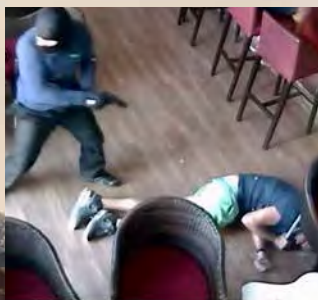


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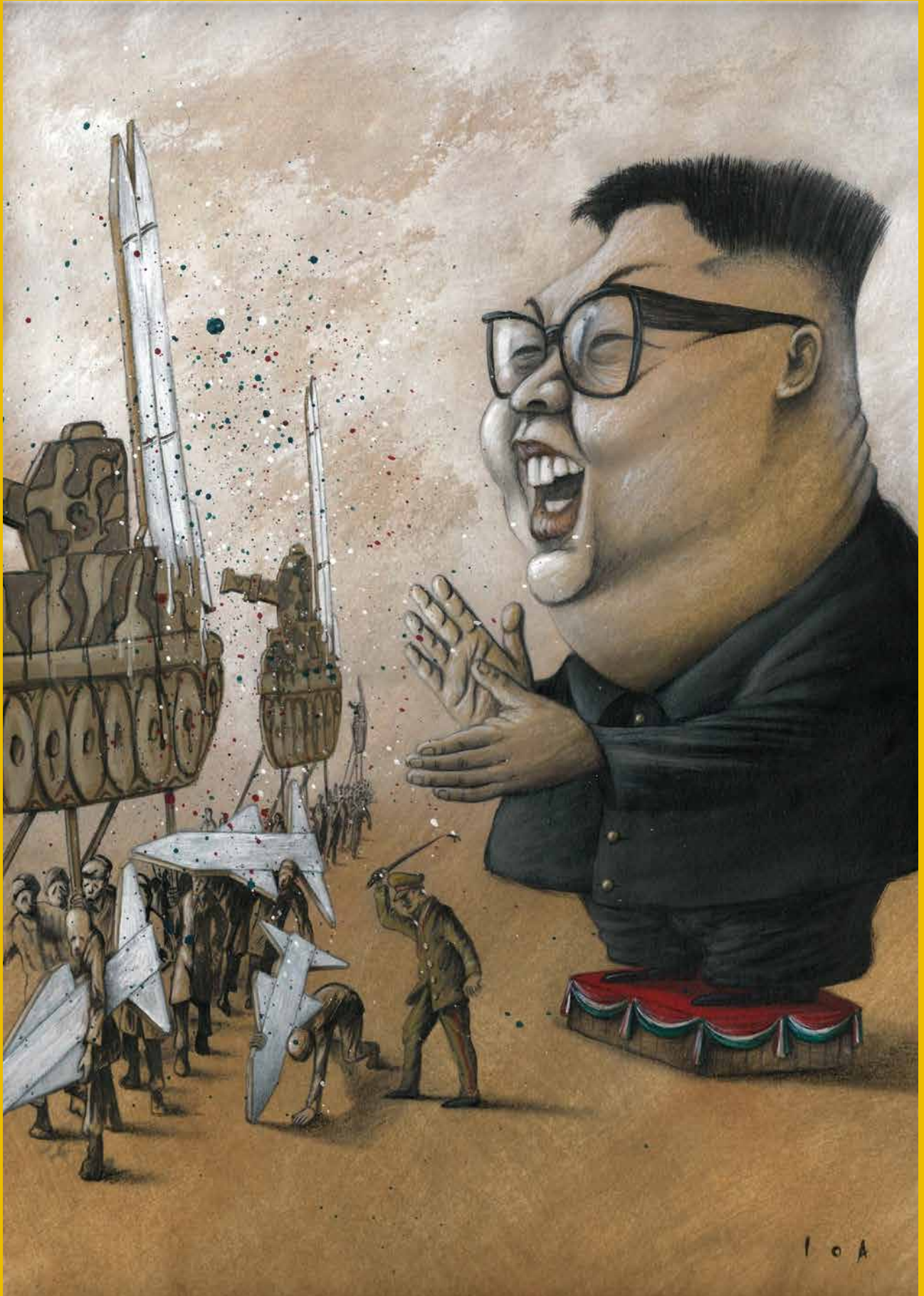
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Nikola Hendrickx



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North Korean leader Kim Jong-Un

A PAST HAUNTED, A FUTURE RUINED

Kim Jong-Un faces moment of truth

5 January 2021...8th Congress of the North Korean Workers' Party.

4,750 delegates and 2,000 spectators eagerly await their leader's speech in the enormous auditorium of the April 25 House of Culture Theatre in Pyongyang.

This rarely-held event is normally the propaganda set-piece for the ruling Workers' Party to trumpet its achievements.

But in his opening address, North Korea's leader Kim Jong-Un accompanied by his sister Kim Yo-Jong who serves as first vice-department director of the Workers' Party Central Committee and other top aides and officials, admitted his country had failed economically, going through what he called the 'worst of the worst': *"The country's five year economic development plan finished last year and we fell short of our goals significantly in almost every sector"*.

Already facing international sanctions for its military nuclear programme, the country has virtually sealed itself off from the outside world during the

global pandemic. It suffered further during typhoons and flooding over the summer of 2020 that damaged infrastructure and crops.

And the end of the Trump administration meant the end of the road for the unprecedented period of summit diplomacy with the United States.

In October 2020, North Korea put on an impressive show of strength on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the ruling party's founding. But Kim seemed to be suffering from the strains

of recent setbacks. In a tearful apology that was highly uncharacteristic of the country's authoritarian leader, he thanked the "great people of North Korea" for their efforts in trying to curb the Covid-19 pandemic. He also said no one could appreciate the "heroic devotion" of the country's armed forces without "shedding tears of gratitude".

It was a rare show of emotion by a North Korean leader, given to the backdrop of a carefully choreographed military parade with huge new missiles on display.



Kim Jong-Un apologising and shedding tears at the 75th anniversary of the ruling party founding

But despite the tears on one side and the show of force on the other, the country's economy is decaying fast. Combined with the general downturn caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, North Korea is facing its greatest challenge since the terrible famine of the 1990s that resulted in nearly half a million people starving to death, according to independent estimates. And Kim's plans for less dependency on imports, for expanding industry and reforming labour laws and practices seem unlikely to turn around the country's dire situation.

This will of course make it difficult for him to fulfil his lofty promises and furthermore, risks severely reducing the available resources for his cherished and extremely expensive military projects.



Dr Bong Young-Shik

Dr Bong Young-Shik, is a South Korean political analyst and a Research Fellow at the Yonsei Institute for North Korean Studies : *"Kim Jong-Un must be extremely frustrated and even highly disappointed about the lack of any progress, especially on the front of economic development since the breakdown of the summit meeting with former President Trump in Hanoi. So, the North Korean leadership has been basically flailing, trying this and that, without any well-coordinated strategy"*.

Be that as it may, a new five-year plan was born of that congress which was the first to take place in five years and only the eighth in North Korea's entire history.

Other than plans for expanding and developing industry, mining, railways and other forms of public transport, the project contains - quite unsurprisingly - proposals for a large



Kim Jong Un gives guidance to nuclear weaponization

array of new military hardware, including of course, more advanced nuclear weapons.

This is clearly a continuation of North Korea's "Byungjin" policy of parallel development of the economy and nuclear weapons.

During the congress, North Korea watchers were particularly on the lookout for any clues as to Kim's likely approach to the new administration of then US President-elect Joe Biden and whether there would be a return to more traditional arms-length diplomacy.

The first test could in fact come soon with a possible announcement of resumed military exercises between US and South Korean forces in the spring, which had been largely suspended during Donald Trump's term in office.

Dr Bong Young-Shik : *"There is a very narrow window of opportunity, a very limited amount of time for Biden's administration to strike a conversation and dialogue with the North Korean regime"*.

So, close to the inauguration of the new American president, North Korea's position seemed to be a cautious 'wait and see'.

LOCKDOWN FOLLOWING KOREAN WAR

North Korea remains an extreme case, unparalleled in the world.

It is often the object of intense scrutiny by the international community for its aggressive displays of militarism, its internationally condemned nuclear programme, and of course its oppressive government dictatorship.

Locked up since 1951 according to the will of its leaders, this "People's Democratic Republic" seems to have fallen into a kind of spatiotemporal airlock.

It has its phobias; namely the imperialists, South Korea, the UN and the inspectors from the IAEA. Not forgetting the overly-observant NGOs, capitalism, disorder, doubt.

In short, any information coming from outside.

But also the will to power of the United States in the south, the ogre-like appetite of Beijing which remains its ultimate ally in the north, the hegemony of Japan, the eternal enemy to the east, and the ambiguity of Moscow.

In short, the fear of others...all the others.

And above all, that of seeing this paranoid entity, guarded by 1.2 million soldiers and a fearsome secret police unravel in the light of truth.

It has been estimated that the economy of North Korea has a nominal GDP of



Kim Jong-Un supervising a military maneuver



© Kena
Kim Jong-Un and Chinese President Xi Jinping

US\$ 25 billion or a Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) of US\$ 40 billion. And this is actually an incredibly hard figure to calculate because of the extreme lack of reliable economic data for the country and because you need to appropriate the value of the North Korean Won which is pretty much an internationally worthless currency with no foreign exchange market.

What this estimate does mean though is that North Korea has a transactional economy smaller than Beverly Hills, California!

Of course, instead of designer handbags and luxury cars, North Korea does channel a large portion of that income back into its military.

At any rate, beyond the dramatic and nationalistic chest-beating and despite all of the opportunities this country has been given, it has dwindled into complete economic obscurity.

To truly understand this catastrophic state of affairs, it is necessary to step back in time.

1980S, THE END OF THE BEGINNING

In the early days after the Korean War, the North actually had a lot going for it. It was starting at a pretty low point but it was able to trade its abundant natural resources with its communist partners and in exchange, they would provide North Korea with industrial goods and technical know-how to transform the country from a fledgling agricultural nation into an industrialised powerhouse.

But then in the early 1960s, overall Soviet support started to dwindle as North Korea began to align more with China. It was also coming under pressure to increase its defence spending given the increased pressure

of western nations and particularly the United States who were determined to stop the communist domino effect.

And in 1965, for the first time and despite all the disadvantages it had previously faced, South Korea exceeded the growth rate of its northern neighbour, even though it still had a smaller economy overall.

The small problem of slowing growth eventually turned into a full-on crisis in the late 1970s.

At this point, North Korea was still able to raise money through government borrowing and it had sunk itself deeply into debt, trying to maintain these ambitious plans. This wouldn't have necessarily been a bad plan had the money actually been invested into productive infrastructure.

But by this time, North Korea was allocating as much as 25% of its budget into its military and considering that its economy is a centrally planned one, the government's budget is in fact, the economy. And so in this period, military expenditure was around 20% of the total economy.

All of this economic mismanagement and reckless military spending meant that in 1980 North Korea defaulted

on its debts which cut off its ability to borrow money to keep its head above water.

These financial problems were compounded by a large-scale drought that was plaguing the nation at this time and meant that at this point, its neighbour to the south was easily able to surpass it economically and continue to grow into what it is today.

North Korea struggled its way through the rest of the 1980s, relying heavily on China and the Soviet Union to feed its people and keep its infrastructure afloat.

These two countries were actually pretty happy to help out in exchange for more of North Korea's natural resources and also, in a desperate attempt, to prove to the world that communism was the way of the future. Also that central planning was definitely legitimate and did not lead to widespread starvation.

1991, THE BEGINNING OF THE END

If it couldn't get any worse for North Korea...it did. In 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed, and when it did, North Korea lost its biggest lifeline. It had to drastically adapt and two years later, it announced another budget plan.

This time, a three-year plan focusing on agriculture, light industry and foreign trade. This all sounded great, but it more or less went the same way as previous economic plans...in other words, failure.

North Korea no longer had access to sufficient stores of fertiliser that was previously supplied by the Soviet Union. Its trade agreements flopped because of its crippling foreign debt and also, because it did not



© Wikipedia
A view from South Korea towards North Korea in the Joint Security Area at Panmunjom. North and South Korean military personnel, as well as a single US soldier, are shown



North Korean farmers

produce enough goods to actually trade with. This aggravated the situation by making investments into infrastructure all but useless.

They were not able to produce the machinery needed in North Korea because of a lack of technical expertise and were not able to import machinery because of a lack of anybody that wanted to do business with them.

A lack of trade for a small economy such as North Korea is all but a death sentence in today's world.

At this point, the country was desperate to try anything to get its economy back on track, even if it meant resorting to the idea it hated the most...



Military Parade in Pyongyang

“LET’S TRY CAPITALISM !”

In a desperate attempt to modernise its economy, the North Korean government began playing with the idea of private enterprise. But it was proceeding in a very North Korean way.

Experimentation into small-scale entrepreneurship took place from 2009 to 2013 and although there continued to be legal uncertainties, this developed into a significant sector. By 2016, economic liberalisation had progressed to the extent that both

locally-responsible and state industrial enterprises gave the state between 20% and 50% of their total output, selling the remainder to buy raw materials at market-based prices.

In 2014, the Enterprise Act was amended to allow state-owned enterprise managers to engage in foreign trade and joint ventures, and to accept investments from non-government domestic sources.



Panorama of Pyongyang, North Korea

Under the new rules, enterprise directors became more akin to western chief executive officers. As for chief engineers, previously a government job, they had an operational role more like a western chief operating officer. These individuals could even personally benefit from running these operations efficiently.

As of 2019 though, it is unclear as to whether these semi-government, semi-private institutions are still in operation.

CLOSED BORDERS TO KEEP THE VIRUS AT BAY

In January 2020, North Korea closed its land borders and progressively halted international flights and rail links to and from China and Russia to protect itself from the coronavirus that first appeared in the Chinese city of Wuhan. Many experts believe Kim Jong-Un made that decision because he knew that his country's run-down healthcare system would be overwhelmed by an outbreak.

Whatever the reason, foreign diplomats, international aid workers and NGO staff began gradually leaving the country rather than risking being stranded for a long period.

According to Alexander Matsegora, Russia's ambassador to North Korea, the situation in Pyongyang is continually worsening with shortages of various foodstuffs and people losing their jobs. In a recent interview given to the Russian press agency Interfax, he spoke about the life of foreign diplomats there : *“To be frank, life hasn't been easy for us in Pyongyang, but where has life been easy for anybody these days? In fact, the situation in North Korea has its specific features. The country closed its borders in late January 2020. It's still possible to leave the country, although with certain difficulties, but everyone, including citizens of the country, are absolutely prohibited from entering North Korea”.*

And the difficulties of leaving North Korea came to light on 25 February when eight Russian diplomats and their families left Pyongyang in circumstances that bear witness to the country's dire economic situation, its dilapidated railway system as well as its disease control policies and procedures in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.



North Korean airline, Air Koryo



© Russian Foreign Ministry

Third secretary Vladislav Sorokin is seen pushing his family and their luggage along the rail tracks wearing thick winter clothing. On the Russian side of the border, the families were met by officials from the Foreign Ministry who drove them to Vladivostok airport for the flight back to Moscow

Since the national airline Air Koryo has suspended its flights to Vladivostok, the Russian diplomats' journey began by train. The first part of the trip was a 32 hour train ride on North Korea's extremely slow, old and poorly maintained railway system. This was followed by a 2 hour bus ride in order to reach an area close to the border and finally, the eight families had to load all their luggage onto a rail trolley and push it the rest of the way, over a distance of about 1 kilometre which included a bridge over the river Tumen that separates North Korea from Russia.

From a public health standpoint, Kim Jong-Un's strategy in closing down borders and stopping imports may have worked although independent experts as well as officials from the World Health Organisation doubt Pyongyang's claims that the country has not seen a single case of the virus. Furthermore, if this really is true, then why would North Korea want to hack into the systems of western vaccine manufacturers in order to steal intellectual property and other vital information for itself?



© NIF

A North Korean 50 won note worth 0.047 Euro

According to officials, South Korea's intelligence agency, the NIS has foiled North Korean attempts to hack into its companies developing coronavirus vaccines. The agency did not specify how many and which drug makers were targeted.

The revelation came after Microsoft announced that in November 2020, hackers working for the Russian and North Korean governments had tried to break into the networks of nine pharmaceutical companies and vaccine researchers including Pfizer, in Canada, France, India, South Korea and the United States.

It named a North Korean hacking team dubbed "Zinc and Cerium" and a well-known Russian group nicknamed "Fancy Bear".

South Korea's NIS has also reported that Kim Jong-Un had taken some "unreasonable actions due to Covid-19 paranoia". They said those actions included banning fishing and salt production because of fears that sea water might have been contaminated with the virus.

Despite the fact that North Korea has not confirmed any coronavirus infections, the NIS has said that an outbreak there can definitely not be ruled out as the country had active trade and people-to-people exchanges with China before closing the border in late January 2020.

WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

Today, North Korea finds itself going nowhere. Its economy has started shrinking and its increased militaristic chest-beating has meant that more and more sanctions have been placed

on it, further suffocating an already struggling economy.

For reference, South Korea which started in the same place as its neighbour to the north after the Korean War in 1953, was not blessed with the same kind of natural resources as North Korea, it did not have the land connection to a powerful ally such as China, and it did not get offered countless extensions on foreign aid and debt relief programmes.

Yet, South Korea's economy today is over 60 times larger than North Korea's because it facilitated private enterprise and it invested into infrastructure to support the massive industry that it has today.



© NIF

North Korean ICBM

To further credit the difference between the two systems, South Korea also achieved its growth while developing and growing under the constant threat of a nuclear strike from its belligerent neighbour.

So, what does the future hold for North Korea? Well, it really is difficult to say. The government seems to be stuck in a cycle of ramping up military aggression as a weird way to turn around and beg for more foreign aid in exchange for calming down a bit. While this strategy keeps on working, it is likely that the government of North Korea will continue resorting to it.

In the meantime, the world can only look on and perhaps hope that the whole system will implode peacefully and good governance can eventually take its place.

Hossein Sadre



© Kremlin.ru

German Chancellor Angela Merkel with Russian President Vladimir Putin, January 19, 2020

PIPE DREAMS

When commerce meets politics, it's a gas

However much the West's political classes may condemn Russia's geopolitical expansionism, and especially its architect, Vladimir Putin, nobody seriously expects to halt the progress of the gas pipeline known as Nord Stream II, at least not for long. The West cannot really afford to, so temporary halts to the work are viewed in Moscow as pointless gestures, which, to a large extent, they are. The rounding up of political prisoners and their dispatch to the Lubyanka, or wherever the successors to the KGB stash Putin's possible enemies and critics, draw the inevitable condemnation. The West protests, the European Parliament votes for sanctions, the United Nations expresses disapproval (cautiously, of course; anything stronger would be vetoed by Russia) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe says it's very disappointed and passes a vote of censure, although Russian delegates continue to participate in its debates.

It's widely thought that one must treat Russia with kid gloves; express serious anger too strongly and its representatives will storm off in a

huff like disgruntled schoolboys in a playground. It won't make any difference, either. "We have to remember that jaw-jaw is better than war-war," I was told by British Conservative MP Sir Edward Leigh, who recently proposed a redrawing of the rules of procedure for the Council of Europe to deal with obstreperous member states. "It's better to have Russia or Turkey or Azerbaijan or Armenia or Georgia or any other country that sometimes might have a dodgy human rights record...in my personal view it's better to have these

© NTF
Sir Edward Leigh

countries in the Council of Europe, and if you're going to expel somebody it should be a very high bar indeed; not two-thirds majority, a large cross-section from delegations or political groups, all that sort of thing."

But some sort of retribution must remain a possibility, Sir Edward explains, if only as an unimaginable last resort, and only if there is massive democratic support for such action. "Yes, it's three political groups and fifteen national delegations, so basically, to cut a long story short, it'll probably never happen," he said. Not that Putin would fret much if it did; he sees the West as a soft touch, its geographical and political parts easily turned against each other.

Where does that leave us as far as Nord Stream II is concerned? Pretty much where we were before, it seems. All the objections, the competition for contract work for the construction, the arguments, protests and demonstrations are like a barn dance and the man calling out the steps, inevitably, is Vladimir Putin. Dosey-doe to that, if you can. So what is Nord Stream II?



© Pedant0/Wikicommons

Stack of pipes/tubes for natural gas pipeline Nord Stream 2 at Mukran Port, Germany

It's a partially-built pipeline destined to carry gas from the coast of Russia and along the bottom of the Baltic Sea to Germany, involving the construction of two massive pipes with a total capacity of 55-billion cubic meters per year. So far, 95% of it has been completed, according to the Russian news agency, TASS. However, a German financial investor, Uniper, has announced it will put no more money into the project. "We can confirm to you that we do not plan to make payments in future. I hope this information will help you," a top Uniper manager told TASS, without disclosing how much it had invested or would now withhold. "OMV, Shell and Wintershall Dea announced completion of project financing earlier," TASS announced.

Whatever the outcome – unlikely to be anything more serious than some delay – the issue of sanctions is proving controversial for America's new Joe Biden administration. "To sanction a big project by threatening German and other European targets burns up a lot of political capital," Daniel Fried told Al-Jazeera. Fried is a former ambassador, assistant secretary and State Department sanctions coordinator under Democratic and



© WHF

US President Joe Biden

Republican administrations. "They didn't create this problem," he said. "They didn't screw this up. But they're trying to fix something in a way that takes everybody's interests into account and it's not easy." In case that isn't clear enough, Al-Jazeera explains that Biden is personally against Nord Stream II, despite its tangible advantages to Germany, now the US's most important ally in the EU since the UK sailed off on its own. "President Biden has made clear that Nord Stream 2 is a bad deal," White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki told Al-Jazeera. "It's a bad deal because it divides Europe, it exposes Ukraine and Central Europe to Russia, Russian manipulation."

PRAISING UNCLE JOE

Nobody who underwent rule by a Stalinist Soviet Union feels easy about letting Putin get too much power. Earlier this year, many Russians went to put flowers on Stalin's grave on the anniversary of his death. Many elderly Russians (very elderly, considering he died on 5 March 1953) remember him with fondness and won't listen to any criticism of the man, which is odd when you consider that he is reckoned to have slaughtered some six million Russians directly, or nine million if you include those starved or frozen to death on his orders or who died because of the harsh conditions in the gulags. What a nice man. He must have had something about him and not just that aura of danger leading to fear; after all, his most senior general, Georgy Zhukov, remained committed to him despite the way in which he was so badly treated after the war he helped Russia to win. And he did help to win it, was one of the Allies' most essential assets. An old former British soldier I once knew, who had fought his way across Europe, always said that people should remember that it wasn't the British or the Americans who won the war. It was Russia's Red Army. He insisted that all his fellow 'Tommies' (British soldiers) knew that, too.

Despite his high reputation within Russia itself, 'Uncle Joe' is remembered much less fondly in the countries that were ruled by the Soviet Union, even after his unexpected and slightly mysterious death. There is a fear that Putin, once a KGB operative, sees himself as being cut from the same

cloth as Stalin and therefore destined to rule Mother Russia for ever. He may succeed, too; he has shown himself to be every bit as ruthless, albeit on a smaller scale. So far, he hasn't tried to starve to death an entire country as Stalin did.



© NIF

Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter, Yulia

He picks individual victims, and his favoured weapon is poison, albeit military-grade nerve poison (as in the failed attempt on Sergei Skripal and his daughter, Yulia) or a radioactive substance (such as the polonium-210 deployed to kill Alexander Litvinenko), just to show who is behind the attempt. He likes his victims to know, so he deliberately, it seems, leaves his fingerprints all over the place. Hercule Poirot would have no difficulty identifying the murderer without using many of his 'little grey cells'. Putin, however, remains safe from prosecution.

He also seems to remain immune to competition for the best seat in the Kremlin. And where poisons cannot work, he can employ his troll factories to undermine his enemies. That's what has happened with Alexander Navalny. His attempted murder and subsequent imprisonment raised angry outbursts throughout the West at the unfair treatment of someone described as 'a prisoner of conscience'. Then Amnesty International withdrew that status after a secretive on-line campaign showed him allegedly describing Muslims as "cockroaches", even though he was, at that moment, pointing at a picture of Islamic terrorists. It was certainly an unwise choice of words and too easily misunderstood, if it was. He has since expressed regret for using the term and we should recall that the complaint to Amnesty International was raised by Katya Kazbek, who freelances for RT, Putin's propaganda

broadcaster. However, Amnesty was sufficient taken in to put Navalny on the 'naughty' list and delete him from the acknowledged group of political heroes. The hope, obviously, is that the clamour for his release will die down. It probably will. We're a gullible lot, we humans, and we get bored easily. And, like Amnesty, we're often cowards, too. It's true that some of Navalny's earlier remarks suggest a degree of distasteful nationalism, denigrating immigrants, but, unlike Putin, he hasn't suggested invading countries he doesn't like. In any case it certainly doesn't justify the head of RT describing Navalny as 'a Nazi'. Use of just a pejorative term by one of Putin's stooges brings to mind the notion of pots and kettles. It's worth remembering that during his show trial in 1964, Nelson Mandela was stripped of his 'prisoner of conscience' label for defending the use of organised political violence for the sake of a clearly good cause. We have short memories, which is something upon which Putin counts.

STICKS AND STONES MAY BREAK MY BONES, BUT WORDS ARE WORSE

Putin may dismiss Navalny as a racist but it takes one to know one. Just in case you think the Russian people might rise up in Navalny's support, think again.



Alexei Navalny, Russian opposition leader

Putin's people have put together a video for public viewing of ordinary people wishing "death and suffering" on Navalny, without being able to explain any crime he may have committed, other than "cosying up to the West." State propaganda works, just as the culpable nonsense spouted by far-right conspiracy theorists like QAnon has persuaded so many Republican voters



Director of the Federal Security Service, Alexander Bortnikov



Russia's Chief Prosecutor, Igor Krasnov



Viktor Zolotov, Director of the Federal Service of the National Guard Troops - Commander-in-Chief of the National Guard of the Russian Federation



Pavel Popov, Deputy Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation, General of the Army

that Biden stole the election from Trump to assist paedophile Democrats who, they allege, are engaged in devil worship. There is nothing so totally daft that some idiot won't swear that it's 'holy writ', believing they're too clever to be taken in by 'mainstream thinking'. Their knowledge of history is poor too, it seems: many of the Trumpist protestors don't seem to realise that the Confederacy lost the Civil War.

Of course, It was the poison attack on Navalny that led to the latest sanctions, including a halt to work on Nord Stream II. Altogether the Biden administration has imposed sanctions on seven senior Russian officials, as well as on fourteen companies or bodies involved in the production of Russia's chemical weapons.

Among the officials named are the head of the FSB, Alexander Bortnikov, and deputy defence ministers Alexei Krivoruchko and Pavel Popov. To accompany this, the EU has also imposed sanctions on four Russian officials: Alexandr Kalashnikov, who runs the prisons, Alexandr Bastrykin, chair of the Investigative Committee, Igor Krasnov, who is Russia's Chief Prosecutor, and Viktor Zolotov, who is in charge of the National Guard. The sanctions include travel bans and the freezing of their assets. These may not seem very severe, but the BBC's Moscow Correspondent, Kevin Connolly, says they're a compromise between the Baltic states, which wanted severe measures against their dangerous and ever-hungry neighbour, and Germany, which relies on Russian gas.

As far as the European Parliament is concerned, the sanctions don't go anywhere near far enough. In a resolution, adopted in January by 581 votes to 50 against, with 44 abstentions, they called on EU member states to take a more active stance over the arrest of Alexei Navalny to "significantly strengthen the EU's restrictive measures vis-à-vis Russia". This includes sanctioning the "individuals and legal entities" involved in the decision to arrest and imprison Alexei Navalny. They also want sanctions imposed against Russian oligarchs linked to the regime, members of President Putin's inner circle and Russian media



Nord Stream opening ceremony on 8 November 2011 with Angela Merkel, Dmitry Medvedev, Mark Rutte and François Fillon

propagandists, “who possess assets in the EU and can currently travel there”. Additional restrictive measures could also be taken under the new EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime.

And they voted to end Nord Stream II for good. Putin must be delighted: Germany could not afford to agree to that, so this call for a ban helps to drive EU member states further apart. It’s just what the Kremlin wants. Following years of deteriorating relations, MEPs stressed the importance of “critically reviewing cooperation with Russia in various foreign policy platforms and on projects such as Nord Stream 2”. They also called on the EU to immediately halt all work on the controversial pipeline, and they underlined that the EU should “no longer be a welcoming place for Russian wealth of unclear origin”.

All of this may read like a pretty moderate response to an outrage, but Russian officials have dismissed it as “illegitimate” and as nothing more than “unfair competition”. TASS



Sergei Nechaev, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation to the Federal Republic of Germany

reports that Russia’s ambassador to Germany, Sergei Nechaev, stated in a press conference that “Attempts to hamper the implementation of the Nord Stream II project are manifestations of unfair competition”.

He said that completion of the pipeline would be in the best interests of both Russia and Germany. “I am sure that both Russia and Germany are able to determine their energy policy independently, without interference and advice from outside, on the basis of more than 50 years of experience of effective and mutually beneficial cooperation,” he said. When dealing with Putin’s Russia you have to be aware that you win no prizes for good behaviour. He seems to find it amusing that initial political bluster is seldom followed up by anything more substantial than a slap on the wrist. Even so, to describe sanctions imposed because of unacceptable political activity as “unfair competition” seems an understatement too far.

And meanwhile, sanctions notwithstanding, the Nord Stream II pipeline would appear to be unstoppable. The US is not happy about that and told TASS so. “We will

monitor activity to complete or certify the pipeline,” said a spokesperson, “and, if such activity takes place, make a determination on the applicability of sanctions. Sanctions are only one among many important tools.”

The US will continue working with its allies and partners “to ensure Europe has a reliable, diversified energy supply network that does not undermine our collective security,” the spokesperson added. With some construction companies showing a degree of concern that their other activities could fall foul of American disapproval and withdrawing from the project, Moscow is keen to criticise the US administration. “Perhaps it makes sense for our American partners to be less preoccupied with Nord Stream 2,” a Kremlin spokesman said, “and to be more concerned about the events in Houston, Texas, namely the power and heat supplies. Of course, gas would not hurt there either.” This reaction, though, is unlikely to win Moscow many friends in Washington, nor in Houston. There is no connection between exceptional weather in Texas and political assassination attempts in Russia. One cannot be helped, the other can, but not, perhaps, as long as Putin is in the Kremlin. One gets the impression that Moscow simply cannot see why another country should disapprove of its way of tackling political opposition.

DEMOCRACY IN ACTION?

Many years ago, I attended a session of the Moscow School of Political Studies, held in Golitsyno, a small town around 40 kilometres outside the capital. The educational project was organised by the Council of Europe and one of its lecturers on that occasion (although I left before he arrived) was Boris Johnson, now Prime Minister of the UK.





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Baroness Shirley Williams

Another was Baroness Shirley Williams, a former member of Harold Wilson's Labour government and co-founder of the UK's Liberal Democrats, after breaking away from the Labour party as part of what was called, somewhat over-dramatically, 'the Gang of Four'. The idea of the training session was to instil in Russia's politicians the notions of democracy, fairness and respect for human rights expected of a country that joins the Council and hopes to take its place among the liberal (with a small "l") countries of the world. The 'students' – mainly elected politicians with experience of vote-winning – seemed very keen and unphased by the largely unpleasant food and overheated accommodation. I wouldn't have missed it for a pension. There was an unseasonal heatwave at the time (enough to melt the runway at Moscow Airport, causing widespread disruption and delay) but I was told that before a certain date – still about a month away – it would be impossible to turn down the boilers or open the windows. A fair amount of vodka was consumed and there was a lot of beautiful singing. I have often wondered what happened



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Alexander Novak, Deputy Prime Minister of Russia



Gerhard Schröder and Russian President Vladimir Putin

to the 'students' who were there; they no longer appear to sit in the Duma of Vladimir Putin.

In an interview for the Rossiya-1 TV channel in February, Russia's Deputy Prime Minister, Alexander Novak claimed that "The Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline will be built despite Washington's destructive steps aimed at hindering this effort.

European countries and European companies are interested in it. We are sure that it will be built despite those destructive approaches, which we have seen on the part of the US that certainly, in its turn, has been delaying the implementation of this project." It's all Washington's fault, in other words; nothing at all to do with the attempted murder and subsequent imprisonment of a politician opposed to Putin. "This project is fully in accordance with European legislation. Here there is rivalry fuelled by American partners, who want to supply their liquefied natural gas to Europe, and basically, these are non-market methods of competition. And speaking about legislation and the legal issue, this project is absolutely in line with the law and meets all the requirements of European legislation. That's why the countries taking part in it are absolutely interested in fulfilling this project," Novak said. "The Nord Stream 2 pipeline will not stand idle after its construction is completed, as European partners are interested in pumping gas through it." So nothing to do with Putin, then. He, like the far-right Republicans, must have been very unhappy that his pal, Donald Trump, didn't win a second term

in the White House. Could Biden's team still put a spanner in the works? Novak thinks not. "I don't think there are such risks, because, again, our European partners are interested in it," he said in answer to a question about whether or not Russia would be able to use the pipeline, given the global opposition. According to Novak, Nord Stream 2 is 95% complete to date and is absolutely in compliance with European legislation. I don't recall anyone saying it isn't, but just because there's no law against it doesn't remove the widespread fear of Russia's burgeoning influence. Clearly the EU and especially its MEPs are not convinced.

Germany's uncertainty may end when Angela Merkel steps down. Her predecessor as Chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, is in favour of Nord Stream II. As reported (unsurprisingly) by TASS, "It seems to me, that there is too much ideology here," he is claimed to have said, adding that the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project should not be linked to the situation surrounding Alexei Navalny, whom TASS dismisses as a mere 'blogger'. "Why a connection is drawn between issues that are not related to each other? What can be in common between Nord Stream 2 and the Navalny case?" he asked rhetorically, describing this approach as a mistake. But then he would, wouldn't he? Schröder chairs the board of Nord Stream AG and turkeys don't vote for Christmas, even those that are arguably past their sell-by dates. It is perhaps of more importance that Merkel's likely successor, Armin Laschet, would also seem to



Armin Laschet

favour Nord Stream II and has even expressed some admiration in the past for Putin and for Bashar Al-Assad, the murderous kleptocratic leader of Syria. Significantly, he's also been very critical of the US and of Britain.

It's good to know who your friends are. In view of the anger over the Navalny affair, Laschet has recently expressed some criticism of Putin, but it seemed somewhat half-hearted and probably unlikely to outlive his elevation to the chancellorship, if indeed that happens. He was elected to lead Merkel's CDU party without discussion of his foreign policy. He seems to rate the economy and jobs much more highly than the relative morality involved in silencing critics. Could that mean the moral high ground is either for sale or ripe for development?

DOWN IN THE DEEP BLUE SEA

The Nord Stream II pipeline begins in Russia at Ust Luga in the oblast of Leningrad, to the west-south-west of St. Petersburg. When the locals were asked in a referendum if they wanted to revert to the old Tsarist name, those living in the city readily agreed,

but people in the surrounding region chose to stick with Leningrad. The original Nord Stream enters the sea at Vyborg, a little further north.

Both arrive in Germany at Greifswald, from where the gas will be piped around Europe. As some commentators have pointed out, European dependence on Russian gas will hand a huge amount of power to the Kremlin, while Europe has no comparable threat to counter it. A few experienced German politicians have noted this discrepancy: talking to Moscow produces no results. Putin is not interested in the views of other world leaders unless they're armed. To that end, they favour tougher sanctions and a little military sabre-rattling, without which the Kremlin has no reason to listen. It has no interest in issues that only matter to the EU, for instance, such as climate change and environmental issues. Europe never applies serious economic sanctions for fear of harming itself, and Moscow has no respect for that at all; note how it deliberately insulted Josep Borrell, the EU's Foreign Policy chief during his most recent visit to Moscow, describing



Gustav Gressel

the EU as an "unreliable partner", although the description would more nearly fit Russia itself, while it expelled three EU diplomats for taking part in pro-Navalny demonstrations. The message was clear: we don't care what Europe thinks; Russia's internal affairs are none of your business.

Gustav Gressel, Senior Policy Fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, wrote in February that Germany's assumption that the best way to address the issue is by engagement with Russia has been shown to be false.

Moscow doesn't care. "The quick dismantling of Merkel's Russia policy in her party may be surprising to foreign audiences," Gressel wrote, "after all, she has staunchly defended sanctions in the European Council and dismissed other countries' desires to strengthen economic ties with Moscow. But things look different at home. In the past 16 years she has centralised all important foreign policy decisions in the chancellery. Unfortunately, Merkel has also seen off every intellectually capable contender in her own party over the past decade. And her personal indifference to security and defence matters has hardly helped foster a sustainable domestic consensus on how to deal with Moscow or on the stakes for European security." So one tough lady has left the door open, it would seem, convinced she could face up to any challenge, and with her out of the way intruders can creep up the stairs and along the corridors of power. Laschet's pragmatism is never going to work in dealing with a Russia that believes in coercion and dominance. Germany's increasingly important Green Party may be keener to stand up to an overweening Kremlin but it probably lacks the influence or even the tools to see it through. A post-Merkel Germany looks set to be weaker and less reliable.

Even so, Biden remains determined to have an effect because he really doesn't like Nord Stream II, and one possible way to avoid that, from Russia's standpoint, might be for Gazprom to increase gas transit revenues for Ukraine. Biden has a problem (well, quite a few, to be honest) in that his predecessor was one of Putin's pals and therefore



© Wikipedia



Meeting with Gazprom CEO Alexei Miller



Pipe laying operations in German territorial waters

approved of the pipeline, although he did impose a few last-minute sanctions before leaving the White House. Since Trump was on record as having said he hated the EU, giving the Kremlin leverage over it was a plus. However, opinion in Congress and across Washington as a whole is dead set against Nord Stream II. Biden would prefer to avoid a conflict with the outgoing Merkel, however. In February, Washington announced sanctions against a ship laying the pipe and against its owner. They're not very important sanctions, however, and will do little to win over the pipeline's many opponents, so there is that Ukrainian way out, if Moscow feels inclined to take it. After all, if this was a commercial venture, Gazprom could have updated existing pipelines which cross Ukraine, Belarus and Poland and for much less money.

This, however, is a geopolitical project aimed at bypassing Ukraine so as to deny it the revenues it would get for the gas passing over its territory, and weaken it economically. It would not be difficult, however, to increase the flow through Ukraine as well. Given Moscow's continuing misbehaviour in Eastern Ukraine, with seizing Crimea and with killing or trying to kill its opponents, it has offered Washington a huge target in Nord Stream II. Euractiv reports that in February a bi-partisan group of Congressmen and Congresswomen wrote to the President to say they're ready to work with the Executive Branch "to counter Russian malign influence, including by ensuring Nord Stream II is never completed." Sanctions won't satisfy them; they want the entire scheme spiked. That does not please Berlin, of course, which hopes to persuade the Americans that it will impose a regulatory mechanism "to constrain any Russian market manipulation attempts; provide support to build terminals that could receive [and presumably process] American liquified natural gas; and agree that certain Russian actions could trigger a halt to gas imports via Nord Stream II." The idea is that Germany would then switch to the American gas and close the Nord Stream II pipe. Good luck with that; it certainly won't satisfy the pipeline's opponents. What's more, American liquified natural gas is obtained by fracking, which is less environmentally friendly than the Russian gas and inclined to burn less evenly. What's more, the Germans (who will be dependent on the gas) are unlikely to

agree with the Americans (who are not) about what exactly could justify anyone to turn off the taps.

Meanwhile, a second Russian pipe-laying ship has arrived to finish the last stretch of the pipe through Danish waters. The Adakemik Cherskiy has joined the Fortuna south of the Danish island of Bornholm in Denmark's Exclusive Economic Zone. The Fortuna recommenced its work in February while the Adakemik Cherskiy was undergoing sea trials near Kaliningrad. There was said to be around 150 kilometres out of 2,460 left to complete, although the Fortuna may have been laying only one of the two pipes, but the arrival of the second vessel should contribute to getting it finished.

Forget the morality of it all. As a former Scottish Socialist MEP, the late Alex Falconer, shouted angrily at me when the Uruguay Round was finally completed and the World Trade Organisation was set up, the big and important decisions will no longer be taken in the parliaments and ministries of the world. The real power has been handed over, lock, stock and barrel, to multinational companies. "The really big decisions won't be taken by governments," he said, poking me in the chest with his finger, "they'll be taken in the boardrooms of international corporations." He was right, it seems, but I don't think that news would bring him any cheer at all.

Robin Crow



Gazprom's UGS natural gas storage facility in Rehden, Germany



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CONFUCIUS TAKES THE TRAIN

Join him, and the guard may demand more than your ticket

“

The man who moves a mountain begins by carrying away small stones” wrote Confucius in his Analects. Confucius – more correctly Kong Fuzi, which means Master Kong but whose name was Latinised as Confucius – wrote down quite a few sayings, many of them somewhat ambiguous to a Western mind. He was, according to John Keay in his enthralling book, *China – a History*, “a poorly paid minor official in the irrelevant state of his birth”. The 4th century BCE Chinese philosopher Zhuanzi, a central figure in the philosophy of Daoism whose proper name was Zhuang Zhou, described Confucius as having “brambles for brains”, which is hardly flattering. Confucius had a very limited circle of disciples to mourn him when he died



© nrf

Confucius Statue at the Yushima Seido Confucian temple located in the Yushima district near Akihabara Japan

in 479 BCE but no-one has been more influential for Chinese thought, not even, I think, Mao Zedong or Karl Marx (and yes, of course I know he wasn't Chinese). Mao will be all but forgotten in two or three hundred years from now in all probability, but Kong Fuzi will still be being quoted, his precepts followed and his sometimes-puzzling analects studied. I think that would be more than he expected or felt worthy of. He was a civil servant to his core and believed in obedience to his masters.

Much of his philosophy is concerned with honour and respect. Apart from being a civil servant, he was also a scholar of some note. He believed, somewhat naively, it seems, that morality and virtue would triumph if only men would study. If only! Since his death, two-and-a-half millenia ago, many have studied his writings but there's been little agreement on how best to translate them, even if the gist of his argument is straightforward. Respect is the key. “Sons must honour their fathers,” Keay explains him as having said, “wives their husbands, younger brothers their elder brothers, subjects their rulers. ‘Gentlemen’ should be loyal, truthful, careful in speech and above all ‘human’ in the sense of treating others as they would expect to be treated themselves.” Not a bad idea, although most if not all of today's political leaders seem to ignore that. Coming back to the present day and China still sees itself as the leading power in Asia and therefore as meriting the unquestioning respect of neighbours, almost to the point of

a kowtow (or *khàu-thâu*), in which the subservient party must touch the ground with his or her forehead when confronted by someone of higher rank. Enter into a deal with China's President, Xi Jinping, and that is, figuratively speaking, what he will expect in return. No-one must ever question Beijing's motives or actions, nor criticise what it does (and for Beijing, read Xi Jinping). Indeed, if your country is in a trade deal with China it might be best for your trade minister to carry around a cloth to protect his forehead from the dirty ground. Because China is a bully to countries it sees as smaller and less important than it is, which is certainly how it regards its nearest neighbours and, indeed, most of the other countries in the world. Perhaps we should note part of another of Confucius's analects: “Is it not gentlemanly not to take offence when others fail to appreciate your abilities.” Try telling that to Xi.

Just look at some of the ‘punishments’ China has dished out in recent times. China has blocked the import of lobsters from Australia, along with other commodities, such as coal, barley, timber and copper ore. The Chinese people may have an unsatisfied demand for lobsters (they eat a lot, it seems, or used to) while Australian lobster fishermen are stuck with crustaceans they can't sell, all because of a number of infringements, such as condemning China's treatment of the Uighur people, or criticising its activities in Hong Kong and of allegedly having a media that is ‘biased’ against



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Chinese President Xi Jinping reviews the armed forces as part of the commemorations to mark the 90th founding anniversary of the People's Liberation Army (PLA)

Beijing (for which read that it is actually reporting China's many abuses, rather than ignoring them as Beijing would prefer). Other countries to have been metaphorically 'sent to Coventry' by Xi include Sweden for daring to criticise the kidnapping and jailing of a Swedish citizen born in China, Gui Minhai, who published books Beijing didn't like; Norway because its Nobel Committee awarded a prize to the Dalai Lama; South Korea for permitting the deployment of anti-missile batteries against North Korea that Beijing thought could peer into China, and so on.

The list of complaints is long and it's clear that China thinks the reasons for their actions should be clearly understood and in any case immediately acted upon, whether they are understood or not. China even ordered a boycott of the South Korea-owned department store chain, Lotte, which has branches in China, because it had provided the land upon which the missiles were to be sited. China is like the prickly old granny every family fears, because she can get into a huff about anything or nothing. Anyway, Australia's Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, has stated publicly that he won't cave in to Chinese bullying and that he intends to take China to the WTO over its barley ban. That will scare them!

ALL ABOARD!

Meanwhile, China's famous One-Belt-One-Road (OBOR) project continues. Its aim, supposedly, is to restore the



© Nrf

Marco Polo

ancient Silk Road, linking China with Europe. But before anyone starts talking romantically about Genghis Kahn, Tamerlane, Marco Polo or the fabled delights of Samarkand, you must empty your mind of silkworms, camels and the long list of emperors, good, bad and forgettable.

Today's silk road will be a creation geared more towards conquest, albeit commercial rather than military. OBOR (also known as BRI, the Belt and Road Initiative) is a long-term strategy which encourages investment in Eurasian transport and logistics such as railways to transport freight, and encourage economic integration. China likes to plan far ahead. China, of course, is a very big country and its ports are in its east or south, while the shortest routes to Europe, geographically speaking, are from the western or central areas. Manufacturing companies have set up in those areas because it's cheaper and labour doesn't demand such high wages, but then they need to get their goods to market. Developing railways has been China's answer. If you want to rule the world, you have to be able to reach it.

China can be confident that its neighbours, especially Russia and Europe, will be keen on its railway development. Railways cut transportation times and costs and where they exist, manufacturing facilities evolve. It's not all for one-way traffic either, of course, because China needs the raw materials Europe can supply to feed its factories: minerals, machinery and chemicals. The Chinese government also provides subsidies for imports of between \$1,000 (€840) and \$5,000 (€4,200) for each Forty Foot (12.192 metres) Equivalent Unit (FEU), which is the size of a standard shipping container. There are also smaller twenty foot equivalent units, TEUs, of 6.1 metres that are used in international freight transport. It's important because

shipping costs have been skyrocketing for freight between China and Europe, according to Lloyd's Loading List: "Multiple sources are reporting rates of US\$10,500 (€8,800) per feu to secure capacity from China to European main ports, with China-UK rates now topping \$16,000 (€13,440) per feu in what has become an auction for space." The UK, Lloyd's reports, has been especially hard hit, with carriers unwilling to use British ports, partly because of congestion. UK exporters can be asked to pay a fortune to transport their goods and only then if they get them to Antwerp first. One freight forwarder described it as "survival of the richest" while another predicted empty shelves in the UK where Chinese goods are concerned. Meanwhile, between 2011 and 2016, China's provincial governments spent more than \$300-million (€250-million) subsidising trains running between China and Europe.



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A logistic station of the Erenhot Port in north China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. The port has handled 379 China-Europe freight trains in the first quarter of this year

According to the South China Morning Post, the COVID pandemic is actually working in China's favour for trade. It reports that the China Railway Express, "a key project under China's Belt and Road Initiative, operated a record 11,000 trains across Eurasia by early last November". What's more, "China continued to run a large trade surplus with the European Union in the first 10 months of year" (2020), indicating that westward shipments remain much larger than those going the other way. "The coronavirus may have pushed China's freight shipments to Europe by rail to record highs, but far fewer trains have returned with European products, according to data from China's state railway operator and external analysts,"

the newspaper reports. Between 200 and 400 CE, it was the invention of the compass and the appearance of domesticated camels that fuelled trade along the Silk Road, but it took a long time. The rail links between China and Europe have developed in a mere decade, despite the massive and costly infrastructure required.



The first "Silk Railway" train that departed China for Prague as its final destination entering Ankara railroad station, Turkey, in November 2019

SPREADING FAR AND WIDE

The rail lines follow six main routes: the New Eurasian Land Bridge, linking Western China with western Russia; the China-Mongolia-Russia corridor, connecting North China to Eastern Russia via Mongolia; the China-Central Asia-West Asia corridor, linking Western China to Turkey via Central and West Asia; the China-Indochina Peninsula Corridor, which connects Southern China to Singapore via Indo-China; the China-Pakistan corridor, which links South Western China via Pakistan to the sea routes of Arabia; the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar corridor, connecting Southern China to India via Bangladesh and Myanmar. Furthermore, the maritime stretch of this latter-day Silk Road connects coastal China to the Mediterranean via Singapore-Malaysia, the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Strait of Hormuz. Nobody ever said it's not an ambitious plan. In fact, China now has the second longest rail network in the world. It's not all plain sailing, however. The China-Pakistan corridor, for instance, has led to a row between the two countries. China had offered to lend Pakistan \$6-billion (€5.05-billion), which Pakistan hoped would be at a preferential rate of less than 3%.



However, China is reluctant to comply because it fears that local politics could delay the returns on its investment.

An analysis conducted in 2018 pointed out that in 2006 a standard container from Shanghai would take 36 days to reach Hamburg by rail. By the time the report was compiled that time had shrunk to just 16 days. As the old saying goes, time is money. It has also meant that, thanks to refrigerated containers, known as "reefers", it is now possible to move perishable goods to and from Europe, not just laptops and mobile phones. One train operator, Far East Land Bridge, reported that the number of FEUs being shifted had risen from 21,900 in 2016 to 37,000 a year later, with cargo values of \$160-million (€134-million) for 2017, a rise of \$52-million (€43.66-million) over the previous year.

Another interesting point is that rail transport has been less disrupted by the pandemic while demand, especially for PPE-related goods, has soared by double-digit volumes in both directions: by 21% for goods bound to China from the EU, and by 44% for those going in the opposite direction. Figures also suggest the disparity between east-bound and west-bound freight is diminishing. Even so, the railway still has only a small share of the overall freight transportation business, despite that spectacular growth. Furthermore, the Chinese government has decided

that rail freight will be the 'primary supporting pillar' for Chinese foreign trade and the operators of so-called 'block trains' are actively encouraged to co-operate closely with Chinese-owned cross-border e-commerce companies, especially with regard to logistics.

Block trains, also known as 'unit trains', are trains upon which all the freight wagons, cars or containers are carrying the same goods, loaded at one single loading point and carried to a single destination, without being broken up along the way or having their wagons separated and stored somewhere en route. With the use of 'reefers', the cold shipping of perishable goods has been developing, although the increased volume of meat from the EU to China did not involve rail transport. There are still too many administrative and infrastructure barriers along the way. However, with Russia now permitting food transport across its territory there have been trial journeys of European salmon from the Netherlands. It's not straightforward and some obstacles remain, especially in Russia, but for perishable goods, the express railways shipping line now reckons on a journey time of 10 to 12 days between Xi'an and Hamburg, offering a viable alternative to costly air freight.

OBOR spans 78 countries and has been described by the Chinese government, not unreasonably, as "the project of the century". It requires the co-operation



of other countries, of course, but it is helping them to fund the construction work from which they will clearly benefit. In China's case, obviously the rail expansion is economically valuable, but Beijing sees it not just as a way to boost domestic growth but also as a form of 'economic diplomacy'. "By connecting the less-developed border regions like Xinjiang with neighbouring nations, China expects to bump up economic activity," explains Investopedia. "OBOR is expected to open up and create new markets for Chinese goods. It would also enable the manufacturing powerhouse to gain control of cost-effective routes to export materials easily." Developing railways doesn't come cheap but it worked in 19th century England, where the cost of rail freight transport in 1870 was a mere tenth of what road transport rates had been in 1800. As a result, more goods and people travelled. By the 1840s, England and Wales were living through what history records as 'railway mania', with every member of parliament wanting to have a railway station in his constituency.



Chinese President Xi taking the China Railway High-speed train

According to the UK's National Archives, "In the 1840s 'Railway Mania' saw a frenzy of investment and speculation. £3-billion (€3.5-billion) was spent on building the railways from 1845 to 1900. In 1870, 423 million passengers travelled on 16,000 miles of track, and by the end of Queen Victoria's reign (she died in 1901) over 1100-million passengers were using trains." And, of course, little boys always loved trains, with their puffing, steaming engines the closest things they could find to the dragons of storybooks. Perhaps that's why the Chinese love them, too.

STILL ON TRACK

It is hardly surprising, given that lesson from history, that participating countries such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are very keen on OBOR, thanks to massive investments by China. Even Nepal, which is landlocked and therefore has difficulties in moving freight in and out, has signed up to participate, thus improving its connectivity with China, while Pakistan should benefit from the \$46-billion (€38.66-billion) China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), connecting China to and through Pakistan giving access to Arabian Sea routes. While the development of OBOR benefits those countries through which it passes (or to which it is linked), it doesn't take a great leap of imagination to see how it will reinforce and strengthen China's economic and political power. Investopedia thinks it's very possible that we will see increased use of the Chinese yuan as the currency of choice along the route of OBOR, which would be a welcome development as far as Beijing is concerned. It would give Xi even greater leverage. He should, perhaps, acknowledge one of Confucius's analects, however: "He who exercises government by means of his virtue may be compared to the north polar star, which keeps its place and all the stars turn towards it." I somehow don't think the Uighurs or the people of Hong Kong would necessarily describe Xi as virtuous. The word 'brutal' springs more readily to mind for them, perhaps.

We must remember, too, a point I made earlier: yes, the plan is economically important for China, but it is primarily a political project. It will, hopefully, make those along the way a little richer, just as the proliferation of railways in Victorian England did. But it also strengthens the

central power. If you think of all these fast-expanding routes as being like a spider's web, there is no doubt who is sitting in the middle, alert to every twitch on a fibre. One twitch could come from the effect of the railway on population growth. Take the experience of Victorian England, for example. In the 18th century, England had been a largely agrarian society; the trains changed that, and surprisingly quickly. The population rose from 8.6-million in 1801 to 17-million by 1851 and to 22,3-million thirty years later, according to a report produced at Cambridge University. The birth rate continued to rise until 1881, with children largely viewed as assets to help with their parents' jobs (much of it in agricultural work or in crafts such as weaving), but then began a long decline as children were increasingly seen as a burden that prevented their parents from working and thereby affecting the family income. The sharpest decline came in the professional classes, but ten years later there was a sudden rapid decline among those engaged in mining. It's impossible to tell at this juncture if OBOR will affect birth rates in the countries through which it passes, nor whether it will cause an increase or a decrease if it does.

One way in which OBOR is helping China to overcome its difficulties concerns the Uighur people of Xinjiang, in East Turkistan. Such is their interest in the economic advantages they can see that even the Taliban has withdrawn its support for them. The Chinese offer to the Taliban is to make highways and connect all Afghan cities to each other. Other offers include energy projects to develop Afghanistan while the Taliban has to promise peace in return. It seems they're rather more pragmatic than the old-style Mujahideen used to be.



A Great Northern Stirling. A total of 53 were built at Doncaster, UK, between 1870 and 1895

China is also interested, of course, in Afghanistan's mineral wealth. Chinese companies had won contracts to mine copper and explore for oil but could not do so because of all the internal strife in the country. China would be keenly looking at working on the contracts further. As the Wife of Bath said in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, "It's all for sale", by which she meant virtue, morals and standards, but I'm sure she would have included copper ore and crude oil if she'd known.

The Chinese Communist Party holds its centenary this summer and the refrain it keeps singing in celebration is that "the East is rising while the West is declining". It's hardly original, but the annual legislative sessions held in Beijing have been full of praise for China's handling of the pandemic. The former party leader in the Xinjiang region in the far west of China has spoken to his fellow deputies at the National People's Congress of "extraordinary accomplishments". According to the South China Morning Post (SCMP), Zhang Chunxian described 2020 as a "watershed year" for China.



Zhang Chunxian, Communist Party Secretary of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, and the Political Commissar of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps from 2010 to 2016

"Since no country could escape the major test of the pandemic last year," he is reported as saying, "this trend that the East is rising while the West is declining has become very obvious." Obvious to him and the other deputies, anyway. He also spoke of the US "retreating". Politics gives way to economics. Mao Zedong wrote in his 'Little Red Book': "Every Communist must grasp the truth, 'political power grows out of the barrel of a gun', but it also grows out of a pocket calculator and an ambitious plan.



Guo Shengkun, Politburo member and Secretary of the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission of the Communist Party of China

The SCMP quotes Guo Shengkun, party secretary of the Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission, as going even further than Zhang Chunxian. "Chinese, of all ethnic groups," he said, "experienced the extraordinary accomplishments achieved by our party, the country and the public. This was especially seen in the striking contrast of the order in the East and the chaos in the West, the rise of the East and decline of the West, and the ascendancy of China and fall of the US." That seems to be putting it a little strongly, don't you think? The fall of Donald Trump is not the same as the fall of the entire country. He and his followers may believe that 'Trump' and 'the United States' are synonymous but they're really not. Yes, a surprisingly large number of conspiracy theorists and believers in the loony-tunes branch of the far right may have invaded government buildings in a bid to overturn an election result but that's not final, it didn't succeed and nor is it exclusive to the US. Anyone remember Tiananmen Square?

Or how about present-day Hong Kong? Whatever Guo Shengkun may believe, there are people in China who are less than happy with the rule of Xi Jinping, even if they wisely keep quiet about it, and in history there have been others who disapproved of their leaders.

Mind you, China's handling of the pandemic was exemplary and Beijing has a right to boast about it. Xi bragged in the official People's Daily newspaper that the success in the pandemic was down to China's political system and the choices the Chinese people had made. In a way, that could be right: when Beijing orders a lockdown people obey. To do otherwise would not be wise. Even so, Xi has a right to be proud. "Now, when our young people go abroad," he told members of an advisory committee, "they can stand tall and feel proud – unlike us, when we were young."

Perhaps, but a little more transparency during the early stages, when the virus was first detected in Wuhan, might have prevented some of the 2.6-million deaths that SARS-CoV-2 has caused. The evidence suggests that China was not the cause of the pandemic, nor was the virus a biological weapon, spread deliberately. We can file such notions under "conspiracy theories" to satisfy racists. They explain why some university students, even post-doctoral students, of Chinese ethnicity have faced hostility and threats in the US, limiting their time spent on research: some people long to have somebody to blame and some are simply violent thugs who like to pick on minorities. It's a sad fact of being human. But it's pointless to point the finger of blame. When someone catches German measles they don't go and shoot people in Berlin to get their own back.



A China-Europe freight train bound for Duisburg of Germany leaving Wuhan, in central China's Hubei Province, on March 2020

MIXING THE MEANS

The OBOR project is not only a railway (or even several railways); it is a system that uses rail lines to link to other transport routes. For instance, the China-Europe railway connects to London via road and ferry, shipping from Duisburg via Rotterdam. It's what's called an 'intermodal' system, developing ports as well as rail lines. The China-Europe Land-Sea Express, operated by COSCO, uses the Greek port of Piraeus as its transition hub, connecting to the Croatian port of Rijeka, using an express shipping line, and then on to the rest of Europe by rail. The long-term strategy includes a direct railway connection, Piraeus-Belgrade-Budapest, for access to the European market. China agreed to lend to the Hungarian government the money needed to fund the work. Both governments are keen. Others in the shipping industry are engaged in expanding the north-eastern Asia-Europe intermodal connection through the far-eastern ports of Russia, Vostochny and Vladivostok. The freight carrier Maersk, working with Pantos Logistics, has been offering an inter-continental sea and rail shipping line to connect South Korea and Japan to Europe, Pusan (ocean freight)-Vostochny (trans-Siberian Railway)-Europe, halving the time it takes purely sea-borne freight to reach its destination. Shipping volume is reported to have risen by 30% since the pandemic arrived.

In addition to Maersk, RZD Logistics, FESCO and PCC Intermodal have launched their own multi-modal shipping service from North-East Asia to Europe using the Trans-Siberian Railway. For China, its long-term economic and political interest in South-East Asia has developed into a long-term vision of intermodal connections, joining manufacturing sites in South-East Asia with the valuable market of Europe by 2025. This means bringing two OBOR projects under one roof: the 'West Land-Sea international trade corridor' and the 'China-Europe Railway'. In that way, the idea has attracted interest from the governments of Vietnam and Kazakhstan. A trial run from Dong Dang in Vietnam reached Duisburg in Germany in 22 days. In Victorian England, the railway network spawned factories and the growth of small towns into thriving cities right across its network. China has

to get a good return on its investment; it's been estimated that the total cost of completing the project could come to \$1.2-trillion to \$1.3-trillion (€1.01-trillion to €1.09-trillion) by 2027.

Coincidentally, the project is encountering the same problem the railway entrepreneurs faced in Victorian England. Most of the country followed George Stephenson's standard gauge of 4 feet 8.5 inches, 1.435 metres, which is still used for 54.9% of railways around the world. Isambard Kingdom Brunel, however, preferred his "wide gauge" of 7 feet 0.25 inches (2 metres 1.2 centimetres) to aid safety at high speeds.



George Stephenson, British civil engineer, renowned as the "Father of Railways"



Isambard Kingdom Brunel, English civil engineer considered "one of the most ingenious and prolific figures in engineering history", "one of the 19th century's engineering giants"

It's said that Stephenson chose his odd gauge because he had experimented at nearby Killingworth Colliery, whose

trucks of coal were horse-drawn along tracks that happened to have that gauge. During the railway mania phase and for several years afterwards, it meant trains stopping where the tracks met and the coaches or wagons being transferred onto appropriate bogeys. On China's prestigious OBOR, that would not be practicable. China still uses Stephenson's 1.435 metres (the managers of Killingworth Colliery should be proud) while Russia uses the old Tsarist Imperial gauge of 1.520 metres, as do Mongolia and Kazakhstan. In England, all railways (remember, there were not THAT many lines at the time, and the money they were making was phenomenal) had their tracks ripped up and replaced with the Stephenson gauge. If Brunel had won, the UK would have had high-speed trains rather earlier. Russia is unlikely to want to change all of its rail infrastructure, or even to be able to. In mainland Europe, a difference in gauges between France and Spain caused a similar problem. China is said to be developing high-speed trains that can adjust to either gauge as they go along, although there are still technical problems.

Rest assured, they will be overcome. China is a clever country with many ingenious engineers and inventors. Where the generation of wealth is concerned, ways are inevitably found. Where the pursuit of power and influence is concerned, China will not allow an annoying detail like incompatible gauge sizes to get in its way.

A Chinese train will be coming to (or at least through) a station near you in the very near future. Before you know it, the companies that make model trains will be offering an OBOR version, although it will require a lot of track: they're very long trains. Think of the possible options for model buildings! Little boys will love it (quite a few little girls will, too; let's not be sexist here) assuming their parents can afford it. Then again, we should remember another of Confucius's analects: "In a country that is well governed, poverty is something to be ashamed of. In a country that is badly governed, wealth is something to be ashamed of." And there's another, similar one: "To be wealthy and honoured in an unjust society is a disgrace." I wonder if President Xi will take note?

Jim Gibbons



Daniel Kinahan, (right) poses with boxer Tyson Fury

LEPRECHAUN LANE

How Irish gangsters help Europeans to play with the faeries or sleep with the fishes

In Irish folk tales, leprechauns sometimes offer strangers a pot of gold, normally to be found at the end of a rainbow, from where, of course, it can never be retrieved. Leprechauns mess with people's minds, too. If you want to play with the faeries in real life, of course, there is always a pharmaceutical means of getting to fairyland, and it is apparently being exploited by ruthless and murderous Irish gangsters. Those who cross them in any way tend to end up dead, rather than merely confused. They never find the pot of gold, either; all the gold is being claimed by the Irish gangs who are exploiting the COVID pandemic to smuggle tonnes of South American cocaine into Europe, along with weapons, now that small-scale air couriers are no longer practical. The weapons are used in the way in which gangsters have always used them: to further their aims of making a lot of money while snuffing out any competition. None of this is likely to attract tourists to the Emerald Isle.

The man allegedly at the top of this criminal activity in Ireland has never been charged and denies any criminality, although he has been named in the Dáil and in a Dublin courtroom as a criminal gang boss. Daniel Kinahan is a boxing promoter and widely believed by police forces across Europe and around the world to head a criminal syndicate worth some \$2-billion (€1.66-billion). In pursuing this illicit and unpleasant endeavour, he and his younger brother are following a family tradition; following in his father's footsteps, you might say, by assuming the leadership of the drug smuggling gang his father created. Daniel Kinahan was initially praised by controversial heavyweight

boxer Tyson Fury, known as 'the Gypsy King', for arranging his world title fight with Anthony Joshua. In a 55-second video, Fury named Kinahan three times, which may not have had the effect Kinahan wanted, as it drew attention to the sport's links with a man alleged to be one of Europe's foremost mobsters and inevitably involved with drugs, guns, murder and mayhem. Real boxing fans and those associated with it as a serious sport would love to see Kinahan's links with it expunged. Not all of them, though, perhaps: there are plenty of photographs of Kinahan chatting amiably with big-time boxing promoters like Frank Warren' while others in the sport have said the police should leave this "honest

businessman" alone. Incidentally, the "Gypsy King" title was self-chosen and it is unlikely to endear him to the Roma community from which he claims descent because most Roma see the word "gypsy" as derogatory.

What really brought Kinahan to public notice, as opposed to just the forces of law and order, was his long feud with one of his syndicate's rivals, the Hutch Gang, which reached a climax in February 2016 at the Regency Hotel in North Dublin. A weigh-in was being held there before a tournament that Kinahan's promotion company was organising. Suddenly, all hell broke loose and shots were fired while men disguised in the uniforms of the Emergency Response Unit of An Garda Síochána, the Irish

Police, but carrying Kalashnikovs, guarded the entrance. More shooting followed and one of Kinahan's known associates, David Byrne, was shot dead. The attackers were there to kill Kinahan and were claimed to be led by Patrick Hutch, whose brother Gary, a former close associate of Kinahan, had been murdered. Patrick Hutch, unsurprisingly, blamed Kinahan for that but although he was arrested over the shoot-out, Hutch's trial subsequently collapsed. Even so, the exchange of gunfire, in which innocent bystanders were endangered and forced to run for their lives, has given the Gardai the necessary excuse and the required resources to look into the business methods of seemingly-honest people involved in the dirty trade of drug smuggling and supply.



© Regency Hotel Cctv

David Byrne runs for his life towards the lobby area of the hotel before being shot

Meanwhile, Kinahan's organised crime group, seemingly run by him from his home in Dubai but with his younger brother, Christie junior, as a lieutenant, has been described by the head of the European anti-drugs smuggling agency as "one of the biggest threats to law and order in Ireland". Michael O'Sullivan, the former Assistant Commissioner of the Garda who now runs Europe's Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre for narcotics – MAOC (N) – is keen to keep up the long battle against Kinahan's assumed smuggling operation.

In February, law enforcement officers seized a ship carrying an astonishing 9.5 tonnes of high-purity cocaine with an estimated street value of some €800-million. The vessel was boarded while docked on the island of Cape Verde following a tip-off from MAOC. MAOC was also involved in the seizure of a yacht on its way to Britain from



Fat Freddie Thompson (left) with Daniel Kinahan at the funeral of David Byrne in Dublin

South America carrying 1.4 tonnes of cocaine. The five British men who were in charge of it were sentenced to a total of 120 years in prison.

The organisation was also involved in other successful operations, such as when, in an unprecedented joint operation with the Brazilian Federal Police and with operational support from the Brazilian Navy, a sailing vessel was intercepted off the coast of Recife, Brazil, resulting in the seizure of 2.2 tons of cocaine and the arrest of 5 crew members. The intimidation and murders of teenage street sellers and the way in which teenage girls are lured into prostitution to fund their habits doesn't bother them; they're just collateral damage. There have been claims made that Kinahan is backing away from the drugs trade but there's little sign of it in reality, according to law enforcement agencies. Michael O'Toole, crime and defence correspondent for the Irish Daily Star newspaper, spoke with O'Sullivan about it and Tweeted his response to that claim. "The Kinahan Organised Crime Group is alive and well and continuing in the drugs trade," said the Tweet.



Seized cocaine by the Brazilian Federal Police

MERCILESS AND MERCENARY

MAOC is under the control of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), which was established in 1993 and inaugurated in Lisbon in 1995 as one of the EU's decentralised agencies. MAOC, or MAOC (N) in its anti-narcotics mode, is an inter-governmental working group or taskforce comprising six EU Member States: Spain, France, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal plus the UK (apparently still part of MAOC, if not of the EU) and it was set up to tackle maritime drug smuggling in Europe. Last year, MAOC helped to seize drugs worth around €1.5-billion aboard ships bound for Europe.



© MAOC

MAOC-N's seizure of tons of cocaine by Spanish authorities

Kinahan and his ilk are clearly very wealthy but losses as substantial as that must cause them some unease, surely? O'Sullivan has described Kinahan's father Chris, also a drug dealer, as "a real mercenary"; otherwise how does somebody who doesn't have a heroin addiction become involved in one of the world's most destructive forms of criminality? It seems that the same epithet applies to Kinahan Junior. His attitude towards rivals, even those who have been his friends and lieutenants, suggest he has shown little mercy. His only love is for money, it has been claimed, and he has brought inter-gang warfare to the streets of Dublin and other cities across Ireland and the rest of Europe, even resorting to such terrorist-style acts as the use of car bombs to enforce his dominant position.

Kinahan comes from a criminal family, although that in itself is strange. Despite apparently middle-class origins, his father, Christie Kinahan, chose the drugs trade after a spell as a fraudster. Criminality appealed to him; it was a lifestyle choice.



Criminal Assets Bureau and Irish Garda

He was arrested several times and has served time in prison, in Ireland, the Netherlands and Belgium, before moving abroad to avoid further problems with An Garda Síochána, the Irish police. Like father, like son, as the saying goes, although Daniel Kinahan has never been arrested. Dubai is said to be considering his extradition, however (even if deportation seems a more likely outcome) because of all the international police interest in his activities. Police forces in several countries are investigating him and Garda Headquarters is now liaising with the US Drug Enforcement Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation on how best to pursue the 43-year-old.

Despite his seemingly cosy relationship with leading figures in the boxing world, including his official rôle as advisor to famous American boxing promoter Bob Arum, who runs Top Rank, and to his own MTK promotions company, he and 27 other members of his syndicate are banned from entering the United States. Arum described Kinahan as “an honourable man”, but US authorities told him not to bother applying for an ESTA (Electronic System



American boxing promoter Bob Arum



The true story of the rise of the Kinahan Gang and Its Deadly Feud with the Hutch Gang

for Travel Authorization) visa, the kind usually used by visitors to the country. According to the Sun newspaper in Ireland, the Kinahan syndicate has been placed on a list of narco-terrorist gangs compiled by both the Drug Enforcement Administration and the FBI in the United States, alongside Mexican and Columbian cartels. The Sun Ireland, a newspaper, quoted one US investigator: “The name of Daniel Kinahan is known to law enforcement agencies all over the world thanks to the murderous activities of the Kinahan cartel.

They are operating on a global scale and their members and associates will not be admitted to the United States.” And just in case anyone thought the US wasn’t being serious, he added: “Mr Kinahan might not have any convictions but he’s been named in various jurisdictions because of his connections to organised crime. If he’s brave enough to apply for an ESTA he will be turned down.”

DANGEROUS LIAISONS

According to an old Japanese proverb, “when the character of a person is not clear, look at their friends.” It was also written by that famous Greek writer of fables, Aesop, some 2,600 years ago: “A man is known by the company he keeps.”

Kinahan’s friends would seem to leave much to be desired, but then perhaps they should be wary of being associated with him, too. After all, it’s been estimated that the Kinahan

syndicate could be responsible for up to a third of Europe’s cocaine market and is increasingly using violence to shore up the criminal organisation in the face of increasing attempts at competition by other gangsters. An inter-gang war that began in Ireland with the feud between Kinahan’s mob and their rivals, the Hutch gang, run by Gerry “the Monk” Hutch, has now spread across Ireland and the rest of Europe.

Hutch was given the nickname “the Monk” because of his ascetic lifestyle after leaving prison, but the investigative journalist who first called him that, Veronica Guerin, was later murdered. No-one in Ireland can even make jokes about the country’s leading mobsters. Hutch, however, is now said to be anxious to come out of hiding and return to Dublin after spending the five years since the Regency Hotel attack in hiding, both from the Gardaí and from members of Kinahan’s gang, seeking revenge.



Veronica Guerin, Irish crime reporter fatally shot six times by an Irish gang member

Clearly Hutch is not one of Kinahan’s friends (although his murdered brother once was), but Kinahan does have close links with some other very dubious characters, such as “Fat Freddie” Thompson, a convicted gangland killer, as well as with the well-known and notoriously chubby mobster Naoufal “Belly” Fassih. Fat Freddie Thompson and another Kinahan associate, Thomas ‘Bomber’ Kavanagh are now in jail and other gang members are on the run.

As it was written in the Ecclesiasticus section of the biblical Apocrypha, which would be familiar in Roman Catholic



© National Crime Agency (NCA)

Thomas 'Bomber' Kavanagh, 52, has pleaded guilty to drug-smuggling offences detected as part of a multinational probe aided by Gardai.

Ireland, even if it is not accepted as 'holy writ' by Jews and Protestants, "He that toucheth pitch shall be defiled therewith; and he that hath fellowship with a proud man shall be like unto him." Judging by his reactions to media coverage and his intent to "sport-wash" his name, as one newspaper reported it, the pitch part is all too real, and it seems the "proud man" title fits Daniel Kinahan, too.

Kinahan has lashed out at the Media, especially at the BBC for a Panorama television programme exposing the corrupt involvement of the mob in boxing. Kinahan pointed out that he had never been arrested (his lawyers repeated this statement, saying that all allegations against Kinahan are false and lack any evidential basis) but said he could never get a fair trial in Ireland because of "the media," which often gets the blame for exposing real crimes. It is a strange fact of life that many people who choose to live their lives in the public eye, the 'glare of publicity' and of what they hope is public adoration later blame the media on which their

lifestyles have depended for any negative publicity that emerges. "It's the fault of the media," is a popular cry from many of those with pots of money and a shallow taste for 'bling', even those with impressive, dare I say even 'royal' titles? However, it makes you wonder why so many law enforcement agencies believe the stories about Kinahan, too, because they certainly seem to. It seems unlikely that he would be prohibited from setting foot in the United States on the basis of an article or two in an Irish tabloid newspaper. The plain fact is that while the on-going gang war has been terrorising the people of Dublin and other cities, the influx of illicit drugs has been wrecking society and damaging the Irish economy. The economies of other European countries have been damaged by the cocaine trade, too. Nobody except the criminals benefits financially from large-scale drug smuggling and dealing.



© Crab

That could change, however: one courageous member of the Dáil, the Irish Parliament, wants the seized assets of criminal gangs to be used to improve society and to help fight the mobsters. Neale Richmond of Fine



© Wikipedia

Neale Richmond

Gael thinks the seized funds should be ring-fenced for anti-crime measures. During 2020, police seized more than €16-million in cash, more than double the previous year's total. "These cash seizures are on top of seizures of property and luxury good likes motor bikes, jewellery and artwork that will be sold at auction," Richmond said. "We are seeing huge success in taking the proceeds of crime, but we need to see these proceeds ploughed back into early intervention services, youth diversion programmes, community policing and addiction services to target criminality at source." Richmond tabled a series of Parliamentary questions to the ministers for Public Expenditure and for Justice in Ireland, pointing out the advantages of taking the gangsters' ill-gotten gains and using them to help fight the war against organised crime.

Richmond has also written to UK television stations, explaining Kinahan's criminal activities and his deep involvement in boxing, which he is said to rule through fear, coercion and bullying. "I welcome the comments from the Minister of State, Deputy Griffin," he said in the Dáil, "that he has communicated with the British authorities and with the broadcasters. There is a lesson for the international press, in particular, to make sure it looks through the full details of what is going on in respect of the fight preparation and who is involved. I hope to see a change of tone and a bit of education." I wish him luck with that; however loudly and clearly a politician speaks, money talks louder and often proves to be more persuasive. Few who make accusations about Kinahan's 'business methods', incidentally, are willing to be named; they have seen what happens to those who cross Kinahan or his cartel.



© Nrf

Gerard 'Hatchet' Kavanagh, being shot several times on the terrace of a bar on the Costa del Sol in September 2014. Hatchet' Kavanagh was another of the cartel's leading figures, overseeing the smuggling of large quantities of cocaine

CATCHING THE FISH

First, of course, the Gardai (or another law enforcement agency) must catch Kinahan, who has never faced an Irish court, despite being wanted in connection with three murder plots, with the Dublin Special Criminal Court accepting evidence last summer that Kinahan's gang had carried out what were called 'execution-style' murders as well as trafficking in drugs and firearms. As the 1747 book "The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy", written by Hannah Glasse, says about a recipe for carp, "First catch your fish." That's a disputed quote, by the way; some say the phrase initially appeared as "First catch your hare". But catching Kinahan won't be easy, especially if he is allowed to go on running his empire from Dubai.



Gerry 'The Monk' Hutch

Looking back, it's strange how he and Hutch chose such different but equally felonious routes. Back when they were first friends and neighbours, he and Kinahan's father Christie laundered money and dealt in stolen cheques, helping each other. But while Kinahan was heavily into drug dealing, Hutch didn't approve. Armed robberies were his area of interest and expertise. It may seem like a strange kind of morality but it is, perhaps, part of the reason why Hutch acquired the subriquet "the Monk". But Hutch's nephew, Gary, threw in his lot with Kinahan instead of his uncle and moved to Spain to become Daniel Kinahan's lieutenant, passing his boss's instructions on to the 'lower ranks'.

Kinahan had also set up a gym and a boxing management company in Marbella, with Birmingham-based boxer Matthew Macklin as its front man. The gym, known as MGM (Macklin's Gym Marbella) attracted serious fighters, as



Daniel Kinahan promoting the MGM Gym

well as thugs and crooks and a few keen amateurs. The operation even attracted leading British boxing promoters Frank Warren and Eddie Hearn.

Even so, criminality seemed to cling to whatever Kinahan did; boxing trainer Jamie Moore was shot in the leg at Kinahan's house. He survived, but it seems he was not the intended target. The gunmen had been after Kinahan and Gary Hutch was suspected of organising it. A month later, another gym regular was shot. In 2014, Gary Hutch was suspected of having turned informant as well as organising the attack on Kinahan. As TheJournal.ie reported, "He fled Spain when it emerged that Kinahan had survived." An attempt was made, the news site reports, to calm things down. "Gerry Hutch attended various meetings with the Kinahan gang to work out a 'peace deal' – it is understood cash was paid in return for the cartel's word that Gary would not be targeted." Perhaps a

gangster's word is not to be trusted; he was shot dead soon afterwards in what turned out to be one further murderous step towards a deadly gang war. It spread fear through a part of Dublin and has left 18 people dead so far.

MONEY FOR OLD ROPES

It is true that Kinahan's firm have poured money into boxing. MTK has signed some of the world's top boxers, often luring them away from long-established management companies. To sign up so many promising world-class fighters requires a lot of money and suspicion has been growing that it comes from Kinahan's drugs cartel. There is even a lawsuit pending in California that MTK receives funds from Kinahan in some way, although MTK says they will strongly fight any such allegation in court, if it gets that far. Unfortunately, wherever Kinahan is in the world, his enemies tend not to have long life expectancies. People involved with his MTK promotions agency readily admit that Kinahan still advises boxers, as he did Tyson Fury, even while MTK itself vigorously denies Kinahan is involved in running the firm. MTK also, of course, denies that it's drug money that has funded its meteoric rise. Officially, "Kinahan has left boxing". Kinahan's lawyers have stressed that he has "no criminal record or convictions" and describe the many, many claims of his involvement in large-scale drugs smuggling as "wild allegations". Of course, they also say he is not a crime



Identity particulars

Family name	TAGHI
Forename	RIDOUAN
Gender	Male
Date of birth	20/12/1977 (41 years old)
Place of birth	Beni Selman, Morocco
Nationality	Netherlands, Morocco

boss, even though a large number of the world's law enforcement agencies are certain that he is. His close ties to boxing were clearly revealed in the Tyson Fury video, and that revelation did Kinahan no good, according to TheJournal.ie. "Diplomatic missives were sent from Ireland to the Middle East and within days, KHK Sports, the Bahraini combat sports firm, cut ties with its recently hired 'special advisor' Daniel Kinahan," the website explained. "KHK, which was established by the son of Bahrain's king, announced it would no longer engage his services." Even princes have an aversion to touching pitch.

Neale Richmond has written to the government of the United Arab Emirates, warning them what Kinahan represents and urging them to protect their citizens, as well as boxing fans, from his allegedly malign influence. The Irish Gardaí have even set up a bureau in Dubai to gather information but Kinahan remains free, although many of his associates have been seized. It's been hinted that the information gathering on Kinahan is continuing and the longer he is at large the more likely he is to implicate more of his 'business associates'.

As it is, one of his contacts, Ridouan Taghi, was arrested by Dutch police last December and flown to the Netherlands to face trial. He was wanted on international arrest warrants for murder and drug trafficking. He had been linked to the murder outside Amsterdam of the Dutch lawyer representing a state witness in a case brought against him. He was also linked to a Europe-wide drugs cartel associated with Kinahan and his father.



American gangster and businessman Al Capone

Boxing has long historical links with gangsters. In 1927, the long-anticipated rematch between Gene Tunney and Jack Dempsey was moved from Chicago to Philadelphia because Dempsey had heard that Al Capone was one of his fans and, it's claimed (although never proved) that he didn't want Capone to be involved in the match, especially as he had bet \$50,000 on a Dempsey win. The fight has been called the "long count" fight, because under new rules, to which both fighters had supposedly agreed, when one man was knocked down his opponent had to stand in a neutral corner, away from his trainer, before the count could begin. Having knocked Tunney onto the canvas, Dempsey refused, so the referee couldn't start the count. Dempsey moved eventually but the count started very late and by some reckonings, Tunney only got to his feet after thirteen seconds had passed. Later in the match, the referee started the count immediately after Dempsey had been knocked down, despite Tunney not going to a neutral corner.

Was it a fix? After so long it's hard to be sure, but there's no doubt that Capone fixed fights so as to win money. It's a violent sport and it tends to attract violent men to its fringes. Whatever really happened that day, Tunney and Dempsey became firm friends and visited each other later in life. Capone, of course, was jailed for tax evasion. He eventually died in Florida of a heart attack while suffering from paresis, a late stage of syphilis affecting the brain. No-one, as far as I can discover, has accused Kinahan of fixing fights upon which he or his associates had placed bets. He seems to have a genuine affection and respect for the sport. He is also said to be very much a family man with five children, so he has little to fear from paresis.

He is also very determined to hold on to what he considers his. According to the Irish newspaper SundayWorld, the Kinahan cartel has been bombarding Spanish court officials with demands for the return of assets seized during Spain's unsuccessful crackdown on organised crime. Kinahan and his father have successfully reclaimed the bail money paid for their release after more than a decade, they and their associates being handed nearly €1-million in cash. The money had been seized by police from Kinahan's luxury apartment on the Costa del Sol in May 2010. Lesser charges may

be preferred against both the Kinahans. The problem comes in getting people to testify. In the inner North Dublin area, one in four people admit to having faced intimidation at the hands of the Kinahan cartel but only one in five of them was willing to come forward and say so.



Garda Síochána

The Gardaí report that intimidation and open drug dealing have become the norm in some areas. But the new person in charge of the Garda Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau has warned that she will show no mercy in clamping down on drug dealing and organised crime. Detective Chief Superintendent Angela Willis, who has overseen the Bureau's response to organised crime and, in particular, to dismantling the Kinahan gang, told SundayWorld that "nobody is outside its reach". And she warned gang members that anyone who gets involved with a gang at any level must be prepared to spend time in prison.

SPREADING THE POISON

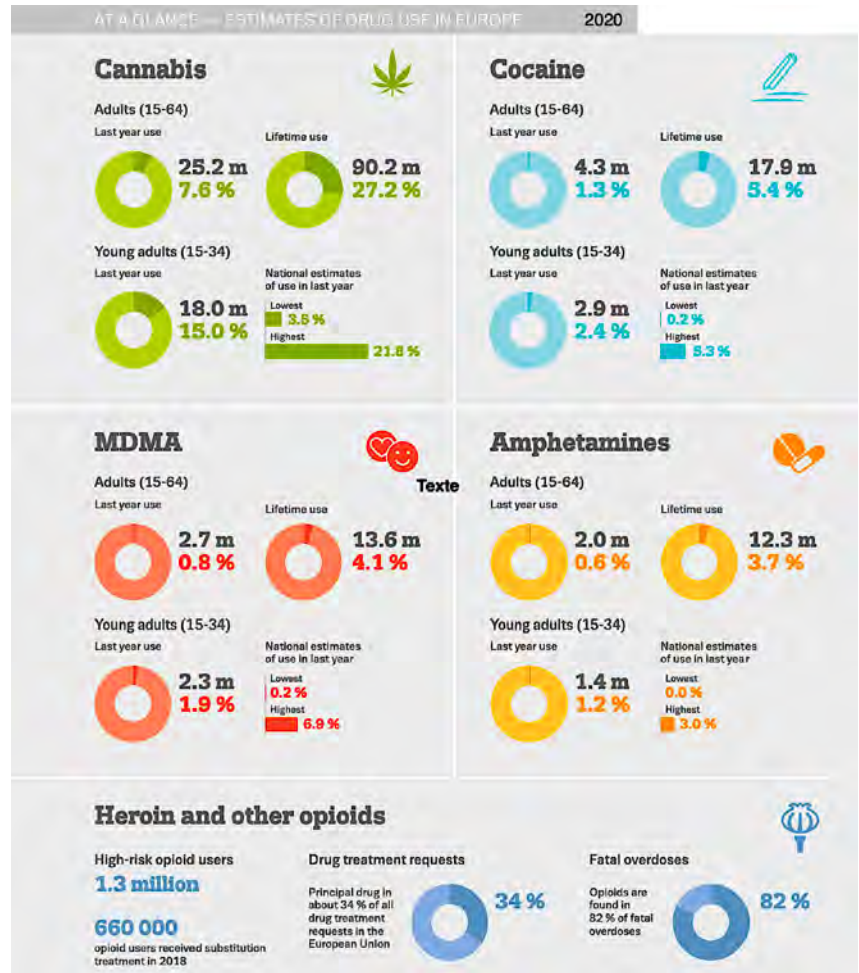
Ireland seems to be adopting the type of drug distribution seen in the UK, where it's known as 'county lines'. Young people, often from broken families or care homes, are sent out into the provinces to take orders from addicts which are then telephoned in to a central hub, from where the drugs are distributed. It means that it is usually only the youngsters, seen by the real dealers as dispensable, who attract the attention of the police and face arrest. "The provincial towns are considered attractive thanks to the direct access to local users and potentially new customers and the comparatively weak competition from local drug dealers," according to a report by Europol, which went on to say that the phenomenon has become associated with "a range



Alexis Goosdeel

of harms, such as violence and the exploitation of vulnerable populations, including children”. Europol say the Irish drug trafficking business has three layers. At the top are the cartel bosses, calling the shots and sufficiently remote from the business to avoid police ‘interference’ in their activities. They have expensive lawyers, too. Next comes a middle tier of criminals, normally engaged in high-risk, low-reward activities, such as transporting, holding or dealing drugs, carrying guns, and conducting shootings, beatings, punishments and serious intimidation. After that, right at the bottom and with little to gain except, perhaps, access to small amounts of the drugs in which they deal, come what Europol calls “highly disadvantaged young people”. Most often, they themselves are addicts and also carry out much of the intimidation. According to Europol, their typical activities are “bullying, assaulting, stealing, vandalising and spreading fear on behalf of the network”. Even so, the ‘county lines’ of Ireland are said to be less well-developed and sophisticated than those in the UK.

The Director of the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), Alexis Goosdeel, is on record as saying “This report is a clear wake-up call for policymakers to address the rapidly growing drug market, which is increasingly global, joined-up and digitally enabled. Hyper production of drugs, within and beyond EU borders, is leading to high availability of natural and synthetic substances. This means that consumers now have access to a diverse range of highly potent and pure products at affordable prices. A mounting concern is the rise in drug-related violence and corruption within



the EU.” It is certainly big business for the organised crime gangs, with Europeans currently spending some €30-billion a year on illicit drugs. In 2017, 8,238 people in Europe took fatal overdoses. Around 4-million Europeans aged between 15 and 64 admit to having taken cocaine during the last year. The EU is also emerging as a transit area for the onward transmission of drugs to Asia and the Middle East.

Now the Gardaí are investigating who was behind what is the biggest haul of cocaine in Ireland in recent years: 172kgs worth an estimated €12-million, uncovered in searches of a vessel in Ringaskiddy Port, Cork, and apparently destined for separate markets in Europe. They are checking to see what other ports the ship was due to dock in. A photograph taken of the drug shows that one of the blocks was marked with a shamrock. Could that have been Ireland’s share? If Ringaskiddy was just one port on a long route, it may suggest that another trafficking cartel was involved and not necessarily the Kinahans. According to the latest EMCDDA report, the average purity of cocaine at retail level varied from 23

% to 87 % across Europe in 2018, with half the countries reporting an average purity between 53 % and 69 %. The report explains: “Among those countries consistently providing data on purity and price, the purity of cocaine has been on an upward trend over the past decade and in 2018 reached a level 44 % higher than the index year of 2008. Over the same period, the retail price of cocaine has remained stable. Considered along with the seizure data, these indicators suggest that cocaine availability in Europe is at an unprecedented level.”

If I can express it in boxing terminology, it looks as if the long war between the Kinahan cartel and the forces of law and order could go the distance without any knock-out punches being delivered. And even if they succeed in taking him (and his father and brother) down there will be another challenger stepping into the ring straight away in an attempt to claim his winner’s belt. In any event, the Irish economy – especially its vital tourism industry – is likely to be the loser.

T. Kingsley Brooks



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Sustainable economy

THE GREEN NEW DEAL

A blueprint for Europe's just transition

Every day, we are struck by the dramatic consequences of climate change in faraway territories as well as in countries closer to us. We are stunned by the catastrophic images that reach us from the rest of the world.

Fires, heat waves, droughts, floods, cyclones, melting ice, pandemics, displacement of populations... Climate change has become our day to day reality, from Europe to the Sahel in Africa, from California to Bangladesh. And we are only at 1.1 degrees of average warming! According to the UN, this will mean 150 million victims per year by 2030.

In December 2019, the European Commission proposed a Green Deal for Europe and its citizens. It reiterates the Commission's commitment to address climate and environmental challenges as a major mission of our generation.

Year after year, the atmosphere is warming and the climate is changing. Of the estimated eight million species on our planet, one million are already at risk of extinction. Forests and oceans continue to be polluted and destroyed.

On March 10, 2021 the European Parliament voted on a resolution on the future Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). The instrument, which is scheduled to come into force in 2023, should enable the European Union to impose its environmental standards on foreign companies exporting to its territory.

In concrete terms, this mechanism would define a threshold of greenhouse gas emissions above which an economic activity would be considered too polluting. All goods imported into the EU whose production has a carbon footprint above this threshold would then be subject to an additional tax.

In order to reduce its carbon footprint, the European Union is currently acting mainly on its own territory. But not everything depends on the greenhouse gas emissions of the single market alone. The EU is a free-trading entity with a largely globalised economy. It has imported over 2,100 billion euros worth



Tax on pollution rally

© Nick Carson / English Wikipedia

of goods in 2019; this intense trading is almost the equivalent of France's GDP and represents 20% of Europe's greenhouse gas emissions, whose carbon footprint increases year by year.

Faced with the increasingly ambitious environmental regulations imposed in the EU, multinational companies established in Europe may be tempted to relocate their activities so as to pollute "freely" elsewhere. This is precisely what The Greens in the European Parliament are striving to avoid.

The carbon adjustment mechanism thus aims to reduce the carbon footprint of companies exporting to the EU by limiting carbon "leakage". In other words, to prevent Europe from forcing its industrial fabric to comply with demanding standards on its territory, while at the same time importing goods whose production accelerates global warming.

MORE AND MORE CO2 THROUGH PRODUCTS AND SERVICES IMPORTED BY THE EU

The Paris Agreement adopted in December 2015 had initiated the first positive move forward by limiting global warming to well below 2, preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels.

Unfortunately, all the Member States have not yet begun to fully implement the measures.

Current climate policies are leading us towards a warming of 3 to 4°C, or even 5 or 6 according to the most pessimistic scenarios. For future generations, this could bring about irreversible damage and lead to an unknown world of chaos.

Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission has made the Green Pact for Europe the cornerstone of her mandate. It is a Pact with a very



President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen



Group photo of world leaders meeting at the 'Earth Summit' in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 13 June 1992

ambitious goal: to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. She has in fact referred to it as "Europe's man on the moon moment", adding that the first package of proposals aims to reconcile "our economy with our planet".

In her first State of the Union speech in September 2020, Ursula von der Leyen said :

"We have more proof that what is good for the climate is good for business and is good for us all". And she added, after announcing an increase in the existing 2030 emission-reduction target, from 40 percent to 55 percent, compared to 1990 levels :

"There is no more urgent need for acceleration than when it comes to the future of our fragile planet".

In concrete terms, this means that the Union's greenhouse gas emissions must be low enough to be absorbed by natural carbon 'sinks' - such as the oceans and forests - and technological ones, which can capture them artificially.

On March 10, 2021 MEPs voted on a non-binding resolution on the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism. Armed with this text that allows MEPs to take a position before the actual legislative process, they hope to have some political influence on the direction that the mechanism will take.

In June 2021, the project will be the subject of a legislative proposal by the European Commission before the three-way dialogue and negotiations begin in 2022.

Implementation of the measures are expected to begin on 1 January 2023, in accordance with the timetable of the recovery plan adopted by European leaders in July 2020.

AN OLD IDEA BUT A NEW RESOURCE FOR THE EU

The idea of a carbon border adjustment mechanism is not new. It was first proposed by the EU in 1991, one year

before the Rio Earth Summit.

At the time, many Member States dismissed the idea as untenable. But it returned to the European Commission's agenda in late 2019.

This would encourage exporting companies to turn to less polluting technologies and would consequently allow the EU, by reducing its greenhouse gas emissions to limit its "external" climate balance.

To mitigate the economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Member States adopted in July 2020, a 750 billion euro recovery plan financed by borrowing. The financial package around this operation specifies that the repayment of this loan shall be made with the money released through new resources.

Within this framework, the EU institutions have agreed on a legally binding schedule. The border carbon adjustment mechanism should be in place by January 1, 2023 and according to the Commission's estimates, it could bring in between 4 and 14 billion euros per year for the EU. In addition to its environmental impact, the project is therefore part of an economic recovery strategy.

It is also part of another dynamic: the autonomy of the European budget. Three quarters of the budget is in fact funded by national contributions from the Member States, which have a decisive financial leverage.

By creating new own resources, the EU gains independence from this financial windfall. However, in its resolution, the European Parliament believes that the money generated by this mechanism should also be redistributed to the less advanced countries to enable them to develop a more environmentally friendly economy.

THE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE EU

Although it has been under study for several decades, this carbon adjustment mechanism at the borders is nonetheless very innovative for the Union. It has even been compared to an "ideological revolution", by some members of the EPP group in the European Parliament.



French MEP, François Xavier Bellamy

The young French MEP François-Xavier Bellamy for instance, believes that the EU is developing a "new relationship with globalisation" with this mechanism: *"For a long time, the European core principle was based on free trade and on the conviction that the only mission of the EU was to abolish barriers to bring the cheapest possible product to the final consumer (...). Today, we see a break in this ideology because with this mechanism, we are putting in place an environmental and industrial strategy that will allow us to move towards fair competition between European and global companies."*

Beyond this paradigm shift, the carbon adjustment mechanism at borders marks a turning point in European industrial and trade policy. The EU, which preaches "the end of a naïve Europe" in the words of Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, aims to create the conditions for fair competition with companies from third countries.

By introducing this mechanism, it would place companies from all over the world on an equal footing for access to the European market. In other words, this mechanism would fully comply with World Trade Organisation rules and guidelines.

At any rate, it is in this spirit that MEPs would like this mechanism to be applied.



The aim is certainly not to put in place protectionist measures and disadvantage companies from third countries.

THE FORM TAKEN BY THE MECHANISM

Although the European Commission's detailed proposal will not be known until next June, several points are already being debated.

The first concerns the form that this mechanism should take. Three solutions are being considered: consumer taxes, a customs tax or the extension of the carbon emissions trading scheme (ETS) to companies in third countries, which currently only concerns companies based in Europe.

The European Union has set up a carbon market, which allocates carbon emission quotas to companies. If these quotas are exceeded, they must pay a surcharge, defined by the market (25 euros per ton of carbon at the end of 2019). This solution, favoured in the European Parliament's resolution, would guarantee fair competition with European companies.

Conversely, a border carbon tax would be of a fixed amount and therefore potentially higher or lower than the European carbon market price, risking the creation of new inequalities for competition.

The European Parliament's resolution also opposes the proposed consumption tax, which *"would be tantamount to making Europeans pay the cost of the ecological transition,"* argues Pascal Canfin, Chairman of the European Parliament's Environment Committee.

If it were to be extended to companies in third countries, the ETS would have to be reformed. Currently, the system grants, in more or less large proportions, free carbon emission allowances to companies operating in sectors under pressure due to the economic situation and competition. *"For example, 80% of the carbon emission allowances allocated to the European aviation sector are free,"* says Pascal Canfin.

These exceptions which are harshly criticized by the European Court of Auditors, could therefore be lifted to achieve the fairest possible competition.



Pascal Canfin, Chairman of the European Parliament's Environment Committee

INDICATORS AND MEASUREMENT TOOLS

If the option of extending the carbon market to third countries is retained, another crucial question must be answered : what is threshold above which companies will be deemed too polluting and will have to buy quotas ? This threshold can be calculated in two ways: either by taking into account the carbon balance of exports to Europe by companies in third countries, or by taking into account their carbon balance as a whole.

In both cases, the mechanism will run into a major problem.



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It requires the establishment of a database listing the carbon footprint of companies on whose activity the calculation can be made. It also implies being able to "trace" each good exported to Europe in order to assess the responsibility of each link in the production chain (the company



Pollution cloud

© Edm

that extracts the raw materials, the one that transforms them, the one that exports them, as well as all the different subcontractors involved).

This is nevertheless the position defended by the European Parliament.

There is also a plan on the negotiating table to add an exceptional provision regarding companies in countries with the least developed economies. Pascal Canfin sums up its purpose as follows:

"It would be questionable to finance part of our recovery plan with money generated by the carbon cost of exports from less developed countries. It seems more equitable to us to redistribute part of this financial windfall to these countries so that they can finance their own ecological transition".

THE SCOPE OF APPLICATION

Although its scope has yet to be defined by the European Commission, the mechanism could concern the vast majority of industrial activities if it were to extend the European carbon market. If the objective is to progressively integrate all products that have an impact on the climate, the Commission should start with the most emitting industrial productions, namely cement, steel, aluminium, chemicals and fertilizers as well as electricity. These alone account for 94% of industrial emissions.

Other sectors, however, are subject to debate; in its resolution, the European Parliament also advocates the inclusion of the maritime sector and wood burning for example, in the carbon adjustment mechanism.

"These measures are important and reasonable," says Richard Fuchs from the Institute of Meteorology and Climate Research (IMK) in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany. "But it will be also necessary to specify foreign trade goals. Otherwise, we will only outsource the problem and continue to damage our planet."

In order to maintain social cohesion, the European Commission must ensure that the burden of this necessary transformation does not fall on ordinary wage earners, or on the most economically fragile among the population.

With the revenues obtained, the climate transition in Europe and in the poorest countries that are most affected by climate change can be financed.

European citizens expect the European Union to act with more determination and ambition for the climate. And that it stops being "naive" or cynical about its trade policy, too often ignoring the social, environmental and industrial costs of the free trade agreements it signs.

The border carbon adjustment mechanism is a tremendous opportunity to reconcile climate, territories, industry, employment, resilience, sovereignty and relocation.

In this respect, it constitutes a major political and democratic test for the Union.

The European Parliament must show the way!

James Lookwood

NEWS IN BRIEF

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Poland: draft media laws should respect European human rights standards

In a letter to the Prime Minister of Poland, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović urges the government to ensure that two draft laws concerning an 'advertising revenue tax on media outlets' and 'protection of freedom of speech of social media users' respect European human rights standards, specifically those related to freedom of expression, media freedom and pluralism, and the right to respect for privacy.

The Commissioner is concerned that the tax proposed in the first draft bill would, in practice, lead to the suffocation of independent media outlets, thereby limiting the public's ability to choose the content of their interest and unduly restricting their freedom to receive information. She therefore urges the Polish authorities to ensure that any measure adopted is not discriminatory, whether in letter or in practice, and does not trample on media pluralism, in line with Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. "It must not have the effect of stifling a sector of society whose work is so essential to ensuring an open and diverse media environment", added the Commissioner.



© Coe

Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović

Regarding the draft law on 'protection of freedom of speech of social media users', which envisages the establishment of a body to review appeals against internet companies' decisions on access to content, the Commissioner expresses concern about the independence of the body, the overly broad definition of what constitutes illegal content coupled with persisting gaps in the national framework regarding hate speech, and the lengthy data retention obligation introduced by the bill. She urges the Polish authorities to ensure that any measures to regulate the scope of social media companies' decision-making over online content are based on clear and predictable provisions, pursue a legitimate aim, and are necessary in a democratic society. She further points out that suspicionless mass retention of

communications data is contrary to the rule of law, and that effective remedies should be available against all decisions related to user content and data.

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION HAS APPOINTED TWO NEW HEADS OF THE REPRESENTATION FOR GREECE AND BELGIUM

Ms Niovi Ringou will start in her new function in Athens on 16 May 2021. **Mr Stefaan De Rynck** will take up his duties as Head of Representation in Brussels on 16 March 2021. Heads of Representation act as the official representatives of the Commission in the Member States under the political authority of President Ursula **von der Leyen**.

Ms Niovi Ringou, a Greek national, will draw on her strong policy background, her communication and managerial skills and legal expertise in EU matters in her new function. Since 2014, she has been working in the Justice Policy and Rule of Law Unit in Directorate-General for Justice (JUST), where she was appointed as Head of Unit in 2018. Since 2002, she has been working in DG JUST, where she was first Deputy Head of Unit in the Data Protection Unit and the Civil Justice Unit. She joined the European Commission in 1989, in the Directorate-General for Internal Market, where she worked on the planning and coordination of the "Dialogue with Citizens" programme. She notably worked for the first awareness raising campaign for the citizens' rights in the single market. Previously, she worked on the harmonisation of company law. Ms Ringou is a lawyer who graduated from the Faculty of Law of Athens University and from the University of Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne where she specialised in European Law (DEA).



© Wikipedia

The European Commission in Brussels

Mr De Rynck, a Belgian national, brings with him a wide range of experience in EU affairs and policies gained during his 25-year career in the European Commission, including

in communication and public diplomacy. He was Head of Unit in various departments, most recently for the Brexit Task Forces and in the Directorate General for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union, where he was in charge of free movement of capital and enforcement. In 2016, he took on the role of adviser to Michel Barnier, the European Commission's former Chief Negotiator for Brexit. Prior to that, he worked as Head of the Communication Unit in the Directorate General for Single Market and Financial Services, and as Head of Unit for Editorial Contents and Media Analysis in the Directorate-General for Communication. Earlier in his career, he was a spokesperson responsible for Transport policy and for the Convention on the Future of Europe and Intergovernmental Conference (2001-2004). He also spent several years of his career working on regional and urban policy. Prior to joining the European Commission, Mr De Rynck was a research fellow and consultant for the Institute for Government at the University of Leuven. He holds a PhD from the European University Institute in Florence, and has published widely on various EU and Belgian public policy issues.

Background

The Commission maintains Representations in all capitals of EU Member States, and Regional Offices in Barcelona, Bonn, Marseille, Milan, Munich and Wrocław. The Representations are the Commission's eyes, ears and voice on the ground in EU Member States. They interact with national authorities, stakeholders and citizens, and inform the media and the public about EU policies. Heads of Representation are appointed by the President of the European Commission and are her political representatives in the Member State to which they are posted.

Source European Commission

GREECE: EIB CO-FINANCES CRETE-ATTICA INTERCONNECTION



Crete HV transmission system infrastructure

The Independent Power Transmission Operator announces the participation of the European Investment Bank (EIB) in the financing of Crete-Attica interconnection, a project with a total budget of 1 billion euros, being implemented by IPTO's fully owned subsidiary "Ariadne Interconnection".

"Ariadne Interconnection" and EIB signed a 200-million-euro loan agreement, with the option of extending the funding by 100 million euros. The funding is guaranteed by the Greek State and has a duration of 20 years, including a 5-year grace

period. The possibility of EIB's participation in the financing of the project was provided as an option in the loan agreement signed in July 2020 with Eurobank, which was activated ensuring even better financing terms.

Crete-Attica interconnection is the largest energy infrastructure project currently under construction in Greece. Its financing comes from three sources: bank lending, equity and EU funding. The equity amounts to 200 million euros. As to the bank lending, the project is now co-financed equally by Eurobank and EIB (with 200 million euros each). For the remaining amount of 400 million euros, the co-financing tools of Greece and the European Union will be deployed.

Minister of Environment and Energy, Kostas Skrekas, commented: "The electrical interconnection of Crete with the mainland is pivotal in achieving our goal to overhaul the electricity system in the next few years. Connecting the largest Greek island with the national electricity transmission network is a decisive step in this direction, as well as in the transition of the country to a low carbon footprint economy".

Mr. Manos Manousakis, President and CEO of IPTO, pointed out: "The participation of EIB secures even better financing terms for the flagship project of Crete's interconnection to the mainland grid, while it reaffirms the confidence of the European bank in the projects of IPTO. We are particularly satisfied with the implementation progress of the project, which brings significant economic and environmental benefits for all citizens of Greece".

Mr. Christian Kettel Thomsen, European Investment Bank Vice President, commented: "The European Investment Bank is committed to supporting transformational energy investment across Greece. The new EIB 200 million long-term financing backs one of the longest submarine power links in the world essential to increasing transmission of green energy from Crete and increase use of clean energy in Greece.

Source EIB/Ipto

THE US FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION AUTHORIZES MARKETING OF NOVEL DEVICE TO REDUCE SNORING AND MILD OBSTRUCTIVE SLEEP APNEA IN PATIENTS 18 YEARS AND OLDER

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has authorized marketing of a new prescription only device intended to reduce snoring and mild obstructive sleep apnea. Unlike devices used while patients sleep, this is the first device used while awake that is intended to improve tongue muscle function, which in time can help prevent the tongue from collapsing backwards and obstructing the airway during sleep.

"Obstructive sleep apnea not only impacts sleep quality, but can have other serious health impacts if untreated. Today's authorization offers a new option for the thousands of individuals who experience snoring or mild sleep apnea," said Malvina Eydelman, MD., director of the Office of Ophthalmic, Anesthesia, Respiratory, ENT and Dental Devices in the FDA's Center for Devices and Radiological Health.

Obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) is a prevalent sleep-disordered breathing with potential serious long-term effects. It can occur when the upper airway becomes blocked repeatedly during sleep, reducing or completely stopping airflow. Untreated OSA can lead to serious complications such as heart attack, glaucoma, diabetes, cancer and cognitive and behavioral disorders. OSA is categorized by the number of apneas (pauses in breathing) plus the number of hypopneas (periods of shallow breathing) that occur, on average, each hour. This number, called the Apnea-Hypopnea Index (AHI) measures the severity of OSA. Mild OSA is defined as an AHI score of more than five but less than 15. The device, the eXciteOSA, is a removable tongue muscle stimulation device that delivers neuromuscular stimulation to the tongue in order to reduce snoring and mild sleep apnea for patients who are 18 years or older.

The eXciteOSA device works by delivering electrical muscle stimulation through a mouthpiece that sits around the tongue. The eXciteOSA mouthpiece has four electrodes, two located above the tongue and two located below the tongue. The device provides electrical muscle stimulation action in sessions that consist of a series of electrical pulses with rest periods in between. It is used for 20 minutes once a day during a wakeful



Crete HV transmission system infrastructure

state, for a period of 6-weeks, and once a week thereafter.

The FDA assessed the safety and effectiveness of the eXciteOSA device in 115 patients with snoring, including 48 patients with snoring and mild sleep apnea. All patients used the device for 20 minutes, once a day for 6 weeks, then discontinued use for 2 weeks before they were reassessed. Overall, the percent of time spent snoring at levels louder than 40dB was reduced by more than 20% in 87 out of the 115 patients. In a 48-patient subset with snoring and mild OSA, the average AHI reduced by 48%, from 10.21 to 5.27, in 41 out of 48 patients. The most common adverse events observed were excessive salivation, tongue or

tooth discomfort, tongue tingling, dental filling sensitivity, metallic taste, gagging and tight jaw.

Patients should receive a comprehensive dental examination prior to use of the device. The eXciteOSA device is contraindicated for patients with pacemakers or implanted pacing leads (electrodes); patients with temporary or permanent implants, dental braces, intraoral metal prosthesis/restorations/ appliances or dental jewelry in the mouth; patients who are pregnant or may be pregnant; or patients suffering from ulcerations in or around the mouth. The eXciteOSA device is not intended for patients who have or are suspected of having OSA with an AHI of 15 and higher.

INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT LAUNCHES CASE LAW DATABASE

Today, 9 March 2021, the International Criminal Court (ICC) launched the ICC Case Law Database. The database provides free and easy access to the Court's jurisprudence on, among other topics, core international crimes and international criminal procedure, the rights of the accused and the rights of victims. The database can be consulted at: <https://legal-tools.org/cld>

In the ICC Case Law Database, users can search for ICC jurisprudence based on several criteria, including a full-text search and a keyword-based search. The ICC Case Law Database currently contains more than 6,000 legal findings extracted from the judgments, decisions and orders that have been issued by the Court since 2004. The content of the database will constantly grow as new judgments and decisions are issued and additional existing jurisprudence is included. The ICC Case Law Database is currently available in English. A French-language version of the ICC Case Law Database



The Judges of the International Criminal Court and eminent guests at the opening of the ICC judicial year 2020 on 23 January 2020 at the seat of the Court in The Hague

is currently under development; further details regarding the French-language version, including a timeline for its publication, will be announced by 9 April 2021.

The ICC Case Law Database is part of the International Criminal Court's Legal Tools Database, which is the leading information service on international criminal law, providing free access to documents and information relevant to this field of law.



MONACO'S NEW LUXURY MARINA IN ITALY - 15 MINUTES AWAY FROM THE PRINCIPALITY

The high-speed power catamaran Monaco One christened on 8th March 2021 in Monaco

On March 8th took place the official christening of the highspeed catamaran **Monaco One**, designed and built by Advanced Aerodynamic Vessel in La Rochelle, France, to connect Monaco's Ports to Cala del Forte and Ventimiglia. The occasion saw the presence of His Serene Highness **Prince Albert II**, his niece and godmother of Monaco One, Ms Camille Gottlieb, Her Royal Highness the Princess of Hanover, Her Serene Highness Princess Stéphanie, Mr and Mrs Louis Ducruet and Ms Pauline Ducruet.

Aleco Kousseoglou, President of the Société d'Exploitation des Ports de Monaco, welcomed guests to the Yacht Club de Monaco's waterfront, the vast open spaces of which allowed for the full application of all necessary health and safety rules aimed at contrasting the pandemic, with a few opening words: *"Today is a day we should all be celebrating. The Monaco One, with her futuristic design, symbolises the hope we hold for a better tomorrow, a tomorrow we actively work towards, a tomorrow we believe in".*

After thanking those who came to witness such a momentous occasion, the SPEM President continued by stressing *"the importance of the direct connection now possible thanks to the Monaco One for private clients of the Principality's ports and of Cala del Forte, reinforcing the strong bond Monaco already shares with Ventimiglia and Liguria's Ponente coast."*

"Finally – Mr Kousseoglou added - I would like to thank all those involved, especially Ms Camille Gottlieb for having agreed to act as godmother to the Monaco One, we are all deeply honoured. The Société d'Exploitation des Ports de Monaco will join Monaco One in establishing a partnership with the BE SAFE Association, of which Ms Gottlieb is President. The Association pursues a particularly noble purpose and we are thrilled to be able to help in this endeavour."



© Eric Mathon / Prince's Palace
Camille Gottlieb, Godmother of Monaco One, niece of Prince Albert of Monaco

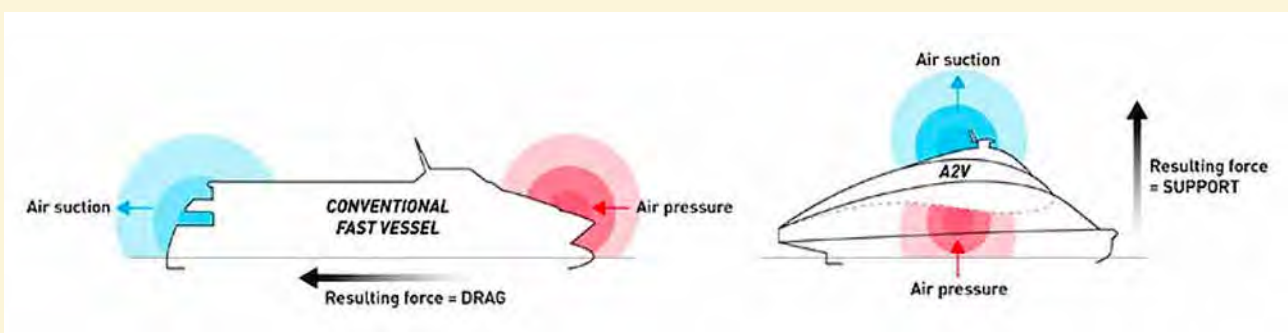
After the religious ceremony enacted by the Archbishop of Monaco, Monsignor Dominique-Marie David, followed by the traditional smashing of the sacrificial bottle against the hull carried out by godmother Camille Gottlieb, the Grimaldi Family joined President Kousseoglou onboard the Monaco One to enjoy the catamaran's inaugural launch at sea.

The Monaco One is a powerhouse of state-of-the-art technology: built in a sandwich-structured composite of carbon and glass, measuring 12.00 metres in length and 7.50 metres in width and powered by two 350 Hp Yanmar engines. The brand-new power catamaran can sail 250 miles on a full tank. In performing her duties as a shuttle service, the Monaco One can travel from Monaco to Ventimiglia carrying up to 12 passengers in absolute comfort. Guests of the both ports will be able to travel between the two marinas in just 15 minutes at 45 knots. The design combines a need for speed with a reliable and sustainable approach thanks to cutting-edge aerodynamic solutions that allow for fuel consumption at top speeds to be half that of conventional designs.

The first aerodynamic alleviated passenger boat

Behind the breakthrough energy efficiency hide years of R & D and sea trials in high seas and strong winds, conducted by a small group of naval architects and computer fluid dynamic specialists with the ambition to explore a different path. The faster the wing-shaped vessel goes, the stronger the aerodynamic lift it generates and the lighter it becomes on the water, thus drastically reducing drag. thanks to this innovative aerodynamic design, fuel consumption has been halved, even when cruising at speeds of over 40 knots.

Monaco One is also equipped with a tracking device known as a 'REPCET', which can monitor the location of large marine mammals in real time and help protect marine wildlife.





The Queen presents the 1966 World Cup trophy to England captain Bobby Moore

YES, NO, MAYBE....

Gender in a flexible world faces public inflexibility

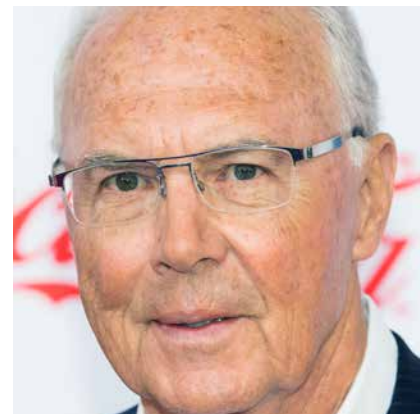
In the evening of the Day England won the World Cup in 1966, I went with my sister, her husband, my cousin and his wife-to-be to a pub in Rickmansworth to celebrate. Rickmansworth is a small town in Hertfordshire, about 27 kilometres northwest of Central London. As a town it had no connection with the football match, other than being home to a pub within easy reach of my grandparents' house in South Oxhey, where we had all watched the match. Indeed, just about everyone, it seemed, had watched the match; I've never seen the streets so deathly quiet. But that evening, people were in politely celebratory mood in that pub, with only good things to say about skipper Bobbie Moore and the Charlton brothers, who at least hailed from that part of England I called home, the North East. I say politely, because any cheering was muted and far from the nationalistic nonsense that is often chanted today.

If Franz Beckenbauer, Horst-Dieter Höttinger or Willi Schulz had walked up to the bar, most of the patrons would have slapped them on the back and offered to buy them a pint. Except, perhaps, for a large group of women occupying one corner of the barn-like room. They came in two varieties, too: some in very pretty, floral outfits fringed with frills and furbelows, while the rest had short hair, rather masculine trousers and no make-up. In fact, it soon became clear that we had walked in on a get-together of a local Lesbian group, who may or may not have been celebrating England's one-and-only World Cup win. I was just 18 at the time, so this was the first time I had been made aware of the somewhat un-binary nature of sexual relations. It was not something we had ever talked about at my school. I learned

more later when my elderly uncle took me to meet his long-term boyfriend with whom he had lived happily for years. The friend was quite noticeably 'camp', but my uncle liked him, so that was OK, although I turned down his offer to join him for some nude sunbathing in the garden. It was raining anyway.

Life was never just one thing or another, black or white; there has always been a degree of uncertainty at the crossover point, many different shades of grey. Later, when carrying out a job in Wales, I was warned that I "might be embarrassed" if I went for a drink in a particular pub near to my Cardiff hotel. It was known locally as a place where men met other, like-minded men. But, as the French eloquently put it, "à chacun son goût". We all have our different

tastes; we're born with them and cannot help what we are. I'm grateful to have been born "normal" as some people put it, although there's nothing "abnormal" about being gay. I have had this argument



German former professional footballer and manager Franz Beckenbauer

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IN POLAND AND
IN EUROPE



with an Austrian friend who believes (on the basis of no evidence whatever) that homosexuality is “a lifestyle choice”, like joining the Conservative Party, taking up billiards or becoming a Freemason (none of which I have done). I tried to point out that some people were born that way and couldn’t help it, nor did they want to help it. It was part of what they were. My friend, though, was religious and couldn’t bring himself to believe that his God would have “made a mistake”. Looking around the world and reading the news websites, I find one is drawn to the unavoidable conclusion that God (if he exists) makes mistakes all the time. One is left to wonder if he sometimes sniggers at them, too. Now, I don’t want to upset my religious friends, whatever religion they choose to follow. I’m proud to have friends who are Muslim, Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and one I particularly like who, along with his family, is a Jehovah’s Witness. A nicer family would be hard to find. But I don’t share his faith, even though he very kindly gave me a copy of the Jehovah’s Witness bible. I’ve seen enough war zones and sickness and dead bodies to convince me that “man’s inhumanity to man” has very little to do with an all-powerful spirit of some kind and more to do with us humans having a strong propensity for hatred of our fellow-humans and a love of spilling blood.

It was the great Scottish poet Robert (Robbie) Burns who wrote in 1784 his “dirge”, *A Man Was Made to Mourn*, which contains the lines:

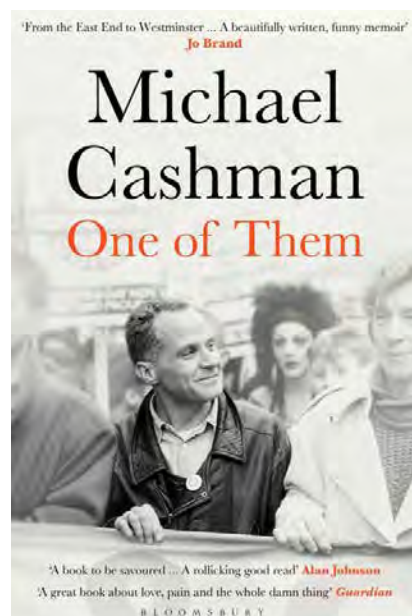
“And man, whose heav’n-erected face
The smiles of love adorn,
Man’s inhumanity to man
Makes countless thousands mourn!”

The “inhumanity” line had been used before, if not so neatly worded, by Samuel von Pufendorf in 1673, (he actually wrote: “More inhumanity (to man) has been done by man himself

than any other of nature’s causes,” which doesn’t quite have the ring of Burns) and in many references since.

CHANGING NATURE’S PLAN (IF IT HAS ONE)

By and large, from what I have seen, people who are gay don’t try to recruit us “straights” to their cause (despite my uncle’s pal wanting me to sunbathe nude with him; I am convinced there would have been no ‘hanky-panky’, as people quaintly put it in those days, if I had). You are what you are, and yet Poland has tried to prevent people from being what they are. Or perhaps it wants them simply to deny what they are. Over a hundred local authorities have declared themselves “LGBTIQ-free zones”, which means local authority administrations are knowingly and deliberately intolerant towards people who express themselves



Michael Cashman, now Lord Cashman of Limehouse, tells his life story in *One Of Them: From Albert Square To Parliament Square ... from East End boy and child actor to soap star, Stonewall founder, MEP and now member of the House of Lords*

as ‘Lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, trans-gender or trans-sexual, intersex or queer or questioning’, and where gay “ideology” is banned. I have travelled widely and reported from many different parts of the world but I have yet to understand what on earth is meant by LGBTIQ “ideology”. Someone is either gay or they’re not; it’s not a political party, it’s not left wing or right-wing, it’s not a set of beliefs or some kind of participatory sport and it doesn’t demand elaborate ceremonies or the wearing of strange regalia, like in the Masons. It’s what your body is. Those who indulge in such restrictions should, perhaps, ask themselves if they personally could be swayed by pro-gay ‘ideology’ (I have yet to see any, if it exists, other than ill-written and rather rude graffiti in men’s toilets). I’m sure they couldn’t, and no more could gay people be swayed by anti-gay propaganda.

Michael, now Lord, Cashman, a Labour member of Britain’s House of Lords and a former Socialist member of the European Parliament, has spent much of his life campaigning for gay rights and was married to a very charming man, Paul, in a ceremony attended by the then prime minister, Tony Blair. At a press conference in Strasbourg, Cashman once surprised and embarrassed the then President of the Parliament, German Socialist Martin Schulz, by kissing him on the lips in front of everyone. It was a very brief act of pure mischief and Schulz looked somewhat shocked, but he laughed about it, as he was meant to.

It was hard to stay angry with Cashman. He had been an actor before entering politics and took part in the first gay kiss between two men in a prime-time episode of the popular television soap opera, *EastEnders*. As a child, he was approached to audition for the American version of the musical *Oliver* after being spotted by a talent scout in a school production. He describes it in his appropriately-titled and fascinating autobiography, *‘One of Them’* (I’ll leave you to guess what the ‘them’ referred to), including his father’s opposition. “It’s full of queers yer’ know,” said Cashman’s father, and it didn’t put him off. “My ears pricked up but I pretended I wasn’t listening and continued watching the telly. “‘Queers,’ repeated my Dad. Queers. It seemed a funny word. But it wasn’t so much the word, it was the way everyone reacted to it.” In a conversation in Strasbourg, Cashman once told me

that the idea that he'd be "surrounded by queers" was one of the features of the acting profession that he found most attractive. As a boy, he had 'scrounged' the money for a seat in the gallery to see the London performance of *Oliver* and was captivated immediately by the magic of the theatre. The whole experience entranced him and set the course of his life.

I know that gay people will not agree with me, but I actually feel very sorry for anyone born to prefer sex with people of their own gender. Those I have known have often ended up lonely and rather sad, however flamboyant in everyday life. Even my uncle saw out his days in an old folk's home on the south coast after his life-long (and more successful) partner – also an actor – died, mainly surrounded by elderly ladies who found his good looks and wonderful deep brown speaking voice irresistible, but who were unable to interest him physically.

I did not inherit his looks, sadly, but neither did I inherit his sexuality. The brilliant but difficult comic actor Kenneth Williams admitted to loneliness, resulting from him being gay, from being 'different'.



© Wikimedia

Kenneth Williams

"I wonder if anyone will ever know the emptiness of my life," he wrote in his diary. The fact of writing in it at all disturbed him. "Fundamentally, diaries are about loneliness," was one of his comments. His final entry reads "Oh, what's the point". And that feeling came despite his huge popularity and the frequent repeats on television of the so-called "Carry On" comedies in which he had starred so often, with their use of rather obvious and slightly rude innuendo. In fact, despite his

unhappiness, he could rarely resist a joke about his situation "I can't stand innuendo," he once wrote. "If I see one in a script, I whip it out immediately." I must say that as far as I'm concerned, what other people do in the privacy of their own bedrooms is of no interest to me at all. I would draw the line at cruelty or violence, but not at what two like-minded people want to do to or with each other. It's none of my business, nor anybody else's. Life's too short to agonise about the finer points.

ALL CHANGE FOR TOLERANCE

Williams might have appreciated the decision taken in March by the European Parliament to declare the EU an "LGBTIQ Freedom Zone". The overwhelming vote was in direct response to the anti-gay actions of Poland, and, to a lesser extent, Hungary. The Polish regulations insist that local governments should "refrain from encouraging tolerance towards LGBTIQ people and withdraw financial assistance from organisation promoting non-discrimination and equality." Which means that a supposedly Christian country is encouraging the sort of response against the way people are that the Romans exercised against those who adopted Christianity as their chosen faith. Or, perhaps, people in the 16th and 17th centuries did towards those who, despite being fellow Christians, used a different prayer book and therefore had to end their lives on a bonfire. I'm sure they don't see it that way, of course; they think they're saving people's souls, rather than driving them towards suicide and despair. The European Parliament motion, passed by 492 votes in favour to 141 against, with 46 abstentions, points out how the declared LGBTIQ-free zones lead to increased hate speech from public authorities, the president and the pro-government media. Why? Homosexuality is not catching, like measles, so what are the Polish authorities afraid of?

I know that things can be different if someone decides they want a change of sexual identity later in life. When I was working in radio, the station had a late-night disc jockey with a deep, cultured voice and a faint Irish accent. I won't give his real name; let's call him Mike (which wasn't his name, of course). He was a large man, broad of shoulder and deep of voice and he broadcast his



© Wikimedia

immensely popular live show from a remote studio, a good half an hour's drive from the station's headquarters, where I worked as a journalist. One of my colleagues returned one day to base with a claim that 'Mike' was changing; he sounded the same and was as professional as ever. But he had started wearing make-up. A little later, someone reported that he'd presented his show in a wig. Not long after that, he was spotted wearing women's clothes. His audience loved him but were unaware of what was happening. Then it came out that he was in a queue to have a sex change operation. He had two teenage sons, who joined their mother in begging him to change his mind, not his gender, but he wouldn't, even when his American surgeon warned him that "you'll make one Hell of an ugly broad, Mike" (he did, too). Mike went through with his plan. He even explained to me in gory detail what the operation involved. I think I sat with my legs crossed for the next few weeks.

Anyway, his convalescence over, he returned to work. The boss called him in and reassured him that he could continue with his regular programme. But he would have his pay cut. Why, you may ask (Mike certainly did). "Because we pay our female presenters less than we pay the men," the boss said. It was shocking back then in the 1980s and it sounds downright disgraceful to a modern ear. I think Mike was most upset by the fact that his sons wanted nothing more to do with him. That's the thing with gender changes or even with just a change of sexuality: the person at the centre of it seems to forget the colossal shock and hurt their decision forces upon those around them, especially their life partner and any children. They presumably find it impossible to continue to live what they see as a lie, but it forces everyone who

knows them to face a truth they could never have anticipated. I don't know where the morality is in such a case but Polish intolerance doesn't appear to me to be an answer. Intolerance seldom is.



© Wikipedia

Dutee Chand

VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE

Another issue thrown up by gender uncertainty comes in the field of sport. Take the case of the female Indian track star Dutee Chand. She was India's leading female sprinter, recording a fastest-ever time in a 60-metre race. But just as she was getting noticed, the Athletics Federation of India, backed by the sport's parent body, barred her from competing in world events because of her unusually high level of natural testosterone. No-one ever accused her of taking a banned substance; it was just one of those strange things that nature sometimes comes up with to surprise us all. Chand's case was reported in the magazine *Scientific American*. The high testosterone gave Chand an advantage when running that is normally only enjoyed by men. Not surprisingly, she disputed the claim that she was more like a male sprinter than a female one: all the



© Facebook/gracehuckins

Grace Huckins

other physical features made plain her female sexuality and in 2015 the Court of Arbitration for Sport agreed with her. So Chand resumed her sporting career. It did lead to a change in the rules, however. World Athletics now bars women with abnormally high levels of testosterone from races of between 400 metres and a mile unless they either take medication to lower their testosterone or else choose to compete against men. The rule does not affect Chand, I'm pleased to report, because she's a sprinter and never races over such distances. *Scientific American's* official editorial policy is that high testosterone should not bar women from competitive sports. They didn't seek out that condition, nor do anything to attain it.

The writer of *Scientific American's* fascinating article, Grace Huckins, is a doctoral student of neuroscience at Stanford University as well as being a graduate of the masters' programmes in neuroscience and women's studies at the University of Oxford. "As an interdisciplinary scholar trained in both biology and gender studies," she wrote, "I have examined the ways in which scientists take social categories such as 'woman' and 'man' and attempt to turn them into fundamental truths. For as long as scientists have been trying to figure out the biological basis of sex and gender, nature has presented divergences from their theories." In case you need further clarification, she stresses that 'sex' refers to biological characteristics; 'gender' refers to social rôles and identification. It's nothing like as easily understood and clear-cut as the Polish government (and the country's bishops, it seems) would like us to believe.

As Huckins points out, "sex has never been a simple binary". That's a scientific fact, whatever the people who want to suppress homosexuality may choose to believe. It has caused problems in sport for years. Huckins stresses that dozens of women were singled out or even disqualified by the Olympic regulators from the 1960s to the 1990s because of their chromosomes. Huckins cites the case of Ewa Kłobukowska, who was declared to be a woman after a genital examination in 1966 but was disqualified two years later because of the make-up of her XY chromosomes. For most women so affected, the truth never comes out and they lead perfectly normal lives. As girls, they probably still played with dolls, rather than toy soldiers. It's only in



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Archbishop of Kraków, Poland, Marek Jędraszewski in an interview for *Telewizja Republika* said that the LGBT ideology was a contradiction of the vision that God had when creating man in his image

sport where officials look for possible rule breaches, however unintentional. Is it fair? Arguably not: the unusual height of Sudanese-born basketball star Manute Bol at 2.31 metres gave him clear advantage and helped his teams, the Washington Bullets and others, to success, mainly by blocking shots, rather than scoring. Nobody suggested he should be barred; he came from a family of exceptionally tall people: his mother had been 2.08 metres tall, his father 2.03, the same height as his sister. They were all members of the Dinka people, who all tend to be very tall for genetic reasons.



© Wikipedia

Manute Bol

He died of acute kidney failure in 2010 at the age of just 47 after contracting Stevens-Johnson syndrome, an especially unpleasant complaint, during a visit home. There are downsides to being exceptional and dying younger

than one should is often one of them. Incidentally, Bol had also been an energetic campaigner for human rights in the Sudan and had donated almost all of his earnings as a player to Sudanese charities. He was a much liked and greatly-admired human being.

As Huckins points out, androgens, which are male hormones such as testosterone but include others, too – and their female equivalents, estrogens, are much more closely linked than many of us might think. She also stresses that every naturally occurring estrogen in the human body started out as testosterone but was converted into estrogen by an enzyme called aromatase. As to what exactly constitutes a chromosome, they are thread-like structures to be found inside the nucleus of animal and plant cells. Each one is made of protein plus a single molecule of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA). Passed from parents to offspring, DNA contains the specific instructions that make each type of living creature unique. Scientists often disagree on how much of any hormone is ‘natural’. The actual figures change and sometimes overlap during a human lifetime, while levels of testosterone are linked with age for men (younger men have more) and with the degree of fitness in women (women who work out regularly may well have higher levels of testosterone).

The point here is that it’s not all cut and dried with conclusions being drawn from how much of various hormones people individually possess. All humans have 23 pairs of chromosomes: 22 that are numbered, called autosomes, plus one pair of the sex chromosomes, X and Y. A child contains one set of chromosomes from each parent: if they get two X chromosomes, they are born female, but if it’s one X and one Y, the baby will be male. Very occasionally – in



Gay Pride in Pratzta Taksim, Istanbul

about one case in a thousand – a child is born with one extra Y chromosome, being born with an XYY arrangement, known as Jacob’s syndrome. In most cases, this makes little or no difference. Some may be taller than average, or have learning difficulties or speech impediments, or even have a physical problem, such as a muscle weakness. By and large, we are divided fairly clearly into male and female, although not always as obviously, nor as certainly as some Polish law-makers may like.

WALK LIKE A MAN

It’s certainly unwise to say you are a member of the LGBTIQ community when you are travelling abroad. In Brunei, for instance, a law was passed last year making it legal to flog or stone to death anyone who identifies as LGBTIQ. Prohibiting gay couples from adopting children and not respecting their right to cohabit seems small beer by comparison. Being gay is currently illegal in 71 countries, including Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan and Iran (the last two are pretty dangerous for anyone, gay or straight).

In Nigeria, a gay person can be beaten half to death in the street and still face fourteen years in prison. In some Islamic states, Sharia law still demands the death sentence. You have to ask yourself: why? As I mentioned earlier, homosexuality is not catching, nor does it pose a threat to anyone except the gay person, who may face violence, discrimination and hate speech, as well as a lonely old age. It’s as if those imposing the vicious sentences are afraid of difference. Variety, they say, is the spice of life; in homophobic countries it may also be the road to death.

Lyric Fergusson, a journalist and blogger, has pointed out that of the 70 countries

in which a same-sex relationship is illegal, 47 were once members of the British Empire. What a proud record for today’s British neo-nationalists to boast about! Fergusson points out that it was only in 2018 that India finally annulled a colonial-era law against same-sex relations – what India’s red-coated “masters” had called ‘unnatural acts’.

And in case anyone should imagine that this was just the imperialist Brits enforcing old laws from the past, Fergusson is keen to stress that Indian literature, such as the Mahabharata and Ramayana have many references to heroes who would have identified as LGBTIQ in today’s world, “including transgender warriors and two queens who made love in order for one queen to get pregnant with an heir for their kingdom,” (I’m not quite sure how they thought that would work). “To cut a long story short, this points to the fact that it was likely the British influence that largely led to Indian homophobia in the first place,” she says. It’s true that when I was at primary school in the industrial north of England, all coal mines, factories and cranes, our school atlases still showed much of the world in pink, representing the British Empire. My mother thought it was wonderful and played ‘Land of Hope and Glory’ on the piano for us to sing along with. It never occurred to us – and we were never taught – that to “set the people free”, as the song urged us to do, the best thing we could all have done would have been to pack up and go home.

But problems can occur in Europe, too. In Belgium, I interviewed a couple of gay men who lived together in Antwerp and had done so for several years. They didn’t disturb or hurt anyone else. Then an Islamic family moved in next door and their quiet domestic life became a living hell. The neighbouring father encouraged his children to shout abuse



Gays being hanged in Iran

at them if they went into the garden. Unpleasant objects were put through their letter box. Sometimes stones were thrown at them.



© LGL.it

Pijus Beizaras and Mangirdas Levickas who got the European Court of Human Rights to condemn Lithuania for failing to act on online hate speech State of Lithuania

Their garden became a no-go area. They had never retaliated but the police were, they said, unwilling to do anything for fear of being accused of racism. The local authority opened an Islamic centre nearby and a senior Islamic cleric gave a speech to the people attending the ceremony. The local authority representatives there were shocked to find out later that the speech urged Antwerp's Muslims to attack anyone who was gay and to hurl them to death from the newly-built (council-approved) minarets. Love, peace and vertigo.

In my Koran (I have an English translation published by the Oxford University Press but I hope to learn Arabic one of these days) there is an instruction – several, really – NOT to kill people. In Sura V, called 'The Table' (they all have names that seem odd to Western ears) early in the Holy Book, the tale is told of the two sons of Adam. "When they offered a sacrifice, and it was accepted of one of them, and not accepted of the other. 'I will surely slay thee,' said one. 'God accepts only of the god-fearing,' said the other. 'Yet if thou stretchest out thy hand against me, to slay me, I will not stretch out my hand against thee to slay thee; I fear God, the Lord of all Being. I desire that thou shouldst be laden with my sin and thy sin, and so become an inhabitant of the Fire; that is the recompense of the evildoers.'" But nobody was thrown off a minaret to make the point; any punishment was left to God. I do not doubt that today's senior clerics

know their Koran very thoroughly and certainly much better than I do, but from what I have read, most of it is devoted to wise words urging peace and brotherhood. Perhaps Mohammad (peace be upon him) doesn't actually want his followers to go out and murder people, just for being different.

RUN, RUN, AS FAST AS YOU CAN...

Remember the case of Dutee Chand? A similar problem has been hitting the headlines in the United States, where 17-year-old Alanna Smith wants to run for the Lady Tigers athletic team at Louisiana State University. Now a junior at Danbury High School in Connecticut, she took the New England title in the 400 metres while she was a freshman. But now transgender athletes have been asserting their rights to compete according to whatever gender they personally choose. Supposedly 'female' athletes against whom she must compete today took part as boys not very long ago. Her lawyers in a federal lawsuit she is bringing are from a conservative Christian group, but support for her case from the Justice Department was hastily withdrawn once Joe Biden was elected and schools athletics bodies don't seem to be interested. That appears to be the pattern developing under the new administration. If it persists, however, it could mean the end of women's athletics: all future events will be won by women who were born men. Alanna's dreams of representing her birth state during her college years are fading because of circumstances over which she has no control. "I just want fairness to be made in all women's sports," she told the Washington Times, "This isn't fair, and I only have a few seasons."

The problem when deciding what's right and what's wrong is that it is seldom, in reality, a question of 'yes' or 'no'. Alanna's unfortunate situation arises from the lust for glory of some males who cannot compete successfully in all-male events. But it doesn't mean that those who self-identify as a gender other than their birth gender are to blame, nor that they should be denied access to sporting competitions. I'm glad the decision isn't up to me, but simply denying the rights of the LGBTIQ community is not the answer. Now, the Vatican has decided that it cannot bless same-sex unions because, it says, "God cannot bless sin". Given some of the things to which it has



© alannasmithhh / Twitter

Alanna Smith

turned a blind eye in the past, some may find that a little rich.

The action of the European Parliament in declaring Europe an "LGBTIQ freedom zone" is purely symbolic, in fact, if well-intentioned. Evelyne Paradis, executive director of ILGA Europe, which campaigns for LGBTIQ rights, welcomed the European Commission's more strident defence of them. "It is essential to take bold and decisive action at multiple levels," she said, "so that the human rights of LGBTIQ people in all their diversity will continue to advance across the region, and the promise of equality will be experienced in their lived realities." It's strange: in ancient Rome homosexuality was acceptable and several Roman emperors were gay, like Hadrian, who built the famous wall across Britain. He is still rated as one of Rome's 'good' emperors and was a formidable general. Alexander the Great was gay, too, as was (it seems) Homer's great hero, Achilles. Try telling him he's "not a real man" and see what happens.

In Oxford, not far from Balliol College and the Eagle and Child pub, where J.R.R. Tolkein used to drink with C.S. Lewis and the other 'Inklings', is the Martyr's Memorial, where in 1555 the bishops of London and Worcester were burned to death for being Protestants. The Archbishop of Canterbury followed soon afterwards, having been obliged to watch from his cell. The gender problem is rather different, though: the bishops had chosen their faith, members of the LGBTIQ community are stuck with what they've been given. It would seem we have learned little in the intervening years, except that as well as "yes" and "no", there is also "maybe". And, as Popeye the Sailor Man used to say, "I am what I am". More spinach, anyone?

Toby Bowman-Grant



POLICE AND CUSTOMS AUTHORITIES WORLDWIDE ARE WARNING THE PUBLIC TO BE VIGILANT WITH THEIR GIFT-GIVING AFTER THEY SEIZED OVER €16 MILLION WORTH OF FAKE TOYS

Close to 5 million counterfeit toys have been confiscated as a result of Operation LUDUS organised by Europol with the support of OLAF and the EUIPO.

Over 4 700 inspections were carried out across 24 countries between 19 October 2020 and 31 January 2021 in order to detect the illegal shipment and storage of counterfeit toys. So far, 11 fraudsters have been arrested, with investigations ongoing in a number of countries to dismantle the criminal networks putting child safety at risk. This is the first operation ever organised on such a scale targeting the sale of counterfeit toys.

RESULTS OF THE OPERATIONAL PHASE

- Close to 5 million toys seized for a total value exceeding €16 million;
- 4 768 inspections carried out;
- 44 127 samples tested in laboratories;
- 125 judicial cases opened;
- 11 individuals arrested so far.

PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES

Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, France, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, United Kingdom, United States.

FAKE TOYS PUTTING CHILD SAFETY AT RISK

Toy cars, board games and dolls from popular children TV shows feature among the most seized items.

The confiscated pieces were almost exact copies of the real products and were extremely hard to distinguish. However, in almost all of the cases, the seized toys posed a serious health risk for children. These fake toys had not been subjected to the rigorous safety tests required by law and had no warnings or advice on the packaging.

Examples include 2 800 dolls seized in Italy and 8 000 toy cars seized in Belgium which posed a choking hazard, more than 5 000 plastic toys seized in Spain which contained a toxic chemical that could damage children health and several other electronic devices confiscated in various countries which exceeded legal decibel limits for toys which could permanently damage a child's hearing. A total of 1 175 toys destined for infants were also confiscated in Romania after failing to include essential information on the packaging to prevent a child getting injured, such as an age label, instructions for use and a list of materials they contain.

Commenting on this operation, Europol's Executive Director Catherine de Bolle said: "This operation shows yet again that criminals will take advantage of any and every opportunity open to them to make a profit. During the

festive period, criminals cash in on the surge in demand of certain toys by selling dangerous toys to unsuspecting shoppers. Thanks to Operation LUDUS, we have successfully taken out of circulation millions of toys which were not only unsafe but ripped off legitimate brands."

Europol and its partners urge consumers to resist cheap offers that look too good to be true, particularly if certain toys are sold out in well-known retailers, as this could be a sign that they are fake, unsafe or of poor quality. It is just not worth the risk.

EUROPOL'S INVOLVEMENT

Europol's Intellectual Property Crime Coordinated Coalition (IPC3), co-funded by the EUIPO, was instrumental in the success of this operation:

- It brought all the involved countries around one table and coordinated the operational activities across the globe;
- It developed risk indicators which were shared with law enforcement and customs authorities to help them prioritise checks;
- During the operational phase, it provided a platform for real-time information sharing and cross-checking of intelligence, creating a communication network involving both police and custom authorities.

Information collected and shared during the action will be processed and analysed to inform further hits against toy counterfeiters in Europe and beyond.

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THIRD CULTURE KIDS, THE GLOBAL CHILDREN

When you say 'diplomatic' life, you automatically think about a life 'on the move' from country to country, in which every couple of years, you put your whole existence into a few boxes and leave everything except your family behind, to go into the unknown and start afresh. This fragmented episodic life, in which you have to constantly reinvent yourself and always start from the beginning, as in the ancient myth of Sisyphus, may sound idyllic to some, but scary and complicated to many. After all, psychologists say that moving up the ranks is the third most stressful situation in life, after the death of someone dear and divorce.

With today's accelerated globalization, career mobility now means working practically anywhere in the world, gained worldwide mobility. Many multinational corporations have emerged that have, in addition to the traditional categories of 'career nomads', such as diplomats, military employees or religious missionaries, created new categories of migrant labour force. It is said that in the 21st century, an expat is moving from one country to another every 44 seconds! All these people travel the world with their families, spouses and children.

These children live far from their countries of origin for years and it is only natural that they will develop a particular pattern of behaviour. In fact, this type of life has led to the emergence of a category of people, with a particular upbringing, that has acquired a name: **THIRD CULTURE KIDS (TCK)**. This notion was first introduced in the 1950s by researchers Dr. Ruth Hill Useem and John Useem. The first culture of TCKs is the culture of their parents, second is the culture

of the country where their parents reside for a period of time (especially in childhood years) and the third culture is the combination of the two. Dr. Ruth Hill Useem said: 'The third culture kid builds relationships to all the cultures, while not having full ownership in any'.

But who are they? Why are they special? By definition, Third Culture Kids are people who were raised for a significant number of years during their childhood in a culture other

than that of their parents or their country of origin. This particular situation provides the framework for a different emotional development.

The fact that they are exposed, from an early age, to an amalgam of cultures, traditions and rules which are foreign to them, the fact that they change countries, houses, schools and friends every few years, although deeply disturbing emotionally and sometimes even heart-breaking, provide the perfect for the creation



Lycée Français in Vienna, Austria

of complex adult personalities by giving them a set of unique social skills, that are important and useful later on in life.

They are people who have lived just for few years in one place, were in daily contact with local cultures, without having had the opportunity to developed a personal and cultural identity related to their 'first culture', that of the country from which the parents originated.

From the USA to Singapore, to France, Brazil or the UK... where is home? I heard a friend of mine, diplomatic spouse and Third Culture Kid herself, saying that one of the most difficult and also annoying questions she was ever asked was: 'Where are you from?'

Indeed, for such individuals, identifying themselves with a place might be complicated. Because they

grow up as global citizens, they lack a strong sense of belonging. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the third culture kid's life experience, the sense of belonging will always be more in relationship to others of the same background, that is other TCKs. Home is more a feeling than a place or a country.

As we grow up, we usually learn who we are from our parents and close family circle, but we also assimilate a lot from the environment and people around us. If these two are different, we will try to integrate elements of the two cultures in our own cultural identity, but that is in fact why Third Culture Kids end up, most of the time, not feeling completely comfortable or secure with their dominant culture. Sometimes people around don't understand them and cannot possibly relate to them

because they didn't grow up in the same circumstances. I guess we could say that TCKs are cultural hybrids, unique combinations of concepts and customs which don't always go perfectly well together. Especially when they move between completely different cultures, for instance from individualistic societies to more collectivist ones, from low-context to high-context cultures...

'Who am I?' is also a common question and a reason for inner introspection. Often they have trouble understanding and defining their own cultural identity and, in most cases, these Third Culture Kids become 'chameleons', adapting instantly and switching to the local culture, whenever required. They act and react differently; they speak differently, as a direct response to the environment. They try to fit in, to integrate, to even out their peculiarities, and thus only adding to the confusion. I have read that when you speak in a different language, you automatically change your tone of voice (which normally counts for about 38% of communication), intonation and even attitude. Now imagine people who are bilingual or even speak several languages... the changes they must go through each time they switch to another language!

But being bilingual is not uncommon anymore. In the 21st century it is estimated that worldwide there are as many bilinguals as monolingual children, which is in fact great for humanity. Languages open doors, facilitate relationships and help promoting unity in diversity in the world.

Third Culture people learn more than one language from an early age, so they basically have more than one mother tongue, which is one of the greatest gifts for their adulthood. Often, various words in foreign languages will remain forever linked to fond memories, will be associated with places where they grew up and will remain in their hearts forever.

Speaking as many languages as possible is certainly an advantage nowadays. Often educated in international schools, Third Culture Kids will have the opportunity to interact with different people with



The Berlin Brandenburg International School



© Efi

French International School Brussels

similar life stories. Besides a great education (TCKs are generally four times more likely to earn Bachelor's degrees in their lifetimes), they will also gain valuable interpersonal skills, which are important for the future. Luckily nowadays there are numerous possibilities and options worldwide, meant to give a sense of continuity and normality to these children and to ease the burden of being 'the new kid in class' every once in a while.

For instance, there are quite a number of British Schools, American Schools (mostly leading to globally recognized International Baccalaureate), 'Lycée Français' network (with the advantage of a common curriculum all over the world, coordinated by the French Foreign Ministry), 'Deutsche Schule' (a network of 140 German schools

abroad, supported by the German Foreign Ministry) and 'Europe Schools' (a network of 25 schools in the European Union, which stress on a multilingual and multicultural approach, leading to the European Baccalaureate).

Diversity is truly beautiful! All these schools bring children from all parts of the world together and build bridges of culture, education and cooperation between nations. And it is impressive to see how easily children can relate to one another, overcoming language and cultural barriers and always finding common ground... That is a lesson which many of us, adults, still need to learn...

Switching between cultures is never easy, but to TCKs it comes naturally. These people will grow up as

international citizens and will have a far greater compassion, cultural awareness and tolerance. They learn from an early age to be respectful of other cultures and traditions, to break free from racial stereotypes and preconceived ideas related to origin and nationality. They appreciate diversity and are open minded individuals.

Moving is hard and adapting takes time, at least six months are necessary to start feeling comfortable in a new country. They always feel somehow out of place. As adults, they might also have problems relating to their own ethnic groups. But this is exactly what makes them, in the long run, more resilient and independent.

Third Culture Kids usually adapt quickly and are more emotionally mature; they also have a far greater cultural intelligence level than mono-culturally raised people. Their own experience of life shapes their future personality and increases their sensitivity and understanding of other cultures, of social and political realities. All these are great gifts which life offers in return for the emotional toll that they pay for moving and losing parts of their soul in different corners of the earth. But ironically, later in their adult life Third Culture Kids often look for similar nomadic careers. It is generally well known that, especially in diplomacy, there are families who perpetuate the tradition of wanting their children to follow in the footsteps of their grandparents and parents in choosing the same profession and the same career.

Third Culture Kids often feel the need to continue the same experience and maintain a global dimension throughout their lives. The feeling of rootlessness and restlessness is common among third culture kids. Consequently they end up offering the same kind of life to their own children, perpetuating the tradition and thus strengthening the ranks of global citizens of the 21st century.

With more and more globally raised individuals, the need to normalize their story grows bigger and bigger every day. The need for recognition and for an increased sense of belonging to a group



© Wikipedia

Deutsche Schule Shanghai, China



© Edm

which understands them, empathizes with them, and which has the same history and peculiarities, has lately led to the development of an entire global community that recognizes and applauds the merits of TCKs. Numerous bloggers, influencers, magazines and specialized websites now concentrate on this topic and show in fact the extent of this phenomenon.

They also emphasize on the advantages of such a trailing life. With a high number of multicultural experiences at their disposal, it is only normal that there will be differences regarding how TCKs perceive the world and how they deal with complex intercultural issues.

Nowadays we know quite a few high prominent public figures who are also considered Third Culture Kids. One of the best examples is Barack

Obama, 44th president of the United States from 2009 to 2017, born in Hawaii, USA in a multicultural family (his mother was American and his father from Kenya) and who spent significant parts of his childhood in Indonesia.

Another example is the famous Afghan-American novelist Khaled Hosseini, author of 'The Kite Runner' (2003), a debut novel telling the intercultural story of an Afghan boy.

I also raise two TCKs in our diplomatic home and I often try to put myself in their place, try to see things from their perspective and fully understand what they are going through. After all, it's us, their parents, who chose this kind of life for them... They too feel the anxiety with each new beginning. But I am

always amazed at the ease with which children adapt to new realities. I have also seen how children can gain self-esteem and self-confidence from this nomadic experience. They can use their knowledge later for their betterment, increasing creativity and innovation.



© VWH

Former US President Barack Obama

I am fully aware that they have no really deep roots. They are conscious of their origins but not too tied up to them, Having been exposed from an early age to a completely different culture, they are not too religious, not too attached to places and customs, that on day they will leave behind. They don't have racial prejudices; as international global citizens they are accustomed to the diversity of the world in which they live.

I can only hope that the future years will prove that all these life experiences helped shape their character into becoming complex and cultural conscious adults. I hope they will be happy to have shared this kind of life with us and, looking back, will appreciate that it helped widen their horizon, refine their understanding of the world and set the stage for a great international experience.

'Like arrows in the hand of a warrior are the children of one's youth' (Ps 127:4)

Alexandra Paucescu



© UNHCR Brian Sokol

Khaled Hosseini



JOIN THE NEW ERA OF EXPLORATION AS AN ESA ASTRONAUT

For the first time in over a decade, the European Space Agency (ESA) is seeking new astronauts to join humankind's greatest adventure for the benefit of Earth.

Applications open 31 March 2021 and ESA's Astronaut Selection webpage (https://www.esa.int/About_Us/Careers_at_ESA/ESA_Astronaut_Selection) provides everything you need to know to prepare a strong application and apply. This site is the hub for all ESA astronaut selection content and will be updated throughout the campaign.

The opportunity to become an ESA astronaut is rare and highly competitive. ESA last sought applicants for astronaut positions in 2008 and has held only three recruitment rounds, including its first in 1978.

This time there is a new opportunity for astronaut hopefuls thanks to the introduction of a parastronaut feasibility project.

Full details of the requirements for the astronaut selection and parastronaut feasibility project will be released when applications open. The application

period will run until 28 May 2021 and the outcome is expected to be announced in October 2022.

THE NEW FACE OF SPACE

An addition to the career astronauts, who will be trained for long-duration or complex space missions and hired as permanent ESA staff members, ESA's parastronaut feasibility project is a global first that aims to begin removing barriers for people with disabilities to carry out a professional space mission.

Individual(s) who are psychologically, cognitively, technically and professionally qualified to become astronauts, but who have a physical disability that would normally prevent them from being selected due to the restrictions of current space hardware are encouraged to apply.

ESA is already working with its international partners and commercial spaceflight providers to create a more accessible environment, and determine the feasibility of an astronaut with



Astronauts from ESA's Class of 2009 at Le Bourget before the Human Spaceflight and Exploration in Europe conference

specific physical disabilities flying a safe and valuable mission to the International Space Station as we look ahead to the Moon and Mars.

ARE YOU READY?

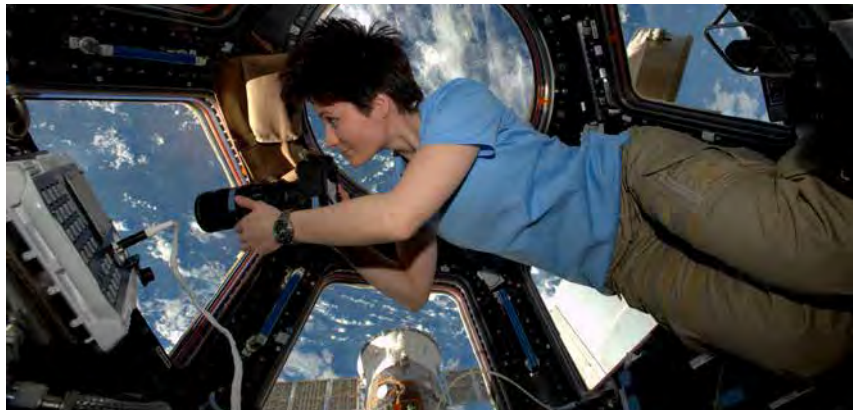
ESA is looking for candidates from a large variety of profiles and backgrounds, but for the best chance of success, astronaut hopefuls are urged to familiarise themselves with the minimum requirements.



ESA astronauts Matthias Maurer and Thomas Pesquet stand in front of a SpaceX rocket

These include being a citizen of an ESA member state or associate state, (https://www.esa.int/About_Us/Corporate_news/Member_States_Cooperating_States) holding the minimum of a Master's degree in natural sciences, medicine, engineering, mathematics, or computer sciences or holding a degree as an experimental test pilot and/or test engineer from an official experimental test pilot school. Candidates must have at least three years of relevant professional experience after graduation and be fluent in English. Good knowledge of another foreign language and any other additional language is a plus.

Applicants do not need to hold a pilot's license but they must submit a class 2 medical certificate issued by an aviation medical examiner that shows they are medically qualified for a private pilot licence (PPL).



ESA astronaut Samantha Cristoforetti on the International Space Station

RIDING A ROCKET TO WORK

ESA astronaut Samantha Cristoforetti was selected in ESA's 2008-09 astronaut selection and describes becoming an astronaut as "a dream come true".

"It brings together many of my passions: science and technology, complex machines, demanding operational environments, international teams, physical fitness, public outreach. And of course, occasionally you get to ride a rocket to work!"

There are many other exciting careers in the space sector beyond astronauts. ESA is constantly on the lookout for experts in engineering, science, IT and business services to join its teams. Discover ways to join ESA, wherever you are on your career path by visiting the ESA careers website. (<https://jobs.esa.int/>)

STAGES OF SELECTION

From closure of the vacancy notice on 28 May 2021 to the worldwide announcement of selected astronauts in mid-late 2022, ESA's astronaut selection consists of six key stages. These are preceded by a screening phase as follows:

Screening: several screening rounds will be conducted on the basis of all documents submitted with the application form as well as the screening questionnaire completed as part of the application. In addition, applications for the selection of candidates with physical disabilities will undergo a medical screening on basis of the eligible impairments.

Test Phase 1: cognitive, technical, motor coordination and personality testing.

Test Phase 2: psychometric testing, group and individual exercises and practical tests.

Test Phase 3: applicants' physical and mental abilities are measured against international medical standards for spaceflight missions.

Interview Round 1: panel interview in which applicants are tested on technical and behavioural competencies (educational qualifications are verified and criminal record checks are carried out).

Interview Round 2: final stage of the selection process. Applicants who make it through to this stage can expect an interview with the ESA Director General, after which a final decision will be made.



TIMELESS CHIC

Standout Fashion and Beauty trends

By Clara Bauman

New time...New watch

All temptations are justified for returning to summer time in style. It's up to you to choose among the three top models of the season:



© Balmain

Gold or silver? Both!
Watch with two-tone bracelet
(balmainwatches.com)



© Omega

Diamonds are a girl's best friend
Crafted in 18K gold and features
38 full-cut diamonds
(omegawatches.com)



© Longines

Timeless
A symbol of Longines' classic elegance
and timeless sophistication
(longines.com)

It-bag: 'Something pastel'

It's become the most anticipated event for fashion addicts: which will be THE It-bag of the season? This spring, the trend is more dedicated to a colour code: in fact, pastel tones. Green mint, baby pink and baby blue, lilac or even pale yellow... Above all, let's not deprive ourselves of them: they add brightness and gaiety to the most sober of outfits.



1

© Jacquemus

"Chiquito" by Jacquemus
in «Green Light»
(jacquemus.com)

© Bottega Veneta

"Cassette Bag" by Bottega Veneta
in «Lavender»
(bottegabeneta.com)

2

© Gucci

3

"Marmont" by Gucci in «Pastel Pink»
(gucci.com)



© Marc Jacobs

(marcjacobsfragrances.com)

Hello Spring!

What's good in the new fragrance 'Daisy Eau So Fresh Spring' by Marc Jacobs? As always, an evocation of spring and the awakening of nature. Its fragrance pyramid consists of: a fruity top (enhanced with pink pepper), a floral heart (green tea blossom) and a feminine base (matcha tea accord). There's no doubt...it fully lives up to its name!

TIMELESS CHIC

Standout Fashion and Beauty trends

By Clara Bauman

The 2021 fashion hashtag: #athflow

What's Athflow? According to the social media Pinterest (*), "Athflow" is the new "casual chic", a mixture of sporty look and elegance.

Here is a user's guide to this new and addictive style.

If your pre-pandemic wardrobe has become a distant memory, you'll be thrilled to meet Athflow.

The Athflow style is above all a clever combination of styles and a choice of specific items. Think of it as a move on from traditional loungewear whose looks are still comfortable enough to let you go about your daily lockdown life; from your living room yoga class to a nip into the Post Office, to hitting the sofa for a Netflix marathon.

Some examples :

- A coat as soft as your favourite plaid but belted, so as to enhance the silhouette.
- An extra-large sweater worn with leather trousers.
- A large knit sweater embellished with feminine details (beads, rhinestones...)
- Cosy, homewear pants with a silky camisole.
- A trench coat with a jogger set.

3 inspirational ideas (among others)



Dressed in a harmonious monochrome combination of yellow and camel, Leonie Hamme the influencer with 3 million followers wears the "Athflow style" to perfection



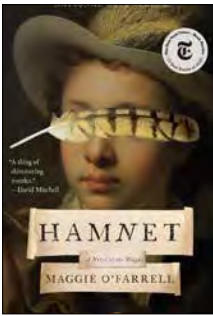
With an elegant bag and a "chain necklace", this comfy jogger set is the 2021 version of the "pantsuit". Who would have predicted it?



If Anine Bing, the "Queen of effortless chic" decrees it, then you can also dare to follow suit: the jogger set can be worn under a luxurious herringbone overcoat

(*) Pinterest is an image sharing and social media service designed to enable saving and discovery of information (specifically "ideas") using images in the form of pin boards. It has garnered to this day, more than 300 million followers.

BOOKS



HAMNET

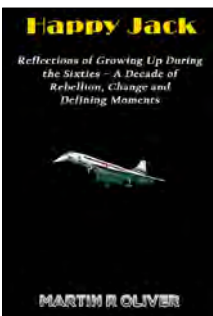
By Maggie O'Farrell

In 1580's England, during the Black Plague a young Latin tutor falls in love with an extraordinary, eccentric young woman in this "exceptional historical novel" (The New Yorker) and best-selling winner of the Women's Prize for Fiction.

Agnes is a wild creature who walks her family's land with a falcon on her glove and is known throughout the countryside for her unusual gifts as a healer, understanding

plants and potions better than she does people. Once she settles with her husband on Henley Street in Stratford-upon-Avon she becomes a fiercely protective mother and a steadfast, centrifugal force in the life of her young husband, whose career on the London stage is taking off when his beloved young son succumbs to sudden fever.

A luminous portrait of a marriage, a shattering evocation of a family ravaged by grief and loss, and a tender and unforgettable re-imagining of a boy whose life has been all but forgotten, and whose name was given to one of the most celebrated plays of all time, Hamnet is mesmerizing, seductive, impossible to put down—a magnificent leap forward from one of our most gifted novelists.



HAPPY JACK

By Martin R Oliver

BIOGRAPHY

Happy Jack: Reflections of Growing Up During the Sixties – A Decade of Rebellion, Change and Defining Moments are the memories of a young man from a working-class family coming of age during the sixties decade, and the many iconic moments and

sometimes humorous events of that period.

Over fifty years later, people still talk about the Vietnam War, the moon landing, Woodstock, Monty Python, the music of The Beatles, and The Rolling Stones. James Bond movies continue to be popular to this day. There were the Mods and Rockers, The British Invasion, The Hippies, Pirate Radio, The Civil Rights Movement, Che Guevara, and JFK's assassination.

The stories portray school, factory, teenage years, family life, and summer holidays, before colour TV was introduced and the internet, email, mobile phones, laptops and gadgets were ever invented.

These stories are for the younger generations to understand the decade that became known as "The Swinging Sixties", and our youth-driven Cultural Revolution, which saw a surge in freedom of expression, a time when working-class youth challenged authority, a time of creativity in fashion, music, photography, art and technology that went on to change the world.

The stories are also for those that, like myself, grew up or came of age during that tumultuous time, who will relate to my stories and the challenges of the sixties' generation. My observations may not always be correct and, yes, your recollections might not be the same as mine; maybe I didn't mention Fleetwood Mac, Elvis Presley and some important events that were important to you, but I make no apologies for that. These are my recollections of that time, which I hope will bring some fond memories and nostalgia.

– Martin R Oliver



LOST ROSES

By Martha Hall Kelly

A NOVEL

It is 1914, and the world has been on the brink of war so often, many New Yorkers treat the subject with only passing interest. Eliza Ferriday is thrilled to be traveling to St. Petersburg with Sofya Streshnayva, a cousin of the Romanovs. The two met years ago one summer in Paris and became close confidantes. Now Eliza embarks on the trip of a lifetime, home with Sofya to see the splendors of

Russia: the church with the interior covered in jeweled mosaics, the Rembrandts at the tsar's Winter Palace, the famous ballet.

But when Austria declares war on Serbia and Russia's imperial dynasty begins to fall, Eliza escapes back to America, while Sofya and her family flee to their country estate. In need of domestic help, they hire the local fortune-teller's daughter, Varinka, unknowingly bringing intense danger into their household.

On the other side of the Atlantic, Eliza is doing her part to help the White Russian families find safety as they escape the revolution. But when Sofya's letters suddenly stop coming, she fears the worst for her best friend.

From the turbulent streets of St. Petersburg and aristocratic countryside estates to the avenues of Paris where a society of fallen Russian émigrés live to the mansions of Long Island, the lives of Eliza, Sofya, and Varinka will intersect in profound ways. In her newest powerful tale told through female-driven perspectives, Martha Hall Kelly celebrates the unbreakable bonds of women's friendship, especially during the darkest days of history



THE CARTEL

By Stephen Breen Owen Conlon

THE DEFINITIVE ACCOUNT OF THE RISE OF THE KINAHAN GANG AND THE DEADLY FEUD THAT HAS SHOCKED THE NATION.

February 2016. A daring gun attack in the Regency Hotel brings Dubliner Christy Kinahan and his international criminal cartel to a horrified public's attention.

Kinahan's son Daniel, the target of the attack, escapes. A trusted henchman dies at the scene. And the deadly rivalry between the Kinahans and the family and associates of the veteran Dublin gangster Gerry Hutch is now all-out war.

The Cartel offers a unique behind-the-scenes account of how Kinahan got so big, and why a local feud could bring about the unravelling of his global crime empire. Its authors - experienced crime journalists Stephen Breen and Owen Conlon - have written a meticulous, eye-opening and gripping story of double-crossing, vengeance and murder.

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