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Putin tries to
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IN THIS ISSUE



■ SUPER MARIO TO THE RESCUE!

Can the former boss of the European Central Bank save Italyp.6

■ LOWERING THE BAR

Putin tries to block maritime access to Ukrainep.14



■ THE HUMAN TSUNAMI

Europe's reverse migrationp.20

■ A DISTURBING PATTERN OF BEHAVIOUR

Two spies, two explosions, two deaths and still many questionsp.24



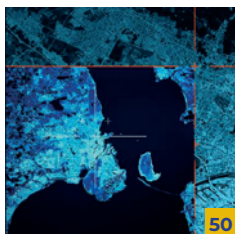
■ NEWS IN BRIEF

■ FELONIOUS HARVEST

How crooks reap where the EU sowedp.35

■ IF YOU PRICK US, DO WE NOT BLEED?

Anti-Semitism continues to confound justice in today's Europep.42

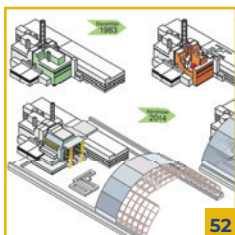


■ SERIOUS AND ORGANISED CRIME IN THE EU

A corrupting influencep.48

■ OPERATION 30 DAYS AT SEA 3.0

1,600 marine pollution offences worldwidep.50



■ CHERNOBYL The next phasep.52

■ Timeless Chic Standout fashion and beauty trendsp.56

■ Books Our selectionp.58

EUROPE
Diplomatic
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Nikola Hendrickx

EDITORIAL

SABOTAGE, THREATS, ASSASSINATIONS...

More fingers pointing at Russia

In March 2021, Bulgaria exposed an espionage network and arrested agents operating in the country. In April, Italy did the same and arrested a Russian spy. Then Prague exposed a Russian intelligence operation that blew up an arms depot in the Czech Republic in 2014 (see our article). All of this is just the latest in a series of Russian espionage and clandestine acts in Europe, some with deadly results.

Russian interference in elections, assassinations across Europe, sabotage and explosions, violent and deadly operations. These anti-European activities demonstrate the true nature of Vladimir Putin's regime which does not differ much from that of the former Soviet Union. They also highlight the decline of the Russian intelligence apparatus, following countless failures.

When we speak about intelligence failures, we normally think of the inability to anticipate a coup for example, or a terrorist attack. But when we consider Russian intelligence services, we are talking about a different set of standards altogether. Their failures are linked to the revelations made to the general public of their destabilisation operations which unfortunately, have often prove deadly. Let us take a look at some of the more prominent failures of Russian intelligence services in recent years, such as the attempted poisoning of Bulgarian arms dealer Emilian Gebrev, the arrest of Nicolai Malinov, leader of the Russophile Movement in 2019, for spying for Russia and in 2020, the arrest of two Russian diplomats also accused of spying. In March 2021, the malign and destabilising activities of the Kremlin were denounced by the international community following the expulsion of two Russian diplomats from its embassy in Rome, Italy. There are also the recent revelations by the Czech government incriminating Russian military intelligence (GRU) agents in the deadly explosion of an arms depot on its territory.

Russia's reckless and aggressive stance was singled out yet again, this time by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken who attended the May 3-5 G7 ministerial summit in London.

A statement issued following the meeting criticised Moscow for its "irresponsible and destabilising behaviour" in Europe and the world, particularly against Ukraine and for cyber-attacks.

Russian attempts to steal secrets from Bulgaria, Italy, NATO and the EU may seem trivial to European countries. After all, what country does not resort to such manoeuvres ?

On the other hand, Europe has the right to condemn and counter the brutal actions of Russian spies across Europe and to place Russia under close scrutiny for its various forms of violent actions, whether by allegedly unattributed deadly acts of their intelligence agents or under the guise of unofficial entities such as the infamous "Wagner" group of mercenaries, used as a 'paramilitary weapon' in armed conflict zones.

Russia continues to use ruthless tactics to poison and eliminate its enemies, wherever they may be, and does not hesitate to commit acts of violence, sabotage and other acts reminiscent of the Cold War. Innocent European citizens are often caught in the crossfire and pay with their lives.

This also serves to highlight to Europeans, in an emphatic manner, the words of Sergei Lavrov when he belittled Josep Borrell during his visit to Moscow in February when he declared that "Europe is an unreliable partner for Russia."

The capture of Russian spies and the dismantling of their espionage networks is an indication of the incompetence and decline of a once formidable opponent.

The fact that European nations have reacted swiftly and successfully exposed and dismantled several espionage networks, followed by a wave of arrests of Russian intelligence agents across the continent, is a blow to the Russian president's ego and has begun to undermine his credibility.

In the words of Charles Michel, President of the European Council : "The fact that we are imposing these sanctions means that we, in Europe, are totally committed and that we are united in our very tough and very firm attitude, in order to promote our values and to defend our interests". And the European institutions, in response to Russia's unorthodox schemes, have acted collectively and firmly by imposing these sanctions and by expelling diplomats and spies.

These measures have proven somewhat effective in hindering Russia's malign actions, but unfortunately, only temporarily. Russia's rather casual attitude in this regard was demonstrated through its Foreign Minister's remark about Europe's unreliability as a partner, during the EU High Representative's visit to Moscow last February.

European leaders in Brussels, Berlin, Paris and elsewhere must now choose an even tougher response in order to put a definitive end to this situation. Will Paris and Berlin stand in solidarity with Prague, Sofia and other capitals by expelling Russian spies acting under diplomatic cover in order to stem Putin's ability to perpetrate further violent acts in Europe?

Or will Merkel and Macron appease Putin once again, in the name of their 'Realpolitik', to dispel any risk of harming an open dialogue with Russia?

Trajan Dereville



Chigi Palace, the Italian Prime Minister's Residence

Super Mario

SUPER MARIO TO THE RESCUE

Can the former boss of the European Central Bank save Italy's "Regno dei Funghi" from the wicked Bowser?

In Nintendo's famously successful Super Mario series of computer games, Mario, an Italian plumber from Brooklyn in New York, saves the Mushroom Kingdom of Princess Peach from the game's arch-villain, Bowser. Many are comparing the moustachioed cartoon hero with Mario Draghi, the former head of the European Central Bank (ECB), now drafted in to take over the running of his home country, Italy. Draghi was first nicknamed 'Super Mario' while heading the ECB, but he's likely to find in Rome a less comfortable seat than was his chair in Frankfurt. Draghi is a banker and a successful one.

Apart from heading the ECB he had also been President of the Bank of Italy, but it was Italy's President, Sergio Mattarella, who drew him into the political spotlight to make him Prime Minister.

It followed a political crisis – and Italy is no stranger to political crises – that forced the former premier, Giuseppe



Italian President Sergio Mattarella and Prime Minister Mario Draghi

Conte, a fairly inexperienced former lawyer, to resign. Conte's predecessor in the job, Matteo Renzi, withdrew his small Italia Viva party from the ruling coalition. Renzi had disagreed with Conte's plans for spending Italy's €200-billion share of the EU's post-pandemic (and EU-wide) recovery plan.

Draghi has held several prestigious positions in his life but never one

that aroused such emotion. He seemed almost overwhelmed by the responsibility handed to him. "I'd like to tell you that, in my long professional life, there has never been a time of such intense emotion and such ample responsibility," he told the house of the Senate during his 55-minute inaugural speech which drew an impressive 21 rounds of applause. According to the Forbes website, 61% of Italians support him. For now, at least.



© Presidenza della Repubblica

Matteo Renzi



© Presidenza della Repubblica

Giuseppe Conte

It was the Roman writer of satire, Juvenal, who said that the modern citizen only wants two things: bread and circuses. He also wrote: “*Omnia Romae / Cum Pretio*” – Everything in Rome has its price. Can Draghi provide both bread and circuses? And can he (and Italy) afford the price? Time will tell. In his inaugural speech he gave his top priority to tackling the pandemic. Coincidentally – or at least ironically – it was a pandemic recovery package that led to the resignation of Draghi’s immediate predecessor, Giuseppe Conte, who failed to get Italy’s squabbling parties to agree, despite being a member of none of



© Wikipedia

Silvio Berlusconi

them. Draghi’s pledge will have met with approval: Italy is currently seeing around 12,000 new Covid cases every day and 369 deaths. The spread of the disease is getting faster, too. He also spoke about the need for cooperation and urged Italians to forget the claim in many circles that his premiership is the result of a “failure of politics”. “Nobody is stepping back from their identity,” he said in his speech, “if anything, they take a step forward, in an unprecedented perimeter of collaboration, to give an answer to the country’s needs, to get closer to the daily problems of the families and firms that know well when it is time to work together, with no prejudice or rivalry.” If he can achieve that, he will have exceeded the dreams of all the emperors who ruled Rome and the consuls who preceded them. Perhaps the crisis that launched Draghi’s premiership was not so much ‘a failure of politics’ as a ‘failure of politicians’. Take a brief look at other recent incumbents and it would seem Draghi won’t need to do much to impress.

Apart from the inexperienced Conte, whose administration lasted just 16 months, there was Silvio Berlusconi, a former cruise ship crooner who promised reforms but ended up facing repeated court appearances.

Berlusconi was also famous for his “bunga bunga” sex parties. And no, I don’t know quite what “bunga bunga” means either, although I could hazard a guess. After such unimpressive predecessors, it would seem that Draghi has little to prove. Interestingly, in the crisis that followed Conte’s resignation, Berlusconi suggested that his Forza Italia party could be available for a larger government of national unity. “There is only one road ahead,” he proposed, “a new government that represents unity of the country in a moment of emergency.” Fortunately for Italy, it got that but with Draghi in charge instead.

THE FLYING ECONOMIST

Draghi wants to rebuild Italy from the bottom up, he told the Senate, just as it was done in the aftermath of the Second World War. He suggested that it would only work if everyone believed they were engaged in constructing a better future for everyone. “This is our mission as Italians,” he urged, “to give a better and fairer country



© NRT

Portrait of Niccolò Machiavelli by Santi di Tito

to our children and grandchildren.” He told the present generation – his own generation – that they must be prepared to make the sorts of sacrifices their grandparents had done.

The big question here is: will that be enough? It’s by no means certain that the Italian people will remain supportive unless Draghi can achieve improvements for the citizens very quickly. The infamous advisor to leaders of Florence in the 15th to 16th centuries, Niccolò Machiavelli, wrote: “It is necessary for him who lays out a state and arranges laws for it to presuppose that all men are evil and that they are always going to act according to the wickedness of their spirits whenever they have free scope.” To put that in Nintendo terms for Super Mario, always be aware that the evil Bowser will be trying his hardest to mess up your plans. I can’t quite see Mario Draghi rushing through the streets seizing prizes and weapons with which to defeat his enemies like the computer game version, but he’s a fairly formidable character. As Anna Zanardi Cappon wrote on the Forbes website, Draghi’s appointment seems to have done some good. “The Italy of the last few days,” she wrote in mid-February, “is a renewed, confident Italy, hopeful in an unclear future, but already rosier, due to the not so obvious choice of the Government of Mario Draghi and a handful of brave heroes, who have abandoned comfortable positions earned over the years and lavish salaries, to become Ministers who must try to untangle a now Pathologically messy bundle. To them, few in truth, I grant my respect and my gratitude.” Nothing like piling on the expectations, eh?

Let's take a look at Mario Draghi and how he got to where he is now. Born on 3 September 1947, he was brought up in Rome and educated by the Jesuits. He gained his first degree at the Sapienza Università di Roma in 1970 before moving to the United States and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) where he gained a doctorate in economics in 1977. His early career was as an educator, teaching economics at the University of Florence, during which time he also served as an executive director at the World Bank, based in Washington DC. From 1991 to 2001, he was General Director of Italy's Treasury, heading the committee that revised and renovated the country's corporate and financial legislation. From 2002 to 2005, he was Vice Chairman and Managing Director of one sector of a huge investment bank, Goldman Sachs International. Goldman Sachs doesn't always get a good press, as we shall see in a moment.

From 2006 until 2011, Draghi served as Governor of the Banca d'Italia. His time as governor at Italy's central bank included the start of what's been called 'the Great Recession' in 2008. During this time he was chosen to become the first Chair of the Financial Stability Board (FSB), which had replaced the Financial Stability Forum. The FSB is an international standard-setting body that monitors and makes recommendations about the global financial system. It does so by co-ordinating the work of national financial authorities and international standard-setting bodies as they strive to achieve strong regulatory, supervisory and other financial sector policies. The aim is to create a level

playing field, so Super Mario was a sensible choice. After that, of course, he was appointed to run the ECB.

But back to the Goldman Sachs years. It was in 2009 that Rolling Stone magazine that first coined the nickname for the bank that would be hard to live down. "The world's most powerful investment bank is a great vampire squid wrapped around the face of humanity, relentlessly jamming its blood funnel into anything that smells like money." Criticism doesn't come much more vicious than that. The long article alleged how successive American governments had caved in to demands from the bank in return for it providing lots of money – always with a good return. "The bank's unprecedented reach and power have enabled it to turn all of America into a giant pump-and-dump scam," the article said, "manipulating whole economic sectors for years at a time, moving the dice game as this or that market collapses, and all the time gorging itself on the unseen costs that are breaking families everywhere — high gas prices, rising consumer credit rates, half-eaten pension funds, mass layoffs, future taxes to pay off bailouts." Goldman was also accused of selling dubious securities backed not by the cast iron mortgages promised but by large numbers they knew would fail. Its deliberate and cynical fraud cost a lot of innocent investors large sums of money; a friend of mine found his savings had shrunk by 10% because of it. Goldman Sachs will pay \$5.06-billion (€4.16-billion) for its role in the 2008 financial crisis, the US Department of Justice said. The settlement, over the sale of mortgage-backed securities from 2005 to 2007, was



Former Malaysian Prime Minister, Najib Tun who was condemned to a 12-year jail term in the 1MDB corruption trial

first announced in January. The bank was penalised with a reduction in its earnings of \$1.5-billion (€1.23-billion) after tax for one quarter, a civic penalty of \$2.385-billion (€1.96-billion), \$875-million (€720-million) in cash payments and \$1.8-billion (€1.48) in customer relief. My friend got nothing back.

A number of reputations have become tainted through association with Goldman Sachs. Quite recently, for instance, the bank became involved with 1MDB, which was an investment fund set up by the Malaysian government that lost billions due to fraudulent activity. The global web of fraud and corruption led to a 12-year jail term for Malaysia's ex-prime minister Najib Razak which he is appealing. Goldman Sachs called its involvement in the scandal an "institutional failure". Goldman agreed to pay nearly \$3-billion (€2.5-billion) to government officials in four countries to end an investigation into work it carried out for 1MDB. That work earned Goldman \$600 (€500-million) for arranging the bond sales in 2012 and 2013. Investigators around the globe have also spent years investigating its involvement. In the end, the 1MDB scandal cost the bank more than \$5-billion (€4.15-billion) and its Chief Executive, David Solomon, has had his pay cut by \$10-million (€8.3-million) for the bank's involvement in the scandal. But Goldman's dubious reputation with the public (if not with the financial community) has not harmed Draghi. Unlike too many others, he emerged from the job with a clean bill of health.



International Monetary Fund's Managing Director Dominique Strauss-Kahn (L) talks with, European Central Bank President Jean-Claude Trichet (C) and Bank of Italy's Governor Mario Draghi (R) prior to the start of their G-7 meeting at the Istanbul Congress Center in 2009



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Anti austerity demonstration in Italy

His first actions as Italy's Prime Minister have met with general approval. For instance, in response to the pharmaceutical company and vaccine-maker Astra Zeneca which had been defying the EU over where the vaccines went, he blocked the company from exporting 250,700 doses to Australia. It is hardly surprising that Canberra was not best pleased. The Italian Ministry cited its reasons for the action: it doesn't consider Australia to be a vulnerable country; Italy and the EU had previously experienced shortages of supplies and delays from AstraZeneca; Italy also argued that too many doses were being exported outside the Union in comparison to those being supplied to EU countries. The Italians approved of the decision; they like a tough guy. So did the New York Times. "The move shook up a Brussels leadership that had seemed to be asleep at the switch. Within weeks, in part from his pressing and engineering behind the scenes, the

European Union had authorized even broader and harsher measures to curb exports of Covid-19 vaccines badly needed in Europe." In fact, the NYT sees Draghi as reasserting Italy's place in the leadership of Europe. "In his short time in office — he took power in February after a political crisis — Mr. Draghi has quickly leveraged his European relationships, his skill in navigating EU institutions and his nearly messianic reputation to make Italy a player on the continent in a way it has not been in decades." Princess Peach's castle is looking safer by the day and Bowser's chances of upsetting everything are fading, at least for the duration of Draghi's administration.

He showed that side of himself again when European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen found there was no seat for her when she and European Council President Charles Michel met the Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. It was clearly a snub and intended to underline Erdoğan's sexist attitudes and his belief that women should be subservient. Draghi called him "a dictator", which annoyed him considerably. "I felt very sorry for the humiliation that European Commission President von der Leyen had to undergo," Draghi told a press conference. "I believe it wasn't appropriate behaviour." He also had advice for dealing with such macho leaders: "With these — let's call them for what they are — dictators, which we however need to cooperate with ... one has to be frank in expressing a diversity of views, opinions, behaviours, visions of society. And also has to be ready to

cooperate to safeguard the interests of their country. This is important. We have to find the right equilibrium." He made it clear that he doesn't equate 'manliness' with bullying women, as some apparently do.

Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu has condemned Draghi's remarks and demanded that he withdraw them. He will not, of course. What's more, the leader of one of the coalition parties in the government over which Draghi rules, Enrico Letta of the centre-left Democratic Party, has recently named a woman as one of his two deputies and given women eight of the party's sixteen seats in its executive, despite having had to sack three men to create the vacancies. Erdoğan may not approve but Draghi, one assumes, probably does.

LEADING FROM THE FRONT

Ursula von der Leyen seems to have dwindled somewhat in importance as some of her actions have aroused comment and disapproval.



Emmanuel Macron, Angela Merkel, Mario Draghi

Meanwhile, Angela Merkel's importance to Europe is weakening as the end of her term of office draws near. Then there's Emmanuel Macron, who now seems more concerned with French matters than with European ones, especially with a general election looming. Draghi himself is held in such high respect by others, especially by the market, that there's a risk that expectations may prove too high. Indeed, The Economist



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Turkey's Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu

magazine, in its Charlemagne column, while praising Draghi, expresses some concern. “Bluntly,” it says, “Mr. Draghi’s government can write cheques because it is he who leads it.” It offers proof, too: “Earlier this month, his government announced plans to add €40-billion (2.4% of GDP) in stimulus, and bond yields barely budged”. At this rate people will be expecting him to walk across the surface of the Tiber. Having mentioned the imminent retirement of Angela Merkel, it’s possible Germany’s next government will include the Greens, who would expect to deliver “looser spending rules and deeper European integration”, both of which would meet with Draghi’s approval. He is also very committed to the eurozone and feels that failure to develop it fully could possibly jeopardise the “long-term success of monetary union when faced with an important shock”.

There could surely be no greater shock than the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, but Draghi is already eager for Italy to hit the ground running in drawing back tourists. At an on-line meeting of tourism ministers from the Group of 20 wealthy nations, he announced a national vaccine pass, available from mid-May, a month before its EU equivalent goes on trial: “In mid-May

tourists can have the Italian pass... so the time has come to book your holidays in Italy,” Mr Draghi said. “Our mountains, our beaches, our cities are reopening.” He assured potential visitors that there will be no quarantine either, “as long as they can prove that they have recovered from Covid, [been] vaccinated or tested negative.”

You will not be surprised to learn that the tourism industry looks set to be a major beneficiary of the EU’s €222.1-billion to restore the economy after the pandemic. Italy, in fact, gets the biggest share and tourism accounts for 13% of Italy’s economy. According to EuroNews, “Over a quarter of the money has been earmarked to digitally transform the economy and public administration, broadening access to high-speed internet service, especially in schools, and providing incentives to the private sector to digitise. Around €22.4-billion is aimed at “social inclusion” investments and programmes to boost training and employment opportunities for women and help cities improve access and opportunities for disabled people.” The aim of the measures, which include increased day care places, is to remove the obstacles that have, in the past, kept Italian women at home, looking after children, the elderly and those who are sick or disabled. It’s important because women accounted for more than half of the 456,000 jobs lost in Italy last year. With an EU target of reducing the emission of greenhouse gases by 55% by the end of this decade, it wants to see 37% of the money spent on helping to achieve carbon neutrality. Draghi’s proposal is to spend 40% of the money, €68.6-billion, on green initiatives, such as recycling, replacing public transport systems with low-emission vehicles while extending high-speed rail links and reducing water waste by improving the country’s waterways. It’s an ambitious programme.

The important thing to note is that when Draghi speaks, world leaders tend to listen and to believe. It’s widely believed that he single-handedly saved the euro from collapse while he was President of the European Central Bank (ECB), at a time when collapse looked imminent. How? With three simple words. At a conference in London in 2012, when Draghi was asked what he would do to save the

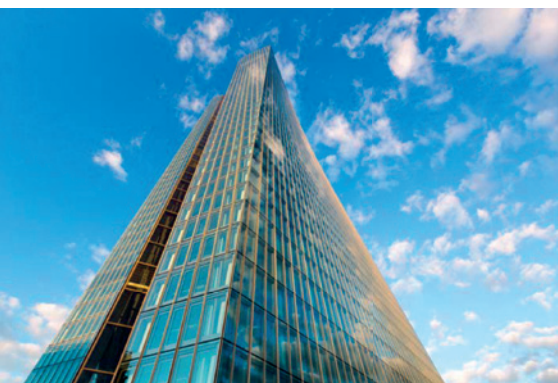


euro, he replied: “Whatever it takes.” In other words, there was no step he would hesitate to take to protect and preserve Europe’s single currency. The speculators saw that the whole of the ECB’s considerable financial power would be opposed to any attempts to undermine the currency. His actual words were: “Within our mandate, the ECB is ready to do whatever it takes to preserve the euro. And believe me, it will be enough”. The markets settled and the currency survived, although he would prefer it to be more mature and more widely used.

Can he do the same for Italy’s battered economy? “It is not a question here of emphasizing its magical aspect,” wrote Anna Zanardi Cappon of Forbes, “but of acknowledging its restorative function that his reputation and expertise can convey, together with some of the good technical experts whom he has chosen to relaunch the Italian economy. He had an articulate objective, to bring together various disciplines necessary for good governance.” Draghi has already pledged his support for gender parity and tax reform while positioning Italy firmly to being EU- and US-orientated. To read some of the reports one might imagine that Draghi is



On 18 March 2015 Mario Draghi cutting the ribbon during the inauguration of the ECB new premises in Frankfurt on 18 March 2015



Anna Zanardi Cappon

headed not only for ever-higher esteem and economic success but he could be a candidate for beatification.

A WORD OF CAUTION

Of course, you can't please everyone. Perhaps not surprisingly, even Draghi is not without his critics. At least one critic, anyway: Yanis Varoufakis, the one-time finance minister of Greece and currently leader of the European Realistic Disobedience Front (MeRA25) party and Professor of Economics at the University of Athens. He attacked Draghi, or at least one of his decisions, in a Tweet in March. "So predictable, so sad: Mario Draghi hired McKinsey to 'organise' Italy's distribution of Recovery Fund monies. What next? Get the Mafia to re-organise the Ministry of Justice?" The Naked Capitalism website seems to think he has a point. "Independent of Varoufakis' questioning McKinsey's ethics, as we and many others have (see for instance our recent post, *Goldman Is Evil But McKinsey Is Worse*), the Greek economist is correct to call out how the Italian government is engaging McKinsey in a role that usurps democratic rule."

In fact, the Draghi government's spending plans for the EU bail-out fund seem to have met fairly widespread approval in Italy, so let's see just what it is about McKinsey that Naked Capitalism doesn't like.

"It is remarkable the way that McKinsey goes from train wreck to train wreck yet manages to depict itself as some sort of Corporate America Zelig: ever on the scene but not doing much of anything



Milton Friedman receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom from US President Ronald Reagan in 1988

in particular," Naked Capitalism says, crossly. "This is despite the fact (for instance) that McKinsey was singularly responsible for the biggest value destroying deal of all time, save maybe Bayer's purchase of Monsanto, which was the Time Warner acquisition of AOL. McKinsey pitched AOL to the Time Warner board five times and the board had the spine to reject it only four times. Or how about the Enron bankruptcy? McKinsey was all over Enron every bit as much as Arthur Andersen had been but didn't leave fingerprints at the crime scene like signing off on Enron's financials... even though it was widely acknowledged as having approved of the accounting treatment that sank Arthur Andersen."

In case you are not familiar with what the company does, this is from its own website: "McKinsey & Company is a global management consulting firm that serves leading businesses, governments, non-governmental organizations, and not-for-profits. We help our clients make lasting improvements to their performance and realize their most important goals." The company's advice hasn't always turned out well for the client, it seems. McKinsey has come in for a number of attacks in the media, such as this one in *The Atlantic*, under the heading: "How McKinsey Destroyed the Middle Class: Technocratic management, no matter how brilliant, cannot unwind structural inequalities". Management consultants, of course, advise directors on how to run their companies and sometimes they get things wrong (or wrong in the eyes of the workers at least), which is hardly surprising for a

company that was set up 95 years ago. McKinsey advises 90 of the world's 100 largest companies, but, as *The Atlantic* explained, "Managers do not produce goods or deliver services. Instead, they plan what goods and services a company will provide, and they coordinate the production workers who make the output."

According to *The Atlantic*, McKinsey was at the forefront of fulfilling the aims set out by Milton Friedman, "The social responsibility of business is to increase its profits." One way to do that was to get rid of expensive middle management, leave the running of a firm to its wealthy senior executives, assisted of course by hired-in business consultants when needed. Friedman, of course, was the profit-obsessed economist who once said that any executives not pledged to maximising profits were "unwitting pup-pets of the intellectual forces that have been undermining the basis of a free society these past decades." In other words, who cares about the workers, line your own pockets. His idea of a free society and the workers' own would seem to be very far apart. Friedman did not believe in conscience getting in the way of making money and seemed to want company bosses to follow a moral plan devised by Charles Dickens' Fagin: take whatever you want and can get away with. McKinsey applied Friedman principles and, over a fairly short time, the career structure that trained new staff to pass through middle management on their way to the top was swept away. No more middle management equates to no more middle classes



Yanis Varoufakis

but lots of consultancy fees for companies like McKinsey. The company was criticised for the ruthlessness of its advice, always in pursuit of the Friedman mantra of maximising profits at any cost. McKinsey, for instance, advised Purdue Pharma on how to achieve that, allegedly suggesting that it should drive the sales of OxyContin, a highly addictive opioid whose widespread sales contributed to the opioid crisis that has devastated families and communities across the United States, according to the New York Times. Once again, forget any moral imperative, all that matters is profit. All of this leads some in Italy to question Draghi's decision to hire McKinsey when he could have sought the advice of Italy's home-grown economists.

STORM CLOUDS OR A LIGHT SHOWER?

While Draghi has been bathing in the warm approbation of the Italian people, his hiring of a successful but not uncontroversial American management company is not his first act to raise questions since taking office. DiEM25 reports on its website that over the first few weeks of his premiership, Draghi "hired Francesco Giavazzi (the infamous theorist of the expansive austerity) as economic consultant, but also Sirena Sileoni, deputy director of Bruno Leoni Institute (whose motto is 'Ideas for the free market'), where a paper was published a few months ago claiming that the blocking of layoffs causes a bubble 'which sacrifices the freedom of dismissal



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Francesco Giavazzi

by companies and the efficient reallocation of productivity which would be ensured in the medium-long term, by the free deployment of the productive forces'.

And to conclude (for now) the unexpected contract with McKinsey." It's hardly surprising that the decision has drawn criticism from the left: McKinsey is no poster-boy for workers' rights. Some also see the contract as suspicious because it is so small – just €25,000 – and seemingly of little value to McKinsey. Italy's Economy Ministry said in a statement that it had asked McKinsey to assess the plans already prepared by the other EU countries and to provide "support for monitoring the finalization of the (Italian) Plan". Draghi's government has said that it remains in charge of making the decisions, leaving many to wonder exactly what McKinsey's interest may be. It's not known for its charitable work. Knowing Draghi's Teflon reputation for emerging from any situation without a stain on his character, he will presumably explain his decisions at some point. Anyway, while he may choose to listen to advice, he's not obliged to follow it.

"He's a very sophisticated politician who cannot be reduced to the rôle of banker," Bruno Tabacchi, a centrist politician who has known Draghi for several decades, told Politico. "When one has run the ECB for eight years, having to deal with the head of the Bundesbank and succeeding in saving the eurozone, what more do you want?" While he was at the ECB, he kept a small coterie of close advisors around him, but he mainly took decisions on his own, sometimes choosing the exact opposite path to the one recommended. He has always been his own man. He is going to need to be, to prove to doubting Italians (and Yanis Varoufakis) that he will never be in the pocket of McKinsey, nor of anyone else. If he can survive working for Goldman Sachs without drawing criticism, he clearly thinks for himself. He will certainly need all his skills if he is to save Italy, which has the second highest national debt in the EU.



Bruno Tabacchi

Is he really Super Mario? So far, Princess Peach seems hopeful and her Mushroom Kingdom, the "Regno dei Funghi", would seem to be in safe hands. However, questions over how much he knew of Goldman's activities in apparently advising Greece on how to circumvent EU budget rules through credit swaps have been answered and Draghi is in the clear. The affair did not prevent his appointment to head the ECB, so perhaps the doubts and the doubters are now behind us. As he has done before, Draghi will act according to his own ideas. For the time being, it seems, the villainous Bowser will be defeated by Super Mario and his hopes for seizing the Mushroom Kingdom must rest on the fact that Super Mario is growing old. Finding someone else to take on the many and difficult challenges will not prove easy. Meanwhile, Italy can hope again. As Draghi said in his inaugural speech before the Italian Senate, much has changed since populist parties fought each other for power in the 2018 election: "Those were the days of anti-euro protests, of flirting with the idea of Italy leaving the EU, of little wars with France and Germany, of dreams of happy degrowth and denial of global warming. Of simple and illusory answers to complex problems that could not be solved with Italian-style sovereignist formulas." Times have changed. Bowser must be tearing his computer-generated hair out.

Jim Gibbons



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The Crimean Bridge also called the Kerch Strait Bridge

LOWERING THE BAR

Putin tries to block maritime access to Ukraine

Size isn't everything, as the old saying goes. In the case of the Kerch Strait Bridge, it is. Russia has built what is properly known as the Crimea Bridge deliberately too low for a great number of the cargo ships upon which Ukraine depends for its trade to pass beneath it. The bridge span, between the Taman Peninsula of Krasnodar Krai and the Kerch Peninsula of Crimea, stands just 35 metres above the water. Strange, when its length is an impressive 19 kilometres, making it the longest bridge in Europe. But its low height means that large cargo vessels, capable of carrying Ukraine's metal exports and other bulk goods, are simply too big to pass underneath. They have to have a maximum height of just 33 metres to do so safely; a great many of today's large merchant vessels are higher than that. It's no accident. It's been estimated that 144 of the merchant vessels that used to ply to and from Mariupol can no longer get to the Sea of Azov. Russia's annexation of Crimea was a crime under international law, so the bridge is illegal in any case, but building it low enough to limit maritime access to Ukraine's main ports was clearly an unpleasant, aggressive act designed

to damage Ukraine, just as is Putin's support for pro-Russian rebels in the east of the country. Vladimir Putin does not do things by accident. Construction of the bridge, which cost \$3.7-billion (€3.06-billion), began virtually as soon as the unlawful seizure was complete.

It was certainly seen as illegal by the European Union, which has applied sanctions to two people and four companies involved in the bridge's construction. This brings the total number of people being subjected to restrictive measures in connection with the seizure of Ukraine to 177, as well as 48 entities. The sanctions include a travel ban and an asset freeze. But Putin is no doubt amused by measures that can't hurt him while he expands his 'empire'. Russia's economy is strange; the Kremlin has largely isolated it from the global economy using its oil and gas sales in order to build up reserves. It makes it virtually immune to international shocks whilst also having very low debt levels, but developing it further is not an option. It keeps Russia's economy safe, but stagnant and perhaps dangerously dependent on fossil fuel exports, which make up 60% of the total, with the EU

its biggest customer. Its innovations and developments in the field of new technology come nowhere near those of China. Russia's current rate of growth, says *The Economist*, is just half the rate experienced by the old Soviet Union between 1977 and 1985.

Still, it must frustrate, if only slightly, the people and companies named in the sanctions that have been imposed by various countries and organisations. The EU, like many western bodies and countries, does not recognise Russia's annexation of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol on the other side of the country. It was, in fact, the first



Russian Navy in Sevastopol, Crimea



Vladimir Putin familiarizes himself with the information on the development of transport infrastructure in the south of Russia, in particular the Crimean Railway. With Transport Minister Yevgeny Ditzikh

such annexation since Adolf Hitler's Nazi Germany decided to seize the Sudetenland from what was then Czechoslovakia. The EU's action means that the 177 people listed can neither enter the EU nor pass through it on the way to somewhere else, while the asset freeze means that any funds or economic sources held in the EU, either by the listed individuals or by named companies that were involved in the construction work are blocked from accessing them.

Not that any of this deters Putin from trying to make things worse for the Ukrainians. Indeed, it smacks more of spite than of any sensible economic planning. One must assume that in the unlikely event that Russia regains total control of Ukraine it will want its conquest to flourish. Having seen the anger demonstrated by ordinary people in Maidan Square against the country's ambitious northern neighbour, with young people rattling tins to collect for those fighting the Russian-backed rebels, I cannot imagine them surrendering easily to Putin's bullying. Perhaps that's not the point. One is left with the inescapable conclusion, however, that the only way to stop Russia from trying to inconvenience Ukraine even further would be if Kyiv voluntarily agreed to give up the country's independence. That, of course, is not going to happen. Nor to be perfectly honest is it likely that democratic means will unseat Putin any time soon. His political opponents tend to end up poisoned or dead from some similar cause, or in prison on trumped-up criminal charges, where they will undoubtedly suffer and – if Putin is lucky – die. Russia has become

what it was under Stalin: a police state. The difference (apart from the numbers being executed all over the vast country, far fewer than when Stalin was in charge) is that Stalin was supposedly defending Marxism-Leninism, even if neither Marx nor Lenin would have recognised such mass murder as justifiable, while Putin is defending what would seem to be a kleptocracy. It's not just the seizure of other countries that he seems to have learned from Hitler. It's the brutality and the refusal to accept that anyone else's point of view may matter. His own pre-eminence seems to matter more to him than that of Russia itself.

There's no doubt that EU sanctions will be unpopular in Moscow but they won't make any difference. The EU first imposed sanctions on 17 March 2014, and yet Crimea and Sevastopol remain firmly in Russian hands and likely to stay that way, while the Kerch Strait Bridge has been constructed in the years since then in defiance of international opposition. In May 2020, six years and two months after the sanctions were imposed, Putin personally led a fleet of construction vehicles across the new bridge, sending his one-finger message to Kyiv (as well as to Washington and Brussels and possibly Beijing) that Crimea and Sevastopol are now Russian and likely to remain so. He had said that the bridge would “bring us all closer”, although that is the last thing most Ukrainians want. “Bringing people closer together” was clearly not the intention in deciding to build the bridge, either. It was to impose an economic stranglehold on Ukraine, which is being further backed up with forced “inspections” of vessels passing through the strait, which can take more than 2 days to complete. Some shipping companies don't want to risk such costly interruptions to their schedules, which Russia has almost certainly foreseen. To be honest, though, it's unlikely that the people of Sevastopol would prefer to be ruled by Kyiv.



SILENT GUNFIRE

Founded by Prince Grigory Potemkin in 1783 following Russia's capture of the Crimean khanate from the Ottoman Empire, its population of almost 400,000 is made up ethnically of 75% Russian people and only 20% Ukrainian. Potemkin led his empress, Catherine the Great, on a tour of Crimea after successfully capturing it. That had involved a peace agreement with the Cossacks and the virtual annihilation of the Cossack Zaporizhian Sich, a territory the Cossacks had controlled against raids by various groups unsympathetic to the Cossack people.



© Wikimedia

Portrait of Russian Field Marshal Grigory Potemkin

'Sich' means fortification or fortified area. It meant nothing to Catherine, however, who calmly absorbed the territory into her Tsarist state. Potemkin, you may not be surprised to learn, was one of Catherine's many lovers. 'Zaporizhian' is a contraction of the words 'za porohamy', meaning 'beyond the rapids', the rapids in question being on the Dnieper river which has lain at the centre of so many conflicts down the ages. It rises in the Valdai Hills near Smolensk, in Russia, then flows through Belarus and Ukraine to the Black Sea. It's Europe's third most important river; only the Volga and the Danube are greater. What's more, its north-south flow effectively divides Ukraine in half, with the western side decidedly pro-Ukrainian and, as a consequence of more recent events, pro-western, while the eastern half (or nearly half) is more ambivalent or even actively pro-Russian. The war in Donbass, where pro-Russia rebels are secretly (but obviously) supported by Russia, has been dragging

on for seven years. Ironically, it's quite probable that the name Potemkin today is more closely associated with the film entitled "Battleship Potemkin", the famous silent movie produced in Soviet Russia by Mosfilm in 1925 and directed by Sergei Eisenstein, purporting to dramatize the 1905 mutiny by the crew of the eponymous battleship against their tsarist masters at the height of the failed revolution. The movie was named as late as 1958 among the greatest of all time. In it, there is a shoot-out on the Odessa Steps with Tsarist troops firing into a crowd of ordinary citizens while a baby carriage runs away, bouncing dangerously down the steps with its infant passenger and with gunfire ringing out on every side. The scene was copied in the 1987 movie about American gangsterism and the FBI, 'The Untouchables,' and later recreated as a brilliant and hilarious pastiche in the comedy, "Naked Gun 33⅓", with no fewer than four baby carriages, a lawn mower, the Pope and a Jihadist bomber among the people and items tumbling down the stairs at Union Station while gunfire rings out all around them. Yes, it's silly but it still makes me laugh.

The long war in Eastern Ukraine has so far claimed more than 13,000 lives and displaced over a million Ukrainians. They are among the 2.8-million Europeans to have been displaced by internal conflict, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Indeed, the issue was raised in a report to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe by Fabien Gouttefarde, a member of France's Assemblée Nationale. "Many Europeans are refugees in other countries," he wrote, "in particular Ukrainians who fled the war in eastern Ukraine and the Crimea; more recently, the conflict over the Nagorno-Karabakh region has led to new waves of displaced persons."

He told me that the Assembly is pressing all the Council's member states to sign up to protecting the human rights of displaced persons, with particular emphasis on Russia and Turkey. Gouttefarde's report, passed overwhelmingly by the Parliamentary Assembly this April, called on member States to transpose the standards of international law into national legislation, and to "introduce therein the principle of universal jurisdiction of national courts" for arbitrary displacement and other war crimes or



Fabien Gouttefarde, a member of France's Assemblée Nationale

crimes against humanity. He spoke to me of the terrible things that armies do when deliberately displacing citizens, such as rape and torture. "First and foremost, we must protect young girls," he said, "we must pursue wrongdoers and we must try to prevent it from happening." Of course, getting Russia to sign up to something is one thing, getting it to abide by the rules it has signed up to is something else altogether.

Moscow, however, seems to think that the displacement of so many Ukrainians is not enough and has recently brought over 100,000 troops, together with heavy equipment, right up to Ukraine's border. They pulled back again from Crimea and the Ukrainian border in late April. That hasn't saved Russia from a stark warning against further military adventurism. "Should military build-up lead to an invasion of Ukraine by Russia," warns a report adopted by the European Parliament in late April, "the EU must make clear the consequences for such a violation of international law and norms would be severe," MEPs agreed. "Such a scenario must result in an immediate halt to EU imports of oil and gas from Russia, the exclusion of Russia from the SWIFT payment system and the freezing of assets and cancellation of visas for Europe of all oligarchs tied to the Russian authorities." If carried through (and that may be a big 'if') it would certainly have an impact on Putin's realm.

Meanwhile, as Ukraine argues that closing parts of the Black Sea to foreign warships is illegal, Putin and his government are threatening dire retribution if anyone should look like lifting a finger to help the government in Kyiv. The bellicose rhetoric coming from Moscow resembles the outpourings prior to the 2008 war in Georgia, which is especially worrying.



© Nrf

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy visiting the conflict zones

Putin's favourite propaganda television station, Russia Today (RT), has been getting increasingly militant and has urged Putin simply to annex the entire Donbass region, which would mean more war. The station's global editor-in-chief, Margarita Simonyan, has been calling for it and one member of the UK's Scottish Assembly, Stewart McDonald, has been imploring the British government to add her name to the list of those sanctioned for their bellicosity and support for bloody repression. The problem is the wealth of Russian oligarchs who are supportive of Putin. However disapproving a western country may be of Moscow's politics, a lot of western banks and financial institutions are falling over each other in the race to help launder their ill-gotten gains. McDonald has admitted that the UK government, like others in the West, has sought to support Ukraine in constructive ways, but Britain remains a provider of laundry services for dirty money.

A number of oligarchs have benefited hugely from Putin's kleptocracy and, as McDonald has pointed out, now mix merrily with British cabinet members and those sitting comfortably in the House of Lords. With Britain now

having lost its position as the centre of financial activity in Europe following the UK's decision to leave the EU, the various banks and financial institutions are naturally reluctant to turn away wealthy clients, however dirty their money.

But Britain is not alone in offering the comforts of home to Russian crooks, which encourages Putin and his followers into believing there will be no unwelcome consequences arising from their attempts to strangle Ukraine. Because that is what Russia is trying to do in the Sea of Azov. Quite apart from its unnecessarily low bridge, Russia has been imposing frequent "Freedom-of-navigation" restrictions, including the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) Coast Guard, which has been boarding and inspecting merchant vessels travelling through the Kerch Strait to or from Berdyansk and Mariupol, both Ukrainian ports that are vital to the country's exports and to its supplies of essential goods. Some of these incidents, clearly intended to intimidate and to discourage shipping companies, have taken place just 8 to 11 kilometres offshore. Consider that together with the low height of the Kerch Bridge and it becomes clear that Moscow wants its hands on Kyiv's jugular.

It would seem we may not have not seen the last annexation. It is to be hoped that Ukraine is not viewed, as the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia was by the then British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain, who said "How horrible, fantastic, incredible it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas-masks here because of a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing." With Putin, Chamberlain-style appeasement is probably not a good idea.



© Wikipedia

Stewart McDonald, member of the UK's Scottish Assembly

BOBBY SHAFTOVSKI'S GONE TO SEA, LOTS OF MISSILES ON HIS KNEE

The answer would appear to be "not a lot", which is what Putin is counting on. Washington has strongly criticised Russian plans to limit access to the Black Sea and the Kerch Strait for most of the next six months due to military exercises. It's outrageous for any one country to tell another that it must close its ports because of another country's military exercises and it begins to look like a deliberate provocation to see just how far Russia can push without negative consequences. The U.S. Defence Department has described the Kremlin's plan as "just the latest example" of Russian aggression in the Black Sea and insisted that the US's own plans would continue unimpeded. Pentagon press secretary John Kirby told reporters: "We have routinely operated naval warships in the Black Sea and that will continue. We call on Russia to cease its harassment of vessels in the region and reverse its build-up of forces along Ukraine's border and in occupied Ukraine." (Which they now have). I can't imagine such a statement putting much fear into Putin's government. After all, his country boasts the latest supersonic Onyx anti-ship missile systems, which are exceptionally fast and very effective. He may not use them, however.

A recently-released video suggests he may fall back on a missile system that first saw action during the Cold War. The Utes launch system, contained in an elaborate bunker, is still supposed to be defending Crimea. Shown on the Russian Defence Ministry's own TV Zvezda in October 2020, it was a 3M44 Progress that was being launched.

In service for almost 50 years, the 3M44 Progress anti-ship missile system is still in use, it seems, for the defence of Crimea, although the Utes launch system can also handle the much newer Onyx missiles. In fact, the 3M44 launch may have been designed to test the anti-missile defensive capabilities of the class-leading Russian Navy frigate, Admiral Grigorovich, whose Shtil air defence system brought down the incoming missile at a safe distance. Of course, Putin's available arsenal doesn't restrict him to using just the weapons we know about.



The 3M44 Progress anti-ship missile system

The Utes coastal-defence anti-ship missile launch system, built in 1954, is claimed by Russia to be the world's first land-based anti-ship missile system. I suppose we must discount the many anti-ship batteries of canon that have been used since the invention of gunpowder to repel enemy ships and sink them, or indeed the mysterious 'Greek Fire' of classical times which could allegedly set enemy ships ablaze.

My grandfather's ship was sunk by a Krupp shell fired from a Turkish shore battery at the Dardanelles during the First World War, although one failed to explode and is still standing on the bookshelf in front of me as I write. Codenamed 'Object 100' by the Russians, the Utes launch site is built into cliffs at Balaklava and was brought into service in 1957. The early sub-sonic Sopka missiles were replaced in the early 1960s by the super-sonic P35B type, which in 1982 gave way in turn to the 3M44 Progress, which had an improved range of almost 450 kilometres and a 350-kiloton nuclear warhead. Since then, Russia has developed the formidable P-800 Onyx missile, which the Russians call the Oniks (or the Yakhont in its export version), Which is described by the Military-Today website as the deadliest anti-ship missile in existence. It has a 300-kilometre range and can be equipped with a conventional or a nuclear warhead.

It makes my old Krupp seem very insignificant, even though one just like it sunk a British Royal Navy warship. Sevastopol is some way around the Ukrainian coast from the Kerch Strait and its unhelpful bridge but that is of little consequence for a modern missile. The 3M44 Progress may not be a modern missile in some respects but it could still sink a ship and, being out of date, is unlikely to be Putin's only option in the region. The footage of the 3M44 Progress was posted online on October 14, 2020, by TV

Zvezda, the official television channel of the Russian Ministry of Defence. The accompanying report suggests the missile-firing exercise occurred after the large-scale Kavkaz-2020 manoeuvres, which took place partly in the Black Sea, in late September.

Were it to be Russia's only option there, it would be almost (but not quite) the equivalent of issuing American marines with muzzle-loading Jäger rifles with which to confront Russian aggression. Even so, the West's response to Putin's unbridled and careless aggression has been half-hearted at best. On its website, NATO writes that: "NATO stands with Ukraine, and will continue to provide political and practical support to the country within the framework of our established cooperation. NATO will continue to monitor the situation." I don't think that will give Putin many sleepless nights.

UNLIKELY THREATS, UNLIKELY AGREEMENT

Washington has expressed alarm about Russia's plan to close off part of the Black Sea for the next half year in order to hold a naval exercise, and has stated that the United States will not be deterred from sending naval vessels there, military exercise or not. The US Defense Department has stated that the Kremlin's action is "just the latest example" of Russian aggression in the Black Sea and insisted it would have no impact on US plans. "We have routinely operated naval warships in the Black Sea and that will continue," the Pentagon's press secretary, John Kirby, said at a press conference, although it would seem that there are none there at present. "We call on Russia to cease its harassment of vessels in the region," Kirby said, "and reverse its build-up of forces along Ukraine's border and in occupied Ukraine." Well, at least they've done that. It sounds a little like the old story that the Emperor Nero "fiddled while Rome burned", although the fiddle family of instruments were not invented until more than a thousand years later and furthermore, Nero himself was at his villa in Antium when the fire started, 56 kilometres away. When he heard about it he rushed back to organise measures to house those left homeless. Still, it's a good way of suggesting inaction and relative disinterest when something bad is going on. And Nero was an awful person anyway.

Unlike Nero, Putin has not shifted the blame for a major disaster onto a disliked minority, in the way in which Nero blamed the fire on the Christians. But he does blame anyone he sees as a potential rival, ruthlessly getting rid of him through cooked-up charges of some more or less fictional crime or else through extra-judicial murder. He has issued some 200,000 of the Donbass rebels with Russian passports, giving him an excuse to intervene militarily if they feel "threatened". According to The Economist, "Military analysts doubt that a full-scale invasion is afoot – the troop movements are too blatant for a surprise attack. But Mr. Putin's navy has threatened to block the Kerch Strait, cutting off parts of Ukraine from the Black Sea." Of course, it could all be shadow boxing: posing as the big, tough leader afraid of no-one just to cover up his own nervousness and vulnerability, rather like the famous Wizard of Oz. His speech to the nation was full of tub-thumping warnings to the West. He even suggested a Western plot to overthrow the Belarussian president, Alexander Lukashenko, based on the report being debated at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, calling for urgent electoral reform in the country. The report's writer, Lord David Blencathra, a Conservative life peer and former MP, seems a most unlikely plotter. I asked him if he thought his report could be viewed as an attempted coup.

"It's nonsensical," he replied, "Absolutely nonsensical. In preparing my report, which was approved by the Parliamentary Assembly on Wednesday, in the preliminary discussions in the Political Affairs Committee, I was constantly accused by some of the Russian delegation that we were being dictatorial towards Belarus and



Russian President Vladimir Putin aboard the Marshal Ustinov missile cruiser observing an exercise of the Black Sea Fleet involving more than 30 ships, a submarine and more than 40 Russian military aircraft in 2020



Lord David Blencathra

I said we're not." It was clear from our conversation that Lord Blencathra did not understand the Russian objections and found them both frivolous and worrying. "Belarus is an independent country," he insisted. "We have offered them a menu of things they can do if they want to join the Council of Europe and if they want their elections to be free and fair." Judging by the reaction of the Council's Russian delegates and by Putin's egregious threats, they don't want either, or at least their leaders don't. Putin would be very unhappy to see free and fair elections in Belarus. He prefers leaders he can control, like Lukashenko. He doesn't like games of chance he could actually lose.

Russia has at least stopped its FSB Coast Guard inspections since Ukraine started putting vessels from its own Navy and State Border Service on escort duty for vessels sailing to and from its main ports. Russia has also reduced the waiting time for vessels wanting to enter the Kerch Strait after a threat of Western sanctions, although it later extended the wait for vessels heading out of the Sea of Azov, which suggests Russia wants to impede the progress of Ukrainian exports. It would seem that Russia tightens its grip when trying to put pressure on Ukraine but loosens it when trying to demonstrate its 'good will' to the West.

There seems to be precious little 'good will' at present. Russia closed off several areas of the Black Sea on 24 April, with the restrictions to stay in place until 24 October, saying, nevertheless, that the restrictions on foreign naval vessels will not affect the Kerch Strait, according to the Russia news agency, RIA. Is there a reason for all this aggressive posturing? The Economist thinks there is. "Mr. Putin is weaker than he looks," it writes in a

leader column, "but that makes him dangerous. His previous Ukrainian adventures came when the Russian economy was in trouble and his polls needed a boost. Today his personal polls are sliding and barely a quarter of Russians support his party." The protests in January against the arrest of Alexei Navalny were the largest Russia has seen in a decade, which perhaps explains why his speech to the nation was accompanied by the arrests of several of his critics. The fact is that with Russia's inward-looking economy it's very hard to make sanctions work. For one thing, everyone in the West would have to sing from the same song sheet and they don't. Germany won't block the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, even though it is intended to put Europe into a Russian stranglehold while bypassing and thus harming Ukraine. Work on the pipeline should stop, but it probably won't. In much the same way, British financiers should stop cosying up to crooked Russian oligarchs and helping them to launder their ill-gotten gains, however much that costs. The Economist reckons that the cost of Putin's thuggish behaviour should be higher to discourage his hangers on and others from continuing to support him. At present, any opposition party to appear is branded 'extremist', however mild.

Meanwhile, although a majority in Crimea look to Moscow, rather than Kyiv, human rights in the annexed country are suffering, according to NATO. It makes this claim on its website: "Allies are deeply concerned by the human rights abuses and violations being carried out by the Russian de-facto authorities in illegally annexed Crimea against Ukrainians, the Crimean Tatars, and members of other local communities. These violations include extrajudicial killings, abductions, enforced disappearances, violence, arbitrary detentions, arrest, and torture." NATO has also condemned the Kerch Strait Bridge and has made what is probably a pointless appeal to Moscow. "Russia's unjustified use of military force against Ukrainian ships and naval personnel near the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait in November 2018 is part of the larger pattern of Russian aggressive actions in the region. In line with United Nations General Assembly Resolution 73/194 from 17



Nord Stream 2 Pipe Line

December 2018, we call on Russia to unconditionally release the Ukrainian crew members it detained, to return the captured vessels and to comply with its international commitments by ensuring unhindered access to Ukrainian ports in the Sea of Azov and allowing freedom of navigation." In fact, Russia returned the three vessels after a year and also the 24 Ukrainian sailors somewhat earlier, three of whom had been injured in the attack.

Putin has lost his 'friend in the White House' with the departure of Donald Trump and it would appear he may have also lost the leadership of those countries hostile to Western values. That particular crown would appear to have passed to Xi Jinping in Beijing. Putin's Russia continues to anger the West with disinformation websites, untruthful on-line media and with interference in lawful activities, the Kerch Strait Bridge being an example. And, of course, it still has nuclear weapons, which no-one wants to see it deploy. But it has, perhaps, become more of a nuisance than a threat the West takes seriously. That is especially the case with the new regime in Washington, where President Joe Biden employs and listens to genuine Russia experts. Even so, it would be very unwise to write off Vladimir Putin. He is hard to predict and with his massive arsenal of proven weapons he must be taken into account. Even so, in a world facing the threats of climate change, poverty and disease, he may be more of a distraction than a threat. And I hope he doesn't block exports from Ukraine; I have a great liking for Ukrainian vodka. Budmo! everyone. It means "Cheers!"

T. Kingsley Brooks



© Wikimedia

Turkish and Moroccan guest workers in the Netherlands in the 1960s

THE HUMAN TSUNAMI

Europe's reverse migration

For most of us, 2020 represented a radical change in terms of behaviour, work and everyday lifestyle. The Covid-19 virus which rapidly spread across the world, swept through Europe and forced us all to adapt to a new reality. Traditional ways of doing business were changed, social contacts reduced and trends reversed. Migration across Europe was no exception, but nobody suspected the full extent of the phenomenon.

From ancient times, Europe has been at the crossroads of human mobility and has attracted people or compelled them to move away mostly for social, religious or financial reasons.

While in the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries Europe was a continent of net emigration with people leaving, mostly to reach the American continent after World War II, it later became an area of net immigration due to a number of factors and situations that led to this reality. Among these are the decolonisation of Africa and Asia, the refugee crisis after WWII, the 'guest workers' policies implemented especially by countries such as Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Belgium, political unrest in the Middle East and North Africa and the rapid economic development of Europe.

Especially in the 20th century, Europe played a crucial role in developing a set of rules and norms regulating human mobility in the region. It also became increasingly important to have accurate, up to date and accessible migration data, essential to inform both authorities and the general public.

The last decades also witnessed a great trend towards migration within Europe. Central and Eastern Europe lost millions of their labour force. Due to the free movement and employment regulations within the European Union and its enlargement that took place in 2004 and 2007, people began to

leave their home countries and moved West in search of better jobs and opportunities, hoping for a brighter future for their families and higher living standards. Although there were initially much stricter regulations, bilateral work quotas were established and work permits were among the requirements (until 2011). Labour migration within the EU caused some controversy and changed the political landscape in some countries, especially in those where the influx of people was greater. Derogatory stereotypes such as the 'Polish plumber' or the 'Romanian strawberry picker' appeared. But despite the original fears and concerns, the movement



A poster from the "Polish Plumber" campaign issued by Poland in 2005 with regard to the negative stereotypes surrounding Polish workers in France. "I'm staying in Poland - do come over"

was proportionally smaller than anticipated and it was generally acknowledged that the benefits were far greater than the setbacks.

To a certain degree, the situation was beneficial to all involved. Wealthier western European states suddenly had access to a new, cheaper and in many cases, well-trained and qualified workforce that also helped to rejuvenate some deserted areas, that became populated with younger people, willing to prove themselves and to prosper in their adoptive countries. Eastern Europeans are traditionally well trained, speak foreign languages and are also sometimes eager to do jobs that are probably less sought after and appealing to the westerners. On the other hand, the countries of origin, mostly in Central and Eastern Europe, experienced a great talent and brain drain; so much so that the lack of skilled workers made itself felt. Problems began to appear : thousands of jobs were available but there were no applicants.

However, these countries benefited from the massive influx of foreign capital that returned home monthly in the form of remittances for their families by those who worked in the West. Unfortunately, the human cost was high : countless torn families, whole generations of children left in the care of grandparents or other relatives and raised away from their

parents. Stories of lives broken in the search for a more prosperous future abounded. Some eventually did return home, built new houses and even started their own businesses, using the knowledge gained over the years spent away from home.

Eastern Europe has been the only region which has recorded a population decrease in three consecutive decades, and has been the worst affected area in terms of population decline in peaceful times. I have read that some countries in Europe have lost more people than Syria has in its war.

Just before the pandemic kicked in, Europe was in the middle of a flourishing economic phase, with a record high employment rate of 73.1% (for people aged 20 to 64, according to Eurostat data). This is the highest recorded figure since 2005 (still 11.7% higher for men than for women).

And then, there came the pandemic... Covid-19 has affected global human mobility and migration not only in Europe but across the globe. It has drastically restricted movement, affected migrants' lives and their social and economic integration. Legal procedures take longer to deal with, social contacts are severely limited, millions of jobs have been lost and businesses have shut down. In many cases, authorities have been taken by surprise by the complexity and severity of the 'new normal'. According to the European Commission, there was a low level of

irregular border crossings and a 33% decrease in the number of asylum seekers in 2020. Rapid economic deterioration has translated into less or no income for many, with the impossibility of supporting themselves and affording basic everyday living costs, not to mention health insurance which is of the highest importance in these difficult times.

In the midst of all this, a totally unexpected phenomenon has occurred: a massive reverse migration. This is a trend that began in March 2020 when the first lockdowns across Europe were implemented and it has since only amplified. It is a population movement comparable to a 'human tsunami', the extent of which was beyond expectation. In some cases, it is estimated that the total number of returnees is between 4 and 8% of the total working population. Worldwide, it is said that around 450 million people made their way back to their native countries, seeking security and new jobs there. Just as an example, about 2 million Indians or 600,000 Afghans returned home during the pandemic (Source: International Organization for Migration). Also, many expats were forced to leave their exotic job locations such as Qatar or Abu Dhabi, sometimes with not more than 30 days' notice.

In Europe, the great move happened mainly from West to East. Spain and Italy were some of the countries most affected by the international



Afghan refugees wait by the buses that will take them back home



Smuggling migrants in lorries dismantled in Germany and Romania

health crisis. Consequently, their economies suffered, as many businesses collapsed and migrants had to leave, with no jobs available. About 1.3 million Romanians, 500,000 Bulgarians, many from Poland, Lithuania and more generally, people from mainly Central and Eastern Europe have returned home in a matter of months in 2020.

There are many reasons for this sudden human movement : the fear of the pandemic which is something that none of us have experienced in our lifetimes, lack of proper health insurance in foreign countries for some, fear for the well-being of the loved ones back home and the loss of jobs and the impossibility of finding new employment.

Brexit only helped add more pressure to this worldwide crisis and tricky situation. Authorities say that tens

of thousands of people have left the UK recently because of Covid-19 and Brexit-related issues combined. At its peak, it was estimated that the total number of European migrants was around 5 million, roughly about 7.5% of the total British population. Emigration to the UK has fallen yearly ever since the first moves towards Brexit began and today, with a contracted market and a difficult economic situation, many have left and will not even consider returning. For some, this particular situation has actually acted as a strong incentive to relocate.

For Western countries, the problem is that they suddenly saw themselves without a much needed additional work force, partly made up of seasonal workers coming from other EU countries just for a few months, but greatly contributing to their economies. In a desperate search to find solutions to bring back at least some of these people, a few countries have organised special flights and convoys with virus testing and strict hygiene protocols in the workplace. Even so, not many have gone back. There have been situations in which outbreaks of infection in various densely populated work areas have increased the distrust of these workers who are reluctant to return to their jobs anytime soon.

Irrespective of the reasons invoked for repatriations, this is undoubtedly a historic moment and

an unexpected opportunity for the countries of origin to rethink their social and economic policies. They need to try to attract and convince as many people as possible to remain in their native countries permanently and not seek jobs abroad in the near future.

The 'brain drain' which is something that Central and Eastern European countries have complained of for many years, has suddenly stopped. Also, the current trends of working from home and remotely, I think will only reinforce the present tendency of returning to home countries for many, since one can theoretically work for any company worldwide from the comfort of one's own hometown with fewer financial and emotional costs.

Many of these returning people have now declared that they are thinking seriously about remaining home indefinitely. This is also because the living standards have steadily increased in Central and Eastern Europe in recent years and the quality of life is good. Jobs are better paid and the cost of living is, in most cases, far lower than in Western European countries.

Compared to the Western European economies, the developing European countries are still reporting positive rates of economic growth, which makes them more attractive now, not only for their own estranged nationals, but also for others, seeking new and more profitable job opportunities.

But this reverse migration puts stress on the countries of origin which need to act fast and find reliable solutions for real social protection for its newly returned citizens. For countries in the East, it is vital that they succeed in keeping their young work force home. It is important to have clever policies in order to convince these people to look for work in their native countries and thus contribute to both the national GDP and the local pension systems.

Unemployment rates in the European Union averaged 9.13% from 2000 until 2021, reaching an all-time high of 11.5% in January 2013 and a record low of 6.4% in March 2020, before the onset of the pandemic.

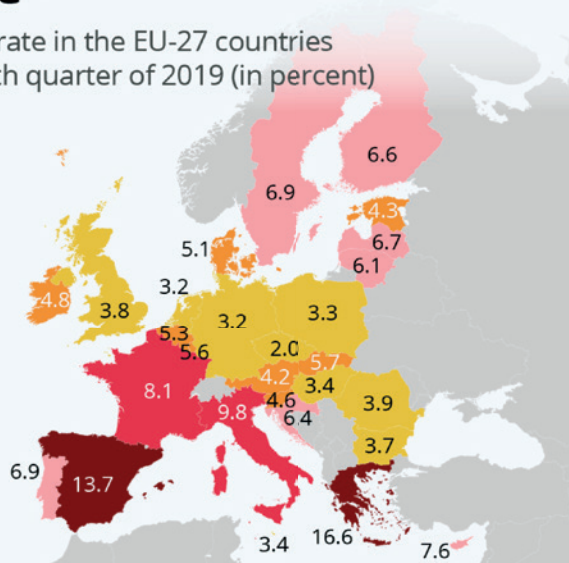


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The State of Unemployment in Europe

Unemployment rate in the EU-27 countries & UK in the fourth quarter of 2019 (in percent)

- >10
- 8-10
- 6-8
- 4-6
- 2-4



Sources: Eurostat, National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (France)



statista

In February 2021, the rate was 7.5% (about 16 million people). Euro area unemployment was even higher, at 8.3 %. (Source: Eurostat). Compared to February 2020, unemployment rose by 1.922 million people in the EU. Spain (16.1%), Greece (15.8%) and Italy (10.2%) reported the highest rates in December 2020. (Source: Statistisches Bundesamt). Outside the EU, the most affected European state is Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a 33.68% unemployment rate.

On the other hand, the trend seems dissimilar in the East. Poland (3.1%) and the Czech Republic (3.2%) registered the lowest rates, with most of the Central and Eastern European states registering rates below the European average.

In Europe in general, more than 44 million people are currently unemployed, with the younger generations most affected. It is estimated that about 37% of the youth in Italy and about 20% in Spain are unemployed. It is also even more difficult for young people with African, Asian or Latin American origins to find a job. Germany has

currently the lowest unemployment rate in Europe. The relevance of labour attachés has increased significantly in recent years. There is a great need for correlated work policies across Europe with coordinated measures, protection regulations for workers such as paid sick leave, weekly work hours and pension rights, so that there is a unity in decisions and similar conditions across Europe.



Nicolas Schmit

Within the European Union there is a set of common objectives and targets for employment policy, to create more jobs throughout the Union. The European Pillar of Social Rights states 20 key principles and rights to support fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems.

The EU Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights, Nicolas Schmit, said: "The European Pillar of Social Rights has been our reference point for building a strong social Europe. Now we breathe new life into it, turning its principles into actions. Creating jobs is one of our main priorities, and making sure people have the right skills for those jobs."

Also, as a reaction to the difficulties directly related to the Corona pandemic that countries face, two new instruments have been put in place. The Recovery and Resilience Facility is designed to help ease the impact of Covid-19 on EU member states and help them become more resilient and sustainable.

The React Fund represents a 47.5 billion Euro increase in structural funds, a fresh and much needed influx of money for member states which could help better incorporate the work force, create new jobs and help the economies recover after the health crisis.

The success of all these measures also depends on the national programmes, long term strategies and targeted actions for each state. The benefits of reverse migration for the countries of origin will be greater, depending on their ability to convince people to stay for long periods and take advantage of the newly created favourable situation.

Europe needs a young, well trained and mobile work force, capable of supporting the European economy and able to face major international challenges. Only close cooperation between European nations with real understanding and support for individual issues is the key to long-term success. After all, human resource is the most valuable asset there is, and every future action should make citizens' well-being a priority.

Alexandra Paucescu



Inspection of the site of the explosion at an ammunition warehouse near Vrbetice, Czech Republic, on October 20, 2014

A DISTURBING PATTERN OF BEHAVIOUR

Two spies, two explosions, two deaths and still many questions

A unit of Russian agents specialising in sabotage and assassination, the explosion of a weapons warehouse in the Czech Republic, poisonings in Britain and Bulgaria, diplomats expelled in Prague and Moscow: these are all ingredients that would fit perfectly into a spy thriller.

But this particular story is not fiction. It began many years ago, and it is still unfolding.

And the last chapter may not have yet been written.

The story begins in a forest in the east of the Czech Republic. In quick succession, two months apart, on 16 October and 3 December 2014, two explosions destroyed warehouses in Vrbetice (Zlin province), not far from the Slovak border. The warehouses contained 58 tonnes of weapons and ammunition worth an estimated 40 million euros. The blast was so powerful that the windows of several buildings in the nearby village were completely shattered. Was the entire stockpile destroyed? Could more explosions follow?

As a safety measure, the local authorities decided to close off access to the area and quickly evacuated the surrounding villages. Two local men who worked at the depot were missing. Their remains were found more than a month later by investigators who concluded that it was probably an accident.

At the time, it was perhaps too early to establish a link between this event and the war in eastern Ukraine, opposing the Ukrainian army and pro-Russian separatists supported by the Kremlin. The weapons were perhaps intended for the Ukrainian military fighting Russian regular troops, mercenaries as well as pro-separatist irregular forces. It has been speculated that the weapons may also have been readied to be shipped to Syria to be used by combatants fighting against the régime of Syrian president, Bashar el-Assad.

Be that as it may, the cache of weapons and ammunition destroyed in the Czech Republic belonged to Emilian Gebrev, a Bulgarian arms dealer who became seriously ill six months later after a stay in a hotel in Sofia. His son and business partner also fell ill. These events took place in April 2015.



Emilian Gebrev

At first, it was thought that simple food poisoning was to blame. But according to new evidence recently revealed by the Czech secret services, it is much more likely that they were poisoned with an as yet unnamed chemical substance.



Anatoliy Chepiga (left) and Alexander Mishkin accused of poisoning Sergei and Yulia Skripal

A surveillance camera in the underground car park used by Gebrev's company, Emco next to the Sofia hotel complex, filmed two men approaching Gebrev's car presumably to smear the poison on the door handles.

Now, the Czech authorities say Russia was definitely involved and it's pointing the finger at two familiar faces. The Russian secret agents charged with the Salisbury poisonings in England in 2018 : Alexander Mishkin and Anatoly Chepiga.

The pair were also caught on CCTV in Salisbury and accused of using the nerve agent 'Novichok' to try to kill former Russian double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter.

They survived but a local woman, Dawn Sturgess died after picking up a discarded perfume bottle with the poison on it.

On their return to Russia, Alexander Mishkin and Anatoly Chepiga had claimed on state television that they were sports nutritionists and that they had gone to Salisbury to visit the cathedral and nearby Stonehenge.

STATE TERRORISM

For years, the cause of the deadly blasts deep in a Czech forest remained unexplained until very recently.

A key piece of evidence came when Czech investigators found an email requesting permission for two men to inspect the warehouse. Attached were scans of the men's passports which claimed they were from the National Guard of Tajikistan and gave false names : Nicolai Popa and Ruslan Tabarov.

The pair had been spotted by Czech intelligence and identified as Ruslan Boshirov and Alexander Petrov when they arrived in Prague on October 11, 2014.

On October 13, they traveled to Ostrava where they checked into a hotel near the arms depot and left the country on

October 16, the day of the explosion, using the same passports.

In fact, four other Russian agents were involved in this sabotage and present at the scene, a few hours before the explosion. Two of them, Alexey Kalinin and Evgeniy Kapinos, arrived in Ostrava by car from Budapest on October 10. And then, on October 11, Nikolay Ezhov and Andrey Averyanov, arrived from Vienna to join the other four.

The whole operation was apparently directed by the two highly placed operatives, Kalinin and Kapinos, who landed in Budapest under their own names but with diplomatic passports, allegedly carrying mail in the diplomatic pouch for the Russian embassy.

Kalinin is assumed to have been supervising Anatoly Chepiga and Alexander Mishkin who most likely masterminded the attack in the Czech Republic.

THE FALLOUT

On 17 April 2021, Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babis revealed his suspicions during a hastily arranged news conference : *"Based on clear evidence obtained during the investigation by our security services, I can say there is well-grounded suspicion about the involvement of officers of the Russian intelligence service GRU, Unit 29155 in the explosion of the ammunition depot in the town of Vrbetice in 2014"*.

Before dawn on April 18, Czech activists splashed the walls of the Russian embassy in Prague with ketchup to symbolise the blood of the victims of the explosion. The accusations of a Russian attack on the Czech Republic unleashed strong emotions and created the biggest crisis in relations between the two countries since the fall of communism.

General Petr Pavel, former Chief of Staff of the Czech army and former Chairman of the NATO Military Committee commented via twitter : *"This action, carried out by members of a special military intelligence unit against a civilian facility of a sovereign state, is an open act of aggression and I am not afraid to call it state terrorism", before concluding : "We have to take a very firm stand against this and protect our security. Alone and in cooperation with the Allies."* The Czechs gave 18 Russian diplomats, most of whom were members of the



General Petr Pavel, former Chief of Staff of the Czech army and former Chairman of the NATO Military Committee

FSV (foreign intelligence service) their marching orders. This was an echo of the wave of tit for tat expulsions after the Salisbury poisonings. Russia's foreign ministry said the allegations are absurd but Britain said the Czechs had exposed the lengths Russian intelligence will go to. The following day, Russia retaliated by expelling 20 staff at the Czech embassy in Moscow. A great classic of diplomacy.

Twenty four hours later on 19 April, the EU expressed support for the Czech Republic's expulsion of Russian diplomats. The EU's Foreign Policy Chief, Josep Borrell read out the official statement : *"These diplomats have been identified by Czech intelligence to be Russian military service agents. The European Union stands united and in solidarity with the Czech Republic."*

Meanwhile, a Kremlin spokesperson called the Czech accusations "groundless" and accused the West of a "massive anti-Russian psychosis". Tensions had deepened as Russia deployed thousands of troops and military hardware on the Ukrainian border. There is also the case of jailed opposition leader, Alexei Navalny which only adds to the tension.

The Russian president is trying to whip up support at home, says analyst Ian Bond who was a member of the British diplomatic service for 28 years before joining the Centre for European Reform as director of foreign policy in 2013. His area of expertise is Russia and the former Soviet Union : *"Putin hasn't had a particularly good 12 months; Russia has one of the highest excess death rates from Covid-19 in the world, the economy is pretty stagnant and the IMF is forecasting that it will stay pretty stagnant for a while. And the protests about the arrest of Navalny in January 2021 were the largest Russia had seen in quite a long time."*



Rosatom Headquarters in Moscow

But things didn't stop there; on 19 April, the Czech government decided to exclude the Russian State Atomic Energy Corporation Rosatom from a multi-billion euro tender to build a new unit at the Dukovany nuclear power plant by 2036. In the same breath, the Czech Republic announced it was giving up the purchase of Russian Sputnik V vaccines.

Some countries have already expressed their solidarity with the Czech decision, such as the United States and the United Kingdom which said it was reserving its decision on a more elaborate response for a later date.

Latvia too has already expressed its solidarity through a tweet by Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs. *"The subversive actions carried out by Russian agents are deplorable. [...] The perpetrators must be punished."*

The United States imposed new sanctions in April 2021 over alleged cyber attacks and other malign acts. The Czech Republic called for further measures from its allies to counter the Kremlin's interference.



Foreign Minister of Latvia Edgars Rinkēvičs

SOLICITING EU AID

The larger problem in all this however was that the Vrbětice affair could quickly take a European and Euro-Atlantic turn with all 27 EU member states risking being drawn into this dispute once Prague presented its evidence at European ministerial level.

On 20 April, Prague asked its European Union and NATO partners to also expel Russian diplomats, in a show of support and solidarity with the Czech Republic in its confrontation with Russia. The Czech interior minister said he had summoned the Russian ambassador to notify him of new measures.

The (acting) Foreign Minister Jan Hamáček spoke with his European counterparts on 19 April at the Foreign Affairs Council which was held by video conference.

As for Prime Minister Andrej Babiš, he discussed the affair on 17 April until very late with Charles Michel, the President of the European Council, and intends to raise it at a European summit planned in June 2021, unless exceptionally re-scheduled.

The last time the EU sent its High Representative Josep Borrell to Moscow, he was humiliated by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who declared that Europe "is an unreliable partner" and that three European diplomats from Germany, Poland and Sweden were declared 'persona non grata' and must leave Russia because they had participated in a demonstration in favour of the jailed Kremlin opponent Alexei Navalny.

As for any hopes of the EU standing up to Moscow on this and other matters, former Czech diplomat and MEP Petr Ježek seemed slightly downcast: *"The precondition is unity within the EU and within NATO. And then, we can try to improve our instruments, our strategy and tactics. But frankly, we do not have many of them at the moment and it's quite difficult to cope with an unpredictable Russia and also with the growing influence of China."*

However, several European countries are reportedly scrutinising their entry and exit records... The story is far from over.



The entrance of the Main Intelligence Directorate building in Moscow

GRU UNIT 29155

A theory generally considered plausible by international analysts is that the Russian intervention had a very precise military objective: to prevent the delivery of weapons to Ukraine. The warehouses were rented by the Imex Group, an import-export company in Ostrava, in order to stock weapons purchased by Emilian Gebrev, the Bulgarian arms dealer.

It is thought that the Russian intelligence officers planted a device in the consignment of weapons and ammunition that was meant to blow up when the arms were bound for Ukraine, but the device went off too early.

A disturbing coincidence however: ammunition depots in Bulgaria exploded at the same time as in Vrbětice according to the British specialist open-source investigative site Bellingcat which again suspected Unit 29155 of Russian military intelligence (GRU).

Since the Skripal affair in 2018, the name 'GRU' has appeared constantly in world headlines and cited by Western intelligence agencies and the media. Bellingcat and the German weekly Der Spiegel have already successfully linked a number of events to Unit 29155. It is widely believed that this unit has been in operation since at least 2008 but that its existence became known publicly only as late as 2018.

In fact, Bellingcat's investigation established that it was exactly at this time, at the end of 2014, that Alexander Mishkin and Anatoly Chepiga received the medal of 'Heroes of the Russian Federation' from the hands of Vladimir Putin, for hitherto alleged feats of arms in Ukraine.

Another significant piece of information provided by Bellingcat is that the Czech operation was supervised personally by the head of Unit 29155, General Andrey Averyanov. He happened to be in Central Europe incognito at the precise time of the operation and flew back to Moscow just hours after the explosion.

It appears that this was the only known overseas clandestine operation for which the general was personally present. This is probably an indication of the significance of this particular mission for the Kremlin.

This unit of Russian military intelligence is suspected of carrying out, among other malign activities, a political destabilisation campaign in Moldova in 2016, of manipulating a pro-Serbian coup attempt in Montenegro the same year and of twice attempting to poison an arms dealer in Bulgaria in 2015.

Unit 29155 was even found to be active by Spanish intelligence during the 2017 demonstrations in favour of independence in Catalonia.

According to an investigation by French daily Le Monde in 2019, this unit which the New York Times had previously described as an “elite force”, had even established a sort of rear base in the Savoie region of France. The overall impression is that this unit is made up of highly mobile special forces, capable of striking anywhere on Moscow’s command.

Mark Galeotti is a Russia analyst at University College, London. He says that these incidents paint a picture of how this unit operates : “ *When we had the Salisbury poisonings, there was the shock and horror that in a time of peace, Russia would carry out such operations. Now, we can actually track that back and realise that this covert*

campaign had been going on for years beforehand. And also that in some ways, the Russians don’t have quite as many of these operatives in this Unit 29155 which has been blamed for all these attacks, as we might have feared. So basically, the same figures keep cropping up. There are probably about 20 operational staff and maybe, 200 support personnel.”

The fact that Unit 29155 has such limited personnel was also confirmed by Gerhard Mangott, another expert on Russian intelligence at the University of Innsbruck in Austria : “Ever since it was founded in 2018, it has probably only had around 20 active agents. They don’t have many people compared to the other branches of Russian intelligence.”

And during a speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2019, then chief of MI6, Sir Alex Youger said : “You can see there is a concerted programme of activity – and, yes, it does often involve the same people”, before continuing : “We assess there is a standing threat from the GRU and the other Russian intelligence services and that very little is off limits”.



Alex Youger, Chief of MI6, known as ‘C’

However, it has since emerged that a threat from an all-powerful intelligence unit ready to strike at Russia’s enemies could well be overestimated. Nevertheless, its members are highly-trained Spetsnaz special force fighters who conduct sabotage and assassination missions.

And as such, Moscow deploys them when “*the ends matter more than the means*”, according to Mark Galeotti, who goes on to explain that unlike agents from the FSB (internal security agency) or SVR (external intelligence service) who are known for their discretion, members of Unit 29155 will do anything it takes, including the use of unsuitable



The site of the MH17 flight crash

methods in order to achieve their objectives. “*That’s why their failures – including the botched assassination attempt on Skripal and the failed coup attempt in Montenegro - can appear unprofessional and leave traces that allow their perpetrators to be identified.*”

But ultimately, even if these missions fail, they still allow Russia to send a strong signal to other powers in Europe and beyond to say that they are there and can act not only on their own soil but whenever and wherever they see fit.

Russia analyst Ian Bond explained : “*They (Unit 29155) seem to be extremely active in a number of parts of Europe and we’ve seen the assassination of the Chechen-Georgian separatist, Zelimkhan Khangoshvili in Berlin in August 2019. For this murder, a Russian is on trial in Germany and we’ve still got the MH17 (Malaysian Airlines) trial going ahead in The Hague, and we’ve had other Russian citizens assassinated elsewhere in the EU.*”

MORE SANCTIONS?

The Czech event and the ensuing revelations could be a timely pretext to launch a new wave of sanctions against Russia. Some countries had already been asking for it as a protest against the reinforced Russian military presence in Ukraine.

Other ultra-confidential discussions took place between EU ambassadors in mid-April to consider new names to be added to the ‘Human Rights’ blacklist in a similar manner to the Magnitsky Act.

As a reminder, the Magnitsky Act, formally known as the Russia and Moldova Jackson–Vanik Repeal and Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act of 2012, is named



© Mark Galeotti

Mark Galeotti



© Wikipedia

Sergei Magnitsky

after Sergei Magnitsky, a Russian lawyer who became a symbol of the fight against corruption.

He died in a Moscow prison in 2009, probably due to severe ill-treatment. The bipartisan law, passed by the U.S. Congress and President Barack Obama in November-December 2012, is named after the lawyer because it came to apply financial sanctions and visa bans to Russian officials suspected of being involved in his death.

It was later applied in other contexts too. For example, in June 2020, it was used against a number of people accused of involvement in corruption and the murder of protesters in Iraq.

These discussions across Europe could also be intended for planning and initiating a coordinated reaction by the EU, should there be a serious or possibly fatal degradation in the health of Russian political opponent and fierce Putin critic, Alexei Navalny who had been on a prolonged hunger strike in his prison cell.

However, there may be one hitch; according to detailed analyses by a number of international jurists,



© Wikimedia/Michael Sieglie/jeviz

Alexei Navalny

there may be no adequate legal basis in European legislation today to implement such restrictive measures on individuals following a 'conventional military' type action on the territory of a member state.

This is provided for in case of a cyber-attack or use of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons, but not for a 'classic' explosion, even though voluntary, as was the case in Vrbětice. Unless of course, the action is qualified as a terrorist act, which would be extremely tricky for a foreign secret service anyway.

Also, from a practical point of view, this measure would probably have a predominantly symbolic effect as most of the incriminated officials are already on a blacklist for other acts.

European retaliation - if there is any - could therefore take the form of summonses to ambassadors and expulsions of diplomats in a more or less coordinated manner and of course, wide-ranging economic measures. At the Czech level, certain of these measures have already been taken.

CLOSURE OR CONTINUATION?

But however exceptional this clandestine operation may seem, Russian espionage has been active on Czech territory since the end of the 1960s, when the Soviet Union began to monitor the Prague Spring and regularly send spies and agents to suppress the democratic movement. At that time, with an embassy of inordinate size, Soviet intelligence created and maintained a whole network of contacts, structures, traditions and roots.

In 2020, Czech police and counter-intelligence services obtained information from inside the Russian embassy that an agent may have come to Prague with the aim of making an attempt on the lives of two members of the city council who are highly critical of Russia. One of these is the mayor of Prague, Zdeněk Hřib, a member of the pro-European and pro-Eurozone Česká Pirátská Strana (Czech Pirate Party).

As recently as April 14 2021, Interior Minister and acting Foreign Minister Jan Hamáček proposed to organise a meeting between Joe Biden and



© Wikipedia

Czech Interior Minister and acting Foreign Minister Jan Hamáček

Vladimir Putin in the Czech capital, before announcing that he was to fly to Moscow on April 19 to negotiate the delivery of doses of the Sputnik V vaccine... all that seems so far away now.

The revelations about the 2014 Russian mission in the Czech Republic has changed all that and marks a new crucial stage in the turbulent history of relations between Prague and Moscow. And there is still an unresolved issue that could cause problems of sorts: Milos Zeman, the president of the Czech Republic is a declared pro-Russian; he has formally stated that he feels there is not enough evidence to accuse Russia of the explosion at Vrbětice.

On April 29, thousands of people demonstrated in Prague against President Zeman, calling him a "puppet" of Russia, against the backdrop of tensions in relations between Prague and Moscow with the expulsion of many diplomats from both sides.

"This president does not serve the interests of our country," said singer Michael Kocáb, who was one of the negotiators for the departure of the Soviet army from Czechoslovakia in 1991 and who has just circulated a petition for Milos Zeman to be "tried for high treason".

In two months' time, the 30th anniversary of the final departure of the last Soviet soldiers from their Bohemian garrison, will decidedly be celebrated here in a very particular context.

Hossein Sadre

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NEWS IN BRIEF

PLACES TO VISIT

Hauser & Wirth Monaco opening with inaugural exhibition by Louise Bourgeois



© The Easton Foundation / DACS, 2021. Photo: François Fernandez

Louise Bourgeois, Spider, 1996, Installed in Monaco © The Easton Foundation / DACS, 2021

The inaugural exhibition 'Louise Bourgeois. Maladie de l'Amour' opens on 19 June 2021 in Monaco on the Côte d'Azur. A monumental public sculpture from the French American artist's Spider series, a bronze arachnid over three meters tall, will be installed in the gardens adjacent to the gallery.

Located in the heart of Monaco, near the historic Hôtel de Paris, our new gallery features a spectacular main exhibition space, a 290 sq.m. cube with 9 meter high walls, lit from above by a dramatic skylight. The conversion of the site has been conducted by Selldorf Architects, New York, which has collaborated with Hauser & Wirth on its spaces internationally since the founding of the gallery in 1992. In Monaco the gallery occupies the lower spaces of a building designed by Rogers Stirk Harbour + Partners and owned by the Société des Bains de Mer.

'When we were invited to play a part in the continuing revival of the art scene in Monaco,' says Iwan Wirth, President, Hauser & Wirth, 'we saw that it offered an exceptional opportunity to present our artists in the heart of city, engaging with the vibrant contemporary scene across the south of France, strengthening our European presence. In former times, Monaco was a destination for artists, writers, and filmmakers who were as captivated as we have been by the Côte d'Azur. Over our nearly 30-year history, Hauser & Wirth has created physical spaces in the locations where our artists and our collectors reside—not only in the large urban centers of London,

New York, and Los Angeles, but also in legendary resort communities and seasonal gathering spots such as Southampton and St. Moritz. This is something we have always done. But it's an even more important step given the impact of events over the last year during which we have sought out new ways to present and sell works of art.'

The works in the inaugural exhibition by Louise Bourgeois span a period between 1947-2008 and draw on recurring themes of anxiety and longing, emotions which the artist repeatedly mined to create her personal visual vocabulary. Along with Bourgeois' monumental Spider sculpture dating from 1996, one of the artist's most enduring and iconic motifs, two further aluminium sculptures are suspended inside the gallery. 'Untitled' (2004) gently rotates, as a continuously morphing form. The abstract spiral belongs to an important series Bourgeois made during the 1990s and shares a particular affinity to a previous work entitled 'Les Bienvenus' (1996), commissioned by the French Government and installed in the Parc de la Mairie in the village of Choisy-le-Roi, France, where she grew up.



© The Easton Foundation / DACS, 2021. Photo: François Fernandez

Louise Bourgeois, Untitled, 2004, Installed at Hauser & Wirth, Monaco

For its reopening, the British Museum announces first major UK exhibition on Roman Emperor Nero

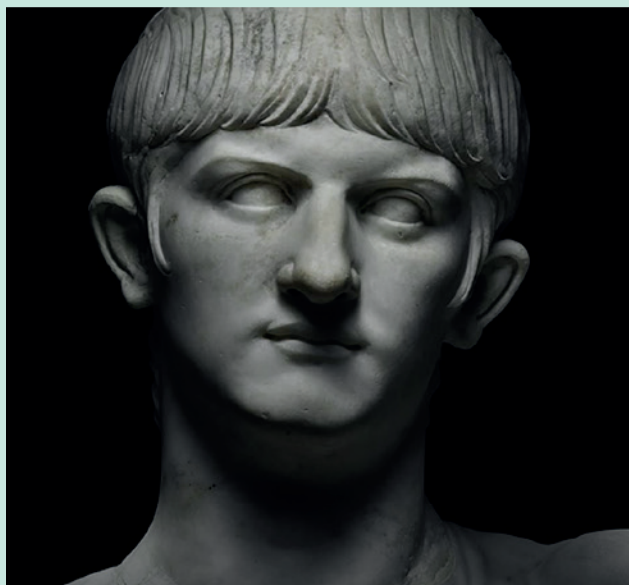
Nero: the man behind the myth will explore the true story of Rome's fifth emperor informed by new research and archaeological evidence from the time, challenging the biased historical accounts written after Nero's death that have shaped his legacy.

Recent discoveries relating to Nero's fourteen-year rule reveal a more accurate picture. Treasures hidden during the

destruction of Colchester in AD 60-61 during Boudica's Icenic rebellion, burned artifacts from the Fire of Rome in AD 64, and evidence from the destruction of Pompeii uncover a new understanding of Nero's turbulent and misconceived reign.

Tickets are available to book today for *Nero: the man behind the myth*, as well as tickets to the special exhibition *Thomas Becket: murder and the making of a saint*.

This major exhibition is featuring over 200 objects, charting the young emperor's rise to power and examining his actions during a period of profound social change in regions from Armenia in the Near East, to Britain, and across mainland Europe. Drawn from the British Museum's world-class collection alongside rare loans from Europe, most never seen in the UK before, the exhibition includes humble graffiti next to grand sculpture, precious manuscripts, objects destroyed in the fire of Rome, priceless jewellery and slave chains from Wales, telling the story of rich and poor alike.



Nero (r. AD 54–68), the last male descendant of Rome's first emperor Augustus, succeeded to the throne aged only sixteen. Britain had been under Roman rule for just eleven years. During his reign of nearly fourteen years, he had his own mother killed, his first wife, and allegedly his second wife. Written accounts even claim that Nero himself started the Great Fire of Rome in AD 64. In June AD 68, when confronted with rebellions by insubordinate military officials, Nero was forced to commit suicide. The Roman senate immediately excised his memory from official records, and his name was vilified to legitimise the new ruling elite.

The image of Nero as a tyrant created 50 years after his death by the historians Tacitus and Suetonius, and written about more than another century later by Cassius Dio, is a story that has been repeated for centuries. We now know that this Nero is a fabrication and that ancient sources stand between us and the historical character. This exhibition

challenges traditional preconceptions and explores what the ancient elite narrative on Nero tells us about the inner conflicts of Roman society.

Statues of Nero were erected throughout the empire, yet very few survive due to the official suppression of his image. A star piece in the exhibition is a bronze head of Nero, long-mistaken as Claudius, which was found in the River Alde in Suffolk in 1907. The head was part of a statue that probably stood in Camulodunum (Colchester) before being torn down during the Boudica-led rebellion. A small bronze figure of Nero, lent by Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Venezia and seen in the UK for the first time, gives a rare sense of a complete sculpture.

The Fenwick Hoard will be shown as part of a major exhibition for the first time since it was discovered in 2014 beneath the floor of a shop on Colchester's High Street. The treasure was buried for safekeeping by settlers fleeing for their lives during Boudica's attack. Among the items are Roman republican and imperial coins, military armlets and fashionable jewellery very similar to finds from Pompeii and Herculaneum.

Famously, Nero was the first Roman emperor to act on stage and compete in public games as a charioteer. Aged 21, Nero first took to the stage as part of private games, but a few years later he performed publicly in Naples and then in Rome itself. This event was described in hostile sources as unprecedented and scandalous, but contemporary evidence shows that Nero was hardly the first young man of good family to take part in public performances. Chariot racing, gladiatorial combats and theatre were incredibly popular in the Roman world, as shown by fascinating objects such as gladiatorial weapons from Pompeii on loan from the Louvre, stunning frescoes depicting actors and theatrical masks lend by Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli.

One of the defining moments of Nero's reign was the Great Fire of Rome in AD 64, which burned for nine days and laid waste to large parts of the city. Excavations in recent years have revealed the true extent of the ferocity and impact of the fire. A warped iron window grating, discovered near the Circus Maximus, will be displayed in the UK for the first time, as testament to the intensity of the flames and destruction.

Nero, who was in the nearby city of Antium rather than in his palace watching the inferno, led the relief and reconstruction efforts. A new palace, the Domus Aurea, rose from the ashes. Stunning frescoes and wall decorations will give visitors a taste of Nero's opulent residence. The elaborate designs and the use of precious materials such as exotic marbles, cinnabar and gold speak to the height of imperial luxury.

Nero: the man behind the myth runs from 27 May to 24 October 2021 in the Sainsbury Exhibitions Gallery at the British Museum.

Open Saturday – Thursday 10.00–17.00, Friday 10.00–20.30. Last entry 90 mins before closing.

Adult tickets £20 weekdays and £22 weekends, under 16s free, 2-for-1 tickets for students on Fridays, and concessions and group rates available.

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DASSAULT AVIATION LAUNCHES FALCON 10X, FEATURING INDUSTRY'S LARGEST CABIN AND MOST ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY ON A BUSINESS JET

High-speed, ultra-long-range Falcon will come with innovative safety features derived from latest fighter technology.

Dassault Aviation today announced an all-new Falcon jet that will deliver a level of comfort, versatility and technology unmatched by any purpose-built business jet. Featuring a range of 7,500 nautical miles, the Falcon 10X will fly nonstop from New York to Shanghai, Los Angeles to Sydney, Hong Kong to New York or Paris to Santiago. Top speed will be Mach 0.925.

“Today we are introducing a new benchmark in business aviation,” said Dassault Chairman and CEO Eric Trappier. “The Falcon 10X will offer an unrivalled passenger experience over both short- and long-duration flights, along with breakthrough safety features from Dassault’s frontline fighter technology. We have optimized every aspect of the aircraft with the passenger in mind and established a new level of capability for ultra-long-range aircraft.”

The Falcon 10X will enter service at the end of 2025.



Taking cabin modularity to unprecedented heights

The 10X will have the biggest and most comfortable cabin on the market and offer greater modularity than any other aircraft in its class, with a selection of multiple interior configurations. The 10X is large enough to accommodate four cabin zones of equal length but owners can configure their cabin to create a truly customized interior, including for example, an expanded dining/conference area, a dedicated entertainment area with a large-screen monitor, a private stateroom with a queen-size bed or an enlarged master suite with a private stand-up shower.



“The 10X will be more than just another big step forward in business aviation. It will be absolutely the best business jet available in the ultra-long-range category, and will remain so for a long time,” said Trappier.

The 10X will have a cabin cross section larger than some regional jets. Its cabin will be 6-feet, 8-inches (2.03 m) tall and 9 feet, 1 inch wide (2.77 m). That will make it almost 8 inches (20 cm) wider and 2 inches (5 cm) taller than the widest and tallest purpose-built business jet flying today.

Pressurization will also be the best on the market, with passengers experiencing a 3,000-foot cabin pressure altitude while flying at 41,000 feet. A next-generation filtration system will provide 100-percent pure air. The aircraft will be at least as quiet as the Falcon 8X, currently the quietest business jet in service.

New structures, new materials, ultra-efficient power

The 10X will feature an entirely new fuselage with extra-large windows—nearly 50 percent larger than those on the Falcon 8X. Thirty-eight windows will line the fuselage making for the brightest cabin in business aviation.

The high-speed wing will be made of carbon fiber composites for maximum strength, reduced weight and minimum drag. Tailored for speed and efficiency, the very-high aspect ratio wing will be equipped with advanced, retractable high-lift devices offering superior maneuverability at low approach speeds.

The twin-engine aircraft will be powered by business aviation's most advanced and efficient engine, the in-development Rolls Royce Pearl® 10X. The 10X is the latest, largest and most powerful version of the Pearl series, delivering more than 18,000 pounds of thrust.

A major advance in flight deck technology

The Falcon 10X's flight deck will set a new standard in intuitive design, with touch screens throughout the cockpit. A next-generation Digital Flight Control System, derived directly from Dassault's latest military technology, will provide an unprecedented level of flying precision and protection, including a revolutionary, new single-button recovery mode.

A single smart throttle will serve as the primary power control, connecting both engines to the Digital Flight Control System which will automatically manage the power of each engine as needed in different flight scenarios.

Thanks to Dassault's breakthrough FalconEye® combined vision system—the first to offer both enhanced and synthetic vision capabilities—combined with dual HUDs able to serve as primary flight displays, the 10X will be capable of operating in essentially zero ceiling/visibility conditions.

“We have set the bar for our new Falcon incredibly high,” said Trappier. “But I can confidently say that we have put this aircraft at the top of the market.”

About Dassault Aviation

Dassault Aviation is a leading aerospace company with a presence in over 90 countries across five continents. It produces the Rafale fighter jet as well as the complete line of Falcons. The company employs a workforce of over 11,000 and has assembly and production plants in both France and the United States and service facilities around the globe. Since the rollout of the first Falcon 20 in 1963, over 2,500 Falcon jets have been delivered. Dassault offers a range of six business jets from the twin-engine 3,350 nm large-cabin Falcon 2000S to its flagship, the tri-engine 6,450 nm ultra-long range Falcon 8X and the new ultra-widebody cabin Falcon 6X.

About Dassault Falcon Jet

Dassault Falcon Jet Corp., is a wholly owned U.S. subsidiary of Dassault Aviation, France. Dassault Falcon Jet markets and supports the Falcon family of business jets throughout North America and South America.

THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE CALLS ON TURKISH AUTHORITIES 'TO PUT AN END TO LAWS AND PRACTICES THAT CONTRAVENE DEMOCRATIC STANDARDS'

The Assembly has strongly reiterated its call on the Turkish authorities “to put an end to laws and practices that contravene democratic standards, to revise its legislation and constitutional framework in order to ensure the separation of powers, to restore freedom of speech and media freedom, to restrict the interpretation of its anti-terror legislation, and to

implement the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights”.

At the end of an urgent debate at the end of April on the functioning of democratic institutions in Turkey, the parliamentarians also stated that the presidential decision of 20 March 2021 to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention - which aims to combat violence against women and domestic violence - constitutes “a step backwards for the country”. They deeply regretted that this decision was taken “without any parliamentary debate and on account of misleading narratives” and requested the expertise of the Venice Commission to prepare a comparative study on the modalities of ratification and denunciation of the Council conventions.

The adopted resolution, based on a report prepared by Thomas Hammarberg (Sweden, SOC) and John Howell (United Kingdom, EC / DA), notes with concern the procedures aimed at lifting the parliamentary immunity of one third of parliamentarians - mostly from the opposition - as well as the attempt to dissolve the People's Democratic Party (HDP) and the repression of its members. The Assembly therefore “urges the Turkish authorities to put an end to the judicial harassment of parliamentarians and refrain from submitting numerous summaries of proceedings seeking the undue lifting of their immunity which gravely impedes the exercise of their political mandate” as well as to political pluralism.

The text also calls for the immediate release of former HDP co-chair Selahattin Demirtaş and philanthropist Osman Kavala “in application of the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights of 2020 and subsequent decisions of the Committee of Ministers, which is supervising their implementation”.

According to the Assembly, the Turkish authorities should seize the opportunity of implementing the Human Rights Action Plan and revising the legislation on elections and political parties to take “concrete and meaningful steps”, which thus respect the obligations rising from the Council of Europe membership.





The Gigafactory in Berlin

THE TESLA GIGAFACTORY IN BERLIN ON ITS TRACK TO START PRODUCTION IN 2021

Gigafactory Berlin-Brandenburg will be the most advanced high-volume electric vehicle production plant in the world. Starting with Model Y production at launch, it will establish original vehicle design and engineering for worldwide markets out of Germany.

The Gigafactory product technologies and production methods will be cutting edge: The most powerful Battery Systems as well as high performance Drive Units and Power Electronics. A new dimension of Casting systems and a most efficient Body-Shop, leading to a high level of vehicle safety. With a next generation Paint Shop, enabling color tone depth and complexity, never seen before in volume production cars, as well as with a high-quality Final Assembly, world class vehicles will be delivered to the customer.

Tesla Gigafactory Berlin-Brandenburg (also known as Gigafactory Berlin, Gigafactory 4 or Gigafactory Europe) is a European manufacturing plant for Tesla, Inc. under construction in Grünheide, Germany. The campus is 35 kilometres (20 mi) south-east of central Berlin on the Berlin–Wrocław railway, which forms the north border of the site between Erkner station and Fangschleuse railway station; and the A10 motorway, which forms the west border. The facility and its Berlin location were announced by Tesla CEO Elon Musk in November 2019. The factory is planned to produce batteries, battery packs and powertrains for use in Tesla vehicles, and also

assemble the Tesla Model Y, with a proposed start of production in late 2021. Elon Musk projected that the Tesla Model Y could become the world's best-selling car by 2022 or 2023. Musk announced that the Tesla Model 3 became the best-selling luxury sedan of any kind in the world during its latest earnings call. Based on Tesla's calculations, the Model Y could beat the Model 3's record.

Some recent news announced some delays regarding the production due to numerous constraints that deal with battery pack output and the pandemic situation. The Brandenburg Economic Minister Jörg Steinbach, still believes Tesla is on pace for a late-Summer or early-Autumn start at Giga Berlin.



Tesla Model Y



Harvest in Kościelniki district in Poland

FELONIOUS HARVEST

How crooks reap where the EU sowed

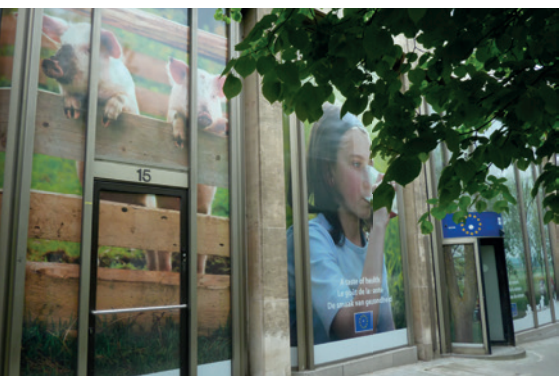
It was US President Dwight D. Eisenhower who once said: “Farming looks mighty easy when your plough is a pencil, and you’re a thousand miles from the cornfield.” In other words, thought doesn’t make crops grow and making plans isn’t such hard work as getting down on the soil and getting your hands dirty. However, with thoroughly dishonest thought and illicit planning, you reap far more than you ever planned to plant, assuming you plant anything at all. The European Union pays out somewhere in the region of €54-billion in subsidies each year through its Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to support farmers and to help rural communities. But wherever there is a big enough honeypot, of course, the flies and the wasps will gather, and they do. It’s not just organised crime, either; politicians have been siphoning off the funds to reward their friends, boost their electoral chances and punish their critics. The problem is that the member states have opted for a secretive approach to the distribution of the funds, which has empowered the same antidemocratic forces that are a threat

to the EU’s future. As the New York Times put it in 2019: “across Hungary and much of Central and Eastern Europe, the bulk (of the money) goes to a connected and powerful few. The prime minister of the Czech Republic collected tens of millions of dollars in subsidies just last year. Subsidies have underwritten Mafia-style land grabs in Slovakia and Bulgaria.”

That’s the trouble with populists and oligarchs: they don’t just steal, they undermine the entire Union and they don’t care. The NYT’s survey was unsparing of the people involved in this misuse of funds and of power. Take Hungary, for instance: “Mr. Orbán’s government has auctioned off thousands of acres of state land to his family members and close associates, including one childhood friend who



Participants of the "Common Agricultural Policy 2014-2020" meeting of Chairpersons of Agriculture Committees of the EU member states in the Polish Senate



Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development in Brussels

has become one of the richest men in the country, the (New York) Times investigation found. Those who control the land, in turn, qualify for millions in subsidies from the European Union.” Jozsef Angyan, who was at one time Orbán’s Under-Secretary for Rural Development, described the subsidy scheme: “It’s an absolutely corrupt system,” he told the NYT. According to Britain’s Independent news website, “Europe’s machinery in Brussels enables this rough-hewed corruption because confronting it would mean changing a programme that helps hold a precarious union together. European leaders disagree about many things, but they all count on generous subsidies and wide discretion in spending them.”

The damning verdict is reflected by France 24, too: “Nearly 40 percent of the EU’s budget ends up in farms,” says its website in a promotion for a studio debate, “through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which funds tens of billions of euros in subsidies. But now, the Commission is proposing new strategies to make farming more sustainable as part of its Green New Deal.” That, at least, is the stated aim of the European Commission: “The EU will be climate neutral by 2050,” it claims. “To do this, it will carry out a series of initiatives that will protect the environment and boost the green economy.” Certainly, there are signs that its existing system of handouts, quite apart from enriching oligarchs and crooks, is helping to drive climate change. To be honest, it’s not just the EU, either. Worldwide, agricultural subsidies come to \$700-billion (€580-billion) a year. Much of that money, according to an on-line article on the One Earth/Cell Press website, is funding income inequality in agriculture and very little of it has been going to climate-friendly and biodiverse regions. The article

points out that “More than €24-billion of 2015 CAP direct payments went to regions where average farm incomes are already above the EU median income. A further €2.5 billion in rural development payments went to primarily urban areas. Effective monitoring indicators are also missing.” Of the €54-billion handed out in CAP payments, the One Earth report estimates that €26-billion – not far short of 50% – was misspent. In fact, some 80% of the money given out in the CAP goes to just 20% of Europe’s farmers.

ONLY THE RICH CAN PLANT MONEY TREES

A new survey into the CAP and its misspent funds makes disturbing reading. “The new data show that most income support payments go to intensively farmed regions already above median EU income, while climate-friendly and biodiverse farming regions, as well as poorer regions, are insufficiently funded. Consequently, the majority of payments are going to the regions causing the most environmental damage and the farmers in the least need of income support.” In fact, quite a lot of the funding is going to urban areas and not to farms at all. “By revealing the extreme concentration of payments to relatively wealthy regions, we hope this study can catalyse radical change in the distribution of CAP funding towards needs-based income support and sustainable development,” said Mark Brady, an economist from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences and Lund University, who was involved in the research. The study was published by One Earth and it should make worrying reading for EU policy-makers. “Right now, the farming regions with the highest greenhouse gas emissions

from intensive livestock production are getting paid to pollute. Farm payments should be needs- and results-based to ensure social and environmental benefits,” concluded one of the researchers, Kimberly Nicholas. “The EU has an obligation to harmonize reporting of CAP spending data, tracked using more relevant indicators, to ensure public spending actually provides public benefits.”

In the European Parliament, the Greens/EFA group have produced their own report, under the title “Where does the EU money go?” It formed the basis of an article in EU Reporter, an on-line political magazine: “The report outlines up-to-date cases, including: Fraudulent claims and payments of EU agricultural subsidies in Slovakia; the conflicts of interest around the Czech Prime Minister’s Agrofert company in Czechia; and state interference by the Fidesz government in Hungary. This report comes out as the EU institutions are in the process of negotiating the Common Agricultural Policy for the years 2021-27.” The article includes a quote from Viola von Cramon, a Greens/EFA MEP and member of the Budgetary Control Committee: “The evidence shows that EU agricultural funds are fuelling fraud, corruption and the rise of rich businessmen.

Despite numerous investigations, scandals and protests, the Commission seems to be turning a blind eye to the rampant abuse of taxpayer’s money and member states are doing little to address systematic issues. The Common Agricultural Policy simply isn’t working.” We can hardly be surprised that member state government are not policing the CAP properly if some of



Headquarters of Agrofert Holding



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Viola von Cramon



© Wikipedia

Mikuláš Peksa

them are creaming off the profit for their personal benefit. That concern is voiced in the article by Mikuláš Peksa, a Czech biophysicist and Pirate Party MEP who is also a Greens/EFA Member of the Budgetary Control Committee, who said: “We have seen in my own country how EU agricultural funds are enriching an entire class of people all the way up to the Prime Minister. There is a systemic lack of transparency in the CAP, both during and after the distribution process.”

On the plus side, despite the vast sums distributed supposedly to aid farmers and agricultural workers to produce healthy food whilst earning an honest living, the cost to EU citizens is low: just €0.30 per day. If you lost 30 eurocents down the back of the sofa you probably wouldn't even bother to look for it. Meanwhile, the European Commission does what it can to keep everything legal and above board. “The Commission works with the certification bodies to ensure that CAP expenditure is implemented in full accordance with the applicable EU and national rules,” says its website. “It audits their work to confirm that management and control systems in the respective EU countries are functioning properly. If potential irregularities in expenditure are detected, the Commission covers the risk of financial losses to the EU budget by applying financial corrections under

the conformity clearance mechanism.” It all sounds very promising, doesn't it? The Pirate Party, a political party allied to the Greens/EFA in the European Parliament, have produced a report of their own that suggests the Commission is not keeping such a tight lid on fraud and corruption as its own website suggests. “The Commission is supposed to be guardian of the treaties, but it is refusing to take proper action against fraud, corruption and misuse in EU agricultural funds. Transparency, accountability and proper scrutiny are essential to building an agricultural system that works for all, instead of enriching a select few.” The report, published in February this year, suggests that the various reforms announced have not had the intended affect. “The report's main findings reveal a system that is more and more based on cash crops,” it says. “As funds are based on the size of the land, incentives are given for higher land and capital concentration and agricultural production. As a result, small family farms are the beneficiaries of only a small proportion of the EU support, whereas bigger agro-conglomerates and bigger companies are receiving the overwhelming majority of CAP funds.”

The report is mainly concerned with the distribution of Common Agricultural Policy funds in Central and Eastern Europe and gives a handy country-by-country breakdown. In Bulgaria, for instance, it states that following the fall of Communism in 1989, the return of land to its former owners was slow. In fact, it took nine years to complete, and it resulted in some of the new tenants buying up tens of thousands of hectares of fertile soil. The largest share, however, is divided among a large number of small owners, many of them urban

dwellers incapable of organising large scale agricultural production, as a result of which a large proportion of it is cultivated not by small land-owners but by large arendatori, land tenants, whose enormous farms have badly affected small farmers and other rural communities. The report claims that the CAP encourages cash crops such as wheat, maize and sunflowers, replacing the vegetables for which the country had once been famous. That, in turn, reduced the demand for labour, leading to unemployment and migration to the towns.

THE LAND OF LOST CONTENT

With more than 5 million hectares under cultivation, cash crops now cover 80% of the land in Bulgaria. According to the EU statistical office Eurostat, 48.6% of the country's land is being cultivated by farm owners with an annual turnover of €500,000. Hardly what you would call ‘small farmers’ then. The report goes on to mention a number of investigative journalists, NGOs and academic researchers in Bulgaria, who made a link between the ‘land oligarchy’ and the skewed distribution of EU agricultural subsidies. “ERI 2016 (the thematic report of the Economic Research Institute) pointed out that the final beneficiaries of the lion's share of the EU AGRI funds in Bulgaria amount to approximately 100 individuals. This number may be tentative and yet it is beyond doubt that some of the richest people in the country are being subsidised via the CAP with millions of euro on an annual basis. This complementary financial flow cements their economic power and enhances their political influence. There are indications that public institutions and agencies secure political and legal comfort for the biggest players.”

In fact, the report finds a lot wrong with the administration of EU agricultural funds in Bulgaria, concluding that: “The system administering EU AGRI funds in Bulgaria displays many unfavourable features, including obstructed flow of information, lack of focused support for small farmers, numerous loopholes for evading the capping of direct payments and providing the biggest players with a comfortable administrative and legal regard.” But it would be wrong to single out Bulgaria for criticism; similar problems exist in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania.



The Greens/EFA tweet on CAP



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In a video published by investigative news outlet Bivol.bg on June 8 2020 Bulgaria's Agriculture Minister Desislava Taneva admitted being aware of fraud in the distribution of EU funds for farmers but is urging all concerned parties to keep this secret as otherwise the funding will be stopped

Let's look at Hungary. After Communist rule ended, land was very cheap and a number of foreign investors tried to purchase it. To prevent a land rush, the government of the time introduced a ban on foreign ownership. But laws like that are made to be broken and cunning lawyers soon found ways to bypass the regulations. The report explains how: "To evade this regulation, so-called pocket contracts became widespread, which meant that the land was formally rented from the new Hungarian owners who did not wish to cultivate it, but this was supplemented by an undisclosed, unregistered ('pocket') agreement that the land would be transferred to the tenant after the end of the ban." Three types of players were then engaged in farming in Hungary:



© Wikipedia

Sándor Fazekas, Minister of Rural Development of Hungary

corporations and large companies, co-operatives and individual farmers. With the liquidation of Communist-style co-operatives, there began a concentration of property ownership. In the most infamous case, the Fidesz government of 1998-2002 sold twelve state-owned farming companies, some of them formerly flagships of the old Socialist economy, to 'politically connected' buyers, circumventing the provisions of the Privatisation Act. The twelve farms became known as 'the dirty dozen'. As a result of these dubious practices, there was little change in the concentration of land ownership and local small-scale and medium-scale farmers are still unable to acquire land. As a result, the report concludes, 2.5% of Hungary's farmers use two thirds of the country's arable land.

Needless to say, the accusations made in the Greens/EFA report have been robustly condemned by Hungary's agriculture ministry.

It called the report a "tsunami of lies" with a "complete disregard for the facts". Euractiv.com reported a statement by the ministry refuting all the allegations of wrongdoing. "Hungary has one of the most stringent and sophisticated monitoring systems in relation to the disbursement of agricultural subsidies," the statement claimed, "which is not only subject to strict accreditation but is also regularly reviewed by the European Commission and the European Court of Auditors." This met with a hostile response, of course, from the Greens/EFA, Euractiv.com reports: "In response to the rebuttal, Green MEP Viola von Cramon, a member of the budgetary control committee, told EURACTIV that the government's statement 'does not contradict a single sentence from our study'. The majority of the CAP funds are getting into the hands of a very few people, and none of these facts were disproved by the Hungarian Ministry," she said.

This comes at a time when Hungary's Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, has been using his large parliamentary majority to transfer as much as he can of the country's infrastructure into the hands of his political allies, seemingly in a bid to cement his position in perpetuity. Even if he loses the next election, the incoming party will be unlikely to secure



© Wikimedia

Viktor Orbán, Prime Minister of Hungary

a sufficient majority to overturn his bid for very long-term (permanent?) control. As for farmers, the New York Times summed it up neatly. Under Communism, farmers toiled in their fields to grow wheat and corn for Socialism.

"Today, their children toil for new overlords, a group of oligarchs and political patrons who have annexed the land through opaque deals with the Hungarian government. They have created a modern twist on a feudal system, giving jobs and aid to the compliant, and punishing the mutinous." Worst of all, says the NYT, "These land barons, as it turns out, are financed and emboldened by the European Union." Across Hungary and much of Central and Eastern Europe, most of the funds from the Common Agricultural Policy go to the well-connected and powerful few. "The prime minister of the Czech Republic collected tens of millions of dollars in subsidies just last year," the paper says. "Subsidies have underwritten Mafia-style land grabs in Slovakia and Bulgaria." Nothing in those countries will be able to return to what it once was before a World War and a lengthy period of Communist rule. As the poet A.E. Housman wrote about the far-off past that he recalled: "That is the land of lost content / I see it shining plain, / The happy highways where I went / And cannot come again." It will take more than EU subsidies to put that right, although it's unlikely that the dreamed-of past was quite as jolly as you (or A.E. Housman) recall.

CLEVER CROOKS; COMPLEX CRIMES

There have been other forms of fraud regarding agriculture; the criminal mind is always inventive. Take Slovakia, for instance, where fraud was detected at the country's agricultural paying agency, PPA, which doles out the EU funds among its beneficiaries. Of 110 cases involving €47-million that were checked by the accountancy firm PwC, 60% of them showed signs of fraud. The findings were announced at a press conference by a PwC spokesperson and Slovakia's Rural Development Minister, Ján Mičovský. Favoured consultants had been paid enormous fees, well above the normal rates, while the financial health of companies benefiting from the payments had been falsely stated, among a number of fraudulent actions. In one case, the purchase price of a combine harvester, which in reality had cost €250,000, had been falsely recorded as €600,000, according to the Ministry's State Secretary, Martin Fecko. The findings so far suggest that the irregularities began back in 2006 when Juraj Kožuch led the PPA. He is now under investigation. The PPA itself has come in for heavy criticism for alleged fraud in its handling of the EU's CAP funds.



© denník.sk

Juraj Kožuch during his arrest. The court described nine cases in which Juraj Kožuch and Martin Kvietik demanded bribes, amounting to €924,000 in three years

However, in a list of countries in which fraud has been perpetrated against the EU budget, Hungary comes way out in front. The EU anti-fraud office is known as OLAF, which stands for Office européen de lutte antifraude (European office for the fight against fraud). In the annual report published in autumn 2020, by far the greatest share of the irregularities it had uncovered for the

period 2015 to 2019 were in Hungary. OLAF carried out 235 investigations into the misuse of both European CAP payments and those under the European Structural Funds and it recommended that the European Commission should recover 0.36% of total funding across all member states due to fraud. However, many EU countries got a totally clean bill of health. Hungary was completely off the scale, with a recommended recovery rate of 3.93%. Compare that with the next highest, Slovakia, where the recommended recovery rate was 0.53%. Next came Portugal with 0.44%, then Germany with 0.38%, right the way down to France at 0.02%, Latvia and Spain with 0.01%, while in Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta and Sweden no recoveries were recommended. Hungary saw 43 investigations by OLAF into funding misuse. The current Hungarian government laid the blame on the policies of the preceding Socialist government.

WELCOME TO MY CLIFF

OLAF has reported that its investigations have been getting more complicated in recent years, largely because individual cases are no longer restricted to one region or even one country. Instead, they stretch across borders, sometimes into third countries. "Organised criminals defraud EU funds and abuse EU and national rules by hiding their tracks and activities around Europe," according to OLAF's 2018 annual report. Their methods make for interesting reading, too. "They skilfully exploit every possibility to try to appropriate EU funds by manipulating procurement procedures, receiving agricultural grants for plots of land they did not farm, or misdeclaring imports to avoid paying customs fees." The Common Agricultural Policy, as the largest cash chest to which the EU holds the key, is a particular target. Italy also came to OLAF's attention with what became known as the "false farmers" case, in which fraudsters submitted aid applications under the names of people who had died, with false lease contracts and by using land that was ineligible for agricultural subsidies. OLAF worked in conjunction with Italian law enforcement agencies and together they uncovered a wide-ranging fraud scheme with possible links to the Mafia. OLAF also found that the same "false farmers" fraud had been used in other countries, too.

France, too, was the setting for a fraudulent attempt to obtain EU funds illegally. "OLAF investigators discovered claims for EU support for large and remote plots of land that were not actually farmed," said the report, "claims for plots of land belonging to other individuals who had not granted appropriate permission, the so-called 'agro-pirate' cases, or for 'ghost-herds', which are animals that were never properly identified and unlikely to exist."



© Olaf

The seat of the European Anti-Fraud Office, in Brussels

OLAF also uncovered claims for EU support for plots of land where no entitlements for farming could be provided by the beneficiary or simply claims for plots that were not even farmed." The ingenuity of the fraudsters is startling. In one case in Corsica, a hairdresser made a claim for land on which he or she wanted to graze animals. Upon investigation, it turned out to be a vertical cliff upon which grazing would have been impossible, even for mountain goats. It wasn't the only such incident. "In the course of one investigation, OLAF discovered that claims were submitted for several years in Corsica for parcels of land in mountainous areas without any suitable infrastructure that would allow for farming, such as access track, water supply, corrals or feeding facilities. Fraudsters also submitted applications for parcels of land despite the fierce opposition of the legitimate owners, or for herds which were not properly tagged or even non-existent."

Italy doesn't get off Scot-free, either. The Mafia has been doing very well out of the Union's largesse in the countryside over an extended period. From 2010 to 2017, for instance, €10-million from EU funds went to 151 farms owned by the Nebrodi family in Sicily, in this case from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). Overall, the fraud involved the theft of €55-billion from the EU. The fraud is so serious (and was so prolonged) that it damaged Italy's rural economy. The suspected perpetrators were arrested, however, and 94 members of various Mafia clans went on trial. According to the 'factcheck.eu' website, each of the suspects had a very specific task, such as finding a field to acquire, 'persuading' farmers to get involved, supplying a figurehead for the purchase or renting of land, supplying forged documents and applying fraudulently for loans. Mafia efforts, the website claims, have helped ensure Italy's agriculture remains backward whilst extracting money that could have helped legitimate farmers.

"Honest farmers have been forced to rent their lands out to local Mafia families," said Vincenza Rando – lawyer and vice-president of Libera, an organisation that promotes the use of land and assets seized from the Mafia to set up local food cooperatives. "They are looking for land loans as they need more lands to get EU funds." The loans were applied for and supplied through the EU's legal system, meaning the money is clean and 'legitimate', even if acquired through fraud. It was industrial-scale fraud: one might imagine that such ingenuity and effort could have been applied to legitimate business and earned as much. Meanwhile, some



OLAF investigators and Member State partners during carousel fraud operation

97 Mafia mobsters and their white-collared assistants are now on trial, accused of crimes ranging from fraud, giving false statements, extortion, creating fake companies for illegal gain, drug pushing and even stealing livestock. It involves 90 lawyers and 1,000 witnesses, according to Politico, and may take a year to complete. The investigating judge described the scam as "a colossal fraud, exploiting the EU funding on a huge scale and to perfection." This is more than just a bit of fiddling to siphon off EU funds. "This is the major new development revealed in this trial: an integrated, organised system" of subsidy fraud, said Italian Senator, Mario Giarusso, long-term anti-Mafia campaigner, who sat in court as the trial began. If found guilty, the defendants face up to 25 years in prison.

The investigators put part of the blame on the complexity of the legislation, which confused the honest and proved to be a goldmine for criminals. There is an old saying: "Promises are like pie crusts; made to be broken". The same is apparently true of laws. OLAF investigators noted an increase in

cases in which several persons and organisations have worked together in order to gain access to EU funds. For instance, OLAF discovered that established agricultural operators in Bulgaria, who were past beneficiaries of EU agricultural funds, attempted to expand their operations and holdings by creating and using new, and seemingly independent, operators. The fraud occurs when an established known operator reaches the limit for the total eligible cost available for EU financial support for his holding or group of holdings. As a result, this operator cannot legitimately obtain further funding to expand his business. Instead, other "independent" entities, which are actually under the control of the initial operator, apply and obtain EU funds. Criminal gangs love the CAP.

EU lawmakers are well aware of the shortcomings in the way the well-meaning Common Agricultural Policy was drafted. Now there are to be reforms, as the European Commission has explained: "On Friday 23 October 2020, the European Parliament adopted its final positions on the various parts of the European Commission's 2018 legislative proposal for the CAP reform post-2020, namely: "Regulation establishing rules on CAP Strategic Plans, horizontal regulation establishing rules on financing, management and monitoring the CAP and regulation establishing rules on Common Market Organisation for agricultural products."

After two and a half years of negotiations on these three pieces of legislation, the EU Council also adopted its position on Wednesday 21 October 2020. However, the



The Messina prosecutor's press conference



The CAP facebook communication

Commission's good intentions were watered down by the centrist political groups in the European Parliament, working in concert for once, and by the European Council. The Commission had wanted a fairer distribution of CAP funds, more ambitious 'green' ambitions and a new delivery model. Not anymore, it seems. As the Heinrich Böll Stiftung wrote in a critique of the long-awaited reforms: "1. Any reform on the distribution of payments might be excluded: ie by removing any mandatory capping to payments or still leaving payments based on land and title ownership, rather than on social and environmental criteria.

2. The green ambition will strongly decrease: by diluting 'environmental spending' with interventions which do not prove to contribute positively to the environment; by excluding 40% of agricultural land subject to make space for nature; by excluding or postponing the mandatory support to 'eco-schemes'.

3. Performance mechanisms are going to be undermined: such as by excluding performance bonus, postponing the performance assessments, trying to reduce the number of target indicators subject to performance review, excluding impact indicators in the performance reviews."

So, business as usual, then? Well, the Heinrich Böll Stiftung fears that the insistence of both the European Council and the European Parliament on a 'laissez-faire' CAP, is unlikely to

meet the demands of the so-called 'Green Deal'. Quite apart from the CAP's virtual invitation to fraud, "In the European Union (EU), the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is failing with respect to biodiversity, climate, soil, land degradation as well as socio-economic challenges," says the Heinrich Böll Stiftung. There has been criticism, too, from the British Ecological Society (BES), although Britain is no longer part of the EU. "We call on the European Commission, Parliament, Council and Member States," it reads, "to use the breadth of scientific knowledge and experiences from past CAP reforms for drastically improving the CAP in order to avoid a policy failure and further ineffective use of taxpayers' money." Among a range of proposals that are almost certain to be ignored, it wants the abolition of coupled payment systems for intensive production that results in high greenhouse gas emissions. With an eye to greenhouse gases again, it wants the CAP to focus more on improved nitrogen fertilizer applications. It wants more done to maintain biodiversity and address environmental challenges. It's quite a list and it includes the sorts of measures the European Commission was hoping to introduce before the big groups in the European Parliament got in the way, together with the Council (member state ministers), preferring to retain the current "nothing-to-see-here, move on" approach. Still, there

are real reforms, finally agreed by EU agriculture ministers in Luxembourg. As Deutsche Welle reported: "Under the new proposal, member states will have a greater level of freedom over how they achieve the agreed-upon goals regarding the conservation of nature, environmental protection and ensuring food quality." It remains to be seen how this "greater level of freedom" will affect the greening of Europe, reducing greenhouse gas emissions and reducing damaging monocultures across Europe's green and pleasant land. The countries will still have to get their plans approved by the European Commission, as well as coming up with new "eco-schemes" that go beyond the existing rules and carrying the possibility of more generous payments.

You will not be surprised that the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament, who were not part of the agreed centrist group decision, are not happy with the outcome. "In 2021, in Europe," they complain on their website, "there are still several cases where major beneficiaries of CAP funds actually decide how to allocate them – huge conflicts of interest. It is notably the case in Czech Republic and in Hungary, where, as outlined in a recent study commissioned by our group, CAP funds have fuelled anti-Semitic, xenophobic and anti-EU oligarch Viktor Orbán, who owns gigantic agro-industrial properties. A well implemented mandatory capping of direct payment, could at least limit their revenue streams and let EU taxpayers' money fund those who feed us instead." You can see why Agriculture Ministers in the Council may not share that view. Will the reformed CAP help the EU to manage its land and ensure its crops prosper? It seems likely that some – probably those rich enough and crafty enough to milk the system – will benefit most. As Virgil wrote in his Georgics number 2, "O fortunatus nimium, sua si bona norint, Agricolas!" ("O farmers excessively fortunate, if only they recognised their blessings!").

James Lookwood



© Gustave Doré

The assassination attempt against Edward I in June 1272

IF YOU PRICK US, DO WE NOT BLEED?

Anti-Semitism continues to confound justice in today's Europe

If anybody thought that the defeat of Hitler's Nazis would bring an end to anti-Semitism in Europe, they were wrong. Just as many African Europeans face colour prejudice and Roma and Sinti people suffer discrimination, a great many Jews still face anti-Semitism on a regular basis. In the past, the Jews practised 'usury' when Christians wouldn't, but that just means that they recognised the need to charge 'rent' on money loaned while Christians (and Muslims) considered it a sin. Now, of course, the banks and finance houses do it and it is a practice that makes it possible to borrow money. One could say it is what make the global economy work. If you are buying a house, and unless you are rolling in cash, you probably go to a reputable financial institution to make the transaction possible. Bankers are not burned at the stake, nor murdered (as the Jews were following the coronation of England's much-lauded Richard the Lionheart on 3 September 1189, some of them in the palace as they handed over their coronation gifts to the king). Hundreds were killed because the king was a religious fanatic who hated anyone who didn't share his views..

Jews remained under suspicion in the decades that followed and in 1290, whilst actually in France and broke, England's Edward 1, who was popularly known as 'Longshanks' and a thoroughly awful individual, issued an edict expelling all Jews from England. Mainly, he wanted their money and valuables to help pay his debts, so not much religious fervour there.

It happened all over Europe; religious bigotry was used as an excuse to remove or murder anyone Jewish. On the aptly named Steep Hill in the city of Lincoln, England, stands a beautiful

12th century building still known as the Jew's House, formerly Aaron the Jew's House, which was part of the thriving Jewish community in Lincoln until the expulsions of 1290. Aaron himself was a financier and probably the wealthiest man in England at the time. Oddly, he specialised in funding the building of monasteries and religious buildings, including at least nine Cistercian abbeys. He clearly had no religious prejudices where business was concerned. Today his former house is a restaurant and well worth a visit for its historic beauty and interest. It was clear to Europe's Jews throughout mediaeval times that the Christians

didn't like them, but they did need them: usury – lending money with interest – is an essential element of any economy, whatever the Christians believed. It is also against Sharia law, of course, where it is called 'riba', which means increase, so other ways have been found by Islamic banks to make loans that are 'Sharia-compliant'. It must have been worth the Jews' while in Mediaeval times to continue to live in Europe and suffer the hatred they faced from neighbours. Where else could they go anyway?

In Shakespeare's play, *The Merchant of Venice*, the Jewish moneylender,



© Illustrator unknown

Shylock



© Nrf

Antonio

Shylock, expresses his own puzzlement at the attitudes of the Christians to his people. "Signior Antonio," he says to the man who is – for want of a better word – the 'hero' of the play, "many a time and oft/ In the Rialto you have rated me/ About my moneys and my usances:/ Still have I borne it with a



© Lord Michael Cashman

Michael Cashman

patient shrug,/ For sufferance is the badge of all our tribe./ You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog,/ And spit upon my Jewish gaberdine,/ And all for the use of that which is my own."

The play is based rather more on Antonio's hatred and contempt for Jews, whilst still relying on their financial services, than it is on Shylock's demand for "A pound of flesh, to be by him cut off/ Nearest the merchant's heart" for defaulting on the debt. He doesn't get it, of course, and to please a 16th century audience, Shylock is compelled at the end to accept baptism into the Christian faith as a justly punished villain. But Shylock's description of his ill treatment at the hands of the play's 'good' merchants suggests that Shakespeare himself had some sympathy for the plight of Jews. Once, in conversation with the British actor-turned-MEP, Michael Cashman, now in the UK's House of Lords, he told me how, while playing Antonio he had, on stage, worn gloves to shake hands with Shylock while sealing the deal, and then ostentatiously wiped his gloved hand afterwards, all to convey the character's contempt for Jews and his belief that they were in some way 'unclean'.

Shylock mentioning how Antonio had, on previous occasions, spat at him again makes me suspect Shakespeare sympathised. Given that background, Shylock's determination to see Antonio dead is hardly surprising. Antonio is clearly a racist and not at all a nice man, hero or not, even if he is supposed to be doing it to help a friend.

KIND? CONSIDERATE? INTOLERANT?

Think it's all OK now that we're more civilised and urbane? Think again. I have no idea why, but anti-Semitism is alive and well, especially in France, it seems. There have, over the years, been various incidents of Jewish gravestones being spray-painted with swastikas, but I suspect the perpetrators are not genuine Nazis, just rather dim, unpleasant youths who would spray pictures of flowers instead if they thought they would cause more offence. This sort of brainless thuggery is never going to be expunged from society, I fear. However, the case of Sarah Halimi and her killer gives cause

for concern. Ms. Halimi was a 65-year-old Orthodox Jewish woman, thrown from the balcony of her third-floor Paris apartment in the Belleville area by her neighbour, 27-year-old Kobili Traoré, who chanted verses from the Koran while doing so, shouting "Allahu Akbar" – God is Great – in Arabic as she fell to her death. He has admitted the killing, which took place in 2017, but is not to be put on trial.

Traoré is currently in a specialised unit of a psychiatric hospital and looks likely to stay there for a while. France's highest courts, including the Cour de Cassation, have confirmed that he will not stand trial because he was going through a "delirious episode", the result of years of cannabis abuse, and was therefore not responsible for his actions. The victim's family have argued that the same rules should apply as if he'd been drunk at the time.



© Halimi family

Sarah Halimi



© Nrf

Kobili Traoré

After all, he took cannabis of his own volition and, incidentally, in contravention of the Qur'an, which is fairly unforgiving on the subject of intoxication. Chapter 5, verse 90 states that: "Intoxicants, gambling, idolatry, and divining arrows are an abomination of Satan's handiwork. So avoid that so that you may be

successful.” You’ll note that it doesn’t forbid alcohol, it is not “haram” (forbidden), although it and any form of intoxication should be avoided. However, pious Muslims who even avoid prescribed medicines or cosmetics containing alcohol could be accused of pride, which is considered an unforgivable sin. On the other hand, the Qur’an warns against prayer while under the influence of anything that affects the brain. Clearly, while Traoré was muttering Qur’anic verses and simultaneously killing Sarah Halimi, he was under the influence of cannabis, so if nothing else he was committing a sin. After all, Islam, Judaism and Christianity all spring from the same root, making them what are called ‘Abrahamic’ faiths. In the second Sura of the Qur’an it is written: “Surely they that believe, and those of Jewry, and the Christians, and those Sabaeans, whoso believe in God and the Last Day, and work righteousness – their wage awaits them with the Lord, and no fear shall be on them neither shall they sorrow.” The Sabaeans, by the way, were a Semitic group who founded the city of Saba. They were Arabian but their faith doesn’t quite align with other major Abrahamic faiths, although it seems to have been respected by Muslims.

Obviously, the fact that Traoré was committing a sin against Sharia law is no consolation to the victim’s family and is a matter to be taken up with his Imam. The victim’s sister has pointed out that if Traoré had merely been drunk he would have faced trial for murder. The lawyers of the victim’s family have drawn attention to the fact that Traoré took drugs of his own

volition. No-one forced him to get high and off his head. That argument has been repeated by others in France, by no means all of them Jewish. On 25 April this year, huge crowds gathered on the Trocadero Plaza, just in from of the Eiffel Tower, to denounce the decision of France’s highest court that Traoré could not be held criminally responsible and that he could not therefore go on trial. They had been urged to turn up by a number of Jewish organisations.

The Cour de Cassation admitted that Traoré was clearly motivated by anti-Semitism, but it also stated that if someone committed a crime whilst in what it called a “delirious state” they cannot be sent for trial, a decision that has caused outrage across France, despite their agreement that his mental state had been caused by his persistent and long-term use of cannabis. It’s perhaps not quite so shocking as it may first appear. Under French law, people cannot be held criminally responsible for any actions they commit having fully lost their judgement or self-control due to a psychiatric disorder. Traoré may be in a psychiatric hospital but is he really mad? President Emmanuel Macron is not convinced. He told *Le Figaro* newspaper that “Deciding to take narcotics and then ‘going mad’ should not, in my view, remove your criminal responsibility.” Macron also used the interview to express his support for the victim’s family, while France’s Justice Minister, Eric Dupond-Moretti has said that he plans to plug what he called ‘a legal vacuum’ in French law over the voluntary use of narcotics and their consequences.

GETTING LOW, GETTING HIGH

Drugs remain a major issue in Europe, not just in France. According to a report by the Organisation in Europe for Cooperation and Development (OECD) there is heavy use of narcotic substances. “Almost a third of adults in the European Union aged 15-64, or around 97 million people, have used illicit drugs at some point in their lives, with the experience of drug use being more frequently reported by men than women.” Cannabis remains the go-to drug of choice but there are others, the report says: “some have also used cocaine, ecstasy



François-Michel Lambert, French member of parliament, brandishing a marijuana joint on the floor of the National Assembly, to denounce the criminalization of cannabis and calling for a policy change

(MDMA), amphetamines, and other drugs, (according to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction or EMCDDA, 2020). The use of illicit drugs, particularly among people who use them regularly and heavily, is associated with higher risks of cardiovascular diseases, mental health problems, accidents, as well as infectious diseases such as HIV when the drug is injected. Illicit drug use is a major cause of preventable mortality among young people in Europe.” Ask the people of Dundee, Scotland’s fourth largest city with a population of around 150,000. It also has the unenviable reputation of being “the drug death capital of Europe”. In 2017 there were 57 drug-related deaths: more than one a week. It’s the worst record in Europe. However, it doesn’t seem to be the traditional drugs that are killing off the population; it’s a mixture of alcohol and benzodiazepines, a group of especially strong tranquilizers, often prescribed by doctors for things like insomnia, anxiety and panic attacks. But they’re also available on street corners and in pubs and clubs. Dundee is a university city, after all, and not far from the much larger university cities of Edinburgh and Glasgow, so there is no shortage of young potential customers to target. ‘Benzos’, as they’re known, accounted for 1 in 2 of the deaths in 2017.

These drugs, although they’re tranquilizers like diazepam (also known as Valium) have been getting stronger. In an article in *Vice UK*, Doctor Andrew McAuley at Glasgow Caledonian University said that after a phase in which Phanezepam



The Cour de Cassation in Paris



Doctor Andrew McAuley

was the drug of choice, it has now been replaced by Etizolam, which he described as “a really bad drug, much stronger, with a much shorter half-life.” It was implicated in 229 deaths in Scotland in 2017. McAuley told Vice UK that “people simply don’t know what they’re taking. We’ve seen (from police seizures) that pills share the same, or similar, branding to diazepam tablets, something that’s pretty much ubiquitous across the country.” It is reported to be “ludicrously easy” to get hold of the pills. The dealers and pushers approach people in the middle of the day in the town centre, it’s claimed, while Etizolam can be bought for £1 (€1.15) per tablet, sometimes less. None of this in any way excuses violence against people of different ethnic origin or faith, however ‘high’ the perpetrator.

DWINDLING NUMBERS, DWINDLING EFFECT

For several decades across Europe the Jewish population has been in decline, and according to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), four out of ten young Jewish people aged between 16 and 34 are considering emigrating. They still feel unwelcome, even after the defeat of the monstrous Nazis with their deadly anti-Semitism. Just over 80% of those surveyed by the FRA report that anti-Semitism is a problem in their country and believe it has got worse over the last five years. The Internet is a popular place for those who want to discredit, insult or threaten Jews, but they say it’s bad in the street, too, with many choosing not to wear any symbols of their faith. A shocking 4 % of the young Jewish Europeans who took part in the survey said they had

experienced “a physical antisemitic attack in the previous year, and about half of these were not reported to the police or any other authority.” Many of these incidents were perpetrated by a ‘teenager or group of teenagers’, or a ‘colleague from work or school/college’.

According to the report, 56% of those surveyed were at school or university during the preceding year and there was one finding that resonates unpleasantly with the killing of Sarah Halimi: “in many cases, antisemitism has a distinctly ideological flavour: young Jews report that one third of all cases of antisemitic harassment, and over half of the cases of antisemitic violence they have experienced in the past year, were perpetrated by ‘someone with a Muslim extremist view.’” The survey was the second in a series and focused on the experiences and perceptions of antisemitism among young Jews living in twelve EU Member States – Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. It was the largest study ever conducted among Jews in Europe and was undertaken by a consortium of the UK-based Institute for Jewish Policy Research and the international research agency, Ipsos.

Michael O’Flaherty, Director of the FRA writes in a foreword to the survey that: “The young Jews surveyed indicated encountering harassment at higher rates than older generations: 44 % say they were targeted at least once in the year before the survey. Yet startlingly few report such incidents, with 80 % opting not to do so. To protect themselves, many avoid wearing or carrying items that may



Michael O’Flaherty, Director of the FRA

identify them as Jewish.” And yet to offer unprovoked violence to anyone based on their Jewishness is clearly against the Qur’an and against Sharia Law. What we are witnessing would seem to be simple tribalism.

The question of “why” is something that has disturbed EU lawmakers, who have tried to outlaw anti-Semitism. The Public condoning, gross trivialisation or denial of the Holocaust are illegal. In particular, the European Commission’s website states that: “negationism can be considered as a specific manifestation of antisemitism since it both constitutes a denial of the Holocaust, and an incitement to hatred against the Jewish community. Denying crimes against humanity and disputing the existence of clearly established historical events do not constitute scientific or historical research and shall be considered incitement to hatred towards Jews, as laid down by case-law of the European Court for Human Rights.”

Furthermore, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen wrote: “Antisemitism is a poison for our community. It is up to all to fight it, to prevent it and to eradicate it. The fight against antisemitism is as much for every other part of our community as it is for Jewish people. It is one which must be led at local, regional, national and European level. We must all do our part. The Jewish community is not alone.” Unfortunately, it sometimes has reason to feel alone.

ANTI-SEMITISM IS A DIRTY WORD – LET’S IGNORE IT

There are plenty of examples of perpetrators being let off with very light sentences for acts that could only realistically be recorded as ‘anti-Semitic’. In the German town of Wuppertal in 2014, for example, three Palestinians were given suspended sentences for attempting to burn down a synagogue. The court decided the act was ‘anti-Israeli’ but not ‘anti-Semitic’. In December 2017, three young people threw a Molotov cocktail at a synagogue in Gothenburg, causing twenty or so young people to seek safety in the cellar, but although a Gaza-born Palestinian was told he would be deported after a 2-year prison term for committing the



Abdoe Khouilani

© The Hague Municipality

attack, this part of his sentence was overturned on appeal because it “could put him in danger from Israel”. Also in Sweden, threats from neo-Nazis caused the Jewish community of Umea to be dissolved, a unique result in an EU country, and the city of Malmö is considered “the capital of European anti-Semitism”, according to the Jerusalem Post.

In the Netherlands, a visit by schoolchildren to the Dutch parliament was marred by a comment from a Muslim member of the municipal council chamber, who described the students as “Zionist terrorists in training” and “future child murderers and occupiers”. A case brought against the man, Abdoe Khouilani, was dismissed because, the judge said, “his remarks did not constitute incitement to hate”. It seems as if the EU, whilst well-meaning, needs to define the various terms in play here more precisely.

Anti-Semitism is an issue that simply won't go away. The FRA report says that 65% of French Jews see it as a problem, way ahead of the other countries surveyed. 43% of Germans and Belgians also see anti-Semitism as an issue. I used to take a tram ride through Strasbourg from my hotel, near the station, to the European Parliament or the Council of Europe, my journey taking me past a synagogue that now requires concrete barriers to protect it from car bombs, while barbed wire is much in evidence, just as it once was at the Nazi death camps. France was identified in the FRA survey as having the biggest problem with anti-Semitism. But the report also highlights what it calls “vicious commentary” on the internet, in

the media and at school and work. The day the report was published, Italian police reported having to investigate the thefts of 20 memorial plaques dedicated to a Jewish family murdered in the Holocaust.

A faster response to hate posts on the internet may help and in April the European Parliament voted through a report that introduces, among other things, the ‘one-hour rule’, which demands that the most dangerous content is removed as soon as possible after publication.

It's the proposal of Polish MEP Patryk Jaki of the European Conservatives and Reformers group, who writes that: “Today, the Internet has become the main haven for terrorists. This phenomenon even intensified during the pandemic lockdown. It can be seen especially in the example of social media – for example, in 2020 Facebook removed over 43-million posts containing terrorist content, which was twice as many as the year before.” Of course, it was not purely to deal with anti-Semitism that the regulation was formulated, it was to tackle terrorist cells, but it may help indirectly with anti-Semitism. Incidentally, Poland comes fourth in the FRA survey of places where Jewish people fear anti-Semitism, with 39% saying they do. We cannot forget two facts, however: Poland is staunchly both Christian and very conservative. It was also where Auschwitz murdered many thousands of Jews, along with Roma and Sinti people, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses and anyone out of the mainstream. 75 years after the Holocaust the fears of today's Jewish population are an awful indictment of European intolerance and prejudice.



Patryk Jaki

© Wikipedia

Overall, nine in 10 (89 %) respondents in the 2018 FRA survey feel that antisemitism increased in their country in the five years preceding the survey; more than 85 % consider it to be a serious problem. Respondents tend to rate antisemitism as the biggest social or political problem where they live. They assess antisemitism as being most problematic on the internet and on social media (89 %), followed by public spaces (73 %), media (71 %) and in political life (70 %). Being Jewish does not necessarily mean being very religious. Only one in seven European Jews define themselves as regular attendees at the synagogue. According to the FRA report, however, in most cases, the respondents' Jewishness is important to them. Given the opportunity to self-assess the strength of their Jewish identities on a scale of one to ten (where 1 = weak and 10 = strong), over half scored 9 or 10, and four in five scored seven or more. Young Jewish Europeans did not differ from 35-59-year-olds or those aged 60-plus in this regard – the scores for all three groups were strikingly similar, says the report.

It seems that their fears are well-founded, with anti-Semitism on the increase across the entire EU. Could this mean a return of Nazi ideology? Nobody really knows, but it seems to be cropping up in the most unlikely places. Time Magazine, for instance, reports an incident in the seemingly sleepy mediaeval Swedish town of Lund, with its cobbled street and ancient buildings, where an elderly Jewish professor returned to her car after a working day to find a threat written on a piece of paper and slipped under the windscreen wiper. It called her “a filthy Jewish swine” and bore the logo of Sweden's home-grown neo-Nazi group, the Nordic Resistance Movement. She lived in fear for days, careful to scan the street before venturing out of her home. There were more threatening notes to follow and eventually someone broke into her home and set fire to it. Fortunately, she was out at the time, although the fire destroyed her living room and dining room, together with the writings of her long-dead mother, detailing her experiences in a Nazi concentration camp. The professor had to go for therapy to recover, says



© Wikimedia/Peter Isotalo

Nordic Resistance Movement demonstration

Time. It is unknown how had she attracted such hate. Had one of her students, perhaps, been a member of this Nazi gang and been given low marks by her? Could this have been an act of personal revenge? Perhaps, but hatred of Jews and Judaism is a continent-wide phenomenon that the European Council, Commission and Parliament have been trying to address. But a worryingly large proportion of Europeans seem predisposed to hate 'others' – those of a different, race, ethnicity or religious identity, with Jewish people the most likely to be targeted.

RACISM THRIVES

Many of those questioned about anti-Semitic acts say they are reacting to the policies and actions of Israel. They do not, however, attack citizens of, say, Russia, Iran or Turkey, despite reports of abuses by those countries. It seems that Jews are especially singled out for attack with their homeland – even if they have never visited it – being blamed as the cause. But it doesn't wash: the attacks on Jewish people are not the result of Binyamin Netanyahu's actions, now or in the past. They makes no sense. I am reminded of the famous words of Shylock in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, when he points out to Salerio, one of Antonio's friends, the similarities

between Jew and gentile: "If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you/ tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we/ not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If/ we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that." The victims of today's anti-Semitic attacks have little chance of "revenge", of getting their own back, and not just because they're tricked by a crafty lawyer, as Shylock is.

But there are differences, of course, that Shylock fails to mention. Differences in religious practice, for instance. With the start of Passover in March – the commemoration of freedom from slavery under Egypt's Pharaohs, many European Jews



© Wikipedia

Prime Minister of Israel, Binyamin Netanyahu

found it hard to obtain truly kosher meat, which requires animals to be killed with a slash to the throat with a sharp knife, incising the trachea and oesophagus and without prior stunning, a practice banned in some European countries. The argument over whether or not ritual killing without stunning the animal first constitutes cruelty to animals is continuing. But these are points that mainly concern more pious Jews and Muslims who want to observe all the ordinances of their faiths. The continuing attacks on Jews and on synagogues is another matter but also a major issue of concern for all Europeans. There is an interesting line in the last fantasy novel to be written by the late Terry Pratchett, "Raising Steam", which concerns inter-racial conflict and in which the fictional head of police, Commander Sam Vimes, says: "That's the trouble, you see. When you've had hatred on your tongue for such a long time, you don't know how to spit it out." The ruling that Traoré cannot stand trial for the killing of Sarah Halimi has drawn criticism from a wide range of people, including the French President, Emmanuel Macron, who would like to see a change in the law.

It may not be the end of the matter. Sarah Halimi's sister, Esther Lekover is seeking justice through Israeli criminal law, which can apply to anti-Semitic crimes committed in other countries. But that would require the extradition of Traoré, and France does not expedite its citizens. Esther Lekover's lawyers said in a statement that they "deplore being forced to expedite this procedure, but they cannot accept a denial of justice which offends reason and fairness far beyond the Jewish community of France." Their action, however, whilst drawing attention to the decision not to try the self-confessed killer is unlikely to set him before a court. "If you wrong us, shall we not revenge?" asks Shylock. Apparently not, whatever Macron and the rest of the EU may say.

Anthony James

SERIOUS AND ORGANISED CRIME IN THE EU: A CORRUPTING INFLUENCE

Europol publishes its Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment 2021

Europol has just published the European Union (EU) Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment, the EU SOCTA 2021. The SOCTA, published by Europol every four years, presents a detailed analysis of the threat of serious and organised crime facing the EU. The SOCTA is a forward-looking assessment that identifies shifts in the serious and organised crime landscape.

The SOCTA 2021 details the operations of criminal networks in the EU and how their criminal activities and business practices threaten to undermine our societies, economy and institutions, and slowly erode the rule of law. The report provides unprecedented insights into Europe's criminal underworld based on the analysis of thousands of cases and pieces of intelligence provided to Europol. The SOCTA reveals a

concerning expansion and evolution of serious and organised crime in the EU. The document warns of the potential long-term implications of the COVID-19 pandemic and how these may create ideal conditions for crime to thrive in the future. The report clearly highlights serious and organised crime as the key internal security challenge currently facing the EU and its Member States.

Launched at the Portuguese Police's headquarters (Policia Judiciária) in Lisbon during the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the SOCTA 2021 is the most comprehensive and in-depth study of serious and organised crime in the EU ever undertaken.

THE MOST PRESSING INTERNAL SECURITY THREAT TO THE EU

EU citizens enjoy some of the highest levels of prosperity and security in the world. However, the EU still faces serious challenges to its internal security, threatening to undo some of our common achievements and undermine shared European values and ambitions. As the EU is facing the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the most significant crises since the end of World War II, criminals seek to exploit this extraordinary situation targeting citizens, businesses, and public institutions alike.

The analysis presented in the SOCTA 2021 highlights key characteristics of serious and organised crime such as the widespread use of corruption, the infiltration and exploitation of legal business structures for all types of criminal activity, and the existence of a parallel underground financial system that allows criminals to move and invest their multi-billion euro profits.

Serious and organised crime encompasses a diverse range of criminal phenomena ranging from the trade in illegal drugs to crimes such as migrant smuggling and the trafficking in human beings, economic and financial crime and many more.

Key findings of the SOCTA 2021:

- Serious and organised crime has never posed as high a threat to the EU and its citizens as it does today.
- The COVID-19 pandemic and the potential economic and social fallout expected to follow threaten to create ideal conditions for organised crime to spread and take hold in the EU and beyond. Once more confirmed by the pandemic, a key characteristic of criminal networks is their agility in adapting to and capitalising on changes in the environment in which they operate. Obstacles become criminal opportunities.
- Like a business environment, the core of a criminal network is composed of managerial layers and field operators. This core is surrounded by a range of actors linked to the crime infrastructure providing support services.
- With nearly 40 percent of the criminal networks active in drugs trafficking, the production and trafficking of drugs remains the largest criminal business in the EU.
- The trafficking and exploitation of human beings, migrant smuggling, online and offline frauds and property crime pose significant threats to EU citizens.
- Criminals employ corruption. Almost 60% of the criminal networks reported engage in corruption.
- Criminals make and launder billions of euros annually. The scale and



complexity of money laundering activities in the EU have previously been underestimated. Professional money launderers have established a parallel underground financial system and use any means to infiltrate and undermine Europe's economies and societies.

- Legal business structures are used to facilitate virtually all types of criminal activity with an impact on the EU. More than 80% of the criminal networks active in the EU use legal business structures for their criminal activities.

- The use of violence by criminals involved in serious and organised crime in the EU appears to have increased in terms of the frequency of use and its severity. The threat from violent incidents has been augmented by the frequent use of firearms or explosives in public spaces.

- Criminals are digital natives. Virtually all criminal activities now feature some online component and many crimes have fully migrated online. Criminals exploit encrypted communications to network among each other, use social media and instant messaging services to reach a larger audience to advertise illegal goods, or spread disinformation.

and organised crime and terrorism and to tackle the threat the EU is confronted with. Therefore, at a time of transition to the new EMPACT cycle 2022-2025, SOCTA 2021 is of particular relevance in identifying priorities for the operational response to these phenomena".



Europol's Executive Director Catherine De Bolle

Europol's Executive Director Catherine De Bolle: "With the launch of the SOCTA 2021, Europol has harnessed its position as the nerve centre of the EU's internal security architecture with its platforms, databases, and services connecting law enforcement authorities across the EU and beyond. The intelligence picture and assessment presented in the SOCTA 2021 is a stark reminder of the dynamic and adaptable adversary we face in serious and organised crime in the EU."

Member States. The complexity of the modern criminal business models was exposed in 2020 when French and Dutch authorities supported by Europol and Eurojust dismantled EncroChat; an encrypted phone network used by criminal networks. Organised crime groups are professional and highly adaptable as shown during the COVID-19 pandemic. We must support law enforcement to keep up, offline and online, to follow the digital trail of criminals."



Minister of Internal Affairs, Eduardo Cabrita: "The EU's Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA 2021), produced by Europol, constitutes an important instrument for affirming the European police partnership. It allows police action to go from pursuing criminal facts and minimising their impact, to anticipating trends in the criminal landscape. By placing intelligence at the service of security, we enable police to be more pro-active and efficient in tackling crime."

The SOCTA 2021 assists decision-makers in the prioritisation of serious and organised crime threats. It is a product of close cooperation between Europol, EU Member States law enforcement authorities, third parties such as EU agencies, international organisations, and countries outside the EU with working arrangements with Europol. These crucial stakeholders' involvement is also reflected in the SOCTA's role as the cornerstone of the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT) in the EU.



Francisca Van Dunem, Minister of Justice of Portugal

Portugal's Minister for Justice, Francisca Van Dunem: "The strengthening of the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice requires us all to build a Europe where citizens feel safe, free and protected, a Europe that promotes justice for all, ensuring respect for human rights and protecting victims of crime. Cooperation and information sharing are essential to combat serious



Ylva Johansson, European Commissioner for Home Affairs

Ylva Johansson, European Commissioner for Home Affairs: "The 2021 SOCTA report clearly shows that organised crime is a truly transnational threat to our societies. 70% of criminal groups are active in more than three



© Frontex

OPERATION 30 DAYS AT SEA 3.0 REVEALS 1,600 MARINE POLLUTION OFFENCES WORLDWIDE

Frontex took active part in Operation 30 Days at Sea, which was globally coordinated by Interpol. As part of the operation aimed at detecting environmental crime, Frontex planes and vessels monitored nearly 1 000 vessels. The operation's tactical phase included the detection of 1,600 marine pollution offences, often triggering fines and follow-up investigations around the globe.

Thousands of suspects, companies and criminal networks engaged in maritime pollution have been detected and investigated in a global INTERPOL-led operation.

Operation 30 Days at Sea 3.0 (1-31 March) saw simultaneous action by 300 agencies across 67 countries resulting in an unprecedented 34,000 inspections at sea and inland waterways, coastal areas and ports to detect marine pollution violations.

Frontline action followed five months of intelligence collection and analysis, enabling the identification of specific hotspots and suspects behind the

criminal, deliberate pollution of the world's waterways.

Preliminary results from the operation's tactical phase included the detection of 1,600 marine pollution offences, often triggering fines and follow-up investigations across all continents. These include:

- Nearly 500 illegal acts of pollution committed at sea, including oil discharges, illegal shipbreaking and sulphur emissions from vessels;
- 1,000 pollution offences in coastal areas and in rivers, including illegal discharges of sewage, mercury, plastics, and other contaminants, leading to serious water contamination which flows into the oceans;
- 130 cases of waste trafficking through ports.

By using INTERPOL's wide range of databases and analytical capabilities, countries were able to connect pollution crime with other serious offences such as fraud, corruption, tax evasion, money laundering, piracy, and illegal fishing.

With surveillance down, criminals are seizing opportunities

With many enforcement resources being reassigned to tackle the pandemic, criminals have been quick to exploit growing vulnerabilities in environmental security and reduced risk of detection.

Authorities in Indonesia detected 65 oil spills and detained two vessels which tried to evade detection by turning off geolocation systems and concealing their national flags.

A major criminal network trafficking plastic waste between Europe and Asia was exposed, triggering cooperation between authorities from both regions. So far, 22 suspects have been arrested and thousands of tonnes of waste have been prevented from being illegally shipped to Asia, where it would have likely been dumped, contaminating soils and generating considerable marine litter.

Several countries from Europe, Asia and Africa reported illegal shipments of contaminated or mixed metal waste falsely declared as metal scraps. In one

case, the Italian Coast Guard seized and prevented 11,000 tonnes of metal scraps mixed with plastic, rubber, mineral oil and other contaminants from being loaded onto bulk carriers headed for Turkey. Namibia, the Philippines and Croatia also reported cases of illegal waste shipments from Europe.

Growing trends included COVID-19 disposable items such as masks and gloves, with 13 cases involving medical waste opened as a result of the operation.

With the value of gold on the rise, agencies across Africa, Central and South America worked to track illegal mining, which often results in devastating contamination due to mercury discharges.



Interpol Secretary General, Jürgen Stock

INTERPOL Secretary General Jürgen Stock said: “The threat of pollution crime is constantly evolving, endangering the air we breathe, our water and soil. Although this is the third edition of 30 Days at Sea, it is never the same exercise.

“It is thanks to a global yet agile network that we have seen the number of inspections more than double since the first edition: a clear sign that the international community will not stand for criminal attacks on our environment.”

INTERPOL will assist member countries in their follow-up operations and intelligence analysis with support from its Pollution Crime Working Group.

Joining forces for greater impact

With INTERPOL's Environmental Security Programme coordinating the operation globally, Europol and FRONTEX (European Border and Coast Guard Agency) provided crucial support by coordinating the European



Europol Executive Director Catherine De Bolle

leg of 30 Days at Sea 3.0, as part of the EMPACT action plan on environmental crime.

Europol's Executive Director Catherine De Bolle said: “Marine pollution is a serious threat, which endangers not only the environment but our health and in the long run our global economy. Criminals do not care about the environment; they do not think of tomorrow, but only of increasing their profits on the back of our society. Consolidated law enforcement efforts such as 30 Days at Sea are critical to tackle these borderless crimes and protect our environmental heritage for generations to come.”

“Environmental crime is one of many criminal activities Frontex targets as part of our mission as the European Border and Coast Guard Agency. This is our contribution to the protection of the environment. I'm proud that, as part of 30 Days at Sea, Frontex aerial and maritime assets monitored nearly 1 000 vessels,” said Frontex Executive Director Fabrice Leggeri.



Frontex Executive Director Fabrice Leggeri

All three editions of Operation 30 Days at Sea have been carried out with funding from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad).

Participating countries

Participating countries: Angola, Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Benin, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, China, Cote d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cyprus, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Fiji, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guatemala, Guinea Bissau, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kenya, Kuwait, Latvia, Liberia, Malaysia, Maldives, Malta, Namibia, Netherlands, Nigeria, Norway, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Tanzania, Thailand, Timor Leste, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay, Vietnam, Zimbabwe

Source : Frontex





© EBRD

The New Safe Confinement at Chernobyl

CHERNOBYL: THE NEXT PHASE

At 01:23:40 on 26 April 1986, the failure of a routine test at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant in Ukraine, then part of the Soviet Union, caused reactor 4 to explode, releasing parts of its radioactive core. It was the worst nuclear accident the world had ever seen, with far-reaching political, economic and ecological consequences. Thirty-five years on, Chernobyl is still as well-known as it was a generation ago.

Fires broke out, causing the main release of radioactivity into the environment. Wind carried contaminated particles over Ukraine, Belarus and Russia, as well as parts of Scandinavia and wider Europe. The 50,000 inhabitants of the adjacent town of Pripyat were evacuated, never to return.

The accident destroyed reactor 4, killing 30 operators and firemen within three months and causing numerous other deaths in weeks and months that followed. To this day, it remains the only accident in the history of the civil

use of nuclear power when radiation-related fatalities occurred. The precise number of short- and longer-term victims remains heavily disputed.

By 06:35 on 26 April, all fires at the power plant had been extinguished, apart from the fire inside reactor 4, which continued to burn for many days. Some 5,000 tonnes of boron, dolomite, sand, clay and lead were dropped from helicopters in a bid to extinguish the blaze. When the destroyed reactor was later enclosed in a provisional structure – the so-called sarcophagus – these fuel-containing materials were also walled in.

The sarcophagus was built under extremely hazardous conditions and unprecedented time pressure. By November 1986, a steel and concrete shelter was in place to lock away the radioactive substances inside the ruined reactor building and to act as a radiation shield. It was always intended as a temporary measure, with an estimated lifespan of 20-30 years.

The search for a long-term solution started soon after, alongside the massive challenge of cleaning up the accident site. By the end of 1991, the Soviet Union had dissolved and newly independent Ukraine had been left with the Chernobyl legacy. Following a G7 Action Plan to improve nuclear safety in central and eastern Europe, the Nuclear Safety Account was set up at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) in 1993. Two years later, the scope of the programme was extended to include Chernobyl.

A breakthrough came with the Shelter Implementation Plan in 1997, which provided a road map of how to tackle the immediate and longer-term tasks. In the same year, the G7 officially invited the EBRD to set up and manage the Chernobyl Shelter Fund, which became the main vehicle for all efforts to ensure that the destroyed reactor 4 remained in an environmentally safe and secure state.

Emergency repairs in 1998 and 1999 prevented the imminent collapse of the sarcophagus, as well as a vent stack that was endangering the adjacent turbine hall over reactor 3, which was still in operation. It was only at the end of 2000 that all nuclear power generation in Chernobyl ceased. The following year saw a landmark decision to build an arch-shaped steel structure, called the New Safe Confinement (NSC), to seal off reactor 4.

In the subsequent years, several tasks were carried out simultaneously. Detailed technical work on the NSC started. The site had to be stabilised and prepared for the construction work. The first project the EBRD managed was the construction of a liquid radioactive waste treatment plant (LRTP) to handle some 35,000 cubic metres of low- and intermediate-level liquid waste at the site. Meanwhile, the safe storage of the spent fuel assemblies from reactors 1, 2 and 3 came into focus.

All this has been achieved. The LRTP has been operational since 2014. A new interim storage facility for the treatment and storage of spent fuel has been built and, after successful hot tests, is currently awaiting a permanent licence from the Ukrainian regulator. The NSC, the most visible Chernobyl project, was slid into position in late 2016 and then handed over to the Ukrainian authorities.

In total, the Bank has managed close to €2 billion in donor funds through the Chernobyl Shelter Fund and Nuclear Safety Account. Of this, the EBRD provided €715 million of its own resources to complete the Interim Storage Facility and New Safe Confinement.

Today, the New Safe Confinement dominates the skyline over Chernobyl, as the sarcophagus once did. The steel structure is 108 metres high and 162 metres long, with a span of 257 metres and a lifetime of at least 100 years. It was assembled in two stages in a cleaned area near the accident site and, despite its size and weight of 36,000 tonnes, was pushed 327 metres into position. It is the largest moveable structure ever built.

This is not where the story ends, however. The fact that the NSC has a lifespan of 100 years means that the next phase of work now has to be planned, agreed and implemented. The estimated 200 tonnes of radioactive nuclear fuel inside reactor 4 are now shielded by the New Safe Confinement. However, parts of the sarcophagus are becoming unstable and will have to be removed at some point. Once this is done, work will come closer to the reactor's interior.

The EBRD remains a key partner in these efforts. Following a request by Ukraine, in November 2020, the Bank established the new International Chernobyl Co-Operation Account, aimed at creating an integrated plan for the site to serve as the basis for developing and implementing longer-term projects. The new fund will hold its first assembly meeting on Tuesday – fittingly one day after the 35th anniversary. The Chernobyl story continues.

Source : [ebrd.com/Axel Reiserer](https://ebrd.com/Axel-Reiserer)

CHNPP WILL SOON START COMMERCIAL OPERATION OF ISF-2

The State Nuclear Regulatory Inspectorate of Ukraine has granted the SSE Chornobyl NPP an operating license for the nuclear facility, thus authorizing the load of spent nuclear fuel into the dry storage systems.

This became possible following successful «cold» and «hot» testing carried out at the facility, elimination of faults noted in the comments during the tests, and approval of the Final Safety Analysis Report which involved large amount of works

performed by the ChNPP staff aimed at ensuring safety of the new SNF storage facility.

The culmination of the activities was 18 November and 14 December 2020, when two double-walled canisters (DWC – patent held by Holtec International) loaded with RBMK spent nuclear fuel were successfully placed for storage into the Interim Spent Fuel Dry Storage Facility 2 (hereinafter – ISF-2). The loading was done by operators trained by Holtec.



In the presence of President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy, a license was presented to carry out the activity - operation of the nuclear installation "Spent Nuclear Fuel Storage Facility" (SNFSF-2) at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant. Hryhoriy Plachkov, Head of the State Nuclear Regulatory Inspectorate presented the license to SSE Chornobyl NPP Acting Director General Valeriy Seyda

«Based on the discussion, the Regulator suggests that the conclusions of the nuclear and radiation safety expert review of the «Interim Spent Fuel Dry Storage Facility. Final Safety Analysis Report» submitted by SSE Chornobyl NPP be endorsed. Authorize the



The Interim Spent Fuel Dry Storage Facility (ISF-2)

Nuclear Facilities Safety Department to carry out license issuing activities to award the SSE Chornobyl NPP an operating license for the ISF-2 nuclear facility operation», — said SNRIU Chairman Hryhorii Plachkov. Flawless performance of «hot» tests carried out by ChNPP personnel in Autumn 2020, and obtaining a license is the result of the efforts taken for more than two decades aimed at putting this important facility into operation.

«This essential milestone has been achieved due to years of dedicated work and joint efforts by ChNPP, Holtec, SNRIU, SSTC NRS and other involved

parties. Obtaining an operating license shows that the technology and handling processes for spent nuclear fuel introduced at ISF-2 meet current legislative requirements of Ukraine and IAEA recommendations, and ensure the safe management of ChNPP spent nuclear fuel. Activities on transferring spent fuel assemblies from the wet-type spent fuel storage facility to ISF-2 are going to be our top priority», — said ChNPP Acting Director General Valeriy Seyda.

FYI. The Interim Spent Fuel Dry Storage Facility (ISF-2) is the facility designed for acceptance, processing and storage

of spent fuel assemblies accumulated at Chornobyl NPP.

About 21 thousand spent fuel assemblies will be transferred from the old wet-type spent fuel storage facility, processed, loaded into canisters and placed for storage.

The ISF-2 was designed to process the minimum annual capacity of 2500 spent fuel assemblies.

ISF-2 construction was financed through the Nuclear Safety Account and by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

A monster cage to contain the beast

Big bones

Sixteen enormous steel trusses run from one side of the NSC to the other. Knitted together by over 500,000 custom-made bolts, this structure forms the backbone to which the cladding, cranes and other dismantling equipment are attached.

Nerve centre

The 'technological building' forms the brains of the NSC operations, a high-tech centre housing the crane control and monitoring systems that are critical for the safe operation of the NSC.

The remains of unit 4

Underneath the hastily constructed concrete sarcophagus lies the damaged reactor itself. Approximately 5,000 metric tonnes of sand, lead and boric acid – was dropped from helicopters during the weeks that followed the accident – is mixed with more than 200 tonnes of uranium, forming a lava-like mass. These so-called Fuel Containing Materials (FCMs) remain highly radioactive and represent the most significant radiological hazard at the site.

Analysis shows that less than 5 per cent of the radioactivity contained in Unit 4 was released to the environment during the accident.

Studies of the existing sarcophagus (the 'object shelter') are well advanced and deconstruction of its most unstable parts can commence once the NSC is completed. The FCM removal will start at a later stage and will take decades to complete.

Thick-skinned

Consisting of multiple layers, the cladding is designed to resist moisture, radiation and heat, and even a class-3 tornado. The space between the external and internal cladding will be depressurised to minimise the potential for any release of radioactive substances.

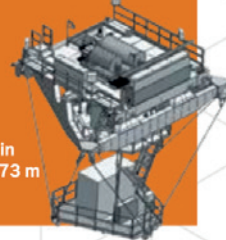
Heavy-handed

Two remotely operated cranes will hang just under the roof of the NSC. A set of 96 metre bridges will enable both cranes to operate together or independently. To allow workers access to high-radiation areas, one of the crane carriages is equipped with a shielded protective box.

Many hands make light work

A mobile tool platform can be fitted to either carriage, which includes a manipulator arm, core drill, concrete crusher and 10 tonne vacuum cleaner.

Carriage specifications
Size: 6.5x7.0 m
Speed: 0-15 m/min
Capacity: 50 tonnes
Lifting speed: 0-10 m/min
Vertical lifting distance: 73 m



Source: EBRD, Bechtel International Systems



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TIMELESS CHIC

Standout Fashion and Beauty trends

By Clara Bauman

The 3 trends of Spring

The days are getting longer, the weather is getting warmer – it's time to open the windows and welcome in the spring season! It's finally time to say goodbye to all the sweatshirts and joggers we've been living in all winter and say hello to these 3 new top trends.

1. The «Folk bo-ho» trend

Spring 2021 is seeing the return of bohemian or boho-chic clothing, reminiscent of the 60s and 70s. Just one glance at the social network Instagram proves it: Jackets with folklore looks and prints are particularly sought-after by fashion lovers et influencers.

Among the fashionable items:

- Folk hippie dresses and jackets.
- Silk pants with wide legs.
- Silk foulards as tops and scarves.
- The amazing return of the clog.

© STELLA MC CARTNEY



Vegan suede clogs with chunky heels and sustainable wood soles
(stellamccartney.com)

© CAROLINE BISS



Midi dress
(carolinebiss.com)

© INSTAGRAM - @TT_STORIES



Inspiration

Clogs are invading streets and sidewalks, being spotted at various Fashion Week events.

© INSTAGRAM @HERMES



© HERMÈS



Silk foulard by Hermès
90 cm x 90 cm
(hermes.com)

"An observation : fashion is an endlessly repetitive cycle with great inspiration from the 1960s and 1970s"

TIMELESS CHIC

Standout Fashion and Beauty trends

By Clara Bauman



© MICHAEL KORS

Inspiration
The little striped dress, the ideal
basic by Michael Kors
(michaelkors.eu)

2. The nautical trend

This year's nautical trend is definitely getting us in the mood for spring. We're welcoming in chic, striped dresses whether long, short, flowy or form-fitting. ('visits' for online purchases have increased by +55%) (*)

High waisted shorts are also having a moment, with 'visits' increasing by +20%.



© BALMAIN

High rise cotton shorts with golden
crest-embossed buttons at the sides
([Balmain on mytheresa.com](http://Balmain.on.mytheresa.com))



© TOMMY HILFGER

Stretchy polo dress with
a Breton stripe and tie belt
(uk.tommy.com)



© ETRO

Nautical print poplin shirt
(etro.com)

3. The Baby Chic trend

Among some of the most searched-for colours in the last period on Google: baby pink and baby blue (30% and 47% more searches compared to the previous year) but also lilac, mint green or pale yellow.

Of course, summer is right around the corner, but we're also living at a time when the calming effects and benefits of soft colours are in order.

Inspired by delicate textiles and fabrics and pastel colour palettes, this trend is all about cardigans (+ 614%!), blouses (+ 102%) but also "accessories".



© & OTHER STORIES

Wrap blouse finished
with a frilled neckline
and puff sleeves
(stories.com)



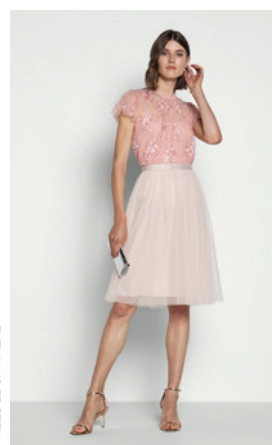
© & OTHER STORIES

Alpaca and wool blend
cardigan finished with
bee-shaped button closures
(stories.com)



© MARC JACOBS

"The Snapshot" crossbody bag
([Marc Jacobs, available on debijenkorf.be](http://MarcJacobs.availableon.debijenkorf.be) and
mytheresa.com)



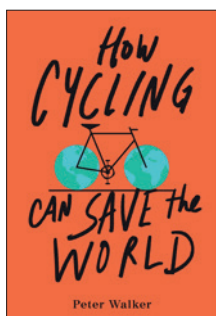
© NEEDLE & THREAD

Inspiration
Soft pink, airy materials and an
ultra-romantic style ...there's no
doubt, we are in 2021!
(needleandthread.com)

(*) Source: Stylight.

Stylight is the world's leading online search platform for Fashion, Beauty and Design, with over 1,500 partner shops across 16 global markets (insights.stylights.com)

BOOKS



HOW CYCLING CAN SAVE THE WORLD

By Peter Walker

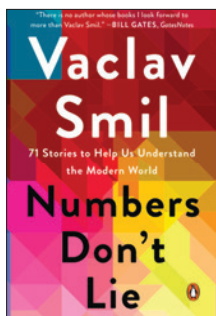
Peter Walker—reporter at the Guardian and curator of its popular bike blog—shows how the future of humanity depends on the bicycle.

Car culture has ensnared much of the world—and it's no wonder. Convenience and comfort (as well as some clever lobbying) have made the car the

transportation method of choice for generations. But as the world evolves, the high cost of the automobile is made clearer—with its dramatic effects on pollution, the way it cuts people off from their communities, and the alarming rate at which people are injured and killed in crashes. Walker argues that the simplest way to tackle many of these problems at once is with one of humankind's most perfect inventions—the bicycle.

In *How Cycling Can Save the World*, Walker takes readers on a tour of cities like Copenhagen and Utrecht, where everyday cycling has taken root, demonstrating cycling's proven effect on reducing smog and obesity, and improving quality of life and mental health. Interviews with public figures—such as Janette Sadik-Khan, who led the charge to create more pedestrian- and cyclist- friendly infrastructure in New York City—provide case studies on how it can be done, and prove that you can make a big change with just a few cycling lanes and a paradigm shift.

Meticulously researched and incredibly inspiring, *How Cycling Can Save the World* delivers on its lofty promise and leads readers to the realization that cycling could not only save the world, but have a lasting and positive impact on their own lives.



NUMBERS DON'T LIE

By Vaclav Smil

71 STORIES TO HELP US UNDERSTAND THE MODERN WORLD

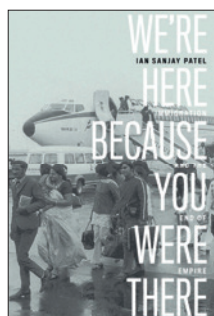
"There is no author whose books I look forward to more than Vaclav Smil."—Bill Gates

An essential guide to understanding how numbers reveal the true state of our world—exploring a wide range

of topics including energy, the environment, technology, transportation, and food production.

Vaclav Smil's mission is to make facts matter. An environmental scientist, policy analyst, and a hugely prolific author, he is Bill Gates' go-to guy for making sense of our world. In *Numbers Don't Lie*, Smil answers questions such as: What's worse for the environment—your car or your phone? How much do the world's cows weigh (and what does it matter)? And what makes people happy?

From data about our societies and populations, through measures of the fuels and foods that energize them, to the impact of transportation and inventions of our modern world—and how all of this affects the planet itself—in *Numbers Don't Lie*, Vaclav Smil takes us on a fact-finding adventure, using surprising statistics and illuminating graphs to challenge conventional thinking. Packed with fascinating information and memorable examples, *Numbers Don't Lie* reveals how the US is leading a rising worldwide trend in chicken consumption, that vaccination yields the best return on investment, and why electric cars aren't as great as we think (yet). Urgent and essential, with a mix of science, history, and wit—all in bite-sized chapters on a broad range of topics—*Numbers Don't Lie* inspires readers to interrogate what they take to be true.



WE'RE HERE BECAUSE YOU WERE THERE

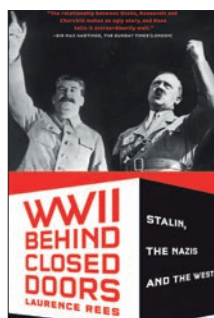
By Ian Patel

IMMIGRATION AND THE END OF EMPIRE

What are the origins of the hostile environment for immigrants in Britain?

Drawing on new archival material from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Ian Sanjay Patel retells Britain's recent history in an often shocking account of state racism that still resonates today. In a series of post-war immigration laws, Britain's colonial and Commonwealth citizens from the Caribbean, Asia and Africa were renamed immigrants. In the late 1960s, British officials drew upon an imperial vision of the world to contain what it saw as a vast immigration 'crisis' involving British citizens, passing legislation to block their entry. As a result, British citizenship itself was redefined along racial lines, fatally compromising the Commonwealth and exposing the limits of Britain's influence in world politics. Combining voices of so-called immigrants trying to make a home in Britain and the politicians, diplomats and commentators who were rethinking the nation, Ian Sanjay Patel excavates the reasons why Britain failed to create a post-imperial national identity.

The reactions of the British state to post-war immigration reflected the shift in world politics from empires to decolonization. Despite a new international recognition of racial equality, Britain's colonial and Commonwealth citizens were subject to a new regime of immigration control based on race. From the Windrush generation who came to Britain from the Caribbean to the South Asians who were forced to migrate from East Africa, Britain was caught between attempting both to restrict the rights of its non-white colonial and Commonwealth citizens and redefine its imperial role in the world. Despite Britain's desire to join Europe, which eventually occurred in 1973, its post-imperial moment never arrived, subject to endless deferral and reinvention.



WORLD WAR II BEHIND CLOSED DOORS

By Adam Higginbotham

THE UNTOLD STORY OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST NUCLEAR DISASTER

In this revelatory chronicle of World War II, Laurence Rees documents the dramatic and secret deals that helped make the war possible and prompted some of the most crucial decisions made during the conflict.

Drawing on material available only since the opening of archives in Eastern Europe and Russia, as well as amazing new testimony from nearly a hundred separate witnesses from the period—Rees reexamines the key choices made by Stalin, Churchill and Roosevelt during the war, and presents, in a compelling and fresh way, the reasons why the people of Poland, the Baltic states, and other European countries simply swapped the rule of one tyrant for another. Surprising, incisive, and endlessly intriguing, *World War II Behind Closed Doors* will change the way we think about the Second World War.

Praise

"Rees is vastly well informed about the second world war. His judgments can seldom be faulted... There are many surprises here, and much good detail... The relationship between Stalin, Roosevelt and Churchill makes an ugly story, and Rees tells it extraordinarily well."

—Sir Max Hastings, *The Sunday Times* (London)

"A powerful and moving reminder that behind the generalizations of historians lie the fates of real human beings... Amply worth reading."

—David Stafford, *History Today*

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