

EUROPE

Diplomatic

magazine



POLES APART

The world's coldest parts get hotter



WOKE, BUT SLEEPWALKING?

The “woke” movement’s cold reception in Europe

THE REIGN IN SPAIN

The uneasy but ambitious grip on power of Spain’s Pedro Sánchez

June 2021

Fly Royal Jordanian from Copenhagen

3 weekly direct flights!

ROUTE DESTINATIONS:

Aqaba	Dammam	Kuwait
Abu Dhabi	Doha	Medina
Beirut	Dubai	Najaf
Baghdad	Erbil	Riyadh
Bangkok	Sulaimaniyah	Tel Aviv
Basra	Jeddah	
Cairo	Kuala Lumpur	

Fly to and from Copenhagen, the land of historic landmarks, beautiful architecture and the world's first amusement parks!

From Copenhagen to Amman
3:25 PM to 9:00 PM

From Amman to Copenhagen
10:45 AM to 2:30 PM

For more information, please visit rj.com, RJ mobile app, RJ sales offices or your preferred travel agent, call +45 5 373 2333 or email cphgdrj@rj.com.

*Fares start at advertised prices and are subject to availability.

rj.com



ROYAL JORDANIAN

الملكية الأردنية



IN THIS ISSUE



■ WOKE, BUT SLEEPWALKING?

How a US campus fashion to obliterate from history those its followers don't like is now spreading to Europep.5

■ THE REIGN IN SPAIN

The uneasy but ambitious grip on power of Spain's Pedro Sánchezp.12

■ POLES APART

The world's coldest parts get hotterp.20

■ RED IN TOOTH AND CLAW

How authoritarian regimes are misusing red notices to harass their political enemies abroadp.26

■ THE ROAD TO HELL IS PAVED WITH GOOD INTENTIONS...

but sadly strewn with problemsp.32

■ NEWS IN BRIEF:

From around the Worldp.38

■ JUST A DIPLOMATIC SPOUSE

The time of the traditional 'knitting club' is long gone...p.44

■ E-EVIDENCE PROTOCOL APPROVED BY CYBERCRIME CONVENTION COMMITTEE

.....p.47

■ AUSTRALIAN POLICE HAS STRUCK A HEAVY BLOW AGAINST ORGANISED CRIME WORLDWIDE

.....p.48

■ NEW EU DRUGS AGENCY REPORT

Health risks and increasing availability of 'designer benzodiazepines' in Europep.52

■ WADI RUM, THE VALLEY OF THE MOON

Jordan is finally easing restrictions to allow tourist to the countryp.53

■ DALÍ, THE ENDLESS ENIGMA

In 2021, the Atelier des Lumières will be illuminated by Salvador Dalí's famous psychedelic worksp.56

■ Books Our selectionp.58

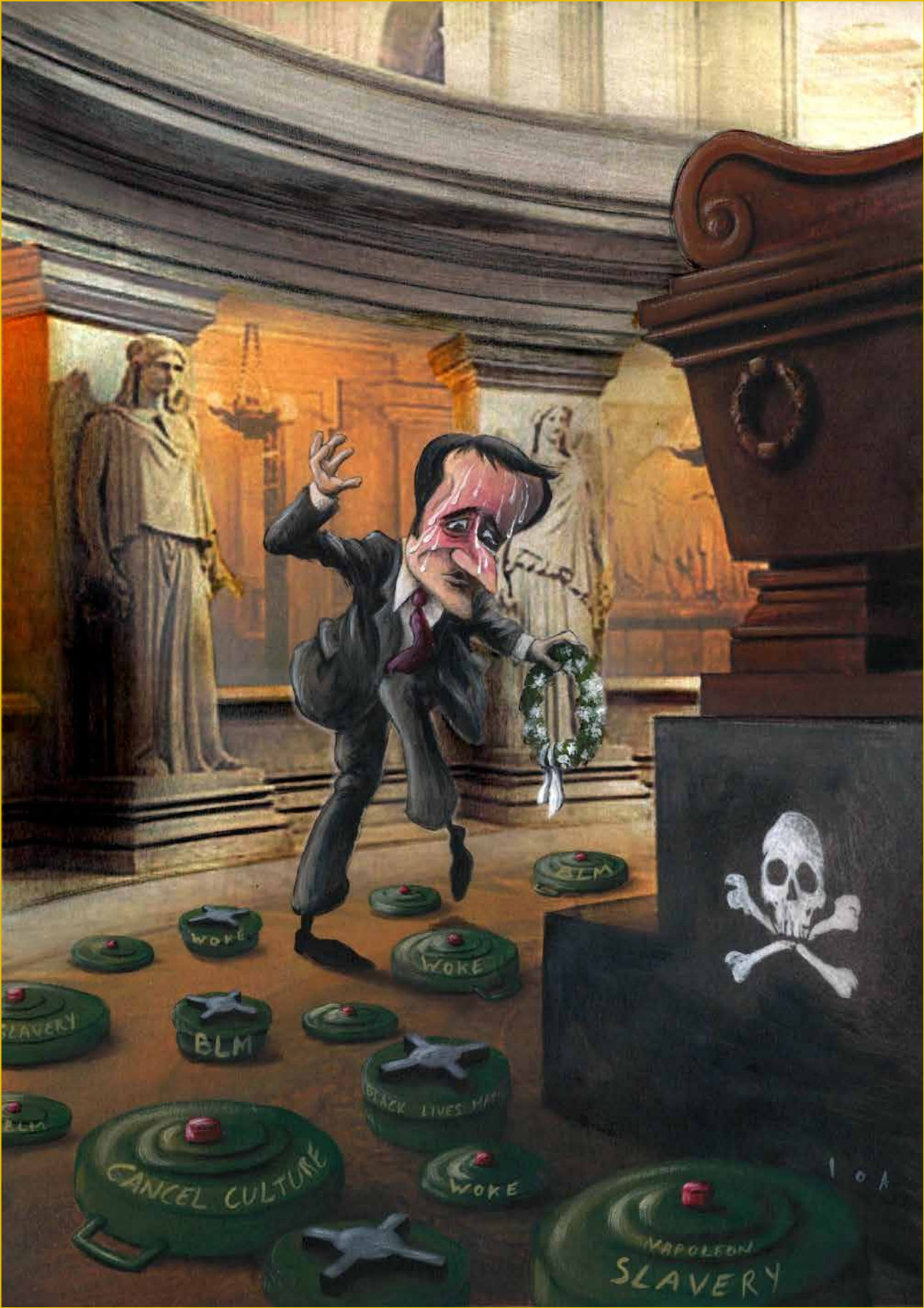
EUROPE
Diplomatic
magazine

international officials or academics, the magazine gives everyone the necessary and useful information about all topics that make up our daily lives. Covering sensitive issues such as nuclear, the rise of Islamism and energy dependence, the magazine opens its pages to recognized specialists who would like to express first order and exclusive information. But Europe Diplomatic Magazine is not only a source of information on recent topics. It is also addressing older facts with deep thought for further analysis. Whether it's news, security, diplomacy, technology, energy, terrorism, European affairs, no subject is treated superficially. Europe Diplomatic Magazine is an independent media, conveying balanced ideas of openness and analysis based on almost 30 years of experience in the journalistic world.

Visit our site and please give us your comments:

<https://europe-diplomatic.eu/>

europediplomaticmagazine@gmail.com



Nikola Hendrickx



BLM graffiti on a looted Target store on Lake Street, Minneapolis the morning of May 28, 2020

WOKE, BUT SLEEPWALKING?

How a US campus fashion to obliterate from history those its followers don't like is now spreading to Europe

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.



© Gov.Uk

Tim Parker

Parker's resignation came after a motion was put expressing 'distrust of his leadership', although it attracted only 1% of the

vote of a membership he'd helped to boost from 4.2-million in 2014 to 6-million by the time the pandemic began. UK government ministers, it seems, would rather the heritage industry ignored embarrassing things like colonialism, the misappropriation of foreign riches (the Elgin Marbles spring to mind but there have been many others) or Britain's rôle in the slave trade. Disturbingly, it would appear that some government ministers would rather dive under the covers and throw the alarm clock away. Yet many of them went to expensive schools and must have learned history, as well as the classics, one assumes.



© AdamSmith.org

Benjamin Disraeli

The 19th century British Conservative Prime Minister, Benjamin Disraeli, was a firm believer that no topic should be taboo; knowledge was what mattered. In a speech to Parliament in 1873 he

said: “A university should be a place of light, of liberty, and of learning”.

On the other hand, the “woke” movement could see learning in some fields curtailed and the study of classics ending altogether. According to New Europe’s website, a high school teacher in Massachusetts, Heather Levine, has boasted on social media that she was “very proud” to have got *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* removed from the school’s curriculum because of the attitudes of the supposed heroes, like Agamemnon, Menelaus, Odysseus and the Trojan King Priam.



Adam Nicholson

They may have been dead for some 4,000 years in some estimates, if indeed they ever existed at all as historical figures, but the teacher said she feared that they could still “poison” her students by their cruelty, Western-imperialist attitudes, sexism and so on. Perhaps she assumes (as few experts on bronze-age history have done) that Homer’s characters were real. Or, indeed, that Homer was. We’ll never know; when asked by the *Wall Street Journal* to explain her campaign she replied that she found the question “invasive”.

There is a very interesting book arguing that everyone should study Homer because apart from containing brilliant poetry, created before the arrival of writing in Greece, it also carries a message for us today. The book is called ‘The Mighty Dead – why Homer matters’ by Adam Nicholson (the 4,000 year estimate is his). He mentions a series of arty dinners held at Le Repas Magny in Paris in 1863, at which the most brilliant *litterateurs* of the age sat, ate, smoked and argued about books, mainly the classics. One of the diners was the notoriously waspish writer Jules de Goncourt,



Théophile Gautier by Nadar

who was doomed to die of syphilis six years later at the age of 39. He grew angry when asked by the traditionalist poet Comte de Saint-Victor why he kept mentioning Homer. At least he didn’t say the question was ‘invasive’. According to Nicholson, the reply came from the Breton philosopher Théophile : “Most people read Homer in those stupid eighteenth-century translations.

They make him sound like Marie-Antoinette nibbling biscuits in the Tuileries,” Gautier began, “But if you read him in Greek, you can see he’s a monster, his people are monsters. The whole thing is like a dinner party for barbarians. They eat with their fingers. They put mud in their hair when they are upset. They spend half the time painting themselves.” The dinner ended, not unusually, it seems, with a stand-up fight and the waiter ordered them all out. It was just another typical literary and artistic evening on the Left Bank of the 6th Arrondissement in the 19th century. The exchange of words was transcribed later by de Goncourt and thus quoted by Nicholson. And now by me, too.

FASHION AND FANCY

All ways of thinking have their fashions, even physics, as the prominent mathematical physicist Sir Roger Penrose points out in his astounding book, ‘Fashion, Faith and Fantasy’. In classical times, there was the belief in ‘Platonic solids’, such as Greece’s ‘five elements’, each with its own ‘shape’: fire (a tetrahedron), air (an octahedron), water (an icosahedron) and aether (a dodecahedron). Now we no longer think aether exists, although nothing in physics is set in stone. The Greek astronomers’ theory of planetary motion, which

was terribly complex with its reliance on ‘epicycles’(to explain the planets’ changes in direction), was believed for centuries before being upset by the ideas of Ptolemy and Galileo. Then along came Kepler, Newton and, of course, Einstein. Now we have string theory, which has its firm disciples and its equally firm sceptics. Who knows what tomorrow will bring if even Penrose doesn’t? Philosophy certainly has its fashions, too, of course.

Follow the ‘woke’ path chosen by Ms. Levine a little further and one could, perhaps, be obliged to ban the teaching of history altogether and certainly of the bronze age. Human beings are not and seldom have been “nice”, which may explain the absence of Neanderthals and Denisovans today. You would probably have to forget the French Revolution, too, and anything about the Roman Empire and the way in which uppity slaves were punished outside the city walls by being crucified. Even the Roman citizens were fairly horrified by the notion of torturing someone to death in that way, variously attributing the origin of the practice to the Carthaginians, the Seleucid Empire or the Parthians, rather than admitting that Rome started it. Logically, that would also entail banning Christianity, which includes the most famous crucifixion of all. Shakespeare would have to go: think of the blatant sexism of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (even though the ladies win in the end) or the still controversial *The Taming of the Shrew*, about which even Shakespeare seems to have had his doubts, making the main story a “play-within-the-play”, staged for the deception and amusement of the beggar, Sly. Then there is the antisemitism of *The Merchant of Venice* (including Shakespeare’s subtle anti-antisemitism message) or the



Roger Penrose

blinding of Gloucester in Shakespeare's magisterial King Lear. You may, then, be restricted to children's stories among which some students may be troubled by the Brothers Grimm (remember The Robber Bridegroom, with its tale of Murder, decapitation and cannibalism?) and even Hans Christian Anderson (Thumbelina and The Little Mermaid have their dark sides). Logically, you'd be left with precious little more than a syllabus devoted to writers such as Beatrix Potter and L. Frank Baum, unless you find Peter Rabbit (who is a thief, after all) or The Wizard of Oz (a fraud) too disturbing in some way?



Certainly the whole “woke” issue has caused vicious arguments in France, where various intellectuals have engaged with the “woke” movement. France is perhaps more conscious of its own intellectual heritage than many countries, which is what makes a visit to an historic site there rather more pleasant than it is in, for instance, the UK or the United States. The French fear that the whole “woke” movement sees historical civilization as something to be destroyed. The Independent Women's Forum (IWF) reports on its website that France is fighting back against this fashionable wave of thought. “American intellectuals may be hopping on the woke bandwagon,” it says, “rushing to put up ‘Black Lives Matter’ and ‘Hate Doesn't Live Here’ signs. Refreshingly, and perhaps surprisingly, prominent French intellectuals are pushing back against the woke ideas emanating from American campuses.”

The article quotes the New York Times, while commenting on its somewhat hysterical tone: “The threat is said to be existential,” the



Jean Paul Sartre and Simone De Beauvoir

IWF article quotes the NYT as saying, “It fuels secessionism. Gnaws at national unity. Abets Islamism. Attacks France's intellectual and cultural heritage.” If it's existential, France should be able to deal with it; after all, it was the French Catholic philosopher Gabriel Marcel who first coined the word ‘existential’ in the 1940s, and others such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir and Albert Camus were disciples.

As it is, reports IWF, “French intellectuals are to be applauded for being more willing to engage in debate than US academics.” The article criticises the smashing of statues, pointing out that many of the perpetrators are often ignorant as to the identity of the person the statue represents or what they did. The writer of the article says it gives her “a glimmer of hope that American intellectuals may follow the French in an awakening from wokeism.” Perhaps Hungary got it right.



Front page of French Courrier International : Do we still have the right to disagree? Defense of minorities, blacklisting of personalities, erasure of certain works. Does cancel culture go too far? To the point of preventing any debate. The foreign press is torn apart

Budapest was full of Soviet-era sculptures, such as one of Lenin appearing to usher people towards a factory to work. With Communism gone, they moved the statues to a new site that was named Statue Park (at least, it was when I was last there). Some of the sculptures were excellent and worth saving, some were awful. It was on a street market nearby, though, that my cameraman negotiated for me the purchase of a small bust of Lenin which now adorns my office.



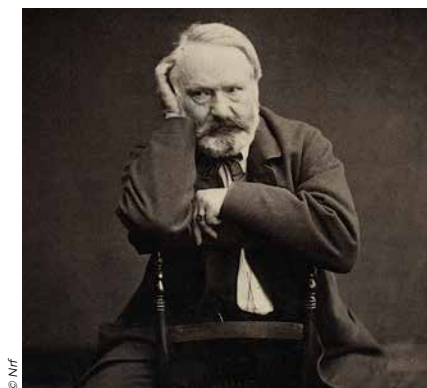
US Congresswoman Marcia Fudge with a “Stay Woke: Vote” tee shirt in 2018

In the landslide ‘woke’ movement, where do you stop? If you start banning the fictional tales of classical writers and information about the age in which they lived, you'd really have to dig a deep hole and sit there, fingers in ears and eyes tightly closed to avoid the fact that we live, as we always have, in a violent, imperfect world where people hold a wide variety of views, which may, indeed, change over time and which, of course, you may not like right now. Think of all the popular on-line games, such as ‘Call of Duty: Warzone’, ‘Fortnite’, or ‘Destiny 2: Shadowkeep’. They are about fighting and killing, so should those be banned, too? I cannot remember ever being

taught about Yusuf As'ar Yath'ar, the last Jewish king of the Himyarī region of Arabia. Little is recorded about him, and it is not clear if he had any true claim to the throne. What is known is that he conquered the Ethiopian garrison in Zafār (125 km south of San'a) and annihilated the Christian population connected with Aksūm and Byzantium. He was pious but famously (and hideously) cruel, having conquered Nijran and packed the local Christians into a church which he then burned to the ground. Eventually, facing defeat by a Christian army, his final act was to ride his blood-flecked white charger into the Red Sea while wearing full armour. He drowned, and was not, I should think, greatly missed.

CHANGING HORSES IN MIDSTREAM

The fact is that most people go through phases of beliefs, informed perhaps by their parents in their early lives, by their school a little later, by the pleasures and difficulties of meeting members of the opposite sex, then raising a family, and by friends. Take the great French writer Victor Hugo, for instance.



1862 Portrait photograph of Victor Hugo

Megan Behrent, writing in International Socialist Review (ISR), describes Hugo as a hero of the left but a very flawed one. "One of his more famous contemporary critics, Paul Lafargue, who was married to Karl Marx's daughter Laura," she writes, "argues that it is ultimately as a writer and poet of the bourgeoisie that he distinguishes himself." In Hugo, Lafargue argues, the bourgeoisie sees 'one of the most perfect and brilliant personifications of its instincts, passions and thoughts.' That Hugo was bourgeois is undeniable, but towards



Napoleon III and family

the end of his life he wrote to an Italian minister to explain his intentions with his great book, *Les Misérables*: "Social problems know no borders. The wounds of the human race, those great wounds which cover the globe, do not halt at the red or blue lines traced upon the map. Wherever man is ignorant and despairs, wherever woman is sold for bread, wherever the child suffers for lack of a book to instruct him and a hearth at which to warm him, the book *Les Misérables* knocks at the door and says: 'Open to me, I come for you.'"

Hugo's politics changed drastically throughout his life. "At his best, he espoused a form of left-wing bourgeois republicanism—a hodgepodge of humanism and pacifism with a little socialist mysticism thrown in," says ISR. "At other times, he was a royalist, imperialist, and counterrevolutionary." Having been elected to the National Assembly as a conservative, he broke from his party and professed his more liberal views on issues such as social injustice, press freedom and the death penalty, which he always opposed.

As a result, he was exiled by Napoleon III, who also abolished democracy in France after staging a coup to gain power. Hugo described Napoleon III as "Napoléon le petit" to distinguish him from the more famous Emperor (known as Napoléon le grand) and as an insult to the country's new leader. Although Hugo and wife stayed together, neither was faithful to the other. In 1831 or thereabouts, Hugo's wife, Adele, became romantically involved with a well-known critic and good friend of Victor Hugo's named Charles Sainte-Beuve. It was around the same time that Hugo became involved with the actress Juliette Drouet, who soon became his

mistress, giving up a promising stage career. Supported by a small pension from Hugo, Drouet became his unpaid secretary and traveling companion. During their relationship, which lasted for the next fifty years, Drouet wrote him some 20,000 letters, now held at the University of Rouen which, together with the Sorbonne, is trying to transcribe them. They're very hard to read. Although some doubt hangs over Hugo's commitment to Socialism, his writings are still revered by left-wing thinkers. "I feel myself the brother of all men and the guest of all peoples," Hugo famously said. A plaque bearing that quotation is displayed at the Place des Barricades in Brussels, close to one of the places in which he lived. He believed in a "United States of Europe", which the EU has so far failed to become, despite the dreams of its founders, Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman.



French President Emmanuel Macron commemorating the 200th anniversary of the death of Napoleon Bonaparte despite calls to boycott the late emperor over his record on slavery

If you look up the word 'woke' in my Chambers Dictionary, it simply refers you to its synonym, 'wake', defined as "to be or remain awake, or active or vigilant; to keep watch or vigil, or pass the night in prayer; to hold a wake; to be awake or to be aroused from sleep or from indifference, daydreaming, etc." The word is not to be found at all in my much older Walker's Dictionary, nor in my Roget's Thesaurus. Being used as it is for the strange dumbing and blindfolding movement that started on American campuses gives it a new definition, but one so loose that it can mean almost anything. What it mainly seems to mean is intolerance of alternative views. One of the problems is not only the movement's attempts



Florida Governor Ron DeSantis

to stifle debate on some topics, but also the way that it attracts right-wing politicians and commentators to seek ways to legislate against it. If you want to stop someone who refuses to listen, the solution surely isn't to prevent them from hearing, either. Take Florida, for instance, where there is an attempt to silence some people who seek to silence others.

This is how it was reported on the Forbes website: "Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis signed a bill into law Monday that levies hefty fines on social media companies that 'deplatform' political candidates after conservatives widely criticized big tech giants like Facebook and Twitter for purportedly discriminating against them—but experts warn the legislation likely violates private companies' First Amendment rights." Incidentally, deplatforming an election candidate for 14 days will theoretically lead to a fine of \$250,000 (€204,000). So, there we have another new word: "deplatforming", which means trying to prevent somebody whose views you don't like from getting an audience anywhere, either by preventing them from making a public speech or by trying to remove their contributions to social media sites. In Florida's case, however much the social media platforms are curbed, De Santis is unlikely to silence the journalist and humorous writer Carl Hiaasen from writing scurrilous satires about corruption and graft in Republican-run Florida, his home state. The books are very funny, by the way.

'Woke' and 'deplatforming' walk hand-in-hand with the 'cancel culture', defined on the on-line website 'Pop Culture by Dictionary.com', as

referring to "the popular practice of withdrawing support for (*cancelling*) public figures and companies after they have done or said something considered objectionable or offensive. *Cancel culture* is generally discussed as being performed on social media in the form of group shaming." In other words, ostracism, or, in the strange English idiom, "being sent to Coventry". No-one is absolutely certain where that phrase originates, Coventry being a perfectly pleasant town in the English Midlands whose Gothic cathedral was destroyed by Nazi bombs in the 1940s. Journalist Fraser McAlpine has suggested the phrase emanates from a fear of being hanged from a covin tree (a 'covin' tree was a traditional meeting or trysting place) outside the city's castle during the time of Henry III, who reigned from 1227 to 1272, which was a long reign back in those blood-thirsty days.

If you were sent to the covin tree, in other words, you didn't come back. History recalls Henry as a fairly average monarch by the standards of the time, although the Encyclopaedia Britannica notes also that despite being charitable and cultured, "In diplomatic and military affairs he proved to be arrogant yet cowardly, ambitious yet impractical". Nevertheless, he managed to win the Battle of Evesham against the usurper Henry de Montfort in 1265 at a time when he was described as being "weak and senile". He probably wasn't "woke", however. Even in his dotage he managed to face his enemy with sword in hand, rather than telling everyone just to ignore him. He didn't march along with a banner reading "down with de Montfort", either. He probably won't feature on the curriculum of that Massachusetts school.



Pacific Legal Foundation anti "cancel culture" poster on its internet site

HITTING BACK AT THE LONG DEAD

Next, let's consider the statue-smashing groups, who pull down the statues of those whose beneficence to the places in which the statues are erected was built on their deep involvement with a trade we see tend to deplore. However, the idea that the slavers were doing anything immoral seems never to have crossed their minds. They even recruited churchmen to support the trade on moral grounds.



Vandalized monument of Confederate general Robert E. Lee in Richmond, Virginia, on July 1, 2020

It may have involved money being paid in return for arguing that Africans were "not really human". In some American states, it was illegal to teach the slaves to read. South Carolina was the first state to pass such an ordinance in 1740. It said that "having slaves taught to write, or suffering them to be employed in writing may be attended with great inconveniences; be it enacted, that all and every person

and persons whatsoever, who shall hereafter teach or cause any slave or slaves to be taught to write, or shall use or employ any slave as a scribe, in any manner of writing whatsoever, hereafter taught to write, every such person or persons shall, for every such offense, forfeit the sum of one hundred pounds, current money." That was a great deal of cash back then. Slaves were also forbidden to own paper, pens or ink. But those were very different days, long before newspapers, mass communications and the Internet, and it's even possible that many ordinary citizens would have found the trade and those laws acceptable. After all, their own lives were far from easy.

But some did care, famously. One year into the Civil War in America between the States of the Union and the Confederacy, cotton workers in Lancashire, in North West England, decided to support the victims of slavery by taking the Union side and boycotting the cotton imported from the American South. Many workers in cities like Manchester, known as "Cottonopolis" because it was so central to the trade, faced hardship and hunger through their action, but despite pleas for them to return to work, they refused, even though there were many Confederate flags flying in Liverpool. The North West supplied most of the cotton goods to Europe, so the boycott brought the industry to its knees. President Abraham Lincoln expressed his gratitude for their self-sacrifice in a letter he sent to them in 1863. His words were later inscribed on the pedestal of a statue of him in the appropriately named Lincoln Square in Manchester. The letter, addressed to "the working men of Manchester" spoke of the selfless act of "sublime Christian heroism, which has not been surpassed in any age or in any country". He also sent ships to bring relief supplies for the starving cotton workers, which the Confederate navy tried to intercept. Even Britain's industrialists got involved with the anti-slavery movement.

Josiah Wedgwood's world-famous and very successful potteries issued a medallion, showing a kneeling slave in chains and bearing the slogan of the British abolitionist movement, "Am I not a man and a brother?" It invited people to look at the supplicant figure and think why is he in chains while



Josiah Wedgwood pottery

most people walking the streets of Britain (and the rest of Europe, for that matter) are free? Slavery officially ended in the UK in 1833, with the Abolition of Slavery Act. It set some 800,000 people free but it offered them no way to return home. It had taken Britain a very long time to put right a long-standing wrong, urged on by evangelical Christians like William Wilberforce, and even then, it was somewhat half-hearted. Between 1662 and 1807 British and British colonial slaver ships had brought an estimated 3,415,500 Africans to the Americas. Of this number, 2,964,800 survived the 'middle passage' and were sold into slavery in the Americas (those who died on the way were dumped overboard). Only Spain and Portugal transported more.

Now the issue of race seems to be obsessing the United States. It's easy to see why: black citizens there are more likely to be poor, to live in deprived

areas, and to have inadequate health care. In a statement to the Financial Literacy and Education Commission in late May, America's Secretary of the Treasury, Janet L. Yellen commented on that poverty: "It was probably because I started studying economics during the Civil Rights Movement. I took my first course around 1963. I was a freshman in college, and if you looked at the economic data back then, the average Black family possessed roughly 15% the wealth of the average white family. That is more than a 6-to-1 difference, and it is stark. But perhaps it isn't surprising: Jim Crow laws were still in effect in many places. What is surprising, however, is that it's now more than half a century later, and that 6-to-1 number has barely budged."

DON'T SHOOT!

There is also a great likelihood for a black person to be shot dead by police. Or, in the case of George Floyd, to be strangled for no obvious reason while already under arrest and in handcuffs. His was not the first life lost through police incompetence, albeit in a country afloat in a sea of military-grade weapons. The very right-wing National Rifle Association argues for even laxer gun laws on the grounds that if enough "good guys" have guns they will be able to defeat the "bad guys".

This is clearly a nonsense, considering that gun deaths in the United States in 2017 stood at 19,223, compared



Masked protesters in Philadelphia, USA on June 2, 2020



© Gouvernement.fr

Elisabeth Moreno, in charge of diversity in French President Emmanuel Macron's government: "The 'woke' culture is something very dangerous, and we shouldn't bring it to France," the French delegate minister for gender equality and diversity told Bloomberg on the sidelines of a TV interview, saying that the excesses of cancel culture "kick out people from ongoing debates because they think otherwise

with 3,993 in the much more heavily populated European Union, a figure which, incidentally, is 63% lower than in 2002 and includes all types of homicides, not just gun deaths. Of the gun deaths in the United States, 60% (25,854) were suicides while 37% (14,542) were murders. The rest were unintentional, involved the police or remain unsolved. That means 3.96 people murdered per 100,000 in Europe in 2017, compared with 12 per 100,000 in the United States. In China, the number is just 0.02 per 100,000. Belgium's Flemish Peace Institute states on a fact sheet that: "In countries with more firearms, there are usually more deaths by firearms."

It's easy to understand why people carry banners with the slogan 'Black Lives Matter', but surely ALL lives matter, black certainly, but also brown, white and even green, if we're ever invaded by aliens. At times it would be good to be colour-blind. The United States is the only country in which laws were passed to ban the teaching of black people in case it overturned the slavery system. Frederick Douglass escaped from slavery in Maryland when he was about 20 (no record was kept of slaves' birth dates). He continued to educate himself and to fight against slavery in all its wicked forms. He was exceptionally well read and given to quoting Cicero's speeches. He clearly believed that everybody should have the right to read whatever they wanted. "We have all met a class of men, very remarkable for their activity, and who yet make but little headway in life," he wrote, "men who, in their noisy and impulsive pursuit

of knowledge, never get beyond the outer bark of an idea, from a lack of patience and perseverance to dig to the core; men who begin everything and complete nothing; who see, but do not perceive; who read, but forget what they read, and are as if they had not read; who travel but go nowhere in particular, and have nothing of value to impart when they return." It seems likely that he, too, would have opposed the 'woke' movement.

I can understand why today's young people (mostly young people, anyway) feel the need to punish the perpetrators of slavery by bringing down their statues. Yes, they deserve dishonour for the frightful suffering they caused, but is smashing up their statues the right answer? You can't change the past by destroying memorials to those who created it, for good or ill. Many think it would be better to leave the statues in place but to put a plaque on them to explain how these 'heroes' gained the money they used for some 'civic good' or other. What was the true price in blood?



© Nf Winston Churchill

Take the case of Sir Winston Churchill. He is remembered, of course, as Britain's wartime leader and his gift for speaking undoubtedly stirred and cheered up the British people suffering nightly attacks from fleets of German bombers. He is (inaccurately) attributed with inventing the expression "Iron Curtain" for the 7,000 kilometre boundary between the Europe of the West and the area under the control of Soviet Russia, but is more likely to have come from

'Apocalypse of Our Time', by Vasily Rozanov, written in 1918. In this case, the term 'Iron Curtain' refers to the legally-enforced fireproof screen drawn across the stage of a German theatre when a performance has ended. "With clanging, creaking, and squeaking, an iron curtain is lowering over Russian History. 'The performance is over.' The audience got up. 'Time to put on your fur coats and go home.' We looked around, but the fur coats and homes were missing," the book says. Churchill had a rather chequered career before emerging as a hero of the Second World War which included espousing the use of gas on the "troublesome" tribes of Northern India. And yet a statue of Churchill stands in Parliament Square in London. Before anyone tries to pull it down, perhaps today's young Britons should be told a little more about a wartime leader who held very right-wing views on most things but was, nevertheless a brilliant wartime leader.

We have to remember what the French writer and philosopher Voltaire wrote in his book, *L'Ingénue*: "*En effet, l'histoire n'est que le tableau des crimes et des malheurs.*" ("Indeed, history is nothing more than a tableau of crimes and misfortunes"). The thing is that we have to know about all those crimes and misfortunes, often the results of our forebears' mistakes, in order to try and avoid repeating them. After all, if a baby orangutan doesn't learn from its mother that the lovely (and increasingly rare) clouded leopard is a creature to avoid, it will probably end up as lunch. Being "woke" is fine, as long as it doesn't harm you (or anybody else's) education. But although some decry the 'woke' movement as leftist, it really isn't. You can never have too much learning; the early Socialist campaigners set up schools for working people. As Mao Zedong said in a speech in 1957, "Letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend is the policy for promoting progress in the arts and the sciences and a flourishing socialist culture in our land." Like Frederick Douglass, Mao would surely have hated 'wokeism'.

Jim Gibbons



Outgoing prime minister, Mariano Rajoy (right), congratulating incoming prime minister, Pedro Sánchez (left), upon losing the no confidence vote on 1 June 2018

THE REIGN IN SPAIN

The uneasy but ambitious grip on power of Spain's Pedro Sánchez

Spain has long been a place of legends and proverbs, not all of them especially encouraging. “Thou shalt make castles thane in Spayne, and dreame of joye, all but in wayne” wrote Jean de Meun and Guillaume de Lorris in their two-handed 13th century story in verse, Roman de la Rose, “And thee deliten of right nought, / While thou so slombrest in that thought” At least, that is the wording in Geoffrey Chaucer’s 15th century translation. The original poem goes as follows: “Lors feras chastiaus en Espaigne / E avras joie de neient / Tant con tu iras foleiant / En la pensee delitable / Ou il n’a que mençonge e fable.” Mediaeval French was slightly different from what you’ll hear today on the Paris Metro or read in Le Figaro or Libération (or in La Libre Belgique, for that matter). It meant having unrealisable ambitions and dreams, hopeless hopes that could never be fulfilled. By the 15th century, the reference to “castles in Spain”, whilst

remaining in currency in France, had long been replaced in everyday English by the expression “castles in the air”, which means the same thing. Where the expression comes from is a matter of some debate, although most people think it dates back to the time when much of the Iberian Peninsula was under the control of the Moors, who invaded in 711 and remained in charge until 1492. Back then, any castles a Christian leader (such as a French knight, perhaps?) might build in Moorish territory were quickly knocked down, which may be why it was considered an impossible goal. Running this difficult and multi-faceted country has been proving difficult for Spain’s Prime Minister¹, Pedro Sánchez, but not yet impossible. His difficulties are far from over, however.

Actually trying to run Spain has long been a difficult job. After all, it had a dreadful civil war that ran from 1936 to 1939 and completely divided Spanish

society. It had been caused by the failure of democracy and an uprising by right-wing generals. Altogether, some 500,000 people lost their lives in the conflict, of whom about 200,000 died as the result of systematic killings, mob violence, torture, or other brutalities. It was a ghastly time for the country with both sides guilty of committing atrocities and it was won, eventually, by Frederico Franco’s ultra-nationalists, aided by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy.



General Franco in 1930

¹ In Spain, the Prime Minister is also ‘President of the Government’, which often causes confusion outside Spain

The German airforce attacked known Republican positions and completely obliterated the Basque town of Guernica, which shocked the world and inspired Pablo Picasso's famous and brilliant painting. Such an attack is reported in detail by the Anglo-French writer, Robert Payne. He was visiting the battlefield with the Republican Spanish poet, Vicente Campos. After hiding among vines, Campos was exuberantly celebrating the Germans' poor marksmanship, having missed all their visible targets, when Payne noticed they'd had at least some success. "Half an hour later, when we were on our way to Mora de Ebro, I realised that I was stuck to the bench in the back of the truck," he wrote in his book, *Eyewitness*. "A bomb splinter had caught me in the buttock and the blood acted as a glue. There was also a trickle of blood from my right ear, and I was to learn later that the explosion of the bomb had cracked the eardrum." He remained deaf in that ear for the rest of his life. When he and his little group reached Mora de Ebro, they found that the village had been turned to rubble with not a single house left standing.

Even today, many Catalans would like their particular part of Spain to be independent. Flying Catalan flags is, strictly speaking, illegal (a law 'more honoured in the breach than the observance'²) but they are all over the place in Barcelona, or they were the last time I was there.



Jordi Pujol, President of the Government of Catalonia from 1980 to 2003, indicted last April for criminal organization, money laundering, crimes against taxpayers, and falsification of documents

The separatists even had a stall selling Catalan t-shirts, mugs and other such items at the annual (and wonderful) festival of books and flowers. Given that linking of the two things should make the verse-book 'Romance of the Rose' popular in Catalonia. It doesn't seem to have swayed Sánchez's opinion, apparently happily condemning the promoters of a referendum on independence to 100 years in prison. He does not seem to have worked out yet that you cannot imprison an idea, even if you can scare people into denying that they support it.



Meeting of the Coordination Committee on the situation in Catalonia on October 17, 2019, chaired by the Acting Prime Minister, Pedro Sánchez

The total refusal to negotiate with the separatists was the policy of previous prime minister Mariano Rajoy, but Sánchez has been blindly following the same path. In the UK, when nationalist and separatist ideas started to gain traction in Scotland and Wales, the UK government of the time reached an accommodation with the leaders of the states that make up the UK which may or may not last. Under it, both were granted a degree of self-rule, which the overall UK government hoped would suffice. In Scotland's case, it may not survive another referendum, which is why the overall government is refusing to allow one. The last time one was held, the argument for remaining part of the UK was that it was the only way Scotland could stay in the EU, which it needs for its exports (whisky is popular everywhere). That, of course, no longer applies; an independent Scotland, where a considerable majority voted against Brexit (in the referendum to decide if the UK would leave the EU),

would presumably apply to re-join. Things may be changing, however: Sánchez told the Spanish parliament in May that his government was considering possible pardons for the separatist politicians "for the benefit of co-existence among Spaniards".



King of Spain Felipe VI with former prime minister Pedro Sánchez and then President of the Government of Catalonia Carles Puigdemont. Carles Puigdemont, former separatist leader of Catalonia has been charged with sedition for leading a 2017 independence bid. Recently, the European Parliament has stripped his immunity paving the way for his extradition from Belgium to Spain

The separatists were sentenced in October 2019 for sedition, misuse of public funds and disobedience but the government has the power to overturn that decision if it wishes. Furthermore, in the touchy partnership of El Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE), headed by Sánchez, of course, with the similarly left-wing Podemos, Sánchez relies upon the support of the Republican Left of Catalonia. Sánchez knows, however, that a move to pardon the separatists would be opposed by the moderately right-wing Partido Popular and their supporters.

WE DON'T TALK ANYMORE

Sánchez sometimes seems to find negotiation difficult. He is sharing power with fairly like-minded politicians, after all, but they disagree on several things. The website of International Socialist Review explains the problem of having two main parties backed by smaller groups, not only in terms of negotiations (or the lack of them) but in the wider terms of governance and policy: "The Socialist Party introduced neoliberalism into Spain.

² Hamlet by William Shakespeare, Act IV



Pedro Sánchez and his wife after his victory in the PSOE primaries, singing La Internacional in 2017

It is responsible for much of the devastation caused to ordinary Spaniards by the Great Recession. The Popular Party matched the Socialist Party in wreaking economic mayhem. It negotiated the austerity agreement imposed on the Spanish state by Europe's 'troika' (the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund). Both parties are profoundly tainted by corruption." The website seems to argue that the Socialist Workers Party is as much to blame as its centre-right rival for the chaos of Spain's economy. "The PSOE and the PP—like their counterparts in Portugal and Greece—treated Spain's public patrimony as the occasion to hold a gigantic garage sale. Together they relentlessly privatized state enterprises in the energy, transportation, and communication sectors. Sadly, the traditional left parties proved incapable of organizing resistance to the neoliberal onslaught. In a number of cases, they simply acquiesced to both neoliberalism and austerity." It's not a great end-of-term report, but then Spain only returned to democracy in 1978. Furthermore, the PSOE has suffered as other social democratic parties in Europe have from dwindling support. They fought through the post-war years to build a more equal society through modernisation but now it has been delivered, more or less, many voters are looking to see if they can find something new and more interesting. As a result, PSOE's share of the vote has dwindled, down to just 90 seats out of 350 in 2015 and then to 85 in 2016.

Much of the problem seems to stem from the fact that Sánchez simply doesn't seem to talk much to other political leaders. That is a serious

handicap in a coalition government. However, they did negotiate in November 2019 after a second election, only months after another general election had brought no clear winner. "As I said on election night after hearing the results, what was a historical opportunity in April has become a historical necessity," said the Unidas Podemos leader, who had refused high office after the indecisive first vote. "I'm pleased to announce today, together with Pedro Sánchez, that we have reached a preliminary agreement to create a progressive coalition government that combines the experience of the PSOE with the courage of Unidas Podemos." It was an almost desperate bid, in reality, to halt the growth of the far-right party, Vox, which had gained the most votes since the earlier election, although nowhere near enough to get into government.



Pablo Iglesias Turrión

As the Spanish newspaper El País reported it at the time: "The agreement wasn't possible," said Sánchez, in reference to the parties' failure to do a deal after the April polls. "We are aware of the disappointment. It will be a progressive government whatever the case. A progressive government made up of progressive forces that are going to work for progress. There is no room for hatred between Spaniards." That last comment was almost certainly a reference to Vox, whose number of MPs soared from 24 to 52, making it the third biggest party in the Cortes Generales, as the parliament is called. Such was the fear among the journalists covering the event of the need for a third election that when Sánchez embraced the leader of

Podemos, Pablo Iglesias, there was an audible sigh of relief.

LOOK RIGHT

Politics is a dangerous profession in Spain. Iglesias has received death threats from the far right. At any political rally held there, it's easy to spot the Vox supporters (or at least the male ones): they tend to have very short hair or shaved heads and quite a lot of tattoos, much the same as far-right supporters (and football hooligans) in other countries.



Isabel Díaz Ayuso

They have been much in evidence in the lead up to regional elections that saw a right-wing member of Partido Popular win Madrid. Her campaign platform was against lock-downs and restrictions on movement to curb the pandemic; Isabel Díaz Ayuso says her campaign slogan is "freedom". One has to hope that the SARS-CoV-2 virus doesn't adopt the slogan, too. The country does not seem to be able to flatten the curve of infections, despite efforts to curb the spread by barring the population from all social interaction. The confirmed number of cases of the coronavirus disease in Spain reached more than 3.5 million as of May 6, 2021. The virus has spread to every region in Spain, with Madrid suffering the highest number of cases: more than 600,000 people. Ayuso's policy of loosening the restrictions seems to have played well with the voters but we have yet to see the results in health terms. Ayuso has said she will not go into coalition with Vox, which still has a toxic reputation for a large part of the electorate, but there are many others who still look favourably on the far right. When Catalonia illegally issued its 'declaration of independence', Vox's membership rose by 20% in just 40 days.



Santiago Abascal Conde, leader of the Spanish far-right party Vox since September 2014

Vox came in for criticism during the campaign for claiming that underage immigrant are 'a burden on regional finances', but a poll of PP supporters found 78% in favour of their party forming a coalition with Vox. Vox would clearly back some of her other policies, such as lowering taxes, encouraging bullfights and having fewer controls to combat the pandemic because they endanger the economy. Vox is an authoritarian party, opposed to what it calls "radical left-wing feminism", favouring traditional gender rôles for people, with men at the top, of course. It goes without saying, I imagine, that its economic viewpoint is 'neoliberal'.

It's a problem for Pedro Sánchez. He is, by nature, an internationalist. Unlike the supporters of Franco (and they haven't all gone away) he believes in countries cooperating with one another to tackle problems that – in today's connected world – tend to themselves to be international. Even Franco's government, of course, was happy to cooperate with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. In a German symposium held every year at the London School of Economics, Sánchez spoke to the assembled German students about the future of a post-Covid Europe, relations between Spain and the EU and about the European Union's relationship with the UK after Brexit. He called for "multilateralism and international solidarity" to tackle the crisis. "I continue to trust in this pandemic leading to a fundamental leap towards international cooperation that lasts for generations," he told his audience. He furthermore declared that Europe should continue to lead the response to the major challenges of our time, and he underlined what he called the "decisive" rôle of the EU in fighting

the pandemic and in mitigating its socio-economic impact. He used his speech earlier this year to call on the EU to "step up" its collaboration to guarantee affordable and fair access to the available vaccines. "No-one will be safe until we are all safe," he said. "This not only means ensuring that everyone is vaccinated in Spain, but also in the rest of the world."



Pedro Sánchez during the meeting of the Coronavirus Monitoring Committee

He would not be impressed by the debate in the European Parliament over a proposal to waive the patent on the vaccines to speed up their use, especially in the Developing World. The left supported the idea, while the centre and right expressed fear that by denying pharmaceutical companies the vast profits a successful vaccine could provide would rather stifle innovation. MEPs on both sides criticised the US and the UK for hoarding too many doses at a time when poorer countries have little or no access to jabs. The only organisation to have tried to overcome the difficulties has been the EU, which has exported roughly half of its production to countries in need. However, while India and South Africa proposed an official patent waiver to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), a cautious (some might argue

'reactionary') EU put forward a counter proposal in response to pressure from the lobbyists of large pharmaceutical companies (sometimes referred to, somewhat insultingly, as 'Big Pharma'), who want to hang on to the patents resulting from the hard work of their researchers. Surprisingly, the US threw its weight behind the waiver idea (although at the time of writing it had yet to implement it), but the EU, Japan, the UK and Switzerland blocked its adoption. The left argues that in this instance, profits are being shown to be more important than people.

The EU's proposal, quoted in The Times of India, is to "facilitate the use of compulsory licensing within the trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights (TRIPS). The agreement already provides this flexibility, which is a legitimate tool during the pandemic that can be used swiftly where needed.

" Although it hasn't, so far. It sounds to many like a rather feeble cop-out. Incidentally, Bill Gates also spoke out against the waiver, despite his work for the under-privileged around the world. The pandemic is still raging in a number of poor countries such as India, Brazil, Iran and Nepal but the better-off countries still seem reluctant to share. "It did not have to be this way," says the professional periodical for doctors and surgeons, the British Medical Journal (BMJ), which is clearly aware of the UK's part in blocking the plan. "We have multiple safe, highly efficacious vaccines that we should be deploying worldwide to end the pandemic.



Pedro Sanchez and Bill Gates

And yet only 0.3% of total doses have gone to low-income countries, a grotesque inequity that Winnie Byanyima, executive director of UNAIDS, calls 'vaccine apartheid.'



Winnie Byanyima

The disparity in access to Covid-19 vaccines between rich and low-income countries – the very thing Sánchez opposes – has become impossible to ignore. According to data from UNICEF, 86% of all doses given worldwide up to the end of March were administered to those in high- and upper-middle-income countries, while just 1% of jabs have been given to those in the world's poorest places. In the face of well-funded lobbyists, there's not a lot that Sánchez can do about it, however disturbing it may seem. Other voices have also been raised without affecting the attitudes of Big Pharma, such as Dutch member of the European Parliament, Guy Verhofstadt.



Janssen's vaccine launch facility in Leiden, the Netherlands

"It is for the upcoming authorisations of vaccines from, for example, Johnson & Johnson and CureVac," he wrote, "that the European Medicines Agency must follow a fast-track procedure, putting aside the question of liabilities towards third parties. And in the longer term, a real health union must be established with a real budget so that we can match the US in supporting the development and production of new medicines and treatments by the pharmaceutical industry. Part of this

union must also be a dedicated agency responsible for the European-wide acquisition of medicines to avoid the errors made during this pandemic. And finally, also, the question of patent rights needs to be openly discussed and addressed." He'd get no argument from Spain's leader. Sánchez has been a long-term advocate of equality, which seems to be in even shorter supply than a Covid vaccine in a poor country. He has promised that by the end of August, 70% of the Spanish people will have been vaccinated.



Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez prior to his institutional declaration in La Moncloa in 2019

Catalan News reported this public commitment: "In a press conference held on Tuesday, he pledged to reach some vaccine rollout landmarks including having fully inoculated 5 million Spaniards by the week beginning on May 3, 10 million by the first week of June, 15 million by the week beginning on June 14, 25 million by the week beginning on July 19, and 33 million residents by the end of August." It's a bold move, because failure to reach the targets would be seriously damaging to his prospects of re-election.

IS SUPPORT FLAGGING?

The Covid-19 pandemic, however, is not the only problem Sánchez has. According to the State of the Left website, he faces a number of challenges. Firstly, says the article, he must "facilitate the regeneration of the party internally and externally". His fellow-members are a disputatious lot, it seems. Spain has also developed what the media call a 'war of the flags', with the Spanish flag being looked at as a symbol of the far right, something of

which Sánchez firmly disapproves. He told the media that the flag "is a fabric that symbolises a nation woven by 47-million threads, one that represents everyone, with the will to live together, create a project for a common country, and that no-one has the right to use it against others".



The Spanish flag being looked at as a symbol of the far right

In fact, it is a reflection of a trend that has been seen across much of Europe, with far-right parties conflating neo-nationalism with national pride and a developing hatred for others, especially those of different faith or colour. It's a form of tribalism that our mammoth-hunting ancestors would have appreciated, right before they struck you on the head with a stone axe. "The poison of hate is the most damaging," said Sánchez. "Let us say no to the poison of hate, no to verbal and physical violence, no to insults and provocations. Our parents did not sacrifice themselves for this."

Flag-waving nationalists have become surprisingly common across much of Europe and the world and flags are very emotive. Those campaigning in favour of Brexit in the UK were inclined to carry the Union flag (often incorrectly called the Union Jack and sometimes unwittingly held upside down) to demonstrate their belief in separatism and national isolation. The pro-Trump rioters who invaded the Capitol in Washington were not only carrying guns but also brandishing Confederate flags, which is against the law. NBC News reported that: "The sale or display of Confederate flags, swastikas and other 'symbols of hate' on state property is banned in New York under a law signed by Gov. Andrew Cuomo," despite concerns that it may violate free speech protection under the U.S. Constitution. "This country faces a pervasive, growing attitude of

intolerance and hate — what I have referred to in the body politic as an American cancer,” Cuomo said in his bill-signing memo. The Confederate flag has come to represent not so much the states that broke away in 1861 as simple white supremacy and a belief in segregation.



© Casa de S.M. el Rey

Kings Don Felipe VI and Mohammed VI

Meanwhile, relations with Morocco have worsened. The problem has its roots deep in Spain's colonial past. Five small areas, on or very near the coast of Morocco, remain in Spanish hands. They are Alhucemas, Ceuta, the Chafarinas Islands, Melilla and Peñón de Vélez de la Gomera, totalling altogether almost 32 square kilometres. Ceuta is administered as part of Cádiz province, the rest as part of Málaga province. The current war of words is to do with the conflict in the Western Sahara, which began with an insurgency against Spanish colonial rule by the Polisario Front. Once Spain withdrew from what had been called the Spanish Sahara, the Polisario Front began what turned into a 16-year independence war against Mauritania and Morocco, aimed at establishing the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). More recently it's been called an intifada against Morocco, with

Algeria and Libya on the side of the Polisario Front.

The current row concerns Spain's decision to admit the rebel leader, Brahim Ghali, for medical treatment without informing the Moroccan government first. Morocco promptly said it would open its borders to let some 10,000 migrants enter the enclave of Ceuta. Most migrants who make the crossing are rounded up and returned to Morocco, but Spanish law forbids the deportation of minors, so Spain suddenly found itself responsible for a large number of children.

© NTF
Young migrants enter the water from the Moroccan side to cross into Spain

Sánchez described Morocco's action as unacceptable while Morocco said that by admitting Ghali for treatment, Spain violated 'good neighbourliness'. Ghali has been hospitalised, suffering from COVID-19. Morocco has withdrawn its ambassador and has threatened to sever diplomatic links with Spain if Ghali is allowed to leave without facing trial.

Ghali, along with his lieutenants, stands accused of genocide, murder, terrorism, torture and the “disappearances” of rivals. Morocco

regards the Western Sahara as part of its own territory. Sánchez reminded Rabat that Spain is Morocco's best friend inside the EU. It has served a court summons on Ghali, too, but at the time of writing it is unclear whether or not he holds an Algerian diplomatic passport, which would rule out the chance of a trial. Sánchez said that admitting Ghali for medical treatment had been a “humanitarian gesture”, although it looks like being one that could plague him for some time.

WALKING INTO A GREENER FUTURE

Sánchez seems determined to make Spain a more ambulatory country. Back in May, he announced his plans for reform over the next thirty years. His “España 2050” plan is certainly radical, which means it may be hard

© Montecó
Pedro Sánchez at the presentation of the project 'Spain 2050'

to deliver.

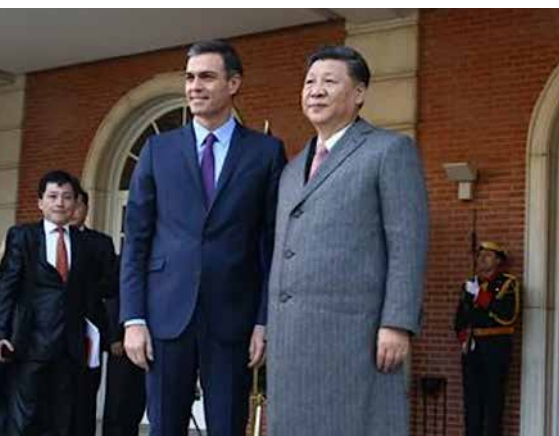
On the issue of employment, he admitted that full time contracts may no longer be an option and that Spain's focus will be on retraining its workforce. It's an ambitious scheme:



Brahim Ghali's fake passport used to enter Spain for medical treatment without informing the Moroccan government first



© NTF



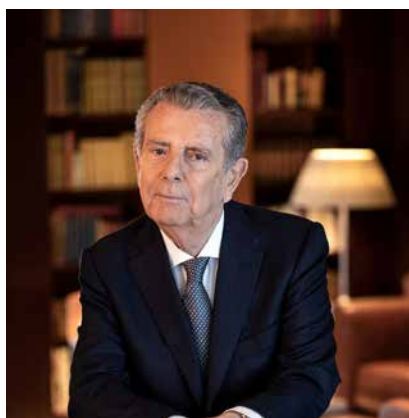
Pedro Sánchez and China's President, Xi Jinping

he foresees having to retrain some 90% of the population, after which employment will involve a simplified work contract. It could mean the end of 'jobs for life'. Sánchez also promised to overhaul the taxation system by increasing taxes and introducing a tax on wealth, inheritance and goods. He wants to modernise education and increase the numbers of students going on to higher education from an already impressive 70% to 93%. He also plans to incentivise women to have more children – like Italy, Spain has a falling birth rate – with financial aid for mothers. He has said he wants to reduce Spain's reliance on cars and air travel to reduce pollution, putting the country's focus on rail travel. That means scrapping short haul domestic flights that would take less than 2 hours 30 minutes by train. If people must have personal transport, he wants it to be electric. Otherwise, he wants to see more people walking.

Altogether, the plan has not been very well received. Nor has his telephone conversation with China's President, Xi Jinping, in which they discussed the possibilities for China to co-invest in projects being part-funded with EU recovery funds. Brussels, like Washington, is wary of China gaining increased power and influence in Europe, especially where it involves funding crucial infrastructure projects. But the Spanish government said in a statement that Sánchez had told President Xi that he was sure they could reach some sort of 'common ground', with Spain playing an important rôle in improving Sino-European relations. Spain is anticipating receiving around €140-billion in pandemic recovery

funds from the EU in the near future and Sánchez reminded Xi of the huge investment opportunities in "the green transition, electric mobility, circular economy and digitalisation". Overall, it would mean fewer cars, higher taxes on more things, less job security and – the sweetener – shorter working days. Some have dismissed the whole scheme as unrealistic; 'castles in Spain', you might say.

Sánchez has been energetic in his search for an acceptable compromise with the separatists of Catalonia. In a speech during a ceremony in Barcelona in June of this year, he called for the recovery of lost coexistence. "Let us commit ourselves to harmony and reunion as weapons of progress," he said, "and let us get to work." The ceremony was to present a medal commemorating the 250th anniversary of Foment del Treball to the publisher and president of the Godó Group, Javier Godó.



Javier Godó Muntañola

Foment del Treball is a federation that has represented entrepreneurs and Catalan industry since its foundation in 1771. In front of a Catalan audience, Sánchez appealed to "every woman and every man in our society, whatever their profession and condition; wherever they live" to have courage and what he called a 'sense of exemplariness'. He asked his audience to advance the search for "a new 'us'", as he put it. "Let's exchange threats for proposals, wherever they come from," he said. "And let us not look for justifications or revenge, but for solutions: with pragmatism, with honesty and with common sense," adding that in his view "this new 'we' will be our greatest success as a society."



Pedro Antonio Sánchez in his youth practicing martial arts

Sánchez also had a message for the Catalan business forum, urging them to take part in the 'transformation programme' set out in his 'Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan'. "You are indispensable," he told them. "Catalonia is essential; we need the best version of Catalonia to lead, as it has always done, the economic and social modernisation of Spain." He reminded them that May saw a fall in unemployment of 130,000 people and that job creation has reached the same level as before the pandemic, even before the first EU funds arrive in July. No-one could accuse Pedro Sánchez of a lack of ambition. He has many ideas to bring Spain up to date and make it greener and more pleasant, even if not all of them may prove workable. In one recent Tweet, Sánchez said: "Becoming a greener and more sustainable country is one of our aims. We are working on this, in legislating to build a society that cares for its environment, that cares about the present and the future, that is committed to a more ecological and fair system." Castles in Spain? Well, possibly. But you cannot blame a man for dreaming. And his "dreme of joye," may not, after all. Be "but in vayne".

Henry Carruthers

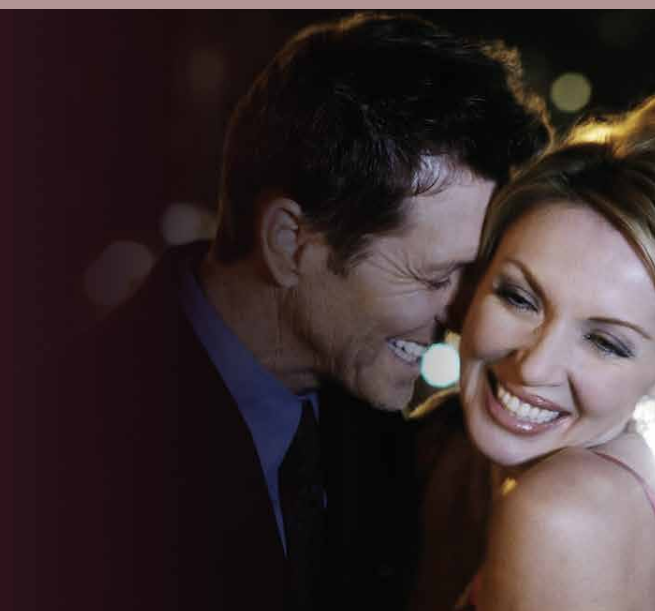


SAVVIVA

Concierge Services

EFFICIENT PERSONAL SUPPORT IN BUSY TIMES

- Personal assistance
- Private concierge
- Property management



WE ARE AT YOUR SERVICE, 24/7
CALL NOW

Experience Belgium's leading
concierge service

SAVVIVA

www.savviva.be | +32 2 669 07 29 | concierge@savviva.be



© Edm

POLES APART

The world's coldest parts get hotter

Russia's President, Vladimir Putin, is not famed for his diplomatic language. Even so, his threat to “knock the teeth out” of any nations laying claim to what he considers Russian territory is somewhat extreme. Anyway, how could you knock out an entire nation's teeth? Russia is a vast country, of course, and as it borders the north polar region, it's understandable that it seems determined to claim more of the seafloor as part of its continental shelf. Planting a Russian flag on the sea bottom at the actual pole, which it did in 2007, is going a little bit too far, say some of Russia's neighbours. For example, Canada's Foreign Minister at the time, Peter MacKay said “This isn't the 15th century. You can't go around the world and just plant flags saying ‘we're claiming this territory’.”



© Wikipedia

Peter MacKay

Although the longest stretch of coast by far in the Arctic Circle is Russia's, parts of Alaska, Canada, Greenland and Norway also have a claim. It may be one of the coldest places on our world but tempers about it are getting hotter. Russia has warned the West against militarising the polar region but has also shown off its own massive new military airbase at Nagurskoye, on the Franz Josef Land archipelago, the most northerly part of Russia's Arkhangelsk oblast. The reasons for all this sabre rattling are money and personal prestige. As the ice retreats because of global warming, it is opening up access to vast reserves of oil and gas as well as rare earth metals. Hence Putin's bombastic threat of physical violence.

While Russia clearly has a strong claim to territory near the North Pole, its claim to the other end of the world is less obvious.



© Wikimedia

Russian President Vladimir Putin arriving at Nagurskoye airbase on Ilyushin Il-76

Russia maintains that as the land of Antarctica was first sighted by a Russian expedition in 1820, since when Russian mariners and researchers have played a leading rôle in exploring the place, it should be seen as Russian. Putin-loving Russian TV presenter Dmitry Kiselyov even stated one evening that “Antarctica is ours”. If Russia’s claim is based on having seen the place in 1820, the English poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge could have made a similar claim. It was in 1798, after all, that his brilliant (and very long) poem, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* was published in the first edition of his *Lyrical Ballads*. He didn’t name Antarctica in the poem, but it seems fairly clear that it’s the place the poor old Ancient Mariner’s ship had been blown to by a fierce storm:

“The ice was here, the ice was there,

The ice was all around:

It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,

Like noises in a swound!”

Coleridge described it in his odd ‘side notes’ as “The land of ice, and fearful sounds, where no living thing was to be seen.” There were no penguins there either, it seems, although Coleridge may not have known about them. It’s there, however, that the Ancient Mariner and the rest of the crew come across a very large seabird:

“At length did cross an albatross,

Thorough the fog it came;

As if it had been a Christian soul,

We hailed it in God’s name.”

Anyway, it proves to be ‘a bird of good omen’ because the imprisoning ice cracks and “The helmsman steered us through”. It was probably a wandering albatross, which inhabits Antarctica and has the largest wingspan of any bird at 3.5 metres. But size isn’t everything, of course: the albatross is notable for other things, too, like never flapping those enormous wings in flight. It glides instead and is at risk of extinction as it mates for life with a single partner and together they only produce one egg every two years. Their fishing trips can last for up to twenty days, during which they may cover some 10,000 kilometres. Of course, if the crew had disembarked and looked around a bit more they might have met penguins, too, or elephant seals,

while a glance over the ship’s rail could have given them sight of a humpback whale or an orca, but they seem not to have entered into Coleridge’s (probably opium-induced) dream. It seems he wrote some of his most imaginative poems while stoned out of his mind on opium to cope with the pain he suffered from systemic lupus erythematosus, SLE. His Ancient Mariner had a terrible time even after escaping from this unnamed icy land, getting marooned later in what was probably the Sargasso Sea, (although Coleridge doesn’t name that, either) while the figures of Death and Life-in-Death play a game of dice for the souls of the crew. Life-in-Death wins the eponymous sailor, compelling him for ever after to go around frightening wedding guests with his ghastly tale. Even so, he never said “Antarctica is ours”. He just wanted people to be nice to albatrosses and all other creatures, which may not be a matter of much concern inside the Kremlin. In any case, under the Antarctic Treaty of 1959, the place is officially neutral. No country can lay claim to it, and it can only be used for peaceful and scientific purposes.



Signature of the Antarctic Treaty on 1 December 1959 in Washington, D.C., by Ambassador Herman Phleger from the United States, who chaired the Conference on Antarctica from 15 October to 1 December 1959 (Department of State, 1960)

As far as that is concerned, Russia has ten research stations in Antarctica but only half of them are operational all year round and most of them are in a fairly dilapidated state and desperately underfunded. Other research bases there belong to Chile, Finland, the United States, Poland, New Zealand, Uruguay, Japan, Australia, Argentina, India, South Africa, Chile, Brazil, Germany, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, the UK, Spain, Italy, South Korea, Pakistan, Belgium, China, Romania, Peru, Ecuador, Bulgaria, Sweden, New Zealand, Ukraine and Italy. If I have missed any countries off the list I apologise. Some of those research

facilities are permanent, some are only used during what passes for summer in Antarctica. The English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams wrote his seventh symphony about the place, *Sinfonia Antarctica*, based on the film music he had written in 1947-48 for the film, *Scott of the Antarctic*, about Captain Robert Scott’s ill-fated trip to the South Pole in 1912 (they arrived only to find they had been beaten to it by a Norwegian party led by Roald Amundsen). Scott and many others died during the return from the Pole in what turned out to be the worst weather seen there for years, but the music is wonderful. Vaughan Williams, being both a confirmed Socialist and a pacifist would never have claimed ownership of the place as Kiselyov did.

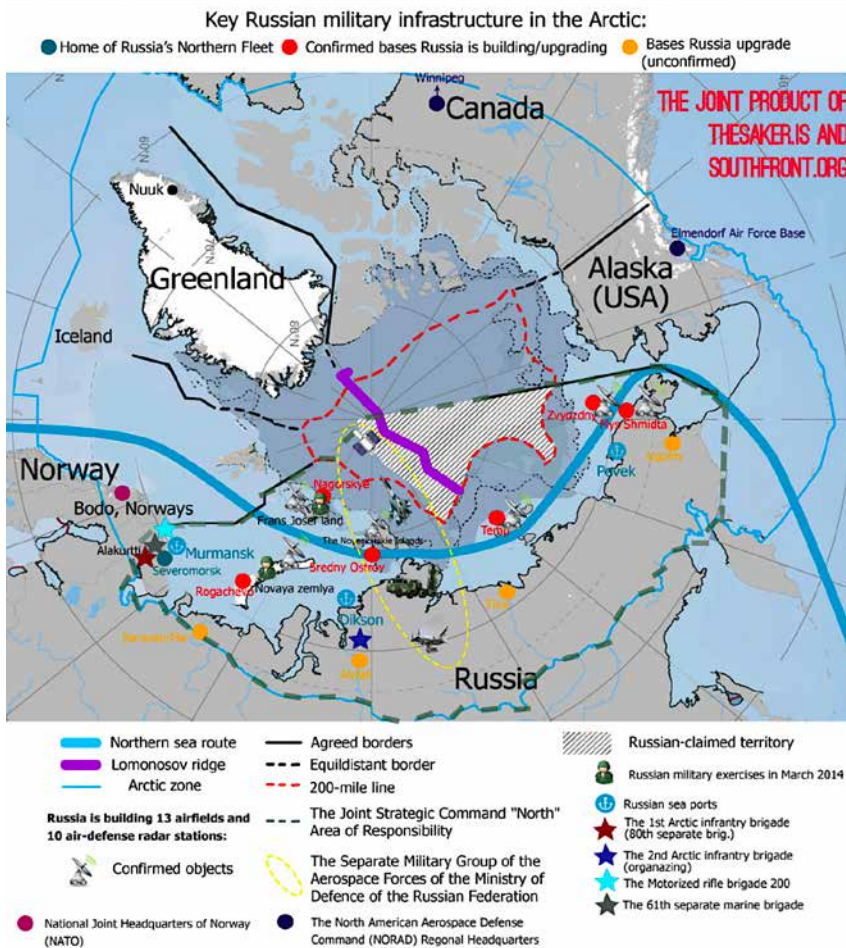
NORTH AND SOUTH

But let us return to the other end of the world, the Arctic and the North Pole, over which Russia at least has some sort of legitimate claim. The Arctic can boast some 4-million inhabitants, of whom 2-million are Russian. It’s there that Russia wants to maximise its access to the rich natural resources. Russia says it’s equally keen to protect the ecosystems of the Arctic, as well as ensuring that the shipping routes through it remain open. It also says it wants the area to remain “a zone of peace and cooperation”. In order to ensure it remains peaceful (the Kremlin says) it maintains a large military presence there, which it plans to expand considerably. Since it clearly hasn’t been built to fight aliens from outer space, it seems it must be intended to menace the West. Russia also plans to enhance the presence of its border guards there.



A Russian Ilyushin Il-76 arriving at the Nagurskoye airbase

Of the sea routes it wants to maintain, the Northern Sea Route, which lies to the east of Zemlya and runs along Russia’s Arctic



coast from the Kara Sea, along Siberia to the Bering Strait. It is the most important sea route for transportation and it's said that Russia's Security Council is looking at ways to develop it, partly by investing in improving the infrastructure. Some would argue that its research stations are really there to back up Russia's territorial claims on the seabed of its continental shelf. Its stated desire to create a 'zone of peace and cooperation', however, is hard to square with its Nagurskoye military airbase in the Franz Josef Land archipelago. Neither does it really fit with the fiercely-spoken words of Russia's combative foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, that he could see no reason for any military programmes in the area by other countries. It was said at a prickly Arctic Council meeting in Reykjavik, Iceland in May, where Putin made his "knock their teeth out" comment.

What both men would seem to be saying is that Russia must be allowed to militarise the region as much as it likes but woe betide any other country bordering the Pole that does anything similar, on however small a scale. "We

have highlighted at the meeting," Lavrov told a press conference, "that we see no grounds for conflict here. Even more so for any development of military programmes of some blocs here." Perhaps Putin and Lavrov are merely adopting the policies of Publius Flavius Vegetius Renatus, a Roman writer known only for this one military work, *De Re Militari* (Regarding Military Matters) written in the 4th century CE (probably), and another on veterinary medicine. The quote most often heard is: "Igitur qui desiderat pacem, praeparet bellum", which is normally rendered as simply "Let he who desires peace, prepare for war". It made sense in classical times and it worked after a fashion during the Cold War: two rival blocs, each armed to the teeth with nuclear weapons, facing each other across a global stage. The war occasional got warm but never completely hot, despite some scares. I was at my local grammar school when the Cuban Missile Crisis erupted; it was the talk of the school yard as my friends and I wondered when we'd be called up for military service.



US Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken participates in the Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting, in Reykjavik, Iceland on May 20, 2021

OUR GUNS ARE BIGGER THAN YOUR GUNS

Russia's attitude at the Arctic Council did not sit well with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken who said it was important that all countries and parties "uphold effective governance and the rule of law" to make sure that the "Arctic remains a region free of conflict where countries act responsibly". That would seem to be an idle hope. Clearly, that lack of grounds for developing military programmes doesn't apply to Russia. Whilst stressing the importance of Russia's own ambitious military developments, Lavrov said he would 'speak to' Norway's Foreign Minister, Ine Marie Eriksen Soreide about the reinforcement of her country's military presence near to the Russian border. In Moscow's view, only Russia should be allowed to build facilities and rattle its sabres. Lavrov warned Blinken against deploying any additional US forces in Poland, too, pointing out that to do so would be in violation of the 1997 treaty on relations between Russia and NATO.

However, work continues on developing the Nagurskoye airbase, with its runways being extended to 3,500 metres, so that they can handle every kind of aircraft, including the 4-engined Ilyushin Il-76 airlifter, which can carry 126 paratroopers with parachutes, 145 personnel in a single-



Nagurskoye Russian air base

deck version and 225 in a double-deck version, and heavy strategic bombers like the Tu-95 Bear, a four-engine turboprop-powered strategic bomber and missile platform, as well as strategic jet fighters, of course. The Russian military invited various media organisations on a rare tour of the facility earlier this year, where they were told that apart from its capacity to refuel and work with Russia's heaviest aircraft, it has been constructed to house 150 soldiers with the main aim of maintaining the viability of its Northern Fleet. Putin has stated that it's all part of a plan to bolster Russian presence within the Arctic Circle to "ensure the future of Russia." Since the vast facility is only 257 kilometres from the coast of Norway's Svalbard archipelago, it clearly looks more like a threat to Western interests. The displaying of its remarkable facilities to Western journalists looks suspiciously like a playground game from my junior school that involved the outside and roofless toilet block and a degree of bravado. It was a game that the owners of houses whose gardens backed on to the wall didn't much like. The cane awaited any boys caught in the act.



A Russian transport helicopter Mi-26 made a flight over more than 4 thousand kilometers from Khabarovsk to Anadyr airport in Chukotka with several landings on the Kuril Islands

Russia showed journalists what it described as a "state of the art" radar facility, with which they claimed to track the movements of NATO ships and aircraft, even boasting that they have frequently monitored American and other aircraft it considered "adversarial". The Russian also showed off its Bastion coastal defence missile system which, it claims, can strike at maritime or land targets more than 320 kilometres offshore. US Secretary of State Blinken has previously expressed "concerns about some of the increased military activities in the Arctic." It's not as if Putin makes any secret of Russia's aggressive stance.

Returning to his "teeth" analogy, what he actually said was that his country boasts huge energy reserves and he would react strongly if anyone sought to "bite off" a part of them. "They should know, those who are going to do this, that we will knock out everyone's teeth so that they cannot bite anymore." He also added that the key to this teeth-bashing exercise is "the development of our armed forces." Every country has the right to defend its territory, of course, but Putin seems to see national territory as a moveable feast. Russia's seizure of Crimea provides an object lesson.

The nerve centre of Russia's Arctic ambitions is the closed town of Severomorsk, in the oblast of Murmansk, on the coast of the Barents Sea and 25 kilometres from the city of Murmansk itself.

It's the headquarters of Russia's Northern Fleet and it is home to some 50,000 people. Under the United Nations Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), coastal nations with territory inside the Arctic Circle itself are entitled to exploit them within 200 nautical miles (370 kilometres) of their coastal baselines. If those countries subsequently want to claim undersea territory as part of their continental shelf, they have to submit geological evidence to the UN.

Moscow must deeply regret the disappearance of Beringia, the land bridge that used to exist between Siberia and Alaska. Today, it's defined in Wikipedia as "the land and maritime area bounded on the west by the Lena River in Russia; on the east by the Mackenzie River in Canada; on the north by 72 degrees north latitude in the Chukchi Sea; and on the south by the tip of the Kamchatka Peninsula". It was not a safe place for paleolithic man to go, with large predators such as giant short-faced bears, Beringian cave lions, scimitar-toothed cats, mammoths, and grey wolves. During the Late Glacial Maximum (LGM) of 31,000 to 16,000 years ago, it was also

quite cold. Dangerous it may have been, but it seems to have brought the ancestors of today's native Americans all the way from North Siberia. They merged with another group, the Ancient East Asians some 25,000 years ago and in so doing provided the majority of the DNA now found in most of what Americans call the "First People" by which they mean the first to reach and settle in what would become the United States.



Jennifer Raff

They then split into two groups between 18,000 and 22,000 years ago, according to an article by Jennifer Raff, an anthropological geneticist at the University of Kansas, in the May 2021 edition of Scientific American. One of these groups, the Ancient Beringians, seems to have died out without leaving any descendants, although they left traces in Alaska. "The other branch, known as the Ancestral North Americans," Raff writes, "gave rise to the First Peoples south of the Laurentide and Cordilleran ice sheets." The land of Beringia is often thought of as having been a bridge between Asia and North America, but according to Hakai magazine, that is a misleading picture. "The 'Bering land bridge' wasn't a bridge at all, for instance—at its greatest extent, it was a landmass roughly as large as Australia, stretching 1,600 kilometers north to south and 4,800 kilometers east to west, from Canada's Mackenzie River to Russia's Verkhoyansk Mountains. Scientists call it Beringia."



A Russian Submarine in Severomorsk

SNOW FLOWERS?

Nor was it just a frozen wilderness, says an article on line. According to fossil and pollen evidence, it supported wildflowers and shrubs, which provided food for such creatures as the steppe bison, western camels, pleistocene horses (there were several species, which were mainly smaller than their modern descendants at only some 5 hands high), antelope and woolly rhinoceros. Despite the ice on every side, Beringia itself stayed largely ice-free, more like Alaska is today, according to Hakai magazine. The LGM locked up vast volumes of water in ice and caused sea levels to fall by around 100 metres, according to the US National Park Service. "For perhaps 80% of the last million years, Alaska has been joined to Siberia by this land bridge," says its website. It goes on to suggest that it had other effects, too. "The land bridge did more than link the two continents," says the website. "It also ushered in a new climatic regime to the entire Beringian region by blocking Pacific moisture from entering the interior regions of both Alaska and north-eastern Siberia. Thus these regions became much drier than they are today. In fact they became so dry that their lowlands remained ice-free, even during the coldest climatic episodes of the ice ages."

So, what happened to Beringia? Let's start with where it used to be. This is the explanation given on the website of the US National Park Service: "Beringia is the land and maritime area between the Lena River in Russia and the Mackenzie River in Canada and marked on the north by 72 degrees north latitude in the Chuckchi Sea and on the south on the tip of the Kamchatka Peninsula."



A volcano is pictured in the Kamchatka Peninsula of Russia as the International Space Station orbited 264 miles above

The website goes on to point out that some small parts of Beringia would seem to survive out of the water: "As the ice age ended and the earth began to warm,

glaciers melted and sea level rose. Beringia became submerged, but not all the way. The Diomed Islands, the Pribilof Islands of St. Paul and St. George, and St. Lawrence and King Island still poke out of the water." So far, the Kremlin hasn't claimed them, but its militarisation of the Arctic is certainly worrying Western nations.



Russian Minister of Defence General of the Army Sergei Shoigu handing diplomas to graduates of the Military Academy of the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces in 2020

According to CNN: "Russia is amassing unprecedented military might in the Arctic and testing its newest weapons in a region freshly ice-free due to the climate emergency, in a bid to secure its northern coast and open up a key shipping route from Asia to Europe." Weapons experts in the West are particularly worried about Russia's new Poseidon 2M39 torpedo. According to Popular Mechanics magazine, this is more than simply a torpedo. "Russia's intimidating nuclear-powered torpedo is running toward new key tests this year," says the magazine, "with a planned deployment for later this decade. The 'tsunami apocalypse torpedo,' the first of its kind, is designed to travel across the world's oceans to deliver a knockout thermonuclear blow against a coastal target or city." The missile seems especially important to Putin, who has asked his defence minister, Sergei Shoigu, for updates on the results of the tests it must undergo. The progress is also being closely followed in state media and it sounds like a very unpleasant weapon indeed. A leaked (deliberately) Russian Ministry of Defence document told the world what it could achieve: "The defeat of the important economic facilities of the enemy in the vicinity of the coast and causing assured unacceptable damage to the country through the establishment of zones of extensive radioactive contamination, unsuitable for implementation in these areas of military, economic, business or other activity for a long time."

Ironically (and perhaps tragically) the path of this missile, if it's ever launched, may trace the route taken by the settlers whose descendants would become the first Native Americans. Of course, the other result of firing it would be all-out nuclear war, an atmosphere completely contaminated with radiation for thousands of years and the destruction of humankind. Further leaks, printed in Popular Mechanics, describe it as a nuclear-powered giant torpedo, or even a large crewless submarine, measuring 6.5 feet (2 metres) in width and 65 feet (20 metres) long. The weapon can travel at speed of up to 70 knots, which is very fast under (or more likely on) water. With nuclear power, the weapon has a considerable range, and experts believe the Poseidon can travel across the Pacific and Atlantic oceans on its own to deliver its payload. The torpedo's high speed will make it difficult for U.S. (or any other) forces to intercept. Some US defence experts believe that facilitating a visit to the Nagurskoye military base may have been intended as a mere show of force just before the meeting of the Arctic Council, of which Russia has taken over the rotating chairmanship. As a matter of convention, 'the Arctic' either refers to the five Arctic coastal states, including Canada, Denmark (because of Greenland and the Faeroe Islands), Norway, Russia, and the United States or the eight full member states of the Arctic Council (the five just listed, plus Finland, Iceland, and Sweden).

"Until recently," writes Carnegie Europe on its website, "it made physical sense to distinguish between the ice-free areas of the North Atlantic Ocean and the Norwegian coastline, on the one hand, and the more or less permanently frozen areas within the Arctic Circle, on the other. So far, these two geographic areas have also corresponded to two different kinds of politics: regular security politics, including through NATO, in the Atlantic; and tentatively more cooperative international politics among the coastal Arctic states. Yet as polar ice melts and contracts, the Arctic, too, risks becoming a zone of increased great-power competition." And, of course, as the Polar region melts, interests in the wealth being uncovered by the retreating ice have been growing.

"While NATO member states and Russia have significantly reduced the size of their navies," says Carnegie Europe, "Russian development of new missiles in effect makes distances smaller and regions closer to each other. The range, speed, and precision of these weapons make it more



A Russian Tupolev Tu-95 aka 'Bear' launching a cruise missile

difficult to separate the North Atlantic and the Arctic as distinct theatres of operations, as both the Baltics and the Norwegian Sea can be the targets of attacks from the Barents Sea as well as from land.

Land, submarine, and air-launched cruise missiles challenge NATO's ability to reinforce both mainland Europe and the North Atlantic." Russian concern to defend what it sees as its obvious interests around the North Polar region is understandable. Its interest in the South Polar region somewhat less so (unless it views penguins and krill as important likely food sources).

PICKING UP A PENGUIN

In recent years, Putin has sought to stress Russia's interest in the Antarctic, complaining in 2018 that the various geographical names of places there have been better known internationally in their Western forms. He grumbled that names given by Russian explorers have been squeezed out, thus diminishing the awareness of Russia's contribution to exploring the world and to world science. He even requested the creation of a new world atlas to show the Russian names for the world's countries and cities, including places in the Antarctic. It has yet to surface, however. Meanwhile, Russia's research stations in Antarctica are falling increasingly into disrepair and there is little sign of any additional funding being made available. When Russia sent a scientific expedition to assess Antarctica's fish stock in 2019, it was the first for 15 years. Environmentalists would be very unhappy to see a Russian krill fishing fleet back in Antarctic waters, given that krill is a vital food source for whales and penguins. There have been attempts to create 'no-fishing' zones to the east of Antarctica but Russia and China have always blocked them, as they did a proposal for the world's largest

sanctuary in Antarctica, to protect penguins, reefs, various seabirds and the entire ecosystem. The two sides are unlikely ever to see eye to eye (or to meet flipper to flipper).

The Polar advisor to Greenpeace, Laura Meller, says Russia is "pursuing niche fishing interests whilst preventing the Antarctic Ocean Commission from fulfilling its mandate to create a network of sanctuaries in the Antarctic Ocean." Russia, meanwhile, accuses the Commission of adopting 'discriminatory decisions' by seeking to restrict its access to the resources of the Antarctic waters. However, the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) can claim some successes in its attempts to ensure that life continues in this most inauspicious part of the world, with inspections of fishing boats and the requirement that all vessels active there have a CCAMLR permit or licence. Inspectors can order vessels to stop while formal checks are made, and "If, as a result of inspection activities carried out in accordance with these provisions, there is evidence of violation of measures adopted under the Convention, the Flag State shall take steps to prosecute and, if necessary, impose sanctions."



Greenpeace has been very critical of the CCAMLR for failing to get a more comprehensive deal. Frida Bengtsson, of Greenpeace's Protect the Antarctic campaign, spoke of her disappointment with the outcome of the 2018 meeting in Hobart, Tasmania: "This was an historic opportunity to create the largest protected area on Earth in the Antarctic: safeguarding wildlife, tackling climate change and improving the health of our global oceans. Twenty-two delegations came here to negotiate in good faith but, instead, serious scientific proposals for urgent marine protection were derailed by interventions which barely engaged with the science." Bengtsson was especially critical of Russia and China:

"Rather than put forward reasoned opposition on scientific grounds, some delegations, like China and Russia, instead deployed delaying tactics such as wrecking amendments and filibustering, which meant there was barely any time left for real discussion about protecting Antarctic waters."

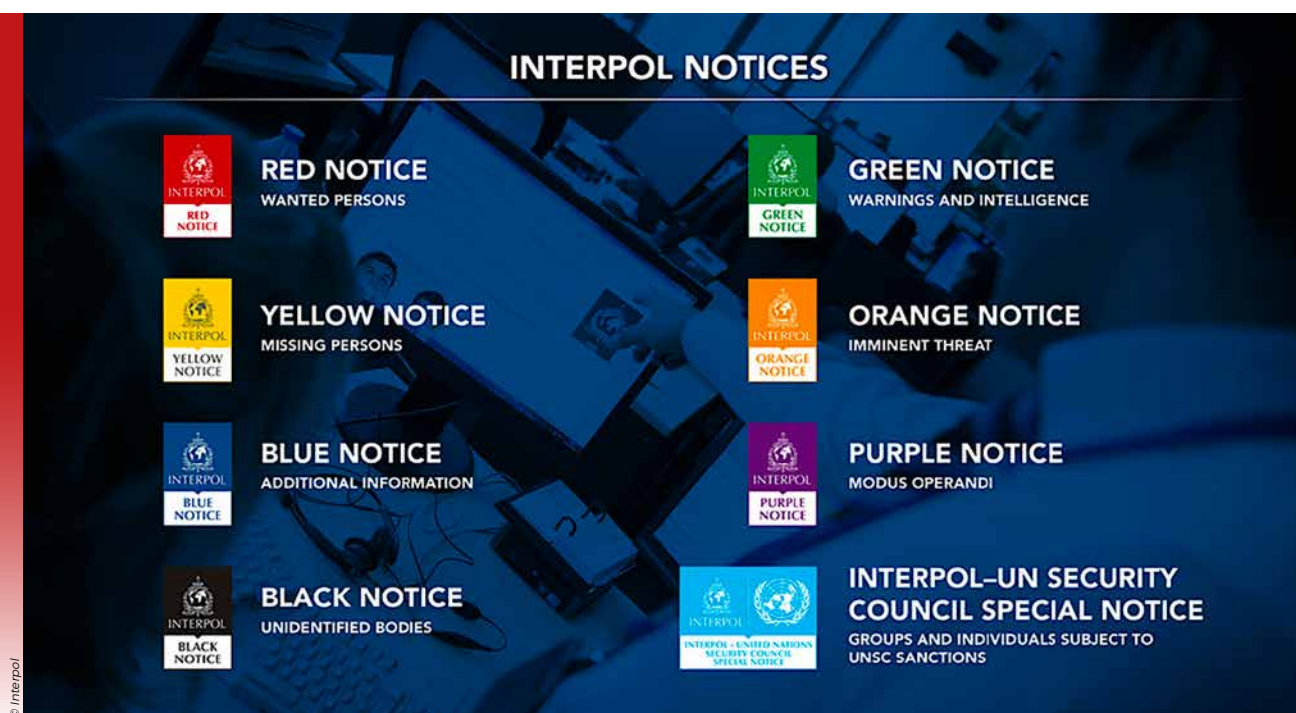


Laura Meller

But Russia does conduct scientific experiments in Antarctica. It was the Russian scientist Peter Kropotkin who first suggested in the late 19th century that fresh unfrozen water may be found under the Antarctic ice. It was then another Russian scientist, Andrey Kapitsa, who used seismic soundings made between 1959 and 1964 in the area of Russia's Vostok Station to suggest the existence of a lake beneath the ice, and a Russian glaciologist, I. A. Zotikov, wrote his PhD thesis on the subject in 1967. Various Russian teams were involved in further research before one of them finally reached the lake itself, now named Lake Vostok, (such a Russian name must surely please Putin?) in 2012. The water in the lake had been sealed off from the atmosphere by some 4 kilometres of ice for 15-million years and it may even contain some life forms. Other scientists had helped along the way with advice, satellite scans and other such things, proving that scientists can cooperate without waving their flags while politicians seem to find that difficult. Of course, scientists deal only with facts; politicians, it seems, deal mainly with self-interest and image. It's a cheering thought that the world of scientists usually outlasts the machinations of mere politicians.

Everyone remembers Galileo Galilei, few recall Pope Urban VIII or the member of the inquisition who "questioned" Galileo, Father Vincenzo Maculani da Firenzuola. Just as well, really; they're irrelevant.

Robin Crow



RED IN TOOTH AND CLAW

How authoritarian regimes are misusing red notices to harass their political enemies abroad

“Come out, come out, wherever you are,” is a line often heard during the children’s game of hide and seek, in which one person – in this case the speaker – is seeking friends who are hiding nearby. It seems to have become a leitmotif for autocratic leaders who fear opposition. Several of them are enlisting the help of law enforcement agencies around the world to help them (albeit unwittingly) to catch those who got away having dared to question their authority. The method is simple: government officials have taken to using INTERPOL by issuing what are called ‘Red Notices’, which require authorities to trace and arrest the person named and perhaps return them to the country that issued the notice in the event of an extradition request. Often there is no such request; the Red Notice is sometimes used merely to inconvenience and discomfort the subject.

Red notices are only supposed to be issued in cases where a serious violation of the law has occurred; the sort that would be recognised as a crime in any country. To quote the Lexology website, “Red notices are published at the request of a National Central Bureau or an international entity with powers of investigation and prosecution in criminal matters in order to seek the location of a wanted person and his/her detention, arrest, or restriction of movement for the purposes of extradition, surrender, or similar lawful action.” The use of Red Notices to catch and detain political opponents, rather than criminals, is an abuse of the system

and it comes in three forms. Firstly, there is political abuse, in which the notice is issued against exiled political activists or asylum seekers. Then there is corruption, says Lexology, which includes the issue of Red Notices as a form of retribution or revenge, whether it relates to personal matters or corporate affairs. It is sometimes used against whistle-blowers. The third form of abuse is where there is a failure to seek extradition, although by issuing a Red Notice it can have an impact on the person it names but without any attempt being made to bring them back to the country that issued the Notice in order to stand trial.

Extract of a Russian red notice posted on the Interpol website.

The notice mentions:

“Charges

Published as provided by requesting entity

Getting trained for terrorist activity; participation in terrorist organization; participation in illegal armed formation “

The worst offenders, says Lexology, are Russia, China and Turkey, but they are not alone. There have been some 7,000 Red Notices issued, according to data

from 2020, of which 2,631 were based on requests from Russia. By comparison, the United States has issued 331 and France just 26. The system has also been abused by, among others, Egypt, Azerbaijan, the United Arab Emirates, Venezuela, Iran, Indonesia and Bahrain. Lexology cites the case of an Egyptian man who escaped torture at home and who sought asylum in Australia, arriving there with his wife and children in 2012. He was detained indefinitely on the basis of a Red Notice issued by INTERPOL at the request of the Egyptian government and he spent five years in detention before the notice was lifted in 2018. It later turned out that the convictions against the man relied on evidence that had been obtained under what was described as 'severe torture'. The Ancient Romans believed in torture and it was required whenever slaves were questioned, but in these supposedly more enlightened times we have learned that someone undergoing torture will confess to anything, just to stop the pain. When the Templars were tortured, they initially confessed to nothing because they didn't know what they were being accused of. Once somebody thought to tell them, they confessed to it straight away. They were not guilty, of course, but France's King Philip IV ('Philip the Fair') wanted their riches. However, the case of the detained Egyptian man is just one example; unfortunately, there are hundreds more. The Council of Europe has called for tougher action against the abuse of Red Notices, but the European Union appears not to be listening and often turns a blind eye to Russia's misdemeanours. The Council's Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) wants to see more funds being made available to permit INTERPOL to investigate Red Notice requests more fully, but INTERPOL itself stands accused of a lack of transparency and accountability.

The Assembly sees the problem as a human rights issue that should be addressed. A report by Aleksander Pociąg



Aleksander Pociąg



Russian Revolutionary political leader and author Leon Trotsky

adopted in November 2019 sets out the problem clearly. The report, entitled "Abusive use of the Interpol system: the need for more stringent legal safeguards" says that it "has identified a pattern of misuse of the Red Notice system by certain States intent on persecuting political opponents beyond their borders, and addressed a number of concrete recommendations both to member States and to Interpol itself aimed at improving the flow of information and strengthening the filtering and appeals mechanisms at Interpol in order to ensure that abusive requests are less likely to cause damage to the rights of innocent persons in the future." It's not the first time the Assembly has come to that conclusion – a similar report was adopted in 2017 – but the main culprits appear unlikely to change their ways any time soon.

RABBITS AND ASSASSINS

Even supposed revolutionaries don't always get their own way when their home country wants them silenced. Take the example of Lev Davidovich Bronstein, better known to history as Leon Trotsky. He was the only political figure of any stature to stand up to the tyranny of Joseph Stalin, although he was obliged to do it from far away. Stalin was determined to get rid of him because some people still believed that Trotsky's brand of Communism was purer and closer to the ideals set out by Karl Marx and his collaborator, Friedrich Engels, than those of Stalin himself.

They were right, so Trotsky had to go. He fled abroad from Stalin's NKVD killers. He was in Norway when the Spanish Civil War broke out and when the Moscow show trials of Lev Kamenev, Grigory Zinoviev and fourteen others began. They were the closest thing

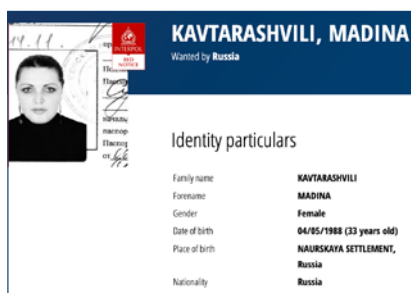
that Stalin's regime had to a political opposition, but they were charged with high treason, conspiracy and attempting to assassinate Stalin. What's more, the indictment claimed that it was all part of a terrorist plot led by Trotsky and his son, Lev. It was all nonsense, of course, dreamed up to justify the arrests and inevitable executions (Stalin is thought to have been responsible for between six and nine million civilian deaths overall; almost as many as Hitler). Coming up to the present day, the validity of the charges brought against Alexei Anatolievich Navalny for daring to oppose Vladimir Putin have similarly been questioned.

History has a habit of repeating itself when autocratic leaders seek to cement their rule through violence. Back in 1936, the Moscow show trial mentioned the existence of a "Trotskyite-Zinovievite Terror Centre", which did not exist, but Stalin was not a man to let the truth get in the way of revenge.



Alexei Navalny

On the second day of the trial, Trotsky "offered to submit himself to a Commission on Political Terrorism sponsored by the League of Nations," according to Joshua Rubinstein's biography, simply called 'Leon Trotsky – a revolutionary life', he was willing "even to accept extradition to Moscow if an independent commission found him guilty of the crimes alleged against him by the Kremlin." Stalin's government urged Norway to expel him as a "notorious criminal", but they never sought extradition because that would mean putting their case before an impartial Norwegian judge who would be likely to spot fraudulent evidence in a vindictive prosecution. The Norwegian government was put under pressure by Stalin and by Germany's Nazis (they hated Trotsky for being a Communist) and responded by placing Trotsky and his wife under house arrest, where they remained for three months. One of the accusations was



that Trotsky and his son had met to plan their conspiracy at the Hotel Bristol in Copenhagen in 1932, apparently unaware that the hotel had been demolished in 1917. No country seemed keen to offer the Trotskys refuge because they were afraid of angering either Stalin or Hitler.



Red notice of recently arrested Rocco Morabito one of Italy's most wanted fugitives, convicted of drug trafficking and with links to the 'Ndrangheta mafia

Eventually, persuaded by the artists Diego Rivera and his wife, Frida Kahlo (with whom Trotsky had an affair), Mexico agreed to grant them visas and Trotsky spent his time there trying to fend off the lies and insinuations about his beliefs and policies which were spreading through the United States. The great powers were well into disinformation campaigns, even then. Trotsky knew that Stalin's NKVD killers were still seeking a way to kill him. It was there, on 20 August, 1940, while he was feeding his rabbits, that he received an unexpected visit from Frank Jacson, the lover of a Trotsky confidante from Brooklyn called Sylvia Ageloff. Suddenly, in Trotsky's study, Jacson produced an ice pick from under his raincoat and buried the point of it in Trotsky's head. Much to Ageloff's surprise, Jacson turned out in reality to be Ramon Mercader, a Spanish Communist recruited to the NKVD during the Spanish Civil War. Trotsky's assassination had been planned in the Kremlin a long time before. Stalin could not bear the thought of political opposition. Trotsky died in hospital the following day, not far from Jacson, who had been admitted to the same hospital because of a severe beating by Trotsky's guards. Trotsky pleaded with doctors to keep Jacson alive.

These days, disgruntled Communists seeking the praise of a terrifying leader by killing his opponents may be harder to find, but the basic plan remains much the same: track down those opponents wherever they are in the world and eliminate them, or at least silence them. Stalin's agents had tried to kill Trotsky less than three months earlier, when they riddled his bedroom door with machine gun bullets but missed the man himself.

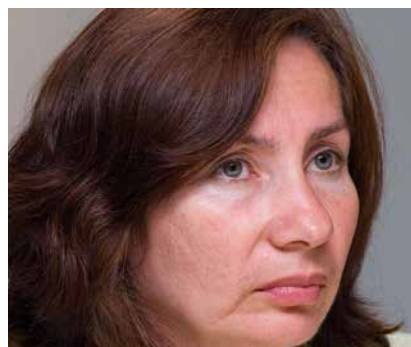


Aleksandr Valterovich Litvinenko

More recently, of course, we have seen the murder by poison of Alexander Litvinenko, a former KGB agent (and MI5 double agent) who died three weeks after drinking a cup of tea at a London hotel, unaware that Andrei Lugovoi and Dmitry Kovtun, agents of the NKVD's modern equivalent, the FSB, had laced it with polonium-210. Bullets were used to kill Anna Politkovskaya, a Russian journalist who had been critical of Putin, accusing him in her book, 'Putin's Russia' of creating a police state. The press room of the European Parliament in Brussels is named after her.

Another journalist who assisted Politkovskaya, Natalia Estemirova, who had exposed human rights abuses by Russian forces in Chechnya, was abducted outside her flat and later found dead from gunshot wounds in nearby woods.

No-one has ever been charged with her murder. Then there was the attempted murder of Sergei Skripal and his daughter



Natalia Estemirova

Yulia, using the Russian-developed military nerve agent, Novichok. Although the Skripals survived – just – the attempt claimed the life of Dawn Sturgess, who unknowingly touched the supposed perfume bottle used to carry the Novichok and carelessly disposed of by the would-be assassins. Her boyfriend, Charlie Rowley, survived, as did the British policeman, Nick Bailey, first called to the scene of the Skripals' Novichok-induced illness, although they became very ill. The fact that they both recovered has been partially attributed to the British weather at the time: thick fog. The resulting humidity can weaken the effectiveness of the nerve agent, according to experts. There have been many other victims of violence who had expressed some form of opposition to Putin. It does not seem to be a healthy thing to do.



Alexander Petrov and Ruslan Bochirov were seen strolling through Salisbury minutes after Novichok attack

NO HIDING PLACE

The use of Red Notices, however, means that for dissidents – at least the most important ones – there is literally 'no hiding place'. It is not supposed to be like that, according to INTERPOL's own regulations. "A Red Notice must concern a 'serious ordinary-law crime' and must not be an offence 'relating to behavioural or cultural norms,' 'relating to family/private matters,' or 'originating from a violation of laws or regulations of an administrative nature or deriving from private disputes, unless the criminal activity is aimed at facilitating a serious crime or is suspected of being connected to organized crime.'" If you have ever reported misconduct by a state or queried the honesty of a state leader you must be aware of the risk you are running and the dwindling number of possible places of concealment. "In 2019 alone, INTERPOL issued 13,377 Red Notices," reports Arnold and Porter, a London based company advising on regulatory, transactional, and litigation issues, "and

currently there are approximately 62,000 Red Notices in circulation, roughly 55,000 of which are non-public.” As a result of governments abusing the Red Notice system for improper ends, the International Bar Association (IBA), based in London but with an office in Washington D.C., has raised concerns about the actions of certain countries.

“To break the cycle of impunity, we must insist on accountability

Mark Ellis
IBA Executive Director



The International Bar Association standing up with the UN Human Rights Office to jointly advocate for the eradication of torture

“By submitting a facially valid but illegitimate request for a dissident’s apprehension and extradition, they are then able to accomplish in United States immigration proceedings what they could not do under the scrutiny of formal extradition proceedings. In turn, US immigration practitioners are increasingly confronted by such persecutory Red Notices, whether in court, when their client is arrested at their house or at a US Citizenship and Immigration Services interview.” In its conclusions, the IBA seems unconvinced that INTERPOL is sufficiently neutral when Red Notices are served, at least in the United States. “Interpol communications are far too often used as conclusive evidence of criminality by US immigration authorities, upending the lives of foreign nationals who are legitimately seeking asylum and other benefits. In order to effectively advocate for these clients, and stand against transnational repression, immigration attorneys must familiarise themselves with how Interpol functions, and learn how to successfully challenge persecutory Red Notices and diffusions.”

London-based lawyers Corker Binning have been involved in a number of such cases and have warned of the dangers posed by Red Notices, even to the wholly innocent. “The practical and reputational impact of an extant Interpol Red Notice is far-reaching,” they warn. “It can render individuals virtual prisoners in their country of residence. It may lead to the closure of bank accounts due to anti-money laundering laws. Regulated

persons, for example by the FCA (Financial Conduct Authority), will need to make appropriate disclosures.



William F. Browder, Chief Executive Officer
Hermitage Capital Management

Knowing how to respond to and challenge an Interpol Red Notice is therefore as important as knowing how to respond to and challenge a domestic arrest warrant.” In all, even if the country requesting the issuance of a Red Notice has no intention – nor the capability – of extraditing the person named, they can thoroughly mess up someone’s life. The US authorities have taken to standing up to Red Notices; they have dismissed eight alerts issued by Russia for Bill Browder, an American-born British financier and political activist who is the CEO and co-founder of Hermitage Capital Management. That’s the investment advisor to the Hermitage Fund, at one time the largest foreign portfolio investor in Russia. Browder’s lawyer in Moscow, Sergei Magnitsky, named three state officials who had tried to steal Hermitage Fund property. They had him arrested and sent to prison, where he was severely beaten and denied medical help. He died. At an event to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the opening by Interpol of an office in Washington, Edward O’Callaghan, a senior official at the US Justice Department, said “We cannot allow INTERPOL to be weaponised against journalists, dissenting voices and oppressed minorities.”



Edward O’Callaghan

INTERPOL likes to stick to the rules and honour requests made to it by member states but there are limits. Following the failed 2016 coup attempt in Turkey, Ankara submitted requests for tens of thousands of Red Notices. INTERPOL chose to set them aside, but many authorities seem to accept a Red Notice as evidence of criminality in itself, locking up the individual concerned and freezing their bank accounts just in case. According to US immigration attorney Sandra Grossman, America’s Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials too often treat a Red Notice as proof of guilt. One of her clients, who is Chinese, has spent months locked up in a detention centre, with the judge refusing to issue him with a bail bond solely because of the Red Notice. Beijing must be happy about that.

**BUMBLE WAS RIGHT:
“THE LAW IS A ASS”**

(Yes, that’s how Charles Dickens wrote it)

“It should be noted from the outset that the reform process at INTERPOL, accompanied by the Assembly’s earlier work, has indeed prompted the introduction of stronger compliance checks for Red Notice requests,” wrote Polish MP Aleksander Pociej, in his report to the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly. “Certain governments have reacted by using ‘Wanted Person Diffusions’ instead. These involve the selective distribution, through Interpol’s channels, of bilateral or multilateral requests for apprehending a targeted person. Whilst Resolution 2161 (2017) (*Abusive recourse to the Interpol system: the need for more stringent legal safeguards*) only referred to Red Notices, it is clear that such ‘Diffusions’ must also be subjected to compliance checks. I was told that this is indeed the case now, although the sheer number and urgent nature of diffusions are challenging.” Want to hide a fraudulent Red Notice request? Issue it among dozens of genuine ones. After all, we must always remember that INTERPOL is not a police force, merely an organisation that facilitates law enforcement cooperation among its 194 member states. There may be safety in numbers, as the old saying goes, but there is also the ability to hide dishonesty and corruption in a crowd.



The campaign group Fair Trials is pleased with the Parliamentary Assembly's involvement in trying to stop abuse of the Red Notice system. "As INTERPOL is an important tool for tackling cross-border crime," it writes on its website, "PACE recommended the organisation to further improve its transparency by disclosing data that would help to assess how effective its review mechanisms are. Among PACE's recommendations are also the improvement of its systems for scrutinising and preventing repetitive requests; better control of the information that flows through its communication system and ends up on national databases; and a strengthened appeals procedure that would make recourse speedier, more interactive and transparent."

As Pocij wrote in his report for PACE: "International co-operation in the field of criminal law is of fundamental importance. When criminals take advantage of reduced border controls in Europe to escape justice in their own countries and transfer criminal assets abroad, States must react by co-operating with each other efficiently to uphold the rule of law. A reasonable balance must be struck between the legitimate interest in preventing impunity for serious crimes, which themselves violate human rights, and the rights of the person targeted by an extradition request, who must not be exposed to a serious risk of flagrant denial of justice, cruel and inhuman punishment and/or discriminatory treatment on political, racial, ethnic or religious grounds. International co-operation in the field of criminal law requires a high degree of mutual trust, based on common standards and practices. Trust is destroyed when international co-operation mechanisms are misused for political or corrupt purposes." A high

degree of mutual trust is not something you get with a flagrantly misused Red Notice.



Félicien Kabuga during his trial in November 2020

Of course, most Red Notices are issued to apprehend genuine criminals, like the twin brothers who broke into the Green Vault Museum in Dresden, Germany, and stole a large quantity of precious 18th century jewellery in 2019. Shortly after the notice was issued, there was an arrest. In early 2020, a man wanted in connection with the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, and the subject of an INTERPOL Red Notice, was arrested by French police. 84-year-old Félicien Kabuga, indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) on seven counts including genocide, conspiracy to commit genocide, persecution and extermination, was taken into custody in a village near Paris where he had been living under a false identity. In another case, a rapist and murderer was arrested in Buenos Aires, Argentina, after 26 years on the run, thanks to an INTERPOL Red Notice. Back in 1994, Nancy Mestre Vargas went to a New Year's Eve party in Barranquilla, Colombia, but failed to return home. Her killer was captured in the Brazilian city of Belo Horizonte,

where he had been living under a false identity. Jaime Saade Cormane had been on the run ever since he raped and murdered Vargas.

He was one of several wanted persons targeted by INTERPOL's Fugitive Investigative Support (FIS) unit as part of Project El PAcCTO (Europe-Latin America Assistance Programme against Transnational Organized Crime). In another case, Brazilian Federal Police caught a Turkish fugitive who had been convicted of smuggling migrants to the United Kingdom from Belgium. In November 2017, the fugitive, identified only by his initials, VK, was sentenced by a Belgian court to eight years in prison for his involvement in an international smuggling ring. The group targeted migrants of Syrian nationality and charged hefty fees to organize their illegal travel to the UK by sailing boat, carrying men, women and children in a perilous manner. He escaped before serving his sentence and had been on the run from Belgian authorities since 2018. INTERPOL's National Central Bureau (NCB) in Brazil traced him to Sao Paulo. When they discovered he was due to fly out of the country two days later, they turned to INTERPOL to obtain additional information as well as a Red Notice against the fugitive.



Jaime Saade Cormane arrested after 26 years on the run, thanks to an Interpol Red Notice

INTERPOL can be proud of its record in bringing serious international criminals to justice by means of Red Notices. The blame for the system's occasional misuse lies completely at the feet of authoritarian regimes that seem to have very strange ideas of justice. INTERPOL does try to filter out malicious requests for a Red Notice, as it explains on its own website: "Every Red Notice request is checked by a specialised task force to ensure it is compliant with our rules. This review takes into account information available at the time of publication. Whenever new and relevant information is brought to

the attention of the General Secretariat after a Red Notice has been issued, the task force re-examines the case.” Of course, the country making the request can (and often does) supply misleading data to back up their case, although it may not always lead to an arrest. “INTERPOL cannot compel the law enforcement authorities in any country to arrest someone who is the subject of a Red Notice,” says its website. “Each member country decides what legal value it gives to a Red Notice and the authority of their law enforcement officers to make arrests.” INTERPOL is not always able to find out if those data are false. “Data means any item of information, irrespective of its source, pertaining to constituent elements of ordinary-law crimes,” says the website, “the investigation and prevention of such crimes, the prosecution of the offenders and punishment of the offences, and any information pertaining to missing persons and unidentified dead bodies.”

THE LAW AS A MEANS TO STEAL

It is not just rogue states, however, that abuse the Red Notice system. It can also be employed as a means of silencing a business rival.



Juri Nemets

Juri Nemets, writing on the Red Notice Abuse Reports website, says “I am often contacted by entrepreneurs with Red Notices and Diffusions published at the request of or disseminated by countries where illegal business takeovers are common. Such takeovers are usually characterised by criminal conduct by a party attempting to force a business owner to surrender his/her rights or interest in the business against the latter’s will by means of force, threats and/or extortion and accompanied by trumped up charges against the victim brought by corrupt government officials in aid of the takeover if the victim refuses to comply.” The Commission for the Control of INTERPOL’s files (CCF) has in the past

highlighted what it calls “politically motivated prosecutions” of “particularly influential businessmen”. The CCF is an independent, impartial body, responsible for ensuring that the processing of personal data complies with applicable Interpol rules. Many autocratic regimes have friendly oligarchs who may need assistance to steal a rival company and the misuse of Red Notices provides a way.



The Law Society in the UK mentions that British governments have tended to ignore Red Notices without arresting the individuals named. “The reason for this stance is well-known and long-established: Interpol cannot be trusted. Its processes are open to grave abuse by countries with a questionable commitment to, or even open contempt for, the rule of law. Red Notices are routinely issued for political or other improper purposes, based on flimsy or non-existent evidence. While an individual can challenge a Red Notice, this is often after the event and the process is opaque and can take 12 months or more.” The problem was mentioned during the passage of a bill through the UK Parliament, although a requirement for countries to state their opposition to Red Notice abuse was dropped. The Law Society ponders the answer: “So, if Interpol cannot be trusted to weed out unmeritorious and abusive Red Notices, we must assess the trustworthiness of the issuing country instead.”



A female fugitive wanted for graft under an Interpol red notice steps down from a plane at an airport in Shanghai on Sept 19, 2017

The misuse of Red Notices and of INTERPOL itself by a member nation for predominantly political, military,

racial or religious reasons is expressly forbidden in INTERPOL’s constitution. But, as the International Bar Association (IBA) attests, it still happens, all too often, it seems. “Governments, international organisations, non-governmental organisations and experts have attested to the reality of Interpol abuse. Immigration attorneys also witness first-hand the damage that a Red Notice can do to an innocent client who is processing a visa, a green card, a naturalisation case or an asylum case, among other applications for immigration benefits.” In other words, you can escape the jurisdiction of one country and its laws, but you may find its powers to interfere in your life and severely inconvenience you can be extended to any country you care to mention, thanks to INTERPOL and its Red Notice system. It’s an issue that seems to be ignored by some countries, although the IBA has announced some progress. “In 2019, the congressional Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the Helsinki Commission, introduced the Transnational Repression Accountability and Prevention (TRAP) Act to address Interpol abuse at an international level and the misuse of its communications by US authorities. The TRAP act would enhance the screening process for Interpol communications to ensure they do not violate Interpol’s constitution or rules for data processing. It would also seek to obtain more transparency and accountability at the CCF by requiring countries found to be in violation of the agency’s rules to seek prior approval before submitting any further complaints about the same individual and would impose penalties for egregious abuse.”

Don’t expect autocratic regimes whose leaders fear being overthrown to take too much notice. There are always ways around regulations if you look hard enough. The Red Notice system itself is too valuable in seeking out real criminals ever to be set aside completely. As the 14th century poet and writer Christine de Pizan wrote in her 1399 ‘Letter of the God of Love’: “Those who plead their cause in the absence of an opponent can invent to their heart’s content, can pontificate without taking into account the opposite point of view and keep the best arguments for themselves, for aggressors are always quick to attack those who have no means of defence.” It seems that the rich and powerful haven’t changed much in the last 600 years.

Anthony James



Bar-Boljare motorway

THE ROAD TO HELL IS PAVED WITH GOOD INTENTIONS

...but sadly strewn with problems

“Neither a borrower nor a lender be,” advised the somewhat facile Polonius, the Danish king’s advisor, to his departing son, Laertes, in Shakespeare’s play, *Hamlet*, “for loan oft loses both itself and friend, and borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.” It’s sound advice for anyone but perhaps the government of Montenegro should have heeded it before work began on the A-1 Bar to Boljare motorway. The first section, which is being constructed by the China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC), has been financed largely with a \$944-million (€775-million) loan from China’s Exim (Import and Export) bank. The first annual payment of \$67.5-million (€55.4-million) falls due this July. But the economy of Montenegro is suffering badly from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to a steep fall in the income from tourism.

In 2020, tourism plunged from 22% of GDP to just 3.5%, which has triggered a sharp recession. The economy shrank

by 15.2%, which has exacerbated the country’s current account deficit, depressed retail services, caused a rise in unemployment and a serious dip in investment and public finances. The Podgorica government must be careful because China has form when it comes to lending to finance projects. The EU made mistakes over its help to Greece which led to China taking over the port of Piraeus. If Montenegro fails to meet its payment deadlines it risks losing sections of its own coastline to Beijing because the terms of the loan contract pledge Montenegrin land as collateral.



Deputy Prime Minister of Montenegro Dritan Abazovic

Montenegro has asked the EU to help it to repay its billion-dollar loan for the as yet unfinished first phase of the Bar-Boljare highway. Brussels has declined a similar approach in the past, but Deputy Prime Minister Dritan Abazović tried again in March to persuade the EU to take over the loan, arguing that it would help to curb Chinese influence on the bloc’s doorstep. The EU expressed sympathy but fell short of offering help. EU Commission spokesperson Peter Stano told one of the Commission’s daily media briefings that it would not help Montenegro to repay its debts. The highway project was approved by Montenegro’s previous government; opposition parties and civic activists had said all along that it was overpriced, and they alleged corruption in the process. Now they’re stuck with it. Montenegro’s Minister of Finance and Social Care, Miloško Spajić told the media that the highway has cost €20-million per kilometre to construct, which makes it one of the world’s most expensive roads.



Minister of Finance and Social Welfare of Montenegro Milojko Spajic

China has pointed out that the loan for the highway represents less than a quarter of Montenegro's total debts, while the Exim bank is only charging 2% interest, which is quite low, with repayment over 20 years and a 6-year grace period.

However, all may not be lost for Montenegro's hopes of assistance. EU Enlargement Commissioner Oliver Varhelyi posted a Tweet in March in which he wrote: "We stand by Montenegro and support its EU path. We're exploring options with VladaCG (the Montenegrin government) and our partners to find workable solutions for [the] country's investment projects and to ensure sustainability of its public debt and eliminate risks of past arrangements, respecting EU policy and financial rules." Montenegro's Chinese loan was taken out at a time when China was extending loans in pursuit of its One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative, according to BNE Intellinews, quoting the Center for Global Development, a think-tank based in Washington D.C., which listed Montenegro as one of eight countries at increasing risk of debt problems.



EU Enlargement Commissioner Oliver Varhelyi

The deadline for completing the first section has had to be extended twice, while costs have grown. Montenegro's ability to pay has not, however. It has a budget deficit of 11% of GDP while budget revenue has fallen by 13.1% year-on-year. The country's total expenditure grew by 4.8%, despite the government's attempts to reallocate spending into

healthcare services and supplies while reducing capital spending. The country's debts reached 100% of GDP by the end of 2020. That may not be as bad as it might appear. Thanks to accumulated government deposits, maturing debt may be paid earlier, so that by March 2021 Montenegro was able to reimburse maturing Eurobonds worth 5% of GDP, while undertaking to repay additional debts of 2% and 6% of GDP later in 2021 and 2022. During that period, though, inflation is set to rise, and because many of its jobs rely on the tourist trade, any growth in employment is likely to be modest. Currently, 15.2% of the population are without a job.

GOING INTO DEBT, A KILOMETRE AT A TIME

Some 85% of a priority section of the highway has been completed. Two deadlines for completion have passed and the new deadline has been set for the end of September 2021, although Montenegro's Minister of Transport and Maritime Affairs, Osman Nurković, refused to confirm that the new deadline would be met. The original deadline was May 2020 and the cost of the construction, including additional work that was required, has been estimated at €895-million. Montenegro, of course, is only responsible for the section of the road that runs through its territory.



Minister of Transport and Maritime Affairs of Montenegro

The road starts in Belgrade, for instance, which is the capital of Serbia, while at the other end stands Bar, the main seaport for Montenegro. Both Montenegro and Serbia would like the road to be listed as one of the 'Pan-European Corridors'. On the Serbian end, work began in 2012 on the 40-kilometre stretch from Ljig to Preljina. The road went into service in 2016, just a year after work began on the Montenegro section.



The Serbian minister of construction, transportation and infrastructure, Zorana Mihajlovic, and the executive president of the Chinese company CCCC (China Communication Construction Company), Du Fei, signing on March 29 2018 a memorandum of understanding and cooperation in the Belgrade-Southern Adriatic project, for the Pozega-Boljare segment

In Serbia, the road has two sections: Belgrade to Požega and Požega to Boljare, the site of the border crossing between Serbia and Montenegro. Because the land contains fewer obstacles to construction, the Serbian section was the easiest to build and also the cheapest, comparatively speaking. It's a different story in Montenegro, which is a mountainous country. The road requires sixteen tunnels and twenty bridges, which are expensive. In August 2019 the Ministry of Transport and Maritime Affairs reported that it had secured financing of €388-million for the tunnels and the highest bridge, the Moračica on the Smokovac - Uvač - Mateševsko section cost €74.5-million..



Moračica Bridge

Of the 1,100 workers employed in its construction, almost 400 were Chinese citizens. It is a formidable achievement, 960 metres long, and 23.4 metres wide, supported on five pillars, with the tallest of them 161 metres high. The bridge forms part of the section from Podgorica, the capital of Montenegro, to Kolašin.

"Construction works were mostly completed on all facilities (bridges,

tunnels, open route),” Jovan Ivanović, deputy leader of the team of engineers (supervision) from the French-Italian Consortium INGEROP-GEODATA, told Media Bureau, “especially on the first half of the route. Works on equipping the so-called highway are also being carried out intensively: electro-mechanical works. The equipment and devices in the tunnels are mostly mounted. These are low and high current installations, hydraulic and fire installations, ventilation, lighting, horizontal and vertical traffic signals and more. The project of water supply of the highway is in the final phase, as well as the project of power supply with electricity.” Ivanović said he did not expect any further delays, although he admitted that there is still a lot of work to do.



Besides local workers, the China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) is employing Chinese citizens in their worldwide bridge constructions

The Chinese contractors have recently found themselves facing an unexpected problem. Under intense public pressure, the China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) had to ask for permission to repair a damaged 500-meter section of the Tara River's bank. The Tara, much loved by tourists back in the days when travel was possible, is one of the continent's most beautiful rivers. It is UNESCO-listed which is supposed to give it protection. This is how Trip Advisor describes it: “It is the deepest canyon in Europe, and second deepest in the world after the Grand Canyon of Colorado, USA. 78 kilometres long, and up to 1,300 metres deep, this “tear of Europe”, as it is also called, is a great natural and tourist attraction not only in the area, but in the entire country.” Sadly, with very few tourists these days, it is being spoiled before they can return. The work for which the request for ‘permission to repair’ is concerned included stabilizing the left bank of the waterway under the alpine Mateševsko bridge, near a hub for mountain tourism in the area called Kolašin.



Kolašin

The riverbank was damaged by the construction of the road. Balkan Insight reports that Montenegro's Agency for Nature and Environmental Protection had rejected a first application to carry out remedial work because contractors had deviated from the agreed plan. “Construction activities led to the turbidity of a river of national importance while the deepening of the 500-metre-long riverbed affected Tara's biodiversity,” the Agency reported. The later request for permission to put right the damage said: “Remedial work is necessary after damage that occurred during the execution of works on the Mateševsko loop. The stabilization of the left bank of the Tara, under the old Mateševsko bridge, to a length of 500 meters, should be completed by October.”

HERITAGE WASHED AWAY

The proposed repairs do not go anywhere near far enough, according to environmental lobbyists. “Rehabilitation of 500 meters of the riverbed looks like a bad joke,” Natasa Kovacevic of the Green Home environmental NGO, told Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's Balkan Service, “since 6.7 kilometres of river flow and the floodplain's key biodiversity zone were destroyed on the loop and upstream access roads alone.” This is an issue that will not simply go away. On March 3, the Prosecution Service in Montenegro launched the first state investigation into environmental damage done to the river, claiming the company had begun work on a part of the river bank without getting the required environmental permits.

“Contrary to law, the company started construction of a facility without submitting an application and set environmental protection measures,” said Prosecutors in Kolašin in a press release. “This has caused damage to the environment to a greater extent and in the wider area.”



Natasa Kovacevic

The Tara's 80-kilometer canyon is the longest in Europe, and it, together with the surrounding coniferous woods, have enjoyed UNESCO World Heritage status since 1980. Environmentalists point out that it has been under threat from small hydro-electric power projects and micro-dams, largely because throughout much of the Balkans, enforcement regimes are weak and often slipshod. Montenegro's Nature and Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA) last year accused the Chinese builders of ignoring its recommendations. Photographs of the area show a struggling waterway that now more closely resembles an inner-city clearance site, with discarded and rusting old equipment and broken metal fences littering the scene. The environmentalist organization Green Home stressed that the Tara is protected on six levels and highlighted its significance as a natural habitat. “The arrogant breach of rules on the Tara,” said a spokesperson, “has crossed the line and the river is dying. Everyone who contributed to the situation as it is must be held responsible, which is why we ask for the works to be halted until the responsibility of the perpetrator and the damage are determined.” It described the damage as “unprecedented ecoside”. The Tara's once-pristine turquoise waters are now brown and sludgy. The website ‘Modern Diplomacy’ lists the Tara River problem as one of several environmental issues brought to light by the fulfilment of the Belt and Road plan. “The most visible consequence of the project is the need for rock excavation for a motorway tunnel,” it says, “but other implications, such as water pollution and illegal landfills also emerged from an investigation by the Montenegrin NGO, MANS.



The Tara River Gorge, northern Montenegro

The European Parliament and European Commission have called on authorities to share more details about the project's environmental impact with the public." Any construction work is bound to have its downside but in this case it's a very big downside for what has long been a spectacular natural national asset. The simple fact remains: drive a massive autoroute through a known beauty spot and you are inevitably going to spoil it.

Dejan Milovac, from MANS, said the prosecution's investigation was surprising since the authorities had ignored environmental warnings from civic activists and environmentalists.

Balkan Insight reports that in June 2016, "when MANS urged the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism to protect the Tara, the ministry insisted no significant damage had occurred." Milovac told the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network: "The prosecutor investigation refers to only a small part of the devastation that has happened at the construction site near Mateševo. The black spots on that route still remain without adequate attention from the authorities, while the contractor has been released from any responsibility for now." The cost of restitution is only part of the story in a country where low-level corruption is more or less the norm whenever large amounts of money are involved.



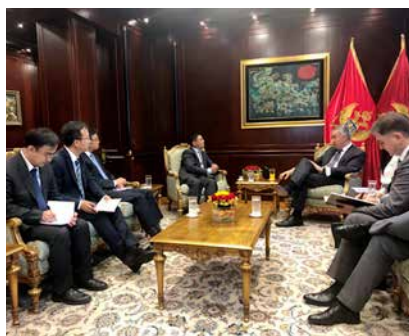
Montenegro Prime Minister Duško Marković inspecting the Moračica Bridge in 2019

Jacob Mardell is a researcher of China's Belt and Road Initiative and contributes to the Mercator Institute for China Studies' (MERICS) BRI Tracker project. In an article for the Berlin Policy Journal he wrote: "There is no hard evidence of corruption in this project, but everyone here admits that corruption is endemic throughout the Western Balkans. Kickbacks vary, but in Montenegro I'm told that 10 percent of contract value

is not an outrageous sum to request as a bribe. Even many CRBC employees, who speak only on the condition of anonymity, assume high-level corruption exists in the project."

STUCK ON THE TREADMILL

Scrapping the project is not an option, of course, so completing the next section from Mateševo to Boljari on the Serbian border becomes essential. In a way, it's rather like a wire-walking artist attempting to cross the Niagara Falls. Getting nervous half way across doesn't help: turning around would not reduce the danger. As Shakespeare's anti-hero Macbeth muses when his blood-soaked bid for power starts to unravel, "I am in blood stepped in so far, that, should I wade no more, returning were as tedious as go o'er." Much the same is true of massive debts being incurred for such a vast project. While the debt is mounting and the delays and obstacles to completion drag on, together with environmental concerns, many in Montenegro and elsewhere question the need for such a road at all. Right back at the planning stage in 2009 the New Jersey-based engineering consultants, Louis Berger, expressed doubts about the value of the project. That conclusion was echoed in 2012 when San Francisco-based URS, the engineering, design and construction company, expressed a doubt that the road would ever carry sufficient traffic to make its construction worthwhile. A feasibility study by a domestic company in Montenegro agreed with that view but still declared it to be 'economically justified'. A certain amount of national pride is involved, of course, plus an understandable desire not to be seen by the public as culpable idiots. No doubt the road will carry traffic; the road is not, as some early critics claimed, the 'road to nowhere'. Or at least it won't be when it's finished.



CRBC President Du Fei meets with Montenegrin President Milo Djukanovic in 2019

According to the website of US-China today, Montenegro started the process of planning the Bar-Boljare highway in 2006. It was eagerly championed by Milo Đukanović, Montenegro's dominant political figure since the 1990s and today the president. The highway was promoted as a way to boost the economy and improve trade with Serbia. It connects the rest of the country to the north, which, being very mountainous, is relatively underdeveloped (although very beautiful and full of wildlife, such as brown bears, Balkan lynxes and the golden jackal). In theory, this rich natural habitat could strengthen the economy and develop the region by bringing more tourists and improving the necessary infrastructure, as well as providing a faster route to Serbia, thus facilitating trade between the two countries. It could even be seen as a step forward on the path to becoming a part of the European Union, for which it is already a candidate.



The Bar-Boljare motorway construction in 2021

However, the Balkan Crossroads website mentions that "The International Monetary Fund advises the country to postpone the completion of the motorway construction until the country enters the European Union (EU) (and) gets access to EU structural and investment funds. However, the earliest term of Montenegro's accession to the EU is estimated at 2025 and most likely even later, given the challenges that the Union is currently facing, but also considering the reforms that Montenegro still has to implement within its institutions."

BUYING WORLD DOMINATION

With a population of only some 622,000, Montenegro could not find a Western investor willing to back the project. US-China Today reports what happened. "Jacob Mardell, an analyst at Mercator Institute for Chinese Studies in Germany, says that Montenegro turned to China because, 'they want the job done, and China is the only one willing to fund it'.



© Thechinaroad.co.uk

Jacob Mardell

Montenegro did not have any European backers due to feasibility studies that highlighted its high cost and low return on investment. However, with China, Mardell says, 'the EXIM Bank isn't going to ask too many questions because it's judged that Montenegro can pay this loan back and this money is going to a Chinese company ... it's not in their interest to say this is a stupid project' Some present-day analysts will nevertheless tell you that it is. It's worth noting, though, that the existing road from Bar to the Montenegrin capital carries only some 6,000 vehicles a day, not nearly enough to justify the cost nor to provide sufficient income from tolls to repay the loan instalments.

Among civil engineers, the project arouses some admiration, albeit tinged with doubt about its justification in economic terms. This is the assessment from Geodata, the giant Italian geoengineering company: "The highway from Bar to Boljare is 169.2 kilometres-long. The section Smokovac-Mateševo, is 40.8 kilometres long, with 20 kilometres of tunnels and 4.5 kilometres of bridges and is the most difficult due to the tunnels, bridges and viaducts that will make up almost 60% of its total length. This highway is the greatest engineering construction project in Montenegro and one of the biggest projects being implemented in the European market." The website goes on to explain that the section will require the construction of 19 double-pipe tunnels and 36 bridges and viaducts. The daily average of traffic on the existing road from Bar to the border with Serbia, in certain sections ranges from 5,100 to 8,300 vehicles with distinct seasonal annual intensity that reaches up to 20,000 vehicles when the tourists are around." Impressive, isn't it? However, the roads from other ports to their countries' capitals tend to be rather busier. The A26 from Calais to Paris, for instance, was used by almost 25,000 cars and well over 4,000 trucks every day in 2017, a total of more than 29,000 vehicles.

The number of likely users for the new road, if it's ever completed, is of no interest to China, which is trying to expand its influence and gain footholds within Europe. The Washington Post has expressed concern: "Montenegro's first debt payments are due this summer. The \$1-billion (€0.82-billion) loan is nearly a fifth the size of the country's entire economy. Montenegrin leaders say they won't miss their loan payment this summer even if no E.U. aid is forthcoming. But European advocates of a bailout say that their neighbor is at risk of being financially captured by China at the same time democratic nations are talking in increasingly urgent terms about Chinese influence around the world, including the U.S. intelligence community in a report released this month." That report from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, published in April 2021, gives a stark warning about Beijing's ambitions: "China seeks to use coordinated, whole-of-government tools to demonstrate its growing strength and compel regional neighbors to acquiesce to Beijing's preferences, including its claims over disputed territory and assertions of sovereignty over Taiwan."

But the report also says that China is using other means to gain influence that some poorer countries in Europe are finding hard to resist. Remember the children's stories in which someone is tempted by what turned to be fairy gold? "Beijing will continue to promote the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)," the report says, "to expand China's economic, political, and military presence abroad, while trying to reduce waste and exploitative practices, which have led to international criticism." That, of course, is exactly what has been

happening in Montenegro. Furthermore, the report points out that China has extremely effective cyber-espionage and cyber-attack capabilities which it can deploy on a global basis. "China leads the world in applying surveillance systems and censorship to monitor its population and repress dissent," says the report, "particularly among ethnic minorities, such as the Uyghurs. Beijing conducts cyber intrusions that affect US and non-US citizens beyond its borders—such as hacking journalists, stealing personal information, or attacking tools that allow free speech online—as part of its efforts to surveil perceived threats to CCP power and tailor influence efforts. Beijing is also using its assistance to global efforts to combat COVID-19 to export its surveillance tools and technologies." It has very modern armed forces, too, of course, but if it can take over the world without firing a shot, that could be easier, even if it takes a little longer.

In Montenegro and in the increasingly troubled EU, concern continues over the massive loan and the unfinished road. "To repay the loan," says the World Highways website, "there has been concern by financial analysts and western politicians that China, by way of its state-run lender Export-Import Bank of China, will seek to control a country's strategic natural resources as payment for defaulting on contracts."



© China.org.cn

A plenary session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, China

There would seem to be mineral resources that China – or any country – would like to lay hands on, too, like the Brskovo mine in Montenegro, which has the potential to be one of the largest and lowest cost open cast mines for zinc, lead, copper, and silver in Europe. A default by Montenegro on a loan repayment, then, could prove very expensive indeed.

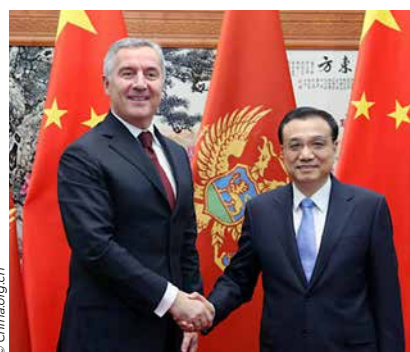
LET'S ALL LEARN MANDARIN

Every four years, the Office of National Intelligence publishes a paper called *Global Trends*, predicting the challenges and risk of the next twenty years. It's intended to help the newly elected President and his team to plan ahead and to try and ensure the United States is prepared for whatever the world may throw at it. In its latest edition, released in March 2021, it says: "The rivalry between the United States and China is likely to set the broad parameters for the geopolitical environment during the coming decades, forcing starker choices on other actors. States will leverage these diverse sources of power to jockey over global norms, rules, and institutions, with regional powers and nonstate actors exerting more influence within individual regions and leading on issues left unattended by the major powers. The increased competition over international rules and norms, together with untested technological military advancements, is likely to undermine global multilateralism, broaden the mismatch between transnational challenges and institutional arrangements to tackle them, and increase the risk of conflict."

That is a terrifying prospect, but *Global Trends* says its predictions are "not set in stone", so hope remains. "During this period, China experienced many of the same environmental and societal problems but was better able to adapt because of stronger social cohesion and trust; agile direction from centralized authority; a proven ability to deliver jobs, goods, and services; and a political system that repressed competing voices. Although to a lesser degree than the growth in the boom years of the 1990s and 2000s, domestic demand generated gross domestic product (GDP) growth sufficient to allow China to surpass the United States to become the world's largest economy by 2030." I have spoken with many successful Chinese people who cannot understand what we in

the West are worried about: they lead their lives, travel, raise families and have fulfilling jobs and a comfortable standard of living. The constant surveillance and the lack of the freedoms that we take for granted don't appear to bother them. Could we in the West get used to that?

Perhaps we should prepare ourselves and learn to speak Mandarin. The writer Robert Payne spoke Mandarin but it was no help when he interviewed Mao Zedong over a dinner in Yanan in 1946. Mao only spoke Xiāng, a language used in the Hunan province where he'd been born and raised. He learned to speak Mandarin but always with a strong Xiāng accent. Payne's interview was through interpretation provided by an American colonel who was also at the dinner. In the interview, Mao was critical of world powers that sided with the Red Army's nationalist enemy, the Kuomintang, and his criticism was not unlike comments made more recently by Chinese officials. After all, Mao's Red Army won; it's the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) that is in charge. "There are people abroad who do not want or approve of democracy in this country," Mao told Payne. "These people are acting with the consonance of the reactionaries in China. Let them know that whatever happens, even if we are faced with mechanised war, we shall win in the end." If anyone is worried about the prospect of a Sino-American war, as suggested in *Global Trends*, they may find reassurance in Mao's next comment to Payne: "On our side, we do not want war, and we look forward to a time when all democratic elements in all countries are united in a common aim for peace." I wonder how the mercurial Mao would have got along with Xi Jinping? Believing, as he did, that "political power grows out of the barrel of a gun", would he have accepted the idea that it could also come out of a cash machine?



Chinese Premier Li Keqiang at the Great Hall of the People with Prime Minister Milo Đukanović of Montenegro in 2015



Doctor Sebastien Goulard

China has internal problems of its own, which are cleverly dissected by Professor Min Ye of Boston University in her book, 'The Belt Road and Beyond', which has been reviewed by Doctor Sebastien Goulard on the OBOR Europe website. "The starting point of Professor Min Ye's analysis is that China's governance is deeply fragmented among three blocks," he writes: "(1) the senior national leaders, 2) the state agencies, and 3) the State Owned Companies (SOEs), private companies and local governments. According to Professor Min, senior leaders are implementing development strategies for social cohesion and nationalism, whilst local governments are motivated by economic growth. SOEs and private companies search for commercial opportunities." Despite the repression of any political opposition or journalistic criticism, Xi's China is not quite as united as he might like it to be and, given the nature of those power blocks, there's not a lot that he can do about it.

Today, Mao Zedong's maxim that "political power grows out of the barrel of a gun" can be set aside in favour of another of his sayings: "Politics is war without bloodshed while war is politics with bloodshed." The Chinese Communist Party thus seeks, in effect, to 'buy' the world with soft loans containing hefty penalty clauses for late payment or default. As the poet T.S. Eliot wrote in his poem 'The Hollow Men': "This is the way the world ends / Not with a bang but with a whimper." And a 'payment overdue' notice, one presumes.

Kingsley Brooks

NEWS IN BRIEF

SNCF VOYAGEURS & ALSTOM LAUNCH TGV M "POWER CAR"

Jean-Baptiste Eyméoud (President of Alstom France), Christophe Fanichet (Chairman and CEO, SNCF Voyageurs), and Alain Krakovitch (Managing Director, Voyages SNCF) unveiled on May 26th the first TGV M power car in Alstom's Belfort workshops.

A new face for a new train

This eco-designed TGV, the first trainsets of which are scheduled to enter service in 2024, has benefited from the know-how of the best experts from Voyages SNCF and Alstom, brought together on a common platform during the definition and co-specification phases of the project. This new way of designing a more innovative and efficient train is a first in Europe.

Thanks to a more compact, simplified, and streamlined architecture, the TGV M boasts reduced acquisition and maintenance costs whilst gaining 20% in capacity.



The return of energy to the catenary during braking, eco-driving and the increasingly aerodynamic shape of the nose allow overall energy savings of around 20%.

4th generation TGV features

These new vehicles, which will also contribute to our OUIGO offer, introduce a number of major advancements:

- unprecedented modularity, making it possible to adjust the number of carriages according to precise market needs (7, 8, or 9), to transform 1st class seating areas into 2nd class areas and reconfigure them by adding or removing seats or bicycle and baggage storage areas, etc.
- on-board floor space increased by 20%, amounting to 740 seats compared to 600 in current duplex carriages.

- ultra-competitive energy efficiency and carbon footprint per journey: with a 97% carbon recyclability objective, the TGV M's carbon footprint is the lowest on the market.
- access to online scalable services to meet passenger needs, such as on-board WiFi and complete real-time information across train areas.
- real-time provision of information on train parts, allowing preventive maintenance.
- 100% accessibility across carriage areas for all passengers. From the start, TGV M was the first TGV to be designed in close collaboration with wheelchair user (WU) associations and will be the first TGV to provide fully autonomous train accessibility for people with reduced mobility.

Design competition results for the two trial trains

Launched late September to create the lamination or coating of two trial trains, the event was also an opportunity for SNCF Voyageurs and Alstom to unveil the internal competition winners amongst 210,000 SNCF employees and Alstom France's 12,500 employees.

The two winners will be invited to participate in trials to be held in the Czech Republic and in France in 2022.

Key TGV M figures

An environmental train

- -32% CO² emissions
- 97% of train materials can be recycled

An energy-efficient train

- -20% energy consumption for more efficient aerodynamism and motorisation
- -20% acquisition costs
- -30% maintenance costs

A 100% online train

- Optimised on-board Internet network capable of integrated all future technical improvements

SNCF, a major territorial economic player

- 100% French design

DANISH PARLIAMENT APPROVES CONSTRUCTION OF THE LYNETTEHOLM MEGA ISLAND



The Danish Parliament (Folketing) has given the green light to the construction of Lynetteholm, a giant man-made island that will protect the waters of the port of Copenhagen from rising sea levels while providing housing for 35,000 people.

The bill allowing the government to move the project forward passed with a massive majority of 85 for and 12 against, paving the way for work to continue on the 2.8-square-kilometer island this fall.

The plan was first announced in 2018 by then Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen and Copenhagen Mayor Frank Jensen. The project, will cost around 20 billion Danish crowns (€2.7 billion) and will be self-financed.

A team of engineers and architects from COWI, Arkitema and THIRD NATURE has been given the task to develop the new island.

The plan faces strict opposition from environmentalists who have concerns over the impact of its construction.

The artificial island faces resistance and concern not only in Denmark, but also with Swedish neighbors and from Poland, Lithuania and Finland.



© Olg Havn

THE EDPS OPENS TWO INVESTIGATIONS FOLLOWING THE “SCHREMS II” JUDGEMENT

The EDPS has launched two investigations, one regarding the use of cloud services provided by Amazon Web Services and Microsoft under Cloud II contracts by European Union institutions, bodies and agencies (EUIs) and one regarding the use of Microsoft Office 365 by the European Commission.

These investigations are part of the EDPS’ strategy for EU institutions to comply with the “Schrems II” Judgement so that ongoing and future international transfers are carried out according to EU data protection law.

In line with his strategy, the EDPS ordered EUIs in October 2020 to report on their transfers of personal data to non-EU countries. The EDPS’ analysis shows that because of diverse processing operations, in particular when using tools and services offered by large service providers, individuals’ personal data is transferred outside the EU and to the United States (US) in particular.

The EDPS’ analysis also confirms that EUIs increasingly rely on cloud-based software and cloud infrastructure or platform services from large ICT providers, of which some are based in the US and are therefore subject to legislation that, according to the “Schrems II” Judgement, allows disproportionate surveillance activities by the US authorities.

Wojciech Wiewiórowski, EDPS, said: *“Following the outcome of the reporting exercise by the EU institutions and bodies, we identified certain types of contracts that require particular attention and this is why we have decided to launch these two investigations. I am aware that the “Cloud II contracts” were signed in early 2020 before the “Schrems II” judgement and that both Amazon and Microsoft have announced new measures with the aim to align themselves with the judgement. Nevertheless, these announced measures may not be sufficient to ensure full compliance with EU data protection law and hence the need to investigate this properly.”*

The objective of the first investigation is to assess EUIs’ compliance with the “Schrems II” Judgement when using cloud services provided by Amazon Web Services and Microsoft under the so-called “Cloud II contracts” when data is transferred to non-EU countries, in particular to the US.

The objective of the second investigation into the use of Microsoft Office 365 is to verify the European Commission’s compliance with the Recommendations previously issued by the EDPS on the use of Microsoft’s products and services by EUIs.



Wojciech Wiewiórowski, European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS)

Wojciech Wiewiórowski, EDPS, said: *“We acknowledge that EUIs - like other entities in the EU/EEA - are dependent on a limited number of large providers. With these investigations, the EDPS aims to help EUIs to improve their data protection compliance when negotiating contracts with their service provider”.*

The EDPS believes that EUIs are well positioned to lead by example when it comes to privacy and data protection. The announced steps are part of a continuous cooperation between the EDPS and the EUIs to ensure a high level of protection of these fundamental rights.

INDUSTRIAL-SCALE COCAINE LAB UNCOVERED IN ROTTERDAM IN LATEST ENCROCHAT BUST

An international multi-agency operation has led to 9 arrests, the seizure of over €3.4 million in cash and the shutdown of an industrial-sized cocaine production lab in the framework of Operation SR13

The cooperation between the French National Gendarmerie (Gendarmerie Nationale) and the Dutch Police (Politie) in the framework of the investigation into Encrochat has led to the discovery of an industrial-scale cocaine laboratory in the city of Rotterdam in the Netherlands.

Acting on information from Europol and the French Gendarmerie, 80 Dutch police officers, accompanied by their SWAT teams and specialised dogs, raided in the early hours of 26 May several addresses in the cities of Rotterdam and The Hague. The clandestine drug laboratory was found hidden in a building also housing a garage used by criminals to customise vehicles with secret compartments to transport drugs across Europe. A total of 7 vehicles already equipped with such compartments were seized on site, alongside a vehicle worth €110 000.

Both the drug laboratory and garage were run by the same criminal syndicate who was flooding Europe with cocaine. One of its members was arrested in Rotterdam under a European Arrest Warrant facilitated by Eurojust.

This sting follows an earlier action day carried out by the French Gendarmerie on 31 March on the occasion of which 450 of its officers were deployed against the same criminal group, leading to the arrest of 8 members of the gang. In addition, €5 million worth of cocaine was also seized in the region of Marseille, alongside €3 million worth of cannabis resin and €3.4 million in cash. The investigation was able to trace back the cocaine to the underground laboratory targeted this week in the Netherlands.



Europol seized material and drugs

Europol support

In the framework of intelligence activities underway with its operational counterparts, Europol developed actionable intelligence concerning the activities in Europe of this criminal syndicate.

In November 2020, Europol brought together the national investigators on both sides who have since been working closely together to establish a joint strategy to bring down the whole network. The suspects were identified with the support of Operation EMMA 95/LEMONT 26, the French and Dutch-led investigation against the Encrochat network.

Since then, Europol has provided continuous intelligence development and analysis to support the field investigators

Source : Europol

LADY MOURA UP FOR SALE FOR FIRST TIME



The Lady Moura in the Port of Monaco

Owned by Saudi billionaire Nasser al-Rashid, close to the royal family, this luxury private 105-meter unit was built in steel to Lloyds class by German yard Blohm + Voss with in-house naval architecture and was delivered in 1990 and has had the same owner ever since.

Lady Moura was the most expensive and innovative yacht in the world. Its construction cost has been estimated at 200 million dollars. It is offered for sale by Camper & Nicholsons for 125 million USD.

Accommodation in a luxury interior designed by Luigi Sturchio is for as many as 27 guests in 13 cabins comprising a master suite, VIP suite and 11 further cabins. All guest cabins have state-of-the-art entertainment systems and en suite bathroom facilities while the crew quarters sleep 60 staff aboard.

Lady Moura's incredible volume allows for an impressive number of onboard amenities. She boasts: a helipad, movie theatre / disco with DJ room, gym, owner's study and medical suites for both owner/guests and crew. There are also two galleys aboard, one for the owner and one for the crew both equipped with the finest commercial-grade appliances, a bakery and separate owner/crew laundry facilities.

All the never seen before features of this splendid yacht can be seen on the seller's internet site:

<https://camperandnicholsons.com/luxury-motor-yacht-for-sale/lady-moura-blohm-voss-1990>



Lady Moura

THE LONGEST PEDESTRIAN SUSPENSION BRIDGE IN THE WORLD IS NOW OPEN IN PORTUGAL

The Arouca Geopark, some 30 kilometres southeast of Porto, was already famous for its gorgeous scenery and outdoor activities. From this month, it now also boasts a new, record-breaking attraction: the longest walking bridge with suspended deck in the world.

Its construction was made possible thanks to EU Regional funds. It culminates at 175 metres above the Paiva River and it would take someone about 10 minutes to cross the 516 meters long at a leisurely pace.

The bridge is expected to boost the regions' tourism industry whilst increasing accessibility to sites of cultural and natural heritage. It will also more easily connect local communities across the Paiva River.



© 516arouca.pt

Through this project, the region will gain not only a better connection for the communities across the Paiva River, but also an asset that will make better use of its endogenous potential – natural and cultural heritage – increasing attractiveness, competitiveness, and employment opportunities across the region, and conserving social and human capital in low-density areas.

The project received EUR 800,000 (ERDF) of investments through the Operational Programme Norte 2020 within the scope of the Program for the Economic Valorisation of Endogenous Resources (PROVERE).

Those who cross it will be able to see the Aguieiras waterfall, Paiva walkways, Alvarenga Bridge and Paiva Gorge. It costs €12 (\$14.46) for adults and €10 (\$12.05) for students, children and seniors.

UKRAINE HAS PROVIDED THE CZECH REPUBLIC ARCHIVES ESTABLISHING ADDITIONAL EVIDENCE OF REPRESSIVE TACTICS AGAINST CZECHS IN THE SOVIET UNION

The SBU (Security Service of Ukraine) has delivered another portion of digitized archive evidence of repressions against Czechs in the Soviet Union to Czech partners in Ukraine. According to Andriy Kohut, director of the SBU (Security Service of Ukraine) archive department : "In the realm of

cultural diplomacy, archival collaboration in the study of Czechoslovak-Ukrainian relations plays a key role.

Discovering and making public the archives of the communist totalitarian regime's oppressive agencies enable Czech and Ukrainian societies to better understand one other.

"This is crucial for the development of solid bilateral relations."

More than 8,000 archival affairs on persecuted Czechs and Czech residents have been identified and digitized.

However, due to the military situation in Ukraine, historic material regarding Czech society in Crimea and specific portions of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions are currently unavailable to scientists.



The Czech Republic's Ambassador to Ukraine stressed the importance of bilateral collaboration, which not only promotes Czech-Ukrainian relations but also serves as a model for many EU nations and the Eastern Partnership.

Radek Matula expressed gratitude to the SBU Archive's director for his efforts and offered to fully support the archival collaboration.

UNITED AIRLINES ADDING SUPERSONIC SPEEDS WITH NEW AGREEMENT TO BUY AIRCRAFT FROM BOOM SUPERSONIC

First U.S. airline to sign commercial agreement with Boom Supersonic; New aircraft will cut travel times in half and operate on up to 100% sustainable aviation fuel



© Boom Supersonic

United Airlines has announced a commercial agreement with Denver-based aerospace company Boom Supersonic to add aircraft to its global fleet as well as a cooperative sustainability initiative – a move that facilitates a leap forward in returning supersonic speeds to aviation.

Under the terms of the agreement, United will purchase 15 of Boom's 'Overture' airliners, once Overture meets United's demanding safety, operating and sustainability requirements, with an option for an additional 35 aircraft. The companies

will work together on meeting those requirements before delivery. Once operational, Overture is expected to be the first large commercial aircraft to be net-zero carbon from day one, optimized to run on 100% sustainable aviation fuel (SAF). It is slated to roll out in 2025, fly in 2026 and expected to carry passengers by 2029. United and Boom will also work together to accelerate production of greater supplies of SAF.

“United continues on its trajectory to build a more innovative, sustainable airline and today’s advancements in technology are making it more viable for that to include supersonic planes. Boom’s vision for the future of commercial aviation, combined with the industry’s most robust route network in the world, will give business and leisure travelers access to a stellar flight experience,” United CEO Scott Kirby said. “Our mission has always been about connecting people and now working with Boom, we’ll be able to do that on an even greater scale.”



Capable of flying at speeds of Mach 1.7 – twice the speed of today’s fastest airliners – Overture can connect more than 500 destinations in nearly half the time. Among the many future potential routes for United are Newark to London in just three and a half hours, Newark to Frankfurt in four hours and San Francisco to Tokyo in just six hours. Overture will also be designed with features such as in-seat entertainment screens, ample personal space, and contactless technology. Working with Boom is another component of United’s strategy to invest in innovative technologies that will build a more sustainable future of air travel.

“The world’s first purchase agreement for net-zero carbon supersonic aircraft marks a significant step toward our mission to create a more accessible world,” said Blake Scholl, Boom Supersonic founder and CEO. “United and Boom share a common purpose—to unite the world safely and sustainably. At speeds twice as fast, United passengers will experience all the advantages of life lived in person, from deeper, more productive business relationships to longer, more relaxing vacations to far-off destinations.”

About Boom Supersonic

Boom Supersonic is redefining commercial air travel by bringing sustainable, supersonic flight to the skies. Boom’s historic commercial airliner, Overture, is designed and committed to industry-leading standards of speed, safety, and sustainability. Overture will be the first commercial aircraft to be net-zero carbon from day one, capable of flying on 100% sustainable aviation fuels (SAF) at twice the speed of today’s fastest passenger jets. Overture’s order book, including purchases and options, stands at 70 aircraft, and Boom is working with the United States Air Force for government applications of Overture. XB-1, a demonstrator aircraft, rolled out in 2020, and its net-zero carbon flight test

program is underway. The company is backed by world-class investors, including Bessemer Venture Partners, Prime Movers Lab, Emerson Collective and American Express Ventures.

CREATING PORTS OF CALL WITH ECO-RESPONSIBLE FACILITIES



Under its La Belle Classe Destinations certification, Yacht Club de Monaco aims to support development of new generation marinas to accommodate tomorrow’s greener yachts. “The whole yachting ecosystem needs to be mobilised. We want to accompany developments not only in how yachts are powered and good practices, but also to ensure these boats will be able to call into virtuous marinas,” says General Secretary of the YCM which will host the Smart Yachting & Marina meeting on 20th September 2021. Supported by the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation and Extended Monaco, the Monaco Government’s digital transformation programme, the meeting is being organised by Monaco Marina Management. It will bring together key players, investors, promoters, manufacturers and innovators to develop eco-responsible, efficient, attractive and user-friendly marinas that are lively places where people want to be. The day will be dedicated to targeted high-level discussions between decision-makers from across this ecosystem keen to invest in innovations that will meet their business and environmental challenges. The most promising solutions will be highlighted to encourage their adoption: this is “Smart” technology at the service of protecting the environment.



Bernard d'Alessandri

Through these initiatives, Yacht Club de Monaco is fast becoming an effective platform promoting an approach to yachting that respects the environment.

“In putting words into actions, these initiatives demonstrate how Yacht Club de Monaco carries out its mission to educate and support all relevant initiatives to ensure recreational boats lead the way in sustainable development,” concludes Bernard d'Alessandri who believes everyone involved in the sector must be mobilised to protect the Ocean.

Smart Yachting & Marina (20th Sept. 2021)

EPIONE

CABINET ELISABETH THURAT

YOUR TRUSTED PODIATRY AND MEDICAL PEDICURE CLINIC IN BRUSSELS



PLANTAR REFLEXOLOGY LASER THERAPY TARGETED AROMATHERAPY



- Uses APIVITA natural French products
- Proposes various treatments using organic essential oils
- Uses the unique Low Level Laser Therapy (manufactured by Erchonia, a US company and world leader in the field of Low Level Laser Therapy)
- Bespoke treatment programs and state-of-the-art equipment
- Spotless hygiene

We provide the best care possible

ELISABETH THURAT CLINIC offers a wide range of care specifically tailored for young children, teenagers, adults, athletes, and people with disabilities.

AT EPIONE CLINIC, YOUR FEET ARE IN GOOD HANDS !

www.cabinet-thurat.be • +32 4 94 04 84 24

Avenue Brugmann 292 • 1180 Uccle • Belgium

Consultations only by appointment • From 8am to 8pm • Monday to Saturday

JUST A DIPLOMATIC SPOUSE

On the outside looking in, it may seem like a highly privileged and indulgent life. Most often, people are fooled by appearances as well as the countless Hollywood clichés that describe the diplomatic world. One thing is clear though: it was and partly still is a man's world.

Social roles in the diplomatic world are still strongly gendered and built on hundreds of years of customs and stereotypes. For a long time, men have been the diplomats and women 'just' the spouses. The often rigid and highly hierarchical diplomatic life only reflected the traditional social norms of the times. Thus, women were simply excluded from the diplomatic corps and when employed by the Foreign Offices, worked in lower positions and in administrative posts such as stenographers, clerks, secretaries or interpreters.

But times are changing and consequently, also the diplomatic realities. The Frenchwoman Suzanne Borel (Bidault, after she married) and the Russian Alexandra Kollontai were among the first women to become diplomats in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century. Nowadays, I am pleased to say that women have increasingly free access to diplomatic jobs, and the famous 'glass ceiling' seems to have finally been broken in this particular field. Madeleine Albright (the first female US Secretary of State) once said: "Societies are better off when women are politically and economically empowered".



Madeleine Albright

However, women throughout the world still remain greatly underrepresented and undervalued in the decision-making and political fields.

The European Union, although considered a global leader in this field, is not much different. Even though gender equality is a founding principle and part of the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights, in 2021 only three out of the 27 Foreign Ministers are women. In the meantime, it should be mentioned that the Foreign Minister of the EU, formally known as the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, a position currently held by Josep Borell, was previously held by two women, Catherine Ashton (2009-2014) and Federica Mogherini (2014-2019).



Catherine Ashton



Federica Mogherini

The index for political power is on average around 55 in the EU, with Sweden topping the list with a score of 95.1 out of 100. Also, when it comes to the foreign ministry, Sweden's ratio is quite impressive. Out of the total number of MFA employees, 836 are women and 577 are men, with an equal ratio of male and female ambassadors. Other countries in Europe have also taken huge steps towards gender equality in the diplomatic field. Just to mention a few examples, Romania has 50% women in key managerial positions within the ministry and 36% of the current appointed ambassadors are women (only last year, 22 women were

officially proposed for an ambassadorial position), Slovakia has a ratio of 51.5% women in its Foreign Office, and 49.1% women posted abroad. Germany has registered more than 50% women among the new employees in 2019 and developed a new and innovative job-sharing model. Since 2017, the German Consulate in Montreal has been the first German mission abroad whose leadership follows this model, where a married couple, Dr. Markus Lang and Dr. Kathrin Misera-Lang, alternate the role of Consul General every six months, in order to better harmonize their professional and personal lives abroad. There is also a shared ambassadorship model in Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia, where two German diplomats alternate ambassadorial duties every



Dr. Markus Lang and Dr. Kathrin Misera-Lang

eight months for a period of four years.

But there are many other European countries still struggling to raise the level of women participation; they still have a long way to go.

Having said that, another question should be raised: with the changing times and realities, how do the diplomatic spouses fit in and how is this group evolving?

Along with the countless stereotypes related to diplomats, their spouses have always been depicted as traditional housewives, the epitome of elegance and grace, raising perfect children and being the perfect hosts, permanently in charge of etiquette and protocol.

Over time, literature has tried to uncover some of the fairy tale mystery

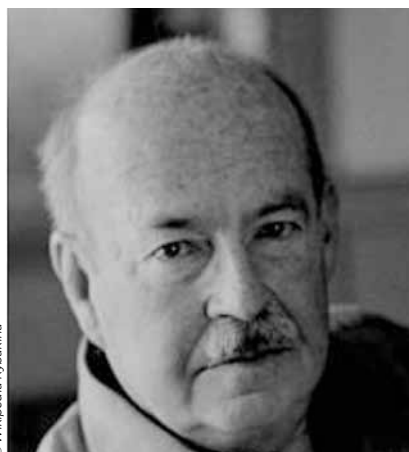
surrounding diplomatic spouses. Books like Brigid Keenan's 'Diplomatic baggage' (2006), 'Diplomatic incidents' (2010) by Cherry Denman or more recently, my own book of memoirs 'Just a diplomatic spouse' (2020), all try to present more realistically and with genuine feelings, the everyday life behind the 'fancy curtains', and the loneliness and the struggles that come with it.



As we move forward, realities are also changing. Diplomatic partners are increasingly reluctant to give up their jobs and independence and move abroad on diplomatic missions. Women and men don't want to be perceived as merely the trailing spouses any longer and are increasingly concerned about their future. They wish to maintain their level of relevance to the professional field and need to have a sense of purpose and a meaningful contribution to society. Losing one's independence is not easy; I recall my own feelings when I first moved abroad with my diplomatic husband and received my first diplomatic ID. There, my name was immediately followed by the description : 'Wife of...', proof of my 'dependency' status.

While more and more women are working in the diplomatic field, the number of male diplomatic spouses is increasing significantly, despite the fact that men are even more reluctant to give up their independence and embrace the role of supporting their wives' career abroad. The traditional role division, with the men as 'providers' and women as 'expressive', dealing with children and family matters, was mentioned in 1955 in the 'Family socialization and interaction process' by Talcott Parsons and Robert Bales. "Family structure will attain long term stability through universal 'modern' reconfiguration which incorporates a nuclear family structure and gender role specialization."

Parsons used family norms to define the 'ideal' family and praised the benefits of gender role specialization, implying that it would create spousal interdependence and thus marital stability. Today, this is no longer the case. Although men still earn more money for similar jobs and are promoted more readily, the model of 'dual-income' families is considered the most acceptable. And so, when moving abroad, there is always the problem of keeping a job or finding a new one for the spouse.



Talcott Parsons

Most diplomatic spouses are highly trained and are university graduates, but due to various reasons, find it impossible to perform professionally while abroad. Some countries don't have bilateral work agreements, others impose restrictions on their own diplomats, or in some cases the diplomatic partners are over-qualified for the jobs that they manage to find. The gap years mentioned in the resumés and the work experience in different and sometimes unrelated fields are not helpful either. Some try professional reconversions, other use the 21st century online platforms and opportunities for working remotely. The most common options are still employment by the national MFAs or working as embassy staff. Employment is important not only for financial security and independence, but also for maintaining mental health and self-esteem.

Keeping a day job is often more important to men than to women. That is perhaps one of the reasons why not all men decide to follow their diplomatic wives abroad; most women ambassadors are unaccompanied by their spouses. Family life is seriously affected in some cases, not to mention the long office hours or the frequent relocations to possibly less attractive diplomatic postings.

Foreign Offices should also pay more attention to the needs and struggles of family members. Although the most common approach is to ignore the issues and leave diplomatic families to deal with them on their own, some countries recognize the toll which this nomadic life takes on all concerned and have implemented effective policies designed to minimize the challenges and the impact on their lifestyle. They successfully offer some kind of protection and support. Some EU countries provide pension contributions for diplomatic spouses abroad when not working. Others set a priority on employing diplomatic spouses for available positions within the embassies and offer additional allowances for spouses on postings. There are also employment contracts for ambassador's wives as a recognition of their contribution, and health insurance covers abroad and at home among other initiatives. Some countries also assure the right to return to a former job, when that is in public office.

The European Union Foreign Affairs Spouses, Partners and Families Association (EUFASA) is a network that tries to bring together the diplomatic spouses associations in Europe and support their causes at a European level. In 2019, EUFASA conducted a survey on diplomatic partnership with the participation of 1,235 diplomatic spouses (males and females), which proved once again the importance and the need for supportive and coordinated measures. According to the survey, 30% of all respondents tried or considered seeking counselling due to the constant pressure, loneliness, career failure and loss of meaning and purpose.

The survey also showed that 40% of diplomats would leave the foreign office if their jobs were to have a negative effect on their families, with more men affirming that their wives would do so.

The EUFASA survey showed the need for regular career coaching and training, a partner pension system, partner financial and emotional support and assistance.

In an interview with Olga Tapiola, herself a diplomatic spouse, wife of current EU ambassador to Thailand, she emphasized the need for support. As a psychologist, she recognized the struggles that spouses face and the additional pressure that male spouses feel while at postings.



© Scandasia.com

Ambassador of the European Union to Thailand Pirkka Tapiola and spouse

Phil McAuliffe (who served two postings as diplomat and two as an accompanying spouse) says on his blog: “Males have a strong part of their identity tied into their work life. Role reversal can be difficult (...), patience is needed to adjust to new roles and a new environment, it doesn’t happen overnight”.



© TheOneDiplomat.com

Phil McAuliffe

Traditional role expectations make the experience of being a diplomatic male spouse different and more demanding than for women in a society which can, at times, be judgmental.

Anne M. Brasely, in her doctoral dissertation about trailing spouses, based on 8 months of research and interviews in Kuala Lumpur and Brussels, noted that gender matters significantly, particularly along “two axes: gendered structures in society and gendered social expectation”.

It is also important to acknowledge the difference in cross-cultural integration between the working diplomat and the spouse, who has less social and work contacts. Thus the integration of the spouse is more likely to be tedious and not always successful.

Nowadays, there are numerous support groups, mostly online, for expat spouses who live a similar kind of life and therefore have a deeper understanding and sympathy for each other. Expat career coaches, businesses based on relocation services, advisors, intercultural trainers, these are all more recent jobs associated with the nomadic lifestyle to which the diplomatic spouses belong, irrespective of gender.

However, for male spouses this is somehow more difficult. This is because male spouses often lack the supportive network and expat group activities traditionally associated with women and initially designed for them.

Tomohiro Harada, spouse of a Norwegian diplomat now posted in Chile, told me: “Most often, we are invisible. People don’t know that male spouses exist. The diplomatic community is decentralised and I am mostly dependent on my wife’s network to provide social connections”. Although he is now working remotely, he thinks that it will be probably difficult to find a job once they return home.

In different diplomatic spouses associations, although the numbers are slightly changing, on average there are about 75% women and only 25% men. But in some cases, men are even

less present. For example, according to Milena Guarino Padula, Board Member of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spouses Association (ACDMAE) and the Italian Delegate for EUFASA in Italy, out of around 300 members of the ACDMAE, only 3 are men.

In 2020, Cécile Atta-Van Peteghem, a Belgian diplomatic spouse hit upon the idea of creating a private Facebook group called ‘The Diplomatic Spouses Association Worldwide’ (DSAW). It aims to reunite diplomatic spouses from all over the globe and to provide support and a meeting platform for all these people. Out of its 4505 members, only 5% are men. Again, the male presence is exceptionally low.

So, what can be done? I think that the 21st century should finally be the century of acceptance, equality, tolerance and integration. People are equal, irrespective of race, colour or gender. Diplomacy must make even greater strides towards these goals and needs to ensure that its diplomats and their spouses feel fully accomplished, are equally heard, supported and integrated. Diplomatic spouses associations must recognize and encourage male spouses to also participate in their programmes. They should also design their activities in a more gender-neutral manner, in order to incentivize male spouses to participate as well. The time of the traditional ‘knitting club’ is long gone. Men should also become more willing to participate and be ‘seen’ in such structures. There is no shame in being part of a spouses association; it makes one no less relevant or capable and it could even prove quite beneficial for one’s mental well-being.

Meanwhile, foreign ministries should accept that volunteer representational spouse work should be more valued and that people, irrespective of gender, need recognition and support in order to feel secure and satisfied with their nomadic diplomatic life.

We are all different but we are in this together.

“Diplomacy is like jazz: endless variations on a theme.” (Richard Holbrooke, former United States Ambassador to the United Nations)

Alexandra Paucescu



E-EVIDENCE PROTOCOL APPROVED BY CYBERCRIME CONVENTION COMMITTEE

The 24th plenary of the Cybercrime Convention Committee (T-CY), representing the Parties to the Budapest Convention, has approved the draft “2nd Additional Protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime on Enhanced Co-operation and Disclosure of Electronic Evidence”.

“Criminals have stepped up their activities, exploiting changes to the ways in which people live and work, at a moment of hardship and real vulnerability. The devices, victims and evidence of these crimes are often spread across multiple jurisdictions”, said Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe Bjørn Berge in his opening remarks. And: “This Protocol will facilitate more effective investigations and ensure that the rule of law reaches deeper into cyberspace than ever before.”



Bjørn Berge

The Protocol will provide for innovative tools to obtain the disclosure of electronic evidence, including through direct cooperation with service providers in other Parties and more efficient ways of public-to-public cooperation. Two articles permit instant cooperation in emergency situations where lives are at risk. The draft

Protocol also promotes joint investigations by Parties. These tools are accompanied by a set of safeguards to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including in particular a detailed article on the protection of personal data.

Experts from the currently 66 States that are Parties to the Budapest Convention from Africa, the Americas, Asia-Pacific and Europe participated in its preparation. More than 95 drafting sessions – many of them in virtual format following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic – were necessary to resolve complex issues related to territoriality and jurisdiction, and to reconcile the effectiveness of investigations with strong safeguards.

“The process of negotiations was not an easy path. Matters related to information technology nowadays intersect with all aspects of our life and with core interests of States, the private sector and individuals. Therefore, it is an outstanding achievement to have reached consensus on an instrument that is breaking new ground and foresees strong data protection standards”, underlined Cristina Schulman, Chair of the T-CY.

The draft Protocol takes into account submissions received from civil society organisations, data protection experts and industry in the course of six rounds of consultations. Further adjustments were

made to the draft text following the last meeting with stakeholders on 6 May 2021.



Alexander Seger

“With this Protocol, the Budapest Convention will remain highly relevant and will continue to stand for a free and open internet, where restrictions are limited to cases of criminal misuse. Given current international divisions on all things cyber, we can be satisfied that we have reached consensus on solutions to difficult questions that can work in different legal systems”, added Alexander Seger, Executive Secretary of the T-CY.

Following T-CY approval of the draft Protocol on 28 May, it will now be considered by relevant Council of Europe bodies. Formal adoption is expected in November 2021 – on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Budapest Convention – and opening for signature in early 2022.



© AFP Federal Police

AUSTRALIAN POLICE HAS STRUCK A HEAVY BLOW AGAINST ORGANISED CRIME WORLDWIDE

One of the results of a global sting where law enforcement agencies took over an encrypted communications network used by criminals but created by the FBI

An Australian Federal Police-led operation has charged more than one hundred organised crime members after developing a world-leading capability to see encrypted communications used exclusively by organised crime.

The encrypted communications – which allegedly included plots to kill, mass drug trafficking and gun distribution – were decrypted from a platform covertly run by the FBI.

More than 4,000 members from the AFP and state and territory police have been involved in the execution of hundreds of warrants since 7 June, 2021, under Operation Ironside, which covertly began three years ago.

Operation Ironside has led to the arrest of 224 offenders on 526 charges in every mainland Australian state.

3.7 tonnes of drugs, a large number of weapons, \$44,934,457 million in cash, and assets expected to run into the millions of dollars, have been seized under Operation Ironside since 2018.

The AFP also acted on 20 threats to kill, potentially saving the lives of a significant number of innocent bystanders, with intelligence referred to state police agencies which took immediate action.

More arrests are expected domestically and offshore under a coordinated global response connected to Operation Ironside.



Seized drugs

© AFP Federal Police

The AFP is also likely to seek extradition requests for a number of persons of interest living overseas. It comes as there have been tonnes of drugs seized and hundreds of arrests overseas.

The AFP has indicated that offenders linked to Australian-based Italian



mafia, outlawed motorcycle gangs, Asian crime syndicate and Albanian organised crime are among those charged under Operation Ironside.

Operation Ironside began almost three years ago and is the Australian component of a long-term, international, covert investigation. The FBI and AFP targeted the dedicated encrypted communications platform, which was used exclusively by organised crime.



Hakan Ayik, a reputed drug lord was identified as influential in giving access by undercover agents to a Anom handset which he then recommended to other criminal associates

After working in close partnership on Operation Safe Cracking to take down the encrypted platform provider Phantom Secure, the AFP and FBI worked together to fill the vacuum.

The FBI had access to a new app, named ANOM, and began running it without the knowledge of the criminal underworld.

The AFP provided the highly skilled technical staff, and capability to decrypt and read encrypted communications in real time, giving law enforcement an edge it had never had before.

AFP Commissioner Reece Kershaw thanked the FBI for its cooperation, along with the 18 countries that worked with the AFP to maintain the integrity of the platform.



As part of the global operation, more than 9000 officers from law enforcement have deployed to the international efforts. Commissioner Kershaw acknowledged the significant resources provided by Australia's state and territory police during the days of resolution.

"Today, Australia is a much safer country because of the extraordinary outcome under Operation Ironside," Commissioner Kershaw said.



Commissioner Reece P Kershaw

"It highlights how devastatingly-effective the AFP is when it works with local and global partners, and takes its

fight against transnational organised crime offshore.

"This world-first operation will give the AFP, state and territory police years of intelligence and evidence.

"There is also the potential for a number of cold cases to be solved because of Operation Ironside.

"However, tomorrow, and in the future, law enforcement will come up against serious challenges.

"ANOM was an influential encrypted communications app but there are even bigger encrypted platforms that are being used by transnational and serious organised criminals targeting Australia.

"They are almost certainly using those encrypted platforms to flood Australia with drugs, guns and undermine our economy by laundering billions of dollars of illicit profit.



Australian Federal Police during its Operation Ironside

"Organised crime syndicates target Australia, because sadly, the drug market is so lucrative. Australians are among the world's biggest drug takers.

"One of the causes behind domestic violence, sexual assault, neglect of children and unspeakable tragedy, is illicit drugs.

"Our first responders, our teachers and every Australian should be able to go to work and live in our communities without being harmed by an individual under the influence of dangerous drugs.

The ANOM app was installed on mobile phones that were stripped of other capabilities. The mobile phones which were bought on the black market, could not make calls or send emails. They could only send messages to another device that had the organised crime app. Criminals needed to know a criminal to get a device.

The devices organically circulated and grew in popularity among criminals who were confident of the legitimacy of the app because high-profile organised crime figures vouched for its integrity.



© AFP Federal Police

"These criminal influencers put the AFP in the back pocket of hundreds of alleged offenders.

"Essentially, they have handcuffed each other by endorsing and trusting ANOM

and openly communicating on it – not knowing we were watching the entire time," Commissioner Kershaw said.

FBI International Operations Division Legal Attaché for Canberra, Anthony Russo said criminals around the world had long used encrypted criminal communications platforms to avoid law enforcement detection.

"The FBI, with our international partners, will continue to adapt to criminal behaviour and develop novel approaches to bring these criminals to justice," said the FBI's Anthony Russo.

"We appreciate our long standing partnership with the Australian Federal Police in the fight against transnational organised crime."

IN THE US AND IN EUROPE, OPERATION IRONSIDE, KNOWN GLOBALLY AS TROJAN SHIELD, HAS ALSO BEEN SUCCESSFULLY LED BY LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

ANOM's administrators, distributors, and agents described the platform to potential users as "designed by criminals for criminals" and targeted the sale of ANOM to individuals that they knew participated in illegal activities.

All defendants are foreign nationals located outside of the U.S.



© NRT

The ANOM website's advertising. Users did not realise that law enforcement officials could read each and every message because the ANOM phones were actually designed by the FBI to monitor the texts of organised crime figures

The US indictment alleges the defendants knew the devices they distributed were being used exclusively by criminals to coordinate drug trafficking and money laundering, including in the U.S. The defendants personally fielded "wipe requests" from users when devices fell into the hands of law enforcement.

The FBI's review of ANOM users' communications worked like a blind carbon copy function in an email. A copy of every message being sent from each device was sent to a server in a third-party country where the messages were collected and stored. The data was then provided to the FBI on a regular basis pursuant to an international cooperation agreement. Communications such as text messages, photos, audio messages, and other digital information were reviewed by the FBI for criminal activity and disseminated to partner law enforcement

Phantom Secure By the Numbers

Phantom Secure helped drug traffickers and other criminal networks avoid law enforcement detection through the use of encrypted cell phones. The FBI and international partners arrested Phantom Secure's chief executive and indicted four other associates.

Phantom Secure:

- Up to 20,000 users
- Revenue: \$80 million over 10 years
- Facilitated murders and drug smuggling
- User e-mail address examples
 - the.killa@freedomsecure.me
 - the.cartel@freedomsecure.me
 - narco@lockedpgp.com
 - knee-capper9@lockedpgp.com

The Takedown

More than 250 agents searched 25 properties in three countries

Seized:

- 150 domains
- 1,000 phones
- Criminal enterprise shut down



© FBI

In October 2018, Phantom Secure's CEO pleaded guilty to a RICO conspiracy in the Southern District of California. He was sentenced to nine years in prison and ordered to forfeit \$80 million in proceeds from the sale of Phantom devices



agencies in other countries. Each user was using ANOM for a criminal purpose. Those countries have built their own cases against ANOM users, many of whom were arrested in takedowns in Europe, Australia and New Zealand over the last several days.

Intelligence derived from the FBI's communications platform presented opportunities to disrupt major drug trafficking, money laundering, and other criminal activity while the platform was active. For example, over 150 unique threats to human life were mitigated.

This operation was led by the FBI and coordinated with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, the U.S. Marshals Service, Australian Federal Police, Swedish Police Authority, National Police of the Netherlands, Lithuanian Criminal Police Bureau, Europol, and numerous other law enforcement partners from over a dozen other countries.



Internet advertising for Sky EEC Sky Global's encryption system

This investigation began after Canada-based encrypted device company Phantom Secure was dismantled by the FBI in 2018 through a San Diego-based federal RICO indictment and court-authorized seizure of the Phantom Secure platform, forcing many criminals to seek other secret communication methods to avoid law enforcement detection. The FBI—along with substantial contributions by the Australian Federal Police—filled that void with ANOM.

When the FBI and the San Diego U.S. Attorney's Office dismantled Sky Global in March 2021, the demand for ANOM devices grew exponentially as criminal

users sought a new brand of hardened encryption device to plot their drug trafficking and money laundering transactions and to evade law enforcement.



OCDETF Director Adam W. Cohen

Demand for ANOM from criminal groups also increased after European investigators announced the dismantlement of the EncroChat platform in July 2020. The ANOM platform - unlike Phantom Secure, EncroChat, and Sky Global - was exploited by the FBI from the very beginning of ANOM's existence and was not an infiltration of an existing popular encrypted communications company.

"Operation Trojan Shield is a perfect example of an OCDETF (US Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces) case - an investigation driven by intelligence and maximizing the strengths of partner law enforcement agencies

in coordinated efforts to dismantle command and control elements of criminal networks," said OCDETF Director Adam W. Cohen.

"Coordination is the cornerstone of the OCDETF program, and the impressiveness of the combined efforts of the U.S. Attorney's Office, FBI, and our foreign partners cannot be overstated. This effort has created lasting disruptive impacts to these transnational criminal organizations."

Europol's Deputy Executive Director Jean-Philippe Lecouffe: "This operation is an exceptional success by the authorities in the United States, Sweden, the Netherlands, Australia, New Zealand and the other European members of the Operational Task Force.

Europol coordinated the international law enforcement community, enriched the information picture and brought criminal intelligence into ongoing operations to target organised crime and drug trafficking organisations, wherever they are and however they choose to communicate. I am very satisfied to see Europol supporting this operation and strengthen law enforcement partnerships by emphasizing the multi-agency aspect of the case."

"This remarkably successful operation demonstrates what can be accomplished when law enforcement agencies throughout the world work together," said DEA Los Angeles Division Special Agent in Charge Bill Bodner. "Through strong relationships with our partners in more than 67 countries, professionals throughout the DEA, including experts in the Los Angeles Division, supported this unprecedented collaboration and our own mission to disrupt and dismantle the criminal organizations that profit from the distribution of illegal drugs."



Special Agent in Charge Bill Bodner's opening remarks

NEW REPORT HIGHLIGHTS PUBLIC HEALTH RISKS AND INCREASING AVAILABILITY OF 'DESIGNER BENZODIAZEPINES' IN EUROPE

New benzodiazepines, which are not controlled by international drug laws, come under the spotlight today in a new report released by the EU drugs agency (EMCDDA). Often marketed as 'designer benzodiazepines', these substances are sold as 'legal' replacements for controlled benzodiazepines and are becoming increasingly available in Europe. They are monitored by the agency as new psychoactive substances (NPS) through the EU Early Warning System (EWS).¹



EMCDDA Director Alexis Goosdeel

The EMCDDA currently monitors 30 new benzodiazepines, over 80% of which were detected for the first time between 2014 and 2020. Despite this relatively large number, the new benzodiazepine market in Europe is currently dominated by etizolam and flualprazolam — although this may change, as both substances were placed under international control in November 2020. In 2019, 1 240 seizures of new benzodiazepines were reported by the EU Member States (around 5% of NPS seizures).

Initially, the substances were sold as 'legal highs' or 'research chemicals' under their own names (e.g. phenazepam, pyrazolam). While this continues to be the case, increasingly, they are also used by criminal groups to manufacture fake versions of commonly prescribed benzodiazepine medicines (e.g. Valium®, Xanax®), which are then sold on the illicit market. Users may be unaware of the substances or doses they are

taking, increasing the risk of severe poisoning, particularly if consumed with alcohol or other sedatives. As some new benzodiazepines (e.g. flualprazolam and etizolam) are placed under control, there is a risk that other substances will take their place. One possibility is the re-emergence of flubromazolam and deschloroetizolam, which were first notified in Europe in 2014.

'New benzodiazepines have firmly established themselves on the new drugs market in Europe', says EMCDDA Director Alexis Goosdeel. 'It is likely that more substances from this group will continue to appear as users seek new drug experiences or alternatives to unavailable prescription medicines. Drugs today are everywhere and the boundaries between what is licit and illicit are increasingly blurred. Faced with a complex market and high demand, we must strengthen our ability to detect, assess and respond to new benzodiazepines and the public health and social harms they cause.'

An increase in insomnia and anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic may lead more people to self-medicate with new benzodiazepines, or inadvertently use fake benzodiazepine medicines.

Similar to other NPS, some new benzodiazepines appear to be shipped from companies in China as bulk powders to Europe, where they are processed into finished products (e.g., tablets, capsules, blotters, and e-liquids for vaping). Produced by licensed pharmaceutical companies, benzodiazepines are the most widely prescribed group of medicines in the world and are used to treat a range of conditions (e.g. anxiety, insomnia, epilepsy, alcohol withdrawal). In most countries, benzodiazepines authorised as medicines are controlled under drug control laws and available by prescription only. This is in line with the 1971 UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances, which currently controls 38 benzodiazepines

Source : EMCDDA

¹The EU Early Warning System, operated by the EMCDDA and Europol, plays a central role in supporting national- and EU-level preparedness and responses to new psychoactive substances (NPS). In operation since 1997, it comprises those two agencies, 29 national early warning systems across Europe, the European Medicines Agency and the European Commission



© AFP Federal Police

WADI RUM, THE VALLEY OF THE MOON

*Jordan is finally easing restrictions to allow tourist to the country
Now is the time to visit this wonder of nature called
“The valley of the Moon”*

A journey to Wadi Rum is a journey to another world.

A vast, silent place, timeless and starkly beautiful. Wadi Rum is one of Jordan's main tourist attractions and one of the most stunning desert landscapes in the world.

It lies some 320 km southwest of Jordan's capital Amman, 120 km south of Petra, and just 68 km north of the port city of Aqaba on the Red Sea.

Uniquely shaped massive mountains rise vertically out of the pink desert sand, which separate one dark mass from another in a magnificent desert scenery of strange, breathtaking beauty with towering cliffs of weathered stone..

The faces of the sheer rock cliffs have been eroded by the wind into faces of men, animals and monsters.

Everywhere in this extraordinary landscape are indications of man's presence since the earliest known times. Scattered around are flint hand axes, while on the rocks at the feet of the mountains are scratched the names of ancient travelers. The inscriptions of Anfaishiyya reveal a series of etchings depicting camels, warriors, and animals that cover a stretch of the huge rock face.

The ancient Nabatean peoples, who first emerged in the 4th century BC and who inhabited these regions until 106 AD have also left their mark in the form of rock paintings, carvings, water systems in key areas, and of course temples and other architectural marvels, especially around Petra.

But today, all around, there is emptiness and silence...in this immense space, man is dwarfed into insignificance.

The valley floors are some 900-1000 meters above sea level, and the great sandstone crags rise sheer, a further 500-550 meters. Jabal Rum is the highest peak in the area and the second highest in Jordan.

The highest elevation in Jordan is, in fact, Jamal Umm al Dami, culminating at 1,840 metres and located 30 kilometres south of Wadi Rum village. On a clear day, it is possible to see the Red Sea and the Saudi border from its peak.

Others are some 27 km north of Wadi Rum village, such as Jabal Kharaz and Jabal Burdah with its Rock Bridge, a spectacular 260-foot-high natural bridge that is truly breathtaking. It is one of Wadi Rum's most popular attractions.

There are many ways to explore this fragile, unspoiled desert retreat. Serious



trekkers will be drawn to Wadi Rum, with challenging climbs some 1750m high, while casual hikers can enjoy an easy course through the colourful hills and canyons.

Naturalists will be drawn to the desert in springtime, when rains bring the greening of the hills and an explosion of 2000 species of wildflowers. Red anemones, poppies and the striking black iris, Jordan's national flower, all grow by the roadside and in more quiet reaches.

Visitors to Wadi Rum usually see very few animals because most desert creatures are nocturnal, to avoid the daytime sun, and many of the larger ones are now reduced to very low numbers.

However, if you take the time to look carefully, you are likely to encounter a number of interesting birds, insects and reptiles – and some desert plants.

Trees are rare in Wadi Rum and restricted to three types: Acacias, False Figs and Tamarisks. The Acacias, with their flat tops and spiny, sparse branches, are the most typically desert-looking tree.

The plants you will see most often are the short, woody shrubs scattered across the desert, which consist of three main species: White Saxaul, Jointed Anabasis and Hammada salicornica.

These provide an important food source for Bedouin goats and camels, especially in the summer months, when the smaller succulent desert plants have all dried up.

The sparse desert scrub harbors a surprising variety of small birds, of which the most common is the buff colored Desert Lark. Other common but more distinctive birds are the black and white Mourning Wheatear and the White Crowned Black Wheatear, whose name gives away its striking color pattern.

You are also likely to see African Rock Martins wheeling across the scrub and along the cliffs during the summer months, as well as passing flocks of Tristram's Grackle, showing their orange wing flashes.

In early spring and autumn, Wadi Rum becomes an important flyway for birds migrating between Africa and Eastern Europe, especially for birds of prey, like Steppe Buzzards, Honey Buzzards and Steppe Eagles. It is possible to see hundreds of these birds on a single day.

Reptiles are widespread in Wadi Rum, but do not exist in high numbers. This may be considered fortunate by some visitors, since there are ten species of snake, of which two are very poisonous vipers: Cerastes gaspertii and Echis coloratus.

The Cerastes has the classic 'side-winder' movement and leaves indented 'S' shaped tracks in the sand. It should be stressed, however, that bites from these snakes are extremely rare; the vast majority of visitors never see them.

Down on the sand, one common small creature is a black beetle with very long legs called a Blaps beetle. It is frequently seen crossing areas of open sand during the daytime, where it tiptoes to keep its body off the hot ground.

Other kinds of invertebrates (insects, spiders and their allies) have different strategies for keeping cool, such as making burrows and hiding under stones.

One group of renowned animals that can be found frequently under stones in Wadi Rum are scorpions.

A total of eight kinds have been recorded so far, from large brown ones to small yellow ones. It is the small, yellow ones that give the most painful sting, although like snakes, few visitors see them and very few ever get stung.

Stunning in its natural beauty, Wadi Rum epitomizes the romance of the desert. Now the home of several Bedouin tribes, Wadi Rum has been inhabited for generations. These hospitable and friendly desert people are settled in Wadi Rum in

scattered nomadic camps throughout the area.

Visitors who are invited to share mint tea or cardamon coffee in their black tents, perhaps sitting by the fire under a starry desert sky, will have an experience not to be forgotten.

Wadi Rum is home to the Zalabia Bedouin who have made a success of developing eco-adventure tourism as their main source of income. The area is one of Jordan's important tourist destinations, and attracts an increasing number of foreign tourists, particularly trekkers and climbers, but also for camel and horse safaris or simply day-trippers from Aqaba or Petra.

Its luxury camping retreats have also spurred more tourism to the area. Popular activities in this desert environment include camping under the stars, riding Arabian horses, hiking and rock-climbing among the massive rock formations. All terrain vehicles (ATVs) and Jeeps, as well as excursions in hot air balloons are also available.

But for the ultimate adventure, there are the Microlight Flights, offered by The Royal Aero Sports Club of Jordan. Experienced ultralight aviation pilots take one passenger at a time for a cruise at speeds of 90 to 100 km/hour at altitudes of 1000 to 1200 metres, which are ideal for photography and filming of the rock formations and sand dunes.

Wadi Rum is probably best known because of its connection with the

enigmatic British officer T.E. Lawrence, who was based here during the Great Arab Revolt of 1917-18, and as the setting for the film about his exploits in the region, "Lawrence of Arabia", shot in 1962.

One of the area's main attractions is the ruins of a house, erected on the Nabatean ruins of a water cistern where, according to legend, "Lawrence of Arabia" lived during the Arab Revolt against the Ottomans.

There is also the Lawrence Spring: Marked by a water tank near the entrance of Wadi Shallalah, this spring is named after T.E. Lawrence who famously made the area his military base and home.

The official name of the small spring is Ain Abu Aineh, and views are spectacular from the top. This spring, on the edge of the open sands, is a regular stop on the 4WD circuit.

Another important historical aspect of Wadi Rum is on display at the Hejaz Railway desert stop.

The refurbished locomotive sitting at this desert station invokes the memory of the century-old conflict that helped shape the modern Middle East.

In 1916, when the world was at war, and much of the Arabic-speaking world was controlled by the Ottoman Turkish Empire, the Allied leadership - Britain, France and Russia - sought to force the Turks out of the region; they urged Hussein bin Ali, Sharif of Mecca, to join them and take up arms against the Ottomans in return for Arab independence.

Under the leadership of Hussein's son, Prince Faisal—and with assistance from the illustrious T.E. Lawrence "of Arabia"—the Arabs fought a guerilla-style war by interrupting train passages on the Hejaz Railway.

In the first three weeks of May 1918 alone, the Arabs destroyed railway tracks on 25 separate occasions. These attacks on transportation systems wreaked havoc on Turkish lines of communication and were instrumental in defeating the Turks and ending the Great War.

The origins of the modern Middle East thus trace their way back to the attacks on the trains of the Hejaz Railway. The refurbished steam locomotive at the Hejaz Wadi Rum stop puts that history on display for today's audiences.

Visitors can walk the perimeter of the train and take pictures, or step inside to observe the compartments.

On certain occasions, visitors can even pay to board the train and partake in a mock battle during a show put on by the Jordan Heritage Revival Company.

Wadi Rum may be on your travel list for its visual parallels to the arid, crimson landscapes of Mars and the mysterious, barren spaces on the Moon, but a stop at historical attractions such as the desert's Hejaz Railway station is well worth the time.

Because finding unique, historical gems within famous destinations is often one of the most rewarding parts of travel.



How to get there

Wadi Rum lies in the south western corner of Jordan 58 kilometers north of the coastal town of Aqaba. It can be reached easily by main roads from Amman (3.5hrs), Aqaba (1hr) and Petra (1.5hrs). Car-hire and bus tours can be arranged through hotels and travel agents and taxis can be negotiated from Aqaba and Petra. Daily internal air-flights operate between Amman and Aqaba.



© Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, ADAGP 2021 © Culturespaces / E. Spiller

DALÍ, THE ENDLESS ENIGMA PRODUCED BY GIANFRANCO IANNUZZI - RENATO GATTO - MASSIMILIANO SICCARDI

Until 2 January 2022

In 2021, the Atelier des Lumières will be illuminated by Salvador Dalí's famous psychedelic works. The new immersive exhibition entitled 'Dali: the endless enigma' will encompass more than sixty years in the career of the Catalan master, who developed and invented various artistic styles.

Explore a thematic itinerary comprising surrealistic and metaphysical landscapes and will be immersed in the artist's amazing and highly imaginative works. Exhibited around the world (the Gala-Salvador Dalí Foundation at Figueres, the Dalí Museum in Florida, the Reina Sofía Museum in Madrid, and MoMA in New York) these works, which can be interpreted on so many levels, will be brought together in the Atelier. Displayed and brought to life on the floors and ten-metre-high walls, visitors will be able to observe every detail of the brushstrokes, lines, and material effects.

Paintings, drawings, photographs, installations, films, and archive images will focus on the unique personality of the painter with the famous moustache, as well as on his obsessions with the strange and the supernatural, and his fascination with his wife Gala, his muse and collaborator.

Emblematic masterpieces, such as *The Persistence of Memory*, *the Face of Mae West* (Usable as Surrealist Apartment), *Atomic Leda*, and the *Temptation of Saint Anthony*, highlight Dalí's immense talent as a creator of new languages and unique canvases, inspired by the greatest masters of painting, ranging from

Velasquez, Raphael, Michelangelo, and Vermeer to Millet.

The latest production by Gianfranco Iannuzzi, Renato Gatto, and Massimiliano Siccardi will focus on the various facets of the artist's approach: from his initial Impressionist- and cubist- inspired works to his mystical works with their religious themes, and his Surrealistic period to his work with the theatre, photography, and the cinema.

More than 30 years after his death, Dalí and his 'Paranoiac-Critical Method' still resonates today.



© Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, ADACP 2021 © Culturespaces / E. Spiller

Discover, from a fresh perspective, the painter's hallucinations and dreamlike delirium, which he channelled into artistic works. 'Dalí: the endless enigma', which will last for around 40 minutes, will reflect the painter's inner world in an almost hypnotic atmosphere.

The entire digital exhibition will be set to the music of Pink Floyd. Constantly experimenting and rejecting all

rational mechanisms, these icons of painting and music shared a fantastical visual imagination, in which obsessive visions and technical virtuosity were blended.

Dalí's deep colours and extended and voluminous forms emerge on the walls to the sound of tracks from legendary albums such as *The Dark Side of the Moon* and *The Wall*, plunging visitors

into a soaring, peaceful, and troubling world.

This retrospective exhibition associated with the music of the legendary 1960s group, will take visitors on a timeless journey that awakens the subconscious and buried thoughts, in which Dalí's oeuvre remains a mystery and an endless enigma.



© Salvador Dalí, Fundació Gala-Salvador Dalí, ADACP 2021 © Culturespaces / E. Spiller

The Atelier des Lumières
38 rue Saint Maur
75 011 Paris

+33 1 80 98 46 00

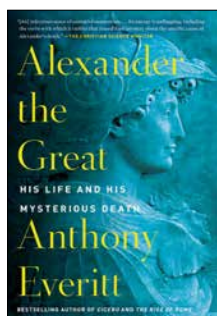
Open everyday.

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday,
Thursday and Sunday:

10am-7pm (last entrance at 6pm) /
Friday and Saturday: 10am-9pm

*Please make sure that you arrive
15mn in advance*

BOOKS



ALEXANDER THE GREAT

By Anthony Everitt

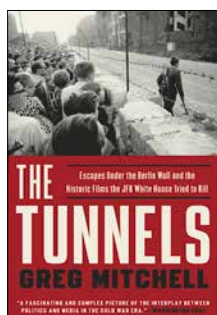
HIS LIFE AND HIS MYSTERIOUS DEATH

More than two millennia have passed since Alexander the Great built an empire that stretched to every corner of the ancient world, from the backwater kingdom of Macedonia to the Hellenic world, Persia, and ultimately to India—all before his untimely death at age thirty-three. Alexander believed that his empire would stop only when he

reached the Pacific Ocean. But stories of both real and legendary events from his life have kept him evergreen in our imaginations with a legacy that has meant something different to every era: in the Middle Ages he became an exemplar of knightly chivalry, he was a star of Renaissance paintings, and by the early twentieth century he'd even come to resemble an English gentleman. But who was he in his own time?

In *Alexander the Great*, Anthony Everitt judges Alexander's life against the criteria of his own age and considers all his contradictions. We meet the Macedonian prince who was naturally inquisitive and fascinated by science and exploration, as well as the man who enjoyed the arts and used Homer's great epic the *Iliad* as a bible. As his empire grew, Alexander exhibited respect for the traditions of his new subjects and careful judgment in administering rule over his vast territory. But his career also had a dark side. An inveterate conqueror who in his short life built the largest empire up to that point in history, Alexander glorified war and was known to commit acts of remarkable cruelty.

As debate continues about the meaning of his life, Alexander's death remains a mystery. Did he die of natural causes—felled by a fever—or did his marshals, angered by his tyrannical behavior, kill him? An explanation of his death can lie only in what we know of his life, and Everitt ventures to solve that puzzle, offering an ending to Alexander's story that has eluded so many for so long.



THE TUNNELS

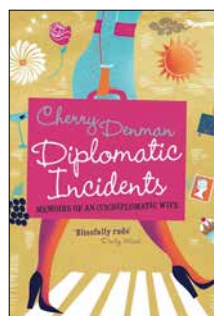
By Greg Mitchell

ESCAPES UNDER THE BERLIN WALL AND THE HISTORIC FILMS THE JFK WHITE HOUSE TRIED TO KILL

In the summer of 1962, the year after the rise of the Berlin Wall, a group of young West Germans risked prison, Stasi torture, and even death to liberate friends, lovers, and strangers in East Berlin by digging tunnels under the Wall. Then two U.S.

television networks heard about the secret projects and raced to be first to document them from the inside. NBC and CBS funded two separate tunnels in return for the right to film the escapes, planning spectacular prime-time specials. President John F. Kennedy, however, was wary of anything that might spark a confrontation with the Soviets, having said, "A wall is better than a war," and even confessing to Secretary of State Dean Rusk, "We don't care about East Berlin." JFK approved unprecedented maneuvers to quash both documentaries, testing the limits of a free press in an era of escalating nuclear tensions.

As Greg Mitchell's riveting narrative unfolds, we meet extraordinary characters: the legendary cyclist who became East Germany's top target for arrest; the Stasi informer who betrays the "CBS tunnel"; the American student who aided the escapes; an engineer who would later help build the tunnel under the English channel; and the young East Berliner who fled with her baby, then married one of the tunnelers. *The Tunnels* captures the chilling reach of the Stasi secret police as U.S. networks prepared to "pay for play" but were willing to cave to official pressure, the White House was eager to suppress historic coverage, and ordinary people in dire circumstances became subversive. *The Tunnels* is breaking history, a propulsive read whose themes still reverberate.



DIPLOMATIC INCIDENTS

by Cherry Denman

Cherry Denman has spent her life trailing husband Charlie round some of the world's most remote outposts and can ask for the lavatory in eleven languages. While some aspects of living abroad will always puzzle her – saunas, tofu and circumcision, to name just three – she wouldn't have missed it for anything. Lessons learnt range from the practical (possessions belong either in the suitcase or the skip: storage is for wimps), to the truly useful (how to avoid the drinks party bore) and the truly bizarre (the episode with the goat . . .). Charming and witty, these hilarious tales of global misunderstandings are illustrated with over seventy original line drawings.



JUST A DIPLOMATIC SPOUSE: A TRUE STORY OF LIFE

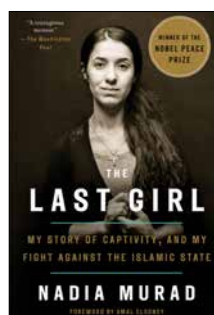
Alexandra Paucescu is an educated Romanian woman who, by the age of 30, sees her whole life changing completely, as she marries a diplomat and embarks on a life long journey as a trailing diplomatic spouse.

She presents the diplomatic life which, looking from outside, it is definitely a privileged one. You get to see the world, you meet lots of interesting and powerful people

and have lifetime experiences. You live in a protected world that gives you immunity... only diplomatic, not for your soul and feelings though. It is a roller coaster of emotions and mixed feelings, as she describes it.

You've got to be strong to adapt, to get to know the rules of this kind of life and to make the best out of it. The book is a collection of events that occurred over a period of more than ten years, rules of diplomatic protocol and ranking, advices for other women at the beginning of a similar journey and also a collection of valuable travel and even shopping tips! It is a diary, a book on diplomatic etiquette, lifestyle and travel blog, ALL IN ONE.

Source: Amazon.com.



THE LAST GIRL

By Nadia Murad

Foreword by Amal Clooney

MY STORY OF CAPTIVITY, AND MY FIGHT AGAINST THE ISLAMIC STATE

Nadia Murad was born and raised in Kocho, a small village of farmers and shepherds in northern Iraq. A member of the Yazidi community, she and her brothers and sisters lived a quiet life. Nadia had dreams of becoming a history teacher or opening her own beauty salon.

On August 15th, 2014, when Nadia was just twenty-one years old, this life ended. Islamic State militants massacred the people of her village, executing men who refused to convert to Islam and women too old to become sex slaves. Six of Nadia's brothers were killed, and her mother soon after, their bodies swept into mass graves. Nadia was taken to Mosul and forced, along with thousands of other Yazidi girls, into the ISIS slave trade.

Nadia would be held captive by several militants and repeatedly raped and beaten. Finally, she managed a narrow escape through the streets of Mosul, finding shelter in the home of a Sunni Muslim family whose eldest son risked his life to smuggle her to safety.

Today, Nadia's story—as a witness to the Islamic State's brutality, a survivor of rape, a refugee, a Yazidi—has forced the world to pay attention to an ongoing genocide. It is a call to action, a testament to the human will to survive, and a love letter to a lost country, a fragile community, and a family torn apart by war.

Fly with Royal Jordanian to Brussels and Back!

At least two indirect flights daily

We also provide rail & fly solutions to/from Brussels – Midi station via Schipol & CDG. Enjoy your stay at a city known for its delicacies, history and life. What more could you ask for?

For more information and to reserve, please call us on +32 2 512.70.70, email brutrrj@rj.com or visit your preferred travel agent, our website rj.com or our RJ app.



rj.com



ROYAL JORDANIAN

الملكية الأردنية



BY YOUR SIDE IN MONACO FOR MORE THAN 100 YEARS

Discover our solutions in Private Banking,
Retail Banking and Corporate Banking.

privatebanking.societegenerale.mc

**THE FUTURE
IS YOU**



**SOCIÉTÉ
GÉNÉRALE**

The present document has been distributed in Monaco by Société Générale Private Banking (Monaco) S.A.M., located 13/15, bd. des Moulins – 98000 Monaco – Principality of Monaco, governed by the *Autorité de Contrôle Prudentiel et de Résolution* and the *Commission de Contrôle des Activités Financières*. The financial products marketed in Monaco can be reserved for qualified investors in accordance with the Law No. 1339 of 07/09/2007 and Sovereign Ordinance No 1.285 of 10/09/2007. Further details are available upon request or on www.privatebanking.societegenerale.mc. © Getty Images.