Russia, China and a number of other countries have pointed out that Washington is no longer a party to the so-called Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPoA), set up under UN Security Council Resolution 2231,

which they are keen to preserve. President Donald Trump pulled the US out of the JCPoA in 2018 but claims that as one of the parties to the original agreement, he still has the right to invoke the clause that allows for sanctions to be reinstated (the term is ‘snapback’, since they would simply reimpose what was previously there). The other parties disagree, and they're not impressed by the letter Pompeo sent to Indonesia's UN ambassador, whose country currently holds the

rotating presidency of the Security Council, accusing Iran of, as Pompeo put it, “significant non-compliance with the terms set out in the 2015 agreement”. But France, Germany and the United Kingdom issued a joint statement in response to the letter, saying it was incompatible with their attempts to preserve the agreement. That hasn’t pleased Pompeo, who suggested that they privately agree with the US but lack the courage to follow through. He said their weakness is endangering the lives of people in Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon and Syria, as well as their own citizens, and those of the United States, of course.

The issue prompted an angry response from Russia after the US vetoed a proposed meeting proposed by Russia to discuss the issue. “Looks like there are two planets,” wrote Russia’s Deputy Ambassador to the UN, Dmitry Polyanskiy, in a Tweet. “A fictional dog-eats-dog one where the US pretends it can do whatever it wants without ‘cajoling’ anyone, breach and leave deals but still benefit from them, and another one where the rest of the world lives and where intl (*international*) law and diplomacy reign.”



Dmitry Polyanskiy, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations

The Chinese also objected, calling into question the legal grounds for acting on Pompeo’s letter. A spokesperson said that “it is nothing but a political show staged by the United States”. Now it all comes down to timing, with the Europeans hoping to keep the JCPOA in play in the hopes that it will be extended if Trump loses the presidential election to Joe Biden, who is more likely to retain it. The fear in Europe is that the reimposition of sanctions would cause Iran to repudiate the deal and withdraw completely, allowing Iranian scientists

to go ahead with building nuclear weapons. In point of fact, though, time may not be on the Europeans’ side. Under the terms of the JCPOA resolution and in accordance with the rules of the Security Council, the sanctions that existed before 2015 will be reimposed unless a motion is passed extending the sanctions relief. Any such move would undoubtedly be vetoed by the Americans, just as they did with Russia’s proposal.

RULES? WHAT RULES?

What of Mike Pompeo, then? A hawk, yes, but also one who flouts the accepted rules and conventions for a Secretary of State. Normally, someone in that position is not supposed to speak at a party political event, such as the Republican National Convention (RNC). Colin Powell, Secretary of State under George W. Bush, said he was not allowed to take part in political debates. “I am obliged not to participate in any way, shape, fashion, or form in parochial, political debates,” he is reported by CNN as having said. The same report also quoted The Washington Post’s long-term State Department reporter, Glen Kessler, as saying of Condoleezza Rice, Powell’s successor, “Off the record, she was keenly interested in the race, constantly checking the Real Clear Politics website. But she made sure she was far away from public partisanship.” Pompeo, after all, is America’s most senior diplomat, even if he seldom seems very diplomatic. As CNN notes, under the Hatch Act, “no federal employee is allowed to engage in overtly political activity”. Passed in 1939, the Hatch Act is designed to “Prevent Pernicious Political Activities” and is a US federal law. Its main provision prohibits civil service

employees in the executive branch of the federal government, with the exception of the president and vice president, from engaging in any forms of political activity.

That would most certainly exclude speaking at a party’s national convention. Pompeo would have had an excellent excuse to miss the event (quite apart from the legal restrictions) as he was in Jerusalem on official business at the time. His excuse was that he appeared at the RNC as a ‘private citizen’, despite being absent on State Department business. Private or not, it would appear to have been in breach of the Hatch Act. Obviously, Pompeo wants to see Trump re-elected, but he’s not supposed to go canvassing for him. If he’s prepared to break the rules so blatantly, the chances of him abiding by the normal conventions in his dealings with Tehran are slim. He accuses Tehran of breaking the law but blatantly does so himself.

It’s worth remembering, too, that Pompeo is partly motivated by his evangelical Christian beliefs. He has said he believes in ‘the rapture’ - the ascent into heaven of ‘true believers’ like himself, while the rest of us get to stoke Old Nick’s furnaces. In view of this, he believes that God gave the land of Israel to the Jews and is not opposed to Israel’s takeover of Palestinian lands. He is also opposed to any groups, American or otherwise, that permit or facilitate abortions. So he’s not very likely to favour Iran and its Shiite version of Islam. He’s certainly not in favour of allowing a regime such as Tehran’s to get its hands on nuclear weapons. But if he is hardly a believer in agnosticism and freedom not to have a religion, he’s not alone: neither is Iran. USA Today reports that: last month, Mohammad Salas, a member of the Iranian Gonabadi Sufi dervish community, which has been persecuted by the Iranian regime for its beliefs, “was convicted and sentenced to death on questionable grounds following violent clashes between security forces and Gonabadi dervishes. Mr. Salas and his supporters maintained his innocence, reportedly stating he had been tortured into a forced confession. Sadly, on June 18 the regime hanged Mr. Salas in the notorious Rajai Shahr Prison.” I once watched (but was not allowed to film) a performance by whirling dervishes



Members of the Security Council unanimously adopt a resolution imposing sanction on the Islamic Republic of Iran, at UN Headquarters in New York on March 24 2007

in Cappadocia. The whirling is seen as a religious act, an act of worship, and seemed to me totally unthreatening. Iran, however, has been cracking down on Gonabadi Sufi Muslims, hundreds of whom remain in Iranian prisons because of their beliefs. It's been reported that some have died at the hands of the security forces, while Iran's religious intolerance has also seen Sunni Muslims, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians and other religious minorities imprisoned for practising their faiths. None of them posed much of a threat to Iran's nuclear programme.

Unfortunately for Iran, it lacks a brilliant physicist like Werner Heisenberg, the head of Germany's research into nuclear physics, who some scientists believe deliberately delayed work by the Nazis to achieve a nuclear bomb. Within the Nazi party he was known as a "white Jew" - a gentile who acted like a Jew. We will never know for sure if he helped delay the work (he never admitted doing so), which is perhaps appropriate for the man who is famed for the Uncertainty Principle that bears his name, under which the momentum and position of a particle cannot be simultaneously known. However, he did work on nuclear research during the war which now, in retrospect, shows a number of errors which seem unlikely to have emanated from the man who was one of the first to realise that the mathematics of matrices could be used to solve problems in quantum mechanics. In conversations with fellow German scientists secretly recorded during their incarceration in England, he said he was glad Germany had lost the war and that

his atomic research had been aimed not at a bomb but at building a source of energy. The main reason Germany failed to develop a nuclear weapon was that its leaders refused to believe that Einstein, being Jewish, could possibly have been right. Nonsensical dogma seems to have saved the world!

But today's Iran lacks a Heisenberg and its scientists are still working on acquiring heavy water: (deuterium oxide, $2\text{H}_2\text{O}$ or D_2O). Deuterium is an isotope of hydrogen with a nucleus containing a neutron and a proton, while a normal (light) hydrogen atom consists of just a single proton. The presence of a neutron gives an atom of deuterium roughly twice the weight of a hydrogen atom. Physicists use centrifuges to create heavy water, which is not radioactive and is only about 10.6% heavier than ordinary water, rather than twice as heavy, because most of the weight of the molecule is in the oxygen atom. Even so, your body contains deuterium, equivalent to about 5 grams of heavy water.



The Ahmadi-Roshan uranium enrichment complex and Heavy Water and research reactors of Khondab and Arak in Iran

It is harmless. By November 2019, Iran had already breached the limits set down in the JCPOA for the accumulation of heavy water, which it needs for the reactor it is building, theoretically for energy. Experts believe (and the deal lays down) that 130 metric tonnes of heavy water are needed; it now has rather more than that. The International Atomic Energy Authority was informed that it had (at that time) 131.5 metric tonnes, hardly an excess to frighten the horses but enough to represent a snubbing of its nose at the United States. It had exceeded the limit before, in 2016.

WHO'S BREAKING THE RULES?

That is mainly what prompted Pompeo to lodge his complaint at the Security Council. "No country but the United States," he said, "has had the courage and conviction to put forward a resolution." Nor the inclination, he might have added but didn't. He continued: "Instead, they chose to side with the Ayatollahs." His action gave the so-called P5+1 group of countries - the US, Russia, China, France, the UK plus Germany - a limited time frame in which to reaffirm sanctions relief for Iran, but as a member of the Security Council, the US will be able to veto it if they do. The other countries of the group are concerned that scrapping the JCPOA altogether would give Tehran carte blanche to develop and sell other armaments to some rather dangerous regimes that are on Europe's doorstep. However, they're a long way from the United States, of course.



Iran nuclear agreement in Vienna in 2015

The actual accord has been looking distinctly wobbly ever since the US withdrew in 2018 and reinstated economic sanctions in an attempt to force Iran to agree to negotiate a rather different version, curbing its nuclear programme and preventing the development of ballistic missiles. Even so, the five-plus one (apart from the US, of course) have endeavoured to keep the deal in play, despite Germany, France and the UK launching the dispute mechanism in January because of alleged breaches by Iran. That could, of course, have led to a return of the sanctions the US is demanding, although Iran had also expressed dissatisfaction that the deal had not led to the economic benefits and trade deals promised for agreeing to it. “The JCPOA was a negotiated diplomatic solution to the peaceful settlement of an artificial crisis over the Islamic Republic of Iran’s peaceful nuclear program,” the Iranian government said in a statement, “which is comprehensive and final in nature. Iran entered the negotiations seriously, with a forward looking approach, and implemented the outcome of the negotiations in good faith. Transparency and voluntary confidence-building measures, beyond the obligations under the Safeguards Agreement, was part of the Islamic Republic of Iran’s efforts to reassure the international community of the exclusively peaceful nature of its nuclear program, in return it was supposed inhuman sanctions imposed under the pretext of the nuclear program be lifted. Unfortunately, not only the Islamic Republic of Iran did not enjoy the economic benefits of the JCPOA sanction lifting, but once again the opponents of the JCPOA actively based on unsubstantiated allegations on past safeguard issues that was supposed under the JCPOA once for all be closed, trying to fully destroy the achievements of the JCPOA.” Clearly, Tehran is rather annoyed. Of course, when the US withdrew in 2018 it reimposed its own sanctions straight away, which has made things tougher for Iran.

Since July, the IAEA has confirmed that Iran has surpassed its permitted stock of heavy water, enriched uranium and also of the purity to which it enriches uranium. It has also breached its ban on enriching at sites



U.S. President Donald Trump signs orders, imposing sanctions on Iran's supreme leader in Washington, DC, June 24, 2019

other than its main plant at Natanz and of using types of centrifuges for enrichment that are not approved in the agreement.

Pompeo has said that the Trump administration would “stop at nothing” to reimpose the embargo. Trump agrees, of course. “My administration will not allow this Iran nuclear situation to go on,” he told journalists in Washington. “They will never have a nuclear weapon.” Germany, France and the UK are determined to try and prevent the US from succeeding in getting a “snapback” of sanctions, arguing that by quitting the deal, Washington lost its right to browbeat the others. The EU’s Foreign Policy chief, Josep Borrell, agrees. He pointed out in a statement that the US had chosen to quit the agreement and he said that the US “cannot, therefore, be considered a participant state for the purposes of possible sanctions snapback foreseen by the resolution. As coordinator of the JCPOA Joint Commission, I will continue to do everything possible to ensure the preservation and full implementation of the JCPOA by all. The JCPOA remains a key pillar of global non-proliferation architecture, contributing to regional security.” One gets the feeling that Borrell and Pompeo, despite both being diplomats (in theory) would not get on very well. Only the US seems to believe that, despite pulling out of the agreement, it still has the right to instigate actions under it. Borrell is unequivocal in his opposition to the move. “As we approach the fifth anniversary of the JCPOA,” he said in early July, “I should like to take this opportunity to recall the importance of the agreement. The

JCPOA is an historic achievement for global nuclear non-proliferation contributing to regional and global security. I remain determined to continue working with the participants of the JCPOA and the international community to preserve it.”



Arak's Khondab nuclear research site in Iran

SPLITTING ATOMS AND ALLIES

Borrell has also repeated the widely-held view that having quit the agreement, the US should not have the right to use it for its own purposes. “As I have repeatedly recalled,” he pointed out, “the US unilaterally ceased participation in the JCPOA by presidential Memorandum on 8 May 2018 and has subsequently not participated in any JCPOA-related activities. It cannot, therefore, be considered to be a JCPOA participant State.” He reiterated the remarks in a telephone conversation with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, according to the EU’s external action service (EEAS). Talking to Lavrov, Borrell reaffirmed his determination to continue to work with Russia,

the other remaining participants of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and the international community, to preserve the agreement, which was concluded on 15 July 2015. Quoted on the German website Qantara.de, Borrell has reminded readers that "It is important to remember that the Iranian nuclear programme remains under tight scrutiny, with its peaceful nature being constantly verified. Thanks to the IAEA inspections regime, we continue to know a great deal about the Iranian nuclear programme, even under the current circumstances. If the agreement were to be lost, however, we would lose these insights and be set back by two decades". It was an IAEA inspection that revealed that surplus of enriched uranium and heavy water. On Pompeo's stated intention of restoring UN sanctions, the United States is completely on its own. All the other members of the Security Council are opposed. The Iranian government issued its own statement to mark the JCPOA's anniversary, quoted on the website of the United States Institute of Peace. "The international, legal, technical, strategic and political capital of this agreement has been deeply eroded on its fifth anniversary," it said, "due to the destructive and illegal actions of the United States. The remaining Participants of the JCPOA are aware of this and by consensus are of the view that the root cause for the current situation is the continuous violations of UNSCR 2231 and the JCPOA, and ultimately the unilateral withdrawal of the United States from an agreement reached after years of hard multilateral negotiations."



© Wikipedia

Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif

Iran's Foreign Minister, Javad Zarif, summed it up in a Tweet: "Today is 5th anniv. of the JCPOA—last decade's greatest diplomatic achievement—and reminder that US lawless behavior should not be the yardstick by which int'l norms are measured. US contempt for law & diplomacy places it in global disrepute & threatens global—and US—security."

If the US were to succeed in reimposing sanctions, it would force Iran to suspend all its activities related to nuclear enrichment and reprocessing, as well as banning imports of any materials that could conceivably be used in developing nuclear weapons or the required delivery systems. Tehran would almost certainly choose to ignore that and also to promptly forget the restrictions on further nuclear work that are also part of the deal. Sanctions would also be imposed on a number of individuals and entities. According to Mohammad Javad Zarif, Iran's Foreign Minister, in trying to get a snapback of sanctions after leaving the JCPOA, the US "has no leg to stand on", while Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister described the move as "absurd". The EU's external action service has said that a meeting of the Joint Commission of the JCPOA was due to take place in Vienna, Austria, on Sept. 1, attended by delegates from China, France, Germany, Russia, the United Kingdom and Iran. Not, you will note, the United States.

But the IAEA received a blunt refusal from Iran for its demand to inspect sites where it's thought that 'undeclared' nuclear materials may be being stored. That sort of thing certainly doesn't help the UN's doves (or herons?) but plays into the hands of its hawks. On the fifth anniversary of the JCPOA, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani vowed that the Islamic Republic "will never surrender to the pressure of major world powers, especially the United States." Not much ambivalence there. However, surrender they did: Iran has now agreed to let the IAEA inspectors into the sites at Karaj and Isfahan, following a personal visit to Tehran by the IAEA's Director General, Rafael Grossi. It's likely to make the other members of the UN Security Council (not the US, of course) more determined than ever to preserve the JCPOA. Iran and the IAEA issued a joint statement afterwards that Iran

was "voluntarily" providing access to the two sites specified and that they had agreed a timetable for the inspection.

HEAVY WATER, STORMY WATERS

Why does heavy water matter? Discovered in 1931 after the isolation of deuterium, it was later found to be useful in moderating neutrons in certain types of nuclear reactors. It's used to slow down neutrons to encourage them to react with uranium-235, which is fissile (capable of nuclear fission), rather than with uranium-238, which is far less so. Heavy water reactors do not require enriched uranium, but they do provide an easily-obtained source of weapons-grade plutonium. Heavy water reactors are more cost efficient than those using ordinary water because they don't need the uranium to be enriched - heavy water is cheaper to obtain than enriched uranium - but they do need to have their fuel changed frequently, at which point nuclear reprocessing can produce the weapons-grade plutonium by extracting it from the natural uranium that has been irradiated in the reactor. Since Iran had been refusing to permit inspections of its alleged storage facilities, there was some concern as to whether or not Tehran is collecting and stockpiling plutonium for possible future weapons. That's why over-producing heavy water is causing Washington more concern that Iran's uranium enrichment activities or its dodgy centrifuges. Nuclear power plants using ordinary water together with enriched uranium are not a good source of the ingredients needed for nuclear weapons.

So, is Iran secretly building nuclear weapons and the means of delivery? That's what everyone would like to know, and Tehran won't tell us. In April 2018, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu claimed that the seizure of more than 100,000 documents from what he called "Iran's secret atomic archives" by Israeli intelligence proved that Iran had been seeking to build five 10-kiloton nuclear warheads under a programme that ended in 2003. It sounds as if the Iranian research is at a relatively early stage, even now, although Netanyahu argued that Iran's secrecy about the programme proved that it had engaged

in negotiating the JCPoA “under false pretences”, while others said it proved the importance of the deal in keeping a lid on further advances through the IAEA inspections.



© Leader.ir

Sayyid Ali Hosseini Khamenei, Supreme Leader of Iran

In fact, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, Iran's Supreme Leader, issued a fatwa against the acquisition, development or use of nuclear weapons, which he said were “anti-Islamic”. He is supposed to have declared the fatwa in the 1990s, although it was only made public in October 2003. Many experts doubt if he ever said it, although the Ayatollah's own website spells it out in Farsi (with translations): “We believe that besides nuclear weapons, other types of weapons of mass destruction, such as chemical and biological weapons also pose a serious threat to humanity. The Iranian nation, which is itself a victim of chemical weapons, feels more than any other nation the danger that is caused by the production and stockpiling of such weapons and is prepared to make use of all of its facilities to counter such threats. We consider the use of such weapons as haraam (forbidden by the Qu'ran) and believe that it is everyone's duty to make efforts to secure humanity against this great disaster.” However, he is no admirer of the United States or its current president. Speaking live on Iranian television on the occasion of Eid al-Adha (31 July, 2020), he drew the attention of Iranians to the “large-scale demonstrations against injustice”, witnessed in the US over recent months. “The main enemy of the US government,” he said, “is not the Islamic Republic of Iran. Rather, it is the people of that country, who will

ultimately destroy the current political system in the US.” Wishful thinking, I am inclined to think. He also said that America's problems are far worse than those of Iran, pointing out “astonishing class inequalities, racial discrimination, economic problems and a high rate of unemployment, problems in managing the issue of the Coronavirus, and the poor management of social issues - which have led to many cases of cruelty, murder and torture by the US police - are some of these problems. Today, the US is abhorred and isolated throughout the world.” A slight overstatement, perhaps, and it's worth remembering that although he's Iran's Supreme Leader, he's not the man in charge: the country is effectively ruled by its largely conservative Council of Guardians. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei did go on to suggest that negotiating with the US could be harmful and probably pointless: “This is what the US is saying today. ‘You should completely abandon your nuclear industry. You should decrease your defence and missile capabilities to one tenth of what they are at the present time, and you should become defenceless. You should also abandon your authority in the region and let go of it forever.’ If we agree to abandon these things, they will not be satisfied and will ask for new things.” I think that means that “haraam” applies only to nuclear weapons, not to nuclear power.



© Iranpress

General Qassem Soleimani Iranian government poster

But of course, back in January 2020, Iran did fire 22 missiles at a base in Iraq housing US and allied troops, in response to the US killing General Qassem Soleimani, described as head of the Quds force, an elite part of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard, who answered directly to the Supreme Leader. He had been held responsible by some countries, including the US, UK and Israel, for destabilising various politico-religious groups in the region, including Yemen's Houthis, the Shia militia in Iraq and Hizbollah in Lebanon. But as one-time British Prime Minister Harold Wilson once famously said, a week is a long time in politics. Several months, therefore, is a veritable lifetime. And the UN Security Council has soundly rejected the United States' request to reimpose sanctions on Iran. Indonesia, which currently holds the presidency, informed the United States that there was “no consensus” for a “snapback” of sanctions, prompting an angry response from Kelly Craft, the US envoy to the UN. She told the Security Council: “Let me just make it really, really clear: the Trump administration has no fear in standing in limited company on this matter. I only regret that other members of this council have lost their way and now find themselves standing in the company of terrorists.”

There's no sign of Pompeo and Ayatollah Ali Khamenei kissing and making up any time soon. Their differences remain and both believe inevitably that God is on their side, as protagonists have believed since conflicts between nations or ethnic groups first began. Since both men are so deeply religious, you might be excused for thinking there should be some common ground, but their respective concepts of faith remain as far apart as ever. Hawks and handsaws apart, the issue does not end as Hamlet said his story did. The rest is not silence, sadly, but a clamorous cacophony of angry words of conflict that could easily erupt into the real thing.

Tobias Bowman-Grant



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EXOMARS TO TAKE OFF FOR THE RED PLANET IN 2022

The European Space Agency (ESA) and the Roscosmos Space Corporation have decided to postpone the launch of the second ExoMars mission to study the Red Planet to 2022. The joint ESA-Roscosmos project team evaluated all the activities needed for an authorisation to launch, in order to analyse the risks and schedule. With due consideration of the recommendations provided by European and Russian Inspectors General, ExoMars experts have concluded that tests necessary to make all components of the spacecraft fit for the Mars adventure need more time to complete.



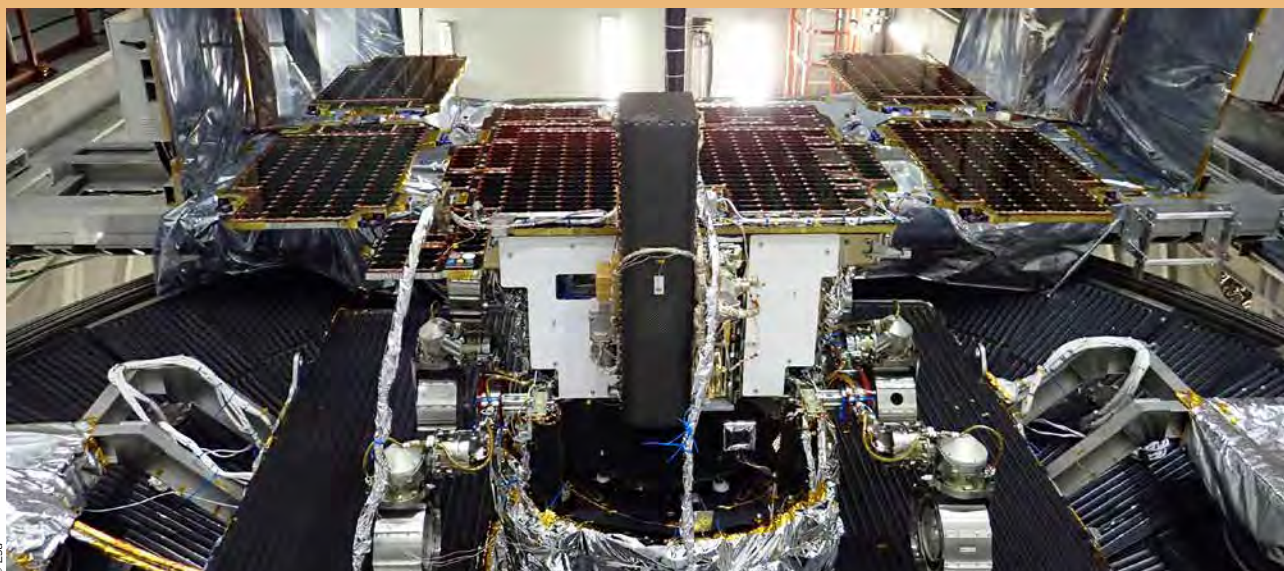
ExoMars parachute extraction tests

The primary goal of the mission is to determine if there has ever been life on Mars, and to better understand the history of water on the planet. The ExoMars rover, named Rosalind Franklin, includes a drill to access the sub-surface of Mars as well as a miniature life-search laboratory kept within an ultra-clean zone.

In the frame of a dedicated meeting, ESA and Roscosmos heads Jan Wörner and Dmitry Rogozin agreed that further tests to the spacecraft with the final hardware and software are needed. In addition, the parties had to recognise that the final phase of ExoMars activities are compromised by the general aggravation of the epidemiological situation in European countries.



Artist's impression of the ExoMars 2020 rover (foreground), surface science platform (background) and the Trace Gas Orbiter (top), not to scale



© Esa

ExoMars Rover

"We have made a difficult but well-weighed decision to postpone the launch to 2022. It is driven primarily by the need to maximise the robustness of all ExoMars systems as well as *force majeure* circumstances related to exacerbation of the epidemiological situation in Europe which left our experts practically no possibility to proceed with travels to partner industries. I am confident that the steps that we and our European colleagues are taking to ensure mission success will be justified and will unquestionably bring solely positive results for the mission implementation," said Roscosmos Director General Dmitry Rogozin.



© Wikipedia

Roscosmos Director General Dmitry Rogozin

"We want to make ourselves 100% sure of a successful mission. We cannot allow ourselves any margin of error. More verification activities will ensure a safe trip and the best scientific results on Mars," said ESA Director General Jan Wörner.



ESA Director General Johann-Dietrich Wörner

"I want to thank the teams in industry that have been working around the clock for nearly a year to complete assembly and environmental testing of the whole spacecraft. We are very much satisfied of the work that has gone into making a unique project a reality and we have a solid body of knowledge to complete the remaining work as quickly as possible."

To date, all flight hardware needed for the launch of ExoMars has been integrated in the spacecraft. The Kazachok landing platform is fully equipped with thirteen scientific instruments, and the Rosalind Franklin rover with its nine instruments recently passed final thermal and vacuum tests in France.

The latest ExoMars parachutes dynamic extraction tests have been completed successfully at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, and the main parachutes are ready for the two final high-altitude drop tests in March in Oregon, US.

The descent module has been undergoing propulsion system qualification in the past month. The ExoMars descent module and landing platform have been undergoing environmental testing in Cannes, France, to confirm the spacecraft is ready to endure the harsh conditions of space on its journey to Mars.

The new schedule foresees a launch between August and October 2022. Celestial mechanics define that only relatively short launch windows (10 days each) every two years exist in which Mars can be reached from Earth.

ExoMars will be the first mission to search for signs of life at depths up to two metres below the martian surface, where biological signatures of life may be uniquely well preserved.

ABOUT EXOMARS

The ExoMars programme is a joint endeavour between the Roscosmos State Corporation and ESA. Apart from the 2022 mission, it includes the Trace Gas Orbiter launched in 2016. The TGO is already both delivering important scientific results obtained by its own Russian and European science instruments and relaying data from NASA's Curiosity Mars rover and InSight lander. The module will also relay the data from the ExoMars 2022 mission once it arrives at Mars.

TIMELESS CHIC

Standout Fashion and Beauty trends

By Clara Bauman

Welcome September !

You can say goodbye to the summer holidays without too much nostalgia ; this autumn's trends have many plus factors to make us happy. Here they are:

The colour pink goes into extra time

Pastels, candy colours and other shades of pink livened up summer 2020's trends.

Here's some good news: we can go for these same colours in our autumn wardrobe, but with warmer or more captivating textures.



© americanvintage-store

Short-sleeves, boat collar fitted jumper. With 78% of alpaca, it's the ideal item against the first shivers that come with the cooler evenings. (americanvintage-store.com)



© Twinset

Two-button closure, pointy lapels, welt side pockets and inner lining for this must-have item that matches skirts as well as trousers. (twinset.com)



© Scotch & Soda

Silky, hidden button shirt. (scotch-soda.com)

«Green» blue jeans

For the «back to school» season, the top of the class is the Levi's WellThread™ High Loose Jeans. And for a simple reason: other than its flattering, high-waisted cut, this denim is part of the trendsetting «Green Fashion». It is composed of 20% recycled denim, 20% of long-lasting viscose and 60% of organic cotton.

In addition to curbing landfill waste, this recycled denim helps decrease water and chemical usage and reduce the CO² footprint. And once your jeans have truly bitten the dust, you can recycle them, starting the process over again.



© Levi's

(levi.com)



© L'Oréal Professionnel

(lorealprofessionnel.com)

Luxury treatment for long hair

After the sand, the summer heat and all that sun, the hair – especially long hair – has probably suffered agonies. At the end of summer it's dry and damaged.

But there's a miracle solution! Pro Longer, the latest range to help prevent breakage and thinning in long hair.

Developed by L'Oréal Professionnel Laboratoires, these haircare products (shampoos, conditioners, masks, serums...) are infused with patented technology «Filler A 100» and amino acids. Hair is plumped and filled from within and protected from the outside.

TIMELESS CHIC

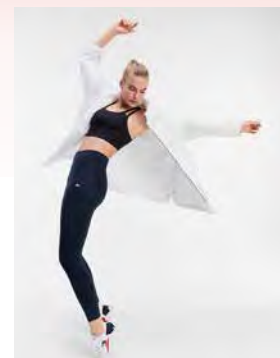
Standout Fashion and Beauty trends

By Clara Bauman

Sporty and trendy go together

A glance at the Tommy Hilfiger « Sport » collection is enough to convince the laziest among us to start to workout again. We love the iconic three-colour logo of the brand (blue, white and red) just as much as the clean cuts of the T-shirts, leggings, joggers, hoodies and bras.

The hardest part isn't moving, but choosing !



© Tommy Hilfiger

(uk.tommy.com)

Turn «Rose» with Nina Ricci

If you love floral and fruity fragrances, you won't resist «Rose»! After the "Rouge" edition (in 2019) this new fragrance by Nina Ricci is a delicate and refreshing scent that comes in its mythical apple-shaped bottle, this time in ultra-glossy pink.

For the master perfumer, Olivier Cresp, the desire to create a 'condensed optimism' is revealed in his choice of ingredients:

Top: bergamot, lemon, pear

Heart: orange blossom, jasmine, neroli.

Base: musk, cedar.

Enjoy !

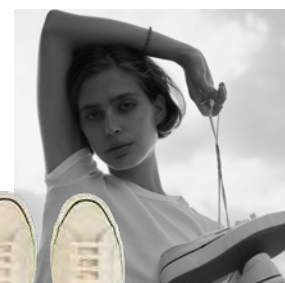
© Nina Ricci



(ninaricci.com)

Organic sneakers

At a time when fashion is more and more «green» and «sustainable oriented», the Italian brand Superga is among the leaders. So, it is particularly pleasing to reveal its iconic sneaker - the 2750 - in a unique blend of 60% organic cotton and 40% natural hemp, while the eyelets and shoelaces are entirely made of organic cotton sourced in Vietnam, according to the internationally recognised organic farming standards. As for the sole, its quality rubber is natural and manually extracted from the rubber tree forests of Vietnam, Malaysia and Thailand.



© Superga

(superga.com)



© Samsøe & Samsøe



(samsøe.com)

The Scandinavian touch

There is no doubt, the Danish brand Samsøe & Samsøe is riding high. We love its simple and elegant design, as well as its comfort and ethical quality.

Could this off-white jumpsuit - to enhance our summer tan - with a casual, yet elegant cut become our impulse buy of the season? By way of accessories: a small belt bag and sandals (unquestionably, the top footwear of the year).

BOOKS

**AGENT SONYA***By Ben Macintyre***MOSCOW'S MOST DARING WARTIME SPY**

The “master storyteller” (*San Francisco Chronicle*) behind the *New York Times* bestseller *The Spy and the Traitor* uncovers the true story behind the Cold War's most intrepid female spy.

In 1942, in a quiet village in the leafy English Cotswolds, a thin, elegant woman lived in a small cottage with her three children and her husband, who worked as a machinist nearby. Ursula Burton was friendly but reserved, and spoke English with

a slight foreign accent. By all accounts, she seemed to be living a simple, unassuming life. Her neighbors in the village knew little about her. They didn't know that she was a high-ranking Soviet intelligence officer. They didn't know that her husband was also a spy, or that she was running powerful agents across Europe. Behind the facade of her picturesque life, Burton was a dedicated Communist, a Soviet colonel, and a veteran agent, gathering the scientific secrets that would enable the Soviet Union to build the bomb.

This true-life spy story is a masterpiece about the woman code-named “Sonya.” Over the course of her career, she was hunted by the Chinese, the Japanese, the Nazis, MI5, MI6, and the FBI—and she evaded them all. Her story reflects the great ideological clash of the twentieth century—between Communism, Fascism, and Western democracy—and casts new light on the spy battles and shifting allegiances of our own times. With unparalleled access to Sonya's diaries and correspondence and never-before-seen information on her clandestine activities, Ben Macintyre has conjured a page-turning history of a legendary secret agent, a woman who influenced the course of the Cold War and helped plunge the world into a decades-long standoff between nuclear superpowers.

**THE FIGHT FOR HISTORY***By Tim Cook***75 YEARS OF FORGETTING, REMEMBERING, AND REMAKING CANADA'S SECOND WORLD WAR**

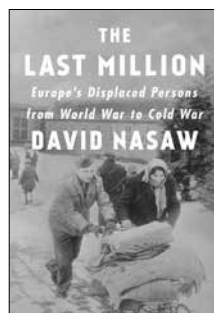
A masterful telling of the way World War Two has been remembered, forgotten, and remade by Canada over seventy-five years.

The Second World War shaped modern Canada. It led to the country's emergence as a middle power on the world stage; the rise of the welfare state; industrialization, urbanization, and population growth. After the war, Canada increasingly

turned toward the United States in matters of trade, security, and popular culture, which then sparked a desire to strengthen Canadian nationalism from the threat of American hegemony.

The Fight for History examines how Canadians framed and reframed the war experience over time. Just as the importance of the battle of Vimy Ridge to Canadians rose, fell, and rose again over a 100-year period, the meaning of Canada's Second World War followed a similar pattern. But the Second World War's relevance to Canada led to conflict between veterans and others in society—more so than in the previous war—as well as a more rapid diminishment of its significance.

By the end of the 20th century, Canada's experiences in the war were largely framed as a series of disasters. Canadians seemed to want to talk only of the defeats at Hong Kong and Dieppe or the racially driven policy of the forced relocation of Japanese-Canadians. In the history books and media, there was little discussion of Canada's crucial role in the Battle of the Atlantic, the success of its armies in Italy and other parts of Europe, or the massive contribution of war materials made on the home front. No other victorious nation underwent this bizarre reframing of the war, remaking victories into defeats. The Fight for History is about the efforts to restore a more balanced portrait of Canada's contribution in the global conflict. This is the story of how Canada has talked about the war in the past, how we tried to bury it, and how it was restored. This is the history of a constellation of changing ideas, with many historical twists and turns, and a series of fascinating actors and events.

**THE LAST MILLION***By David Nasaw***EUROPE'S DISPLACED PERSONS FROM WORLD WAR TO COLD WAR**

From bestselling author David Nasaw, a sweeping new history of the one million refugees left behind in Germany after WWII

In May 1945, German forces surrendered to the Allied powers, putting an end to World War II in Europe. But the aftershocks of global military conflict did not cease with the German capitulation. Millions of lost and homeless concentration camp survivors, POWs, slave

laborers, political prisoners, and Nazi collaborators in flight from the Red Army overwhelmed Germany, a nation in ruins. British and American soldiers gathered the malnourished and desperate refugees and attempted to repatriate them. But after exhaustive efforts, there remained more than a million displaced persons left behind in Germany: Jews, Poles, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, and other Eastern Europeans who refused to go home or had no homes to return to. The Last Million would spend the next three to five years in displaced persons camps, temporary homelands in exile, divided by nationality, with their own police forces, churches and synagogues, schools, newspapers, theaters, and infirmaries.

The international community could not agree on the fate of the Last Million, and after a year of debate and inaction, the International Refugee Organization was created to resettle them in lands suffering from postwar labor shortages. But no nations were willing to accept the 200,000 to 250,000 Jewish men, women, and children who remained trapped in Germany. In 1948, the United States, among the last countries to accept refugees for resettlement, finally passed a displaced persons bill. With Cold War fears supplanting memories of World War II atrocities, the bill granted the vast majority of visas to those who were reliably anti-Communist, including thousands of former Nazi collaborators and war criminals, while severely limiting the entry of Jews, who were suspected of being Communist sympathizers or agents because they had been recent residents of Soviet-dominated Poland. Only after the controversial partition of Palestine and Israel's declaration of independence were the remaining Jewish survivors able to leave their displaced persons camps in Germany. A masterwork from acclaimed historian David Nasaw, *The Last Million* tells the gripping yet until now largely hidden story of postwar displacement and statelessness. By 1952, the Last Million were scattered around the world. As they crossed from their broken past into an unknowable future, they carried with them their wounds, their fears, their hope, and their secrets. Here for the first time, Nasaw illuminates their incredible history and, with profound contemporary resonance, shows us that it is our history as well.

**ON ALL FRONTS***By Clarissa Ward***THE EDUCATION OF A JOURNALIST**

“*On All Fronts* takes the reader on a riveting journey of storytelling. . . From Russia to China to Syria, [she] navigate[s] the most intense of human experiences while finding the tools to stay emotional!”—Lynsey Addario, author of *It's What I Do: A Photographer's Life of Love and War*

The recipient of multiple Peabody and Murrow awards, Clarissa Ward is a world-renowned conflict reporter. In this strange age of crisis where there really is no front line, she has moved from one hot zone to the next. With multiple assignments in Syria, Egypt, and Afghanistan, Ward, who speaks seven languages, has been based in Baghdad, Beirut, Beijing, and Moscow. She has seen and documented the violent remaking of the world at close range. With her deep empathy, Ward finds a way to tell the hardest stories. *On All Fronts* is the riveting account of Ward's singular career and of journalism in this age of extremism.

Following a privileged but lonely childhood, Ward found her calling as an international war correspondent in the aftermath of 9/11. From her early days in the field, she was embedding with marines at the height of the Iraq War and was soon on assignment all over the globe. But nowhere does Ward make her mark more than in war-torn Syria, which she has covered extensively with courage and compassion. From her multiple stints entrenched with Syrian rebels to her deep investigations into the Western extremists who are drawn to ISIS, Ward has covered Bashar al-Assad's reign of terror without fear. In 2018, Ward rose to new heights at CNN and had a son. Suddenly, she was doing this hardest of jobs with a whole new perspective.

On All Fronts is the unforgettable story of one extraordinary journalist—and of a changing world.

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