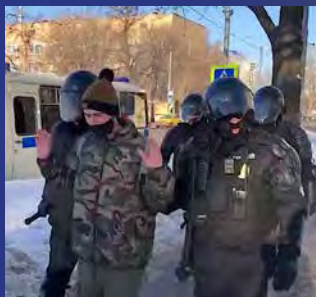


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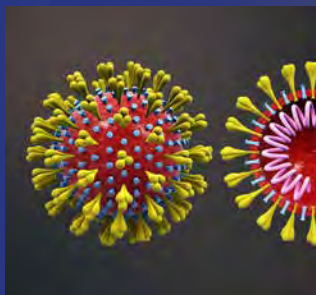
Diplomatic

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THE RUGGED
RUSSIAN BEAR,
BUT SCARIER

Putin defies the world



V IS FOR VIRUS,
VACCINE,
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Rows about preventative
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THE PHILANTHROPIC BOGEYMAN

How the far-right loathes George Soros

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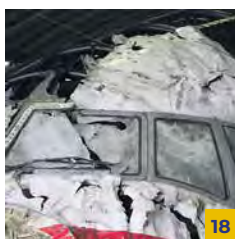


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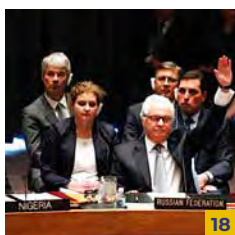


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Nikola Hendrickx



Vladimir Putin with Kremlin delegation

THE RUGGED RUSSIAN BEAR, BUT SCARIER

Putin defies the world

“Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,” shouts Shakespeare’s defiant Macbeth as the blood-soaked ghost of Banquo arrives to haunt his dinner party, although it remains invisible to Lady Macbeth and their guests. It’s interesting that even then “the rugged Russian bear” was the scariest thing Shakespeare could imagine for Macbeth to call upon as a preferable foe to his unwelcome spectral visitor. That was in or just before 1606, with Banquo’s descendants seemingly surviving because the newly crowned James I of England (who was also James VI of Scotland) believed himself to be a descendent of Macbeth’s former friend and ultimately victim. Rather like some of Putin’s ambitious apparatchiks today, Shakespeare was desperately sucking up to the new monarch who was looking favourably on his company of actors, and that is why, when he returns to the three witches with which the notorious “Scottish Play” begins, he is shown Banquo’s descendants in succession. “I’ll see no more,” he says, “and yet the eighth appears who bears a glass which shows me many more: and

some I see that two-fold balls and treble sceptres carry.” Shakespeare is, of course, making reference to James being king of two kingdoms, then three, creating a United Kingdom. Putin, on the other hand, is also keen to bring back under his control the lands there were once part of the old Soviet Union. Shakespeare’s Macbeth is a man of action, more than willing to face armed and vicious enemies (even Russian bears) although he struggles a bit when it comes to intellectual activity.

But this was all more than four hundred years ago; do we still have to fear “the rugged Russian bear”? Well yes, so it seems. Indeed, looking at the suspicious demise or incarceration of so many of Putin’s enemies brings to mind another quote from ‘the Scottish play’: “I am in blood stepped in so far that, should I wade no more, returning were as tedious as go o’er.” We all know, of course, that Shakespeare’s Macbeth comes to a sticky end, his success apparently having been due to the horrid machinations of the ‘three weird sisters’, which was again a sop

to King James VI, a man fascinated by witches. In 1597 he even wrote a book about it called *Daemonology* which is still available today. It may explain why he burned so many Scottish citizens, most of them women. I think he may have had a bit of a personal problem there that could have been better treated with cold showers and a cross-country run in the heather.

But today let’s concentrate on the real ‘rugged Russian bear’: Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin, President of the Russian Federation and likely to stay that way for the foreseeable future because any potential rivals that appear on the scene and gain some popularity, however small, have a habit of dying unexpectedly. The latest contender, anti-corruption campaigner Alexei Navalny, who has survived a poison attempt with a Russian military-grade nerve agent, owes his life to emergency treatment in Germany. Even so, he was thrown into prison the moment he disembarked on Russian soil. Putin-observers would have seen this as inevitable and it will inevitably lead to further action against Russia.



© Wikipedia

Alexei Navalny

In the European Parliament, MEPs voted by a massive majority to impose immediate sanctions on members of Putin's inner circle, especially those involved in Navalny's arrest and imprisonment. Furthermore, any Russian wealth whose origin is not clearly legitimate and acquired honestly is not to be welcomed in the European Union, while perhaps most embarrassingly for Putin, all work on the nearly completed Nord Stream 2 pipeline is to stop immediately and for good. "The arrest of Mr. Navalny and its modalities," said German Christian Democrat MEP David McAllister, "clearly contravenes international law and the Russian constitution. I urge the authorities in Moscow to release him and his supporters immediately."

Not much chance of that; Putin's ears are closed. No amount of witchcraft could have so immured him to the idea of tolerance or mercy. As far as his opponents are concerned, this particular rugged Russian bear only does to them what real bears traditionally do in the woods, so we should not be surprised. European Union foreign ministers, however, decided to put off imposing extra

restrictions on Moscow, despite the arrests of some 3,500 people during demonstrations in which tens of thousands had participated. The ministers pointed out that demonstrations are permitted under Russia's constitution, but that is only if they have prior approval from the authorities, which they clearly have not. Even so, there can be no excuse for their brutal suppression. Except, of course, that Putin cannot accept criticism. He and his minions can dish it out, though. Take the case of Josep Borrell, for instance, the European Union's accident-prone head of foreign policy. Last year he was accused of toning down an op-ed by ambassadors wherein it was suggested that the first case of COVID-19 arose in China (as far as we're all aware, it did), albeit without in any way blaming Beijing for it. China objected, however, and it was alleged that Borrell authorised the bowdlerisation of the text. The European Parliament duly summoned him to a hearing to explain himself. It was not the most brilliant response. "I was not even aware of what was happening," he told MEPs, somewhat unconvincingly. "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 24, 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.'" From a purely personal perspective, I thought he looked shifty. So did several MEPs. Even so, it was, at worst, a case of covering up a minor act of kow-towing to Beijing and in today's diplomatic world, many others have done it, too. And China is not the worst offender in the SARS-CoV-2 disinformation business; that prize goes to Russia, which even funds a disinformation website in German, claiming COVID-19 doesn't exist (it does, of course). But Borrell, unwisely, chose to go there, against the advice of Poland and the Baltic States, who know from bitter experience what Russia is like. While he was there, Borrell apparently never asked to visit Alexei Navalny, and stood next to Russian Foreign minister Sergey Lavrov while he denounced the EU

as "an unreliable partner" (unlike the ever-truthful, ever-innocent Russia, one assumes). In the speech, Lavrov mocked Borrell's opposition to Catalan independence, talking of the Spanish government's ill treatment of Catalan separatist politicians. While Borrell was there, possibly squirming with embarrassment, news surfaced that Russia had expelled German, Swedish and Polish diplomats for attending pro-Navalny rallies. Perhaps Borrell now understands better the opposition to his visit. As an illuminating example of public humiliation for the EU, it's hard to imagine anything much worse. Naturally, there are calls for Borrell's scalp and by the time this edition of EDM goes to press, he may be gone. Yes, the EU's foreign policy has to be diplomatic, but not groveling, surely? And perhaps a little more sure-footed?

CURING THE INCURABLE?

At the January session of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly there was a proposal to refuse to ratify the credentials of Russian members. It was made by the head of the Ukrainian delegation, Mariia Mezentseva, backed by more than thirty other members of the Assembly, as required by the Rules of Procedure. The challenge was made under Rule 8, which allows such a challenge because of "serious violation of the basic principles of the Council of Europe" and "persistent failure to honour obligations and commitments and lack of co-operation in the Assembly's monitoring procedure". The challenge was, however, defeated, although a report was adopted that was highly critical of Putin's Russia. The Assembly adopted a report by Stefan Schennach, a Social Democrat member of Austria's Federal Council. I asked him if it had been the right decision to allow Russian delegates



David McAllister, Chair of the EP-UK Coordination Group



© Kharkiv National University

Maria Mezentseva

to take their seats. “Yes,” he said, emphatically, “this is my way and I continued the way we are working for more than two years, two and a half years. It is a stony way, and I brought in one paragraph that my hope is not so very big, but we have no other chance in the dialogue.”

Basically, Schennach is convinced that the rest of world must continue to talk to Russia, however hopeless it may seem to bring about a change of direction on the part of the Kremlin. His report committed the Assembly to dialogue, arguing that it still provides a platform where the Russian delegation could be “held accountable on the basis of the Council of Europe’s values and principles”. However, the report also listed several concerns, such as a constitutional provision that enables Russia’s Constitutional Court to declare a European Court of Human Rights judgement “non-executable”, so that the judgement can be simply ignored if it doesn’t please Putin and his cronies. It also takes issue with a new law that makes it impossible to solve the issue with Crimea in line with international law. It is, furthermore, highly critical of the crackdown on civil society, critical journalists and on the activities of NGOs, as well as laws limiting the human rights of members of the LGBTI community. Schennach is also highly critical of the lack of any serious investigation by Russian authorities into the poisoning of Navalny, as well as the violent reaction of police to peaceful demonstrations in Navalny’s favour. Putin’s response to criticism of his severity is always to become more severe.

As the pro-Navalny protests were brutally put down, pictures of the vicious beatings by police, shot on mobile phones by demonstrators, appeared first on social media and from there onto the world’s television screens. In response, the Kremlin threatened the social media outlets with fines for encouraging under-18s to demonstrate, which is illegal under Russian law. Nevertheless, opposition to Putin seems to be growing, possibly quite slowly, and thus engendering ever more stringent laws to stop it. Perhaps Putin should remember what the great Russian playwright Anton Chekhov wrote in *The Cherry Orchard* in 1904: “If a lot of cures are suggested for a disease, it means that the disease



Arrested pro-Navalny protester

is incurable.” Perhaps opposition to Putin’s Tsar-like reign is just one of those unstoppable things.

Certainly, Putin’s neighbours are getting increasingly angry over his actions. “The arrest on live TV of the Russian opposition [leader] Alexei Navalny on his return to Moscow last Sunday is unacceptable,” Borrell complained while addressing a plenary session of the European Parliament (and safely nowhere near Moscow), “both to Europe and to the international community, who live in the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.” Borrell issued a statement to Moscow that Europe stands in “strong solidarity” with Navalny, while German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas, speaking before the meeting, called for the immediate release of the detained demonstrators. It didn’t do a lot of good.

One thing Putin has proved is that Russia does things differently, and not always in a way the West would like or approve of. “Russia invaded Crimea, invaded the territory of a member state” said Sir Edward Leigh, a British Conservative MP, “and basically, to cut a long story short, they were expelled from the Chamber, although never from the Council of Ministers.” In a Tweet, issued shortly after the session, Sir Edward set out his position very clearly. “We must condemn Putin’s crimes and we must also guard against institutional Russophobia. It’s still useful to engage with Russia even if just at a personal level as at the Council of Europe. And certainly, we can still appreciate Russia’s contribution to culture over the centuries.” It is an unarguable position, although that does not mean that current breaches of what are seen as democratic norms should be ignored. What Sir Edward wanted to clarify is that the way we

in the West see things is not the way many people in Russia do. “As far as many Russians are concerned,” Sir Edward told me, “Crimea is Russia, and was Russia until Krushchev signed it away in a decree with a stroke of his pen in 1956.” In other words, some of today’s perceived abuses have very long roots; we may see them as abuses, many Russians do not. “We’ve got to condemn Putin for (Sergei) Skripal, for Navalny, all these human rights abuses,” he told me, “but we’ve got to be very careful, we’ve got to take a rather nuanced view. We can’t afford to be Russophobic. We’ve got to understand Russian sensibilities, Russian culture, Russian history. So by all means condemn Putin for particular aspects of his egregious behaviour, and his behaviour towards Navalny is such behaviour, bearing in mind of course that it’s not going to change anything in Russia. He just washes his hands of such criticism, but we have to be prepared to stand up to him.” I asked Sir Edward if he could imagine a post-Putin Russia. He could but without much clarity, he admitted: it’s a hard future to foresee. “Well, of course, there was an outbreak of democracy in Russia under Yeltsin,



Josep Borrell, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and Sergey Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia

but unfortunately, as far as many ordinary Russians were concerned, what they saw in this outbreak of democracy was their state assets being stolen by oligarchs, by the economy crashing, by people being reduced to penury, by the Russian economy being reduced, I think, to the same size as that of Wales.” Iechyd da, Mr. Putin (it’s a traditional Welsh toast, meaning “good health”).

PROPPING UP THE PALACE

That may be a slightly unfair comparison. After all, like Yeltsin, Putin also enjoys the friendship of today’s oligarchs, the people who syphon off the nation’s wealth into their own already- bulging pockets. Even quite recently, it is an oligarch who has come to his aid over allegations that Putin has used money from Russia’s Treasury to fund an enormous palace at Cape Idokopas, beside the Black Sea. Arkady Rotenberg, one of Putin’s childhood judo partners, now a billionaire businessman, says it was being built for him to become a holiday resort, just another business venture. If that is true, Putin may be able to get away with spending a few days of leisure in the place once in a while, but he’ll never be able to live there. Having said that, anything may be possible in the strange, byzantine world of today’s Russia, seemingly built around one man’s needs and desires. Even if the Russian people – or enough of them – believe Putin’s denial of owning the Cape Idokopas palace, they may still wonder how one of his pals was able to amass so much money that he could afford to build such a place while they’re struggling to get by. At the very least there must have been some ‘blind eye turning’ going on. It may not shake their faith



Cape Idokopas Palace

much, though, even after a claimed 100-million plus viewings of the video about the place. Sir Edward also spoke about Putin’s public persona: “I’ve been a Council of Europe monitor for the Russian presidential elections and – people may not like this – but there’s no doubt that although he abuses his position by ensuring that he has dominance in the media and everything, he did win these elections fair and square.”

So what of this so-called “Palace”? It’s not just a residence, Navalny explained in his much-viewed video. “It has impregnable fences, its own harbour, guards, church, its own checkpoint, a no-fly zone and even its own border point,” he says in the commentary. The place also allegedly boasts its own helicopter pad and even a private strip club with a pole on which pole dancers can display their skills and much else besides. Navalny describes it as “a separate state within Russia” after its details were linked to his anti-corruption body by disgruntled construction workers, shocked at the opulence. There is, it’s claimed, an underground ice hockey rink, and it also has an amphitheatre and a tunnel that allows hidden access to its own little beach and to the sea. The video was posted on social media by Navalny’s supporters after he had been arrested and jailed. Initially, in hurried press conferences, the Kremlin dismissed the images as nothing more than compilations of other pictures, although that was before Rotenberg stepped forward to claim the place as his. It was clear that few would have continued to believe the pictures in the video were purely computer-generated images (CGI) or a mish-mash of unrelated pictures edited together to create the sort of structure more often seen in video games or Bond movies, perhaps, as the lair of the arch-villain. Would Putin have a white Persian cat, like James Bond’s arch-enemy, Ernst Stavro Blofeld? If he did, would he stroke it, as the fictional Blofeld supposedly did, or, as Putin’s critics might allege, eat it? We shouldn’t forget that Navalny is alleging not only that Putin owns this strange palace but that it was financed through corruption: the misuse of public funds.

Meanwhile, the protests continue, with Navalny supporters seen dancing



Alexei Navalny’s wife, Yulia Navalnaya in the Moscow courtroom

in a circle on the frozen waters of Amur Bay at Vladivostok, despite the city centre being fenced off and the demonstration banned.

In Moscow, where Navalny’s wife, Yulia Navalnaya, was arrested for a second time, one 40-year-old protestor told Al Jazeera: “I understand that I live in a totally lawless state. In a police state, with no independent courts. In a country ruled by corruption. I would like to live differently.” Putin has described the widespread protests as “illegal and dangerous”, but his methods for suppressing opposition do not seem to work. It is like trying to put out a fire by spraying it with kerosene. Insisting that your every order is followed to the letter without question can be dangerous; it led to Stalin dying without proper medical attention because the staff at his dacha were under orders not to enter his room until they heard him moving about, so, as he was lying unconscious on the floor, they didn’t open the door until many hours later. According to those familiar with life in the dacha, that was extremely unusual. The staff would not normally have been, as they claimed, ‘too scared’ to open the door until the evening. Then, when he saw him, Lavrentiy Beria, the ambitious head of state security, assumed he was just drunk from the night before, he claimed, which also seems unlikely. Doctors were not called because Stalin was very suspicious of the medical profession, which he accused of plotting against the Soviet leadership. Leeches were applied to Stalin’s neck but unsurprisingly they failed to save the great leader. His meeting with others the previous evening, at which heroic quantities of vodka had been consumed, followed his surprising



© Nf

Lavrentiy Beria with Joseph Stalin

decision, despite his ill health, to remain in charge and not hand the reins to his deputy, Georgy Malenkov or to future premier, Nikita Khrushchev. There have been suggestions, never seriously investigated, that they conspired to poison him, which would have been a form of poetic justice, since he is supposed to have poisoned the original leader of the Russian Revolution, Vladimir Lenin. But in reality, Stalin was almost certainly the victim of increasing age, declining health, excessive consumption of vodka and his own paranoia. Putin must be very careful to ensure that his own paranoia doesn't prove equally dangerous.

Nobody should be afraid to talk, even if what they have to say may not be welcome. "Hate, or other things are not good in politics," Professor Schennach told me, still calling for dialogue as the best possible solution to tensions between Russia and the Council of Europe, of which it remains a member. "You have to talk with them, you have to remind [them of] their rights, but also of their duties." He said that the Russian authorities must allow access to the country for the relevant rapporteurs, of which there are currently five, each dealing with a different aspect of the topics in dispute. "The Russian Federation should be very clear: there are two red lines. One red line is not to let in our rapporteurs and the second [is] not to fulfil the judgements of the Human Rights Court." That is very clearly not how matters are viewed in the Kremlin's hallowed halls.

WORLDS APART

While many in the West complain about Russia's deliberate campaigns of disinformation aimed at damaging societies around the world (often

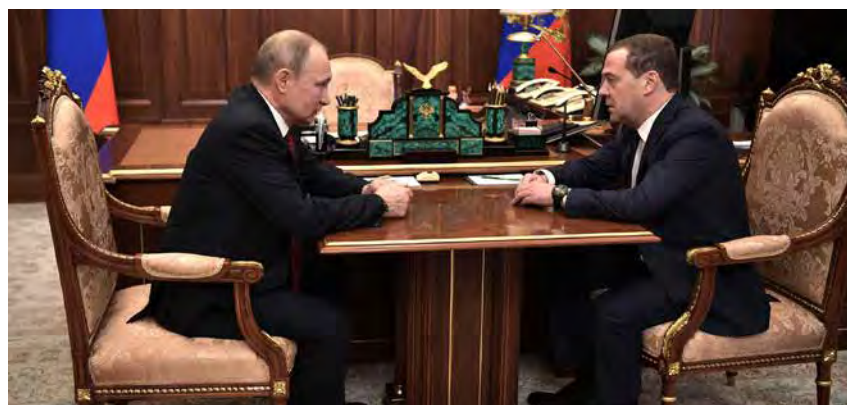
dangerously, as with COVID-19) as well as interference in the political process, Russian leaders claim to feel threatened by an Internet under foreign control.

Former President Dmitry Medvedev, for instance, now deputy chair of Russia's Security Council, has threatened to cut Russia off from the globally accepted web providers and oblige its citizens to use only its own domestic version. This would, of course, protect people from being exposed to criticism of Russia or its increasingly tyrannical leader without preventing the famous St. Petersburg troll factory from tinkering. In many ways it is a strange state of affairs. Back in the days of the Cold War there were massive differences in the basic policies of Russia and the West: one Communist, the other capitalist. Now both are basically capitalist, with relatively no great doctrinal gulf between them. One could argue that one enjoys greater freedom and more access to justice than the other, although recent events involving police shootings in America have even brought that into question.

Let's consider the charges against Navalny for which he was put into

custody the moment he arrived in Moscow. For a start, we should consider the 2014 embezzlement case, which Navalny has always claimed was a trumped-up (and successful) bid to remove him from the political scene. Russia's prison service has accused him of failing to report to it late last year in accordance with the rules, even though he was in a German hospital at the time being treated for Novichok poisoning. Being at death's door because of a Russian military-grade poison is not considered a legitimate excuse for missing an appointment and has since been jailed for three-and-a-half years because of it. Then in 2019, Russian investigators opened an investigation into alleged money laundering by Navalny's Anti-Corruption Foundation. In the process, they froze a number of Navalny's bank accounts, severely hampering the work of the Foundation. If he were to be found guilty, it could land him in prison for up to seven years. He has also been accused of fraud for allegedly spending almost €4-million of donations to his organisations on luxurious foreign travel. That could get him a decade behind bars if found guilty. Furthermore, a criminal investigation was launched into Navalny's alleged slander of a World War II veteran who had appeared in a video welcoming the constitutional changes that could allow Putin to stay in power until 2036. Navalny had described those appearing in the video as traitors and lackeys of the Putin regime. Let's face it, Putin doesn't do things by half; if he has an enemy, he prefers him to be safely locked up in a prison cell, at least if he's still breathing.

Navalny's chances of a fair trial (or trials, I should say) must be very close to zero. Tsar Vladimir is not a man



Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev

© Kremlin.ru



The European Court of Human Rights, sitting in 2017, concluded that Navalny's 2014 conviction was "arbitrary and manifestly unreasonable"

to accept the slightest threat to his throne, even though the European Court of Human Rights, sitting in 2017, concluded that Navalny's 2014 conviction was "arbitrary and manifestly unreasonable".

Of course, Navalny has his supporters, and very determined (and brave) they have shown themselves to be. Although the ever-faithful Russia Today news channel says that the pro-Navalny protests are dwindling in size, they are still taking place, in the face of fierce and vicious violence by the police and security forces. Damelya Aitkhozhina of Human Rights Watch said in a Tweet: "For the second week in a row, Russian police forcibly and brutally dispersed peaceful protests, detaining over 5,000 people. Russian authorities continue to pretend peaceful protestors are a violent mob, but they are not." Another sympathiser, Yulia Gorbanova, Tweeted: "Nothing can justify physical attacks on journalists covering protests. Such actions by riot police are completely illegal and should not be tolerated." Meanwhile Wenzel Michalski, in yet another Tweet, highlighted another worrying line of defence for Putin: "Authorities sent a chilling warning to lawyers and human rights defenders when they detained and prosecuted 2 lawyers for defending FreeNavalny protestors in Russia". It's a way of trying to dissuade lawyers from defending the many demonstrators seized by the police and national guard.

Overreaction to protest marches by Russia's security forces has also drawn condemnation from America's new Secretary of State, Antony Blinken, who Tweeted that the United States "condemns the persistent use of harsh tactics against peaceful protestors and journalists by Russian authorities for a second week straight." Russian

state media and Kremlin officials have accused Washington and NATO of stoking up resentment against Putin, with the Russian Foreign Ministry responding to Blinken's Tweet by saying his support for the protestors was proof of the US meddling behind the scenes. Putin is, without any doubt, a major world leader, in charge of an enormous country that has made a great many major contributions to global culture and science. He undermines that view, however, by apparently wanting to appear on the world stage to be a tin-pot despot, in which guise he sells his mighty country short. It would come as no surprise to anyone that the Russian Federation heads the list of ten Council of Europe member states that have not been applying the judgements of the European Court of Human Rights quickly enough, or even at all. The issue was the subject of a report adopted at the January session of the Council's Parliamentary Assembly.

The report was written by Cypriot Socialist MP Constantinos Efstathiou. I asked him what was going on. "What comes out from the report is that most of the countries, for political or internal reasons, are reluctant to go into implementation of the judgements," he explained. It is not, he is keen to point out, that they are incapable of applying the judgements or that they don't understand them. "They pretend sometimes, or they take advantage of some structural problem they used to have; they don't change it, they live with it, and of course they fear that by implementing a judgement it can harm their internal authority." In Russia's case, the authorities went even further by enacting a law that would even make it illegal to implement a judgement of the Court of Human Rights. And yet Russia remains a member of the Council of Europe, one of whose conditions of membership is that Court of Human Rights judgements must be implemented. As it is, Russia is making a mockery of the idea of respect for human rights protection under the law. It is all very strange. "So there is a contradiction," Efstathiou told me, "between the membership of the Council of Europe and the obligation of respecting the rule of law, because without implementing the judgements, there is no rule of law." It is rather as that anonymous

pro-Navalny protestor told Al Jazeera about living in a police state without law and ruled by corruption. She said she wished it was different, but there is no sign that it will be any time soon.

Can anything be done? Efstathiou remains hopeful. "There is a special procedure," he said, "which has certainly been used against Azerbaijan," in cases of detention for reasons outside the law or pure political motivation. "It gives the Committee of Ministers the means of imposing restrictions, taking measures against the state," he said. But there is, of course, a world of difference between Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation; what works to ward off a hungry moray eel may be less effective against a great white shark. It's a matter of – if you'll pardon the pun – scale. And before anyone points this out, moray eels don't have scales, may I remind you that great white sharks do. When I was filming in Azerbaijan, my interpreter in Baku got very nervous if we stood still for more than a few minutes with the camera running and she walked away if I put up a tripod. In Moscow, journalists and camera crews have faced far greater danger and certainly more violence in covering protests against



Pro-Navalny demonstration in Moscow

Putin. The rugged Russian bear is a far more formidable foe; even the ghostly, ghostly Banquo might seem less of a threat. At the moment, Putin seems to feel safe in the reassurance one of the witches gave to Macbeth: "Be bloody, bold, and resolute; laugh to scorn/ The power of man, for none of woman born/ Shall harm Macbeth." And yet he fell to the sword of a man who family he had slaughtered: Macduff. Perhaps Putin should be very wary of strange women with cauldrons.

Jim Gibbons



© Wikicommons/ Nicolò Ceranti

George Soros

THE PHILANTHROPIC BOGEYMAN

How the far-right loathes George Soros

It's a bit of a conundrum: why is a man famed for philanthropy, who has contributed billions of dollars to causes to alleviate poverty, enhance education, bring fresh water where there is a shortage and other such worthy objectives held up as a terrifying object of hatred by large numbers of people? Of course, human emotions don't have to make sense or rely on intelligence and they make even less sense where large groups are gathered. The humorous writer Sir Terry Pratchett once wrote that the IQ of any crowd equates to the IQ of its dimmest member, divided by the number of people present. George Soros, though, is very bright. He has set up an organisation whose aim is to overcome barriers that hold people back, to improve the prospects of the poor and needy and to generally act as an all-round benefactor. It's a great idea, George, but there are those who don't want barriers removed, who are happy to keep the poor firmly in their places and to prevent internationalism, which they see as bad, for some reason. It's almost as if they're afraid we might actually

like each other, if we got to know each other. Perhaps we would, although the evidence for that is scant

There is a song in the Rogers and Hammerstein musical *South Pacific* that derides race hatred and claims that babies are not born hating people who look different. As babies and toddlers they will play together quite happily, although natural curiosity may cause them to prod each other from time to time, just to check. However, hatred is an acquired feeling; without being taught it by our elders we might actually get on well with those whose skin is a different colour, who speak different languages and who follow different religions. "You've got to be taught/ to be afraid/ of people/ whose eyes are oddly made/ and people whose skin is a different shade," runs the song. It comes when the heroine, US Navy Nurse Nellie Forbush, is repelled to discover that the widowed French plantation owner she fancies, Emile De Becque, has fathered two children of mixed race. She leaves him, which leads him to volunteer for a dangerous mission against the Japanese.

While he is away, Nellie comes to love the children and to realise that race doesn't matter. The film was banned in some southern states of America for that reason. It's a nice idea to have all of us born without prejudice and only to learn racial intolerance from others, but I'm afraid that many of us enter the world with an in-built hatred for anyone different and an even greater hatred for those who don't share their hostility towards people of different races, creeds or colour.



© opensocietyfoundations

George Soros unlocks the front door of the Open Society Foundations in Budapest in 1995



George Soros stands in Pariser Platz in front of the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin in 2004

Looking back through history there have been various tipping points where we could have reset the game and started again from “go”, but we have always missed them. At the end of the First World War, the negotiations for a peace agreement were so controversial that some observers were predicting World War II before the ink was dry on the signatures ending World War I. The Versailles Treaty was a very imperfect document, landing Germany with massive debts it could never possibly repay and a lot of deep-seated resentment. Signed at the one-time royal palace of Versailles, on the outskirts of Paris (a remarkable building and well worth a visit, although when I was there the catering facilities were ghastly; take sandwiches), it held Germany solely responsible for the awful slaughter and imposed wide-ranging penalties, including a loss of territory, massive payments in reparation and also disarmament, which was never likely to happen in a country that manufactured and exported high quality weapons, ranging from small arms to long-range bombers and tanks.



George Soros congratulates a new graduate at the Commencement ceremony of 2003 at the American University of Central Asia. 1997 with funding from the United States government and the Open Society Institute

What it didn't even attempt to do was to deal with the underlying issues that had led to the war in the first place. In the views of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, the war was because of jingoistic calls to arms by the German leaders to support German industry while its enemies wanted the same, but in reverse. “In reality, the object of the struggle of the British and French bourgeoisie,” he wrote, “is to seize the German colonies and to ruin a competing nation which has displayed a more rapid rate of economic development. And, in pursuit of this noble aim, the ‘advanced’ democratic nations are helping the savage tsarist regime to strangle Poland, Ukraine, and so on, and to throttle revolution in Russia more thoroughly.” You must admit, he'd pretty well hit the nail on the head.

It's natural, perhaps, that the allies wanted repayment and compensation for their losses but humiliating the defeated party was bound to fuel resentment and nationalism. It undoubtedly led to the success of Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party, as the German people looked for someone or something to blame, although Hitler, of course, diverted this resentment into hatred for the Jews, handy scapegoats for racism. They, in turn, had also suffered the effects of war and the cost of restitution, as well as having experienced discrimination for decades, albeit not on this deadly scale. The economic crisis faced by the post-war German economy and by its population was easily manipulated by Hitler and his friends into a resentment against the Jews. The very sensible “Fourteen Points” that US President Woodrow Wilson proposed were mostly ignored in the final deal. They were supposed to ensure, among other things, that all future treaties should be public with nothing held back in secret, that there would be free and fair trade, that Belgium would be independent and that Alsace-Lorraine, won from France in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 to 71 would be returned to it, something German nationalists resented immediately. When the Nazis re-took the region in World War II, they made it a criminal offence to speak French in the city of Strasbourg and its surrounding areas with harsh penalties for anyone caught. To sing the Marseillaise (which was composed in Strasbourg by a pro-Revolutionary French Captain of Engineers Claude-Joseph Rouget de

Lisle) meant death. After all, the original Alsatian language has Germanic roots. However, you can still travel around the lovely city of Strasbourg on a bateau mouche called the Roget de Lisle.



George Soros at the 47th Munich Security Conference 2011

It seems, then, that hatred is not a learned attitude but rather something that's innate; it is, perhaps, what helped our homo sapiens ancestors to get rid of the Neanderthals, the Denisovans and any other hominids that shared our planet for hundreds of thousands of years. We weren't cleverer than them, perhaps, just more vicious. That naturally occurring violence can be seen in the faces and chants of some crowds, at sporting events, for instance, and at political rallies. As a matter of interest, the huge crowds that marched through London to demand a second referendum on leaving the EU (the largely anti-EU newspapers didn't cover the marches and the government didn't listen or take any notice) were entirely peaceful. One right-wing newspaper dismissed it as a “protest by Waitrose customers” (Waitrose is a supermarket chain popular with the middle classes). It was simply, as it was intended to be, an insult. On the marches, of which there were three altogether, I saw only smiles and chatter, with no chant more violent than “bollocks to Brexit”, in which respectable-looking little old ladies participated gleefully. Perhaps it was that lack of violence that led to failure; governments only respond to threats that carry the burden of possible attack. The crowd, although more than a million strong, never looked physically threatening, although they might have offered you a sweet.

SELF-DEFENCE BECOMES SELF-OFFENCE

Britain's Eurosceptic right hated the European Union; in other parts of the world those with similar political leanings chose the billionaire philanthropist George Soros as the hate figure against whom they could rally. It's very strange but also quite frightening. Supporters of the far-right from many countries like attacking Soros.



© Cage Skidmore

Leader of the Brexit Party Nigel Farage

Take, for example, Nigel Farage, the leader of Britain's former Brexit Party and before that of the UK Independence Party, UKIP, also campaigning against Britain remaining in the EU. Farage, speaking in the European Parliament during a debate on the so-called 'Paradise Papers', which revealed tax evasion by the very rich, said "When we are talking about offshore money, when we are talking about political subversion, when we are talking about collusion, I wonder if we are looking in the wrong place? And I say that because George Soros recently gave Open Society, which of course campaigns for freedom of movement of people and supranational structures like the European Union, \$18 billion

(€14.9-bn) . And his influence here and in Brussels is truly extraordinary. I fear we could be looking at the biggest level of international, political collusion in history." One has to say that this is the sort of thing Farage, a hater of all things European, is inclined to say quite a lot. He has come in for criticism for anti-Semitic statements in the past, although I've never found him to be an anti-Semite in conversation. He's at his most interesting if you can get him onto the subject of World War I, on which he is an expert and a serious collector of memorabilia. He can tell you which regiments fought where and when and who led them. He just hates everything to do with the EU and is in favour of strong national borders, behind which we must all shelter, not so much waving at each other as making rude gestures, I imagine. Mixing with other nationalities is not to be encouraged in the Farage play book.

As for comparing Soros with the billionaires listed in the Paradise Papers, it's a comparison that doesn't really bear close examination. On the one hand, you have a bunch of extremely wealthy people who have found ways to avoid paying their taxes by hiding their wealth – gained by whatever means – in places with unusually low-tax regimes and thereby saving them from paying their legally required share and thus contributing to society. In Soros you have a man who is, certainly, a billionaire but who not only pays his taxes but also voluntarily donates additional millions to causes that help some of society's poorest and most vulnerable and who believes the world would be a nicer place if we all mixed and mingled, border-free. The problem is that many of Soros's critics cannot accept that a rich man would choose to share his wealth with others, presumably because they

certainly wouldn't. They tend to hold some odd ideas, too, like Robert Bowers, an American convinced that Soros was funding a secret operation to kill all white people and replace them with immigrants, mainly Jewish ones. To "get his own back" in advance, he entered a Pittsburgh synagogue and shot dead eleven worshippers. Idiots who believe in far-fetched conspiracy theories sometimes turn out to be conspirators themselves.



© NIT

Pittsburgh Synagogue Shooter Robert Bowers

Many Americans, it seems, still believe in the theory that Soros wants to replace them all with Jewish immigrants, however ludicrous it may seem to be. That is why, on a neo-Nazi march through Charlottesville, Kentucky, the marchers were chanting "Jews will not replace us". Few who heard it knew what on Earth they were talking about. There is not, it would appear, any conspiracy theory so totally daft that somebody somewhere will not grasp it like a magic talisman and swear it's the truth. As the Irish poet W.B. Yeats wrote in 1928, "We had fed the heart on fantasies, /The heart's grown brutal from the fare."

COUNTING THE PENNIES

George Soros certainly isn't hard up for cash. In May 2020, his net worth was estimated at \$8.3-billion (€6.74-billion). Over the course of his career he has given away more than \$32-billion (€26.4-billion) to the projects of his Open Society Foundation, which is active in 120 countries around the world, engaged in things like health, education, gender equality and human rights, all the sorts of things the far right apparently detests. In their view, it seems, women and foreigners 'must be kept in their place'. Born in Hungary in 1930 Soros lived



© Wikimedia/Resenjari

Anti George Soros graffiti in Resen Macedonia 2018



Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orbán

through the Nazi occupation of 1944-45, which saw half a million Jews murdered. He and his family, he says, escaped with the aid of false identification papers and he claims they helped others to do the same. There is no particular reason to doubt his version of events but once again the far-right claim that he reported his neighbours to the Nazis, leading to more deaths. However, there is a flaw in the far-right's version of events. On the one hand, they say he betrayed his Jewish roots to help the Nazis while on the other some claim he's seeking to replace white western workers with Jewish immigrants. There is no logic to the argument, nor any coherence either.

Sadly, the Internet has the downside of providing a forum for the most outrageous and far-fetched theories to be shared out among people eager to give credence to the latest conspiracy theory. As for the detestation of Soros voiced in Hungary, especially by its leader, Viktor Orbán, we should remember, perhaps, that when Hitler's forces led the invasion of Soviet territory in Operation Barbarossa, the 152 German divisions were joined by 14 Finnish divisions in the north and the same number of Romanian divisions in the south, creating a truly massive number of armed and well-equipped men, set on conquest.

The excellent book, *Stalin's General* by Geoffrey Roberts, a biography of Marshal Georgy Zhukov, the Red Army's most brilliant World War II general whose equestrian statue stands in Red Square, goes on to list the other participants: "Later, the 3.5-million-strong invasion force would be joined by armies from Hungary and Italy, by the Spanish Blue Division, by contingents from Croatia and Slovakia, and by volunteer units recruited from every country in Nazi-

occupied Europe." The numbers of countries engaged in the invasion with its aim of overthrowing the Soviet Union and Communism in general explains, if it doesn't excuse, the cruel vengeance the Red Army perpetrated as it took it all back.

In 1947, Soros escaped from Communist Hungary and made his way to London where, with money earned from manual work, he paid his way through the London School of Economics before emigrating to the United States in 1956. There he thrived in a world of high finance and investments, launching his own hedge fund in 1973. It succeeded and he became one of the most successful – and wealthiest – investors in the US.

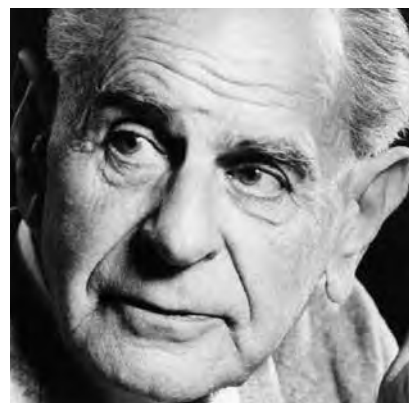
He was a follower of Karl Popper, whose book, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, is a defence of democratic liberalism as a political and social philosophy. Written in 1938, Soros read it while in London. Popper, who died in 1994, was, he said, opposed to dogmatism in science, but even his friends described him as being personally quite dogmatic in debate. He believed firmly in the idea that a proposition must be tested by trying to falsify it and he warned of the dangers of believing in a theory that later experimentation might disprove.

For instance, he was doubtful about Einstein's claims that light could be bent by gravity and said that the whole of General Relativity Theory could be overthrown if experimentation proved that one aspect wrong. Of course, Einstein's claims were proved by the astronomer Arthur Eddington in 1919. It was through this faith in the falsification doctrine that he believed that such ideas as astrology and spiritualism would be disproved. But he believed in the "Open Society" – also the name of his book, which Soros had so admired. It would be a society without barriers between peoples, and that's why it was chosen by Soros as the name for his own foundation. Having amassed a vast and growing fortune, Soros used it to build that very society. In 1979, he got the chance to put his money where Popper's mouth was, by financing scholarships for black South Africans, despite the apartheid regime. He also facilitated fact-finding visits to the West for students at universities in Communist countries, being no lover of a dogmatic philosophy like Marxism-

Leninism. That activity expanded with the fall of the Berlin Wall and in 1991 he opened the Central European University to spread his ideas, and those of the maverick philosopher Popper. Popper had toyed with Communism but disliked the rigid frameworks it imposed. He liked personal freedom and his protégé, Soros, agrees.

Soros became known as "the man who broke the Bank of England" in the early 1990s by short-selling the pound sterling, convinced it would force the Conservative government of John Major to leave Europe's Exchange Rate Mechanism and devalue the pound. It worked; the pound was devalued by 20%, earning Soros \$1.2-billion (€1-billion) and leaving behind the memory of what became known as "Black Wednesday". Major's government never really recovered and I must admit I felt just a little bit sorry for him at the time. He hadn't seen it coming, but nor had anyone else. As Soros himself said, although not apropos of this event, "The financial markets generally are unpredictable. So that one has to have different scenarios... The idea that you can actually predict what's going to happen contradicts my way of looking at the market." If anyone knows how to look at the market it's Soros, and he has not tried to make himself popular in his adopted United States. "The main enemy of the open society, I believe," he said, "is no longer the communist but the capitalist threat."

That sort of comment would never play well in Washington or Wall Street. Soros makes no secret of where he believes the real blame lies, either. "The main obstacle to a stable and just world order is the United States," he has said. "[This idea] happens to coincide with the prevailing opinion in the world. And I think that's rather shocking for Americans to hear."



Karl Popper in the 1980s



© Adrian Pingstone

The Bank of England

What is truly shocking to hear (after all, in the heart of Europe anti-American comments are not that uncommon, although they may diminish now that Donald Trump has gone) are the anti-Semitic comments. Take this quote about Soros from Forbes on-line magazine. “He is frequently the target of conservative and Republican political leaders, including President Trump, who has used his Twitter account to make baseless claims against the financier. Soros has been called a Nazi by some of the President’s supporters (a claim retweeted by the President’s son, Donald Trump, Jr.) and even referred to as the “Antichrist” by Trump’s longtime advisor Rudy Giuliani.” A trifle extreme, wouldn’t you say? Soros is frequently derided in the right-wing press and on conspiracy theory websites as the man funding Black Lives Matter, illegal immigration, fraudulent elections and any number of other things the right hates, even to the ludicrously silly claim that he’s funding a group of paedophile Satanists within the Democratic party. Honestly, does someone just sit down in a dark room (it would have to be a dark room) and see what their febrile imagination can conjure up? Or do they have to consume illegal chemical substances first?

BELIEVE WHAT YOU LIKE

Look into the accusations and attacks on Soros and you soon realise that he is clearly and undisputedly guilty of one thing that invariably raises the hackles of the far right: he’s Jewish. The paedophilia accusation is among those first put out by the conspiracy theory website QAnon.

QAnon, of course, is heavily anti-Semitic in the main, like most aspects of the far right, which brings Soros firmly

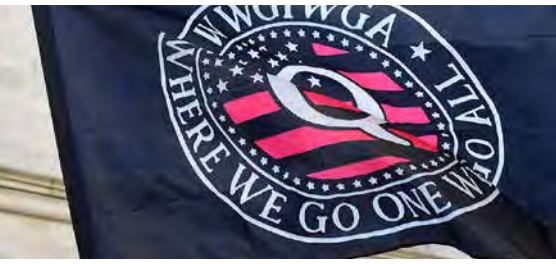
within the ambit of its endless hostility. I have often tried to understand why so many people are anti-Semitic. Jews, after all, come in a variety of shapes and sizes. The New Testament of the Christian bible says that Jesus Christ is born to a Jewish woman, even if we ignore for the moment the idea of a virgin birth. Still, the father who raises him is supposedly from a long line of royal Jewish men descended from King David. The disciples are all Jewish, as are the people he is supposed to preach to. Furthermore, if one assumes that Christians aware of the New Testament are also likely to be cognisant of the Old, one must conclude that adherents see it as a long history of the Jewish race. If that is the case, why do people enchanted by the stories of Noah, David, Moses, Joshua and Job (in which special case I can only say there’s no accounting for taste) suddenly stick their noses in the air about the current representatives of the Jewish race. Even Job inspired a beautiful piece of music from the English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams. It’s still an extremely weird story, however.

The problem, here, is that we’re looking at the whole business logically, while

QAnon and logic have never even met and it’s a running certainty that they wouldn’t get on if they did. It was be an amusing exercise to run a competition, based on the theme “Create Your Own Violent Conspiracy Theory”, with prizes given for the most extreme and outrageous flights of fancy. I’m sure I would not be unable to come up with anything so bizarre or egregious that some idiot hasn’t already put it forward and gained followers for it. How about suggesting that Karl Marx was really an outsized tadpole who became possessed by Beelzebub when he was unable to metamorphose into a frog? Or what if Chairman Mao Zedong was in reality a little old lady from Akron, Ohio, who wrote the famous Little Red Book as a Sunday School project for her pupils? While of course the Second World War was really an accidental projection into our timescale and onto our planet of a war between the giant Bargle-Wargle people from outermost arm of the Sombrero Galaxy and the Mystical Never-Ending Repair Men from the Whirlpool Galaxy. Let’s face it, we can all dream up something similarly ludicrous. There is a never-ending demand for wild theories, as long as they comply with the reader’s political philosophy in some way. That bit is easy: believers in conspiracy theories love to have someone to hate, so all you have to do is come up with an outrageous story about an attempt to take over the world, or at least a part of it, and then lay the blame for it at the feet of anyone Jewish. Somebody rich and Jewish would be even better. Do you remember the satirical song about National Brotherhood Week by the piano-playing mathematician and humourist, Tom Lehrer? “Oh the Protestants hate the Catholics And the Catholics hate the Protestants And the Hindus hate the Muslims



Anti Soros banner on The Liberty Beacon site during the US presidential election in 2016



QAnon flag

And everybody hates the Jews”. That line always brought the house down. Hate figures are easy to conjure up. Even in Myanmar, the followers of the normally peaceful Buddhist faith were induced to attack people.

As for the Jews, they have been the butt of Christian hatred throughout Europe since Mediaeval times. In many cases they were expelled, men, women, children and the elderly, chucked out with no means of support by the supposedly ‘enlightened’ Christians (Muslim conquerors were a little less cruel to them, by and large). By the time of Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice*, which contains very mixed messages that we have to consider advanced for their time, moneylending for profit, though essential to commerce in England, was still illegal.

For one thing, one of the characters is compelled to raise some capital to help a friend. In much of Europe (and certainly in Elizabethan England) to charge interest on a loan – usury – was illegal, so he was obliged to visit a Jewish money lender, Shylock, whose religion permitted it. He wants 3,000 ducats for three months. Lending at interest is Shylock’s business, although he must feel little inclined to help. Antonio, Shylock confides to the audience, lends money free of charge, deliberately to depress the going rate. He also insults Shylock even while negotiating with him and we are told he has recently spat on his coat to show his contempt. Good Christian behaviour, eh?



Shylock the fictional Venetian Jewish moneylender in William Shakespeare’s play *The Merchant of Venice*

An actor friend of mine, the former Socialist MEP, now Lord Michael Cash, told me once how, playing Antonio and wanting to underline the character’s dislike of Shylock, he had worn gloves to shake his hand and even then, he had immediately wiped his hands to clean them of any contamination from touching a Jew. So Antonio is an odd hero: very unheroic and, all things considered, rather unpleasant. But Shakespeare puts a wonderful speech against anti-Semitism into Shylock’s mouth: “Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?” Needless to say, Shylock seeks revenge for years of being wronged but comes off worst. Despite being told he can take his “pound of flesh” from nearest the heart, and having turned down a massive profit on the loan (it would not have done for him to come across as likeable at the end, after all, however much he had been provoked) but – and this has always seemed to me important – the lawyer representing Antonio gets his way: Shylock may take the pound of flesh (just under half a kilo, if you’re interested) but not a single drop of blood. And the lawyer who saves the day is really Portia, a woman and the sweetheart of Antonio’s friend, Bassanio, in disguise. This is further complicated by the fact that it was for Bassanio that Antonio wanted to borrow the money in the first place. So in this strange play of hidden identities, hidden treasure, games of chance, vengeance and punishment, Shakespeare strikes a crafty, albeit whispered, blow against

anti-Semitism and in favour of a degree of gender equality, even if he may not have meant to.

One problem here is that no matter how many irrefutable arguments any lawyer could produce in defence of Soros, the QAnon fraternity wouldn’t listen. They are deaf to the “other person’s” point of views, especially if that “other person” is politically left-leaning and even more so if one of them is Jewish; they can attend only to their own. QAnon post pictures of Soros with his features greatly distorted, just like the terrible anti-Semitic posters and pamphlets disseminated by Hitler’s Nazis, while reusing the long-debunked writing of the supposed ‘Elders of Zion’, which allege that the Jews are running an international cabal. It plays to the growth of anti-Semitism around the world, perhaps most especially in the United States, where interest in anti-Soros nonsense has risen alarmingly following the George Floyd protests. Floyd, you will recall, was a black hip-hop artist who was strangled to death when a white police officer knelt on his neck during his arrest. Just one of those stupid events, born of fear, race hatred and contempt for those who are ‘different’, that have made an existing situation worse. As for Soros, the far-right Breitbart news referred to him as an internationalist financier who “hates sovereignty” and meddles in “too many other peoples’ affairs”. Unlike kindly, unassuming Breitbart, one supposes. Of course, Hungarian nationalist prime minister Viktor Orbán hates Soros with a passion, running election posters with a picture of a smiling Soros and the slogan “Don’t let George Soros have the last laugh”. With so much hatred being heaped upon him, Soros, however, rich he is, would seem to have very little to laugh about.

Anthony James



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A convoy of funeral hearses carrying the remains of the victims of the MH17 plane crash from the airbase in Eindhoven to Hilversum, the Netherlands

JUSTICE DELAYED BUT NOT DENIED

The MH17 criminal trial resumes

The Schiphol Judicial Complex at Badhoevedorp, near Amsterdam was abuzz with activity once again on 1 February 2021. After a nearly three month adjournment due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the relatives of those killed in the downing of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 feared that justice would be delayed, perhaps indefinitely. But the trial that had begun on 9 March 2020 has now resumed – albeit with no public – in this courtroom which is nearest to the point of departure of the doomed flight.

Departed, but by no means ended. The flight took off from Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam on the 17 July, 2014, carrying 283 passengers and 15 crew, bound for Kuala Lumpur.



Whilst flying over Eastern Ukraine, where pro-Russian separatists were fighting Ukrainian government forces, a Russian missile destroyed it in mid-air, killing everyone on board. Contact with the aircraft, a Boeing 777-200ER,

was lost some 50 kilometres from the Ukraine-Russia border and its wreckage showered down over the contested Donetsk region. It broke up into six parts, the remains of which landed across six separate sites. The Dutch Safety Board and a Dutch-led Joint Investigation Team (JIT) investigated the tangled parts scattered over the ground and concluded that it had been brought down by a Russian Soviet-era Buk surface-to-air missile, launched from rebel-controlled territory. Other members of the JIT are Australia, Belgium, Malaysia and Ukraine. The JIT's researchers suggested that the missile, belonging to the 53rd Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade of the Russian Federation, had only arrived from Russia on the day it was fired.

A transporter was allegedly seen by a journalist just 16 kilometres from the crash site later the same day. Other international journalists reported seeing the Buk and that it was operated by a man with a Russian accent wearing an unknown uniform. The JIT announced that Russia was primarily responsible for the attack on MH17 and for the loss of the 298 people on board at the time. The crew had all been Malaysian but just over two-thirds of the passengers had been Dutch, the rest being Malaysian, Belgian and Australian. Even on the eve of the trial opening, a spokesperson for the Russian Foreign Ministry, Maria Zakharova, dismissed the suggestion of Russian involvement as “propaganda”.



Part of the BUK-TELAR rocket that was fired on the MH17 is displayed during a JIT press conference



© NBAAI

Image of 9M38M1 surface-to-air missile showing the approximate location of three of the parts recovered.

It's arguable that the aircraft should not have chosen that route. Eastern Ukraine was a war zone where military aircraft were deployed and where some had been shot down in the preceding weeks. The International Civil Aviation Organisation had issued a warning to airlines that there was a degree of risk for commercial flights. Three days before MH17 was brought down, a Ukrainian Air Force Ilyushin Il-76 military aircraft, carrying nine

crew and forty soldiers had been shot out of the sky as it approached Luhansk Airport. On that same day, a Ukrainian Air Force An-26 transport flying at 6,500 m (21,300 ft) was also shot down. American experts gave the opinion that it, too, had been brought down by a Buk, and that it had been fired from Russian territory. Russia denied it, but the day before the Malaysia Airlines tragedy, a Ukrainian Sukhoi Su-25 close air support aircraft was shot down, too, also supposedly from Russian-controlled territory.

WHO HAS THE MISSILE?

Later that same month, Russian news agencies reported that a Buk had been seized by rebels from a Ukraine military facility they had overrun. On that same day, rebels of the Donetsk People's Republic claimed in a Tweet that they had obtained a Buk missile system; they deleted the Tweet just hours later, once it was clear that a civilian passenger jet had been downed. Indeed, just after the missile struck, the separatists boasted that they had brought down a Ukrainian military aircraft, but that

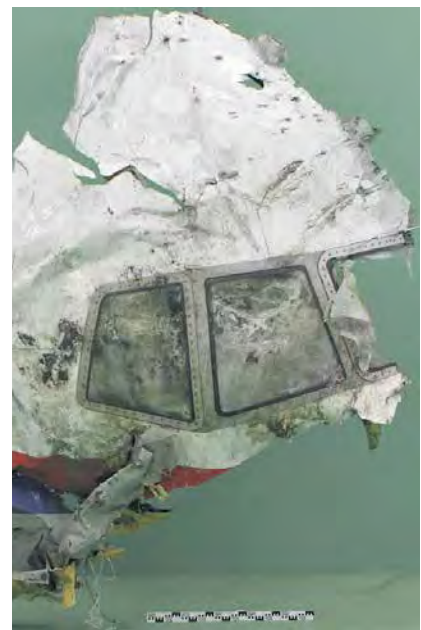


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Vladimir Putin awarding Maria Zakharova, Director of the Information and Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, with the Order of Friendship.



The airplane was perforated by hundreds of high energy objects shaped like cubes and bow-ties. Many preformed fragments were found in the bodies of the crew seated in the cockpit



© KDutch Safety Board

Part of the right hand side of the cockpit



© KDutch Safety Board

Flight data recorder without Underwater Locator Beacon. Source Dutch Safety Board.
Cockpit Voice Recorder

claim was also promptly withdrawn when the truth emerged. Some 37 international airlines were still flying over the area when MH17 went down, despite a warning from the Ukrainian government, issued just three days before the attack, to all European countries.

The warning was reported in the Dutch newspaper, *De Telegraaf*. On the day of the attack, however, it was reported that a Ukrainian Antonov An-26 had been due to carry paratroopers along more or less the same route, if at a lower altitude, on their way to the battlefield. It seems possible that the rebels' radar mistook the Boeing for the anticipated military flight. The mists of battle, though, have been deliberately fogged by those not wanting the truth to be exposed. And an attack on civilians, even in a state-to-state war is illegal. An attack by rebel groups is murder.

Which brings us to the trial, which began only on 9 March. You may not have heard much about it; news in every medium at the moment seems to have been completely taken over by the corona virus. Covid-19 is all anyone wants to talk about. On trial, but not actually present in the Dutch courtroom, are Vsevolodovich Girkin, Sergey Nikolayevich Dubinskiy, Oleg Yuldashevich Pulatov (all Russians) and Leonid Volodymyrovych Kharchenko, a Ukrainian.

They stand accused of having obtained and subsequently deployed the Buk TELAR (transport erector launcher and radar) system with the intention of shooting down an aircraft. Their guilt or otherwise is what the court has to decide. They are not accused of having deliberately targeted a passenger jet, but for rebel forces to deliberately bring down any aircraft is an offence under international law.



JIT-coordinator and Chief Prosecutor Fred Westerbeke signs the prolongation of the JIT agreement

Girkin is the former 'defence minister' of the self-declared 'People's Republic of Donetsk'. The war was not official, between two sovereign nations, and 'combatant immunity' cannot apply to acts of wilful murder. The Netherlands Chief Prosecutor, Fred Westerbeke, says he will summon all four to face two specific charges. Firstly they're accused of "causing the crash of flight MH17, resulting in the death of all persons on board, punishable pursuant to Article 168 of the Dutch Criminal Code". Secondly, the charge lists "the murder of 298 persons on board MH17, punishable pursuant to Article 289 of the Dutch Criminal Code". So, the four are accused of deliberately bringing down the aircraft and of the culpable homicide of all those on board. None of the accused is expected to attend the court, although Pulatov is represented by his lawyer, and it's unlikely that the court's eventual judgement will lead to punishment for anyone found guilty.

Westerbeke warned the court in his opening statement that this is likely to be a long trial, possibly lasting five or six years, and it opened more than five years after the aircraft was shot down, so 'justice delayed' is inevitable, and 'justice denied' is highly probable; investigations into the tragedy are continuing and all four of the accused may be cleared. He also spoke of "the Russian Federation's active efforts to obstruct the investigation" and the risks of retaliation faced by local witnesses. The JIT looked at other possible causes of the crash, such as that MH17 crashed because of an unexplained onboard explosion, that it was shot down by fighter aircraft and even that it was shot down by Ukrainian armed forces. The evidence to be presented at the trial includes documents provided by the Russian Federation. But the JIT investigators reached certain firm conclusions, according to Westerbeke "that flight MH17 was not shot down during a military exercise or by armed forces who believed that they were defending their country from a perceived attack," he told the court in his opening statement, "The Buk-TELAR that downed flight MH17 should never have been in Ukraine, and no-one should have fired a missile there, whether aimed at a civilian or military aircraft. This makes the assessment of this case fundamentally different from

cases where errors of judgment during a legitimate military operation result in the loss of civilian life. Second, the parties responsible for downing flight MH17 have taken no responsibility whatsoever for their actions."

And, to be honest, nor are they likely to, although, as Westerbeke said, an effective investigation, openness about the findings and, where possible, the punishment of those responsible, are not merely a moral obligation. "They are also a legal obligation under international human rights conventions." But that is not all; the Public Prosecution Service admits that many people have questioned the point of holding a trial at which the accused are unlikely to appear and when it's questionable that the defendants, if found guilty, would face punishment. "The possibility that the defendants in this case may not face punishment, even if convicted," the Prosecutor told the court, "is not, in our view, a reason to forego a trial."

SNAPSHOT OF A DISASTER

In the end, it all comes back to what actually happened on that fateful day. The flight plan showed that MH17 was due to fly over Ukraine at 33,000 feet (10,060 metres), then change course and altitude to fly over the city of Dnipropetrovsk on a flight path called Airway Lima 980, flying over the city itself at 15:53 local time. Dnipropetrovsk Air Traffic Control asked MH17 to climb to a higher flightpath to avoid possible conflict with a Singapore Airlines flight, but the crew declined and the Singapore Airlines flight changed altitude instead. At 16:00 local time, the crew asked to deviate 20 nautical miles (37 kilometres) to the north because of thunder storms in the area, which was approved. At 16:19, Dnipropetrovsk ATC noticed the flight was 6.7 kilometres north of the approved flight path and instructed the crew to correct this before asking the Russian ATC at Rostov-on-Don to take over responsibility. The Russians agreed but when Dnipropetrovsk ATC tried to notify MH17 there was no response. The flight had simply vanished from the radar.

There have been many claims of intercepted calls between various



Intercepted phone conversation between Kharchenko and one of his military on the field some hours after the downing of the aircraft

suspects that suggest complicity, but the JIT fears some have been tampered with or else took place too close to the event to have any significance. As the Prosecutor said, the case must be completely watertight, without any room for question or doubt.

Meanwhile, the JIT investigation continues and is still investigating other individuals who may have played a part. Some have blamed the authorities for not doing enough, but as the Prosecutor said, “the question of whether public authorities could have done more to prevent a murder can never absolve the murderer”. It was only following an extensive investigation over an extended time period that the JIT was able to conclude that “flight MH17 was shot down by a Buk-missile launched from a farm field near the town of Pervomaiskyi, to the south of the town of Snizhne; that a Buk-TELAR of the 53rd Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade of the Russian army had been used for this purpose; and that this Buk-TELAR system was transported from the Russian Federation on the night of 16-17 July 2014 and the remaining three missiles on the launcher were transported back to the Russian Federation shortly after the downing of flight MH17.”

Russia has not been at all helpful to the investigation; there have even been allegations that Russia manipulated images to obscure the truth. In July 2015, Malaysia proposed that the United Nations Security Council set up

an international tribunal to prosecute those found responsible for shooting down the aircraft. The Malaysian resolution gained a majority on the Security Council, but it was vetoed by Russia, which then proposed its own rival draft resolution, pushing for a greater U.N. role in an investigation into what caused the crash and demanded justice, but the proposal stopped short of setting up a tribunal: no trial, no verdict, no punishment. Russia’s lack of cooperation prompted Tony Abbott, the Prime Minister of Australia at the time of the incident, to say that “With MH17, Russia has demonstrated that there’s a touch of evil at the heart of their government.”



Left: Volosdymyr Tsemakh at Savur-Mohyla, south of Snizhne, dated 27 May 2018. Right: One of the post-arrest photos of Tsemakh in 2019 that has appeared online

INEXPLICABLE EVENTS

Since then, the Dutch Public Prosecutor’s office have sought the extradition of a Ukrainian, Volosdymyr Tsemakh from the Russian Federation, although it has not been decided if he will face prosecution. The evidence against him is not so strong as the evidence against the four accused. Even so, many feel it was odd that Ukraine, willingly or unwillingly, surrendered Tsemakh to Russia in a prisoner exchange in September last year at Russia’s insistence, especially as he was a key witness in the investigation and



Igor Bezler

part of the legal proceedings. Australia expressed its deep concern about the prisoner exchange.

The Australian government wanted Tsemakh to be questioned by the JIT and for Australian federal police to be involved, while recognising the pressure Kyiv was in from Moscow to do the deal. Australia’s Foreign Minister, Marise Payne said “Australia is disappointed, however, that Mr. Vladimir Tsemakh, a person of interest in connection with the downing of MH17, was included in the exchange.” Payne believes that it will be harder to bring justice to Tsemakh if he lives in Russia.

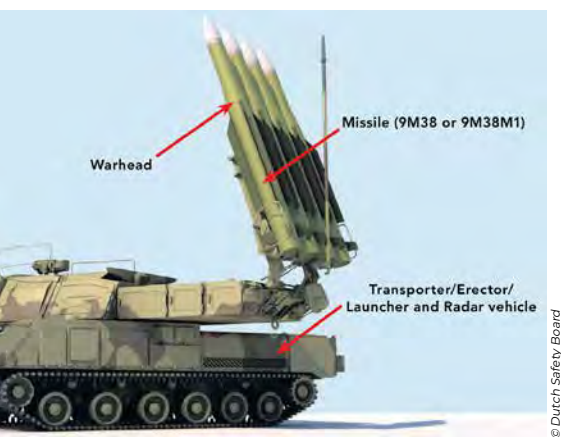
Another colleague of the accused has also been mentioned, Igor Bezler, who, in an intercepted telephone conversation on the afternoon of 17 July, 2014, told the person to whom he was talking (not identified) that a ‘bird’ was coming his way.

This was just before MH17 was brought down, but investigators were unable to establish a definite connection. Two other suspects are

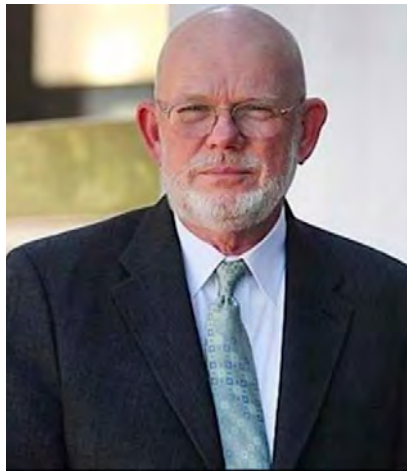
only known by their codenames, 'Orion' and 'Delfin', both thought to be high-ranking Russian officers who were involved in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. In an intercepted telephone conversation on 14 July, 2014, Orion was heard to say that 'they' now have a Buk and are going to shoot down aircraft. Investigations have shown, though, that in the days prior to 17 July, various people and groups were trying to obtain a Buk and Orion's conversation may have referred to a Buk-TELAR brought across the border from Russia but which then caught fire accidentally before it could be used.

As to the actual impact, the Dutch Safety Board has made very clear the sequence of events as they believe it to have taken place. Forensic research has shown that a 9M38-series Buk missile was fired, carrying a 9n314M warhead, which was surrounded by 800 iron fragments, intended to spread very rapidly, even lethally, on detonation. The missile had a proximity fuse, designed to detonate when the distance to the target is less than a pre-set amount. It detonated just above and to the left of the cockpit, the fragments tearing through the cockpit and business class sections of the aircraft. Some of the fragments - mainly small metal cubes or what were described as 'bow tie shaped' pieces of metal - were found in the bodies of the cockpit crew. I have seen similarly-shaped fragments - shrapnel - that had been part of Russian anti-personnel mines dropped in Afghanistan during Russia's war with the Mujahideen.

They are designed to do the maximum possible damage to human tissue.



Buk missile system is a family of self-propelled, medium-range surface-to-air missile systems developed by the Soviet Union and its successor state, the Russian Federation



American aviation lawyer Jerry Skinner is representing five Australian families bereaved by MH17

Coupled with the explosion, this shower of fragments sucked air out of the body of the plane, causing it to break up into six sections which all came down to earth separately. The JIT's description of what happened is based on the accounts of eyewitnesses who claim to have seen the missile being fired, on remnants of the aircraft and of the Buk missile found at the crash sites, on satellite images and data from radar and even on photos and videos of the missile being transported to Donbas, which is held by pro-Russian separatists and from where it was fired.

The trial in Amsterdam is not the only legal case to be brought. Groups of relatives of the victims have brought two cases to the European Court of Human Rights. One of them, prepared by American lawyer Jerry Skinner, demands compensation of €6.4-million from Russia for each of the victims.

Advocate Skinner made a name for himself in the trial held in May 2000 over the downing of Pan Am flight 103 over the Scottish town of Lockerbie in December 1988. Skinner is acting on behalf of forty families of victims and he told the court: "Such a weapon as the Buk missile system, from which MH17 flight was downed, could not leave the territory of Russia without the permission of officials. Probably, we will hear the names of the advisors close to Putin who maintained close links with actors in the east of Ukraine. I believe we will hear about Putin." I'm sure we will, but the denials will continue: Russia's new Tsar sees his own position as bomb-proof. It's

only his political rivals that have much to fear. The European Court called upon Russia to respond to the charges put but has not published what the Russians said. Additionally, four relatives have filed a separate suit at the ECHR, this time against Ukraine for not closing off the airspace over the conflict zone. They had closed it below 8,000 metres only. Strangely, Russia imposed its own ban up to an altitude of 16 kilometres shortly before MH17 was brought down, 16 km being the maximum altitude for a Buk missile.

WHO'S WHO

The problem with cover-ups is that they have to be cohesive, consistent and persuasive, and the JIT do not believe this to have been the case with the MH17 disaster. They have published material that was recorded with the participation of militants and a senior Russian official, made in July



Official portrait of Serguei Choigou in 2014

2014. The official in question allegedly stated that "men are coming from Shoygu (Russian Defence Minister Sergey Shoygu) and that they "will kick the local warlords out of the units".

The same official is claimed to have said to the person being quoted, "you will report to our Minister of Defence. Our Minister of Defence is Strelkov (the codename of Vsevolodovich Girkin), and our Commander-in-Chief, like any other President or Prime Minister, is Borodai." (Aleksandr Borodai, a Russian) According to the investigators, a few former militants told them that the Russian Security Service (FSB) and the Military Intelligence Service (GRU) were deeply involved in running the



Video reconstruction of the moment of the missile explosion. JIT presentation

so-called Donetsk People's Republic (DPR), one of them reporting that the leaders of the DPR regularly travelled to Moscow to consult both the FSB and GRU.

JIT investigators remain convinced that at least some of the leaders of the DPR had been sent there by Moscow. Some witnesses had said that they came from inside the Russian Federation. Just after MH17 was brought down, Girkin announced to Borodai that he was leaving to "return to HQ". In August that year, both Girkin and Borodai travelled to Moscow. In an interview in 2017, it's claimed Girkin said "I was ordered to pass the command to Zakharchenko". Germany has repeated a call for Russia to start getting involved in the investigation. "Those responsible for this crime, the destruction of MH17 flight aircraft," said German Foreign Office spokesperson Maria Adebarr, "must be identified and brought to justice, and, of course, Russia should co-operate constructively in the investigation of this crime." That might seem like wishful thinking, with Russia appearing not to take the whole thing seriously, variously

accusing Ukrainian ground troops, a Ukrainian fighter jet and even, on one bizarre occasion, suggesting that what had been brought down was an aeroplane full of dead bodies supplied by the United States and put aboard an otherwise empty flight just to blacken Russia's name. Few outside Russia believe that, especially the relatives of the murdered passengers and crew.

So who allegedly is to blame? Prosecutor Westerbeke made that clear in his opening statement where he believes all the evidence points. "Among the DPR fighters," he told the court, "we view Girkin, Dubinskiy, Pulatov and Kharchenko as leading players in the downing of flight MH17. Girkin and Dubinskiy were top military leaders of the DPR. Pilatov and Kharchenko were Dubinskiy's direct subordinates. Together, these four men took delivery of the Buk-TELAR from the Russian Federation and deployed it as part of their own military operation, with the aim of shooting down an aircraft." Others, Westerbeke said, may have played lesser rôles, instrumental in shooting down the aircraft, but the responsibility rests with the four accused. "The crew

of the TELAR pressed the button," said the Prosecutor, "but according to the indictment it was Girkin, Dubinskiy, Pulatov and Kharchenko who directed the employment of this weapon in order to serve their own interests. They were in command of others; they directed the Buk TELAR to the launch location; they talked during intercepted communications about the need for a Buk to serve their cause and whether 'their' Buk had done its job; they noted with delight that an aircraft had been shot down; they directed others in the delivery of the system to the launch site and they organise the removal of the Buk-TELAR to the Russian Federation. When it comes to evidence and responsibility, as of now no other suspects in the investigation are in the same position as Girkin, Dubinskiy, Pulatov and Kharchenko." It is the wish of the JIT that the minor players who have been named - the alleged button-pressers, the guards who watched over the TELAR and others - should face justice in Ukraine itself.

Later in the speech, Westerbeke concedes that the murders of innocent foreign civilians may not have been the aim, although it was the effect. "It is perfectly conceivable that the true intention of these defendants was to shoot down an aircraft of the Ukrainian armed forces." Bear in mind, they may be cleared of all charges, of course. In fact, he went on to say that some of the evidence uncovered by the JIT points towards what he called "this error scenario". But that makes no difference under Dutch law. To clarify, he told the court that there is a guiding principle: "wars are fought between combatants, and that civilians are not involved in any way. When despite this principle civilians in Ukraine use violence against Dutch, Malaysian, Australian and Belgian citizens, this violence falls under the scope of the ordinary criminal laws of these countries." He said it didn't make any difference if the perpetrators used a rifle or an advanced rocket system and also regardless of whether the intended victims were civilians or combatants. "Our preliminary conclusion," he said, "is therefore that the suspects were not entitled to claim combatant immunity in July 2014, and that they had no right or excuse to use violence in Eastern-Ukraine,"



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Justice Complex Schiphol



Boudewijn van Eijck and Sabine ten Doesschate
Dutch lawyers assisting one of the four men who are
being prosecuted for the MH17 plane crash

THE STRONG LANCE OF JUSTICE

Judge Yolande Waynobel, responsible for liaising with the media in this case, spoke of the vast volume of evidence amassed by the JIT. “The prosecutor’s office has handed over a lot of materials to us,” she said, “Now the matter is much larger than it was in November. The question is whether these materials are complete. On Monday, the judge will answer this question. If he considers that the file is finished, he can decide to look into the case. But this does not mean that new materials cannot be added to the file.” It will be difficult to add much more material; many dozens of witnesses have spoken about what they claim they saw, what they think they knew and what they may or may not have heard, but in the Russian-controlled DPR and in the Russian Federation itself, they run a serious risk if their statements are seen as ‘traitorous’. For that reason, the identities of many of those witnesses are to remain secret. Moscow’s record for dealing with people who don’t toe the official line is not a happy one. Their defence against officialdom is not strong. “Place sin with gold,” says King Lear in the eponymous play by William Shakespeare, “and the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks. Arm it in rags, a pygmy’s straw does pierce it.”

The opening session of the court was held behind closed doors because of the corona virus scare, although that’s not the reason for the hearing to have been suspended. It’s the sheer volume of the evidence: 36,000 pages of files and other material; Pulatov’s lawyer, the only defence figure taking part in the proceedings, told the court he needs time to study everything. The judge agreed. “The court suspends the

examination of the Pulatov case until June 8th, 10am,” said Presiding Judge Hendrik Steenhuis, “and the defence will be able to speak at that time.” Supporters of the victims’ families placed 298 empty chairs outside the Russian embassy in the Hague as a reminder of those who died, many bearing white roses and photographs of the dead. Embassy officials declined to comment but Putin, while saying he would await the outcome before giving his opinion, cast doubt on the likely objectivity of the trial, saying the evidence gathered is ‘biased and politically motivated’. Although none of the accused is expected to appear - Russia never extradites its citizens and even though Kharchenko is a Ukrainian citizen, it’s thought likely he now holds a Russian passport - relatives of the victims believe the trial could bring some comfort to them. Justice in this case is not only delayed but looks likely to be denied altogether. Those who lost loved ones, though, still see it as more than just symbolic. Meanwhile, Girkin and Kharchenko have been placed under a visa ban and had their assets frozen by the European Union, which has also imposed asset freezes on several Ukrainians who held positions under the pre-2014 regime and who stand accused of ‘looting the country’. Ukrainian investigators are still assembling cases against them. And of course, being accused and standing trial, even if in absentia, as in this case, is no proof of guilt.

So now the case is there but not there, like the missing dead who might have filled those chairs in The Hague. It will continue, but it may take years, and those who caused the disaster will doubtless walk free, untouched and untouchable. Westerbeke, in his opening speech, quoted the Russian writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who once said “Violence has no way to conceal itself except by lies, and lies have no way to maintain

themselves except through violence.” The war in the Donbass region goes on, despite a ceasefire and a ban on certain types of weapon. On one day, 8 April, the ceasefire was reportedly violated eight times and Ukrainian forces near the town of Maryikna and villages such as Pavlopil, Hnutove, and Novo-Oleksandrivka, came under attack from troops firing 120mm and 82mm mortars - both supposedly outlawed - as well as from heavy machine guns and small arms. So the conflict is not over, despite a peace conference in Paris last December, mediated by France and Germany, and despite new Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky agreeing to a 2016 formula that gives special status to the Donbas region.

Some 13,000 people have died in the conflict, not counting the passengers of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17. The Dutch court is determined to ensure that their deaths will count, or at least come under detailed scrutiny, however obliquely. It will focus attention, whether or not the accused are found guilty, but in view of the current media obsession with the corona virus, justice looks like being delayed, denied and, unfortunately, largely ignored.

However, the hearings related to the trial that began on 9 March 2020 continued, and on 25 November of the same year, the District Court of The Hague made what is known as an interlocutory decision, which also marked the conclusion of the pre-trial stage in the proceedings.

The point of such a decision is generally to allow a case to progress unhindered by addressing, for example, an issue that otherwise would cause the case to stall.

In the case at hand, the interlocutory decision comprises rulings on all requests for investigation submitted by the defence as well as the Public Prosecution Service at previous hearings.



Covid protected MH17 Tribunal

Consequently, Judge Hendrik Steenhuis rejected the request by the defence for more time to investigate alternative explanations for the shooting down of flight MH17. The defence repeated a previously submitted request to retrieve information from devices that may have recorded radar activity and also wanted to be given access to additional photographs of the wreckage. These were also rejected by Judge Steenhuis who said that a clear alternative scenario had not been presented.

The Court also called for new questioning of the witnesses and reiterated its wish to hear the four suspects in person.

The three Russians, Pulatov, Girkin and Dubinsky as well as the Ukrainian suspect Kharchenko have not cooperated with the court so far. The case was then referred to the examining magistrate for additional investigation.

Due to the numerous delays caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the hearings only resumed on 1 February 2021. Among the issues addressed were the progress of the additional investigation, the damage claims submitted by the victims' relatives and the official request by the Public Prosecution Service to inspect the reconstruction of the remains of the plane.

At this hearing, Oleg Pulatov's lawyer, Sabine Ten Doesschate requested that an expert from Almaz-Antey, the Russian state-owned arms manufacturer be also allowed to inspect the reconstituted wreckage of the plane.

The Court convened again one week later, on 8 February 2021.

During this session, Judge Steenhuis announced that the Court did not believe it to be necessary to allow an expert from Almaz-Antey to inspect the debris, stating: "The court considers that enough consideration has been given to the usefulness and the need to establish the expertise of the witnesses



or experts, and the understanding or assessment of those documents. Both requests from the defence, because of a lack of an established need, have been denied".

In addition, the defence's request that two new witnesses be interviewed was rejected by the Public Prosecution Service on the grounds that the information available about these witnesses was insufficient.

The Court also confirmed that if the decision to allow an inspection of the wreckage is approved, the number of people able to attend will be limited, for two reasons. Firstly, the reconstructed remains of the plane are in a relatively small hangar situated on a secure, military site. And secondly, Covid-19 measures may still be in place at that point in time. In the event of an inspection, it has been decided that a livestream coverage will be provided by the Court.

Regarding claims for damage compensation, the Court had, on 31 August 2020, determined that for the time being, such claims that are yet to be submitted by the victims' relatives shall be subject to Ukrainian law.

A law firm in Ukraine was asked by Counsel for the Relatives, to cooperate with a professor of Ukrainian law in providing adequate legal advice. Furthermore, it is expected that all claims for compensation will be submitted by 15 April 2021 at the latest. This is the date of the next hearing, during which it will be decided whether

to allow the inspection of the wreckage. If the Court approves the application, this will be conducted in May 2021.

The date of 7 June 2021 has been set as the start of the hearing on the merits in the MH17 criminal trial, if the investigation by the examining magistrate proceeds as expected.

This is the main phase of the trial and as its name suggests, a hearing on the merits is one in which one side presents to the judge the facts which support their side of a case or ruling. Conversely, the other side will attempt to prove that the proponent's case has no merit.

It is expected that the relatives of the victims of flight MH17 will be able to exercise their right to address the court sometime after the summer of 2021.

No definite date has been set for the conclusion of the criminal trial.

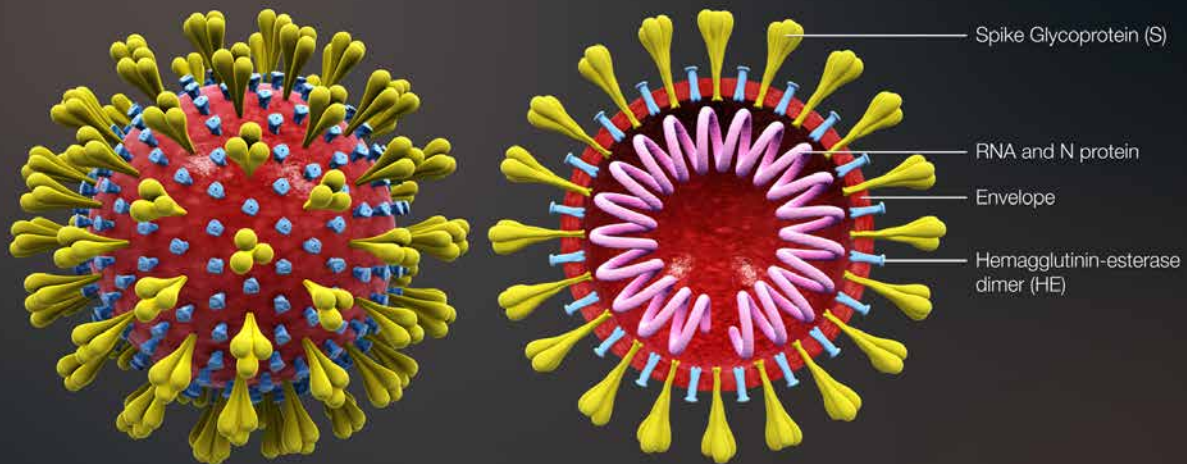
But it must not be forgotten that besides Pulatov, Girkin, Dubinsky and Kharchenko as the suspects, the Russian Federation as a state is also being prosecuted, in particular under the Terrorist Financing Convention, following Ukraine's lawsuit against that country in the International Court of Justice.

The Joint Investigation Team (JIT) continues its work and additional charges cannot be ruled out, while at the hearings in the UN International Court of Justice, Russia has made attempts at delaying the transition to the consideration of merits, citing Covid-19 and other difficulties in formulating its legal position.

By all accounts, it is expected that the International Court of Justice will hand down a final ruling on the MH17 case by late 2023.



TBG & HS



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3D Medical Animation still shot of structure and cross-sectional view of Human Coronavirus

V IS FOR VIRUS, VACCINE, VITUPERATE...

Rows about preventative measure get V for Vicious

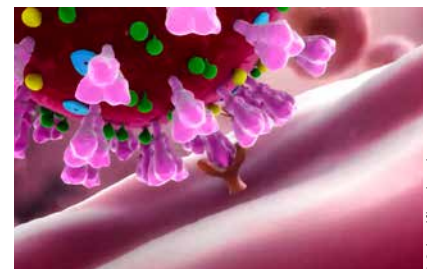
What exactly is a virus? One answer could be “a bloody nuisance”. But is it even a living organism? There’s some disagreement over that, although the general consensus is ‘no’, at least in most cases. “They are problematic as they have many characteristics of the more definably living cells,” wrote Adam Rutherford in a footnote to the introduction of his book, *The Future of Life*, “but lack the cellular machinery to reproduce themselves. Thus they are parasitic on living cells in order to reproduce.” I should really explain that Rutherford’s book is really two books in a single cover: *The Origin of Life* and *The Future of Life*, both parts packed with accessible information and very interesting. Rutherford opts for the ‘not alive’ side of the argument, with certain provisos. But if a virus isn’t really alive and cannot reproduce without help, how come the SARS-CoV-2 virus is causing worldwide death and destruction whilst simultaneously wrecking the global economy? In a way you have to admire something so small that can, despite its tiny dimensions, have such a colossal impact.



Adam Rutherford British geneticist, author, and broadcaster

The virus in question measures between 60 and 140 nanometres in size. That’s around one thousandth the width of a human hair. Your fingernails grow at the rate of one nanometre per second. The SARS part of this particular virus’s name comes from ‘severe acute respiratory syndrome’ and its shape defines it as a corona virus – basically globular with things sticking out of it (early photographs only showed a segment of the outer coat which, with the spikes sticking out, looked a little like a child’s

drawing of a crown) – hence ‘CoV’, while the fact that it’s the second type to have appeared adds the ‘2’ to its official title. The diminutive dimensions mean that a single respiratory droplet of less than ten micrometres (10µM), ejected in a sneeze, a cough or even transferred to a surface by a hand that had touched a mouth or nose, can contain thousands and thousands of virus particles. One is enough. Basically, the virus is a round blob of protein held inside a fatty membrane from which protrude spikes of a different type of protein. Inside it is a strand of RNA – ribonucleic acid – containing its genome: the instructions for making copies of itself. This spike



Medical Animation Still Shot Showing the SARS CoV-2 Spike Protein Binding to ACE-2 Receptor

© Scientific Animations



of “S” protein can grab hold of what’s known as the ACE2 receptor on a human cell, allowing the structural “N”, “M” and “E” proteins it contains to enter the cell and hijack its machinery to construct the other proteins the virus needs in order to reproduce. It’s very good at it, as its growing list of victims around the world clearly demonstrates.

The RNA strand of the SARS-CoV-2 virus is unusually long, with some 29,900 bases, which is close to the limit. By comparison, the Ebola virus has around 19,000, the influenza virus has around 13,500 bases, while the virus for the common cold can boast a measly 8,000. That massive SARS-CoV-2 RNA strand (massive in comparison with others, that is, and still contained inside the lipid envelope) is the virus’s strength but also its possible weak spot. With so many bases to copy, there is a potential for errors, leading to mutations that can spread the disease more quickly or kill it off completely. So far there have not been many mutations; the virus has shown itself to be an unusually accurate proof-reader, thanks to an enzyme called exonuclease, that is able to correct any mistakes. But it also provides an opportunity for a vaccine to disrupt its construction process, although it seems that the long RNA genome contains “accessory” genes that may help it to avoid the human immune system. For scientists working to defeat the thing, finding how to achieve that has been a challenge to which they have risen with commendable speed.

There are various ways in which vaccines can work. Some use disabled fragments of the original virus to spur the immune system into vigorous action. Some map the genes from the virus and insert them into a safe virus of some sort which is then injected. Ribosomes in the host cell then make virus pieces which are

presented to the T cells, thus setting off an immune response. The various vaccines currently being used around the world employ a variety of tactics, but those mysterious “accessory” genes seem to be making it harder to achieve immunity. What’s more, sometimes the immune system overreacts, which is extremely dangerous. Part of its job is to kill off infected lung cells, but the dead ones can then create a lot of mucus-like waste that clogs up the lung, making it necessary for the victim to be put on a ventilator to save them from suffocation. It is a race against time.



Helen_Clark former prime minister of New Zealand

RACING AN UNKNOWN COMPETITOR

“Every day counts if you are trying to stop an infectious disease of unknown origin,” said Helen Clark in an interview with the South China Morning Post. “There just doesn’t seem to be enough happening quickly enough, from the time of first awareness of the cluster onwards, and here we are.” Clark, a former prime minister of New Zealand and one-time head of the United Nations Development Programme, is co-leader of an international panel investigating the pandemic.



MEP Manon Aubry co-chair of the European United Left–Nordic Green grouping with MEP Martin Schirdewan

“The WHO didn’t have all the information it needed, and – let’s be fair here, we are still discovering things about Covid-19 every day, we are on a very steep learning curve – but all the more reason, I would think, for applying a precautionary principle. If it smells bad, it may well be bad,” she told the newspaper.

So, a race against time? It seems more like the three-legged egg-and-spoon race for grumpy parents at a nursery school sports day in the rain, with everyone tripping over their own and other people’s shoelaces, bumping into each other and ending up with egg all over their faces. Take the nonsensical (and uncharacteristic) confusion into which the normally ice-cool Ursula von der Leyen has led the European Commission over which she presides. Cracks have appeared in the relationship among the 27 countries that make up the European Union as coronavirus has stoked fears and a competitiveness over vaccination. They argued over which vaccines were needed and at what cost while Britain, disregarding its former partners, raced ahead, leading von der Leyen to become secretive about what the Commission was doing, allegedly avoiding the European Parliament and unwilling to reveal what contracts it had signed with pharmaceutical companies and “resisting the publication of the contracts and refusing to lift intellectual property rights to ramp up production,” according to The Left group of MEPs, who called the situation “a fiasco”. It was a classic ‘panic’ response. Von der Leyen had agreed to meet privately with some political groups but not others, leading The Left’s Co-President, Manon Aubry to say: “It is unacceptable that the Commission is hiding from EU citizens instead of assuming real leadership.”



Aubry said that at a time of such widespread suffering, the Commission and its president should be seen to be in the driving seat. “The crisis in the EU is growing,” said The Left’s Co-President, Martin Schirdewan, “with families struggling to make ends meet and businesses closing down, yet the Commission continues to adopt a passive approach and refusing accountability of any sort.” The Left have accused von der Leyen’s Commission of handing control of the Covid-19 response to the pharmaceutical companies themselves by refusing to declare the vaccines “a public good”. The Left argue that at a time like this the Commission should waive Intellectual Property Rights and scale up production through compulsory licences.

Von der Leyen also came under attack in the UK when she threatened to break the so-called Northern Ireland protocol, which would have closed the border between the north (the part that is in the UK) and the south (which is the independent Irish Republic).



© Nrf
Conservative MEP Daniel Hannan

“Europhiles have finally had their eyes opened to the hideous reality of the EU;” gloated former Conservative MEP and Europhobe Dan Hannan, writing in the Eurosceptic newspaper, the Sunday Telegraph. One should recall, however, that when he was an MEP he spent much of his time with the officially anti-EU MEPs of Nigel Farage’s UKIP party. Furthermore, he was proud of having given a speech in the US in support of the governor of Alaska, Sarah Palin, in which he warned American voters that unless they voted for her they could end up with a National Health Service, like Britain’s. Yep, that’s what he said: only Palin could save you from getting an NHS, when everyone knows medical

treatment should be paid for, with the richest getting the best, of course. So UK voters should remember that his opposition to the EU over COVID-19 conceals an opposition to any sort of free health care; health should be doled out in accordance with one’s wealth. He made it clear in his speech that he believed in a free market for health, but not in free healthcare. Of course, though, he could not resist an open anti-EU goal when presented to him so egregiously by von der Leyen. Who could blame him? Readers of the Sunday Telegraph might turn a blind eye to some of Hannan’s other policies as long as he’s attacking the old bogeyman of Brussels. But that doesn’t make Hannan a candidate for ‘Good Samaritan of the Year’ where public health is concerned.

Even so, the EU has been lamentably slow in its bid to vaccinate the vulnerable: only 3% of EU citizens had had the jab at the time of writing compared with 14% in the UK. This has drawn envious sniping from some EU politicians over Britain’s hasty (some might say reckless) rush into a vaccination programme with a relatively lightly-tested vaccine. The latest sniffy criticism had just come from France’s Europe Minister, Clément Beaune, saying EU citizens had “nothing to envy” in Britain’s response.

Partly because of the speed of research and development, together with the disunited nature of our world politically, a lot of pharmaceutical companies are rushing to get a product to market, but they cannot bypass their legal requirements. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) there are around fifty different vaccines under development around the world, apart from those already in use.



© Lawrence Jackson
US Vice President Kamala Harris getting her second COVID-19 vaccination

This scattergun approach is necessary because the virus itself mutates and is constantly changing, despite its excellent proofreading and error-correcting mechanism. “What we’re seeing is similar mutations arising in multiple places,” Adam Lauring, a virologist at the University of Michigan, told Scientific American. “That’s pretty suggestive that these mutations are doing something.” Specifically, they appear to help the virus transmit more readily and evade the immune system. The vaccines produced by Moderna and Pfizer BioNTech still seem to work effectively against SARS-CoV-2, some other types rather less so. I certainly hope the Pfizer BioNTech version works – it’s the type I was given a few days ago.

Apart from a mild tenderness in my left arm and a feeling of tiredness for a day afterwards, it has had no ill effects, nor do I expect any. As long as it keeps SARS-CoV-2 at bay, I shall be content, but I show no signs so far of becoming one of the “millions” some conspiracy theorists believe the vaccines will kill.

WHAT’S YOUR POISON?

The Spanish variant of the disease involves the A222V mutation, which hampers the ability of antibodies to attack the virus’s famous spike protein, the little spiky things that protrude from the virus and which are what latches onto our ACE2 receptor cells. The UK version of the virus, known as B.1.1.7, which the British government has warned is ‘more contagious’, contains some seventeen mutations – that’s a lot, considering how proficient the virus has proved at putting right any errors that occur. Whether or not it is more contagious is still up for debate but it certainly seems to kill more of those it infects. The B.1.351 version is



© UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe
UN Secretary-General António Guterres gets Vaccinated against COVID-19 at High School in Bronx

the South African type, which originated far from the UK but at the same time and contains the same mutations, plus a couple of even nastier additions: E484K and K417N which help the spike protein fend off our bodies' attempts to disable it through our immune systems, and it does this even more potently than other types. Just to add to its unthinking malevolence, the South African type is even harder to spot. The UK variant can be identified through a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test, while the South African type requires full genetic sequencing and can be missed even then.



A Duke University Health Systems staff administers a COVID-19 test at a US drive-up testing site

There is another new variant that has cropped up in Brazil, although it has also been noted in Japan, according to Scientific American, which explains that minor random mutations have been happening ever since SARS-CoV-2 made the jump from animals to humans. They are certainly keeping research scientists busy and politicians terrified, either for the health of their citizenry or for their chances of re-election.

But while researchers run themselves ragged in the hunt for a vaccine that works against every variant, and politicians try to save their own careers, conspiracy theorists have been having a

field day. Former US President Donald Trump, for instance, reckoned that a rise in reported cases was merely the result of increased testing. He repeated the allegation in television interviews. It's the equivalent of a lazy householder blaming his home's lack of cleanliness on his visitor's new glasses; if you can't see it, it isn't there. Then there was the claim that if we sat back and just let the virus spread, we would eventually develop what's called 'herd immunity'. The reason this is a bad idea is that the disease would have to infect up to 70% of the community for that to work, and given its tendency to cause widespread mortality, you'd be left with a largely deserted country and some of the world's richest morticians. Additionally, some people (Trump being one of them yet again) dismissed COVID-19 as being 'little worse than flu'. Indeed, Trump claimed that only 6% of the reported deaths were from COVID-19, effectively repeating some nonsense that originated with the debunked conspiracy theorist site, QAnon. I'm sure some people still cling to this nonsense, at least until they get COVID-19.

Such a claim would have had little impact on the population just after World War I when the so-called Spanish 'flu killed some 50-million people. Researchers say the SARS-CoV-2 virus is much more deadly, probably by a factor of five or even ten. There are still people who believe face masks are unnecessary, with some state leaders in the US actually banning the imposition of a requirement to wear masks on their employees. There are movements of people opposed to masks, maintaining that they are an infringement of liberty. They're an infringement on the freedom to willingly catch a virus you don't believe exists and to have the death of your choice rather earlier than you had planned.



Piers Corbyn announcing his candidacy in the 2021 London Mayoral Election on 31 December 2020

Once more, of course, we have the anti-vaxxers, opposed to any sort of vaccination and willing to bet the lives of their loved ones on some unqualified Internet guru being more right than all those research scientists and doctors. Even more ridiculous is the claim that it's all a plot to let Bill Gates insert tracker devices in us all, hidden somehow inside the vaccine. What in the name of every loony who ever lived would he do with that information, even if he had it? And, of course, there's the discredited research scientist Doctor Judy Mikovits who claims that deaths were not caused by the virus but by a reaction to wearing face masks leading to sufferers breathing in (one assumes they also had to breathe out as well, at least before they went 'pop?') their own virus. In an on-line interview for Science magazine, she said "Wearing the mask literally activates your own virus.

You're getting sick from your own reactivated coronavirus expressions, and if it happens to be SARS-CoV-2, then you've got a big problem." Although denying that she's an anti-vaxxer, she does claim that the new COVID-19 vaccines "will kill millions". They won't. I have just had one myself (the Pfizer version) and I'm utterly convinced it's safe. Furthermore, Bill Gates hasn't been in touch.

According to mainstream scientific reports, only believers in conspiracy theories take much notice of Doctor Mikovits these days. That is nothing when compared with Piers Corbyn, brother of the former Labour Party leader in England, Jeremy Corbyn, who publicly likened the rollout of the vaccine in the UK to Auschwitz, although how he makes that leap is anyone's guess. He had been distributing leaflets showing



Doctor Judy Mikovits during a vaccine protest

the infamous gate of the extermination camp but in which the words 'Arbeit macht frei' had been replaced with a new slogan taken from a London Evening Standard headline, 'Vaccines are safe path to freedom'. It is a vomit-inducing slogan that shows yet again a woeful ignorance of basic science on Corbyn's part but which also proves he has never visited Auschwitz, nor does he appear to have any sympathy with all those who died there. No-one who has seen the place could compare it with an attempt to save public lives. I visited with a camera crew in 1993 and I still have occasional nightmares about it. It is foul beyond measure and beyond imagination. That any human being could have sat down and even contemplated such an act of unspeakable evil and cruelty defies logical thought.

SPREADING IT AROUND

If you think we've mainly put such horrors behind us, think again. We have now entered the lunatic realm of "COVID deniers". These bizarre people send threatening emails to doctors and nurses who are daily struggling to stem the tides of deaths to accuse them of misleading the public because there is no such thing as COVID-19. Those who have claimed that hospitals are at bursting point are being daily threatened on social media with murder and even rape (the latter saying more about the mind of the person sending the message than of anything else). How did we reach this stage? I mean, who starts these conspiracy theories and why? We must assume, I suppose that the trolls actually believe the nonsense they keep spouting, leaving aside for the moment those

who realise that it is nonsense but who spread it anyway for a political purpose, and because they are paid to.

The troll factories of Russia, China and elsewhere are, it would appear, trying to spread disinformation in order to cause chaos and confusion and to weaken the response. It's a dirty form of war, especially as no war is officially taking place. Others do it, I assume, for mischievous motives or from a desire to prove to themselves that they know more than anyone else and are therefore cleverer than the experts. It is this arrogance that seeks to undermine the medical and other staff who have to face the horrors and the risks of SARS-CoV-2 on a daily basis.

But before we smugly congratulate ourselves that we would never become trolls to spread disinformation, spare a thought for the world's poorest countries. Looking after them is not mere altruism. "The virus knows no borders," wrote French Assembly-member Jennifer De Temmerman in the summary to her report on 'COVID-19: ethical, legal and practical considerations,' written for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, "and it is therefore in every country's interests to co-operate on ensuring global equity in access to COVID-19 vaccines." As she put it, "Immunisation must be available to everyone, everywhere." But for most of us in the developed world, that means an emergence from the worst of the pandemic in the reasonably near future, thanks to those self-same vaccines, after which our economies, while doubtless changed forever, will almost certainly recover eventually. Will this pandemic be more than an academic subject for school students two decades from now? That's not the case for Africa and other poor regions. "I believe that solidarity at an international level is essential," De Temmerman told me, "and to inoculate some countries and not others is a nonsense."

For the developing world, the pandemic has been at the very least a double-whammy: while it has claimed a relatively small proportion of lives (as far as we know), deaths at the time of writing still exceed 2.6-million across 47 African countries, fewer than Europe's total, but it's still a lot. The pandemic has also held up economies in the developed world whose demand



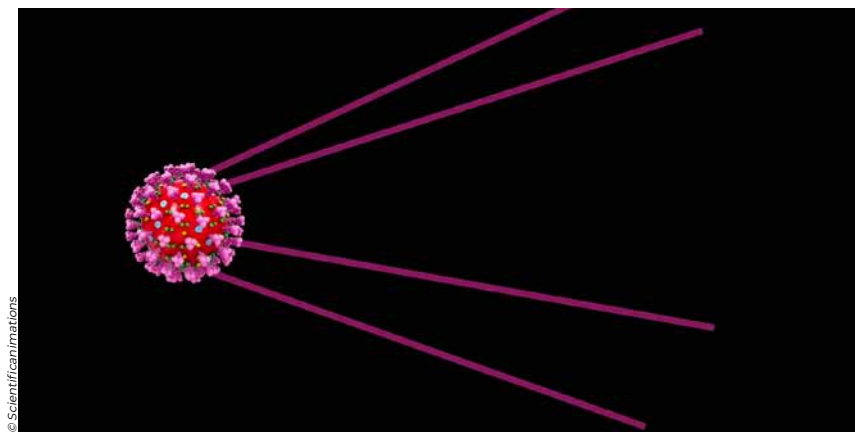
French Assembly-member Jennifer de Temmerman

for raw materials – the chief exports and currency-earners in for instance, sub-Saharan Africa – has led to a dramatic fall in commodity prices and a loss of jobs, especially amongst the relatively young. And Africa, like South America, has a burgeoning population, providing the promise of more and worse unemployment in the years ahead. Much of the demand for exports had been fuelled by the rapid economic growth of China, with its hunger for oil and minerals, such as iron ore and copper, but also uranium ore, diamonds, and agricultural produce such as cotton, coffee and cocoa (there is - or was - a thriving smuggling operation involving cocoa around the Bight of Benin. I was advised for my personal safety not to raise the issue when I was in Togo in the late 1980s). What's more, Africa had been building its now-blighted tourism business, while domestic trade suffered from damage to hard currencies. And, despite the relatively small number of lives lost, the number of what are called 'excess deaths' – the extra number of people dying above and beyond the normal – has been higher than for Western Europe.

Doctors working there believe the real figures are far higher than the published ones anyway. De Temmerman is convinced that all countries, rich and poor, need to tackle the pandemic together if more of us are to survive. "Unfortunately, we do not see that sort of solidarity," she said. What we do see, unfortunately, is countries in the poorer south paying more than three times as much for the vaccines as countries in the EU.



A patient is taken to Mount Sinai hospital in Astoria, Queens, during the COVID-19 outbreak in New York



© Scientific Animations

Medical Animation Representing Sputnik V Vaccine

The scientific community and pharmaceutical companies have been remarkably quick at developing vaccines, which is wonderful news. But it is also helping to fuel what's called 'vaccine hesitancy': those who would benefit from being given the vaccine but who don't trust it because it's new. Even new, can it really be riskier than taking no precautions at all? Still others are resisting taking whatever vaccine is on offer out of a misplaced sense of nationalism: they only want whatever vaccine was developed in their own country. I've never fully understood those who conflate nationalism with patriotism, especially as both are, more often than not, a cloak for jingoism, and a fairly threadbare cloak at that. It was the 18th century man of letters Samuel Johnson who is claimed to have said that "patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel", although his biographer, James Boswell, did not give the context when he gave the quote. It's thought that Johnson may not have been denigrating patriotism per se but merely its showy over-use by the British prime minister of the time, William Pitt. Whatever he meant by it, it sounds sensible to me. I agree with Albert Einstein's view, too: "Nationalism is an infantile disease. It is the measles of human race." In this case, refusing a vaccine because it wasn't created in your country could turn out to be rather worse than measles and very possibly fatal.

In fact, however quickly a vaccine is approved, it still has to undergo a series of stringent tests by its developer, followed by a scientific evaluation by regulatory authorities. For countries inside the EU and the European Economic Area, that may include the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and/or other regulatory bodies before

the producer's own national authorities get their hands on it. The EMA has set up a committee of experts, a task force in effect, to speed up the procedures for checking. The bodies doing the assessing are supposed to be independent and shielded from political interference. No pharmaceutical company is allowed to compromise on safety, quality or efficacy, with vaccines against COVID-19 facing the same legal requirements as vaccines against other ailments and, indeed, other sorts of treatments. Studies into the pharmaceutical quality of any vaccine involve a close examination of the ingredients, including any inactivated virus parts, as well as the manufacturing process. The UK was accused of rushing the approval for the vaccines it licenced for use, but in this case speed was unusually important. There is talk of a vaccine "passport" to allow cross-border travel to resume for those who have been vaccinated, but this seems unlikely, with civil liberties groups expressing the fear that this could lead to a kind of "apartheid" system, effectively making vaccination compulsory, when it must



Pascal Canfin Chair of the EU Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

not be. Germany's Interior Minister, Horst Seehofer, told Euronews that he was opposed to any 'special treatment' regime for those who have been vaccinated and the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, agrees. The small card I was handed after I was vaccinated merely states that it was the Pfizer vaccine and gives the batch number and date. It does not even give my name, so not exactly a passport, then.

Within the EU, members of the European Parliament are demanding better data on how the available vaccines are being allocated. They want the vaccination schedules for each country to be made public and to be provided on a monthly basis. "Only once we have a clear picture can we build trust, address challenges linked to delays in supply and the speed at which vaccines are being administered and fight back the growing wave of uncertainty and disinformation in Europe," wrote Pascal Canfin, who chairs the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI). MEPs pointed out that only a limited number of member states had provided data on their vaccination programmes. Another EU agency, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), is also providing on-line data about the roll-out of vaccination programmes. It can be accessed at the COVID-19 Vaccine Tracker section of the ECDC website. "Vaccination campaigns are not to be viewed merely as a race for the largest numbers at the quickest speed," said ECDC Director Andrea Ammon on the organisation's website. "As the rollout progresses, vaccination strategies will need to be flexible and adaptable. Our updated report on national deployment plans gives context to the evolution of policies and data available in the Vaccine Tracker." That, at least, is an attempt to use science to ensure accurate statistics, the right sorts of weapon with which to confront a pandemic. The poor people of Pompei and Herculaneum had no possible defence against the eruption of the volcano, Vesuvius. Clearly, we face an eruption of a very different sort that requires calm consideration and common sense. Today's conspiracy theorists seem to want us all to shout "boo" and jump into the lava. There's a simple response: don't!

T. Kingsley Brooks



© Marc Hillebrand, Cologne

Aerial View from the South-West

RIVIERA AIRPORT

A gateway between mountain and sea

Nestled idyllically in one of Italy's oldest cultural landscapes, in an area where mountain rivers form a delta and flow into the Mediterranean Sea, Riviera Airport situated some 60 kilometres east of Monaco beckons air travelers approaching the coast through azure blue skies.

There was a time when the skies above this airport were criss-crossed with the white contrails that aircraft of the Italian Air Force left behind like brush strokes on a blue canvas.

This former military airfield known as Albenga Airport will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2022. It has a long association with military achievements, industrial breakthroughs as well as civilian endeavours.

This mythical runway which contributed to the legend of Italian aviation was put up for sale five years ago. With about one hundred airports already run by the state, Italy is trying to reduce this number by allowing some partial privatisations as well as various rehabilitation projects.

Riviera Airport however is an exception. Its total privatisation is part of an experiment and a case study for the Italian government, which agreed to allow a private investor to operate a general and business aviation hub. And the man at the helm of this perilous enterprise is Clemens Toussaint.

He is German, born in Germany but a resident of Monaco. Before going into the aviation

business, he was an art historian. He searched for and tracked down works of art stolen by the Nazis throughout Europe.

Very much affected by the dark past of his country, he decided to embark on a quest for justice, when he realised that the directors of certain museums who were implicated in a number of war crimes during World War II, were still in office as late as the 1960s; they had never been tried or ever punished for their crimes. What's even more shocking is that the vast majority of them had, in total impunity, kept all



© Marco Zanardi, Alasio

Clemens Toussaint



© Milan Ingeneria Srl, Milano & Open Building Research Srl, Milano

Rendering Internal View of Club Terminal

the artworks among which many had been stolen from Jews during the Holocaust.

And so, Clement Toussaint took it upon himself to return these art treasures to their rightful owners or their heirs.

A FLIGHT BETWEEN LUXURY AND ART

Clemens Toussaint meets us at the prestigious Monte Carlo Yacht Club. He smiles, seems at peace and appears confident. After reminiscing on thirty years of trying to heal the wounds inflicted by German history and which have also affected him, he enumerates his future projects just like a man who has regained his serenity.

These stem from a vision that he has had : an airport dedicated exclusively to a high-end clientele and where it's mostly private business jets that take off and land.

And yet, it's impossible for him to forego his first passion which is art; he promises that many works of art – legally acquired of course – will be exhibited within the prestigious terminal.

Aesthetics is at the heart of the project : *“The idea is to bring back the charm of flying. Today, we take a plane like we do the metro; flying should continue to be a unique and magical experience every time”.*

A NICHE MARKET

Monaco is home to a record number of some 200 private jet owners. Until now, it had faced a serious problem of storing these aircraft as there was no

airport in the vicinity that would allow long term parking facilities.

Although Nice Côte d'Azur Airport sees a large number of these prestigious aircraft land on its tarmac, its administrators' policies tend to dissuade wealthy owners from parking their planes for long periods. Not only do they not apply degressive rates but on the contrary, increase the tariffs progressively when parking times are considered too long, thus making it the most expensive airport in Europe.

Other than these commercial considerations, Riviera Airport's main competitor has the major disadvantage of being situated very close to the sea; its runways are actually on the water's edge. Although this makes for spectacular views from the windows on take-offs and landings, the salty sea spray is very corrosive and causes damage to the fuselage of the parked aircraft. The result is more frequent maintenance and repair bills, taking a toll on even well-padded bank accounts.

And the fact that French town planning laws prohibit Nice airport from building hangars for aircraft storage except the one for Prince Albert II of Monaco's private jet, makes this sector a niche market with high economic potential. And it is precisely with this in mind that Clemens Toussaint launched his bid for the privatisation of Riviera Airport.

HIGH POTENTIAL BUSINESS

It was by studying the yachting sector with its insufficient docking spaces



New Terminal Front

on the French Riviera, that Clemens Toussaint came up with a business plan for his airport project.

Yacht owners are forced to anchor in nearby Italian ports and they would therefore become his future clientele.

He reasoned that if some billionaire is prepared to travel fifty odd kilometres to board his yacht for a few hours of leisure, he would surely do the same in order to use his preferred mode of business travel; his personal jet. This can even be seen as a way of making life easier by making it shorter for him to travel from point A to point B.

Before the Covid-19 crisis, Nice Côte d'Azur Airport handled on average 15 million passengers per year, with the administrators forecasting double that figure in the future. But even though these growth factors have been adversely affected, trends suggest that the private and general aviation sectors will quickly reach their operational limits at this airport.

IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

The Covid-19 crisis has had a powerful, negative impact on the civil aviation sector, but Clemens Toussaint has elected to see this as a great opportunity to initiate some daring developments. It is obviously easier to undertake all kinds of construction work when the runway is almost unused, and his recent investments will allow Riviera Airport to establish its reputation as the airport with the most modern amenities.

The airport, which was built in 1922 has been variously used for military, industrial and civil purposes. Up until 1962 when Genoa airport was inaugurated, it was the main airport



Central Square with new Control Tower

for the region and was used mainly for general aviation. But now that it is destined to accommodate a top end business clientele, new infrastructures are of primary importance.

Unlike Nice Côte D'Azur Airport, passengers can arrive at Riviera Airport by car and park right next to their private jets. Likewise, a passenger can disembark from a private jet and hop onto a helicopter in a matter of minutes.

In fact, Clemens Toussaint's conception is very different from that of traditional airports.

Visitors and business travelers will no longer be overwhelmed by boutiques and advertising panels in the terminal halls.

These will make way for design, modern architecture, works of art and quality food outlets.

Another special feature is that Riviera is one of the first airports with concrete runways. The airport which was built during Fascist rule in Italy lies between two rivers on ground with a very solid bedrock that can support aircraft weighing up to 60 metric tons.

As the majority of private jets do not exceed 50 metric tons, Riviera Airport can easily accommodate most aircraft in the private sector. What's more, it clearly stands out from its main competitor at Cannes Mandelieu which cannot accommodate aircraft exceeding 25 metric tons.

In order to allow as many people as possible to experience the feel of the new airport, modernisation work is underway this winter to lengthen the runway by 300 metres, bringing the total length to 1800 metres.



Aerial View from the South

Together with the added advantage of a modern surface layer for perfect water drainage and the latest systems in runway lighting technology, the airport will be able to accommodate the largest private jets.

As far as the new owner is concerned, safety is the number one priority. Therefore, the very first works consisted in the setting up of GPS and GNSS virtual corridors and flight paths, allowing for an efficient and safe instrument approach.

As for the aesthetic aspect of the terminal itself into which will be incorporated the tradition of slick Italian design, the building with its prestigious Milanese architectural style covers an area of almost 800 square metres.

Despite the gargantuan works initiated by Clemens Toussaint, he remains modest about the quality of his building. He readily acknowledges that what makes this airport unique lies mainly in the scenery and the natural beauty of the valley between Monaco and Genoa.

THE LONG TERM VISION : AUTONOMY AND ECOLOGY

Another highlight of Riviera Airport is the construction of high security hangars. Luxury private jets are very expensive little gems that require much care. Since they spend, on average, 330 days a year parked on the ground, their owners want to see them protected from corrosion as well as prying eyes. There is a project for a 12,000 square metres common hangar that can accommodate some ten very large jets to begin with. In the next ten years, this will be converted into a handling facility which will make

way for the installation of individual and custom-made hangars to suit the needs of individual tenants.

In the near future, this type of individual hangar could be used to store cars, serve as wine cellars and cigar cellars, or even a small flat for pilots in transit. In fact, all types of ancillary improvements are considered to add to the quality of service and offer the best customer experience.

For the time being, all efforts are focused on improving the runway and ancillary equipment, but one can imagine how the site will look like in a few years' time. The 100 hectares of land will be covered by a multitude of hangars, there will be a solar park producing 30 megawatts of electricity to supply the whole of the valley. Clemens Toussaint certainly has a keen interest in the development of civil aviation but he also predicts that private aviation will be among the first to act with greater responsibility in the new future.

As far as he is concerned, the solution already exists : it lies in the development of synthetic kerosene, even if it costs more.

Competition is fierce between airports around the world to be equipped with the best, in terms of both technological prowess and the reduction of greenhouse gases.

Riviera Airport's initial aim is to go even further by producing its own electricity and redistributing it to the whole region, as well as creating a residential park to accommodate airport staff, technicians, pilots and air crews...this will allow them to be



Internal Terminal View

as close as possible to their aircraft. At a later stage, the aim will be to boost social and economic activity in the valley with various infrastructures such as schools, nurseries, shops and businesses.

For some, this project may seem something of a fantasy, but Clemens Toussaint relies on hard facts. The Italian Riviera, while benefiting from the same natural attractions as the French Riviera, namely the proximity of the sea and the mountains, the climate and an international clientele, is two to three times cheaper than its French counterpart in terms of the cost of living. In short, an attractive region with great potential, where much remains to be done.

DISASTER RELIEF

Riviera Airport is intended to serve essentially as a high-end private and business aviation hub. But it can also handle “premium” general aviation and more standard flights, as well as a helicopter service. Recently, the Italian civil protection and Carabinieri requisitioned part of the airfield to come to the aid of victims of ‘Storm Alex’.

Once again, Riviera Airport made history by helping to save hundreds of thousands of lives.

THE CÔTE D'AZUR : AN EXTRAORDINARY STORY

Riviera Airport's ambition is to take advantage of the niche market that is the high-end clientele. However,

everyone working on this project is aware that before becoming one of its main competitors, Nice Côte d'Azur Airport was above all one of its progenitors.

One can therefore imagine that it was the construction of this first airport in 1910 that allowed the French Riviera to become a sort of promised land for major events that later became mythical : the Monte Carlo Grand Prix, created in 1929, the Cannes Film Festival in 1939, the Menton Lemon Festival in 1934, the Monte-Carlo International Circus Festival in 1974, the Monte Carlo TV Festival in 1961, or the famous Nice Jazz Festival created in 1948.

Historically, it was a high speed train service (TGV) that was planned to link Paris to Nice, on the Côte D'Azur; in fact, the same technological prowess that made it possible to travel from Paris to Marseille in just three hours. At the time however, building a very high speed railway line seemed impossible or was too expensive, even for the country that first produced the train that was the envy of the world for so long.

At that time, only Parisians and Lyonnais invested in a secondary residence to spend their summer holidays on the Riviera. However, once the project for the TGV high speed line was abandoned, (editor's note : even today, the TGV trains linking Marseille to Nice run at reduced speeds) another solution had to be found. And that's when the

project for this airport began to take shape. At the time, the international dimension that this seaside airstrip would achieve was unimaginable.

The Côte d'Azur's reputation throughout the world rests largely upon the aeronautics industry. Therefore, one can easily deduce that Riviera Airport owes its rebirth, at least in part, to the existence of the Nice Terminal.

Clemens Toussaint considers means of transport and travel as decisive factors in the successful development of a region : *“In the 19th century, at the time of the referendum to decide whether Nice should remain Italian, the decision was taken for it to become part of France because there already was a rail network linking it to Paris. It is the transport links that develop the regions”.*

Since the 1970s, Italy has not developed or invested in tourism-related infrastructures. So, Clemens Toussaint has decided to tackle this challenge head-on; first of all : *“For Italy, so as to create a functioning structure in the context of an important, industrial sector” and then, as a resident of Monaco : “to offer its quality of services to the Principality, because 99% of our customers are Monegasques”.*

Currently, Cannes Mandelieu Airport handles an average of 20,000 flights per year and achieves a proportional turnover of approximately 20 million euros per year.

Riviera Airport handles only 10% of this traffic, which amounts to 2,000 flights per year; there is therefore huge potential for growth.

This will happen, slowly but surely. According to Clemens Toussaint, it would be a great achievement to take from Nice Côte d'Azur Airport 10% of its long haul international flights.

This would ensure sufficient income to continue the development of the airport and the planned infrastructure. And hopefully, one day...it will fly with its own wings.

Caroline Fayolle



Aerial View of Runway



Official ceremonial flag (sometimes called the "Ambassador Flag" as it is the preferred choice of Ambassadors)

THE UNDIPLOMATIC VIRUS

How diplomats cope with the pandemic world

It's already been more than a year since we first heard of a new virus, one that was soon to conquer the world and change our lives, perhaps forever. A pandemic like nothing anyone had lived through before, changed the way we interact with each other, slowed down the pace of our hectic lives and proved to us that we, human beings are such small, powerless and fragile creatures.

What started in the Chinese province of Wuhan in December 2019, originally believed to have come from a wholesale animal market and transmitted from bats, spread with astonishing speed throughout the globe and affected, physically or emotionally, every man and woman on this planet.

Day by day the Coronavirus spread and came closer and closer to us, no matter where we were on Earth. It seemed as if there was no escape whatsoever... Asia, then Europe and America, Africa (although curiously slightly less affected), Australia and New Zealand (perhaps the only instance of exemplary crisis management and of keeping the virus under relative control)... we all learned what COVID is and how perfidious it can be. We heard of numerous cases of peoples' health deteriorating by the day, their lungs and sometimes other organs badly affected and needing intensive care and oxygen to breathe. Some bear the scars and other after-effects on their health long after they had been officially declared cured. Others lived through the pandemic with only mild symptoms such as the loss of smell and taste, and yet others

were totally asymptomatic. This is in fact considered the most dangerous condition, as more often than not, they aren't even aware of carrying the virus and thus, spreading and transmitting it even further.

More than one year into the pandemic, the economic recession is showing its teeth, and the uncompromising reports and statistics which worsen daily, are quite frightening: close to one hundred million people have been infected worldwide, more than two million have died, millions of jobs have been lost, countless businesses have gone bankrupt...billions of lives have been affected.

These tragic statistics, which change rapidly from day to day, and of which no country would like to be a part, show us that at the moment, the most badly affected countries in the

world are the USA, India and Brazil. But Europe has also seen its share of calamities and has witnessed terrible scenes that many never imagined they would go through since the end of World War II. In fact, the first case of COVID in Europe was officially



A view of an ongoing decontamination campaign of public places in the Bamako district in response to the COVID-19 outbreak in Mali

© UN Photo - Harandane Dicko



COV 19 coronavirus

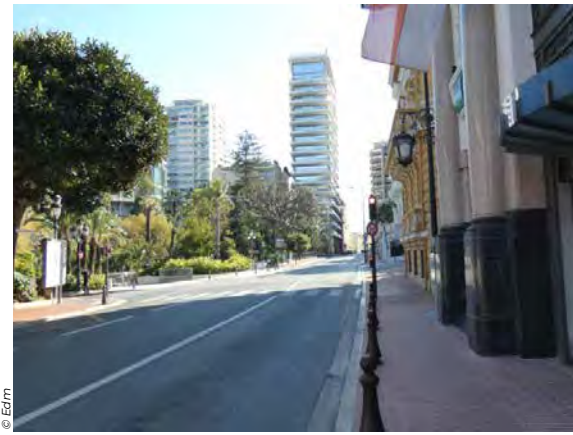
reported in France, as early as January 2020; however nobody expected what was to follow. The aggressiveness of this Coronavirus and the high speed with which it spread throughout the continent took everybody by surprise and unfortunately, caught most authorities totally off-guard. Many complained later that the protective measures were far too slow and inadequate in view of the gravity of the situation in most European countries. One by one, Italy, Spain, the UK and the rest of Europe lived through tragic days that were never supposed to happen in times of peace.

Hospital emergency units were full of infected patients, the seriously ill were kept between life and death by exhausted doctors and nurses, morgues were full of coffins, cemeteries were overcrowded... an awful picture that we would wish to forget as soon as possible. Even for those not infected or ill, it was plain to see that the times were strange. I will never forget the staggering images of empty streets, ghost cities, famous landmarks all over the world completely empty with no eager tourists milling about, pointing their cameras. Instead, we witnessed emotional moments, people singing together from their balconies, trying to cheer up one another and bring hope for the future, and rounds of evening applause and support for the effort of tireless and dedicated medical staff fighting to keep sick people alive.

Progressively, harder lockdowns were imposed all over Europe and strict curfew hours or even mandatory stay-at-home orders implemented in some countries. Inevitably, jokes began to emerge. Suddenly, people with dogs were envied and then, dogs began to get tired of so many walks around the block; everyone was 'jogging' around the neighborhood... 'Stay home, to save lives!' became the universal exhortation. We do indeed live in abnormal times. Recently I even had to attend a funeral – online - thousands of miles away!

However, the manner in which each country responded to the situation was sometimes questionable. Some governments prioritized industries and totally neglected culture which is the most badly affected field of activity. Others chose to close schools for months in a row, forgetting that the only real way to progress in a society is through education. It is too early to say who was right or wrong; only time will tell.

One year into the pandemic, and sadly the situation hasn't changed much. We are still experiencing emotionally wracking lockdowns, still uncertain about how long it will last and how long it will be before our lives go back to normal... if they ever do, that is. New waves of the pandemic have arrived, new and more aggressive variants of the virus have recently been discovered. But although a couple of seemingly effective vaccines have been produced and inoculation has already begun at full speed in many countries, there is still no real hope that the disease is on a downward trend and that this year will mean a return to the simple normality that we all long for.



Empty streets during lockdown

In any case, children under 16 years of age cannot be vaccinated, immunized people could still spread the virus and we don't know the duration of the vaccine's effectiveness.



Preparations for vaccination

There are so many question marks in a society that is slowly losing its patience and endurance. The lessons of past pandemics at the beginning of the 20th century, such as the dreaded Spanish flu have taught us that these diseases do not go away so easily; it takes many years during which millions of people will unfortunately fall victim to them.

This pandemic has forced most people to rethink their lives, to learn to live with less, to interact less with others, to work remotely from home and to try professional reconversions that in some cases, seemed to be long overdue.

Diplomats were no exception. We were affected like most other people. It's true that no jobs were lost as a consequence, but working from home and severely limiting human interactions brought a radical change.



Hospital staff bring in a new patient during the COVID-19



UNTV studio as members of the Security Council hold an open video conference

© UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

After all, diplomacy is by definition, a very socially active kind of activity. People in this field are used to interacting daily with other diplomats and officials, to participating in meetings, to mingling, to discussing and exchanging information, sometimes of a sensitive nature that can only be done face to face. So, by restricting these daily events, the job itself became more difficult to accomplish. Working from home for a while meant acquiring new digital competences and developing a totally new set of skills. It also meant no fully-secure lines of communication and no sensitive information exchanged. Consequently, the volume of work in this field sometimes diminished considerably. Even at the highest levels, most EU meetings were held exclusively online. Health ministers from all European nations met in front of a screen and decided the course of actions to be taken. Locally, the traditional monthly gatherings between all European states' representatives were cancelled or went on virtually; people tried to find new ways to carry on and suddenly all our lives and actions took place in virtual space.



**Leave No One Behind
in COVID-19 response**

But, on the other hand, the new realities called for different measures and actions. Millions of people were stranded in different parts of the globe, without any real possibility of returning to their countries of residence due to massive flight cancellations and restrictions on entry or transit imposed by many states. This led to an exponential increase in the consular activities of most embassies around the world.

Banners with the slogan 'Leave no one behind' were to be seen everywhere. And so, the pressure on Foreign Service officers of all nations grew rapidly. Diplomats have long been at the forefront, providing the necessary assistance to those in need. Hundreds of special emergency flights have been arranged around the world for passengers stranded on the other side of the globe and desperately needing to return home. Road transport convoys have been organized and in many instances, it was the diplomats who negotiated the reopening of borders to facilitate the return to their countries of origin of those who worked abroad and who, in many cases, were left without a job and without the financial means of living in the host countries. Desperate people in desperate situations required rapid and decisive actions. The phone kept ringing around the clock for weeks on end. All these actions probably remain less visible to many, but they certainly made a huge difference and this needs to be emphasized and acknowledged.

For diplomats and their families, this whole situation only added to the stress and the emotional toll that a nomadic life, constantly on the move, usually takes. As a diplomat, you know that your life in a certain country is temporary. You learn to live with that feeling of uncertainty and unpredictability, no matter how unpleasant that may be. You know better than not to become too attached to people and places, not to become too comfortable and not to put down roots in a place that you will call home only for a few years.

But 2020 brought additional complications and greater logistical difficulties to the usual annual rotation process in the diplomatic



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The EU Delegation for the Pacific, under the leadership of Ambassador Sujiro Seam, established a repatriation task force, which made contact with Europeans scattered across 13 Pacific Island countries

world. Suddenly, there were many question marks. How do we move? Is it safe to come into contact with all the usual and essential people in such a complex process? How do we cope with the different measures imposed in different countries? Moving within the EU seemed slightly less stressful since most of the countries had more or less, established coordinated rules. But diplomatic rotations sometimes mean relocation and a move to the other side of the globe. This is no simple task in times of pandemic. How do you make travel plans when flights are delayed from one day to the next or even worse, are cancelled for months on end with little or no additional travel routes to choose from? How do you find adequate accommodation and proper schooling for your children? How do you get in contact with local authorities to fill out the necessary papers required in any



Other period other style. Canadian Ambassador Michael Danagher and South Korean National Assembly Speaker Park Byeong-seug masked up and saying hi COVID-style.

such relocation? All these questions were left unanswered. Therefore, many countries decided to postpone upcoming missions abroad for their Foreign Service officers and to prolong for one additional year their stay in their present countries of residence, in order to slightly ease their burden. I honestly think that this was a wise decision that showed compassion and understanding for the plight of the diplomats.

Travel was restricted in any case, which also meant practically no vacation for most diplomatic staff last year. Who wants to travel when you have to quarantine for two weeks upon your return, anyway? Not to mention the constant stress of not getting infected while travelling, the additional holiday registrations and health insurance and with half your baggage packed with disinfectants and protective face masks.

For the diplomatic corps, holidays are traditionally long (about six weeks of paid holidays per year) and are usually a chance to travel home, visit the extended family and old friends that we have missed while abroad. Not many were offered such opportunities in 2020, and 2021 doesn't look too promising either. We are now in the middle of the pandemic. We look with interest but also with fear at what is happening in our home countries, how the situation is evolving and affecting our parents and relatives. But at the same time, we live in another country where the regulations and the situation are often very different. We must conform to the rules of



Some MEPs participated remotely in the special plenary debate on EU response to COVID-19 in the Brussels chamber.

our host countries, hope that things will soon improve and that life will return to some sort of normality.

Regarding diplomatic activities, nowadays nothing is the same as before. The daily schedule of a career diplomat several months ago illustrates the difference. Other than going to the office daily, the work agenda has changed considerably... for the worse. It is sometimes impossible not to feel that you have lost your usefulness, that your work is no longer as important and relevant as it was previously. Most diplomatic events are now cancelled, most conferences postponed and the very few still taking place have moved to online platforms such as Zoom, Skype or others.

There are no longer evening celebrations or gatherings. How can you still perform your duties and do the work you were trained for, how do you meet new people from other embassies, how do you make

new contacts, exchange information, form alliances, when the most important diplomatic tool - social interaction - is no longer available? Suddenly, most of the important social events in every diplomat's life have disappeared. There are no more grand receptions on the occasion of the National Day of each country, considered the 'high point of the season' and an excellent opportunity for making new acquaintances and socializing with other foreign diplomats. No more exciting and competitive diplomatic sports competitions, such as the Diplomatic Football Cup, Diplomatic Canoe Race or the Diplomatic Tennis Tournament, to name just a few of which I am aware and have participated in. These events that were so popular in the past, included diplomats from many countries who got together and formed close bonds over a relaxed weekend of sports and fun activities, along with their families.

The pandemic and the strict rules of social distancing also greatly affected spouses and partners of career diplomats who live the same nomadic life but usually without much of the social interaction and activities that a normal professional life offers. It is difficult to cope with the change in the dynamics of your social life when you begin trailing along behind your spouse. You generally need mental strength to overcome difficulties and adapt to new situations you find yourself in. You need to have a strong character in order to fight the countless prejudices of society and the clichés often related to the wives of diplomats. You have to learn to take



Pope Francis greets diplomats accredited to the Holy See during an audience in the Hall of Blessings at the Vatican Feb. 8, 2021



Nicolson Street, Edinburgh during 2020 UK Lockdown

your position in society and earn peoples' respect and admiration for your own work and merits, and you certainly need to disregard the often superficial and meaningless titles which are bestowed simply because you are in a 'plus one' position for a while. All these facts, which naturally erode your mental state under any circumstances, are now amplified by the pandemic and the additional trials that arise from it.

As part of this group, 2020 brought to me personally an acute feeling of loneliness and distance from the few friends I had managed to make in my years abroad at my latest posting. All the social events, which usually require our presence, have been cancelled. With no embassy lunches, no exhibitions, no artistic events or ordinary diplomatic functions, the need to wear festive and elegant outfits has also disappeared. High-heel shoes have been totally banished from our sight (between you and me though, they probably think I am dead but they're still waiting for me patiently, perfectly aligned in the shoe closet!). This aspect of the high etiquette of a normal diplomatic life is now all but gone. Even though it sometimes tended to be tiring and too formal, it had its special charm and brought a splash of color to everyday life; it broke the monotony that is often part of our lives abroad.

As a result, cultural diplomacy, which is an extremely important tool, especially for the spouses of diplomats, has unfortunately lost much of its potency and importance this year. My life quietly

turned into an eternal oscillation between homeschooling children and preparing meals for the whole family...breakfast, lunch and dinner. Yet I try to seamlessly slip my own literary activities in between.

The question that comes to my mind now, as I am writing these lines, is: how long will all this last? How much longer does the world have to suffer and when will we all be freed from the burden of this pandemic? Sadly, nobody knows. I read reports every day, some encouraging and optimistic, others that make you want to hide somewhere in a cave and come out only when the disease has disappeared. Another big question mark is whether, once all this madness has passed, will life ever return to normal... the way it was one year ago? I'm still trying to imagine whether people will give up the masks they now wear on their faces any time soon, whether we will ever travel as freely and as light-mindedly as we did before. I wonder if people will warmly shake hands again at every meeting and if we will ever see the traditional welcoming diplomatic row used for greeting diplomats when arriving at official receptions.

Diplomatic events are likely to resume at some point, because they are the essence of this line of work and they clearly cannot be replaced by sterile, online meetings. Social distancing is not effective in diplomacy. I think we will definitely see at some point, the resumption with full force of all the events we miss now, perhaps only with small alterations. Life

will surely resume its course. But the questions of how appropriately we acted now will remain. Was it adequate? Did the measures that were taken have maximum effect and minimum human sacrifice? These days, it seems to be THE topic of discussion: which comes first... countries' economies that seem to be collapsing, or the lives of people who cannot fight the disease?

Have we learnt anything from the present experience? I certainly hope so... this pandemic offered us, besides the opportunity to possibly reinvent ourselves, new personal ways of expression. And, above all, I hope that we learnt to appreciate more the people closest to us, to value our time more and to safeguard our health. I would like to believe that we will no longer take our freedom, nature, friends and family for granted. Please take time to call people you love, express your feelings, promise yourself that you will spend more time doing the things you really enjoy, that you will visit the countries you long planned to visit, that you will be grateful for each healthy day bestowed to you and that you will show gratitude for all that is good in your life.

Mankind has proved countless times that it has the wonderful ability to be reborn from its own ashes, like the mythological Phoenix. Pandemics, natural disasters and two terrible world wars have caused immeasurable losses, tested people's resilience and faith, and brought humanity to near collapse. But each time, the lessons that life has given us have been about resilience and perseverance, about the power to overcome obstacles and look optimistically to the future. It is the legacy that each sorely tried generation leaves for the next one. And I strongly believe that no matter how difficult the present situation is and how long this pandemic will last, kindness, optimism and solidarity will eventually prevail.

Alexandra Paucescu

NEWS IN BRIEF

EGYPT LAUNCHES EBRD-UNWTO TOURISM RECOVERY ASSISTANCE PACKAGE



© Edm

EBRD and UNWTO to boost recovery of the tourism sector in Egypt. Institutions to work with Egypt's international cooperation and tourism ministries. Actions include review of safety and hygiene protocols, tourism revival advice and training

The Covid-19 pandemic has placed acute strain on global tourism. To boost the recovery of the sector, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), joined forces in June to support countries that are among the most dependent on tourism for jobs and economic growth.

Their global technical assistance package builds on measures already taken by the EBRD under its crisis Solidarity Package to support existing clients in their handling of the losses caused by Covid-19 lockdowns. The aim now is to expand on that client-level support package with country-level technical assistance to facilitate the fast and sustainable recovery of tourism. On 12 January 2021, Egypt signed a national package geared to its own needs.

Egypt's Ministries of International Cooperation, and Tourism and Antiquities have engaged with UNWTO and the EBRD to ensure their national priorities are addressed. Assistance in Egypt will include training in impact analysis, measurement and monitoring of Covid-19 impacts in the tourism sector; the development of tourism recovery incentive programmes; reviews of the effectiveness of operational protocols on safety, hygiene and security activity; work on building the resilience of tourism enterprises as they adapt to the Covid-19 reality, including the required safety and hygiene protocols, by developing tailor-made training programmes; as well as institutional strengthening to better coordinate the recovery and further growth of Egypt's tourism.

Over the past three years, Egypt has turned around the sharp drop in tourist arrivals that followed the Arab uprising of 2011. After numbers fell from 14 million visitors in 2010 to a low of 5.3 million in 2016, the trend reversed. Numbers have since climbed to 8.3 million visitors in 2017, nearly 11.3 million in 2018 and 13.1 million in 2019. However the impact of the Covid-19 crisis has reversed this trend and is stalling the tourism sector in the country.

The Technical Cooperation Package, 90 per cent funded by the EBRD and 10 per cent by the UNWTO, will be delivered by August 2021.

Similar support is currently ongoing or envisaged for a number of other countries with economies that are highly dependent on tourism, including Jordan, Morocco, Greece, Croatia, Tunisia, Turkey, Albania, Armenia, Georgia, Lebanon, Montenegro and Uzbekistan.

The joint EBRD-UNWTO response was designed in line with the three pillars of UNWTO's Tourism Recovery Technical Assistance Package: economic recovery, institutional strengthening and building resilience, as well as marketing and promotion.

The UNWTO and the EBRD are longstanding partners, having signed a Memorandum of Understanding for cooperation in 2015, which they renewed in 2019.

The EBRD is committing all of its activity in 2020-21 to helping its regions counter the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic, with investment expected to reach up to €21 billion.

ESA SEEKS NEW ASTRONAUTS - APPLICATIONS OPEN 31 MARCH 2021

For the first time in 11 years, ESA is looking for new astronauts. These recruits will work alongside ESA's existing astronauts as Europe enters a new era of space exploration.

The starting point for this is 31 March 2021, when the vacancies for new astronauts open. ESA is strongly encouraging women to apply, because we are seeking to expand gender diversity in our ranks.

ESA Director General Jan Wörner says, "Thanks to a strong mandate from ESA Member States at Space19+, our Ministerial Council in 2019, Europe is taking its place at the heart of space exploration. To go farther than we ever have before, we need to look wider than we ever have before. This recruitment process is the first step and I look forward to watching the agency develop across all areas of space exploration and innovation, with our international partners, in the years to come."

"Representing all parts of our society is a concern that we take very seriously," says David Parker, ESA Director of Human and Robotic Exploration. "Diversity at ESA should not only address the origin, age, background or gender of our astronauts, but also perhaps physical disabilities.

To make this dream a reality, alongside the astronaut recruitment I am launching the Parastronaut Feasibility Project – an innovation whose time has come."

The vacancy runs from 31 March to 28 May 2021 and ESA will only consider applications submitted to the ESA Career website within those eight weeks. After that, the six-stage selection process will start, which is expected to be completed in October 2022.

The European Space Agency (ESA) provides Europe's gateway to space.

ESA is an intergovernmental organisation, created in 1975, with the mission to shape the development of Europe's space capability and ensure that investment in space delivers benefits to the citizens of Europe and the world.

ESA has 22 Member States: Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Slovenia and Latvia are Associate Members.

ESA has established formal cooperation with six Member States of the EU. Canada takes part in some ESA programmes under a Cooperation Agreement.

By coordinating the financial and intellectual resources of its members, ESA can undertake programmes and activities far beyond the scope of any single European country. It is working in particular with the EU on implementing the Galileo and Copernicus programmes as well as with Eumetsat for the development of meteorological missions.



© Esa

ESA astronaut Thomas Pesquet during International Space Station spacewalk maintenance 2 training at the Neutral Buoyancy Laboratory

UNITED TO WORK WITH ARCHER AVIATION TO ACCELERATE PRODUCTION OF ADVANCED, SHORT-HAUL ELECTRIC AIRCRAFT

United Airlines has announced that it has completed an agreement to work with air mobility company Archer as part of the airline's broader effort to invest in emerging technologies that decarbonize air travel. Rather than relying on traditional combustion engines, Archer's electric vertical takeoff and landing (eVTOL) aircraft are designed to use electric motors and have the potential for future use as an 'air taxi' in urban markets.

Under the terms of the agreement, United will contribute its expertise in airspace management to assist Archer with the development of battery-powered, short-haul aircraft. Once the aircraft are in operation and have met United's operating and business requirements, United, together with Mesa Airlines, would acquire a fleet of up to 200 of these electric aircraft that would be operated by a partner and are expected to give customers a quick, economical and low-carbon way to get to United's hub airports and commute in dense urban environments within the next five years.



© Archer

"By working with Archer, United is showing the aviation industry that now is the time to embrace cleaner, more efficient modes of transportation. With the right technology, we can curb the impact aircraft have on the planet, but we have to identify the next generation of companies who will make this a reality early and find ways to help them get off the ground," said United CEO Scott Kirby. "Archer's eVTOL design, manufacturing model and engineering expertise has the clear potential to change how people commute within major metropolitan cities all over the world."



© United Airlines

United CEO Scott Kirby

With today's technology, Archer's aircraft are designed to travel distances of up to 60 miles at speeds of up to 150 miles per hour and future models will be designed to travel faster and further. Not only are Archer's aircraft capable of saving individuals time on their commute, United estimates that using Archer's eVTOL aircraft could reduce CO2 emissions by 47% per passenger on a trip between Hollywood and Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), one of the initial cities where Archer plans to launch its fleet.

Led by co-founders and co-CEOs Brett Adcock and Adam Goldstein, Archer's mission is to advance the benefits of sustainable air mobility at scale. Archer plans to unveil its full scale eVTOL aircraft in 2021, begin aircraft production in 2023, and launch consumer flights in 2024. To drive this fourth transportation revolution and transform how people approach everyday life, work and adventure, Archer has built a highly accomplished team of top engineering and design talent, with a collective 200+ years of eVTOL experience.

"We couldn't be happier to be working with an established global player like United," said Brett Adcock, co-CEO and co-Founder of Archer. "This deal represents so much more than just a commercial agreement for our aircraft, but rather



© Archer

Archer's co-founders and co-CEOs Brett Adcock and Adam Goldstein

the start of a relationship that we believe will accelerate our timeline to market as a result of United's strategic guidance around FAA certification, operations and maintenance."

Adam Goldstein, co-CEO and co-Founder of Archer added "the team at United share our vision of a more sustainable future. We're working closely with their test pilots and environmental teams to make sustainable urban air mobility a reality far sooner than people could ever imagine."

According to Archer "Over the last 10 years there have been tremendous advancements in electric power systems. Technologies have advanced far enough to build a new class of electric vertical takeoff and landing (VTOL) aircraft that use multiple rotors, giving them inherent redundancies and making them safer to operate. These electric aircraft take off vertically like a helicopter, fly forward like an airplane, and will be 100% electric. There is no runway required and the vehicles can land vertically on a traditional helicopter landing pad or retrofitted landing site - this means these vehicles can fit into the fabric of cities without the need for long airport commutes. They will be operated within cities to solve really hard challenges around traffic congestion, sustainability, ground infrastructure, and public safety".

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AWARDS €1.47 BN IN CONTRACTS TO LAUNCH THE 2ND GENERATION OF GALILEO SATELLITES



The European Commission has awarded two contracts for 12 Satellites (6 satellites each) for a total of EUR €1.47 billion, to ThalesAleniaSpace (Italy) and Airbus Defence & Space (Germany) following an open competition.

With this, the Commission is initiating the launch of the 2nd Generation of Galileo, the European satellite positioning system. The aim is to keep Galileo ahead of the technological curve compared to global competition and maintaining it as one of the best performing satellite positioning infrastructures in the world while strengthening it as a key asset for Europe's strategic autonomy.

The first satellites of this second generation will be placed in orbit by the end of 2024. With their new capabilities relying on high innovative technologies (digitally configurable antennas, inter-satellites links, new atomic clocks technologies, use of

full electric propulsion systems), these satellites will improve the accuracy of Galileo as well as the robustness and resilience of its signal, which will be key for the upcoming digital decade as well as more security & military usage.

Background:

With the Galileo satellite navigation system, Europe operates a state-of-the-art system in positioning, timing and navigation that is recognised worldwide as the most performant of this kind. In operation since 2016, Galileo provides signal services to 2 billion users around the globe. 26 satellites are currently in orbit, with 2 additional satellites due for launch in Q3 2021.

In May 2018, the Commission launched the tender procedure to procure a first batch of 12 second-generation satellites through a competitive dialogue, with the objective of signing two contracts (double source) of 6 satellites each. The tender procedure was run by the European Space Agency (ESA) by delegation. After 2 months of detailed technical and financial evaluation of the industrial offers, ESA recommended to the Commission to proceed with ThalesAleniaSpace and Airbus Defence & Space that represent the best technical and financial offers. The three industrial bidders were notified yesterday.

AIR TRAVEL DOWN 60 PER CENT, AS AIRLINE INDUSTRY LOSSES TOP \$370 BILLION: ICAO

A new report from the UN's air transportation agency confirms there was a "dramatic" fall in international air travel due to COVID-19, of around 60 per cent over the course of last year, to levels last seen in 2003.

The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) said, that as seating capacity fell by around 50 per cent last year, that left just 1.8 billion passengers taking flights through 2020, compared with around 4.5 billion in 2019.

That adds up to a staggering financial loss to the industry of around \$370 billion, "with airports and air navigation services providers losing a further 115 billion and 13 billion, respectively", said ICAO in a press statement.

Grounded in March

As the coronavirus began its global spread, the air industry came to a virtual standstill by the end of March. Following widespread national lockdowns, by April the overall number of passengers had fallen 92 per cent from 2019 levels, an average of the 98 per cent drop-off seen in international traffic and 87 per cent fall in domestic air travel.

There was a moderate rebound during the summer travel period, but recovery was short-lived. "Sectoral recovery became more vulnerable and volatile again during the last four months of 2020, indicating an overall double-dip recession for the year", ICAO said.

Disparity at home and abroad

The report notes "a persistent disparity between domestic and international air travel impacts resulting from the more stringent international measures in force."



Domestic travel proved more resilient and was the main driver of any glimmer of recovery to the industry, particularly in China and Russia, ICAO notes, where domestic passenger numbers have already returned to the pre-pandemic levels.

Overall, there was a 50 per cent drop in domestic passenger traffic globally, while international traffic fell by 74 per cent, or around 1.4 billion passengers.

The plunge in traffic, has put the entire industry's financial liability into question said ICAO, and threatens the viability of millions of associated jobs around the world.

Tourism in crisis

It has also severely impacted global tourism, given that more than 50 per cent of international travellers used to reach their destinations by plane.

ICAO said that the regional breakdown in losses showed a \$120 billion loss year-on-year in the Asia-Pacific region, \$100 billion in Europe, \$88 billion in North America, followed by \$26 billion, \$22 billion and \$14 billion in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, and Africa, respectively.

The agency described the near term outlook as one of "prolonged depressed demand, with downside risks to global air travel recovery predominating in the first quarter of 2021, and likely to be subject to further deterioration."

It does not expect any improvement until the second quarter of 2021, although this will still be subject to the effectiveness of pandemic management and vaccination roll out across the world.

Best-case scenario

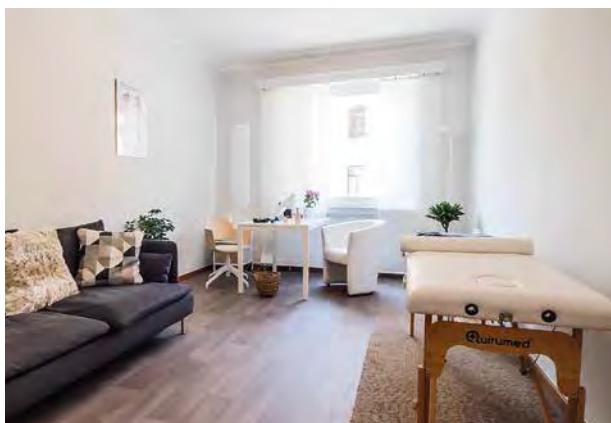
In the most optimistic scenario, said ICAO, by June of 2021 passenger numbers will be expected to recover globally to 71 per cent of their 2019 levels (or 53 per cent for international and 84 per cent for domestic flights). A more pessimistic scenario foresees only a 49 per cent recovery (26 per cent for international and 66 per cent for domestic).

ICAO will continue to provide recommendations and support for the aviation sector to weather the crisis. Its new Guidance on Economic and Financial Measures summarizes a range of measures that can be explored by States and the industry to ease the crisis, and strengthen the industry to withstand future shocks better.

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Sean Ross Abbey orphanage

HUMPTY DUMPTY HAD A GREAT FALL

The truth emerges at last about the mistreatment of unmarried mothers and their babies in Ireland – but there’s still no explanation for the deaths.

It’s hard to sweep a lot of deaths under the carpet, but that is what happened in Ireland for years. In the mainly (but not exclusively) church-run homes for unmarried women who got pregnant, some 9,000 babies died, according to a terrifying 3,000-word report on eighteen of the institutions over a period of very nearly 80 years. In all, some 56,000 unmarried mothers from all walks of life were sent to these supposed “mother-and-baby” homes, where they were shown little or no compassion, even during the process of giving birth. Indeed, the report claims that the women were treated in an especially heartless way at that point. Being terrified and in great pain was, it seems, in the eyes of the staff not sufficient punishment for the sin of unmarried copulation. Having produced the children, the women were not allowed to keep them; most were put up for adoption – effectively

‘sold’ to childless couples – mainly in the United States. The report places a lot of the blame for the ill treatment of the women on the institutions themselves and the church, but it mainly blames society and the women’s families. According to the report, women actually giving birth were sometimes verbally abused, degraded and even slapped. Unfortunately, the report does not draw any conclusions as to why so many babies and children died, but it led Ireland’s Taoiseach – Prime Minister – Micheál Martin to issue an apology on behalf of the Irish state.



Irish Prime Minister Micheál Martin

In a statement in the Dáil (Irish Parliament), reacting to the report drawn up by the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby homes, Martin said the report illustrated what he described as “a profound failure” of empathy, understanding and compassion over a long period. He told the Dáil that children born outside of marriage had been treated as outcasts, and “this was unforgivable”. The babies born in the homes, if they survived the ill treatment, were left without information about their births, which became a terrible burden throughout their lives. Many women and children left Ireland because of the stigma and the abuse they faced, much of it from their own close relations. “We honoured piety,” Martin said, “but failed to show even basic kindness to those who needed it most.” Up until 1960, the report revealed, mother-and-baby homes made little or no attempt to save the lives of what were seen as “illegitimate children”, actively reducing their chances of survival. There is no explanation for



© Nrf

Bessborough Mother and Baby Home

why so many babies died. At the Cork Bessborough home, which was run by the Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, an order of nuns, 75% of children born in 1943 died before their first birthdays.

“For our part, we want to sincerely apologise to those who did not get the care and support they needed and deserved,” the order said in a statement after the report was published. “It is a matter of great sorrow to us that babies died while under our care. We sincerely regret that so many babies died, particularly in regard to Bessborough in the 1940s. We also want to recognise the dreadful suffering and loss experienced by mothers.” I suppose that old saying “better late than never” springs to mind, although it doesn’t in any way explain the ghastly death rate among the children, too young to be anything other than innocent.

Where were the victims buried? That was a question put to the order by the instigative team but, as the saying goes, “answer came there none”. It’s not that the order didn’t try to help, says the report, it was just that nobody seemed to know. “The burial of infants and children who died while in care has understandably become a matter of immense controversy,” the order said in a statement. “We are distressed and saddened that it is so difficult to prove with legal certainty where many of these infants were buried, especially with regard to Bessborough. We did everything possible including the engagement of a professional historian to assist us in our dealings with the commission on this vitally important matter.”

SUFFER, LITTLE CHILDREN

Talk of mother and baby homes conjures up images of pink cots and blue cots, of knitted shawls and teddy bears. The reality was rather different. In a conservative Catholic country like Ireland, pregnancy out of wedlock was, it seems, an unforgiveable sin. The act of copulation was bad enough but was often overlooked with a knowing wink and a tap of the finger on the side of the nose. With prophylactics hard to come by in Ireland (and strongly condemned by the clergy), a girl needed to be able to count and to understand the consequences of unprotected sex. Some of the mothers mentioned in the report were as young as 12, before worldly awareness has had the chance to become established. An Irish member of the European Parliament used to tell me that the priests were always busy dealing with confessions on a Sunday morning, following a lively and hopefully enjoyable Friday and Saturday evening. He used to give a knowing wink and tap his nose, too. The implication was that non-marital sex was a bit naughty for the grown men in the congregation, much naughtier for the women and beyond the pale if it resulted in a pregnancy. We are left to wonder if the 12-year-olds really understood what was going on or its likely consequences.

The mother-and-baby homes received state aid while the public at large turned a blind eye whilst nursing a “serves them right” attitude. One of the homes is alleged to have contained what the nuns called “the reject room”, where mixed race or disabled babies were largely left, unloved and malnourished, sometimes beaten or

simply dragged around by one limb, according to the unsubstantiated allegation of one witness.

The Sisters of Bon Secours, who ran a mother-and-baby home in a former ‘workhouse for the destitute’ at Tuam in County Galway, has surprised Ireland by issuing an apology, although not everyone is convinced that it’s heartfelt. In a statement, the nursing order of nuns admitted that they had “failed to respect the inherent dignity of the women and children who were housed at Tuam between 1922 and 1998”. The remains of hundreds of children were discovered at Tuam in 2017, crammed into a chamber of a septic tank. The nuns were supposed to care for people but it’s clear from the report that they didn’t, or not enough. It would be wrong to heap all the blame on the religious orders, although I’m not sure how they squared their religious beliefs with cruelty towards frightened young women and babies. The women were sent there by their families to avoid “bringing shame” upon them. Having a baby out of wedlock can bring disgrace while suffering long hours of hard physical work and occasional beatings during a pregnancy can apparently bring redemption. It’s a funny old world.

Now I don’t want to drag religion into this but given the subject matter I can’t avoid it. According to Matthew’s Gospel (19:14 in the King James version of the New Testament), Jesus was upset when his disciples tried to shoo away some small children trying to get near while he was talking. He is quoted as saying “Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.”



© AugusteBlancul

Mass grave at the Bon Secours Mother and Baby Home, located in Tuam, County Galway, Republic of Ireland

One assumes the nuns believed that to be the literal truth; so how did they so misinterpret it that they inserted a comma that turned it into an order: “Suffer, little children”. And suffer they did. In the previous chapter of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus is quoted as having said: “Whoso shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.” How did that verse get so totally overlooked? We may never know. Clearly the nuns had no fear of drowning. Incidentally, according to the Qur’an, Mohammed had quite a lot to say about parenthood and instructed everyone to respect their mother, described by the prophet as the most important person in anyone’s life.

The aim of the whole Mother-and-baby home exercise seems to have been not to save the children or their long-suffering mothers but to sweep under the carpet any hint of sexual impropriety in a strictly Catholic and extremely conservative country, although I must point out that a handful of the homes were run by Protestant groups or by the State, and conditions seem to have been no better there. During the first official papal visit to Ireland in almost forty years in 2018, Pope Francis begged forgiveness for the mother-and-baby homes scandal. Meanwhile, the Taoiseach has promised financial help to certain survivors’ groups as well as promising to work with survivors and their representatives to oversee a national memorial. There will also be changes to the education curriculum. The best way of ensuring history doesn’t repeat itself is to ensure that everyone knows exactly what happened in the first place.



Children's Home , Dublin Road, Tuam

Ireland has plenty of experience of punishing girls and women for the crime of getting pregnant. Interestingly, if not surprisingly, the punishment did not extend to the men who had got them into that condition. Who can forget the so-called Magdalene Laundries, where girls could be sent on from one of the mother-and-baby homes, or by a social worker or the Gardaí (police). The ‘laundries’ existed from the time the Irish Free State was created in 1922 until 1996 and, in them, some 10,000 young women (that could be an underestimate) were subjected to long hours of unpaid labour. Some of the places were actually laundries or carried out sewing tasks for money, although the women who did the work never saw any of it. On arrival, everything was taken from them, starting with their names. They were given numbers they had to remember and drab uniforms. Their hair was cut very short and there was a rule of silence. The women were not supposed to form friendships. After 1922, the Magdalene Laundries were operated by four religious orders – the Sisters of Mercy, the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity, the Sisters of Charity, and the Good Shepherd Sisters – in ten different locations around Ireland. They sound like quite shocking misnomers.

BENDING THE LAW

There are organisations seeking to help the victims of this awful practice, which itself seems surprising for a basically good-natured country. After all, many Irish people turn a largely blind eye to minor offences, such as distilling poitín, the traditional but – until relatively recently – illegal Irish spirit. It is most often (but not quite always) pronounced potcheen. The name comes from the Irish word ‘pota’, which means small pot, and the liquor can be distilled from barley, corn, sugar beet, whey, molasses or potatoes, although the potatoes cannot have been involved when it was first produced, allegedly back in the 6th century. An Irish friend who worked in Brussels told me that whenever she went home to her village she knew of a particular wall with one loose stone. If someone put the right amount of money behind the stone they could come back a couple of days later and find a bottle of poitín there. She never knew who produced it.

Poitín was made illegal in the 17th century, mainly because it was farm-



A Selection of Legal Irish and Celtic Poitin or Poteen Bottles Taken in a Poitin Bar

produced, its small still and barrels easy to hide, so that it was difficult for the British authorities to tax the stuff. Remember, Ireland was still a part of the British empire back then. Poitín was only legalised in 1997. And it’s still illegal in the north of Ireland. However, even when it was illegal to make or sell it in the Republic, I was able to buy a bottle in a duty-free shop in Poland. Let’s face it, poitín is what an American would call ‘hooch’: rough alcohol, although in this enlightened age, it’s not so rough. Today, it’s mainly made from potatoes but the varying quality harmed its recovery until the EU granted it the protection of Geographical Indicator status in 2008. “It’s inextricably linked to Irish culture and pride, as it’s hard to separate the two,” says Pádraic Ó Griallais, founder and director of the Mícil Distillery in Connemara, “It was a drink that small farmers made that could help them pay the British landlords’ rent....It was a way for the Irish people to express their irreverence towards the colonial British Empire.” And to get drunk, of course. Incidentally, most of the poitín available to on-line purchasers today ranges from 50o to 90o proof, mainly 90o. It’s not a drink to take lightly. So, although it was acceptable behaviour to get totally legless on a traditional spirit that it was illegal to make or own, getting pregnant was seen as a terrible sin that would bring shame on the family. This is a strange example of double standards but also of sex discrimination: men who ‘play around’ are just a bit mischievous (nod, nod, wink, wink) but girls who do are wicked. No, I don’t understand it either.



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Thomas Creed, SC, Chair of The Bar of Ireland's Human Rights Committee and Paul McGarry SC, Chairman of the Council of The Bar of Ireland presenting its Rights Award to historian Catherine Corless for her tireless work relating to the Tuam Mothers and Babies Home

The wickedness that went on at these 'mother-and-baby homes' is now coming out, somewhat belatedly, and mainly thanks to relentless campaigner Catherine Corless. The truth has been emerging in small pieces. The 5th interim report into Tuam, for instance, which was published in March 2019, revealed that 802 children had died at the home over a period of 36 years. Additionally, 12 mothers had died, mainly from complications arising from childbirth.

The Commission that carried out the investigation said that contrary to reports in the popular press, the human remains found there in 2016-17 were not in a sewage tank but in a specially constructed underground facility with 20 chambers, built inside a large decommissioned sewage tank, probably in or around 1937. So the popular papers were not so far out. The investigators have not established with any certainty the purpose of the structure, although they believe it was likely to have been something to do with the treatment or containment of sewage or waste water. I reckon that means the papers were right, don't you? How on earth was this allowed to go on when the government knew about the homes and the standard of care being given to mothers and babies, just because the women were not married. The Taoiseach (Prime Minister of the Republic of Ireland) was very clear about that. "We had a completely warped attitude to sexuality and intimacy," he told the Dáil, "and young mothers and their sons and daughters were forced to pay a terrible price for that dysfunction." Indeed they were, instantly separated

from the babies to which they had just given birth and forbidden ever to speak to them or hold them.

THE NOT-SO-SWINGING 60S

For the Irish government, the hope is that at last the terrible scandal of the way in which unmarried mothers and their babies were treated can be brought to a close, even though some questions remain to be answered. "All women suffered serious discrimination," says the executive summary to the long official report about what went on. "Women who gave birth outside marriage were subject to particularly harsh treatment. Responsibility for that harsh treatment rests mainly with the fathers of their children and their own immediate families. It was supported by, contributed to, and condoned by, the institutions of the State and the Churches." The women suffered not only the pains of childbirth, accompanied by accusatory and unsympathetic staff, but also the humiliation, long hours of heavy work and, of course, separation from their babies. The fathers suffered nothing at all.

According to the summary, "There were about 56,000 unmarried mothers and about 57,000 children in the mother and baby homes and county homes investigated by the Commission. The greatest number of admissions was in the 1960s and early 1970s. It is likely that there were a further 25,000 unmarried mothers and a larger number of children in the county homes which were not investigated; admissions to county homes were largely pre-1960. While

mother and baby homes were not a peculiarly Irish phenomenon, the proportion of Irish unmarried mothers who were admitted to mother and baby homes or county homes in the twentieth century was probably the highest in the world.

The age range of women admitted to the homes is considerable, from just 12 years old to women in their forties, although most – 80%, the report says – were aged between 18 and 29. It seems that 11.4% – a total of around 5,616 – were under 18, the legal age of consent in Ireland. It is claimed, although it remains to be proved, that the Gardaí were routinely notified of pregnancies in underage women. The number of admissions of girls under the age of 18 rose sharply in the early 1960s and stayed high for the next couple of decades. Under-18s made up almost a quarter of all admissions at one home at Ard Mhuire in Dunboyne, which operated from 1955 to 1991 and which had the highest proportion of minors aged between 12 and 16.

The profiles of the women in mother and baby homes changed over the decades, too, according to the report, mirroring changes in the lives of Irish women. To begin with, most of the women who were admitted were domestic servants or farm workers or else they were carrying out unpaid domestic work in the family home. Later on, though, more of the women were clerical workers, civil servants, professional women and schoolgirls or college students. There is no evidence that women were forced to enter mother and baby homes by the church or State authorities, the report claims. Most women had no alternative, though, which is tantamount to compulsion.



© NIF

'Holding Center' for unaccompanied babies and children, Pelletstown and later Saint Patrick's Mother and Baby home in Dublin where approx. 9,000 to 12,000 women and girls went through its doors.



Unidentified Magdalen Laundry in Ireland, c. early 20th century

There is still no official reason for the exceptionally high mortality rate, mostly affecting children in their first year of life. It seems most likely to have been a simple – if inexcusable – lack of care. Even outside the homes, the death rate was higher for illegitimate children than for those born within wedlock, but it was higher still in the mother-and-baby homes. There, in the years 1945-46, the mortality rate for infants was almost twice the Irish national average for illegitimate children. As the report admits, “In the years before 1960, mother and baby homes did not save the lives of ‘illegitimate’ children; in fact, they appear to have significantly reduced their prospects of survival. The very high mortality rates were known to local and national authorities at the time and were recorded in official publications.” But, as we now know, nothing was done about them, even as the bodies were being concealed without the rite of extreme unction, which, according to the Roman Catholic faith, should be administered to the dying, I’m told.

There were different types of institutions, run in a variety of different ways, with a variety of financial arrangements and practices, says the Executive Summary. “Some were owned and run by the local health authorities – the county homes, Pelletstown, Tuam and Kilrush. Others were owned and run by religious orders, for example, the three homes run by the Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary – Bessborough, Sean Ross, Castlepollard (the Sacred Heart homes). They are often described as

‘extern’ homes or ‘special’ homes. Regina Coeli hostel was run by the Legion of Mary and it differed from the other large homes in that it aimed to keep mothers and children together (a rarity indeed). The Bethany Home was founded by a Protestant evangelical group.” In other words, don’t just blame the nuns. Conditions inside the homes, including sanitary conditions, were generally very poor but the report says that “County homes, Kilrush and Tuam had appalling physical conditions”. It may help account for that astounding death rate.

INDIFFERENCE AS A FORM OF ABUSE

The women received little public sympathy. Those who were transferred from a mother and baby home to an ordinary maternity hospital to give birth for medical reasons, were most often subjected to unfriendly comments by fellow-patients and their visitors. “Mother and baby homes were greatly superior to the county homes,” says the Executive Summary, “where, until the 1960s, many unmarried mothers and their children were resident. Conditions in the county homes were generally very poor; this, of course, was also true for the other residents who were mainly older people and people with disabilities. The women in county homes have been largely forgotten. They included women on a second or subsequent pregnancy and women from the poorest families. County homes admitted women with special needs, mental health problems, venereal disease or a criminal conviction, who would be rejected by a number of mother and baby homes. They also accommodated children who had special needs, including the children of married families. The accommodation and care given to these children in county homes was grossly inadequate; some of the descriptions are extremely distressing.”

Ireland’s nationalist party, Sinn Féin, has criticised not only the report but also the way in which it was leaked to a newspaper prior to publication. “At the very least survivors need to see some level of accountability,” said Kathleen Funchion, TD (it stands for Teachta Dála, or member of the



Kathleen Funchion TD (Teachta Dála, or member of the Dáil)

Dáil) the party’s spokesperson on children’s affairs, “whatever follow-up is made, they’re not going to ever see people prosecuted or in jail for the offences against them over the years and the very least they need to see now is accountability that it’s not acceptable to leak their information and personal stories in such an insensitive manner.”

She wants the Gardaí (state police force of the Irish Republic) to investigate the leak, as well as the criminally poor treatment of the women and babies who experienced life in the homes. The leak came about after the Irish government talked about “sealing” the records away back in October. Now, however, victims of abuse in the homes have found their very personal stories plastered across the pages of the newspapers, causing more pain. Since the leak, Taoiseach Martin has been inundated with letters from survivors who don’t want to see their horror stories buried in state archives for 30 years, with the Taoiseach’s office receiving a petition bearing almost 3,000 signatures. Women who suffered in the homes and the children who survived have spoken of their anger at being expected to wait three more decades to access the records. Martin’s mailbox included letters from supporters of his Fianna Fáil party, saying they would never vote that way again unless the decision was reversed. “Don’t hope it will go away,” was the warning, “Women don’t forget.” The other parties in the coalition, Fine Gael and the Greens have received similar warnings, prompting some of them to accuse other parties of organising troll attacks. “Nope. The campaign

was conceived of by Dr Maeve O'Rourke, Katherine O'Donnell and myself (and paid for by Justice for Magdalene's Research)," said Mother and Baby Homes campaigner Claire McGettrick in a Tweet. "Sinn Féin had no role in its operation. We are very grateful for the support we have received from the opposition and it is our policy to work with all parties and none."

Other opposition parties have been compelled to reject attacks on them for criticising the very strange legislation, which sends all the records to Tulsa for 30 years. Social Democrat TD Holly Cairns said that opposition politicians had raised amendments that had been suggested by survivor groups. "They had extremely simple requests to have guaranteed access to their own information and for an index of the archive for transparency, these requests were ignored," she said. "For government TDs to double down on their defence of this unlawful policy is baffling. This is not a political issue, this is a human rights issue. Yes, there are a few extremists online, but



Social Democrat TD Holly Cairns

the vast majority of the thousands of messages I have received and seen on social media are civil and are just seeking truth.

There is real anger and hurt out there, and the government parties brushing that aside compounds the suffering for survivors of the most awful human rights abuse at the hands of the State," she added. Others agree that the contents of the long-awaited report could and should have been revealed to the victims before it was made public. "Not alone had they the Report for months and failed to give

it to survivors before release," claimed International Socialist Alternative (ISA), "they've attempted to turn reality on its head with a narrative that it was society that was to blame for the misogyny and cruelty, with the state and church only reflecting back, not being the source of it." ISA also point out that the report plays down the responsibility of church and state, blaming 'family and society' instead, as well as playing down the suffering of women forced to carry out heavy work while pregnant or shortly after giving birth. One woman who gave birth at one of the more caring homes (a relative rarity) commented that a priest who was conducting mass in the chapel gave a sermon to all the mainly unmarried young mothers in which he said condoms are "evil" and "the work of the devil". Not the most sensitive subject to pick, perhaps, however strongly he felt about the issue.

"The State fundamentally failed to support the vulnerable of society and ignored the voices of those we should have listened to," wrote Robert Troy a Fianna Fáil TD on his website.

"The State needs to and will listen to the experiences and concerns of survivors. There can be no more 'State knows best' approach. We will not shy away, either in taking responsibility for what happened, or in responding to the report." That's good news, but in a strangely topical turn of events, it has been revealed that the mothers and babies in the homes were used as guinea pigs in trials of vaccines in the past. "The Commission identified a total of seven vaccine trials which took place



Robert Troy a Fianna Fáil TD (Member of Parliament)



Mary Seery-Kearney Fine Gael senator

in the institutions under investigation in the period 1934-1973 and has identified a number of the children involved," said Fine Gael senator Mary Seery-Kearney. "It is clear that the trials were not compliant with the relevant regulatory and ethical standards of the time as consent was not obtained from either the mothers of the children or their guardians and the necessary licences were not in place." I know it sounds a bit like closing the stable door after the horse has bolted but it seems that a lot more horses could still be preparing to bolt.

"These trials all involved either the Wellcome Foundation or Glaxo Laboratories, companies which are today part of the pharmaceutical corporation - GlaxoSmithKline," the Senator said. One assumes that the people of Ireland won't have to wait thirty years to find out what happened there. It was the 19th century Scottish writer Sir Walter Scott who wrote "Oh what a tangled web we weave/When first we practice to deceive." It is proving to be very true for the Irish government, its main political parties, the Irish state, An Garda Síochána (the police), various churches and religious orders, and, of course, members of the public who have disparaged girls who "got into trouble". For a staunchly Catholic country, there is another saying they should bear in mind: "There but for the grace of God go I."

Toby Bowman-Grant

DENMARK DECIDES TO CONSTRUCT THE WORLD'S FIRST WIND ENERGY HUB AS AN ARTIFICIAL ISLAND IN THE NORTH SEA

Denmark has reached a landmark agreement on the construction of an energy hub in the North Sea. The energy hub will be an artificially constructed island 80 kilometers from the shore of the peninsula Jutland. It will be owned by a public-private partnership. The hub will strengthen the integration of Europe's power grids and increase renewable electricity production necessary for a climate neutral Europe.



Denmark has introduced cutoff date of 2050 for oil and gas extraction in the North Sea and canceled all future licensing rounds. Today, by agreeing on the construction and ownership of the world's first energy hub in the North Sea, Denmark takes another significant step in the green transition. The energy hub will produce yet unseen amounts of green electricity and is one of the government's flagship projects for the green transition in Europe. Fully implemented it will be able to cover the consumption of 10 million European households

"This is truly a great moment for Denmark and for the global green transition. This decision marks the start of a new era of sustainable energy production in Denmark and the world and it links very ambitious climate goals with growth and green jobs. The energy hub in the North Sea will be the largest construction project in Danish history. It will make a big contribution to the realization of the enormous potential for European offshore wind, and I am excited for our future collaboration with other European countries", says the Danish Minister for Climate, Dan Jørgensen.

The energy hub will serve as an offshore power plant gathering and distributing green electricity from hundreds of wind turbines surrounding the island directly to consumers in countries surrounding the North Sea. The island is expected to have a total area of at least 120.000 square meters and in its first phase it will be able to provide 3 million European households with green energy. The project will be a public private partnership between the Danish state and private companies. The State will own the majority of the island, but private companies will be crucial for the project to fulfill the potential as regards to innovation, flexibility, cost-effectiveness and business potentials.

"We are at the dawn of a new era for energy. Last year, Denmark set a cutoff date for fossil fuel extraction. Today we are taking a decisive step toward a clean energy future. The EU has set a goal to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 and the Commission has set a target of 300 GW offshore wind energy in order



Dan Jørgensen Danish Minister for Climate, Energy and Utilities

to attain this goal. By constructing the world's first energy hub with a potential capacity of 10 GW, Denmark significantly contributes to this ambitious target. Not only by dramatically expanding renewable energy production, but also by supplying our European neighbors with an abundance of renewable energy", says the Danish Minister for Climate, Dan Jørgensen.

The artificial island will offer the best opportunities to expand the project, for example by building a harbor and facilities for storage and conversion of green electricity from the nearby wind turbines in the sea. It is the long-term ambition to be able to store green electricity on the island, convert it to liquid green fuel, and send it via subsea cables to Denmark and neighboring countries.

Details about the ownership of the island will be specified in order for a tender for private partnerships to be opened, making the island a reality as soon as possible.

A broad majority of the Danish Parliament decided on June 22 2020 to initiate the construction of two energy islands. Both energy islands will export power to the mainland of Denmark and neighboring countries.

Denmark has a long history as a leading country for offshore wind and established the first offshore wind farm in the world. Furthermore, Denmark is the home of some of the world's most experienced offshore companies, that have benefited from the unique location for exploitation of offshore wind.

NEW EUROPEAN BAUHAUS:

The European Commission launches design phase

The Commission has launched the design phase of the New European Bauhaus initiative, announced by President **von der Leyen** in her 2020 State of the Union address. The New European Bauhaus is an environmental, economic and cultural project, aiming to combine design, sustainability, accessibility, affordability and investment in order to help deliver the European Green Deal. The core values of the New European Bauhaus are thus sustainability, aesthetics and inclusiveness. The goal of the design phase is to use a co-creation process to shape the concept by exploring ideas, identifying the most urgent needs and challenges, and to connect interested parties. As one element of the design phase, this spring, the Commission will launch, the first edition of the New European Bauhaus prize.



Ursula von der Leyen

This design phase will lead to the opening of calls for proposals in autumn this year to bring to life New European Bauhaus ideas in at least five places in EU Member States, through the use of EU funds at national and regional level.

European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, said: "The New European Bauhaus is a project of hope to explore how we live better together after the pandemic. It is about matching sustainability with style, to bring the European Green Deal closer to people's minds and homes. We need all creative minds: designers, artists, scientists, architects and citizens, to make the New European Bauhaus a success."



Mariya Gabriel

Mariya **Gabriel**, Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth said: *"With the New European Bauhaus our ambition is to develop an innovative framework to support, facilitate and accelerate the green transformation by combining sustainability and aesthetics.*

By being a bridge between the world of art and culture on one side and the world of science and technology on the other, we will make sure to involve society as a whole: our artists, our students, our architects, our engineers, our academia, our innovators. It will kick-off a systemic change."

Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, Elisa **Ferreira** commented: *"The New European Bauhaus is about how we live together, our values, our common spaces of work and leisure, our collective and private experiences. This is a project for all regions and territories in Europe. In promoting affordable solutions, it should contribute to social cohesion and to solving housing problems.*



Elisa Ferreira

If we want to bring real change around us – for a more beautiful, sustainable life together, we need to think about how the New European Bauhaus can bridge the generation of new ideas with implementation in physical places. We are therefore exploring across the Commission how our tools could be mobilised to launch a first set of concrete New European Bauhaus actions."

Background

The New European Bauhaus is a creative initiative, breaking down boundaries between science and technology, art, culture and social inclusion, to allow design to find solutions for everyday problems.

On the dedicated website launched today, artists, designers, engineers, scientists, entrepreneurs, architects, students, and all interested people can share examples of inspiring achievements for the New European Bauhaus, their ideas about how it should be shaped and how it should evolve, as well as their concerns and challenges.

This is the beginning of an innovative co-design process. Organisations that want to put more effort into their engagement in this process can become 'Partners of the New European Bauhaus,' by responding to the call on the website.

In the coming months, the Commission will award prizes to existing examples that represent the integration of the key values of the initiative, and that may inspire the discussions about, and the transformation of, the places where we live.

In the next phase of the initiative – the 'delivery' phase, five pilot projects will be set up to co-design new sustainable and inclusive solutions with style. The objective of the third phase – 'dissemination', is to spread the ideas and concepts defining the New European Bauhaus via new projects, networking and sharing of knowledge, in Europe and beyond.

Source europa.eu



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EXPO 2020 DUBAI ON TRACK FOR AN OCTOBER 2021 START

Expo 2020 Dubai is gearing up to help shape a post-pandemic world and create a better future for all after a two-thirds majority of Bureau International des Expositions (BIE) Member States voted in favour of postponing the next World Expo by one year.

The global mega event will now run from 1 October 2021 to 31 March 2022, a delay that allows all participants to safely navigate the impact of COVID-19, and allows the World Expo to focus on a collective desire for new thinking to identify solutions to some of the greatest challenges of our time.

His Highness Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al Maktoum, Chairman of Dubai Airports, President of the Dubai Civil Aviation Authority, Chairman and CEO of Emirates Group, and Chairman of the Expo



Terra – The Sustainability Pavilion

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Alif - The Mobility Pavilion

2020 Dubai Higher Committee, said: “We welcome the decision of BIE Member States to support the delay Expo 2020 Dubai by one year. We are thankful to Member States for their continued commitment to contributing to a World Expo in Dubai that will play a pivotal role in shaping our post-pandemic world at a time when it will be most needed.

“Over the last 50 years, we have sought to build bridges, connections, and partnerships around the world because we believe in genuine collaboration to safeguard the future of all. This swift and overwhelming vote reflects the strength of our international partnerships and truly reflects the positive role the UAE and Dubai play with all countries around the world.

“This affirmation by the international community of Dubai’s offering and its ability to deliver, further strengthens our commitment to matching ambition with achievement to hosting an event that will capture the world’s imagination, when the time is right.”

With a BIE General Assembly impossible to stage due to COVID-19 restrictions, Member States voted remotely on the BIE Executive Committee’s recommendation for a delay as proposed by the UAE Government at the beginning of April and recommended by the BIE Executive Committee on April 21. While the vote remains open until

29 May, the two-thirds threshold was surpassed within a week of voting opening on 24 April.

Dimitri S. Kerkentzes, Secretary General of the BIE, said: “I applaud the swift response by BIE Member States. Their support for the postponement of Expo 2020 Dubai – which will be formally approved on 29 May – is a renewed sign of solidarity, and demonstrates the shared will to work together in ‘creating the future’.

“In their support for the one-year postponement of Expo 2020 Dubai, Member States of the BIE are giving the world the opportunity to reconvene in 2021, when together, we can address the challenges facing humanity and celebrate the unity and solidarity that strengthen us. With its theme ‘Connecting Minds, Creating the Future’, Expo 2020 Dubai will offer the world a unique platform to share the lessons, solutions and ideas for a better tomorrow.”

Expo 2020 Dubai retains its name and remains committed to hosting an exceptional event that will celebrate humanity’s resilience, creativity, culture and innovation – including major technological advances in the fields of medicine and science.

The first World Expo to be held in the Middle East, Africa and South Asia (MEASA) region, and largest

ever event to take place in the Arab world, Expo 2020 will welcome 192 countries, plus businesses, multilateral organisations and educational establishments.

THREE THEMATIC PAVILIONS OPENING TO THE PUBLIC FOR A LIMITED TIME, AHEAD OF EXPO 2020

Meanwhile it has been decided to open three thematic pavilions to the public for a limited time, ahead of Expo 2020.

Terra - The Sustainability Pavilion, Alif - The Mobility Pavilion and Mission Possible - The Opportunity Thematic Pavilions will be open to the public five days a week until April 21.



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Mission Possible - The Opportunity Pavilion

“Early Birds” will be among the first few to experience these Thematic Pavilions. Gates are open (Tue-Thu 15:00-21:00 and Fri-Sat 16:00-22:00).

Tickets can be booked online for AED 25. <https://ticketing.expo2020dubai.com/ticketselection.html>

TIMELESS CHIC

Standout Fashion and Beauty trends

By Clara Bauman

Skincare trends: What's up in 2021?

Lockdown, working from home, wearing masks which can lead to “maskne” (a type of acne breakout that results from wearing a face mask) has made us put a little less effort in our make-up routine. As a consequence, it seems that we are now focusing more attention on our skincare practices instead. Compared to 2019, clicks for facial skincare as a category have reportedly increased by +214%! (*)

Highlights of 5 major new trends.

1. Pharmacy Brands

Drugstore and pharmacy brands are becoming more and more popular thanks to their active ingredients, gentle formulations and great value for money.

Among the brands that have garnered the most “clicks”:

- CeraVe (its iconic care product, The Facial Foaming Cleanser, has generated over 1000% more searches on the internet than in 2019).
- La Roche-Posay and Bioderma.



© Bioderma

(bioderma.com)



© CeraVe

(cerave.com)



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2. Vitamin C

Vitamin C is no longer an industry secret; it has now become a mainstream cult ingredient, thanks to its effectiveness in promoting glowing and blemish-free skin. It is also one of the most efficient active agents against premature ageing (wrinkles, collagen deficiency, etc.). Among the leading products, it is vitamin C serums that are in the sights of the discerning clientele.

*Source: insights.stylight.com. Stylight is the world's leading online search platform for Fashion, Beauty and Design).

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© Essie

(essie.com)

3. At-home beauty treatments

Due to the lockdown and closure of hairdressing and beauty salons - thank you, Covid! - we were left with only one option: to take our hair colour, epilation and nail treatments into our own hands. Thankfully, there are so many at-home alternatives on the market right now to keep our manicure or eyebrows on fleek. On our list of 'lifesavers', we are especially grateful to the nail varnishes and nail care products that are as good as the ones professionals use.

4. Wellness tools

Take the Gua Sha (derived from traditional Chinese medicine) that might be one of the more affordable facial treatments you can buy, thanks to the Gua Sha stones.

These are tools traditionally made of jade or quartz and used to relieve tension, to sculpt skin, and increase blood circulation.

Another, immensely popular tool is the jade roller. It is used for facial massage, and is reputed to help sculpt the features, by way of encouraging drainage and toning slackening muscles.

Those new to this method are advised to consult tutorials by professionals before using these techniques.



© Sephora

On the left, a jade roller; on the right, a Gua Sha stone in pink quartz on sale at (sephora.fr)



© PaulasChoice

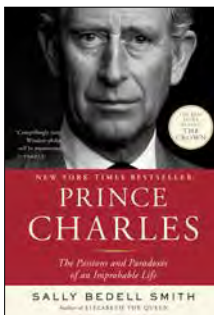
(paulaschoice.com)

5. Chemical peels

They guarantee a radiant and flawless skin, and what makes them especially popular in times of Covid is that they can be applied safely at home, making them the perfect item for a luxurious, lockdown, home-spa treatment.

The more popular ones are based on beta and/or alpha hydroxy acids (such as Paula's Choice Cult Skin Perfecting).

BOOKS

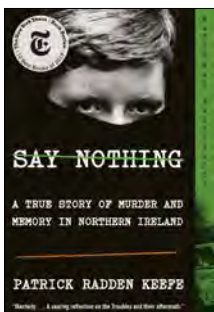
**PRINCE CHARLES***By Sally Bedell Smith***THE PASSIONS AND PARADOXES OF AN IMPROBABLE LIFE**

Sally Bedell Smith returns once again to the British royal family to give us a new look at Prince Charles, the oldest heir to the throne in more than three hundred years. This vivid, eye-opening biography—the product of four years of research and hundreds of interviews with palace officials, former girlfriends, spiritual

gurus, and more, some speaking on the record for the first time—is the first authoritative treatment of Charles's life that sheds light on the death of Diana, his marriage to Camilla, and his preparations to take the throne one day.

Prince Charles brings to life the real man, with all of his ambitions, insecurities, and convictions. It begins with his lonely childhood, in which he struggled to live up to his father's expectations and sought companionship from the Queen Mother and his great-uncle Lord Mountbatten. It follows him through difficult years at school, his early love affairs, his intellectual quests, his entrepreneurial pursuits, and his intense search for spiritual meaning. It tells of the tragedy of his marriage to Diana; his eventual reunion with his true love, Camilla; and his relationships with William, Kate, Harry, and his grandchildren.

Ranging from his glamorous palaces to his country homes, from his globe-trotting travels to his local initiatives, Smith shows how Prince Charles possesses a fiercely independent spirit and yet has spent more than six decades waiting for his destined role, living a life dictated by protocols he often struggles to obey. With keen insight and the discovery of unexpected new details, Smith lays bare the contradictions of a man who is more complicated, tragic, and compelling than we knew, until now.

**SAY NOTHING***By Patrick Radden Keefe***A TRUE STORY OF MURDER AND MEMORY IN NORTHERN IRELAND**

In December 1972, Jean McConville, a thirty-eight-year-old mother of ten, was dragged from her Belfast home by masked intruders, her children clinging to her legs. They never saw her again. Her abduction was one of the most notorious episodes of the vicious conflict known as

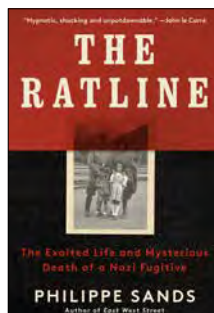
The Troubles. Everyone in the neighborhood knew the I.R.A. was responsible. But in a climate of fear and paranoia, no one would speak of it. In 2003, five years after an accord brought an uneasy peace to Northern Ireland, a set of human bones was discovered on a beach. McConville's children knew it was their mother when they were told a blue safety pin was attached to the dress—with so many kids, she had always kept it handy for diapers or ripped clothes.

Patrick Radden Keefe's mesmerizing book on the bitter conflict in Northern Ireland and its aftermath uses the McConville case as a starting point for the tale of a society wracked by a violent guerrilla war, a war whose consequences have never been reckoned with. The brutal violence seared not only people like the McConville children, but also I.R.A. members embittered by a peace that fell far short of the goal of a united Ireland, and left them wondering whether the killings they committed were not justified acts of war, but simple murders. From radical and impetuous I.R.A. terrorists such as Dolours Price, who, when she was barely out of her teens, was already planting bombs in London and targeting informers for execution, to the ferocious I.R.A. mastermind known as The Dark, to the spy games and dirty schemes of the British Army, to Gerry Adams, who negotiated the peace but betrayed his hardcore comrades by denying his I.R.A. past—*Say Nothing* conjures a world of passion, betrayal, vengeance, and anguish.

**THE LAST LIBERTINES***By Benedetta Craveri***TRANSLATED BY AARON KERNER**

The Last Libertines, as Benedetta Craveri writes in her preface to the book, is the story of a group of “seven aristocrats whose youth coincided with the French monarchy’s final moment of grace—a moment when it seemed to the nation’s elite that a style of life based on privilege and the spirit of caste might acknowledge the widespread demand

for change, and in doing so reconcile itself with Enlightenment ideals of justice, tolerance, and citizenship.” Here we meet seven emblematic characters, whom Craveri has singled out not only for “the romantic character of their exploits and amours—but also by the keenness with which they experienced this crisis in the civilization of the ancien régime, of which they themselves were the emblem.” Displaying the aristocratic virtues of “dignity, courage, refinement of manners, culture, [and] wit,” the Duc de Lauzun, the Vicomte de Ségur, the Duc de Brissac, the Comte de Narbonne, the Chevalier de Boufflers, the Comte de Ségur, and the Comte de Vaudreuil were at the same time “irreducible individualists” and true “sons of the Enlightenment,” all of them ambitious to play their part in bringing around the great changes that were in the air. When the French Revolution came, however, they found themselves condemned to poverty, exile, and in some cases execution. Telling the parallel lives of these seven dazzling but little-remembered historical figures, Craveri brings the past to life, powerfully dramatizing a turbulent time that was at once the last act of a now-vanished world and the first act of our own.

**THE RATLINE***By Philippe Sands***THE EXALTED LIFE AND MYSTERIOUS DEATH OF A NAZI FUGITIVE**

From the author of the internationally acclaimed, award-winning *East West Street: A tale of Nazi lives, mass murder, love, cold war espionage, a mysterious death in the Vatican—and “the Ratline,” the Nazi escape route to Peron’s Argentina.*

Baron Otto von Wächter, Austrian lawyer, husband, father, high Nazi official, senior SS officer, former governor of Galicia during the war, creator and overseer of the Krakow ghetto, indicted after as a war criminal for the mass murder of more than 100,000 Poles, hunted by the Soviets, the Americans, the British, by Simon Wiesenthal, on the run for three years, from 1945 to 1948...

Philippe Sands pieces together, in riveting detail, Wächter's extraordinary, shocking story. Given full access to the Wächter family archives—journals, diaries, tapes, and more—and with the assistance of the Wächters' son Horst, who believes his father to have been a “good man,” Sands writes of Wächter's rise through the Nazi high command, his “blissful” marriage and family life as their world was brought to ruin, and his four-year flight to escape justice—to the Tirol, to Rome, and the Vatican; given a new identity, on his way to a new life via “the Ratline” to Perón's Argentina, the escape route taken by Eichmann, Mengele, and thousands of other Nazis. Wächter's escape was cut short by his mysterious, shocking death in Rome, in the midst of the burgeoning Cold War (was he being recruited in postwar Italy by the Americans and the U.S. Army Counter Intelligence Corps or by the Soviet NKVD or by both; or was he poisoned by one side or the other, as his son believes—or by both?)...

An extraordinary discovery, told up-close through access to a trove of family correspondence between Wächter and his wife—part historical detective story, part love story, part family memoir, part Cold War espionage thriller.

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